

A Puzzle Concerning Gratitude and Accountability¹

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Abstract: P.F. Strawson’s account of moral responsibility in “Freedom and Resentment” has been widely influential. In both that paper and in the contemporary literature, much attention has been paid to Strawson’s account of blame in terms of reactive attitudes like resentment and indignation. The Strawsonian view of praise in terms of gratitude has received comparatively little attention. Some, however, have noticed something puzzling about gratitude and accountability. We typically understand accountability in terms of moral demands and expectations. Yet gratitude does not express or enforce moral demands or expectations. So, how is it a way to hold an agent accountable? In a more general manner, we might ask if there is even sense to be made of the idea that agents can be accountable—i.e., “on the hook”—in a positive way. In this paper, I clarify the relationship between gratitude and moral accountability. I suggest that accountability is a matter of engaging with others in a way that is basically concerned with their feelings and attitudes rather than solely a matter of moral demands. Expressions of gratitude are a paradigmatic form of this concerned engagement. I conclude by defending my view from the objection that it leads to an overly generous conception of holding accountable and suggest in reply that moral responsibility skeptics may not help themselves to as many moral emotions as they might have thought.

1. Introduction

In his influential paper “Freedom and Resentment”, P. F. Strawson (1962/2008) sketches a picture of our practices of moral responsibility in terms of a set of moral sentiments. Some emotions are particularly reactive to the moral consideration—or lack thereof—we display in our actions, which Strawson calls “quality of will”. He does so in order to make the case that we can be morally responsible even if physical determinism is true. In particular, he seems to be concerned with the fairness or desert of blame in the accountability sense of being “on the hook” for one’s actions (Watson 1996: 236). Not much is said about positive emotions of the pertinent sort. Perhaps following Strawson, then, the now popular Strawsonian theories of moral responsibility mostly focus on negative attitudes like resentment and indignation, and how they are personally involved expressions towards

¹ My sincere thanks to Rosalind Chaplin, Mark Timmons, Hannah Tierney, and Monique Wonderly for helpful feedback on previous drafts of this paper. Thanks to Cory Davia, Michael McKenna, Terry Horgan, Max Kramer, Dana Nelkin, Jeremy Reid, Jacob Sparks, and Shawn Wang for discussion. Thanks to the audience at the UC Davis Area Group in Ethics and Related Subjects for helpful feedback and suggestions. Thanks especially to the anonymous referees at this journal for their detailed comments and encouragement.

purported wrongdoers. All Strawson says about gratitude is that it is the positive correlate to negative reactive emotions like resentment and indignation, which he takes to express (or constitute) blame. He describes gratitude simply as an emotional reaction to an intentional action that benefits oneself (1962/2008: 22).

Many Strawsonians have accepted gratitude as a part of accountability (e.g., Shoemaker 2015, Macnamara 2013, McKenna 2012). It seems to be the right sort of moral sentiment to feature in our practices of accountability. There is, however, a problem with the Strawsonian view when it comes to gratitude. Let's say we want to explain moral responsibility in this "on the hook" sense, the kind traditionally at issue in the free will debate. It seems like accountability goes beyond mere moral evaluation towards something like moral *confrontation* between the evaluator and the evaluated (Shoemaker 2015: 87, 112). But can we make sense of their being a positive confrontation in expressing gratitude? Gratitude does not seem to be a way to put an agent on the hook for complying with moral demands or obligations. It can sometimes seem like mere positive moral evaluation. As such, it seems difficult to say that in expressing gratitude we are substantively holding someone accountable. We might even start to worry about whether there is any sense to be made of being "on the hook" in a positive way. As Daniel Telech (2020: 927) has put it, there is a tension between the claim that accountability is about holding one another to moral demands and the claim that accountability involves both blame as moral anger and praise as gratitude. The puzzle concerning gratitude is that both claims seem true.

Some, notably R. Jay Wallace (1994: 37), have responded to this puzzle by denying that accountability involves praise (and so gratitude). Telech (2020: 935-936) has rejected the claim that accountability is to be understood in terms of demands, as does Coleen Macnamara (2013: 900-903). Each suggests that accountability can be understood in terms of a broader sense of moral communication. I reject the former view, and while I believe the latter view makes important progress,

I suggest a novel resolution to this puzzle. Briefly put, my view is that gratitude is a kind of directed engagement with actions that manifest a certain kind of moral agency, which may but need not involve the making of a moral demand. This agency is motivated by a basic human concern for the attitudes and feelings of others (cf., Beglin 2018, Watson 2015). Thus, we can rightly say that gratitude is a feature of accountability, and along the way, come to appreciate a broader notion of accountability as a distinct kind of engaged moral evaluation.

I will proceed as follows. In section 2, I outline the Strawsonian view of accountability responsibility. I then offer a detailed explanation of the puzzle concerning gratitude in section 3. Section 4 concerns a persistent asymmetry in the communicative structure of blame as forms of moral anger and praise as gratitude, which makes it difficult to see how gratitude is a way to hold an agent accountable. In section 5, I suggest that irrespective of this asymmetry, we could think about accountability in terms of moral engagement with agents of a certain sort, agents who are sensitive to a basic concern for the attitudes and feelings of others. At this basic level, moral anger and gratitude are on par, and so at this basic level we can make sense of a positive kind of moral accountability. I respond to the worry in section 6 that this notion of accountability counts too many emotions as ways of holding accountable, by comparing gratitude and love. This discussion will further the point that the positive dimension of accountability is worth taking seriously in the free will debate, as moral responsibility skeptics might not help themselves to as many attitudes as they would like to.

2. Reactive Attitudes and Accountability

Some readers will be familiar with current Strawsonian work in the literature on free will and moral responsibility. Nevertheless, it will be useful to go over the basic commitments of this kind of view to orient ourselves vis-à-vis the relationship between reactive attitudes and accountability.

Strawson's aim was to reconcile his "one-eyed utilitarian" (1962/2008: 35) compatibilist contemporaries to incompatibilists who felt that genuine desert claims are threatened by the truth of

physical determinism (1962/2008: 19-20).² On a plausible reading, Strawson's reconciliation is an argument to the effect that our natural proneness to moral emotions like resentment, indignation, and gratitude is (1) not threatened by the truth of determinism and (2) sufficient for theorizing in a non-utilitarian way about moral responsibility as accountability. The idea is to begin thinking about free agency from within the standpoint of morality construed in roughly sentimentalist terms.

Much ink has been spilled over the first conclusion. Strawson argues that determinism would not count as a universal excuse or universal exemption from moral responsibility. Setting aside interpretive controversies, Strawson is thinking about excuse and exemption from blame as the suspension of moral anger. To show the ridiculousness of universal excuse, for example, he points out the absurdity in thinking that physical determinism would lead to the reign of universal good will (1962/2008: 26), such that no one would have hurt feelings over anyone else's actions. If, as Strawson (1962/2008: 34) provocatively says, the making of our moral demands *is* the proneness to such attitudes, then all a compatibilist about free will and determinism needs to do is show that determinism does not undermine our proneness to feeling resentful and indignant at wrongdoing. Strawsonian compatibilists have offered updated versions of this argumentative strategy, for instance, R. Jay Wallace's main argument in *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (1994).

This negative focus is not all Strawson's fault. The kind of moral responsibility at issue in the free will debate as I understand it is accountability, the kind of responsibility that involves the apt expression of hard feelings and liability to sanction and even punishment (Watson 1996). The threat of physical determinism to free will and moral responsibility understood in this way naturally leads to a special focus on the fairness of blame. For if determinism were true, and if it entailed that no person was morally responsible in this sense, no instance of blame as moral anger would be fair. Maybe

² See for instance Schlick (1939) or Ayer (1954) on the one hand, and Campbell (1957) on the other.

determinism means no one could avoid wrongdoing. Maybe no one is the genuine source of their wrong actions. Either way, our current way of life would be a moral disaster.

Setting aside the background context of the free will problem, let's flesh out a Strawsonian picture of moral responsibility in contemporary terms. It involves three essential commitments.³

First, Strawsonians are committed to the view that our practices of holding each other morally responsible are expressed by and consist of moral emotional reactive attitudes. Let's stipulate that expressions of resentment and indignation simply constitute blame. Expressions of gratitude constitute praise.⁴ As blame and praise, these emotional attitudes are reactive to the perceived forces that animate actions; hence the term *reactive attitudes*. We are emotionally moved by what we see as the attitudes, intentions, cares, and concerns of others as displayed in their actions (Strawson 1962/2008; McKenna 2012; 59-60).⁵ (In cases of blame, it can also be the lack of pertinent motivating forces). It is natural, then, to think of reactive attitudes as emotions whose content is a judgement about actions, as does Wallace (1994), or, as Macnamara (2015a) and Chad Van Schoelandt (2020) suggest in different ways, that reactive attitudes have representational content portraying their intended target in a particular way, as having committed a wrongdoing or as having failed to meet a moral demand. If you are uncomfortable with cognitivism about emotions, we can say instead that the relevant content can be used in a normative assessment of the appropriateness or fittingness of reactive attitudes (as suggested by Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson 2003). In general, reactive attitudes are "cognitive sharpened" versions of more basic emotions (D'Arms and Jacobson 2003: 143). Reactive attitudes involve judgments, representational portrayals, or fittingness conditions that are standardly taken to

³ I am generally following my exposition of the Strawsonian view in Wallace (2019: 2706-2708), with modifications, updates, and further exposition where needed.

⁴ If you want, call third-personal gratitude "approval", and say it constitutes praise in third personal cases as the analogue of indignation. I'll drop talk of "approval" moving forward and talk as if there is third-party gratitude.

⁵ Strawsonians generally take reactive attitudes to express (or constitute) our practices of holding one another accountable for our actions. Other moral emotions, like contempt or admiration, express (or constitute) evaluations of character.

render “pets, computers, and the weather” inapt targets of the attitudes in question (Shoemaker 2018: 69-70). As such, some emotions may have reactive and non-reactive varieties, and we are concerned here with the reactive kind.

The second commitment of Strawsonian theories is that moral responsibility tracks interpretations of the motivating forces behind the actions of others. The disposition to feel these reactive attitudes thus involves a disposition to interpret actions. We understand actions to be manifestations of these motivating forces (or lack thereof). Call these forces the *quality of will*, either good or ill. We hold each other morally responsible for actions because we take them to represent the quality of will our fellows have towards us. We blame when agents have apparently failed to meet a demand for good will (or at least no ill will) towards ourselves and others.

Our disposition to understand actions as manifestations of quality of will is supplemented in our moral responsibility practices by interpretive norms. We often *misinterpret* the kinds of attitudes that underwrite what others have done. This highlights the fact that expressions of the reactive attitudes are generally understood to have a *communicative* structure; they call out for a response (Bennet 2002; Macnamara 2015a, 2015b). They involve an “implicit RSVP” (Darwall 2006: 159). They are, metaphorically, meaningful contributions to an ongoing “moral conversation” (McKenna 2012). To see this, consider that we need ways to get past misunderstandings. Competent adult human agents are well versed in the practice of giving excuses and justifications. Sometimes we must show that we did not in fact act from ill will: “So sorry, I tripped into you accidentally!” This gets us off the hook because it shows that even if we did perform an action that violated our moral obligations, the violation did not stem from the sorts of concerns that underpin obligations in the first place. Other times we have need to show that we acted not from ill will, but with good intentions: “If I hadn’t woken you up you would have missed your train!”

Of course, not everyone is competent in interpersonal relationships (Strawson 1962/2008: 25). Consider very young children or the seriously mentally ill. The actions of these persons are not underwritten by quality of will. Or, if their actions are, such persons are otherwise unable to engage in ordinary interpersonal relations, such that their quality of will is not of the sort we ought to be concerned with. Perhaps the child simply lacks normal adult emotional control (the tantrum is not personal!). Agents like this are not fitting targets of blame as moral anger. They are instead fit targets of management and explanation, what Strawson calls objective attitudes.

Given this account of excuse and exemption, many Strawsonians have argued that one necessary capacity required for morally responsible agency is the capacity to understand the meaning of blame. In paradigmatic cases the blamed agent is the intended addressee of our blame. We want the blamed agent to know that we think they acted wrongly. So, it would be inappropriate to blame someone who did not understand the meaning of blame. To be morally responsible, then, one must understand the meaning of blame, where this involves an understanding that one's own actions are interpretable by others as indicators of quality of will.⁶ We could thus think about our practices of moral responsibility as an interpretive enterprise, where we can think of the actions of responsible agents as signals about their inner life. Responsible agents communicate to one another what they think about these signals. Blame as resentment, for instance, says to someone that you have judged that they have acted with ill will. Put otherwise, blame, at least in its outward expression and when directed at relevant others, especially the blamed, is a form of moral address.⁷

The foregoing suggests the third and final element of a Strawsonian theory of moral responsibility. Strawsonians think that being the appropriate target of reactive attitudes is (in some

⁶ Macnamara (2015b), building on Gary Watson's (1987/2008) suggestion, offers this sort of argument. See also Darwall (2006), Shoemaker (2007), McKenna (2012), and Wallace (2019). More on Macnamara's view shortly.

⁷ Reactive attitudes normally have this communicative function. There might be abnormal or non-paradigmatic instances e.g., indignation at the dead, which lack this feature (cf. McKenna 2012: 175-178).

sense) prior to being morally responsible. This is a point of controversy; some think the priority is explanatory in an epistemic way (e.g., Brink and Nelkin 2013) whereas others take it to be explanatory in a metaphysical way, like (e.g., Wallace 1994). Does being the apt target of reactive attitudes give us good evidence that an agent is really morally responsible? Or is it that being the apt target of these attitudes grounds an agent's actually being morally responsible? Difficult questions! I take no stand here. I will simply say that for the Strawsonian, being morally responsible is to be explained, at least in part, in terms of our demanding and caring about the attitudes and feelings of other persons as expressed in our practices of holding one another accountable.

3. The Puzzle

In this section, I will articulate the puzzle concerning gratitude. The puzzle is that even though gratitude is a reactive attitude—one that might even presuppose a general proneness to making moral demands about good will—gratitude itself does not seem to be a way of holding anyone accountable. Thus, Strawsonians end up in a tricky dilemma. Either we should deny that gratitude (or perhaps any positive reactive attitude) is a part of accountability, or we should deny that accountability is about moral demands and expectations.

It is easy to see why Strawson mentions gratitude given the foregoing sketch of Strawsonian theories of moral responsibility. Let's consider a paradigm case of gratitude:

Magnanimous Mover: Jorge is moving into a new apartment. Luckily, he does not have too much to move and is not moving far away. His friend Sara offers to help him move so that he doesn't have to hire a moving company. Really, the only challenge will be to move the big items: couches, dressers, the mattress and bedframe, etc. Together, Jorge and Sara can manage that. Jorge gladly accepts Sara's offer, and after the move, is extremely grateful to her. He buys Sara her favorite beer and pizza (with

her favorite toppings, of course) to eat when they are finished moving his stuff. He even extends a promise to help her out in the future.

Sara's offer is certainly an expression of her good will towards Jorge. He recognizes this, and expresses gratitude through an action, communicating his feelings to her. Pizza and beer become part of the ongoing "moral conversation", contributing something that Sara can interpret as praise, as a show of good will in return for her help.

Nevertheless, the ease of this explanation should strike the reader as odd. To feel grateful is neither to make a moral demand nor to express a failure to meet a moral demand for a certain degree of manifest quality of will. But I thought we were supposed to think that our proneness to the attitudes in question simply is our proneness to making certain sorts of interpersonal demands! In fact, to show gratitude seems not to be a way to call anyone to account for performing an action, as if I could reasonably say, "Thank you! Now tell me *exactly* what happened!", and then wait to hear an excuse or justification. Wouldn't it be strange if Jorge insisted on a response from Sara, an accounting? "Did you *really* like the beer I got?". Metaphysical concerns about the fairness of Jorge's responses to Sara barely cross our mind, if these concerns cross our mind at all.⁸ Even if gratitude is a reactive attitude because it is reactive to quality of will, it does not seem intimately connected to holding accountable.

You might think that gratitude still is an appropriate reaction to moral demands and expectations. Sara is meeting a moral obligation grounded in her friendship with Jorge, perhaps. But some philosophers have pointed out that gratitude is not always called for when someone meets a demand or expectation for displayed good will (Bennett 1980: 42; Wallace 1994: 27), and I take it that

⁸ An anonymous reviewer pointed out that there could be analogues to excuse and exemption in a case like this, insofar as we could discover that what seemed like an act of good will was not in fact such an act. This is true, and it does show that gratitude is responsive to quality of will, and so is a reactive attitude. Nevertheless, we do not seek out this further information by way of (apparently) holding an agent to account, and so there are no analogous accountability *practices* of excuse and exemption.

these examples are illustrations of the point that gratitude is not necessarily a reaction to moral demands and expectations. For example, consider this simple case:

No-Murder Mike: Mike has a perfectly ordinary day. He wakes up, goes to work, comes home, and makes dinner for his partner Ashley. Ashley responds proudly: “I’m so grateful; you didn’t murder me today!”

Ashley is just making a mistake here. Mike has met the (plausibly) absolute minimum standard of good will we might expect from one another, but he does not merit gratitude.

Gratitude is also apt in cases of supererogation, where a person *exceeds* the moral obligations that they have:

Supererogatory Sohla: Sohla decides to bake herself a delicious cake. She has the ingredients to make a small cake for herself but also enough to make a large cake for sharing. She decides to bake a large cake to share with her co-workers. “Why not?” she thinks to herself. “Everyone loves cake!”

Sohla is under no particular moral obligation to bake anyone a cake. But it’s very nice of her to share with her co-workers. It would be off-putting if her coworkers did not thank her.

Notice too that gratitude is not merited in cases of suberogation, where a person meets their moral obligations but nevertheless acts poorly:

Suberogatory Sam: Sam is sitting on the bus when he sees an elderly person who is having trouble standing up while the bus is moving. Sam is young and able-bodied. It would be no problem for him to stand rather than sit down. He knows that it would be kind to give up his seat. Nevertheless, he is not sitting in a priority seat reserved for those in need. He continues to sit down.

Sam definitely does not merit anyone’s gratitude!

In general, there is wide-spread agreement that gratitude is appropriate when an agent meets or exceeds our moral demands and expectations (e.g., Helm 2017: 53, McKenna 2012: 7-8, Abramson and Leitte 2011: 677). Perhaps, then, gratitude is a reaction to exceeding moral demands, and so presupposes them. Consider that Stephen Darwall (2006: 73) argues that gratitude is apt in precisely those cases where we could not expect the benefits given to us. This view gets the extension of our purported counterexamples—**No-Murder Mike**, **Supererogatory Sohla**, and **Suberogatory Sam**—correct. Sohla’s action merits gratitude but Mike and Sam’s do not.

But even if we agree that gratitude presupposes moral demands, my question is why the expression of gratitude towards Sohla should count as anything more than the mere positive evaluation of Sohla’s good will. A Strawsonian might plausibly say that it is our human proneness to the reactive attitudes as a class that makes us prone to making moral demands. But the puzzle is not about whether gratitude is a reactive attitude or about the general connection between reactive attitudes and accountability. Rather, the puzzling issue is that, in comparison to resentment and indignation, it is difficult to see how the expression of gratitude as praise involves censure or confrontation in a way that should count as *holding accountable* in a substantive way.

Accountability is widely understood in terms of liability to sanction, to demand, to “confrontation”, in a way that distinguishes accountability responses to agents from other forms of evaluation in terms of attitude and character (Shoemaker 2015: 87, 112). Accountability is the sort of thing we might worry about being unfair if determinism is true. Yet there is no obvious confrontational element to gratitude. Herein lies a puzzle. Consider Gary Watson’s (1996: 230-31) classic discussion of two senses of responsibility. We might call the behavior of a colleague *shoddy*, and to do so would be to blame that agent in the sense of *merely attributing* a moral fault to them and their behavior. But beyond this attribution of moral fault, there is the matter of *censuring* the bad actor, of thinking that they are liable (or deserving) of negative reactions and engaging them as such. Gratitude does not

involve the judgement or portrayal of an agent as failing morally in a way that gives rise to an expectation of an explanation for the purported failure. And this raises a puzzle: how should we make sense of there being a positive way to be “on the hook” in expressing gratitude beyond the mere ascription of something good to one’s benefactors?

Telech (2020: 927-928) has put this puzzle in an especially clear way. He claims that there is a tension between the claim that accountability is about expressing or enforcing moral demands and the claim that praise as gratitude and blame as moral anger are symmetrical features of our moral responsibility practices. The first claim seems obvious, and the second claim is a distinctive feature of the Strawsonian view. Hence, he reasons that our options are either to problematically deny that gratitude (or perhaps any positive reactive attitude that expresses praise) is a part of accountability, or somehow deny the idea that accountability is about moral demands.

We must be careful in explicating our target puzzle. Several Strawson-inspired authors have been described as “attributionists” about moral responsibility, including Arpaly (2003), Hieronymi (2004, 2014), Scanlon (2008), Smith (2008, 2012, 2015) and Talbert (2012).⁹ At a very general level of description, the attributionist thinks that the conditions under which it is appropriate to attribute something to an agent exhaust the conditions for aptly holding that agent accountable; thus, an attributionist might deny conditions on moral responsibility involving bad formative history or voluntariness (Talbert 2019, sect. 3.1.2). For instance, Matthew Talbert (2012) argues that agents who lack certain kinds of moral competence can still have blame-grounding qualities of will. Indeed, attitudes and evaluative judgements seem to indicate quality of will too, so an attributionist might take an agent to be accountable for more than just their actions. Critics of attributionism, like McKenna (2018: 982), worry that attributionist thinking cannot distinguish between an evaluation of an agent’s conduct, attitudes, or character and her *responsibility* for these things; attributionism collapses the

⁹ Sher (2006) is also considered an attributionist, but he is a critic of Strawsonian approaches.

distinction between moral agency and morally responsible agency (McKenna 2012: 9-12). Brink (2021: 49) suggests, for instance, that although the correct attribution of quality of will is an important first step in accountability, determinations of accountability track an “agent’s capacities or opportunities” as reflected in our practice of excusing conditions.

It might seem that attributionists will not face the puzzle concerning gratitude, but they do, because attributionists accept a distinction between Watson’s mere sense of attribution and a more robust notion of responsibility. We can see this by focusing on what precisely is being attributed, and how that attribution requires certain kinds of capacities or abilities. For instance, Angela Smith’s “rational relations” view says that for an agent to be responsible for x is for there to be a rational connection between x and her evaluative judgements (2012: 577-578). Judging there to be this rational connection presupposes attributing to an agent the capacities needed for rational evaluation and judgement, which affords the agent a kind of rational control mediated by their quality of will (McKenna 2012: 194-195). Thus, I understand the debate between attributionists and their critics to be about the grounds of morally accountable agency, which we can frame in terms of abilities or capacities. Specifically, the debate is about whether the abilities or capacities to have the right kind of quality of will must provide the agent with a kind of control, and if so, what kind of control, like voluntary control (McKenna 2012: 20-21, 194) or control over their situation (Brink 2021: 74-75).¹⁰

¹⁰ Brink (2021: 45-46) suggests that attributability is an *actual sequence* notion, that is, a notion that appeals only to the actual sequence of events, whereas accountability is a *modal* notion, one that appeals to an agent’s abilities and capacities. We can understand these abilities and capacities by looking at relevant counterfactuals (2021: 95-96). I agree that accountability is a modal notion. However, it is important to stress that many *actual sequence* compatibilists, compatibilists who think that free will and moral responsibility are to be explained only in terms of the actual sequence of events and not by appeals to alternative possibilities, are also trying to explain accountability as a modal notion in terms of abilities and capacities. For instance, McKenna (2013) adopts a theory on which free and morally responsible agents are those agents who have an ability to respond aptly to an appropriately rich range of reasons, where we can understand this ability by looking at relevant counterfactuals, but he does not think that the exercise of this ability does not require a further ability to do otherwise than one in fact does. Thus, only a more specific view of accountability that says that accountable agents must have an ability to actually do otherwise than they in fact do is inconsistent with the actual sequence view. My suspicion is that many compatibilists, following Fischer and Ravizza’s (1998) reasons-responsive theory of moral responsibility endorse a kind of view where we think about accountability in modal terms while endorsing an actual-sequence view of the control afforded by those abilities. I take no stand here on what the best compatibilist conception of the relevant capacities is; rather, my

So, attributionists and their critics alike are trying to explain the conditions under which an agent is accountable in Watson's "on the hook" sense. Insofar as this is true, all of these Strawsonians face the puzzle concerning gratitude and accountability. Although my own suggestion is friendly to attributionism, it will be neutral with respect to competing accounts of the conditions and scope of accountability because I will stay neutral about the underlying abilities or capacities needed to have quality of will of the pertinent sort. For ease of presentation, I will focus on accountability for voluntary actions.¹¹

In what follows, my aim is vindicatory. I will attempt to resolve this puzzle by arguing for a broader notion of accountability. First, however, I will address an instructive but not yet successful response to the puzzle that focuses on the communicative aspect of the reactive attitudes.

4. The Persistent Asymmetry

The orthodox Strawsonian view of gratitude faces a puzzle. Gratitude does not express or rely on moral demands and expectations—at least not directly—and so does not seem to be a way to hold another agent accountable for their actions. Yet, accountability seems like it is about moral demands and expectations. In this section, I suggest that although we should deny that accountability is to be solely understood in terms of moral demands and expectations, there is a communicative asymmetry between praise as gratitude and blame as moral anger that makes it difficult to see how gratitude could be a way to hold an agent accountable as a form of moral address.

As far as I am aware, the earliest discussion of the puzzle stems from R. Jay Wallace, and in response, he rejects idea that gratitude is a part of accountability. As Wallace puts it (1994: 37-38):

“We may distinguish moral reactive attitudes from other moral sentiments in terms of the kind of moral beliefs that give rise to the moral sentiments, and that fix the

concern is to note that a modal understanding of accountability is consistent with both actual sequence and alternative possibilities versions of compatibilism.

¹¹ My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the need to discuss this issue.

content of the reactive attitudes: the reactive attitudes are explained exclusively by beliefs about the violation of moral obligations...whereas other moral sentiments are explained by moral beliefs about the various modalities of moral value”.

On the kind of view Wallace is proposing, not all moral sentiments are implicated in our practices of moral accountability, even if we accept a sentimentalist picture of our responsibility practices, like Strawson. Accountability is to be cashed out in terms of the emotions that are responsive to violations of moral demands alone, and which communicate to others when expressed that we have violated those demands. Wallace (1994: 37) suggests that gratitude is a reaction to the moral value of beneficence, and so not a part of accountability at all.

Wallace’s concern is revisionary; he makes this restriction in order to marshal an argument for compatibilism by considering the normative conditions under which it is appropriate to hold an agent accountable (1994: 84-85, 109-117). Many will not want to agree with this restriction, however, and with good reason. First, Wallace’s restriction seems to implausibly entail that a moral theory which does not feature deontic obligations has no sense of morally responsible agency (Russell 2017: 105-106). Beyond this, Wallace’s restriction is motivated by the worry that there is nothing that will unify the class of reactive attitudes in terms of a single propositional object (1994: 29), but I think this motivation is misplaced. Plausibly, all reactive attitudes are responses to quality of will, including gratitude. As I said in section 2, judgements, representations, or fittingness conditions about quality of will are the unifying propositional object of the reactive attitudes. Thus, I think Wallace misunderstands the nature of the asymmetry between gratitude and the forms of moral anger that constitute blame. Gratitude is obviously a reactive attitude of the sort we are interested in when we theorize about accountability.

Rather than try to excise gratitude from accountability, the right way for the Strawsonian to resolve the puzzle is to reject the idea that accountability is to be understood solely in terms of

demands, as Macnamara (2013: 900-903) and Telech (2020: 933-934) suggest. One way of doing so is to center accountability on the communicative nature of the reactive attitudes and look for structural parallels between gratitude and the forms of moral anger that constitute blame (Telech 2020: 935-936). Recall that on the Strawsonian view, the reactive attitudes call out for response on the part of their intended addressee. Expressed blame, for instance, is a form of moral address, communicating that we believe that a person has done something wrong. Expressed blame calls a person to account. It asks them to explain why they performed the action and accept blame, justify themselves, or offer an excuse or an exemption. Gratitude might call out for a response on the part of its recipient in this same general way even if this call is not seeking a response to a demand. It could foster an expectation to account for oneself in a positive way, thus specifying the missing positive sense of “being on the hook”. These forms of communication can impact the interests of their targets, thus raising questions about fairness appropriate for accountability responsibility (Telech 2020: 936).

Macnamara (2013) and Telech (forthcoming) have both offered views that can substantively flesh out this proposed way of resolving the puzzle. Macnamara argues that the communicative element of reactive attitudes is to be explained in functional terms aimed at *recognition* (2013: 895, cf. Darwall 2006: 86). She claims that reactive attitudes are essentially communicative, and they succeed when there is uptake on the part of their intended target, where uptake involves comprehension of the message being sent (e.g., “Oh no, I did something wrong!”) and then appropriate public acknowledgement (e.g., “I’m so sorry, let me make it up to you!”). On Macnamara’s account, gratitude involves the functional end that the addressee of gratitude overtly self-approbate (2013: 909): “[T]he target of an expression of gratitude or approval acknowledges the speech act by discursively registering her feeling of self-approbation. This she does by saying, “You’re welcome” in response to an expression of gratitude and “Thank you” in response to an expression of approval.” Similarly, Daniel Telech (Forthcoming: 157) has argued that praise can manifest in gratitude and approbation as

invitations and not demands; gratitude invites us “to engage in a form of joint valuation that is at once a way of accepting credit.”

To make this comparison clear, consider the typical “conversational” structure of blame as moral anger. Here I focus on the expression of resentment on the part of yourself having been apparently wronged. (It easily extends to third-party cases):

Step 1: Apparent act of ill will against oneself.

Step 2: Resentment expressed towards wrongdoer.

Step 3: Expression of guilt or remorse from wrongdoer (accepting negative accountability, liability to blame).

Now, consider this recognitional-invitational model of gratitude:

Step 1: Apparent act of good will towards oneself.

Step 2: Gratitude expressed towards benefactor.

Step 3: Expression of self-appraisal from benefactor (accepting positive accountability, liability to praise).

The idea here is that we can see reactive attitudes as accountability-involved because they are aimed at getting the addressee to see themselves as responsible by recognizing their own good or bad action. The call-and-response structure is therefore inextricably linked to the idea of being accountable for one’s actions. On the view we are presently considering, to receive gratitude is to be asked to recognize and celebrate oneself as the (positively) responsible party by feeling and expressing certain kinds of attitudes.

There is a sense, then, in which expressing gratitude could count as holding accountable. Although receiving an invitation is not confrontational in a commonsense way, to receive gratitude is to be confronted with the opportunity to celebrate oneself, and so accountability in the positive sense

could be about being on the hook in terms of expectations or invitations for self-recognition and feeling positive self-directed emotions.

So far so good. Is our puzzle solved by thinking about positive accountability in this way? Unfortunately, it is not yet solved. Macnamara and Telech are right to think that reactive attitudes are communicative insofar as they are recognitional and both do important work in clarifying the communicative nature of reactive attitudes. I agree with them on these points, and my view is substantively consistent with their concern for the communicative nature of the reactive attitudes. Nevertheless, I worry that it is hard to explain how an agent could be interpersonally “on the hook” to celebrate themselves as the positively responsible when we only appeal to these communicative features. It seems to me that the potential expressions of recognizing gratitude are not ways of acknowledging that you have been held accountable in that puzzle-generating, confrontational sense.

First, it is not obvious that successful moral communication via our responsibility practices always involves uptake in the form of an emotional response, like self-approbation. This is especially clear in cases of external uptake, which Macnamara (2013: 909) thinks is a required feature of uptake, but it can also be seen if we instead think about uptake as only involving internal emotional recognition. Perhaps the point of blame is to induce guilt and remorse so as to bring blamer and blamed into moral alignment (Fricker 2016), but people can understand what they *should* feel even when they do not actually have those feelings (Wallace 2019: 2707-2708). Maybe I am at fault for some wrongdoing and you blame me. Maybe I know I ought to feel bad because I recognize that I did wrong by you, but I just don't. Say that I make amends anyways. In such a case, I think I have been successfully addressed by the reactive attitude. Successful address does not require that your intended addressee feel a particular way. I am thus skeptical that the communication of reactive attitudes puts us on the hook to feel a certain way at all.

An easy amendment could get around this problem. Instead of thinking about the uptake of moral communication in terms of emotions, it might be natural to think of uptake in terms of giving an accounting of oneself to someone, which usually but need not involve feeling a certain way. We could thereby think about uptake as an essentially external interpersonal practice. This is an appealing idea, but gratitude does not seem to call out for response on the part of the person to whom it is shown in this sense of giving an account. On the other hand, blame does always seem to be a call for such an accounting—usually by inducing guilt, of course. To see this, take a case of expressed negative reactive attitudes where there is no attempt to hear the response on behalf of the person blamed:

Cussed-Out Classmate: Alicia and Frank are taking a class together at college and have a time and place set for a study session. Alicia is late, even though Frank has a very tight schedule. When Alicia finally arrives, Frank says to her: “Are you f*cking kidding me? How can we get anything done now!?” He storms off.

It is not good that Alicia is late, but Frank is a real jerk. He didn’t wait to hear Alicia’s reply! Maybe she had an excusing reason for being late. Of course, maybe she didn’t. In either case, it seems like he was more interested in expressing *his* feelings than calling Alicia to account for *her* actions. This is unfair. If you are still not on board, consider how the case might continue:

Cussed-Out Classmate, Cont’d: Alicia was late to the study session because she was in an accident. She was prepared to apologize to Frank for being late, even though the accident was no fault of hers.

Surely, Alicia should get a new study partner! The deeper point is that without a proper call-and-response structure in terms of calling to account, blame is just not well executed.

Now compare **Cussed-Out Classmate** with our paradigm case of gratitude, **Magnanimous Mover**. The vignette simply ends with Jorge’s show of gratitude for Sara’s help. We hear of no response from Sara. Nevertheless, things feel more or less complete. We do not think to ourselves

that the vignette ended too soon. No readers (so far!) were shocked at the end. No one has asked: “How come Sara didn’t say you’re welcome?”. Sara has shown Jorge a kindness and he has responded with shows of gratitude. And that’s that. It would be strange if we thought that a show of gratitude was poorly expressed if the person showing gratitude ought to wait for a response in the form of an accounting. In fact, this idea seems presumptuous! Imagine writing a “you’re welcome” note after receiving a thank-you card.

Still, it does seem like gratitude does call out for *some* recognitional response, at least most of the time, even if it is not emotional or external. You should probably let someone know that you got their thank-you card.¹² But consider the growing trend to replace “you’re welcome” with phrases like “no worries” or “no problem” or “of course!”. Here, the recipient of gratitude intentionally downplays their merit—or, perhaps, the assumption that their action was supererogatory. Notice that such responses are not positive forms of excuse: the person is not denying that they performed the action with good will. These responses are indications of uptake; a person responding by saying “de nada!” has of course understood that they are being thanked. Perhaps the old school dislikes such shifts in our moral responsibility practices, but the fact that these downplaying responses are widely accepted as apt is telling. They seem to indicate that gratitude does in fact communicate something like an invitation per Telech (Forthcoming), but one that comes with minimal expectations of reply. One could in many instances practically ignore the call self-approbate or jointly value by way of these downplaying responses, thus undermining the sense that the agent is being confronted with positive accountability for their actions.

So perhaps resentment and indignation communicate a requirement to account and gratitude communicates a permission to self-approbate or jointly value. This view of gratitude would essentially amount to a view of uptake that involved internal recognition that one is being invited to celebrate

¹² Or so says this child of the U.S. Midwest, at least. I have been told heartland Canadians may feel similarly.

oneself that comes with a minimal external expectation to participate in the celebration to which one is invited. I think this is correct, and perhaps this means that all instances of gratitude involve the recognition that one is seen as positively responsible in some sense. I still worry, however, that we have not explained how this sense of responsible is the accountability sense. There remains an asymmetry between responses to expressions of moral anger that constitute blame and responses to expressions of gratitude. The recipient of blame should feel (or know that they should feel) guilt; if otherwise, they must correct the blamer's assessment of what happened in an accounting. The recipient of gratitude need not accept it as praise, or justify their actions, or offer an excuse. They can even downplay what happened. It is hard to see how these responses indicate that a person is being held to account as a feature of our moral practices, even if these responses indicate something communicative and interpersonal has happened, namely, an internal sense of uptake. How is this sense of recognition as internal uptake anything more than recognizing in yourself, merely attributing to yourself, a beneficent will?

So, there remains an asymmetry between resentment and indignation on the one hand and gratitude on the other. The forms of moral anger connected to accountability are forms of confrontation that demand expressed external response. Gratitude does not confront its recipient with anything like this. Our central puzzle remains. What distinctively ties gratitude to our practices of moral accountability if one can simply choose to externally ignore that one has been asked to accept (positive) accountability for one's actions in the form of self-approbation or joint valuation? Once again, it seems as though expressed gratitude involves the belief that an agent has acted beneficently, even in the case of one's own uptake, and so gratitude once again appears to be a mere moral evaluation rather than a way of holding someone accountable.

5. Basically Concerned Engagement and Basically Concerned Agency

In the last section, I argued that the recipient of gratitude need not accept praise, justify their actions, or offer an excuse. Thus, the communicative structure of gratitude as praise looks very different than the communicative structure of blame as moral anger. In fact, gratitude does not seem to demand any kind of specific response as a part of our moral practices, making it unlike blame as moral anger. In this section, I will suggest that the key to resolving the puzzle concerning gratitude depends on what makes it appropriate for someone to have and express a reactive attitude like gratitude towards someone else. I will suggest that moral anger and gratitude are on a par insofar as they are ways of engaging with someone as an agent of a certain sort. Thus, even though they are not structurally similar when it comes to moral communication, they are both ways of encountering another person as a responsible agent. This is why thinking about communication is instructive, because it helps us see the concerns around which our practices are structured. Although Strawsonians are right to focus on moral communication, they should think about accountability in terms of something more basic, namely, our concern for the feelings and attitudes of others.

I propose a very simple view of gratitude as a reactive attitude. It is a response to good quality of will, i.e., the moral consideration for others, that is the product of the right kind of agency. To engage another person with expressed gratitude is just to show another person good will by recognizing them as an agent of good will, where this can give rise to a permission to jointly value the good will of the benefactor per Telech (forthcoming). Simple as this sounds, it strikes me as essentially correct. As Robert Solomon puts it, gratitude is “one of the essential but usually neglected emotions of justice” because it is “the return of good for good” (Solomon 2004: x).

How could this return of good for good be a part of accountability in the needed confrontational sense? Recall that Strawsonians are committed to thinking that reactive attitudes are responses to quality of will. Strawson speaks in reductive terms: “The making of the demand is the

proneness to such attitudes” (1962/2008: 34). Reactive attitudes might appear to constitute a *basic demand* for certain forms of treatment, those expressing sufficiently good (or at least no ill) will. But there is a non-reductive way of construing Strawson’s point that does not focus on our moral demands *per se*. Our moral demands for certain kinds of treatment as expressed in our reactive attitudes might hinge upon a more basic human concern for the attitudes and feelings of others (Beglin 2018: 616). Indeed, Watson calls this concern *the basic concern*, and argues that on Strawson’s view the basic concern is prior to the basic demand (2015: 18-19). More generally, we could think about the communicative nature of the reactive attitudes as being explained by the fact that these attitudes are an expression of this basic concern.

This basic human concern we have for the feelings and attitudes of others explains how gratitude is a part of accountability. The expression of gratitude essentially involves being basically concerned with the attitudes and feelings of others in the same way that expressions of resentment and indignation likewise essentially involves this concern. They are all ways of engaging an agent out of this basic concern. Given this, let’s say that expressions of the reactive attitudes are a kind of *basically concerned engagement* with their intended addressee. These attitudes go beyond the merely evaluative kind of responsibility Watson contrasts with accountability because they are all ways of confronting their targets as being seen as agents of a certain sort. I suggest that all the reactive attitudes connected with accountability share a similar structure in terms of the directed expression of our basic concerns, of which the communication of moral demands is a specific type of directed engagement with another agent. On this view, reactive attitudes need not call out for a response, in general, although many do. Instead, they are all characterized by a specific type of engagement with other persons.¹³ One way to

¹³ As Driver (2016) notes, one problem for the kind of communicative view that, for instance, McKenna (2012) and myself adopt is that it cannot handle cases of private blame. McKenna (2012: 69-70) suggests that private blame is a kind of derivative case, but Driver thinks this will not suffice, since private blame involves many characteristic aspects of blame like change in relationship, the removal of trust, the judgment that someone acted poorly, and so on. Notice that the kind of view I develop here helps to blunt the force of Driver’s worry about communicative views of the reactive attitudes,

engage with persons in this way is to return a specific kind of goodness for the goodness in having someone be beneficently concerned with your feelings and attitudes.

An example might help here to get a sense of the kind of basically concerned engagement I have in mind. Recall that reactive attitudes are cognitively sharpened forms of more basic emotions (D'Arms and Jacobsen 2003: 143). Given the, not all forms of anger count as reactive attitudes: getting upset that one's car is a lemon is not the same as being indignant at one's coworker for negatively gossiping about one's other colleagues (Wallace 2019: 2706). The difference here might be about morality rather than engagement that manifests concerns about the attitudes and feelings of others. But notice that I could be morally angry at cosmic injustices like devastation in the wake of a natural disaster. Thus, there is a difference in being angry *about something happening* and being angry *at someone for doing something*. The latter involves confronting someone *as an agent*. Likewise, consider the distinction between being thankful or appreciative and being grateful.¹⁴ As Tony Manela (2019 sec. 1) points out, there is an emerging consensus that gratitude proper goes beyond appreciation or gladness that something has occurred.¹⁵ To be grateful is to respond to someone for acting in a beneficiary way. My suggestion is that when we experience a reactive attitude, our reaction is to that agent's quality of will insofar as we are fundamentally concerned with the attitudes and feelings of others as manifest in action (i.e., their quality of will), and we take them to *also* be the sort of agent who is fundamentally concerned with these matters, the sort of agent whose actions are modulated and produced by this kind of concern.

As McKenna (2012) has pointed out, our moral responsibility practices require a shared understanding of the reactive attitudes. Agents imbedded in these practices understand both their own

because the right kind of engagement with another person need not, strictly speaking, be overt. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this question about private blame and my view of the reactive attitudes.

¹⁴ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this distinction.

¹⁵ This consensus is built around the idea that gratitude has a prepositional sense, the kind at issue in this discussion, and a propositional sense. See for instance Roberts and Telech (2019) and Manela (2016) for discussion.

actions and the actions of others in terms of shared patterns of interpretation about what actions indicate good or ill will. (Indeed, we understand that actions can even indicate very specific feelings and intentions, that a gift of red roses indicates romantic interest, for instance). We know to exclude some agents from these practices and know that certain kinds of excusing events show that there was not the right kind of agency involved in the production of some actions. Note that, per the discussion in section 2, an agent might display quality of will in their action but might not be the sort of agent whose quality of will is of the pertinent sort. The young child who lacks adult emotional control might not yet have a fully developed sense of the basic concern. Perhaps instead, the child might not yet have developed the capacities to engage with others in light of this concern. In other words, we understand that manifest quality of will is the product of a certain kind of agency—namely, agency that reflects due moral consideration for others within the context of competency with this shared pattern of meanings. If the reactive attitudes are basically concerned ways of engaging with agents, then we could call the kind of agency that makes one the appropriate target of these attitudes *basically concerned agency*.

Framing expressions of gratitude in terms of the basic concern, and so basically concerned agency, can help us form a conception of being positively on the hook. Whether we self-approbate or deflect or demur, when we successfully uptake communicated gratitude, we recognize ourselves as having been recognized as the *agent* of good will, as having performed a meaningful action in the eyes of our fellows as the responsible party. Generalizing, we engage with accountable agents in a unique way such that we see them as being “on the hook” for their own actions insofar as these actions are indicators of inner attitudes and feelings about which we care. What we are on the hook for, then, are actions that display a certain kind of morally valenced agency, namely agency that is animated by the basic concern, only some subset of which can be demanded or expected of us.¹⁶

¹⁶ We can argue about what this subset of actions is, exactly. Strawson (1961) seems to think it was quite minimal.

To explain this in a specific instance, let's return to **Supererogatory Sohla**. Earlier, I asked why Sohla's coworkers thanking her counted as anything like holding her accountable. On my view, when her coworkers thank Sohla, they are directly engaging her in a particular way, as a person whose agency is sensitive to the concerns of others. And this engagement goes beyond the mere evaluation that she is beneficent. Her coworkers' gratitude is sensitive to the fact that Sohla has exercised her agency in a way that manifests an awareness of, and a fundamental concern for, the attitudes and feelings of her coworkers. They are not merely evaluating Sohla's good will, but rather, they are directly engaging with it because they care and are concerned with it. I say that this direct engagement is a way to hold Sohla accountable, to confront her with a construal of how she exercised of her agency.

Notice that we can raise all the pertinent accountability questions about the fairness of being on the hook for an action in terms of basically concerned agency. Is this action the product of the pertinent kind of agency, the sort that manifests a concern for the feelings and attitudes of others, such that it is fair for us to engage with these actions in a way that expresses our own basic concern with this agent's feelings and attitudes? Would the truth of determinism make engaging with an agent in terms of one's concern for their feelings and attitudes nonsensical or otherwise unfair?

Having explicated a wider notion of accountability that can accommodate gratitude as a way of holding accountable, some objections to my proposal are worth considering. First, it might seem that the basic demand framework better explains the negative case of resentment and indignation, and that I am adopting a wider view of accountability in an *ad hoc* manner just to accommodate gratitude. I believe we can offer a simple translation procedure to move from basic demands to basic concerns. Let me illustrate with a sample view. Van Schoelandt (2020: 382) suggests that reactive attitudes represent an agent as violating the basic demand, and so my view here seems to conflict with his. Isn't the blameworthy agent blameworthy because they have shown a *lack* of the pertinent concern for others? But here is an easy amendment: reactive attitudes could represent the agent in terms of the

basic concern. We might make demands of each other to show *sufficient* concern in our actions towards others, when we consider the addressed agent to be the sort of agent who is sensitive to the basic concern and so can show sufficient concern in their actions. This would not substantively change van Schoelandt's proposal, as far as I can tell. Likewise with other views of resentment and indignation in terms of the basic demand.

Second, one might worry that my view is not actually neutral between Strawsonian attributionists and their critics, which was my stated goal from section 3. Consider, for instance, Susan Wolf's (1987: 53-54) famous case of JoJo. JoJo is the child of a maliciously evil dictator and has grown up internalizing a truly wicked set of desires and preferences. JoJo himself grows up to deeply identify with his wicked desires and preferences. They reflect who he really is, and his actions reflect true ill will towards others. Suppose you despise JoJo but realize that his horrible childhood has inevitably formed him into a moral monster. Due to his horrible childhood, you might think that JoJo is not the appropriate target of resentment, indignation, or sanction. Still, in despising him and his evil actions, aren't you responding to JoJo's quality of will, and so, on my view, holding him accountable? If so, then my view is a kind of attributionism after all.

Here is what I will say. JoJo may be a moral monster, but either JoJo's quality of will is not the product of basically concerned agency, or it is. If JoJo's upbringing has rendered him an evildoer by destroying his capacity to care about the feelings and attitudes of others, then I say that it seems possible to respond to quality of will without responding to quality of will as the product of basically concerned agency. For instance, a parent might be genuinely angry at their teenager's disrespectful actions while understanding that this disrespect is not the product of a fully developed, mature agent, someone who is fully basically concerned with the attitudes and feelings of others. Correspondingly, on this way of responding to the objection from the JoJo case, you are not holding JoJo accountable by despising his evil will, since it is not a product of basically concerned agency. If, on the other hand,

JoJo does have the capacity for basically concerned agency and is just a genuine evildoer, someone who *disregards* his own concern for the attitude and feelings for others, then there are reactive attitudes that are appropriate to have in response to him as a special case. There are ways of seeing an agent as morally accountable but are not themselves ways of holding accountable by way of anger as blame. Candidate attitudes here might be moral contempt (Bell 2013: 163-164) and moral disgust (Wallace 2019: 2718), respectively expressing a kind of protest against the target's "badbeing" or an ultimatum that says, "we won't deal with you anymore." These responses, then, are ways of going about basically concerned engagement that go beyond blame. On this way of responding to the JoJo case, you *are* responding to JoJo as an accountable agent, even though it would be inapt to hold JoJo accountable by way of resentment or indignation. In such a case, either we are holding JoJo accountable in a special (contemptuous) way, or he is so bad (morally disgusting) that we remove him from our ordinary accountability practices. Although standard attributionists may prefer the former view if they do not think that history matters for accountability, the latter response is consistent with attributionism too. On either way of reading the case, I do not need to say anything about what specifically constitutes basically concerned agency, and so my view does not take a stand regarding attributionism.

Disagreements about what specifically constitutes basically concerned agency will amount to disagreements about what capacities are needed to have this agency. For Strawsonians, the appropriateness conditions for holding responsible have an explanatory priority over being morally responsible. I have said that moral responsibility is explained in terms of directed engagement at basically concerned agents. Given this, we can frame disagreements about basically concerned agency as disagreements about what we think is involved in the appropriateness of this engagement, where it might be helpful to think about when an agent is excused or exempted from responsibility. Perhaps it is as some attributionists say, that the capacity to have evaluable quality of will is sufficient for basically concerned agency, and so the kind of directed engagement that characterizes accountability. Or maybe

basically concerned agency involve notions at issue in the free will debate. We might think that quality of will of the pertinent sort must involve a kind of responsiveness to a sufficiently rich range of reasons (as in Fischer and Ravizza 1998 or McKenna 2013), where this richness involves reasons concerning the attitudes and feelings of other agents. Or instead, we might think that for an agent to be truly concerned about holding others accountable, they must be concerned about fair opportunity to avoid wrongdoing (Brink 2021). My hope is that by thinking about accountability in terms of basically concerned agency, Strawsonians of many kinds can find a core notion around which to focus these debates.

I have argued that there is indeed a positive sense of confrontation in gratitude. To express gratitude is to engage with another person as a basically concerned agent, and this sense of engagement goes beyond the mere moral evaluation of that agent. And I have argued that the confrontation found in moral anger is just a specific form of the kind of engagement with other persons that truly characterizes the nature of moral accountability, and so there is no asymmetry between moral anger and gratitude, and so between blame and praise, at the level of the basic concerns around which our communicative accountability practices are built. Thus, the orthodox Strawsonian view about gratitude is vindicated, and we have come to a deeper appreciation of the nature of moral accountability.

6. Gratitude, Love, and Moral Responsibility Skepticism

So far, I've argued that gratitude is the communicative recognition that an action displays agency-relevant good quality of will, and so suggested that reframing accountability in terms of the basic concern offers the best way to explain the connection between gratitude and accountability. But now someone might worry that my notion of accountability as basically concerned engagement is too broad, counting some emotional attitudes as a part of accountability that are obviously not. We seem to have lost any sense of difficult confrontation, which was precisely what generated our puzzle! This is an important objection, but in this section, I argue that my view does not let in too many attitudes,

and in fact, shows why moral responsibility skeptics cannot help themselves to as many attitudes as they might have thought.

For instance, my view seems to suggest that love is a part of accountability, which might strike the reader as very odd. There do seem to be some kinds of love that are clearly not reactive attitudes, but that is not the issue. Strawson (1962/ 2008: 21) himself counts love as a reactive attitude, of course, but the problem is that love can be cognitively rich and so much more complex than a mere reaction to quality of will. The problem is that love, even as a reactive attitude, seems like it is about so much more than accountability responsibility.

As Neera Badhwar (2003: 44-46) argues, love is a matter of having a characterological disposition to emotionally affirm the existence of one's beloved and involves taking pleasure in their well-being. And as Bennett Helm (2009) has argued, love is a matter of care about someone *as a particular person*. Indeed, love has profound relationship building potential. These features—the affirmation, taking pleasure in, and care for a particular person—are so much more than the typical Strawsonian reactive attitude. Because of this, expressing love, even in response to good will, does not seem like a way to hold a person accountable.

Just like love seems to be about so much more than accountability, gratitude might seem to be about so much more than accountability too. Indeed, gratitude seems to have much more cognitive content than the sorts of moral anger we associate with blame. As Solomon insightfully points out, gratitude is somehow bigger than we assume in our theorizing. Gratitude is a “philosophical emotion”, a “seeing the bigger picture” that involves “being aware of one’s whole life”; it involves an awareness of “how much of life is out of one’s hands, how many advantages one owes to other people, and how indebted one is or should be to parent’s friends, and teachers.” (2004: ix-x).

Even in intimate interpersonal matters, gratitude seems to be about more than accountability. As T.M. Scanlon puts it, gratitude “is not just a positive emotion but a recognition that one’s

relationship with a person has been altered by some action or attitude on that person's part" (2008: 151). Return to our paradigm case **Magnanimous Mover**. Recall that Jorge promised to help Sara in the future. We can ask why this seems paradigmatic of expressions of gratitude. On Scanlon's view we have a natural answer. To be shown concern by someone makes appropriate a shift in attitudes towards them, such that one should have "a readiness to respond in kind" (2008: 151).

Thus, gratitude is an acknowledgement of our own vulnerability, and correspondingly, of our own good luck. This is the context in which we recognize another person's benefaction, or even the benefaction of our broader community. Given this recognition, we develop a disposition to show good will to others in turn. Conversely, I'm not sure that blaming someone necessarily involves any wider sense of standing against injustice, say, or recognizing and so defending our human fragility in the face of harm, or becoming more disposed to confront wrongdoing. Sometimes we just get mad.

This worry about the scope of the reactive attitudes—and so accountability— is serious. Here's an argumentative strategy for defending the wider view of accountability: Abramson and Leite (2011) defend the view that at least one kind of love is a reactive attitude in Strawson's sense. I find their argument persuasive. In response to the objection that love does not involve demands or expectations, Abramson and Leite suggest that at the core of Strawsonian reactive attitudes is the idea of treating an agent as substantively responsible. As they put it:

"Treating as responsible in this sense is a matter of taking to be appropriate only certain sorts of morally significant responses directed towards the person, and accordingly structuring the relationship in certain morally significant ways rather than others. The sorts of responses which are thus taken to be inappropriate are those belonging in the same broad category as excuse, that is, relationally directed, morally significant attitudes which structure relationships in morally significant ways, but

without ipso facto involving moral approval or disapproval of the person who is their object.” (2011: 692).

Their suggestion is essentially similar to my own suggestion, if different in terminology and specific emphasis. Love can sometimes count as a reactive attitude because it is a way to engage with a person as a responsible agent. On my view, this is to engage with a person as a basically concerned agent. I believe that the basic concern is what *explains* why we take some agents as substantively responsible insofar as some agents as being sensitive and responsive to the basic concern.¹⁷ On the kind of view I am suggesting, there is a kind of love that is a matter of holding another agent positively accountable. As Abramson and Leite point out (2011: 695), loving one’s spouse well not only means having and showing affection for the good conduct of one’s spouse, but also having and showing affection for the affection one receives through that conduct. This is precisely the kind of basically concerned directed engagement that I have argued characterizes accountability.¹⁸

Of course, having a conception on which gratitude and love count is at best a burden shift against the objector. In what follows, I will suggest that we can account for the broader interpersonal and communal features of gratitude by appealing to reactions to basically concerned expressions of quality of will alone. Thus, we can see the broader features of gratitude as dependent on the core reactive features, and so diffuse the worry that the construing accountability in terms of the basic concern counts too many emotions as reactive attitudes, and so parts of accountability. So long as the broader features of any given emotion can be explained in terms of basically concerned reactive

¹⁷ Abramson and Leite want to construe love as a reactive attitude as a response to expressions of contextually determined character virtues indexed to different spheres of intimacy. This is compatible with my view so long as we believe that different kinds of these virtues will be different ways of being characterologically disposed to respond to the attitudes and feelings of others in a good way. This strikes me as a plausible view.

¹⁸ An anonymous referee pointed out that by offering this kind of reply, I might be “fracturing” the moral emotions. The love that you have for your partner will not be the same love that you have for your child or your pet. I think that this is the right result given that reactive attitudes are cognitively sharpened versions of more basic emotions. It is possible, I think, that when we love children and pets, we are having an emotional response to agency. Maybe you love the very good dog because the dog is a good kind of agent. That seems right. But it seems plausible to think that the dog’s agency falls short of the basic concern standard. (Perhaps if the dog is very good and very smart, it might not fall *that* short).

engagement, we should count an attitude as a reactive emotion and so a way to hold accountable. (We could construct a similar defense regarding love).¹⁹

Let's first consider some empirical work on the relationship between gratitude and interpersonal relationships. Sara Algoe and her collaborators have persuasively argued that the explanation of gratitude's ability to build relationships is other-praising behavior (Algoe and Haidt 2009, Algoe et al. 2016a, Algoe et al. 2016b). For example, in one experiment featuring couples (Algoe et al. 2016b: Study 1), each person was asked to pick something his or her partner had done for which he or she was grateful. After selecting the event, the person rated the importance of the event. The couple then had a conversation about the events they selected. One person was randomly selected to go first and discuss their selected event. This person was asked to report both their own feelings, as well as how responsive this person felt his or her partner was. Then, the other person in the couple would discuss his or her selected event. These conversations were recorded and coded for other-praising behavior. The results are striking. "When expressers used more other-praising behavior, their benefactors perceived them as more responsive, benefactors felt good in general and more loving in particular" (Algoe et al. 2016b: 5) In previous research, Algoe and Zhaoyang (2016) appear to have shown that the relationship-benefitting aspect of gratitude is explained by the perceived responsiveness of the person showing gratitude. "[H]ow understanding, validating, and caring the expresser was" to the receiver impacted relationship-building effects (Algoe and Zhaoyang 2016: 400).

This research supports the intuitive idea that relationship strength depends on *expressed* gratitude. It fits well with the idea that gratitude is the recognition of the good will of another person as a basically concerned agent, and that this expression is itself an act of good will. It also points to the interconnectedness of the positive reactive attitudes—expressed gratitude led to reactive love.

¹⁹ Briefly put, one could argue that we to take pleasure in the affection and well-being of a particular person presupposes that we see them as the sort of agent with whom we can be basically concerned.

This interconnection helps explain another feature of gratitude that might seem to go beyond accountability. Macnamara (2015a: 560-561) has convincingly argued that gratitude can build moral community by invoking self-regarding positive attitudes like self-approbation, which in turn motivate further do-gooding. Gratitude has the important role of providing us with a special form of encouragement and community building through the recognition of good agency—understanding, attentive, and caring agency. In being recognized and understood as having expressed good will, we are motivated to do good for others. Generally, it seems like other-praising emotions motivate reciprocal do-gooding; experiencing gratitude motivates a desire to help benefactors and to “give back” (Algoe and Haidt 2009: 122). Being the recipient of gratitude may induce the emotion of elevation in oneself. Elevation is “a pleasurable feeling, sometimes involving warm or pleasant feelings in the chest, that trigger[s] desires of doing good deeds” (Algoe and Haidt 2009: 106). In particular, elevation “gives rise to as specific motivation or action tendency: emulation” (Algoe and Haidt 2009: 106). So, we have a natural explanation of why gratitude promotes reciprocal relationships: it is morally elevating. As I’ve argued elsewhere, elevation appears to be a particularly apt response to extraordinarily good will, and so could also be counted as a reactive attitude (Wallace 2019: 2715). When experienced in oneself, it promotes the return of good for good. As the recipient of gratitude, one is motivated to do good too. Specifically, one is moved to emulate the gratitude that oneself has been shown. So, the kinds of broader considerations that Solomon notes seem to follow from the fact that gratitude is a reactive attitude, and how gratitude functionally relates to other positive reactive attitudes like love and elevation.

So, the objection fails to convince. Gratitude as a reactive attitude does not involve more than accountability, and so accountability understood in terms of the basic concern does not let in too many attitudes as ways to hold accountable. Interestingly, reactive attitudes might have numerous

causal upshots in terms of each other and our relationships. But this only goes to strengthen the case for a more nuanced understanding of accountability in terms of basic concerns.

I started this article by noting Strawson's contribution to the free will debate, and so I will conclude by suggesting one relevant upshot of this discussion. On one way of reading Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment", he sought to contextualize this narrow moral discussion about desert within a wider, interpersonal sphere of morality we might call accountability. Although Strawson's essay is in favor of compatibilism, anyone can recognize that the essay points to "the range and variety of things which determinism puts in jeopardy", as David Wiggins (1973: 56) once put it. By understanding accountability in terms of directed basically concerned engagement, I have suggested that gratitude, among love and other attitudes, are tied to accountability. Thus, I hope to have done some work towards showing the impressive range and variety of things at issue in the free will debate.

A consequence of this impressive range is that, if my view of accountability is right, then many of the positive attitudes that moral responsibility skeptics have argued can be preserved even if we do not have free will are no longer obviously compatible with moral responsibility skepticism. Skeptics about moral responsibility, especially Derk Pereboom (2014), have argued that positive emotions like love (in their non-reactive forms) do not require the control needed for free will, and so these positive emotions—or at least their core components—are compatible with moral responsibility skepticism. Pereboom (2014: 190) says about gratitude that, "no feature of the skeptical view poses a threat to the legitimacy of being joyful and expressing joy when others are considerate or generous in one's behalf." And about love (2014: 190), he writes that, "love of another involves, most fundamentally, wishing well for the other, taking on aims and projects of the other as one's own, and a desire to be together with the other." But I am right about gratitude and accountability, then skeptics like Pereboom have much more work to do. Attitudes like love and gratitude, at least in cognitively sharpened forms, may require that their objects be morally responsible agents. I have suggested that morally responsible

agents are basically concerned agents. And if we do not have free will—the control needed to be morally responsible—then at least joy and interest in the basically concerned agency of our beloveds and our benefactors will be threatened, since this joy and interest will be a kind of basically concerned engagement with them. My point is not that the skeptics are wrong, for surely there are some forms of non-reactive love and gratitude that are consistent with skepticism. My point is rather that, looked at through the lens of basically concerned agency, these non-reactive forms of the pertinent emotions start to seem very thinned out. The burden is on the moral responsibility skeptic to show that the elements of emotions like love and gratitude that they think are consistent with skepticism do not involve basically concerned engagement with their recipients. About the prospect of this consistency, I am skeptical.

7. Conclusion

Strawsonians have mainly focused on negative attitudes like resentment and indignation. These attitudes have an obvious connection to our practices of moral accountability. Gratitude does not have such an obvious connection. In this paper, I hope to have shown that the sphere of morality we call accountability, and the kinds of evaluations we make within this sphere, are more complex than has been widely recognized. And this complexity follows from the very sorts of considerations Strawson considered in “Freedom and Resentment”. Strawsonians should therefore be especially grateful about gratitude.

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