Short title: Book Reviews

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Sher, George. In Praise of Blame.

New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. x+145. $45.00 (cloth).

Philosophers writing on free will, moral responsibility, and related issues in moral psychology have long needed a sustained treatment of blame. As central as blame is to a diverse range of topics, there has been scant attention devoted just to it rather than, for example, the bearing lack of free will would have on it. George Sher's penetrating *In Praise of Blame* remedies this deficiency.

Sher takes his central charge to be accounting for the difference between the negative assessment of a morally wrong act and the assessment distinctive of blame. Sher asks what it is to go beyond an indictment of a person's act to an indictment of her for performing it. Derk Pereboom contends that, because no one has free will, blame is never justified; yet we can speak truthfully of morally wrong acts. Sher disagrees. A commitment to morality and a commitment to blame stand or fall together.

The book is structured around three issues. The first (chaps. 2–4) concerns the presumed relation between an agent and her action when she is blamed for doing wrong. The second (chaps. 5–6) fixes upon what blame is. The third (chap. 7) focuses on the norms rendering blame appropriate and the wrongdoer deserving. We shall discuss each in turn.

I

Hume asked how the badness of an act can explain condemnation of the agent. The act does not endure; the agent does. What warrants blaming the agent once the act has left the scene? Hume's answer: bad acts arise from the enduring flawed character traits of their agents. So we direct disapprobation at an agent in virtue of the flawed character trait that caused her bad act. Sher dismantles this thesis (chap. 2). If the blame directed at a bad act is accounted for exclusively in terms of the