

MORAL RESIDUE AND EXPRESSED QUALITY OF WILL  
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RoME 2023

ABSTRACT. It is plausible that in cases where we must choose the lesser of two evils, even the person who has their heart in the right place and chooses as well as they can is liable to remorse and resentment. But this possibility does not rest easily with many mainstream accounts of blameworthiness, which hold that we are blameworthy only for acts that issue from poor quality of will. This paper motivates the theoretical need for a theory of blame and blameworthiness that accommodates the notion that blame is fitting in these hard cases, and sketches such a theory.

The proposal starts from the idea that blame protests the claims expressed in its target's conduct. This conception of blame supports a more permissive conception of blameworthiness than has previously been recognized, because our actions can express judgments and attitudes we do not in fact possess. The conception of blameworthiness that emerges from this way of thinking about blame is one according to which we can be blameworthy for *expressing* objectionable evaluations, where *expression does not require possession*. I further suggest that sometimes the claims expressed in our actions are objectionable for what they leave out or make salient. The result is the first step toward a theory of blame and blameworthiness that makes sense of the idea that we can be properly blamed for choosing the less of two evils, even in the absence of ill will.

### 1. Setup

Sometimes, we face deep moral conflict and must choose the lesser of two evils. Sometimes, it might even be that no “lesser” evil is available, and we simply must choose an evil that is no greater than any alternative. In these cases, our choice will typically leave a moral remainder: our moral work is not done when we choose the best we can choose. There are things that we should do and think and feel in the wake of our choice. And we are not totally free, it seems, of the possibility of certain forms of negative moral assessment.

Some people think that when I have no good options, I cannot really be blamed for choosing a bad one, assuming I deliberated conscientiously. Any fitting emotional residue will not be one of remorse but something else, such as some form of regret. And the practical upshots of my choice—requirements of remedy and apology—will not bear their usual connection to blameworthiness.

But others think that even when I reason sensitively and conscientiously, and choose as well as I might, the moral residue may be one of blame.<sup>1</sup> I should feel remorse; and the person I've harmed would make no mistake if they resented me. Thus Ruth Barcan Marcus insists that

in such tragic cases as that described by Jean-Paul Sartre where the choice to be made by the agent is between abandoning a wholly dependent mother and not becoming a freedom fighter, it is inadequate to insist that feelings of guilt about the rejected alternative are mistaken and that assumption of guilt is inappropriate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walzer 1973; 2006; De Wijze 2005; Eggert 2023

<sup>2</sup> Marcus 1980, 130–31

In this case and others, she contends that “to insist that ‘regret’ is appropriate rather than ‘guilt’ or ‘remorse’ is false to the facts”<sup>3</sup> or, as she sometimes puts it, “false to the moral facts.”<sup>4</sup>

This disagreement frames a question about blame and blameworthiness. Let us call the remorse and resentment we are liable to feel in cases of choices under deep moral conflict *reactive residue*. I’ll stipulate for the purposes of discussion that, unless otherwise specified, people making these choices are not responsible for their predicament, that they deliberate virtuously, and that they make the best choice they can. Our question is whether, in some cases like this, *fitting* reactive residue is possible. The puzzle over fitting reactive residue arises because of the stipulation I’ve just made: the agent deliberates conscientiously—they lack an objectionable quality of will. But it is plausible that someone is blameworthy only if they possess poor quality of will.<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to make progress on this issue solely on the basis of intuitions about particular cases. No one can reasonably deny that a choice under deep moral conflict will often produce strong feelings in both the person who makes it and the people it affects, or that some feelings of these kind will be fitting. And few people will deny that the feelings that will be fitting in a case like this will very closely resemble remorse and resentment, both phenomenologically and in terms of action tendency. For these reasons, when we judge that someone’s vigorous recoil from their own conduct in these cases is the right response, it’s hard to say for sure what response we are appraising as fitting.

Instead, the question at hand seems to be a theory-driven one. Whether you think that hard choices like those of Sartre’s student yield fitting remorse and resentment will depend in large part on your theory of blame and blameworthiness. If, for example, you are certain that blameworthiness requires ill will, you will likely think that the student cannot properly be blamed for what he chooses, so long as his heart is in the right place. You will insist for this reason that any remorse he feels is not fitting, and any fitting feeling he has cannot be remorse.

Outside the grips of such a theory, however, it’s not clear why you might hold this position with such confidence. After all, what he fittingly feels looks suspiciously like remorse. Given the difficulty of distinguishing regret and remorse phenomenologically or by action-tendency, any insistence that what we might feel in such a case, assuming it’s fitting, simply *must* be regret and not remorse looks a bit like table-thumping.<sup>6</sup>

Discussions of these issues tend to focus on the underlying moral structure of the cases—questions concerning whether there are genuine moral dilemmas or the nature of rights—rather than on blame and blameworthiness. For this reason, no one has attempted to give a theory of blame and blameworthiness geared to accommodating the possibility that we can feel fitting remorse and resentment when we conscientiously choose the lesser of two evils. If such a theory

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<sup>3</sup> Marcus 1980, 133 n

<sup>4</sup> Marcus 1980, 132

<sup>5</sup> What about the other stipulation—that the agent choose as well as they might? I do not think that blameworthiness requires choosing suboptimally. If we imagine that Sartre’s student chooses *gleefully* to abandon his mother, the fact that he had no better option will not save him from blameworthiness. So choosing suboptimally is no necessary condition on blameworthiness. Neither, I should note, is wrongdoing. Gleefully inflicting permissible harm seems to make one blameworthy. And so do slights that are not strictly speaking forbidden, such as refusing to give one’s brother a kidney when he needs one, or refusing to change one’s seat on a flight so that a parent can sit by their child.

<sup>6</sup> For a related discussion in a somewhat different context see McConnell 2022, §6.

can be given, and it is independently attractive, then we have reason to think that remorse and resentment can indeed be fitting in these cases. In this paper, I attempt to supply such a theory.

As this setup makes clear, my approach is not to assume outright that there can be fitting reactive residue and my aim is not to defend this possibility without qualification. Instead, it is to set in motion a process of reflective equilibrium in which we take seriously this possibility and, ultimately, look to wholistically appraise a theory that accommodates intuitions like Marcus's. Needless to say, this paper does not complete this process—it merely starts it.

## 2. Motivating remarks

Some might remain skeptical that we should bother looking into the possibility of fitting reactive residue. My motivation for this inquiry is that intuitions about whether reactive residue can be fitting are indecisive. My own, at least, are muddled. The intelligibility of the inquiry thus depends on there being some reasonable suspicion that these feelings might be fitting. So I will try to say a few things to spark this suspicion.

I will use the following case to frame discussion:

*The Lie.* My friend, Anna, has out of necessity told me a tremendously significant secret—one she cannot bear to have out. In order to protect Anna's secret, I must lie to another friend, Bella, in a way that I know will lead her to make a costly choice. I realize that I must protect Anna's secret, and I lie to Bella's face.<sup>7</sup>

Now were I to actually live *The Lie*, I suspect I would feel remorse for how I treated Bella. I also suspect I would not be quick to disavow this feeling. After all, what would it say about me as a person and my friendship with Bella if I could lie to her without remorse?<sup>8</sup> I believe that careful consideration of the fact that remorse is required or at least recommended by virtue and by an ideal of moral regard supports the notion that this response is fitting.

The easiest way to see that these ideals recommend remorse is to imagine the remorseless liar. The person who does not feel and express remorse will seem like a shirker. To express some other, more qualified emotion is less than ideal. It amounts to a refusal to take ownership of the action, and betrays an excessive readiness to try to excuse the choice and wriggle free of accountability. What's more, expressions of this more cautious sentiment reveal insufficient concern for the person affected by the choice. Were I to fail to express remorse to Bella, instead insisting that while I felt bad, I was ultimately blameless, she would likely feel I was insufficiently concerned with the objectionable dimensions of my treatment of her.<sup>9</sup> Mere *expressions* of remorse, we should add, are not sufficient to fend off criticism. Bella will not expect me to go through the motions of remorse, but the real thing. Were she to somehow know that I was simulating, she would retain her sense that I am not adequately concerned with how I've treated her. And were someone to go

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<sup>7</sup> Perhaps you think it could not be that I “must” protect the secret. Then, you presumably think I must tell the truth, betraying Anna. If so, consider the slightly different case (call it *The Betrayal*) in which I spill the beans.

<sup>8</sup> Walzer 1973, 177 makes much of this point in his discussions of dirty hands, arguing that when a politician must do wrong to do right, she should act “with a heavy heart” lest we are “ruled by men who have lost their souls.” See also Eggert 2023, 6.

<sup>9</sup> See Mason 2019, 248–50 for a similar discussion concerning remorse for inadvertent mistreatment. See also Wolf 2001, 13–15 for a discussion of the “nameless virtue” associated with taking responsibility actions at the margins of one's responsibility.

through the motions of expressing remorse while privately reassuring themselves that they were not, in fact, blameworthy, they would still seem like something of a shirker.

A detractor might claim that everything I've just said in fact provides an error theory for any intuition that reactive residue is fitting. We might *approve* of my remorse after *The Lie*, but that is not because it's *fitting*; instead, it's because it is what virtue or proper concern for my friend recommends. But the fact that personal and moral ideals recommend some emotion does not mean that emotion is fitting, even if it means the emotion is justified or desirable on the whole.<sup>10</sup>

We should reject this argument. Rather than assume that our moral and ethical ideals require unfitting emotions, it seems we should often assume the exact opposite. That is, we should expect that the virtuous person will typically—perhaps even necessarily—feel what is fitting to feel. So it looks like the fact that the virtuous person would feel remorse about *The Lie* suggests that this remorse is fitting. Similarly, we should expect our ideals of interpersonal relations to involve fitting responses to one another's importance, as well as mutual expectations of these fitting responses. If the proper way to demonstrate due regard for Bella is to experience and express remorse, this is a reason to think that this remorse is not baseless, but fitting.<sup>11</sup>

My aim in this discussion has simply been to raise a reasonable suspicion that there can be fitting reactive residue. Those who resist this suspicion, I suspect, do so on the basis of a theory of blameworthiness—presumably one that precludes fitting remorse and resentment in the absence of objectionable quality of will. That is a fine reason to resist this suspicion. But it suffices to set up the rest of my project, which involves sketching an account of blame and blameworthiness to rival those theories that refuse to countenance fitting reactive residue.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. *Moral protest*

Let us turn now to this sketch. Recall that the biggest obstacle to such a theory, as I see it, is the quality of will constraint. The idea that a person is blameworthy for an action only if that action manifests poor quality of will is well-established in the literature on moral responsibility.<sup>13</sup> Although quality of will theorists are in fact a diverse bunch, a thin gloss of what the view involves will suffice for my discussion here. In brief, the quality of will theorist holds that one cannot be

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<sup>10</sup> The *locus classicus* for this familiar point is D'Arms and Jacobson 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Notice that the argument here does not rest on the false claim that the fact that remorse is part of some ethical or relational ideal *makes* it fitting. It says only because proper concern for our friends and the ideal of personal virtue recommend or require remorse, we have reason to believe that remorse is fitting. The key premise is that these ideals demand fitting responses: the virtuous person will feel fitting feelings; and the ideal of moral regard will involve correct emotional apprehension of another person's importance, rather than emotional contortions and misrepresentations. Thus if we agree that the remorseless liar is for that reason morally and ethically defective, we have reason to think that remorse in this case is fitting. I have drawn these arguments pretty directly from Yao 2023. A longer version of the paper runs an analogous argument for the fittingness of resentment, which appeals to the ideal of self-respect.

<sup>12</sup> McKenna 2012; Shoemaker 2015; Scanlon 1988; 1998, chap. 6; 2008, chap. 4; Arpaly 2006; Smith 2005

<sup>13</sup> Prominent, though internally diverse, articulations of quality of will views include McKenna 2012; Shoemaker 2015; Scanlon 1988; 1998, chap. 6; 2008, chap. 4; Arpaly 2006; Smith 2005. The view, I should note, is hardly universally accepted. A more thorough version of the inquiry at hand would canvas conceptions of blameworthiness that do not insist on a quality of will condition to see if they can capture the idea of fitting reactive residue. This project seems important, but I won't undertake it here; instead I will simply offer my own proposal, which has the merit of sharing some of the spirit of the popular quality of will view.

blameworthy for an action so long as one's heart was in the right place in performing it.<sup>14</sup> The contents of one's "heart" or "will" in this formulation can for my purposes be construed relatively broadly to include any evaluative judgements or attitudes that influence one's reasoning, emotions, or patterns of concern or awareness.

The important thing about quality of will views as they've typically been developed is that they maintain that we can only be blamed for actions that reflect evaluative judgments or attitudes we actually *possess*. Thus, although sometimes these theorists say that fitting blaming responses target the quality of will *expressed* in a person's conduct, they have a constrained conception of *expression* in mind—one that says we can only express attitudes judgments and attitudes we actually possess. On my proposal, we retain the claim that blame fittingly targets the quality of will expressed in an action, but discard the possession constraint on expression. In a slogan, my position is that while we can be blameworthy when our actions express poor quality of will, *expression does not require possession*.

To undermine the possession constraint, I will argue that if we take seriously one prominent theoretical argument for the quality of will constraint, we will see that it in fact favors this more expansive interpretation of quality of will views—one which countenances *expression without possession* as grounds for blameworthiness. This source of the quality of will view's theoretical appeal is its connection to a popular conception of the nature of blame, according to which blame amounts to a form of protest which targets the claims implicit in the actions of a purportedly blameworthy agent.

Since my aim is simply to build up a *prima facie* plausible account of blame and blameworthiness that accommodates fitting reactive residue, and the protest account is already a popular and attractive theory of blame, I will say little to motivate this view. Here is Angela Smith's official formulation of the view:

**The Moral Protest Account:** To *blame* another is to judge that she is blameworthy...and to modify one's own attitudes, intentions, and expectations toward that person as a way of *protesting* (i.e., registering and challenging) the moral claim implicit in her conduct, where such protest implicitly seeks some kind of moral acknowledgement on the part of the blameworthy agent and/or on the part of others in the moral community.<sup>15</sup>

As Smith explains, this view is appealing in part because it captures many intuitive features of blame that other accounts miss.<sup>16</sup> The protest model offers an attractive and plausible account of blame's characteristic motives and aims, one which allows us to separate blame from mere judgments of blameworthiness but also harsh sanctioning behavior. It allows us to make sense of a variety of forms of blame (including but not limited to the reactive attitudes), as well as the idea of private blame—wherein the modifications of attitudes such as the development of resentment or the expectation of apology constitute a way of challenging the way one was treated (even if only in one's own mind).

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<sup>14</sup> For a similar gloss, see Madigan 2023, 1–2

<sup>15</sup> Smith 2013, 43. I have omitted Smith's gloss of the content of judgments of blameworthiness from this formulation, since that it part of what's under discussion. The rest of the text is Smith's verbatim.

<sup>16</sup> For more on this, Smith 2013

In order to work the protest view up into one that supports the possibility of fitting reactive residue, I will focus on the idea that blame protests the moral claim expressed in a person's conduct. Blameworthy conduct, on this view, is conduct that expresses some attitude or judgment that merits protest—that someone has reason to challenge, contest, or reject through the modification of attitudes and expectations. This conception of blame relies on the fact that our actions *carry meaning* and can express judgments: “they signify. They are not only causes of effect in the course of events, but carriers of meaning between communicating agents.”<sup>17</sup>

Crucially, the judgments and attitudes expressed in our treatment of other have normative and evaluative content. They make claims about our relative moral importance or about the claims and standing a person possesses, among other things: “They are ways a wrongdoer has of saying to us, ‘I count but you do not,’ ‘I can use you for my purposes,’ or ‘I am here up high and you are there down below.’”<sup>18</sup>

Blame, on the protest model, functions as a form of counter speech. To resent the claim expressed in another's treatment is to affirm what their action denies, to append what their action leaves out, to correct what their action suggests, etc., about me and my place in the moral landscape.

#### *4. Developing the protest view*

With this account of the target of blame in hand, I will now contend that protest theorists have made two mistakes in drawing out the implications of their own view. First, they have erroneously connected their conception of blame to a quality of will constraint on blameworthiness. Second, they have assumed that the only moral claims that merit challenge are *false* moral claims. Correcting these errors will help us develop the protest view in a way that yields a conception of blameworthiness friendlier to the possibility of fitting reactive residue.

##### *4.1 Protest and quality of will*

Start with the connection between the protest view and the quality of will constraint. Although she does not dwell on it, Hieronymi states the rationale for connection explicitly: “An action,” she says, “carries meaning by revealing the evaluations of its author.”<sup>19</sup> This suggests that if you are to be blamed on the basis of the claim expressed in your action, it must be the case that this action *reveals* something about your actual evaluative commitments. An action that did not reveal the evaluations of its author would be meaningless—express nothing at all. Thus the idea that blame protests the claims expressed in a person's conduct means that blame makes sense only as a response to actions that reveal the agent's actual quality of will.

But it is not true that actions carry meaning only insofar as they reveal the evaluations of their authors. Sometimes, the meaning of our actions is divorced from our actual evaluations. Elizabeth Anderson and Richard Pildes develop this idea compellingly with the simple example of a musician who expresses sadness through the performance of a piece, though she herself is not sad at all.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Lucas 1993, 8

<sup>18</sup> Murphy and Hampton 1990, 25

<sup>19</sup> Hieronymi 2001, 546

<sup>20</sup> Anderson and Pildes 2002, 1508

The point becomes more compelling when we realize how often we have reason to express attitudes we do not possess. I have reason to express gratitude for a gift I in fact regard as a nuisance. And you may have reason to express interest in the Dean's model train hobby, though you in fact find it perfectly boring. These examples illustrate that we have all manner of reasons (the musician's aesthetic reasons, my moral reasons, your prudential reasons, etc.) to express evaluations we do not have—reasons we act successfully on all the time.

This smattering of cases may suggest that we can only *deliberately* express attitudes we do not have. But this is not so. My clumsy attempts to communicate what is in fact affection may instead express obsequiousness or obsession. And ignorance of local custom may result in actions that inadvertently express disrespect in the absence of any actual or intended disrespect. Finally, I may *foresee* that my action will express an evaluation that I do not possess without intending to express this attitude. In cases like this, we may try to apologize in advance for what our conduct will mean—engaging in a sort of proleptic or anticipatory counter speech—precisely because we do not possess or intend to express the objectionable attitude.

Once we see that we can express attitudes we do not possess, the connection between the protest view of blame and the quality of will constraint on blameworthiness is severed. This opens up the possibility that we can be blameworthy in virtue of what our actions express, despite the fact that we do not harbor the expressed evaluations.

This, in turn, yields a framework for explaining cases of fitting reactive residue. To see why, I will introduce the notion of a *robustly expressive act-type*. Some act-types are freighted with symbolism. When this is the case, the meaning of tokens of their types may be relatively immune to alteration by the actual attitudes of the person performing the action. Consider, for example, the acts of washing someone's feet in public, uttering a slur, or spitting in a person's face. Nearly regardless of one's actual evaluative comportment, actions of these kinds send strong messages.

Plausibly, the choices we make under deep moral conflict are robustly expressive actions. Even when we do not harbor ill will and I am forced into the choice, the choice to abandon one's mother or tell a costly lie to a friend's face expresses something worth remarking on. Indeed, the act-types of (*mother-*) *abandonment* and *lying* seem quite symbolically freighted. If this is right, the fact that one harbored no ill will in performing an act of this kind may simply not be enough to overcome this symbolism and eradicate the sense that the action expressed something objectionable.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.2 Protest and false claims

If we accept that lies, abandonment, and other triggers for reactive residue are robustly expressive act-types, then it's possible to see our way to the conclusion that some tokens of them express moral attitudes that the agent performing them does not possess. But a worry might linger here: what claim, exactly, do these actions make? If, as Hieronymi suggests, the objectionable claim in blameworthy behavior is "that you can be treated in this way, and that such treatment is acceptable," we might wonder why that claim is objectionable in, for example, *The Lie*. After all, under the circumstances, there is a good sense in which it is acceptable to treat Bella the way I do:

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<sup>21</sup> A longer version of the paper considers the possibility that fitting reactive residue will always target rights infringements or genuine wrongdoing, where acts of these kinds are robustly expressive. This proposal depends on controversial claims about the nature of rights and the possibility of moral dilemmas, so I have omitted discussion of I there.

by stipulation, my action is justified in light of the weightier claim possessed by Anna. It may seem Bella has no grounds for protest when the evaluation expressed in my action is ultimately correct.<sup>22</sup>

But while protest theorists such as Smith seem to take this idea for granted,<sup>23</sup> it is not true that only false claims are objectionable in a way that merits challenge and repudiation. Sometimes, it makes sense to challenge a claim in virtue of what it leaves out or makes salient. If someone says to you, for instance, that “white lives matter,” they have said something true. But it would make sense for you to immediately react in protest in virtue of what’s conspicuously missing from their expression.

Similarly, if we are discussing a case of sexual assault and someone says, “Tina shouldn’t have kept flirting with Kyle even though she wasn’t interested, because she knew that he *was* interested and his feelings could get hurt,” they may say something true—perhaps Tina should have been more conscientious. But in this context, this true expression puts the emphasis entirely in the wrong place. It makes salient Tina’s conduct when what ought to be salient in the situation is Kyle’s. We would likely erupt in protest at this expression, and make sure that it did not stand unchallenged.

Now consider how this model might be applied to a case like *The Lie*. When I lie to Bella’s face, my choice expresses the moral claim that it’s permissible to lie to Bella. In this case, that’s true: because I have promised Anna to keep a weighty secret, I must lie to Bella. But my action may nonetheless express something objectionable in the way that the aforementioned true expressions about white lives and Tina’s flirting express something objectionable. Something important has gone missing, or something has been rendered problematically salient. These elements of the expression call for repudiation, just as moral falsehoods might.

Bella may resent my expression in virtue of its rendering salient the possibility of permissibly lying to her. She may resent this precisely because the possibility of lying to her ought not be particularly salient in the space of practical possibility. The fact that some action would constitute a lie to Bella should structure our practical attention and deliberation in a particular way. In deliberation, this consideration is not typically to be weighed against others. It is instead “presumptively decisive”—perhaps even simply excluded from serious deliberation.<sup>24</sup> It should not, in other words, attract much or perhaps even any practical attention; rather, it should be relegated to the periphery of practical salience.

But my lie renders this possibility salient in a way that it makes sense for her to protest. Rather than attend to the permissibility of *The Lie*, Bella insists that we attend to the fact that lies to her should generally be more or less off the table. This is analogous to the protest we might lodge against the person who renders salient the relatively minor misdeed of Tina when this is not what should hold our attention. Even if Tina was in the wrong, the right response to an assertion that draws our attention to her misdeed is one that draws our attention back away from it to the thing most morally salient about the case.

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<sup>22</sup> Much hangs on what it means to say it’s “acceptable” to treat Bella as I do. It seems plausible that my treatment might be permissible but not something we should simply accept; and if so, then expressing the judgment that this treatment is acceptable may indeed be false. This reply to the worry strikes me as promising and I do not mean to rule it out.

<sup>23</sup> Smith 2013, 42. See also Boxill 1976, 63.

<sup>24</sup> For discussion of this idea, see Wallace 2019, chap. 2.

This yields the following sketch of reactive residue. When I tell my permissible lie, my action expresses the true moral claim that it's sometimes permissible to lie to Bella. This expression renders practically salient something that ought to be practically peripheral. The proper comportment toward the act of lying to Bella is not to focus on the fact that *sometimes* it might be OK. It's to treat this possibility as peripheral. In the wake of *The Lie*, our focus should be on downplaying the salience of the fact that there are some exceptions to the prohibition on lying to Bella. This is why the person who insists on expressing mere agent regret strikes us as insufficiently attuned to Bella's moral importance. He insists on drawing our attention to the fact that in this case, the lie was permissible. But a reaction of this kind is objectionable. The right kind of reaction to the claim that it's OK to lie to Bella is one that functions to restore lies to Bella to the practical periphery. This is the role of remorse: to challenge the unalloyed claim that lying to Bella is OK.

## 5. Conclusion

Let's take stock. We began with the protest conception of blame, according to which blame's characteristic aim is to protest the moral claim expressed in an agent's action. Protest theorists, we saw, have erroneously assumed two things. First, they believed that the protest conception of blame entailed a quality of will constraint on blameworthiness because they assumed that our actions can only express evaluations we actually possess. But this is false: we can and often do express evaluations we do not possess. Second, they have assumed that the moral claim expressed in an action merits protest only if it is false. But this is also a mistake: sometimes our claims merit protest in virtue of what they leave out or what they make salient, even when they are true. Shaking off these assumptions, I've suggested, allows us to make sense of fitting reactive residue.

My aim has been to sketch an account of blame and blameworthiness that accommodates the possibility of fitting reactive residue. Still, much more must be said to determine whether this is a defensible, attractive view. Rather than begin to run through objections, however, I will conclude with a few remarks on the possible big-picture motivation for a view like the one sketched here.

I believe the proposal does justice to the Strawsonian insight that blame functions as the regulatory system for the economy of regard that shapes our relationships with one another. We are deeply concerned with where we stand with others, and our blaming practices reflect the legitimate demands we make of others in the name of proper recognition of our moral significance.

Yet it seems to me that private recognition is only one aspect of the relational ideal of recognition that preoccupies us. Another aspect of the ideal is ineliminably public, and concerns what we might call the *social reality* of our moral significance. This means our demand for recognition involves the expectation that our importance will achieve satisfying affirmations both privately *and* in the social sphere comprised of outward expressions and interpretations. Sometimes, a particular form of treatment may function to undermine the social reality of our importance, even when it does not reflect any deficit of private regard. In these cases, it still makes sense to cry out in protest, demanding that our moral importance be given full social reality.

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