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What is the Virtuous Emotional Response to our Wrongdoing?

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Abstract

Though we are inclined to think those who have acted wrongly should feel bad, we also worry that feeling bad may be futile: that it may only make things worse. I argue that we ought to feel bad not as a way to secure good outcomes, but because feeling bad is part of what it is to be respectful and to value our ethical standing. Employing Aristotle's method of appearances, I provide an account which can explain our confident judgements and resolve cases we find puzzling. In Part One I consider our initial intuitions and puzzles, and explain my method and assumptions. In Part Two I analyse the emotions of guilt, shame, regret and remorse, arguing that each of these emotions are appropriate in different circumstances. In Part Three, I use this analysis to explain the clear cases and resolve the problem cases.

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

I am grateful to everyone who has helped me improve this thesis, but especially to my supervisors, David Owens, David Oderberg, and Bart Streumer; my examiners, John Gardner and Max De-Gaynesford; my good friends Owen Scarr and Emily Baxter; and to my colleagues on the University of Reading PhD program.

This thesis is dedicated to Julie and Alan, my parents, who could never have been more supportive.

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Part One: Introduction

Chapter 1: The question, and how to answer it

1.1 The Question

The question of this thesis is 'What is the virtuous emotional response to wrongdoing?'

I have in mind one's own wrongdoing, not the wrongdoing of others. I am therefore interested in emotions like guilt or regret, rather than emotions like resentment. Aside from that I understand wrongdoing broadly: I am interested in wrongs both serious and slight, self-regarding and other-regarding, vicious and accidental. I shall often consider specific examples of wrongdoing, as the virtuous response is often affected by the details of the particular case; still, I will also draw general conclusions.

1.1.1 The Easy Answer

So how should you feel after you've done something wrong? That's easy: you should feel bad. Everybody knows this.

There are two problems with this easy answer. First, it is light on detail. There are lots of ways to feel bad, so which are appropriate? How bad should we feel? Should we feel bad forever, and, if not, when should we stop? Second, it is not so obviously true as we might at first suppose.

Considering the first problem, we may note that the question was very light on detail too. If we add details to the question, it isn't so hard to add in some plausible details to the easy answer. Some principle of proportionality seems to apply: the worse what you did was, the worse you should feel afterwards, and the longer you should feel bad for. What exactly you did also suggests which emotions you should feel. For instance, regret appears more appropriate after an accident or if you only hurt yourself, whereas if you hurt somebody else, especially deliberately, guilt or shame is more appropriate. It also seems that our emotional response ought to be linked to action, otherwise we appear self-indulgent or insincere. Our guilt should motivate us to apologise and try to make amends, for example. This suggests requirements we should meet before we stop feeling bad: we ought to have apologised, received forgiveness, made amends, reformed and so on.

The more detail we add to the easy answer, the more the second problem looms: it may not be true that everybody knows it. We face the nagging worry that feeling bad doesn't accomplish anything, and considered on its own feeling bad can seem to have little to recommend it. It might appear better to act correctly in response to what we have done – to make amends, and to change our future behaviour – and to simply leave it at that. While this worry is plausible, I will argue that it is mistaken. That one should feel bad after acting wrongly is not so obvious a claim that we do not need to defend it; it is not like the claim that wanton murder is wrong. My first goal in the thesis is therefore to defend and make rigorous the best version of the easy answer.

1.1.2 Problem Cases

As well as these general worries, there is a particular sort of case in which I think the easy answer struggles. This is the sort of case where what has been done is very bad indeed, but where there is only a little that the agent can do about it. A good example of this sort of case is a wrongful killing: it is obviously extremely serious, and since the victim is dead, there isn't anything significant that can be done to make amends to them. Perhaps the killer should apologise to the victim's family, turn themselves in to the police, and of course refrain from further killing. But all of this might be done very quickly, especially if the killing was completely out of character – perhaps committed under the influence of mind-altering drugs, or in extremely distressing circumstances. In such a case, the killer's having done what he should have done in response to his crime doesn't seem to mark the point at which he should stop feeling bad, as it simply comes too soon. We might think that enough time must pass before normal feelings become appropriate again, as well as the killer doing everything he ought to in response. This seems reasonable, but how much time it takes, and why it takes that long, is no longer easy for us to say. As a result, it is not clear when a return to normal feeling, or something like it, would be appropriate.

1.2 How I will answer the question

I will divide this thesis into three parts. The first part will be preparatory. In Chapter Two I set out and defend my methodological assumptions. In Chapter Three I present some preliminary arguments regarding emotions in general. In Chapter Four I argue that the past does matter when it comes to questions about how we should feel in the present.

In Part Two I develop, make rigorous and defend the easy answer. I consider different emotional responses to wrongdoing and ascertain when and why they would be appropriate. It is noteworthy that we use many words to express our expectation that

those who have acted wrongly should feel bad. We say that people should feel regretful, ashamed, guilty, remorseful, sorry, contrite, penitent, terrible or even horrified. I shall argue that in many cases we use these different words to express different claims with different justifications, and I shall present analyses of four emotions (guilt, shame, regret and remorse) which highlight the normatively salient differences between them. It is not my intention to provide analyses which are as faithful as possible to our actual use of language. Rather, I aim to provide an unambiguous conceptual framework with which to answer my normative question clearly. Of course, this still requires analyses faithful enough to ordinary use not to be misleading.

By the end of Part Two I will have dealt with the general worry that we don't ever have good reasons to feel bad because feeling bad doesn't help anything. In Part Three, I will apply the account of Part Two to some problem cases, and argue that the resolution this yields is satisfactory. I take the resolution of the problem cases to be of interest in itself, but also consider a successful resolution of the problem cases to provide further support to the account of part two.

Chapter 2: Assumptions

2.1 Two types of assumptions

In this chapter I set out the assumptions that I will be using for this thesis. I distinguish between necessary and informative assumptions. The necessary assumptions are those assumptions without which the thesis would not be able to proceed satisfactorily. If these assumptions are mistaken, the thesis will not prove that its conclusions are true – only that they follow from the truth of the necessary assumptions. However, I do not need to make many necessary assumptions, and those I do make enjoy broad support.

The informative assumptions are not required for the thesis to proceed satisfactorily: the thesis makes a compelling case for its conclusion even if these assumptions are not taken as given. I discuss these assumptions here to distinguish them from the necessary assumptions, and as an aid to clarity.

Often the reason that the informative assumptions are not necessary assumptions is that the success of my thesis would itself provide good evidence for them. For instance, I assume that there are situations in which we ought to feel some emotion. From my point of view, that assumption motivates the enquiry of this thesis. From the other point of view, the success of my thesis will itself prove that there are situations in which we ought to feel some emotion.

2.2 Necessary assumptions

2.2.1 Cognitivism about emotions

I assume as little as possible about what emotions are, so that my normative conclusions do not depend upon any particular view within philosophy of mind. However, it is necessary to say something about what I take emotions to be. My assumption is that the emotions I consider can be understood broadly cognitively. This means that they involve some close relation between a cognition and a felt affect, understanding both concepts widely. I do not need to assume that all emotions whatsoever can be understood in this way, nor that everything that can be understood in this way is therefore an emotion.

By a wide understanding of cognition, I mean any kind of thought directed at any kind of object: not necessarily conscious thought or belief in a proposition. I am here assuming what John Deigh terms traditional cognitivism and distinguishes from

contemporary cognitivism. Traditional cognitivism understands emotion as involving 'a concept of thought broad enough to apply to all states of mind with objective content' including things like perceptions, imaginings and memories. Contemporary cognitivism understands emotion as involving a 'narrower concept whose application corresponds to the grammarians' complete thought and the logicians' proposition.'[1] The main assertion of traditional cognitivism, and all that I require for this thesis, is that emotions are *about* things. This assertion is still true according to contemporary cognitivism.

We can usefully describe the sort of cognition involved in an emotion and the sort of object the emotion must be about. However, I do not assume that the instances of one type of emotion must necessarily share one object or mode of cognition in common, nor that the cognitions involved in our emotion are always known to us. I shall typically describe an emotion's cognition by saying that the subject of the emotion *takes* something to be the case. This way of putting it is intended to be silent on the type of cognition involved – whether the state of affairs is perceived, believed, imagined or in some other way thought of as obtaining. In particular, it is intended that one can take something to be the case at the same time as disbelieving it (for example by imagining it, or considering it, or supposing it).

By affect, I mean the felt character of our emotion, the way it feels. An emotion always has an affect: when we experience an emotion we always feel something. I assume that we may usefully describe affect in various ways, though this is often difficult. Affect can be described fairly literally as good or bad, or as weak or strong. We can also describe affect more metaphorically, for example as gentle or violent, or as deep or shallow. Some affects are usefully compared to bodily sensations: they are visceral, giddy, painful, warm or suchlike. We also have a good grasp of the way many emotions feel, so it can be helpful to describe an affect in comparison to those, for instance by describing terror as feeling similar to fear, only stronger, or dread as similar to fear, only more visceral. I shall not assume any more controversial thesis about affect, such as that we are always capable of identifying the affect we are feeling correctly, or that each instance of a given emotion always involves the same kind of affect. I shall typically describe affect by saying that the subject of the emotion *feels* a certain way.

Finally, by claiming that there must be a close connection between the cognition and the affect, I mean that the emotion must involve some kind of important, non-accidental relation between the two elements. I do not want to commit to a particular account of this relation, but I suspect that it will be one of causation or

1 Deigh, John, “Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions”, *Ethics*, 1994, vol.104, pp824-854. p827

characterisation. For instance, Deigh's description of the James-Lange theory identifies the relation as causal: '[emotion is] constituted by certain feelings that are aroused by the thought or, as he says, perception of an exciting object.' Alternatively, his description of Broad's cognitivism considers it as characterising: 'Emotions ... are thoughts that have a felt quality or tone'.[2] Some close relation is required to prevent any arbitrary pair of cognition and affect from qualifying as an emotion. For instance, if I believe that 2+2=4 and also feel upset, this is just a coincidence, unless I am upset *that* or *because* 2+2=4. To refer to this connection without committing to a particular account of it I will say that the subject's affect is *about* or *towards* the emotion's cognition.

Putting my proposed ways of speaking together, I will analyse experiencing an emotion as taking something to be the case, and feeling some way about (or towards) this. For instance, a possible analysis of fear is that to feel fear is to take something to be dangerous and to feel distressed and averse towards it.

It is helpful to compare emotions to mental states that do not involve both cognitions and felt affects in the way that the broadly cognitivist picture sets out. On the one hand there are mental states that have felt affect but do not involve cognitions. Some pains and pleasures are like this. A very severe pain located in a specific body part may be tightly connected to a cognition about that body part being damaged or one being in danger, but a pain that is only slight and diffuse is probably not. Deigh gives the example of the pleasure of a warm bath as feeling a certain way but not involving cognition or intentionality.[3] Another example of a state like this is that of a mood: sometimes we just wake up feeling happy, without feeling happy *about* anything. On the other hand there are cognitions that do not involve felt affects, such as those involved in mathematical reasoning.

That the emotions I discuss involve cognitions is a necessary assumption because I take the objects of the emotions I discuss to carry normative implications in some cases. For instance, it is often inappropriate to feel an emotion if its cognition is inaccurate. Similarly, it is a necessary assumption that the emotions I consider involve felt affect, and again this is primarily for normative reasons. In many situations, one ought to feel a certain way, but having an undirected mood will not do. If I ought to feel guilty, I ought to feel guilty *about what I did*, and this requires a non-accidental connection between my feeling and my cognition. If the emotions I discuss didn't involve cognition and affect then these normative moves would be mistaken. Furthermore, the truth of my normative conclusions – such as that we ought

2 Deigh, pp828-829
3 Deigh, p826

sometimes to feel guilty – doesn't itself provide strong evidence for cognitivism about emotions.

2.2.2 Aristotle's method of appearances, or reflective equilibrium

I will take it as a starting point that we already know quite a lot about the virtuous emotional response to wrongdoing. Very briefly, the common answer to the question of how one should feel after doing something wrong is that one should simply feel bad. In some contexts, we are willing to make more specific judgements. In other contexts, we are puzzled: unsure what to say or wanting to say contradictory things.

I assume that a careful analysis of what we are confident about and why can be used to helpfully address the problem cases, and that showing an analysis to be capable of both solving the problem cases and explaining the easy cases is good evidence for it.

This is similar to Aristotle's method of appearances: first, 'we must set out the appearances'[4], which are what we know about cases, as 'we ought to begin from things known to us.'[5] Then, we must explain the puzzling cases, while remaining consistent with as many of the appearances as possible: 'For if the objections are solved, and the common beliefs are left, it will be an adequate proof.'[6] The method is similar to Rawls' reflective equilibrium, where we iteratively approach an acceptable theory by moving between our considered judgements about cases and the principles that provide the best explanation of them.[7]

This sort of approach can be contrasted with top-down approaches, where the starting point is a general normative theory or principle. For instance, it would be possible to apply an act utilitarian principle to my question by working out the expected consequences of various emotional responses to wrongdoing. Any sufficiently general and comprehensive normative theory could be used in this way.

The availability of this very different approach explains why my assumption is a necessary one. If the utilitarian method is the correct way to decide matters, a position worked out according to Aristotle's or Rawls' method would not have much to recommend it – it would start from somewhere plausible, and end up somewhere plausible, but this would not guarantee the truth of its conclusions. Furthermore, the success of my project – its being able to explain the problem cases without

4 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Irwin, Terence, trans. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999, 1145b1-10
5 Aristotle, 1095b1-5
6 Aristotle, 1145b5-10
7 Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1971. pp46-53

significantly revising our firm starting opinions – does not by itself provide good evidence that the utilitarian (or any other) top-down approach is mistaken.

Nonetheless I am very confident in this assumption. For if we cannot begin with some normative judgements in which we are confident, it is hard to see where we could begin at all. It seems unlikely that we could begin from nowhere and pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, and more unlikely still that we could warrantably consider ourselves to have produced a successful normative theory if it did not confirm a lot of the beliefs we are already confident of.

2.2.3 Only as much precision as is warranted by the subject matter

As well as counselling us to begin with the appearances, Aristotle cautions us that we should only attempt to 'make things perspicuous enough to accord with the subject matter; for we would not seek the same degree of exactness in all arguments alike.'[8] Our subject matter, ethics, is one where exactness is not to be expected, especially when considering normative theory rather than particular cases.

The consequence of this assumption for my thesis is that I will frequently conclude my arguments with positions that must be stated using thick normative terms[9], or which point to vague or potentially competing considerations without a fixed rule for establishing priority or settling borderline cases. This does not explain everything: important normative work is left to be completed by agents once they are faced with particular circumstances calling for a decision or judgement. But to leave some things unexplained is not always a failure; if our results provide helpful advice to agents we will have been successful even if what we have said is not complete in every detail. My thesis is intended to be useful in practice by directing agents to many of the relevant features of situations they face, not to be action-guiding in the extremely precise and direct way that a codified theory such as act utilitarianism can be. This is again in line with Aristotle's approach; he notes that his arguments will be useless to us if we are not already a decent person who is either experienced or willing to seek the advice of those who are.[10]

This assumption is also a necessary one, because it concerns the conditions for the

8 Aristotle, 1094b10-15

9 I mean terms like respectful, kind, or honest. I find these terms a helpful way make acceptably vague statements in ethics; all that is required is that you can apply them, not that you analyse them in some specific way. In particular I do not think it matters for my purposes whether or not they might be reducible to thin normative terms and descriptive content.

10 Aristotle, 1095a1-15. The appropriate person to give advice on a particular case is not a philosopher, but a virtuous person acquainted with the details of the case in question.

success of my thesis. If conclusions in ethical philosophy ought to be completely precise then many of my conclusions will be unsatisfactory. Furthermore, my success in producing somewhat imprecise conclusions cannot be taken as evidence that we should not demand fully precise conclusions in ethics. However, it is once again an assumption I am very confident of, especially with regards to my particular question. When it comes to emotion, unlike when it comes to action, there is a possibility of taking two paths at once. If I must decide whether to pull the lever in a trolley problem, then at least my decision must be precise – I either pull it or not. The question of what to do might be very difficult, but if we can resolve it, the resolution will be clear-cut. But if something has happened that I might sensibly feel happy or sad about, there will also be the possibility of my having ambivalent feelings, of feeling both sad and happy at the same time. So even if a greater degree of precision is to be expected when it comes to questions of what we ought to do, we should not expect an equally precise account of what we ought to feel.

It may seem at that I am relying on the content of an Aristotelian ethical theory as well as an Aristotelian method, because the thick terms I use to state my conclusions and advance my arguments include Aristotelian terms – such as virtue, prudence and eudaimonia – as well as more everyday terms such as respect or concern. However, while I find the vocabulary of virtue ethics very helpful to the project and use it frequently, I do not rely in this thesis on any claims unique to virtue ethics. I do not need to assume any of the controversial tenets of some forms of virtue ethics, such as the priority of virtuous character over right action, the unity of the virtues, or the grounding of ethics in human nature. Instead, all I require is that the terms I use are meaningful, which is a much less controversial position.

2.2.4 Summary

These are the only assumptions which are necessary to my thesis. If you agree that it is not confused to talk of emotions as involving both felt qualities and cognitive objects, nor to talk of virtue and eudaimonia, then we are safe from the risk of talking past each other. If you also accept my method, this is enough for the thesis to proceed. Accepting my method requires accepting that we may begin by taking our most confident normative judgements as a starting point, and that we may be satisfied with conclusions that leave some normative work still to be done by the agent, rather than generating complete and determinate answers to every possible case.

2.3 Informative assumptions

2.3.1 Particular considered judgements

Because I intend to begin with the appearances, I am of course taking as a starting point some considered judgements about when and why one should feel guilty or ashamed or suchlike, some of which are my own considered judgements and others of which are drawn from philosophical writing on the subject. These judgements are significant to the thesis, so I will address them at length in the second part, rather than here. But what should be said here is that they are not necessary assumptions for this thesis. First of all, some of them will have to be altered or rejected as a result of my arguments. Second, the thesis will serve as a vindication of the judgements that are retained, by providing arguments for them, and by showing that problem cases can be addressed without revising them.

2.3.2 Objectivity

I assume that ethics is objective in the sense of being truth-apt and in some sense mind-independent, and this informs the sorts of claims I think can be usefully made in a normative argument. However, I do not take this to be a necessary claim for the thesis to proceed – I suspect that a sophisticated subjectivist in either sense will likely be able to express my arguments in their preferred terms. On the other hand, a straightforward rejection of objectivity (such as normative scepticism) is a position that the success of my thesis provides evidence against, if my necessary assumptions are correct.

2.3.3 Morality, ethics and prudence

I also assume that ethics is fundamentally one subject matter, one discourse: the discourse about how one should live. What I mean by this is that I do not distinguish sharply between moral requirements and prudential requirements. When I say an agent ought to do something, I just mean that it is the thing for them to do, all things considered. You ought to help others, you ought to set aside some money for emergencies, and you ought to read *The Great Gatsby*. These are all the same sort of claim.

Probably the most controversial implication of this position is that there is a sort of harmony within the normative sphere: there will not be a situation where there is one thing that it would be most in your self-interest for you to do and another thing that you morally ought to do. This can be pressured either as being too optimistic, because

doing the right thing may seem unlikely to always work out to one's advantage, or as too egoistic, because something's being to one's advantage may seem a dubiously selfish reason to think that it is the right thing to do[11]. However, the position does not imply that all of ethics is harmony, for it is consistent with the possibility of ethical dilemmas: situations where there everything we could do will be in some way seriously bad. This means that situations which seem to involve a conflict between prudential and moral considerations, between what would be good for us and what we ought to do, can still be seen as involving a conflict of a different sort: one between two things that are both worth pursuing, but cannot both be pursued.

That ethics is one subject matter is not a necessary assumption because my arguments do not depend on it. I think treating the normative sphere as unified is helpful, but doing so is not essential for this thesis.

2.3.4 Emotions are ethically important

I also begin with the assumption that there are emotions which we ought to feel and emotions which we ought not to feel. Many virtues place clear importance on how one feels: the kind person is sympathetic, empathetic, and glad to be of help; the brave person is the person who doesn't feel unduly afraid as well as the person who acts rightly even when she is afraid. This is an informative assumption because the success of my thesis would demonstrate its truth, a fortiori.

I will not attempt to prove that emotions matter up front, but I can make the assumption more attractive by saying a little about one very common objection to it. The objection is that we cannot choose what emotions to feel, and that if we ought to do something we must be able to choose to do it. The objection thus relies on the common claim that 'ought implies can'.

I agree that we cannot (at least not at all usually) simply choose how to feel. However, the objection treats evaluating emotions as simply the same as evaluating actions, and we don't have to treat emotions in this way to see them as ethically relevant. There are two sensible alternatives. The first is that evaluating someone's emotions can be seen as an appraisal of their character. When we say that someone ought to feel more concerned for a friend, we impugn their kindness and imply that a kinder person would feel concerned in their situation. The second option is that emotions may be appraised directly, but in a way more analogous to the appraisal of belief than of action. We appraise beliefs for their accuracy, rationality or charitableness, even though we cannot simply choose what to believe, and sometimes our appraisal is an ethical one:

11 I say a little about the egoism worry in section 4.5.2

we are comfortable blaming or praising people for their beliefs, and comfortable saying that people ought to believe certain things.[12] Emotions can be subject to a direct ethical appraisal in a similar way.

Another problem with the objection from 'ought implies can' is that it trades on the idea that emotions are beyond our control, which can be challenged. While we cannot simply choose to have kind feelings, the other choices we make will, over the medium-term, affect whether we are kind or not, and in turn what sorts of feelings we have.[13] So it is reasonable to praise or blame people for their kind or unkind emotions. We can see the analogy between emotions and beliefs again here. We are happy to praise or blame people for their beliefs, even though they cannot simply choose what to believe, because they can improve their beliefs indirectly by improving their intellectual abilities or acquiring more evidence.

2.3.5 Mental health

The appropriateness of appraising emotions could be challenged in cases of mental illness. For instance, a person with an anxiety disorder will feel afraid much more easily than most, but we probably wouldn't say that they were cowardly, or that their fear was vicious (though we would say that it was unfitting). A sociopath or severely autistic person might not empathise well with others, but we wouldn't necessarily say that they were inconsiderate or otherwise criticise them for this. A depressed person might be unenthused about much that it is worth being excited about, but we wouldn't criticise them for their sadness or say they were miserly or lazy. We would just say they were depressed.

However, I don't think cases like this show that we shouldn't ordinarily be appraised for our emotions. Instead, they show that the evaluation of emotion and the relationship between emotion and character is complicated and dependent on context. Of course we shouldn't just mechanically appraise a person's emotional life using an indiscriminate rule. But this doesn't mean we can't make reliable appraisals if we do so properly aware of the context.

As far as this thesis is concerned, I am going to limit myself to considering mentally healthy, neurotypical people. Interesting further work would need to be done to consider just how broadly its conclusions apply and what adjustments might need to be made in other cases.

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12 Owens, David, *Reason without Freedom*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp115-117.
13 Aristotle, 1113b-1114a

Chapter 3: Emotions

In this chapter I present some preliminary considerations regarding emotions which I will argue for rather than assume.

3.1 Terminology for the appraisal of emotions

I am going to use two sets of terms to help describe the ethical dimension of emotions. First, I shall say that emotions are appropriate, inappropriate or neither to describe whether they are virtuous or vicious in a certain situation:

1. Appropriate emotions are those that are virtuous in a given situation. Feeling them is part of what it is to be virtuous, and evidence that one possesses some relevant virtue.
2. Inappropriate emotions are those that are vicious in a given situation. Feeling them is part of what it is to be vicious, and evidence that one possesses some relevant vice.
3. An emotion can be neither appropriate nor inappropriate in a given situation, in which case it is not virtuous or vicious to feel it, and feeling it would not be evidence that one possesses any virtue or vice. Because of this possibility, to say that an emotion is not appropriate does not imply that it is inappropriate, and to say that it is not inappropriate does not imply that it is appropriate.

There can be more than one appropriate emotional response to a situation. Sometimes, several emotions are appropriate together: when entering a dangerous situation for a good reason, it seems appropriate to feel a mixture of fear and determination. Other times, competing emotions are each virtuous on their own: if people are needlessly suffering, either sympathy or anger could be an appropriate reaction.

Second, I shall say that emotions are fitting or unfitting to describe whether the cognition that forms part of the emotion is accurate. For example, if feeling afraid is to take something to be dangerous and to feel distressed and averse towards it, then it is fitting to be afraid of something if and only if it really is dangerous. If the cognition involved in the emotion has a normative component, this will have to be accurate as well for the emotion to be fitting. Thus, if feeling proud involves taking oneself to have accomplished something praiseworthy, then pride will be fitting if and only if one really has accomplished something which really is praiseworthy. I borrow this terminology form D'Arms and Jacobsen[14], who stress that emotions which are inappropriate can still

14 D'Arms, Justin and Jacobsen, Daniel, 'The Moralistic Fallacy: On the

be fitting – for instance, amusement at a cruel joke may be fitting, if the joke really is funny, but still inappropriate, if it would be unkind to be amused by the joke in the context in which it has been told. I do not assume any necessary connection between fittingness and appropriateness in this thesis.

3.2 Different types of felt affect

3.2.1 Good and bad feelings

As we saw in considering the easy answer, there seems to be a clear distinction between emotions that feel good and emotions that feel bad. In considering how we should feel after acting wrongly, I will be examining emotions that feel bad. It is worth noting that the intuitive distinction between good and bad emotions may not be solely to do with how they feel, but also to do with their cognitions. Robert Gordon argues that there is an intuitive distinction between negative emotions (such as 'fear, embarrassment, and anger') and positive emotions (such as 'pride or gladness'), and that this distinction is not, at bottom, a distinction in how they feel. For while positive emotions are typically pleasant, attractive feelings and negative emotions are typically unpleasant, repellent feelings, 'there seems no reason to rule out the possibility that someone might find it pleasant, and therefore attractive, to be sad or angry, and *un*pleasant, and aversive, to be proud'[15]. As well as this, Gordon claims that the fact that certain emotions tend to feel good while others tend to feel bad calls for an explanation. The explanation he offers is that the way emotions usually feel is influenced by their cognitive component. Negative emotions involve wishing the world to be otherwise than one takes it to be, and naturally this wish frustration feels bad. Positive emotions involve wishes that are satisfied by the world, and so naturally feel good[16]. Gordon's distinction between emotions involving positive cognitions and those involving negative cognitions is useful, but doesn't displace the distinction between emotions that feel good and those that feel bad. After all, the person whose anger feels unusually good or whose pride feels unusually bad is feeling importantly differently from the more usual cases, and this difference is a difference in felt affect.

Focusing in particular on the distinction that we can draw between good and bad felt affect, rather than positive or negative cognition, how much can we helpfully say about it? One approach is to identify good feelings with pleasant feelings, and bad feelings with painful feelings, or at least to liken them. There are two ways this comparison

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'Appropriateness' of Emotions', Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. LXI, No. 1, July 2000, pp65-90

15 Gordon, Robert, *The Structure of Emotions: Investigations in Cognitive Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p28

16 Gordon, p31

could go: either pleasant and painful feelings are understood as similar to bodily sensations, or as the sort of feelings involved in enjoying or disliking something.

There are instances of felt affect which are quite similar to bodily sensations of pleasure or pain. Some good feelings are similar to pleasurable sensations, particularly the pleasure of warmth: we can describe someone as feeling a “warm glow” when they feel proud of themselves or a loved one. However, most good feelings are not like this: excitement, amusement, and joy are not usually similar to pleasant physical sensations. It is easier to think of sensation-like bad feelings: many bad feelings are fairly literally uncomfortable, feelings of dread can feel painful and visceral, and we describe anger as “hotheadedness”. When a person is sad or discouraged they may feel weary. However, there are counterexamples here too. Loneliness and spite are not usually similar to physical pains, and sadness doesn't always feel similar to tiredness.

Understanding good and bad feelings as similar to feelings of enjoyment and its opposite runs in to the problem Gordon identified: we sometimes enjoy bad feelings, and sometimes dislike good feelings. This point still stands when we are focusing only on what the emotions in question feel like rather than whether they seem like good or bad emotions overall: when you enjoy getting a fright at the cinema, there is a sense in which the fear you experience still feels bad, even at the same time as you enjoy it. Similarly, someone who finds themselves amused at a stranger's misfortune still has a feeling that in some sense feels good, even at the same time as they dislike having that reaction. Should these cases be explained as cases of mixed feelings? We dislike the fright itself, but enjoy the relief that comes soon after; we enjoy watching the stranger's misfortune, but dislike the self-critical feelings that follow. Following Gordon, I'm not convinced that such strategies will apply to every case[17]. Our fright at the cinema can feel bad and provide an enjoyable rush all at once, and in such cases it would be wrong to say that we dislike it and enjoy it at the very same time – the feeling is not bad in the sense that we dislike it but in some other sense.

So there is a sense in which a feeling can feel good (or bad) which comes apart from the feeling being pleasant or enjoyed (or painful or disliked). This accords with our intuitive picture: a feeling's being a good or a bad feeling seems to be something basic which it is very hard to say anything more about. Nonetheless, we can capture something of what we are getting at indirectly, in three ways. First, we should consider why, as Gordon suggests, it seems natural that negative emotions should feel bad, so that an emotion's negative cognition could provide an explanation of why it tends to feel bad. So an emotion's feeling good or bad is apt to be explained by its positive or negative cognition.

17 Gordon, p29

Second, our having a good or bad feeling about something provides a prima facie, pro tanto reason to favourably or unfavourably evaluate the object of the emotion that feels that way. If I feel happy about something that has happened to me, this is a reason to think it was a fortunate occurrence. (Though of course it may not be a very significant reason, there may be other reasons that tell against it, and there may be some unusual explanation of my happiness that undermines such a reason entirely). It might be objected that only the overall emotion provides this reason, not its felt affect, but this is not the case. If I were experiencing an unusual emotion whereby I took what had happened to be fortunate but felt bad about it – perhaps because I feel it is undeserved, or perhaps not for any reason I am aware of – this would not provide as strong a reason to think things were going well for me. And if I were experiencing an undirected mood that felt good, this would still provide a reason to think that something somehow were going well for me.

Third, good feelings are normally good good for us, and bad feelings are normally bad for us. There are clear exceptions, such as when it is appropriate for us to feel bad, or when we enjoy being frightened by a scary movie. However, there are explanations for why it is good to feel bad in these cases. In the absence of such an explanation, it is clearly better for us to feel good, and worse for us to feel bad.

To point out these features of good and bad feeling is not to directly describe them; it isn't quite right to say that feeling distraught is to feel like something is going badly for you, or that it feels concordant with that thought. Whether good and bad feelings have some essential felt characteristic in common, or whether they are simply sets of feelings, I therefore leave an open question. However, an indirect description of good and bad feelings can still help us to to form a judgement in a case which isn't clear to us. We should ask whether feeling a certain way seems concordant with a positive (or negative) cognition? Does it seem like a reason to think something is going well (or badly)? Is feeling it in itself good (or bad) for the person feeling it?

We can test our intuitions on these points heuristically by placing a description of the felt affect in a statement that describes it as having the features of good or bad felt affect in as general a way as possible, and seeing how that sentence strikes us. For instance, to test for whether an affect feels bad, we could use the following:

> He feels (…). It seems like things are going badly for him.
> He feels (…). Perhaps something is wrong.
> He feels (…). He probably takes it that something is wrong.

The first is designed to get at our sense that feeling bad is normally bad for the person

feeling it; the second, to get at our sense that feeling bad is a reason to evaluate the object of the emotion unfavourably; the third, to get at our sense that bad feelings are concordant with negative cognitions.

In the case where (...) describes a way of feeling bad we should come out with sensible-looking sentences, such as:

> He feels (sick to his stomach). It seems like things are going badly for him.
> He feels (aggravated and bitter). Perhaps something is wrong.
> He feels (hot and bothered). He probably takes it that something is wrong.

In the case where (...) describes a way of feeling good, we come out with odd-looking sentences, such as:

> He feels (warm and fuzzy). It seems like things are going badly for him.
> He feels (pumped up and excited). Perhaps something is wrong.
> He feels (glad). He probably takes it that something is wrong.

However, this is a fairly rough and ready approach, not a perfect test: sometimes the sentences will still sound a little unnatural even in a case where the feeling really is bad:

> He feels (irritated and antsy). It seems like things are going badly for him.
> He feels (irritated and antsy). Perhaps something is wrong.
> He feels (irritated and antsy). He probably takes it that something is wrong.

In this case, our background knowledge of how easy it is to be irritated when nothing is really wrong (and even when we know it!) makes us hesitant. Nonetheless, reflecting on why it sounds wrong can help us correct for this, and it doesn't sound nearly so bad as when we were describing good feelings. A reasonable test for this is whether small adjustments can make the sentences sound better while still keeping them faithful to the features they are supposed to test our intuitions about. In the case of irritation, but not of warm and fuzzy feelings, this can be done:

> He feels (irritated and ansty). It seems like things could be going better for him.
> He feels (irritated and antsy). It's possible something is wrong.
> He feels (irritated and antsy). He probably wishes something were different.

Similar heuristics can be provided for good feelings:

> She feels (…). It seems like things are going well for her.
> She feels (…). Perhaps something is going well.
> She feels (…). She probably takes it that something is going well.

3.2.2 Strong and weak feelings

The second distinction I wish to consider is that between strong and weak feelings: this is the distinction we make between feeling frightened and terrified, or between feeling pleased and overjoyed. It is also the distinction we make between feeling very angry, quite angry, and a little angry, or when we say that one person was more or less angry than another.

The felt affect of an emotion can be strong or weak independently of its cognition: some people are strongly afraid of mice, but this isn't usually because they take mice to be very dangerous. Rather, they take mice to be a little dangerous, but experience strong feelings of fear about them.

There are several ways in which a feeling can be strong. A strong fear may be intense, but quickly pass, as when we are “given a terrible fright”, or it may be less intense, but lingering or preoccupying, as when we dread an upcoming exam. These two sorts of fear feel quite different but both are strong feelings.

I find it helpful to apply parts of Bentham's hedonic calculus here[18]. Although the calculus aims to establish the value of a pleasure or pain, rather than its strength, most of its considerations are relevant to strength. First of all, an intense feeling is certainly a stronger feeling. It is also natural to describe feelings of longer duration as stronger: if we are both upset by something and experience sadness of the same intensity, but I am sad for a week and you for a day, then we would say that I was more upset by what happened than you.

The certainty and propinquity of feelings are not relevant to their strength. Bentham includes these factors because he is concerned with the value we should place on uncertain or distant pleasures.

The fecundity and purity of a feeling (its tendency to be followed by feelings of the same kind, or not to be followed by feelings of a different kind) also contribute to its strength. Sometimes we are upset by something, but don't realise how strongly we

18 Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Chapter 4.

really feel. We don't feel intensely sad, and we don't feel sad about what has happened for very long, so we think that we were just a little upset. But over the next few days we feel sad and frustrated rather more easily than usual, and don't enjoy ourselves like we normally would. Sooner or later, we realise what we are really upset about, and that our first reaction was stronger than we originally realised.

It might be objected that our feelings, including strong ones, are frequently ambivalent. A person might be very glad that a friend is doing well, but at the same time very envious of them. Does this really mean that each feeling weaker, because it is impure? Now, certainly each feeling can be very strong, but I think this is because they can clearly both be intense or long-lasting feelings. The feelings could also both be fecund, though this seems less likely: perhaps this person will experience the same sort of ambivalent feelings a lot over the next few weeks. Nonetheless, it is correct to infer that the person we are imagining is neither as glad for their friend nor as envious as they might be, because their feelings are impure. We wouldn't say that the friend was whole-heartedly glad, precisely because of their ambivalent feelings, and, other things equal, a whole-hearted gladness is a stronger gladness.

3.3. Occurrent and dispositional emotions

It is clear that we speak of emotions dispositionally as well as occurrently, just as we speak of beliefs dispositionally and occurrently. Imagine that Daisy's parents are about to take her on her first trip abroad. We ask her parents whether she feels excited or nervous about the trip, and they say that she is excited about it. This can be true even if Daisy isn't gripped by excitement at the moment we have the conversation: she could be sound asleep, or engrossed in a book. What makes the parents' claim true is that Daisy does feel excited about the trip enough of the time, and when she thinks about the trip in particular.

I will usually talk about emotions dispositionally in this thesis. When I say an emotion is appropriate without specifying the appropriate time to feel it, I don't meant that the agent ought to feel it constantly. Instead, I mean that the agent ought to feel it some of the time. When I describe an emotion as inappropriate without specifying a time, I mean the opposite: that the agent ought never to feel it. This is the most suitable approach because it is unreasonable to expect wrongdoers to feel bad about what they have done constantly, or on a precise schedule. It is enough that they feel bad about what they have done some of the time, rather than not at all, and that they feel bad about what they have done while attending to it. Firstly, this is because feeling constant guilt, or shame or remorse would be to feel extremely strongly about what had happened; this would almost always be to feel too strongly. Secondly, this is

because there will be other emotions the wrongdoer ought sometimes to feel instead, such as glad when their friends are doing well. While we can feel several emotions at once, it isn't always appropriate to do so. As I argued in the previous section, feeling ambivalent gladness is, other things equal, feeling a weaker gladness, and one sometimes ought to be very glad for one's friends.

3.4 Arguments that I will be avoiding

To present the strongest case in the face of doubts about the ethical relevance of emotions, in Part Two I will be avoiding the use of certain arguments for the appropriateness of emotions which fall short of being decisive.

The first sort of argument I will avoid relies on the instrumental benefits of emotion. For instance, emotions frequently motivate us to do something we ought to be motivated to do, and when that is the case it can be a reason for us to feel those emotions. As another example, emotions frequently serve to direct our attention in beneficial ways, as when fear alerts us to danger. The first weakness of this sort of argument is that it is very likely that there will be another way to receive the benefit which doesn't rely on feeling that emotion. It may seem that what is really important is just the benefit, not the emotion itself: the instrumental benefits of an emotion do not make it any more appropriate than other ways of securing the same benefits. A second weakness is that the instrumental benefits of the emotion will not usually be essential to it. It is an instrumental benefit of fear that it often causes us to retreat from dangerous situations, but fear can cause us to freeze up instead. It can therefore be argued that the better way to secure the benefit of retreating from dangerous situations is to be alert to danger and knowledgeable about how to react, so that we can freeze or retreat as appropriate, rather than as fear prompts us to.

The second set of arguments I will be avoiding as indecisive are those that argue an emotion is appropriate because human nature is such that virtuous people are disposed to feel it in certain situations. For instance, we might argue that even though guilt and remorse in a case where we cause a terrible outcome faultlessly are not fitting, we are right to judge agents who do not feel such reactions harshly, because that is just what well-adjusted, virtuous, mature humans do feel in such situations. In such situations feeling guilty is a mark of virtue, and not feeling it is a mark of vice.

The weakness of this sort of argument is that it is really only an epistemic argument, not a normative one. If virtuous people tend to exhibit anger in some situations then this can justify our judging people who don't get angry poorly, and suggest that anger is appropriate, but it is not itself the reason that anger is appropriate. Without

identifying why anger is appropriate, the connection between anger and virtue seems merely contingent. Furthermore, this sort of argument cannot bear much weight in particular cases. Imagine we are blaming someone for not feeling angry, because human nature is such that good people get angry in a situation like theirs. They could always reply that they are an exception to that general fact about human nature, since they don't get angry in situations like this but are otherwise similar to virtuous people. We must provide a further normative argument to show that anger really is appropriate in their situation to defeat this response.

3.5 Arguments from valuing

One sort of argument I will rely on is that feeling a certain emotion is appropriate because it is a part of what it is to value or to care about something we ought to value or care about. I call these 'arguments from valuing'.

Arguments from valuing draw on a general claim defended by Samuel Scheffler. Scheffler argues that valuing involves being 'emotionally vulnerable': disposed to react emotionally to various situations involving that which we value. Scheffler proposes that this emotional vulnerability is what makes the difference between valuing something and merely desiring it, or between valuing something and merely believing it to be valuable.[19] Caring about something also involves emotional vulnerability in the same way; the main difference between them is that valuing something implies a positive judgement or attitude towards what we value, while caring or being concerned does not, since we can care about things like poverty or injustice.[20] It is not important for my purposes whether Sheffler's account is true for all cases of valuing and caring; it is only important whether it is true in the particular cases I consider. The cases that I rely on in Part Two are valuing our virtue, valuing living a good life, and caring about people we have wrongly harmed. I will argue that Scheffler's thesis is particularly strong in these cases.

However, the fact that valuing something involves emotional vulnerability to it is not by itself an argument that we ought to feel any particular emotion about it. On its own, it is only an argument that it would be inappropriate not to feel anything. To argue that a particular emotion is appropriate because of the role it plays in valuing something, I will argue that being vulnerable to that emotion is part of the best way of valuing it, and that other patterns of emotional vulnerability would be inappropriate.

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19 Scheffler, 'Valuing', in his *Equality and Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. pp15-40

20 Scheffler, pp25-6. Scheffler only considers caring; I take concern to be the same or a very similar concept. However, speaking of concern for a person does not have the same connotation of a close personal relationship that speaking of caring about them does, which is helpful for my purposes.

Chapter 4: When does the past matter?

4.1 Mattering

Something matters if it makes a difference; hence, what matters always matters to something. We can ask if something matters when it comes to right or wrong, or to what a particular agent ought to do: “does it matter that Harold's oath to William was coerced?”. We can ask if something matters to how a person's life is going: “does the spelling bee really matter?”. Or we can ask if something matters to the outcome of a football match: “is this a match where the players' endurance will matter?”.

In this thesis I consider the ways in which our past wrongdoing matters to how we ought to feel now. In asking this question, it is assumed that how we feel matters ethically. I have already said a little in defence of this assumption, in section 2.3.4. It is also assumed that some facts about the past matter to how we ought to feel in the present. In this chapter, I defend the general principle that a fact about the past matters to how someone ought to feel if and only if it affects their eudaimonia. I call this the Eudaimonia Principle.

Before defending the Eudaimonia Principle I will consider and criticise some alternative approaches. I will then explain the Eudaimonia Principle and how it addresses the weaknesses of the alternatives. Finally, I present an argument for the Eudaimonia Principle and defend it from objections.

4.1.1 Mattering and reasons

In some cases, mattering is connected to reasons. It seems clear that if something matters to what Fred ought to do, then it provides a reason for Fred to do it. Similarly, if something matters to what Sally ought to feel, then it provides a reason for Sally to feel that way.

However, I won't be analysing mattering in terms of reasons, because the strength and extent of the connection is controversial. For example, is it true that if Fred has a reason to do something, then that reason matters to what Fred ought to do? On the one hand, it seems close to a tautology to say that our reasons to do things to matter to what we ought to do. But on the other hand, if we already have overwhelming reasons to do something, a new, small reason not to do it may not seem to matter, if it's too small to make a difference.

4.2 Alternatives to the Eudaimonia Principle

4.2.1 The past doesn't matter

Perhaps the past simply doesn't matter to how we should feel. On this view, the past is how it is, our feelings won't change it, and getting all het up about it is foolishness. It is better for us to move on than to fruitlessly feel bad about things we can't change, and it is better for us to keep moving forward than to idly feel good about past accomplishments. How we ought to feel is determined by present considerations.

This leaves some room for the past to matter indirectly, because the past of course makes a difference to how the present turns out. I ought to feel excited or glad when I am about to meet a friend I haven't seen in a while. That I will meet my friend soon is what matters here, but the fact that we are friends, and that their visit is a special occasion, depends on how things were in the past. However, if the past only matters in this way, *how* we ended up in the position we are now in never makes a difference to how we should feel about it.

This approach carries some initial plausibility because we often think that people would do better if they let go of the past – if they “let bygones be bygones” – especially when the present consequences of keeping hold of it are bad. Similarly, people who obsess over past glories while achieving nothing new seem to do poorly for that reason. Still, the approach should be rejected because it contradicts too much of what we take to be clear. For example, we ought to be proud of our achievements, if we accomplished them in the right way. Building a successful business is something to be proud of, and it matters that one built it, not just that one owns it. Inheriting a business wouldn't make the same sort of difference to how we should feel. Nor is the consideration that matters whether one is talented and industrious, rather than whether one owns a business. While it is good to be talented and industrious, simply having the potential to accomplish something is not the same as actually accomplishing it, and does not warrant the same degree of pride. As another example, if our house burnt down accidentally, we should feel sad. If an arsonist set it ablaze, we should feel angry. It matters how we got to where we are today.

4.2.2 The past is like the present

At the other extreme, perhaps there is no real difference between the past and the present when it comes to what matters to how we should feel. On this view mattering is something that is determined once and for all. If I needed some help on Monday, it mattered to you on Monday: it was a reason for sympathy (and for helping me). If it

mattered on Monday it will still matter on Tuesday. If you helped me, it will be a reason for you to feel pleased with yourself; otherwise, it will be a reason to feel contrite, or glad that someone else could help. In the distant future it will still matter. Though presumably less important and less urgent, you will still have reasons to respond happily or sadly if you remember the incident.

This view is unpersuasive because it makes the past matter much too frequently and for far too long. On this view, if a fairground ride which you took aged five was thrilling enough to matter to you then, it still matters to you now, however long it has been. Even if you can't remember it anymore, it still matters to how you ought to feel, and you are at a small risk of feeling the wrong way if you have forgotten it. Similarly, if you ate a tasty meal yesterday, if it was tasty enough that you should have enjoyed it (you'd have been intemperately denying yourself pleasure otherwise), then it still matters to you today as well. Don't forget about it when someone asks you how you feel this morning!

4.2.3 Gardner's Continuity Thesis

Another possibility I take from John Gardner. Gardner's Continuity Thesis is proposed as a general truth about reasons: that 'reasons await full conformity'. This means that 'If one does not conform fully to a reason […] the reason does not evaporate […] Instead it now counts as a reason for doing the next best thing'.[21] Gardner also holds that when full conformity to a reason is impossible, the reason now counts as a reason to regret not having fully conformed: 'Regret is the rational response to any measure of non-conformity with any reason, and the reason for the regret is the very same reason that was incompletely conformed to (coupled, of course, with the fact of incomplete conformity to it)'[22].

As well as ceasing to exist if we conform to them fully, Gardner holds that hypothetical reasons can cease to exist if our goals or desires change[23]. If my goal is to watch every Hollywood action movie, then showings of such movies at cinemas will matter to me. If I fail to conform to the reasons I have to attend those movies, they will become reasons to regret not having seen them yet. But if I abandon my goal, the past showings won't give me those reasons any longer. A categorical reason, on the other hand, will always await full conformity, whether you like it or not. However, just because they are still around does not mean they will be decisive: they will often be

21 Gardner, John 'Wrongs and Faults', in A. P. Simester, *Appraising Strict Liability*, Oxford University Press, 2005. p57
22 Gardner, p58
23 Gardner, p59

outweighed[24].

The Continuity Thesis is not intended as an account of when the past matters to how we should feel. However, it suggests a natural modification to the view that the past is like the present: that the past matters to how we ought to feel only until we fully conform to the reasons it provides, or until those reasons cease to exist because our goals or desires change. After that, it doesn't matter any more. On this account the past matters much less frequently (and for not nearly as long) than if mattering is once and for all. This is because facts which once mattered to us will frequently (though not necessarily) stop mattering once we have fully conformed to the reasons they provided us with, or once our goals and desires change. To return to the previous example, if you enjoyed the fairground ride or the tasty meal at the time, thus conforming to your reason, then those things don't continue to matter afterwards.

Despite not generating so many instances of the past mattering as the view that the past is like the present, this account is still vulnerable to the same objection: it generates too much mattering. Suppose that I need your help, and this gives you a reason to help me. If you don't help me, that reason awaits conformity, and becomes a reason for you to regret not helping me (and perhaps to apologise). But suppose that you don't feel any regret, and don't apologise. The reason will keep waiting, however stubborn you are. If you never conform to the reasons provided by the fact that I needed help, then that fact will always be a reason for you to feel something. This remains the case no matter how much time passes and no matter how small the effect on either of our lives is, as long as the reasons involved are categorical, or as long as your relevant goals haven’t changed.

I am not convinced that a small reason to help somebody can last for most of a person's lifetime, if they continually fail to conform to it. It doesn't make a difference to this case that our goals will have changed. Even though it isn't very weighty, the reason to help a stranger read a map is categorical: we have a reason to be helpful whether we want to or not. Because it is a small reason, it may be permanently outweighed, so Gardner is not committed to the conclusion that we *ought* to regret failing to help the stranger. But we still need to justify the assertion that there is such an outweighed reason for regret, rather than no such reason at all.

The persuasiveness of the Continuity Thesis could itself be seen as the explanation of such a reason: the mere passing of time doesn't explain why a reason should evaporate, and we do not want to make the mistake of thinking 'that at every moment

24 Gardner, p59

we start again from *tabula rasa*, rationally speaking.'[25] However, there is an ample middle ground between Gardner's position and the view that past reasons are completely irrelevant. There is also considerable reason to doubt the Continuity Thesis itself. It is not literally true in the ontological sense: after non-comformity to a reason, the fact that provides the reason changes, because we must add to it the fact of our non-comformity, and the action recommended by the reason changes, because it is now a reason to do the next best thing. If both of these things have changed, everything about the reason has changed: it is a new reason. It is clearly right that failures to conform to reasons are usually themselves reasons to do the next best thing, but why should we agree that this is always the case, rather than usually?

Setting aside the Continuity Thesis, I cannot see an explanation of why we have a reason to feel bad about not helping a stranger read a map forty years ago. Forty years ago, the original reason might be explained by the benefit of helping them, by the importance of generosity, or by a duty to be helpful. Shortly afterwards, a reason to regret not helping might be explained by the fact that they might now be lost, by the virtue of generosity, or by our recent breach of duty. But what explains why it is still a reason today, forty years later? Generous people, or those on their way to becoming generous, don't usually regret small, forty-year old mistakes. The stranger is certainly not lost any more, and almost certainly has forgotten the whole affair. To say a forty years passed breach of duty is a reason for regret would be extreme.

Suppose, however, that Gardner is correct about reasons. In this case, we can no longer assumer that the past matters to us for as long as it gives us some reason. On this view, we would have very many reasons grounded in facts about the past, but only a subset of those reasons would matter to how we ought to feel now. Many of the reasons, like the reason to regret not helping a stranger map-read forty years ago, would be so weak that we ought simply to ignore them. If we take this view, we still need an explanation of when the past provides a strong enough reason to matter to how we ought to feel.

4.2.4 Gradually fading importance

One possible explanation is that facts about the past gradually matter less and less, until after a suitable time they no longer matter at all. A very important consideration will endure for a long time in this way, but a slight consideration will not last very long. Thus, we will not be faced with small considerations from our pasts continuing to matter as we grow old – only something very important will matter that long. This move is appealing because it reconciles our intuitions that the past clearly matters in a

25 Gardner, p58

lot of cases, but rarely matters for a very long time. It therefore addresses the objection that the previous two accounts create too much mattering.

This account is a reasonable default position, but it is vague in several respects. Just how long does it take for importance to fade out? Does the importance of different sorts of considerations fade out at a uniform rate? Is there anything about the past that could matter forever? And while it seems roughly right that how important something is fades over time, it is a little mysterious exactly why this should be so. These objections aren't enough to rule out this view, but I will argue that the Eudaimonia Principle provides us with a more precise account and a better explanation of why things stop mattering after enough time has passed.

4.3 The Eudaimonia Principle

The Eudaimonia Principle is that a fact about the past matters to how someone ought to feel if and only if it affects their eudaimonia. Just what this means will depend on our account of eudaimonia, and the ways in which facts about the past can affect it.

4.3.1 Eudaimonia

I have in mind Eudaimonia as Aristotle uses the concept in the Nicomachean Ethics. Eudaimonia is the good life for a human: a life filled with virtuous activity.[26] It is living and doing well. As well as virtue, a modest supply of external goods (food, shelter, health, friends etc.) is necessary for eudaimonia, but is insufficient for it on its own.[27] We will lack eudaimonia if our life is marred by catastrophic misfortune, but eudaimonia is resilient to minor misfortunes, and, similarly, not further enhanced by minor fortunes.[28] Whether or not someone is eudaimon is primarily a judgement we make of their life as a whole.[29]

I have in mind an inclusive interpretation of eudaimonia. This means that eudaimonia is a life that accords with all the virtues.[30] The contrasting dominant interpretation is that eudaimonia is a life filled with action that accords with the highest virtue of wisdom. I also have in mind a pluralist interpretation of eudaimonia. This means that there are many ways to live a good life: there are often many ways to live virtuously, and what the virtuous action is sometimes depends on who you are, or what situation you find yourself in. For instance, eudaimonia requires that we pursue productive or

26 Aristotle, 1098a15-20
27 Aristotle, 1099a25-b10
28 Aristotle, 1100b20-35
29 Aristotle, 1098a15-20
30 Ackrill, J. L., 'Aristotle on Eudaimonia', in Rorty, Amelie, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, Berkeley: Univeristy of California Press, 1980, pp 15-34

creative projects in a committed way, striving for excellence. I write philosophy and cook, but you could live a good life conducting scientific research and playing the violin. Eudaimonia also requires us to be brave. But the actions that would be brave for me are different to those that would be brave for a police officer or fire fighter.

Finally, I have in mind an interpretation of eudaimonia whereby it is not an ideal standard, a perfect target at which we aim but never hit. Eudaimonia is achievable for humans: there are people who live good lives. Thus, at some point we have enough external goods, and our actions are virtuous enough, that our lives just are good ones. Aristotle says eudaimonia is 'lacking in nothing'.[31] As I interpret this, it means not that the eudaimon person “has it all”, that nothing could improve their life in any way, but rather that they have enough, and their life is not going badly because of a lack of anything. Eudaimonia is therefore not the same thing as welfare. My welfare could always be increased a little further. The tomato in my salad could be a little fresher, my dreams could be a little sweeter, my lifespan could be a little longer. In contrast, at some point I cannot be more eudaimon: my actions are virtuous and my external goods are ample. There is an upper bound to eudaimonia. It might seem like we could always be a little more eudaimon by being a little more virtuous, but this is to consider eudaimonia as a perfect ideal and not as something achievable. There may be such an ideal, but I am not talking about it here.

4.3.2 Affecting eudaimonia

How does the past affect our eudaimonia? It can have a direct effect: whether or not our life is going well of course depends on what has happened in it so far. It can also have indirect effects of two kinds. First, facts about the past affect what is virtuous (or vicious) in the present. This in turn affects eudaimonia because virtuous (or vicious) actions affect our eudaimonia, as eudaimonia is a life of virtuous activity. Second, facts about the past affect what we need for eudaimonia, and whether we have what we need.

The past can have a direct effect on our eudaimonia in a few ways. Most importantly, our past behaviour affects our eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is a life of virtuous activity. If I have done anything especially virtuous in the past, or if I have a long history of virtuous behaviour, that will mean my life is more eudaimon. If I have done anything especially vicious, or if I have a long history of vicious behaviour, I will be less eudaimon. If my record is generally virtuous, that is a reason to be pleased, satisfied, and proud. If not, that is a reason to feel regret. However, as eudaimonia is viewed over a whole lifetime, and as it does not demand perfection, some parts of my history

31 Aristotle, 1097b5-25

will not affect it. Like most children, I was sometimes quite unkind growing up. But as long as I learn to be kind and live my adult life kindly, I can still be eudaimon, and I oughtn't to regret the vices of my youth, just as you oughtn't to criticise me for them. In this way, a threshold of significance is built into the concept of eudaimonia.

It is also important how certain things have turned out for us. Suppose I am committed to the goal of writing a collection of poetry. If I have produced a good collection of poetry, then my life is better for it, and it is something to be proud of. And it is something to be proud of beyond the virtuous activity that produced it: if the poems are destroyed in a fire, my life would be worse for their loss, even though it would still be true that I had written them. For another example, it makes a difference to my eudaimonia whether my close friends and family are doing well. Even if their doing poorly is no fault of mine, my life goes better when those I share it with do well too.

The past has an indirect effect on eudaimonia by determining what is virtuous now. The example of the promise illustrates one way in which something about the past can determine what is virtuous in the present. The virtue of faithfulness (usually) requires me to keep my promises, so if I promised to meet you then that (usually) makes my meeting you virtuous. As well as itself determining what action is virtuous, the past is also epistemically relevant. Suppose I am deciding whether to eat a second slice of cake. I ought to consider how I felt afterwards, the last time I had two slices of cake. If it made me feel ill, then it would definitely be temperate of me to abstain this time. But that it made me ill last time isn't what *makes* taking a second slice intemperate. Instead it is *evidence* that two slices is too much cake.

The other indirect effects of the past on eudaimonia are those that affect what we need for eudaimonia, and whether or not we have it. I've already argued that it matters to our eudaimonia whether we are successful in our goals. However, this isn't just a matter of what our goals are right now. While our goals can change, they remain partly determined by our past actions and intentions. If I struggle for thirty years to produce a poetry collection and fail, I may through my hands in the air and say “bah, I don't care about poetry anymore, I give up!”. However, even if I'm completely sincere, this isn't sufficient to make poetry irrelevant to my eudaimonia. My life goes better if in the end I regain my ambition and succeed as a poet. Similarly, it is important that my friends do well. But even though we do drift apart from old friends and make new ones, the past still matters when it comes to the question of who my friends are. A history of close friendship can make it the case that our eudaimonia is affected by how our friend's life goes. The significance threshold built into eudaimonia operates here too: not all of our projects and relationships affect what we require to live a good life even after we give them up – only those that are particularly important.

Finally, the past clearly affects our supply of external goods, which can in turn affect our eudaimonia, if the difference is significant enough. If I suffer a bad period of illness while young, I may be more prone to ill-health throughout my life and this could make me less eudaimon. If I win the lottery, and manage the windfall carefully, I will be safe from financial hardship from then on, and this will make it easier for me to be eudaimon.

4.4 Defending the Eudaimonia Principles

I will defend the Eudaimonia Principle by defending each of the narrower claims that it implies. The Eudaimonia Principle is that the past matters to how we ought to feel if and only if it affects our eudaimonia. Since the past can affect our eudaimonia in several ways, the principle claims that each of these effects is sufficient for the past to matter to how we ought to feel, and that their disjunction is necessary for the past to matter. I will defend each of these points in turn.

4.4.1 A direct effect on eudaimonia is sufficient for the past to matter

Why does everything about our past that affects our eudaimonia matter to how we should feel? This position cannot be defended by the particular arguments that I will make later as to why one should feel guilt, or shame, or any other particular emotion in certain sorts of cases. These arguments are not sufficiently general.

An argument from valuing is sufficiently broad. I ought to care about my eudaimonia: not much seems more important to me than whether or not I live my life well.[32] Therefore, I ought to react emotionally to the things that make my life go well or poorly. For example, I should be proud of my accomplishments, and I should feel sad if my friends are doing badly. If I don't, then it seems that I don't really care about those things, and they are things that I ought to care about.

It may seem that this would lead to a very backward-looking life, and that this may not be the best way to live. However, it is only a dispositional emotion that is required to care about something. If I ought to care about my poetry then I ought to feel proud of it, or to get excited about performing it, but obviously I shouldn't feel this way constantly. That my feelings are usually directed towards other things isn't by itself a good reason to doubt that I care about my poetry.

As well as this, the Eudaimonia Principle doesn't claim that we always have a reason to

32 Dworkin, Ronald, *Justice for Hedgehogs*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. pp202-209

feel, for instance, proud of all of the virtuous actions we have ever performed. Only those actions, or collections of actions, that are significant enough to affect our eudaimonia provide such reasons. This significance threshold is a considerable advantage of the eudaimonia principle over accounts that take mattering to be once and for all, or that are based on Gardner's Continuity Thesis. For example, if I have always been scrupulously punctual then that matters, and I will have a reason to sometimes feel proud of having always been so reliable. I don't have a reason, not even an outweighed one, to be proud of having arrived for the bus on time this morning, even though that was virtuous of me. It doesn't matter, because it just isn't significant to my life as a whole.

Finally, even if I am wrong that those things which have made our lives better or worse are things we should care about and be emotionally vulnerable to, surely the fact that something directly affects our eudaimonia at least makes it less inappropriate to feel proud of it, or sad about it, or to feel some other fitting emotional response. Even if feeling proud of our accomplishments was a waste of time, it would be much worse to feel proud of something utterly insignificant, or of our worst failings. This is a still significant normative difference.

4.4.2 Affecting what we need for eudaimonia and whether we have it is sufficient for the past to matter

The argument from valuing, which I used to show that a direct effect on eudaimonia matters to how one should feel, can be extended to effects on what we need for eudaimonia and whether we have what we need. It is clear that we should care about whether or not we have enough to live the good life – it would be odd to care about living a good life but not about having the prerequisites. Since valuing involves emotional vulnerability, we ought to feel something about having what we need, or not.

However, it is very important to remember that not all that much is needed to live a good life. We need some good friends, but we don't need to be exceptionally popular. We need secure access to life's necessities, but we don't need to be fabulously wealthy. As such, I ought to be grateful for growing up in the UK in the late 20th and early 21st century: I benefit from education, freedom, wealth and security that make my eudaimonia more easily attainable. This degree of good fortune matters. But it's not the case that I ought to be grateful for how sunny it was last Thursday afternoon. It was pleasant, but viewed on its own it didn't affect my eudaimonia. My life would have gone just as well if it had been overcast. Last week's sunshine doesn't matter any more.

4.4.3 Affecting what is virtuous in the present is sufficient for the past to matter

It is clear that the effect of the past on what is virtuous in the present sometimes matters to what we ought to do. The past can make a normative difference, as when you ought to babysit for your colleague, because you previously promised that you would. It can also provide a relevant epistemic consideration: your friend has always gotten very anxious about exams, so the kind thing to do is to spend time with them to help keep them calm, even before they get anxious about the exam coming up.

The Eudaimonia Principle is in two ways stronger than this clear starting point. First, it holds that the effect of the past on what is virtuous matters to how we ought to feel as well as how we ought to act. Second, it holds that the effect of the past on what is virtuous always matters in this way, rather than that it sometimes does.

The effect of the past on what is virtuous matters to how we feel as well as how we act because feeling is also an important part of what it is to be virtuous and to live a good life. When you help your friend, there are appropriate and inappropriate ways for you to feel about that. Depending on the details of the case, it could be appropriate to enjoy their company, or to feel concerned or worried for them, to feel confident, or to feel glad to be of help. But it would be inappropriate to resent them for being so feeble, to feel bored, or contemptuous, or to enjoy their discomfort.

There are times where virtue calls for us to feel very little, as when careful, technical judgement is needed. There are also times where most emotions seem neither appropriate nor inappropriate. If an atrocity has occurred, it could be acceptable to feel any of a wide range of reactions – sadness, fear, resentment, anger, numbness, shock, pity – none of which we would call appropriate because it isn't a failure of virtue not to feel them. However, what is virtuous in these cases still matters to how we ought to feel: virtues can recommend feeling dispassionate, or explain why many emotions are all acceptable. The same is true regarding actions: sometimes a virtue matters to what we do by recommending that we do nothing, and sometimes it matters by making many actions permissible.

Finally, virtue matters to action and feeling even if it is outweighed by another consideration. Perhaps, all things considered, you oughtn't to help your friend with exams, and you oughtn't to worry about them – you are busy with your own exams, and perhaps studiousness outweighs kindness in this situation. Still, it is less inappropriate to worry about them than it would be if they were always cool and collected about exams, and in this way it still matters that past exams have made them anxious.

4.4.4 Some effect on eudaimonia is necessary for the past to matter

So far I've shown that an effect on eudaimonia is sufficient for the past to matter to how we ought to feel. But why is an effect on eudaimonia necessary for the past to matter?

In considering alternative approaches to mattering, we saw that taking things to matter once and for all, or for as long as the reasons they provide await full conformity, led to too much mattering. Because nothing affects our eudaimonia without being significant, the necessary condition of the Eudaimonia Principle prevents this problem, by setting a threshold of significance below which the past doesn't matter to how we should feel. The best alternative response to the problem is to hold that the importance of the past gradually fades. Many things will matter to how we ought to feel for a little while, but only important things will continue to matter for very long. So the question becomes: why prefer the Eudaimonia Principle to this account? I will argue that the Eudamonia Principle has greater explanatory power, and that gradually fading importance gives the wrong account in some cases.

That the importance of the past to how we ought to feel gradually fades explains some of our intuitions about when the past matters. We agree that it matters to whether you should feel upset with your partner if they argued with you yesterday, but we don't think the same argument will still matter twenty years later – not unless it was a devastating argument in the first place. This sort of pattern seems to hold quite generally, so the general principle that the importance of past occurrences fades seems a good explanation of it.

However, while gradually fading importance explains the general observation that things that happened long ago tend to matter less than similar things that happened recently, it doesn't explain anything more than this. We also want to know why importance fades at the rate it does, whether that rate is uniform or variable, and how important something has to be to matter forever.

The Eudaimonia Principle explains both the general observation and the answers to these further questions. This is because something has an affect on a person's eudaimonia only if it is significant in the context of their life as a whole. Consider a young person who is rude, unkind, and inconsiderate, and who often acts on these vices. Their life seems to be going worse as a result, and this matters importantly to how they should feel: they ought to be concerned, to regret their behaviour, and perhaps to be ashamed of themselves. But as they grow older, they become more virtuous, and the effect of their youthful viciousness on their eudaimonia is reduced. To

start with, they are praiseworthy for their efforts to improve, but there is still a risk that they will fall back into bad habits which they may not have completely left behind. Once it is clear that they have become virtuous, their vicious childhood matters a lot less. Then, finally, we judge that their childish vice is irrelevant to their eudaimonia, relegating it to a mere youthful indiscretion. As the effect of childhood vice on eudaimonia is gradually reduced, it matters gradually less to how we ought to feel. Once it no longer affects eudaimonia at all, it no longer matters to how we ought to feel.

This approach also explains the rate at which importance fades: it fades at the same rate as its influence on eudaimonia. Importantly, this will vary with the context. If a person quickly becomes very kind indeed after their misspent youth, the effect of their past vice on their eudaimonia will fall off faster than if they improve themselves slowly, or only manage to become fairly kind. For someone who instead becomes more and more vicious, growing up to be a thoroughly unkind person, their vicious childhood remains important for a lot longer, because the role it plays in their life as a whole is now that of the beginning of a vicious streak that mars their whole life, instead of being a simple misstep.

It might be objected that this is equivalent to gradually fading importance with eudaimonia inserted into the middle: what happened long ago tends to matter less because it affects our eudaimonia less, but the reason what happened a long time ago affects our eudaimonia less might just be that the importance of the past to our lives gradually fades out. But it is not true that what has happened always becomes gradually less important to our lives.

First, some of what happens to us remains as important to our lives as it ever was. For example, when a couple marry, they make promises to each other which are intended to remain just as important to their lives as time passes. Though perhaps they may become less important if the marriage is terribly unhappy, it would be odd to think of marriage vows as becoming gradually less important to one's life simply because of the passing of time. Some achievements also make a difference to a life that doesn't fade in importance as time passes: I have in mind the sort of achievement that would be considered a 'life's work', such as painting a masterpiece or successfully negotiating the end of a long conflict. According to the Eudaimonia Principle, whatever has an undiminished effect on eudaimonia remains of undiminished importance to how one ought to feel. This is the correct result. If someone is proud of the peace they have negotiated, then as long as the peace has not faltered it would clearly be churlish to object that the negotiations were a long time ago and don't matter so much any more.

Second, some of what happens will be important for some time, before suddenly becoming much less important, because of other changes in one's life. For example, consider someone who loses a lot of money on foolish investments, leaving them in considerable financial difficulty. This will have an indirect effect on their eudaimonia, because it will make them less secure, reduce their options, and perhaps deprive them of some of what they need. If they cannot turn their finances around, the effects of their mistake will compound. Even if we place of a lot of the blame on all the incremental poor decisions or misfortunes that prevent them from recovering their finances, it is clear that their initial mistake remains important. But if they later come into a large, sudden windfall, the financial aspect of their situation could be turned around at a stroke. If this happens, the mistake quickly becomes less important. Although it was still foolish, and the agent may have missed opportunities because of it, its continuing indirect effect on eudaimonia is suddenly and dramatically lessened.

4.5 Objections and replies

4.5.1 Is it true that affecting what is virtuous is sufficient to matter to how we ought to feel?

I have claimed that not every vicious or virtuous action we perform is significant enough to affect our eudaimonia on its own. So imagine that I have promised to meet you, and that it is just an ordinary, friendly meeting. There will be no unusually significant consequences to my missing the meeting, and you would not be especially offended if I did. Suppose that I do miss the meeting, because I forget about it. It seems like this won't make me less eudaimon: it is just an ordinary and forgiveable error, the sort even the best of us make occasionally. It doesn't mean that my life is going less well. And here is the problem: it seems that whether or not I keep my promise doesn't affect my eudaimonia, and so by the Eudaimonia Principle, my promise to meet you doesn't matter to how I ought to feel. This would be the wrong result: my promise does matter to how I ought to feel even though it is just an ordinary promise. It counts in favour of regretting being late and against resenting you for being irritated with me.

The problem with this objection is that it considers only the direct effect of the promise and breaking it on our eudaimonia, when the indirect effects are also important. First of all, if I always forget my promises, then I will not be making ordinary forgiveable errors any more, and my eudaimonia will be affected. But it is not the case that one of my promise-breakings will be the first one that counts, that starts making me less eudaimon, while the ones before that don't matter. Rather, it is that promise-breakings affect eudaimonia directly in some contexts but not in all contexts. But they all have

the indirect effect of forming the relevant context. Even if we have a long history of faithful promise keeping behind us, if we were ever to begin breaking trivial promises frequently, it wouldn't take all that long before someone who knew what we were doing would consider us unfaithful or at least unreliable. Being an unfaithful person counts against our eudaimonia, and so our trivial promises can affect how our life goes.

What if our promise breaking is infrequent? What if we do some philosophy, discover how often we can break promises of various importance and still be eudaimon, and then carefully keep to a chart, breaking just that many, on the occasions where doing so would be most beneficial to our other interests? Well, actually performing that elaborate ruse would itself be vicious and make us less eudaimon, so let us set that aside. If we instead honestly and coincidentally forget just that many promises on just that schedule it would not make us less eudaimon, but living so close to the line has a clear indirect effect on our eudaimonia: it would mean that we are close to the vices of unfaithfulness and unreliability, and that our virtue is not as secure as it could be. This doesn't necessarily mean that we should feel anxiety or regret over the promises we have broken, but it does make feeling that way less inappropriate than it would be for a thoroughly reliable person.

All this might invite another objection. If this is the story we tell about what affects eudaimonia, then even seemingly trivial past actions of mine will matter, because they could come to affect my eudaimonia if I make a habit of them. Ordinary youthful indiscretions would matter after all, and must provide a reason for regret, or wariness of a relapse, or something else. Surely this will lead to too many trivial things mattering to how we should feel?

On the contrary, what we have said helps to further explain when and why past vices (or virtues) matter. The same youthful vices can either be an insignificant blemish on what is clearly a good life overall, or a revealing beginning of a life lived badly (or anything in between). Suppose they are insignificant. Later on in the agent's life, we will be in a position to know this, because the circumstances in which eudaimonia is affected have been ruled out. At this time, they will not matter any more. Earlier in their life, even though the agent is improving, the youthful vices could still affect the agent's eudaimonia if the agent slips back into them, revealing them as part of a significant pattern of behaviour rather than an insignificant blip. At this time, they will still matter. Your youthful indiscretions as a 17 year-old matter to you at age 18 but not at age 50, but only as long as you don't fall into the habit of repeating them. This is the correct result, but not the result suggested by the gradually fading importance account.

4.5.2 Triviality

Perhaps the Eudaimonia Principle is true, but too close to trivially true to be very informative. If the past matters to how we should feel when it affects our eudaimonia, and if eudaimonia is living well, then the Eudaimonia Principle holds that the past matters to how you should feel you when it affects whether you are living well. This is close to the claim that the past matters to how we should feel when it matters to us. This isn't a trivial claim, because it is is possible that it simply doesn't matter how we feel, but it might not seem very informative either. We would be wrong to think so, however.

First, the principle's claim is made informative by the account of eudaimonia that underpins it. This account of eudaimonia is compelling, but certainly not trivial. That virtuous activity is the main component of a good life is not a trivial claim, and neither is the claim that the good life is best understood as having an achievable upper bound, rather than as a life which is simply close enough to a perfect life. That the good life includes many virtues rather than just the best one, and that it should be understood pluralistically, are less controversial, but still informative. These considerations affect the application of the eudaimonia principle: that the good life has an achievable upper bound explains why each happy moment and each small display of virtue does not continue to matter long after the fact, and that virtuous activity is important to the good life (rather than just, say, pleasure) explains why we it matters if we break our promises.

Second, the claim that what matters to how we should feel is what matters to our eudaimonia is informative in its own right. At its heart, the Eudaimonia Principle is a claim about how different things that matter relate to each other. It holds that the past matters to how we should feel when it matters to our living the good life. There are other ways in which things can matter: we might ask what matters to everyone, to anyone, to the way the world is, or just to the things we happen to care about. The Eudaimonia Principle denies that mattering in these other ways is sufficient to make the past matter to how we should feel – an effect on our eudaimonia is also required. What matters to how we should feel must be significant enough to make a difference to a life, and it must make a difference to our life in particular.

Is this requirement too egoistic? I don't think it is. While the reason the past matters to how you should feel will be that it affects how well your life goes, how well your life goes is not a matter of narrow self-interest. Your life goes well if it is a virtuous one, one filled with excellent activity pursued for its own sake. It is not a life of selfishness. The kind person is well aware that their life goes better for helping others, but that is

not the only reason they see for doing so.

Since the virtues are not egoistic, many past occurrences which do not have a direct effect on our eudaimonia still affect what is virtuous in the present. For example, we think that it is important to learn about and commemorate the terrible consequences of past wars, and the sacrifices made by those who fought. That we take those past events to require this response today shows that we take them to have at least an indirect effect on our eudaimonia. This means that they matter to how we ought to feel now.

The requirement that the past must have some effect on our eudaimonia to matter to how we feel now is not too egoistic. It is still a meaningful requirement, however: many very bad and very good occurrences have happened in the past and are happening all around the world now, but they don't *all* matter to how we ought to feel. Put another way, it is virtuous to be aware of and moved by history, but there is no need for us to chronicle and mourn every misfortune ever to affect anybody. Two hundred years ago, somebody's love went unrequited, and they were devastated. But it doesn't make a difference to how you ought to feel.

Part Two: Why Feel Bad?

Chapter 5: Guilt

5.1 What is guilt?

5.1.1 The Straightforward Account

We might begin by assuming that feeling guilty is connected in some way with actually being guilty – of having actually performed some wrong action. The most straightforward explanation is that to feel guilty involves taking oneself to have acted wrongly. We can also immediately say a little about the affect that characterises guilt. As Gilbert Harman puts it: 'To feel guilt is to feel bad'[33]. This gives us:

The Straightforward Account of Guilt: To feel guilty is to take oneself to have acted wrongly and to feel bad about this.

This allows for a broad range of cognitions to be involved in guilt, since it seems clear that we can feel guilty without having exactly the belief that we have acted wrongly. First, there are cases of what Patricia Greenspan calls 'anticipatory guilt',[34] where we feel guilty about a wrong action before we have done it, because we are imagining or anticipating having done it. Second, cases of what we might call 'provisional guilt', where we feel guilty about an action that we have performed and which we feel was wrong before we have firmly judged that it was wrong; this could be because it is a difficult judgement to make or because we judged our conduct to be permissible but somebody whose opinion we respect has accused us of acting wrongly. Third, cases of what David Velleman[35] calls 'self-disciplinary guilt' where we feel guilty for some small personal failing such as abandoning our exercise regime. Here we may feel as if our action was wrong even though we do not believe it was wrong. Finally, we may feel as if we have done something wrong even though we know that really we have not, for instance in a case of survivor's guilt, or in a case of harmless taboo violation.

33 Harman, Gilbert, 'Guilt-Free Morality', in Shafer-Landau, Russ, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Oxford: OUP, vol. 4, 2009, pp203-214, p204
34 Greenspan, Patricia, *Practical Guilt*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. p109
35 Velleman, David, 'Don't Worry, Feel Guilty', in his *Self to Self*, Cambridge: CUP, 2006, pp156-169. p166

We must be careful to describe an agent's feelings precisely in order to get the right results from the straightforward account. Consider the case of Victor:

Victor, a vicious person, is caught and punished for vandalising a bus stop. He knows that vandalism is wrong, but he doesn't care about acting virtuously; he vandalises things regardless, because he enjoys it. But because Victor strongly disliked his punishment, after his punishment he comes to regret his action. "I should never have vandalised that bus stop," he thinks, "it was fun, but it wasn't worth getting punished for." Victor then resolves to only vandalise street signs in quiet country lanes, where he is much less likely to be caught.

It is clear that Victor doesn't feel guilty. Nonetheless, Victor does think that he acted wrongly, and he does feel bad, so he does have both the cognition and the affect required by the straightforward account of guilt. However, for him to feel guilt according to the straightforward account Victor's cognition and affect must be related in the right way. To feel guilty, Victor must feel bad about having acted wrongly.

To decide whether Victor feels this way, we must ask whether Victor's bad feeling characterises or is caused by his belief that he acted wrongly. Here, it is helpful to consider whether it is most accurate to say that Victor feels regret that he vandalised a bus stop, regret that he did something which got him punished, or regret that he acted wrongly. Because of what we know about Victor – that his emotion was felt only after his punishment, that he doesn't resolve to stop performing wrong actions but instead only actions he is likely to be punished for, and that he would probably have felt just the same even if he didn't believe vandalism was wrong – the second description seems most appropriate. "Victor only regrets being caught," we would naturally say. The straightforward account therefore gives the correct result in this case: Victor is not feeling guilty because he doesn't feel bad about having acted wrongly, but instead about having been caught and punished.

However, there are reasons to doubt the straightforward account. Consider the case of Ted:

When Ted was a young man just starting a family, he was a problem gambler. He lost a lot of money, and came close to losing the family home before recovering. Ted is much older now, and hasn't gambled at all for 40 years. These days he is in excellent financial shape and proudly retired on an ample pension; he is confident that he won't relapse. But his past recklessness is still painful for him to think about. Ted considers his risking of the family home to be the worst thing he ever did, and is relieved that things didn't turn out much worse.

Ted does feel bad, as he feels pained, and he does take himself to have acted wrongly, as he feels his gambling was the worst thing he has ever done. Does he feel bad about

having acted wrongly? It seems that he must do. He certainly doesn't feel bad only about the bad consequences for himself, because he is in fact relieved with how things turned out. The other alternative is that he feels bad only about having been a reckless person and not about the reckless things he did. But this is improbable, since Ted is clearly thinking about the consequences of his actions as he is relieved that they weren't greater. So Ted is feeling guilty according to the straightforward account.

This is the wrong result. Ted would have felt guilty at the time he realised how badly he was acting, but he now feels very differently to how he felt then. While he finds it painful to think about his past mistake, he views it as just that, a past mistake: this is why he is now proud of himself. Ted would be cross with us if we thought he was foolish or a spendthrift (he is not), or if we openly blamed him for what he did (why are we badgering him about what happened so long ago?). Similarly, Ted would think it inappropriate for us to press him to do anything about what he did wrong, because he already has done everything he ought to have done. Ted is not worried about the future, and is unlikely to be more than ordinarily concerned about what we think of him. Ted admits that he acted wrongly and finds that thought painful, but he is also calm, proud of himself, and inclined to reject blame and criticism. This doesn't seem like a description of someone who feels guilt: it is better to say instead that Ted regrets what he did. (I consider regret in chapter seven).

I shall now consider two further accounts of guilt proposed by Patricia Greenspan and David Velleman. I consider both to improve upon the straightforward account, but each to have problems of their own. I will then propose a new analysis, influenced by each of the three accounts.

5.1.2 Greenspan's Identificatory Account

Greenspan's account holds constant the intentional object of guilt (our acting wrongly) but specifies the negative affect as 'the agent's uncomfortable awareness that his first-order empathetic emotion is self-directed and negative'.[36] In the simplest case this means that, after wrongly harming someone, we experience an empathetic awareness of their anger, which is a negative attitude directed towards us. Our 'uncomfortable awareness' of this comes when we adopt the victim's attitude or something like it as our own, coming to feel angry with ourselves as well as simply aware of the victim's anger. The uncomfortable awareness may consist of any self-punishing emotion, such as self-anger, shame or remorse; which is felt will vary from case to case.

36 Greenspan, p129

Greenspan notes that 'a wider notion of empathy seems to be needed'[37] to account for cases where there is no victim to empathise with. This wider notion would allow for cases of imagined empathy. In the paradigm case where we feel guilty for wrongly harming someone with their knowledge, we have an actual empathetic experience. In a non-paradigm case, we must engage in an imaginative empathy to produce the uncomfortable negative affect of guilt. For example, if we harm someone without their knowing that it was us who harmed them, we may still imagine their reaction if they were to learn that it was us. In a case of self-disciplinary guilt, we might empathise with an imagined ideal persona – the reaction of the person we could have been but for our lack of resolve – or we might imagine the disappointed reaction of a loved one who discovered our failure. In addition to this imaginative empathy, Greenspan could also give an account of learnt guilt, whereby we first learn to feel guilty by experiencing it in paradigm cases, but later come to feel the same way without literally undergoing the intermediate empathetic emotion, thus experiencing an uncomfortable feeling that “it would be right to be angry with me” in which the subject of the anger is left vague and is not the focus of the experience.

Greenspan's account neatly explains why neither Victor nor Ted feel guilty. Victor only regrets that his action has set himself up to be punished; he does not have any sort of uncomfortable awareness that it would be appropriate for other agents to condemn him. He is only concerned with the anger felt towards him in so far as it is a part of the causal story explaining his punishment. Ted does feel bad about having acted wrongly, but because his wrongdoing was so long ago and he has recovered since he is unlikely still to feel worried that others are or should be angry with him. Could Ted be experiencing learnt guilt, where his guilt doesn't arise from real or imaginative empathy? This also seems unlikely, because his feeling is so different in tone from his initial guilt feeling, and indeed empathetic guilt feelings generally, which involve much more than simply feeling pained at the thought of one's wrongdoing. It isn’t reasonable to consider Ted's feeling an instance of learnt guilt rather than a distinct emotion when it is so different from paradigm cases of guilt.

Despite its advantages in dealing with the previous cases, Greenspan's account incorrectly rules out some actual cases of guilt. I have in mind cases where our attention does seem to be appropriately focused on our wrongdoing, and where the negative affect felt does seem to be appropriate to guilt, but where the emotion is neither focused on other people's reactions nor brought about by real or imagined empathy. Consider the following example:

Lloyd secretly steals a library book – it was his favourite book and he almost always had it out on loan

37 Greenspan, p127

anyway. At first, he feels satisfied with himself, but before long Lloyd comes to regret his decision and to feel angry and uncomfortable with himself for stealing it. His attention is directed firmly at the theft: he feels uncomfortably reminded of it by the book, so that he cannot enjoy reading it anymore. He therefore resolves to secretly return the book to the library's shelves and not to act similarly again. Lloyd does not experience any empathetic thoughts of the disappointment of library visitors or the frustration of the librarian that might be caused by his theft – it was not a very popular book, and the library had more copies than people ever wanted to borrow. Neither does he imagine how they might react if they found out it was him: since the library is large and quiet, he is sure that he will be able to return it without being spotted. The idea that people could rightly be angry at him or blame him doesn't cross his mind. Lloyd is simply struck by the thought that he stole the book, and that stealing is wrong. He feels that he has betrayed his moral principles.

To decide if this is a good counterexample we must answer three questions. First, is Lloyd feeling guilty? Second, is Lloyd's situation one that could obtain? Third, must Greenspan's account really deny that Lloyd feels guilty?

We should agree that Lloyd does feel guilty. His bad feeling is prompted by thinking of the theft as wrong, and provides a spur to do something about this particular action; both details are appropriate to guilt. This contrasts with the previous cases of Victor and Ted. Victor does not really regret acting wrongly at all, and Ted only felt spurred to act when he was younger. It does not seem better to say that Lloyd is feeling shame or regret rather than guilt.

The second question is a little less clear. Do we really believe that Lloyd could go through this process of guilt and resolution without thinking of how people would be right to blame him, or to be angry with him? We should agree that the case is possible. Suppose Lloyd is something of a caricature Kantian: he sees morality as a matter of obeying the moral law, concerned only with action and duty. He considers his emotions as being of only secondary importance, others' emotions tertiary. So it is only natural that they sometimes do not occur to him.

Considering the third question, it is clear that Greenspan cannot account for Lloyd's case as involving actual or imagined empathy, but she may argue that Lloyd's case is one of learnt guilt. Lloyd does feel uncomfortable at the thought of what he has done, and he is feeling self-anger, an appropriately punishing affect and one that is the first-person counterpart of the anger others could feel towards him. So Lloyd could be feeling learnt guilt. However, Greenspan's account cannot acceptably rely on this response. Lloyd could have learnt to feel the way he does from experiencing paradigm cases of empathetic guilt. But there is no reason to think he must have done so: perhaps all of Lloyd's guilt experiences have been similar to his current one, or perhaps this is his very first guilt experience. It isn't reasonable to hold that Lloyd's

feelings couldn't possibly have been brought about except as an indirect result of an empathetic mechanism that operated on Lloyd in previous cases.

5.1.3 Velleman's Normative Vulnerability Account

Velleman proposes an account which changes the cognition involved in guilt feelings as well as specifying the type of affect involved. Velleman's position is that guilt does not require thought about our acting wrongly; instead 'guilt requires a sense of *normative vulnerability*'. Normative vulnerability involves 'the sense of being somehow unjustified, of having nothing to say for oneself' but is only felt when that 'sense of indefens*ibility* yields a sense of being defence*less* against negative responses of some kind ... One feels defenceless against these responses in the sense of having no claim or entitlement to be spared from them, because they are warranted.'[38] The kind of negative response involved is later specified as either resentment or the withdrawal of trust. To feel guilty therefore, we must take ourselves to have no claim against others' resentment or mistrust.

Velleman's account also specifies the type of negative affect involved in guilt: 'guilt is a feeling of both anxiety and diminished self-worth. The anxiety comes from feeling oneself exposed to something untoward. The sense of diminished self-worth comes from conceiving of that exposure as a matter of being stripped of a claim or entitlement.'[39] Therefore, if a vicious person knows that they have made themselves normatively vulnerable, but the affect that accompanies this is one of thrill and excitement, then this person is not feeling guilty.

The main advantage Velleman claims for his analysis is that it accounts for self-disciplinary guilt and survivor's guilt. Self-disciplinary guilt is guilt felt over small personal failings like eating too much cake. Velleman offers two explanations of this sort of guilt. First, we may take ourselves to have forfeited our own trust, in effect, damaging our claim to be able to trust ourselves. We had resolved only to eat only a single slice of cake, and yet we ended up having three slices. So we may naturally worry that perhaps our resolutions are not good for much. This is indeed something worth worrying about: 'a loss of self-trust can ... undermine our ability to organise and coordinate our activities over time'. Second, we may take ourselves to have damaged our claim not to be mistrusted by others: 'Insofar as we are un-self-disciplined, we are unreliable, and insofar as we are unreliable, we are untrustworthy.'[40]

In the case of survivor's guilt, we take ourselves to have warranted the resentment of

38 Velleman, p156-157. (Velleman's Emphasis)
39 Velleman, p157
40 Velleman, p166-167

third parties feeling it on behalf of the less fortunate deceased. In contrast to the resentment we fear in the moral case, which develops from anger, this resentment is a development of envy. The thought is that those close to someone who died might be envious that others survived while the person they cared about did not. This envy may develop into resentment if it is also felt that the person they cared about deserved to survive just as much as those who actually did. Survivor's guilt involves anxiety prompted by one's feeling of exposure to this resentment. Thus Velleman holds that moral guilt and survivor's guilt should be treated as 'two distinct species of the same emotion, precisely by virtue of consisting in anxiety about having warranted two distinct species of resentment.'[41]

Velleman's conception of guilt is also able to account well for the cases of Ted and Victor. Victor knows that he has acted wrongly, and so he would not see himself as having a claim against resentment or mistrust. Victor therefore feels normatively unjustified, but it is not clear that he feels normatively vulnerable, for he may not feel defenceless against resentment or mistrust as a result. Victor might be a bit of a loner, used to getting by while people tend to mistrust or resent him, or he may have fallen in with a crowd of similar people who will not react badly to his vandalism. Either circumstance provides Victor with a different sort of defence, an ability to shrug off or endure the consequences of such negative reactions. We should also consider whether Victor might feel defenceless against himself, as Velleman proposes we may in his treatment of self-disciplinary guilt. But Victor would not feel defenceless in this way either, because he is not committed to any project of non-vandalism, nor is he prone to become angry with himself for his vandalism.

Alternatively, Victor might indeed feel normatively vulnerable, seeing the link between resentment and punishment, and between mistrust and his ability to get away with further crimes. But this would still not be a case of guilt under Velleman's account, because Victor's negative affect is not one of anxiety and diminished self-worth. Victor never felt anxious: his regret sank in only after he was punished, and he knows he will not be punished twice. He also has an effective plan to reduce his risk of punishment in the future, by vandalising more isolated targets. Nor does Victor feel a sense of diminished self-worth: he has never drawn his self-worth from his moral standing.

Velleman's account also explains why Ted's case is not a case of guilt. Ted does take himself to have once done something unjustified, but he does not feel normatively vulnerable to complaints about this anymore, since it was both a very long time ago and its adverse consequences have now been recovered from. Even were Ted to consider his past behaviour to warrant some resentment today, he doesn't feel a sense

41 Velleman, p168

of diminished self-worth. He is instead proud of his recovery and robust in his sense of self-worth. He is also unlikely to feel anxious, for the same reasons. Ted is therefore correctly understood as someone who still feels bad about having acted wrongly, but has moved on from feeling guilty.

Velleman's account also coheres well with some of the common but inessential aspects of guilty feeling. It explains why guilt very often involves empathy, since feeling vulnerable to the reactions of others often triggers an empathetic awareness of those reactions, and, conversely, an empathetic awareness of the those reactions in others may cause us to feel vulnerable by helping us to realise that those reactions would be warranted. It also explains why guilt very often motivates us to either hide our wrongdoing or to apologise for it and seek to make amends, as both are natural responses to our anxiety that others will react negatively. By hiding we may prevent the feared reaction from occurring, and by apologising we may temper it.

However, Velleman's account cannot provide the right answer in the case of Lloyd. Lloyd certainly feels normatively unjustified, and he feels normatively vulnerable as well, because he feels defenceless against his own recriminations. In fact, his defences are so compromised that he cannot bear to even read the book that he has stolen. But Lloyd doesn't feel any anxiety about his normative vulnerability, since he is sure he will not be caught. The negative affect that he feels is therefore not appropriate for guilt on Velleman's account. Perhaps Lloyd might feel anxious about his moral character and his ability to act rightly in future, and as a result anxious about whether he really deserves the trust of others or whether he can really trust himself. This would be similar to the anxiety in Velleman's account of self-disciplinary guilt. This would allow Velleman to classify Lloyd as feeling guilty; however, it does not seem that Lloyd must necessarily be feeling anxious in this way in order to feel guilty. The very strength of Lloyd’s guilt might be a good reason for him to be confident that he won't make the same mistake again, or he might simply view the case as an isolated incident.

5.1.4 Revising the Straightforward Account

Why is Lloyd a clear case of guilt while Ted is not? It seemed initially that Ted's feeling isn't guilt because he is too comfortable with his position: he finds the thought of his past mistakes painful, but isn't worried about them or what others will think of him, and doesn't feel the need to do anything about them. On Greenspan's account the deciding factor is that Ted doesn't feel as if others are or should be angry with him. On Velleman's, it is that Ted doesn't have feelings of anxiety and diminished self-worth: his mistakes are painful to him, but he is able to regard them calmly. However, Lloyd's case reveals that these points cannot be what Ted's case turns on: Lloyd clearly feels

guilty, even though his feeling is not empathetic or anxious either.

I therefore propose that the important difference between Ted and Lloyd is that Lloyd feels, while Ted does not, that he has to do something about his wrongdoing, that it demands a response from him – specifically, that he must return the stolen book. Lloyd's guilt is motivating. We would not consider an agent who regretted a wrong action but was not thereby motivated to respond in any way at all to be feeling guilty; this is why Ted feels only regret. Of course, the motivation required by guilt need not be a decisive motivation. We would still consider Lloyd to have felt guilty even if he endured his painful feelings until they subsided, without actually returning the book. Finally, we should allow that the motivation may not be to respond in any precise way. A murderer might be wracked with guilt without knowing what to do, so long as they felt a desperate motivation "to do *something*".

The straightforward account can be revised to rule out an agent who is not at all motivated by their guilt: we may simply stipulate that the emotion is one that motivates us to respond somehow. This gives us:

Slightly Revised Straightforward Account of Guilt: To feel guilty is to take oneself to have acted wrongly, to feel bad about this, and to be motivated to respond somehow to what one has done.

The account now gives the correct response to the cases. Victor doesn't feel guilty because he doesn't feel bad about acting wrongly, only about being caught. Ted doesn't feel guilty because his feeling is no longer motivating. Lloyd does feel guilt, because he feels bad about stealing the book and is motivated to respond by returning the book. However, the added clause must be clarified. First, what sort of motivations satisfy it? Second, what sorts of response are intended by it?

Regarding the sort of motivation required for guilt, we have already seen that it need not be decisive motivation that leads to action. We can also see that the motivation itself should feel bad, to fit the overall tenor of the guilt feeling. Guilt is a feeling that feels bad and at least fairly urgent: it drives us to act, spurs us, and seems to demand a response. I call such motivations negative ones, to distinguish them from motivations that feel good. We sometimes feel bad about having acted wrongly and yet are happily or excitedly motivated to respond appropriately (perhaps because we are glad that things can be put right easily, or because we are eager to turn over a new leaf). But this isn't the same as feeling guilty.

The main question regarding the sort of response involved in guilt is whether it must

be a response that the agent takes to be right, or whether any response will do. While it is very sensible to want to do what is right in response to doing something wrong, as Lloyd does, this isn't essential to guilt. This is because as well as motivating us to try to make up for what we have done, guilt also frequently motivates us to hide or in some other way act selfishly. Consider the case of Mary:

Mary, angry with a colleague, impulsively keys their car on her way out of the office. Having done this, Mary immediately realises that it was wrong, and feels shocked and upset with herself. As well as this, Mary is very worried about being caught. "Oh no, what if someone saw me!" she thinks. Looking around and noticing she hasn't been spotted, she quickly leaves the scene.

Mary isn't motivated to respond in the way that she ought to, nor does she mistakenly think that what one ought to do after acting wrongly is to hide. But she does feel guilty, because she does feel bad about having acted wrongly, and her feeling is one that acts as a spur and demands a response. It would be natural for us to describe her as "guiltily slinking away", or to explain that she ran away because she felt guilty. A more brazen person might not have cared if anyone saw them. This type of guilt can be called childish guilt, both because feeling guilty and responding in this sort of way is familiar from most people's childhoods, and because it is less mature than responding to one's wrongdoing by acting appropriately.

Another sort of response to guilt is an expressive one. Rosalind Hursthouse provides a useful account of what it is to express emotion.[42] Paradigm cases of actions that express our emotions include jumping for joy, smashing a glass in anger, or weeping when upset by something. Hursthouse argues that on many occasions it is true '(i) that the action was intentional; (ii) that the agent did not do it for a reason in the sense that [...] will "reveal the favourable light in which the agent saw what he did" [...] and (iii) that the agent would not have done the action if she had not been in the grip of whatever emotion is was'[43]. When these conditions are met, Hursthouse calls the actions in question arational, to indicate that they are not governed by practical reason, but not contrary to it either. An agent who acted in this way might explain it by saying 'I Φ-ed because I was so frightened [...] I just wanted to'[44]. When we express our emotions in this way, arationally, we are responding expressively to our emotion. In the case where we are joyful because a project of ours has been a great success, that success is clearly a reason to be happy. It is not clearly a reason to jump up and down. We jump up and down not because we ought to, but simply because, in the grip of emotion, we want to. In doing so, we express our emotion, but we do not act for the

42 Hursthouse, Rosalind, 'Arational Action', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 88, 1991, pp57-68
43 Hursthouse, p59
44 Hursthouse, p58

reason that in doing so we will express our emotion[45].

Agents might express guilt by pacing, shouting, or hurting themselves, and often will at the same time as being motivated in other ways. However, simply feeling bad about what one has done wrong and expressing that feeling is not necessarily guilt, because one can intentionally express one's emotion without feeling driven to express it. If Ted thinks about his gambling, frowns, and shakes his head a little, we would say that he is expressing his regret, not his guilt. This is because we think it is unlikely that he feels compelled to frown. If instead Ted wakes in the middle of the night, climbs onto his roof, and screams wildly into the sky, we would then say that he felt guilty: his pain at the thought of his wrongdoing now seems to be driving him to express it, because climbing onto the roof is not something usually done lightly.

The best way to revise the straightforward account of guilt is therefore to require that guilt involve a negative motivation to respond somehow to the wrongdoing. This requires a feeling that spurs us, drives us, or seems to demand a response, but where the response could be of any type, including appropriate responses like apologising or making amends, childish responses like covering up what one has done, or expressive responses like shouting a confession into the night or writing it in a diary. This gives us:

Revised Straightforward Account of Guilt: To feel guilty is to take oneself to have acted wrongly, to feel bad about this, and to be negatively motivated to respond somehow to what one has done.

5.1.5 Defending the Revised Straightforward Account

I will now summarise the argument in favour of the revised straightforward account of guilt and respond to possible objections. The main recommendation for the revised straightforward account is that it classifies the cases I have considered correctly, where the alternatives do not. As well as this, it shares some of the advantages of the other accounts and explains what makes them appealing. Like the straightforward account, it is a simple analysis of guilt, and while it is more restrictive than the straightforward account it still allows for a broad range of feelings to be recognised as guilt. In particular, it is a strength of the account that it follows our usage in allowing for a range of different types of felt affect to be involved in guilt.

Greenspan's account of guilt as an uncomfortable empathetic recognition of the warranted anger or resentment of others provided an appealing explanation of paradigm cases of guilt while misclassifying other cases. The features it relies on –

45 Hursthouse, pp60-61

discomfort, empathy and our relationship to others – are clearly important to guilt. This is still the case on the revised straightforward account. Feeling uncomfortable or ill at ease is clearly one way of feeling bad, but it is also an affect that can be negatively motivating: one way for guilt to motivate us to respond is to make us uncomfortable with leaving things as they are. The revised straightforward account can also explain why paradigm cases of guilt involve empathy and our relationship with others: our awareness of how others have been made to feel by our wrongdoing can easily lead us to feel that we ought to do something in response, and our responding seems especially important in cases that are other-regarding.

The only sort of case that Greenspan would consider guilt that the revised straightforward account does not is the case where we are uncomfortable with the warranted ill-feeling others have towards us, but where this discomfort doesn't motivate us to respond at all, not even by motivating us to do something about their ill-feeling, but without knowing what we could do. Here the revised straightforward account is correct. The agent who doesn't feel any motivation, even in the general sense, seems either to care so little about the other person as to not really feel guilty, or to be relaxed about the situation because they have already responded appropriately, and so to be in Ted's situation of feeling only regret.

Velleman's account makes a sense of normative vulnerability and an anxious affect essential to guilt. Once again it is clear on the revised straightforward account how these feelings can be involved in guilt: if we feel anxious and normatively vulnerable, it is natural for this to motivate us to respond in a way that might return us to a normal position. An advantage of Velleman's account was its ability to cope with self-disciplinary or survivor's guilt, and this is an advantage that the revised straightforward account shares: as long as we take ourselves to have acted wrongly and are driven to do something about it, we can feel guilty – even if we are completely wrong to take things this way, as is the case in survivor's guilt. The advantage of the revised straightforward account over Velleman's is that it does not restrict guilt only to cases where the agent feels anxious or vulnerable. That restriction is too severe to allow for cases of guilt at minor wrongdoing (where we are unlikely to feel anxious or vulnerable to other's reactions), or guilt which involves instead anger, sadness, embarrassment or other ways of feeling bad that can be motivating.

The most likely objection to my account is that we can feel guilt even in cases where our feeling is not at all motivating. My response must rely on our intuitions about guilt. The core intuition here is that a person who is really feeling guilty must be motivated to respond *somehow*, even if they are not decisively motivated and even if they are not motivated to respond in a particular way. To drive this home we can imagine the case

of someone who claims to feel guilty, but who admits that they are not even a little bit motivated to respond to what they have done in any way. This person strikes me as insincere or confused.

The most likely case of a person who may genuinely feel guilty without being motivated to act is a person who thinks that they have acted wrongly but is depressed and overwhelmed by this thought rather than driven to do anything about it. For example, consider the case of Polly:

Polly cares a lot about being a good person, but she also has something of a temper. On one occasion, during a heated argument with her father, Polly snaps and spitefully says something that she knows will be very hurtful to him. Afterwards, Polly realises that it was wrong to say what she did. This leaves her feeling intensely disappointed with herself and painfully aware that how she has treated her father reflects very badly on her. These feelings preoccupy Polly entirely, and she falls into a deep funk. She is distracted from and unconcerned about thoughts of whether or how she should respond to what she has done. She doesn't feel driven to apologise, to avoid her father, or to express herself. She just feels upset and disappointed about what she said.

Greenspan briefly raises the possibility of this sort of guilt, though she also maintains that guilt is motivating in paradigm cases: 'though guilt may be incapacitating in excessive doses, the agent in a state of feeling guilty is typically motivated *by* that state to *escape* it.'[46] I would suggest that when guilt appears so overwhelming as to be incapacitating, it is in fact often motivating an expressive response: we are so overwhelmed that we feel driven to hug ourselves, pull our hair out, or hide in our beds. As well as this, or instead, we might be painfully motivated to respond properly to what we have done, but overwhelmingly discouraged by the difficulty of that response. This explains why Polly's case strikes us as unusual: is she really not anxious about her next meeting with her father in a way that motivates her to put the meeting off? Is she really not painfully aware that she ought to apologise, and spurred to do so? Doesn't she desperately want to do *something*, even if she can't say what, or if it's just to scream or punch the wall? If there truly is no motivating element to Polly's feeling, no spur to respond at all, then she is not feeling guilty: she is feeling some other emotion, such as shame or remorse.

5.2 Why feel guilty?

I shall begin arguing for the conclusion that it is sometimes appropriate to feel guilty by considering Harman's arguments to the opposite conclusion that guilt is never appropriate.

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46 Greenspan, p132

5.2.1 Harman's analysis of guilt

Harman argues that guilt cannot merely be feeling that one is in fact guilty of some offence. Such a conception of guilt would make the claim that we ought to feel guilty when we have acted wrongly trivial: even a psychopath could feel that way, since they may know that they have acted wrongly and simply not care. Instead, Harman holds that guilt requires feeling bad: 'guilt feelings have to be real feelings ... To feel guilt is to feel bad.'[47] Harman is thus working with something similar to the straightforward account of guilt. However, not all kinds of negative affect felt about our having acted wrongly count as guilt for Harman. In particular, he claims that 'it is not enough for nontrivial guilt that one regrets having done something morally wrong', contending that 'one regrets many things one has done without feeling guilty about them,'[48] and again that a psychopath could have such feelings. Finally, Harman lists some of the types of negative feeling that have been suggested as characteristic of guilt: 'remorse, involving deep regret, painful humiliation, distress, self-punishment, and/or self-flagellation', 'anxiety and ... the thought that one deserves punishment.'[49] Though Harman does not specify that guilt must be motivating, his analysis of guilt is similar to my own, because a negatively motivating feeling will typically be a stronger or more intense feeling than simple regret. I will argue against Harman's position that guilt is not required of a moral person using his account of guilt. Later, I will use the details of my account of guilt to identify exactly when guilt is appropriate.

5.2.2 Harman's arguments against guilt

Harman argues for the position that guilt is not 'central to morality'[50]. He has two targets in mind. The first is the normative view that guilt can be appropriate: that if an agent knows they have acted wrongly then 'the agent has a strong *reason* to feel guilt', 'the agent *ought* to have guilt feelings', 'the agent is *justified* in having guilt feelings,' or 'only an agent with *bad character* would not have such feelings'[51]. The second is the conceptual view that guilt plays a definitional role in concepts such as moral standards, moral principles, moral agency, or moral motivation.[52] I am only concerned here to reject Harman's normative arguments. Accepting the view that we ought sometimes to feel guilt is consistent with rejecting the view that guilt plays a definitional role in moral concepts.

Harman's normative conclusion is that guilt is not required of the morally excellent

47 Harman, p204
48 Harman, p204
49 Harman, p205
50 Harman, p208
51 Harman, p203
52 Harman, p203-204

person. His position is that 'there are morally excellent people who are not subject to guilt', that although 'many moral people are susceptible to guilt ... that is a defect in them', that 'it would be a good thing for those moral people who feel guilt to try to eliminate it', and that 'it is possible and better not to need that motivation' sometimes provided by guilt.[53] If we have in mind a completely virtuous person this may be plausible[54]: there is no need to feel guilt or even be susceptible to it if one always acts completely virtuously. However, Harman applies his conclusions more broadly than this: he also denies that 'the moral quality of the people I know varies with their susceptibility to non-trivial guilt' and claims that 'there seem actually to be many moral people with moral principles but no susceptibility to guilt feelings', implying that guilt is not required for ordinary virtue either.[55] (Though 'moral people' is ambiguous between the normative issue of virtue and the conceptual issue of moral agency, it is clear from Harman's talk of 'moral quality' and what is 'very moral' in the same section that he does wish to make a normative claim about virtue as well as a conceptual claim about moral agency). Taken in this broader sense, Harman's conclusions imply that even a bad person who has done something wrong is not required to feel guilty: Harman can only hold that a bad person is morally required to develop and act on guilt-free motivations to act morally. Their feeling guilty could only be commended with qualification: it would be commendable only if it did motivate them to act better, and only in comparison to their not being motivated at all.

The structure of the Harman's normative argument is to claim that guilt stands in need of a justification and then to suggest that no such justification can be offered by criticising a series of possible justifications. To reject this argument, I will show that there are justifications available that are capable of withstanding Harman's objections. I will also argue that Harman's claim that guilt stands in need of a justification is to some degree misleading.

Harman first considers the following justification for guilt:

'When somebody violates the moral code, others may get angry at them and that anger is sometimes warranted or reasonable. So, isn't one reasonable and warranted in getting angry with oneself for violating the moral code? And isn't that to have the relevant sort of guilt?'[56]

Harman then objects that a disposition to feel anger at wrongdoers is useful, because it can provide a deterrent to immoral behaviour, but that this does not imply that a

53 Harman, p213
54 Harman, Footnote 3, p208
55 Harman, p208.
56 Harman, p210

disposition to feel guilt is also useful. As a result, 'if there are people who have adequate motivation to act morally without being susceptible to nontrivial guilt feelings … guilt does not have to be reasonable for them even if having a disposition to outrage and anger at others for their wrongful acts is reasonable.'[57] The argument is that the disposition to anger is warranted because of its usefulness, and so to be warranted a guilty disposition must also be useful. However, guilt is not useful in an agent already motivated to act well, so it is not warranted for such an agent. Therefore, this sort of good agent is not required to feel guilty, and guilt is not essential to moral excellence, nor normatively required.

We may be suspicious of Harman's consideration only of 'people who have adequate motivation to act morally' in his response to a claim about what is appropriate of those agents who have violated the moral code. Surely adequately morally motivated agents would have obeyed the moral code? But we may read Harman here as considering people whose moral motivation is adequate to cause them to seek seriously to become agents who never violate the moral code. If it were true that these people had no reason to feel guilty for their misdeeds, that would be a result that would undermine the appropriateness of guilt.

The problem with Harman's argument is that anger is not only warranted by its usefulness. Suppose that somebody violates the moral code in a way that harms us or otherwise encroaches on our moral entitlements. Don't we already know that our anger is warranted, just because we have been treated shoddily and not accorded the respect and consideration we deserve? A person who does not get angry in this situation lacks proper self-respect. They seem to be dispirited or a pushover, in a way that is bad for them. We would tell them that they ought to be angry and that they don't deserve to be treated that way. In thinking this we think that they have a reason to feel angry that is independent of its deterrent effect, and that this is a reason for them to be more angry than a mere onlooker. This all stands independently of the instrumental usefulness of their getting angry.

It may be objected that self-respect does not require anger in this way. An agent who is aware that they are being wronged and is prepared to stand up for themselves, but who feels forgiving rather than angry, is gracious rather than a pushover. This may be the attitude of those who employ non-violent direct action against their oppressors. Such an agent clearly has a great deal of self-respect, but we should question whether it is true that they feel no anger, or instead that they feel angry but keep their anger under control and choose not to express it through hostility. It is also worth noting that the argument under consideration does not require anger in particular to be warranted

57 Harman, p210

in response to wrongdoing against us: it only requires that some bad feeling beyond mere regret is appropriate. Blame or disapproval may provide a clearer example: it is hard to imagine a self-respecting civil rights campaigner who doesn't strongly disapprove of at least those of their oppressors who know fully what they are doing. Since we have some reason to blame or disapprove of those who wrong us, whether or not this will achieve anything, so we may have some reason to blame or disapprove of our own actions when we wrong others, even if that will not achieve anything either.

Now, just as self-respect warrants anger (or blame, or disapproval) in the victim, proper respect for the victim warrants self-anger (or self-blame, or self-disapproval), and therefore guilt, in the offender. Though the point does not rely on it, Greenspan's account of guilt is able to capture this particularly well. Greenspan holds that guilt originates in an empathetic identification with the warranted anger we attribute to others. She therefore considers feeling guilty for wrongly harming someone (and thereby warranting their anger) to be the paradigm case of guilty feeling. Guilt here is 'the agent's uncomfortable awareness that his first-order empathetic emotion' – that is, his empathetic awareness of the victim's anger – 'is self-directed and negative.'[58] To wrong someone and accept their anger as warranted without feeling guilty would be disrespectful. It would either display a callous lack of empathy for the victim, or a troubling lack of concern for being the subject of such warranted anger. If we were to express our attitude to the victim, we would have to say “Of course I agree that you ought to feel angry with me, but that doesn't make me feel angry with myself, and I don't believe that it should.”

Harman may respond by claiming that there are other ways to show appropriate respect for the victim apart from feeling guilty, just as there are other ways to be morally motivated. Might these be sufficient? Harman notes that:

'The admirable people I have in mind feel regret about moral mistakes, but not guilt … they can apologize, say that they are sorry for what they have done, try to make amends, and sincerely promise not to do it again.'[59]

These do seem at first sight to be attitudes that might show proper respect for the victim. There are two problems with this response. The first is that Harman's account of guilt forces him to use a thin conception of regret, and that this thin conception does

58 Greenspan, p129. This objection can also be stated while accepting Harman's analysis of guilt. The added insight I take from Greenspan is that guilt ought to involve empathy as well as just self-anger. This allows us to additionally explain why we would disapprove of a self-anger was not caused by empathy. But our reasons to be troubled by the empathetic agent who simply lacks self-anger stand independently of this consideration.

59 Harman, p211

not express respect for the victim. The second is that apology, making amends, and promising to do better cannot be sufficient for treating the victim respectfully in cases where guilt is not also felt.

Harman does not provide an explicit account of the way in which he uses the term 'regret'. However, he is clear that regret does not imply guilt, and he contrasts regret with guilt feelings of 'remorse … painful humiliation, distress, self-punishment, and/or self-flagellation … anxiety and … the thought that one deserves punishment'. He also gives one example of regret: 'one may regret having moved one's queen to a particular square in a game of chess'. While regret does not imply guilt, Harman allows that it may be a part of it, as feelings of guilt 'may involve agent regret'.[60] This is important. The guilt-free agents Harman considers to show proper respect can only be feeling the sort of regret that is not a constituent of guilt. Harman says that these agents feel regret 'about moral mistakes', and claimed earlier that this sort of regret was not enough for non-trivial guilt because a psychopath could feel such regret. Now, presumably, a psychopath would regret having acted wrongly for some self-interested reason: they might regret having acted wrongly because it caused them to be punished for instance. That sort of regret does not strike us as a respectful attitude, because it does not have an appropriate cause.

What causes of regret would be consistent with the agent having a fully respectful attitude towards the person they have wronged? The causes must at least include the agent’s empathy for the victim and their knowledge that they had wrongfully harmed the victim. It would hardly be respectful for the agent to feel regret about their action, but for reasons that did not include the harm they caused the victim and the anger they know they have warranted in the victim. The harm caused and the anger warranted are among the most important aspects of the situation to the victim, so we expect any person treating the victim with respect to appreciate their weight. We want them to be part of what is really regretted by the agent. Now, this sort of regret must be a constituent of guilt. For it is a negative feeling accompanying *and caused by* the thought that we have acted wrongly. It fits Harman's analysis of guilt, and is a sort of regret that a psychopath could not feel. As long as it motivates us to respond appropriately, it is guilt on my preferred analysis too. The respectful agent feels guilty, and the guilt-free agents Harman imagines are disrespectful, because they feel regret of the wrong kind.

If Harman's agents' regrets do not express respect for the victim, could their efforts to apologise, make amends, and not to act wrongly again do so instead? I do not believe that they could. Beginning with apology, it seems that these agents are incapable of

60 Harman, p205

making a sincere and respectful apology. For we have seen that any empathy they do have for their (rightly) angry victim is insufficient to make them angry with themselves, and that any regret they feel about their action is not caused by the fact that they wrongly harmed their victim. These attitudes are very incongruent with genuine contrition.

The argument here is not that apologies are required, apologies require guilt, and so guilt is required as a constituent or precondition of an apology. This would risk begging the question: if one is not inclined to care about feelings of guilt one may not be inclined to care about apologies either. The point is that apologies are no better than simple admissions of wrongdoing unless the wrongdoer also feels guilty. The reason to feel guilty (and the reason to apologise) is that it is respectful to the victim.

Perhaps it could be argued that an apology is sincere just because the agent's belief that they acted wrongly is sincere. There is a sense in which we speak of apologising for which this is true: this is that of a simple admission of wrongdoing. However, what this expresses depends very much on the context and on what else the agent is feeling. Perhaps if the agent's wrongdoing is small, ordinary and mostly inconsequential – for example, if they are twenty minutes later to dinner – then such a response would be respectful. However, as a response to something more serious an admission of wrongdoing accompanied only by regret would be disrespectful.

Similar points tell against the respectfulness of a guilt-free promise to act better in future. If the promise made by Harman's guilt-free agent is sincere it must originate from something other than guilt, and so from something other than concern for the effect on the victim or the anger they know they have warranted. For example, they might sincerely report being driven to act correctly in future by a strong desire for self-improvement. But that sort of motivation does nothing to show respect for the victim.

When it comes to making amends, there is not a problem of sincerity. Harman's agents' efforts to make amends could be motivated by genuine empathy or sympathy for the victim, and they could also reasonably feel themselves more obliged to help the victim than anyone else because they were causally involved and at fault. The agents could not therefore be reasonably accused of lacking a respectful motivation. However, there are still problems here. First, making amends alone is insufficient to demonstrate respect for the victim. Second, there are cases where making amends is impossible or inappropriate, and in these cases Harman's agents will be seen to entirely lack respect for their victims.

To understand the first problem, consider the attitude demonstrated by an agent who

offers to make amends to their victim in what we have agreed is a respectful way, but who still does not feel guilt, and so does not feel any regret that stems from a proper concern for the victim and cannot make a respectful apology. I think it is clear that such an agent is, all things considered, only partly respectful. They are doing the right things – making amends, trying their best to reform – but their overall attitude seems detached or callous. Perhaps in a less serious case where we are capable of fully and acceptably making amends this objection might not seem significant. For example, if we forget our promise to act as a child-minder for our friend, who then has to waste some expensive theatre tickets, we may make amends by buying them new tickets and acting as child-minder on another occasion, and perhaps treating them to dinner to make up for the inconvenience we have caused them. This might be an acceptable response, even if no guilt was felt.

However, this leads us to the second problem: there are many cases of more serious wrongdoing where it is impossible or inappropriate to fully make up for what one has done, or perhaps to even begin to make amends. Imagine we are child-minding and we are inexcusably inattentive, resulting in the child suffering a serious accident and breaking their leg. Our friend has to rush from the theatre to the hospital, and their child suffers a lot of pain and cannot enjoy the summer in the way they would have liked. Now, of course we can and perhaps should offer to pay for the child's medical treatment. But in this case, doing so does not fully repair the damage. This is something that cannot be done; the child's leg will remain broken until it heals. In fact, we ought not even to try to completely make up for everything that has happened: to offer to buy new theatre tickets in this case would be hurtful and wrong. Perhaps later we might make some additional gesture: we could offer to pay for, and if we are forgiven to join in on, some fantastic holiday that will make the child's next summer better. But this would not show adequate respect towards our friend and their child if we did not also feel guilty and sincerely contrite. If our friend knew that we did not feel these ways, they would most likely reject our offer in order to express their blame or resentment. To stress the point further, suppose that the child had instead died as a result of the accident, and therefore of our negligence. In this case, it would not be appropriate to offer anything in amends; to do so would be insensitive, hurtful and not respectful at all. In such a case, the only way to show appropriate respect to our friend is to feel deeply sorry, remorseful, and guilty.

Harman considers two further normative arguments in favour of guilt: that guilt serves a useful social function in mitigating anger, and that guilt can ensure more wrongdoers are punished by serving as a form of self-punishment. His responses rest on the same contentions that I have already examined: Harman believes regret, apology and making amends are also sufficient to mitigate others' anger at the wrongdoer, and that

making amends is a satisfactory alternative to feeling self-punishing guilt. These same responses fail for the same reasons. Since regret, apology and making amends alone are disrespectful, they are unlikely to mitigate the anger people feel towards the wrongdoer if it is known that they do not feel guilty. Since seeking to make amends is not always possible or appropriate it cannot always provide an alternative to guilt.

Harman's belief that guilt stands in need of a justification is based on the idea that guilt is 'a negative experience that can make people miserable'.[61] Here, Harman assumes that emotions which feel bad are to be avoided, in the absence of a countervailing reason to feel them. Furthermore, Harman clearly expects such a reason to be instrumental: 'It might be worth paying this price if susceptibility to guilt *made people act better*'.[62] We have seen that we are in a position to provide such a justification of guilt: guilt is often the respectful attitude to have, and we know that respectful attitudes tend to have better consequences than disrespectful ones. Nonetheless, we ought to challenge Harman's expectation of an instrumental justification for bad feelings.

We can do so by employing arguments from valuing, which I introduced in section 3.5. Consider sadness: just like guilt, it feels bad and is capable of making us miserable. If we accept that sadness must be justified instrumentally, we must argue that it is warranted by its ability to motivate us to act in ways that will ultimately make us happier. But it is not clear that we need sadness in order to be sufficiently motivated – just as Harman argues is the case with guilt. Indeed, when things are going badly for us, sadness might seem only to make things even worse. Is this a good reason to try to eliminate our disposition to feel sad? No: when we feel sad it is often because something we value or care about is doing poorly. To eliminate sadness from our lives we would have to stop valuing things, value only things that are sure to do well, or value things in such a way as to be emotionally vulnerable only to pleasant feelings. None of these approaches are attractive or plausible. This is the case for guilt as well: to morally value some course of action is to have a positive experience in following it, and a negative experience in betraying it. Something like this thought lies behind Greenspan's assertion that an agent reflecting on a bad action of theirs must 'appreciate its seriousness, in a sense not unlike aesthetic appreciation to the extent that it rules out being left cold'. And it is not motivation that the 'cold' agent lacks: 'it will not be enough for the agent to make up for the lapse with good deeds'.[63]

I have argued that Harman is wrong to conclude that guilt is never appropriate. We ought to feel guilty at least when we have seriously wronged another person. This guilt

61 Harman, p211
62 Harman, p211-212. My Emphasis.
63 Greenspan, p113

is necessary to show proper respect for them; if we do not feel any guilt then we lack the concern that we ought to have for our victim. Harman does not provide a compelling reason to think the common view that we ought to feel guilty when we have acted wrongly is mistaken.

5.3 When is it appropriate to feel guilty?

So far, I have shown that shown that guilt is sometimes appropriate because it shows respect and concern to the victims of wrongdoing. I will now consider what can be said in general about when it is appropriate to feel it. First, I will argue that appropriate guilt is always guilt that motivates a response that is owed to those we have wronged. Second, I will argue that guilt is only appropriate in fairly serious cases. Finally, I will consider exceptional cases in which unfitting guilt can be appropriate.

5.3.1 The appropriateness of different types of guilt

In this section I argue that appropriate guilt motivates a response that is owed to somebody. I do so by showing other types of guilt not to be appropriate.

In cases of childish guilt we are aware that we have acted wrongly and feel bad about it, but instead of feeling motivated to respond virtuously we feel driven to hide our guilt, blame others, run away or respond in other ways that are vicious. Childish guilt is inappropriate simply because the responses it motivates are inappropriate: it is of course better to be motivated to act virtuously than viciously. Cases of childish guilt will fall into two kinds. In some cases, such as Mary's, the agent ought to feel guilty but should be motivated to respond differently: Mary ought to apologise to her colleague, pay for their car to be fixed, and find a better way to deal with her frustrations. In other cases, all kinds of guilt would be inappropriate, and so the agent should either accept what they have done or, like Ted, feel bad about it but without being driven to respond somehow.

Expressive guilt spurs us towards arational actions such as pacing or clutching our head in our hands. This sort of guilt is not appropriate because it is not required for the wrongdoer to treat those they have wronged respectfully. While it is common to pace anxiously or in other ways arationally express our guilt while apologising, it is not essential to a respectful apology that we do so, or feel as if we should. It is enough that our apology is sincere; this requires that we feel guilty, but not that we feel expressive guilt in particular. However, there is usually no strong reason not to pace anxiously or otherwise express our guilt, so feeling driven to do so alongside feeling driven to apologise would not usually be inappropriate either. What would make expressive guilt

inappropriate would be if it were inappropriate to feel guilty at all, or if the expressive guilt felt was excessively strong.

Another possible response is that of supererogatory guilt. By this I mean guilt that negatively motivates us to perform supererogatory responses to our wrongdoing: responses that are good responses, but which are not owed to anybody as a matter of duty. Consider the following case:

Some nights ago James became very drunk and made a considerable nuisance of himself. No one was badly hurt but his actions wasted the resources of police officers, nurses, and sanitation workers. James has already apologised to the particular people whose time he wasted, and paid any fines or other legal penalties required of him. In fact, he has done everything that he owed to those affected by his wrongdoing. However, James resolves to do more than this: he will also try to reduce the burdens drunkenness places on his community generally, by speaking in an alcohol awareness class in a local school and volunteering as a special constable with the local police service.

If James still feels guilty while volunteering, then his guilt is supererogatory guilt: he feels bad about his wrongdoing, and he feels negatively motivated to volunteer. Would such supererogatory guilt be appropriate? I don't think that it would, because it is no longer required by respectfulness. Consider what we would think of James if he didn't feel guilty, but still went through with his plans to volunteer as a special constable. Imagine James regrets his previous behaviour and wants to do more to make up for it, but doesn't feel guilty because his motivation to volunteer isn't a negative feeling but a positive one. Suppose James sees it as a strong first step towards being a better person, so his attitude is eager and ambitious. He is even a little proud of himself for responding to his wrongdoing so much better than most people do, though of course not completely proud of himself, since he knows that it would have been better to volunteer without doing anything wrong first. This is clearly an acceptable way for James to feel. Precisely because he doesn't owe it to anybody to respond to his wrongdoing by volunteering, the way he feels is not disrespectful or insincere for lacking in guilt.

A case of self-disciplinary guilt is one in which we have only wronged ourselves. Consider Keira:

Keira has resolved to start running once a week on Saturday mornings. Keeping to that resolution would be good for her, so she ought to keep to it, but her failing to keep to the resolution would not be wronging anybody else – she wouldn't be breaking plans with another runner or anything like that. However, come Saturday morning it's raining and Keira puts off starting running. The next Saturday, she is exhausted from a hard week and puts it off again. Soon, the resolution is abandoned.

It might well be that Keira feels guilty for abandoning her resolution. We often say that we feel guilty for giving up on our resolutions, or indulging in pleasant but unhealthy things. This guilt can be perfectly fitting: Keira's action is at least a little vicious, and it is clear enough what sort of thing she ought to do as a result (which is to go for a run!). But would Keira's guilt be appropriate?

Keira's guilt does not show respect for anyone else in this case, so my previous argument in favour of guilt does not directly apply. It might apply if guilt was required as the self-respecting attitude, but it is much less clear in the case of self-respect that simply regretting what one did, or feeling ashamed, would not be sufficiently self-respectful. As with James' case, imagine Keira does judge herself to have let herself down a bit, but then simply resolves once again, more strongly, and in a positive way to take up running. It doesn't seem right to accuse Keira of lacking self-respect in this case.

Another argument for the appropriateness of guilt here is that it is beneficial for Keira to feel it, because it will most effectively motivate her to do what she ought to do. This would be a reason for her to feel guilty, and especially if it made a great difference to her motivation or if she only needed to feel a mild guilt to be so motivated it might be a strong enough reason to outweigh the reason against guilt provided by its unpleasantness. However, as I explained in section 3.4, this is a weak form of argument for the appropriateness of an emotion. As Harman points out, for many people in many cases, non-guilt motivations are effective.[64] Something more than a motivational benefit is required to make guilt appropriate. I therefore conclude that guilt is generally not an appropriate response to wrongdoing that only affects oneself.

Since childish, expressive, supererogatory and self-disciplinary guilt are not appropriate, appropriate guilt will always motivate us to respond to our wrongdoing in a way that we owe to those we have wronged. This is explained by the justification for guilt provided in section 5.2: guilt is appropriate because it is required to be respectful to one’s victims.

5.3.2 Seriousness and appropriateness

To show that guilt is sometimes required by respectfulness, I argued that the alternatives to guilt are sometimes disrespectful on their own. The cases I relied on were cases that were serious, such as negligently injuring a friend's child. This is a necessary feature of such cases: if what we have done wrong is not serious, then admitting what we have done and (if necessary) making amends will be sufficient to

64 Harman, p213

show that we respect the wronged party. In a clearly unimportant case this is plain to see. Imagine that I promised to return your book yesterday but failed to do so. Today, I admit that I was at fault and post it to you special delivery, but don't feel bad about what has happened because I know that you didn't have any urgent need for the book yesterday. It would be overblown to say that my attitude was disrespectful to you.

For cases that are somewhat but not very serious, it will be difficult to say whether guilt is appropriate. If I repeatedly fail to return your book, breaking several promises to do so, and never feel the least bit guilty, then sooner or later it becomes clear that my attitude is disrespectful, as well as my behaviour. However, the point at which this becomes true is not something I can settle in this thesis. For guilt, what matters is whether a guilt-free reaction is respectful, which we know depends in some way on the seriousness of the wrongdoing. Settling the matter will depend on our account of respect and our wider normative views.

When guilt is appropriate, the strength of our guilt feeling ought to be proportional to the seriousness of what we have done wrong. To see this, consider a wrongdoer, Darren, who goes to a party to make trouble, for no good reason. First, Darren throws a drink over Alex, ruining his suit. Later, Darren starts a fight with Brendan, who ends up in the hospital with a broken rib and a concussion. The next day, Darren feels fairly guilty about hurting Brendan, but terribly guilty about ruining Alex's suit. It is clear that Darren has things the wrong way around; he ought to be more concerned about what he did to Brendan than he is about what he did to Alex, and because he is not, his attitude seems disrespectful to Brendan. This isn't merely a comparative point. Suppose Darren has only wronged Brendan, but feels about as guilty as we would expect someone to feel over ruining a suit. We would still criticise Darren for not taking what he has done to Brendan seriously enough.

5.3.3 Unfitting guilt can be appropriate

For guilt to be fitting, one must have acted wrongly. In some cases, this is sufficient, because the motivating part of the emotion does not have a further cognitive component. For example, in expressive guilt, we take it that we have acted wrongly, feel bad about this, and are simply driven, arationally, to scream our confession from the rooftop. In other cases, the motivating part of our guilt involves a further thought about the world which must also be accurate for the emotion as a whole to be fitting. For example, when our guilt drives us to apologise we take it that we have acted wrongly, feel bad about this, take it that we ought to apologise, and are negatively motivated to do so. In this case, the fact that we oughtn't really to apologise would be enough to make our guilt unfitting. This means that for appropriate guilt to be fitting

we must not only have done something wrong, but there must also be something that we ought to do about it.

It is natural to think that all appropriate guilt must be fitting guilt. Surely if we haven't done anything wrong then it isn't appropriate to feel guilty? However, consider the following case:

Anthony likes to make cutting jokes about his friends. He's aware that this could be taken too far and become cruel rather than witty, but he is confident of his ability to avoid that. After a party at which he made what he judged to be a very good joke at Charlie's expense, and which seemed to go down well with Charlie, he is confronted by Bethany. "I can't believe what you said to Charlie last night," she says, "you went way too far, you need to call him and apologise."

Suppose that Anthony's judgement, not Bethany's, is the correct one: Anthony's joke wasn't cruel, Charlie wasn't offended, and there is no need to apologise. Nonetheless, Anthony might well feel guilty after being criticised by Bethany, because her criticism might prompt him to take it that he went too far and ought to apologise – perhaps by believing it or thinking of it as a real possibility, or perhaps just by considering or imagining it – and this might make Anthony feel bad, and negatively motivated to apologise. Could it be appropriate for Anthony to feel this way? It is clear that in the right circumstances, it could be. Bethany's opinion, especially if she is usually a reliable judge of such matters, can give Anthony a good reason to doubt his initial judgement. If so, it is appropriate for Anthony to be modest about his judgement, and once Anthony suspects he might have to apologise, it is appropriate and respectful towards Charlie for this to concern him. It may be that the appropriate sort of guilt here is a milder, less certain sort of guilt, because Anthony may not himself judge that he has acted wrongly, but it is still guilt: it is a negatively motivating feeling about perhaps having acted wrongly and so being required to apologise to Charlie. We commonly experience this sort of anxious feeling of perhaps owing someone an apology, and it feels similar to paradigm cases of guilt. This form of guilt is similar to Greenspan's anticipatory guilt, that form of guilt felt 'in advance of action, as the emotional strut of the motivational force of moral 'ought''.[65] Its similarity to guilt can be made clearer by contrasting it to the way we would feel if our behaviour were criticised unreasonably: this would usually make us feel angry or upset, rather than guilty.

That we must assume Bethany's criticism to be reasonable and plausible to generate the counterexample is revealing. It suggests that what is needed for appropriate feelings of guilt is not that the guilt is fitting, but that we have good reasons to think that it is fitting. This line of thought is supported by our thoughts about the resolution

65 Greenspan, p109

of Anthony's case: once Anthony either apologises to Charlie or asks him how he felt about the joke, and so learns for sure that he didn't act wrongly in telling it, it would be inappropriate for him to continue to feel guilty. If we know that guilt would be unfitting – for example, because we have already responded appropriately – then it is inappropriate.

This suggestion has much to recommend it. First, it provides a natural stopping point for guilt feelings: when we have responded properly to whatever we were feeling guilty about in the first place. Second, it coheres with a simple account of the point of guilt feelings: it is appropriate to feel guilt because it is appropriate to be motivated to respond appropriately to our wrongdoing, and because it would be inappropriate for this motivation to be experienced as positive or as indifferent. Third, to feel as if you ought to be doing something in response to what you did wrong when there is not in fact anything you ought to be doing is to be mistaken about something quite important. At best, you would be feeling needlessly distressed, and at worst, you would be distracted from your other obligations or motivated to do something you ought not to, such as apologising to someone when it would be better to leave them in peace, or offering gifts that are not suitable tokens of contrition but simply offensive and crass. Finally, once one has responded appropriately, the justification of guilt in terms of its connection to respectfulness is greatly weakened. Either feeling guilty and responding appropriately are sufficient to show respect and nothing more is required afterwards, or, in the case is of very serious wrongs, something else is required, but not simply more guilt.

It might be objected that feeling guilt that one knows to be unfitting can be an appropriate response to a case of very serious wrongdoing. After all, one could be well aware that even responding in the best way possible falls far short of making up for what one has done. It would admittedly be distressing and in a way futile, but perhaps in this situation the agent deserves to feel distressed simply because of what they have done?

I agree that feeling distressed, in some way, is often appropriate after you have responded as best you can. But guilt is not the right sort of distress to feel. One important thing emotions do is to direct our attention. If you have already responded as best you can to what you have done wrong, then it is appropriate to direct your attention elsewhere: on the effects of your action on yourself and on the victim, and on how what you have done reflects on your character. The emotions I discuss in the following chapters focus on these things.

5.3.4 Summary

To feel guilt is to feel bad about having acted wrongly, and negatively motivated to respond somehow. Guilt is appropriate when we have good reasons to believe that we have committed fairly serious wrongdoing, and that a response is owed to those we have wronged. Guilt is appropriate in this sort of case because a failure to feel guilty would be disrespectful.

Chapter 6: Shame

6.1 What is Shame?

My aim in this section will be to provide an account of shame that is clear, reasonably close to common usage, and which coheres well with my account of guilt. I will first consider competing philosophical accounts of shame, then develop an account of shame which draws on their strengths while avoiding their weaknesses.

6.1.1 Taylor and Williams: Shame and self-evaluation

Gabrielle Taylor and Bernard Williams provide similar accounts of shame, and make two important claims about it. The first is that feeling shame involves feeling distressed or uneasy at the way one is seen, or might be seen:

'at the core, to feel shame is to feel distress at being seen at all'[66]

'The basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition''[67]

This is predominantly a claim about what shame feels like. The second claim is about the cognitive content of shame: that feeling shame involves an unfavourable self-evaluation. For Taylor:

'the person feeling shame [...] feels herself degraded, not the sort of person she believed, assumed, or hoped she was or anyway should be'[68]

Taylor holds that the adverse evaluation of the self involved in shame is sufficient to make it a moral emotion, taken in a broad sense:

'There is no reason to deny that shame in all its occurrences is a moral emotion [...] The final self-directed adverse judgement in shame is always the same: that he is a lesser person than he should be, for an in some way better person would not find himself in a position where he can be seen as he is'[69]

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66 Taylor, Gabrielle, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. p60
67 Williams, Bernard, *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p78
68 Taylor, p64
69 Taylor, pp76-77

Taylor also links shame to one's sense of self-respect and the view that one has fallen short of one's standards. Taylor views self-respect as a matter of making certain normative judgements about one's behaviour and the way one is treated: 'The self-respecting person has certain views of what is due to him and from him'. Thus, 'Certain kinds of behaviour and … treatment will seem intolerable to the person of self-respect'. Shame comes into the picture because 'the frustration of [the self-respecting person's] expectations in this area is precisely the occasion for feeling shame'. As a result, Taylor claims that 'we can characterise self-respect by reference to shame: if someone has self-respect then under certain specific circumstances he will be feeling shame.'[70]

Taylor's view then is that to feel shame is to take an adverse ethical view of oneself: to take oneself to have fallen short of where one ought to be – either because one has acted improperly or because one has been treated badly. The felt affect of shame is one of feeling distressed at the thought of being seen in one's condition.

For Williams, the cognitive content of shame is to be understood in relation to that of nemesis: the shock, contempt, or rage that is felt in reaction to the shameful behaviour of others. Because standards for shame and nemesis are shared and internalised, they must have meaningful normative content:

'there has to be something for these interrelated attitudes to be about. It is not merely a structure by which I know that you will be annoyed with me because you know that I would be annoyed with you. These reciprocal attitudes have a content: some kinds of behaviour are admired […] others despised, and it is those attitudes that are internalised, not simply the prospect of hostile reactions'[71]

Williams argues that understanding shame to involve this sort of normative cognition allows us to avoid the mistaken view that shame concerns only appearances:

'the silly mistake is to suppose that the reactions of shame depend simply on being found out, that the feeling behind every decision or thought that is governed by shame is literally and immediately the fear of being seen.'[72]

Finally, Williams also holds that the normative evaluation involved in shame is an evaluation of the self that is closely connected to one's sense of self-respect. It therefore falls within the scope of the ethical in a similarly broad sense to that employed by Taylor:

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70 Taylor pp78-80
71 Williams, pp83-84
72 Williams, p81

'What arouses shame [...] is something that typically elicits from others contempt or derision or avoidance. This may equally be an act or omission, but it need not be: it may be some failing or defect. It will lower the agent's self-respect and diminish him in his own eyes.'[73]

It is correct to understand shame as involving an ethical self-evaluation, so long as ethical is understood in the right way. If what it is to be an ethical evaluation is construed very narrowly, for example as concerning only our appraisals of how we treat others, or of how closely we keep to a set of explicit duties, this would rule out many clear cases of shame. For example, one may be ashamed of feeling pleased about someone else's misfortune, and one may be ashamed of merely dreaming one acted wrongly. We need not take ourselves, improbably, to be treating people badly or acting wrongly in order to feel ashamed in those ways. A narrower alternative is to consider an evaluation to be ethical just in case it is a self-evaluation, placing every evaluative judgement we could make about ourselves in the ethical domain. However, this makes shame too broad. Consider the case of Henry seeing an unflattering photo of himself; just for a moment, he thinks 'gosh, I look terrible' and feels a little uncomfortable at the idea of it being displayed for everyone to see. This is a case of an adverse self-evaluation involving distress at the idea of being seen, but Henry is not feeling ashamed, he is just feeling displeased or embarrassed.

Implicitly, Williams and Taylor treat an ethical self-evaluation as one that reaches a certain degree of importance. For Williams, shame must concern something deemed serious enough by one's shared norms that others' nemesis is an appropriate reaction to one's shameful state. For Taylor, shame involves taking something seriously in the sense of taking it to violate a demand of self-respect or to be a way of falling short of where one ought to be. A more explicit account of shame as involving a self-evaluation that meets a threshold level of seriousness can be provided by employing the concept of eudaimonia. An ethical self-evaluation is one that carries an implication for the agent's eudaimonia: it bears on whether or not, or to what degree, the agent is living and doing well. This is the significance threshold used in the Eudaimonia Principle of Chapter Four: it means that an agent who takes shame views that which they are ashamed of to be important enough to make a negative difference to how their life is going. If Henry doesn't like his appearance in the photo, but doesn't take it seriously in this way, then he isn't ashamed of it.

It may be objected here that surely a person may feel ashamed without explicitly thinking to themselves that their life is a worse one for its inclusion of whatever they are ashamed of, let alone conceptualising this as an ethical difference. This is to be

73 Williams, pp89-90

accepted: we ought not to assert that shame requires this thought. The point is only that shame requires a significant self-evaluation: whatever the agent is ashamed of, we know that they take it to be significant, that they “take it seriously”, as we might say. How significant is that? Significant enough to affect how a human life goes. A person can take something that seriously without thinking of it in that way.

I am not persuaded that shame must always involve a feeling of exposure, or distress at how one is or could be seen. While feeling shame often involves feeling this way, there are also clear instances of shame where this feeling is lacking, even when we allow that one can perfectly well feel exposed without actually being exposed. Imagine someone who is ashamed that they are too often afraid to stand up for others. Sometimes, their shame will involve feeling discomfort at how they will look to a real onlooker; other times it will involve a general anxiety about what others might think of them. Both of these possibilities are consistent with Taylor's and Williams' accounts. However, there are many other ways their shame might feel. Their shame might take on a downcast, disheartening quality, as when a person feels that they are “letting themselves down”. Their shame might involve feelings of distress at their cowardice, and anxious or angry reflection on their difficulty in improving themselves. Their shame might even have an anguished or horrified quality, especially if it is prompted by a dramatic incident, as when someone is struck by the thought “what have I done?” or “what have I become?”. These alternatives could equally well accompany or come apart from feelings of exposure or distress at how one is or could be seen.

The most convincing cases of shame without feelings of exposure are those of agents who feel ashamed for things that their peers tend not to judge as shameful. For example, the shame of a person who believes that they are not doing enough to prevent climate change or alleviate global poverty, but who still does far more than their peers, will probably lack the sort of felt quality that Williams and Taylor describe, since their peers are likely to be impressed, rather than critical of them. Of course, we can still imagine that person as feeling exposed: to an idealised other, to those who are suffering, or to the gaze of future generations. The point is that imagining the case this way is not necessary to imagining that the agent is ashamed.

6.1.2 Velleman: Shame and self-presentation

The accounts of Taylor and Williams are close to what Velleman calls the standard conception of shame, where 'the subject thinks less of himself at the thought of how he is seen by others'.[74] Velleman seeks an alternative account of shame because he

74 Velleman, David, 'The Genesis of Shame', in his *Self to Self*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp45-69. p46

believes there are clear cases of shame where the subject neither thinks less of himself nor has any reason to, such as the case of Adam and Eve's shame in their nakedness.

Velleman's account links shame to failures of self-presentation, paradigmatically seen in failures of privacy. We feel shame when we fail in some attempt of ours to present the public image that we had intended to. Shame involves anxiety, because being able to control your public image is essential to being able to communicate and cooperate with other agents, and therefore to living a good life:

'Threats to your standing as a self-presenting creature are thus a source of deep anxiety, and anxiety about the threatened loss of that standing is what constitutes the emotion of shame.'[75]

For Velleman, then, feelings of shame do not have to involve any ethical self-evaluation at all, only a failure to present oneself as intended. However, Velleman accepts that many cases of shame appear ethical in nature, and suggests an explanation for this:

'[ethical] judgements are associated with shame because they often serve as the grounds for relegating aspects of ourselves to the private realm [...] shame would not be associated with that assessment in absence of any sense of compromised self-presentation – for example, if we acted on the same impulses with abject resignation or brazen defiance.'[76]

However, this explanation is not satisfactory: we do sometimes feel shame after acting brazenly, which provides a counterexample to Velleman's position. Consider the case of Liam, who deliberately humiliates somebody out of spite. Liam has a cool head, and spends considerable time contemplating how to cause the most distress to his target. He carefully orchestrates his actions so that as many people as possible will see him humiliating his victim. This cannot possibly be a failure of self-presentation – Liam presented himself exactly as intended – but it certainly is plausible for him to feel ashamed of himself for acting this way.

A possible reply is that to feel shame after acting this way, Liam must change his mind about wanting to be seen to be spiteful, or belatedly realise that he never wanted this at all. This may be so, but this is not the most important realisation Liam must come to if he is to feel ashamed. The most important realisation is that he does not in fact want to *be* spiteful, because spitefulness is to be evaluated as bad, vicious or wrong. If Liam

75 Velleman 2006, p55
76 Velleman 2006, p59

were really committed to and approving of his spitefulness, if he evaluated it positively, and was merely anxious about his ability to present himself differently, we wouldn't say that he was feeling shame.

As with analysing shame to be necessarily characterised by a feeling of exposure, it also seems incorrect to analyse shame as necessarily characterised by a feeling of anxiety. Once again, while anxiety is a common feature of many cases of shame, we can recognise other cases which do not involve an anxious affect. Shame may have a straightforwardly downcast, disheartening affect, or a feeling of being angry at oneself rather than anxious at one's position. Shame may not have an anxious quality to it in cases where it is felt at its strongest and most immediate. If the ashamed person feels that they have hit rock bottom, anxious feeling would be out of place: what is there to be anxious about when things cannot get any worse? These possible affects could characterise shame in conjunction with anxiety, but also apart from it. For the clearest case of shame without anxiety, consider the shame that may be felt for conforming to a widely endorsed norm that one nonetheless rejects. Having conformed, one may have secured the self-presentation expected of one and feel, as a result, less anxious about one's social standing. Nonetheless, one might feel ashamed at the very same time that one's anxiety recedes, lamenting that one is the sort of person who abandons their principles for a chance at an easier life.

6.1.3 My account of shame

So far I have endorsed the cognitive aspect of Taylor's and Williams' view: to feel shame is to take an adverse ethical view of oneself. Such a view is ethical if it is taken by the agent to be significant enough to affect how their life goes. However, I have found the accounts of Taylor, Williams and Velleman too narrow in their treatment of the felt affect of shame: for each way of specifying the felt affect of shame there have been counterexamples.

Therefore, as a starting point for my analysis of shame, I take the cognitive element used in Taylor's and Williams' accounts, but broaden the range of felt affect that can be involved in shame. While distress at the way one is seen or anxiety about being exposed are paradigm cases of what it feels like to be ashamed, shame does not have to feel that way. I have suggested feelings of distress or disappointment simply at one's vice as another set of paradigm shame feelings, and I do not see a general reason to rule out other possibilities, so long as they involve feeling bad. This gives us:

Starting Analysis of Shame: To feel shame is to take an adverse ethical view of oneself, and to feel bad about it.

However, this pared-down analysis leaves shame too similar to other emotions that can take an adverse self-evaluation as their object, particularly regret. If we regret being vicious, then we feel bad about our adverse ethical self-evaluation. Is shame really nothing more than regretting a certain sort of thing?

One difference is made clear by the starting analysis: if we are ashamed, we must take our self-evaluation to be significant. This is not the case if we only feel regret: we can regret something without taking it to be significant. For example, after Henry sees the horrible photo of himself, he may regret not having styled his hair that morning. But we wouldn't infer from this that Henry felt ashamed, because we are inclined to doubt that he takes his failure to style his hair to be important.

However, there is a second difference which requires a change in the analysis: shame is always a strong or fairly strong feeling. In contrast, regret can be a very weak feeling. Imagine Olivia, a person who knows that she is thoroughly greedy, but who never normally feels bad about this. One day, she feels a slight, fleeting pang of discomfort at the thought of her greed after watching a charity appeal. The instant the appeal is over, the feeling passes, never to recur, never giving rise to any uncomfortable feelings about other matters, and never inhibiting or dampening any good feelings. Was Olivia, briefly, ashamed of herself? I am reluctant to say so: in an experience of shame, the way the agent feels is concordant with the serious, adverse view they take of themselves. Just as it would be discordant (and not really shame) if they were to feel good instead of bad, it is discordant (and not really shame) if they feel weakly bad instead of strongly bad.

It may be objected that we are happy to describe some people as feeling a little ashamed of themselves. However, this is consistent with the view that shame is a strong feeling. When we describe someone as a little ashamed we mean that they feel neither very strongly nor very weakly about their adverse self-evaluation, so that their feeling is weak *for shame*, or on the borderline between shame and something else. We should also remember that a feeling can be strong enough to be a case of shame without needing to be very intense – this is because it could be strong by having a long duration, or by displacing good feelings that we might have had otherwise, or prompting more bad feelings[77]. It might be this sort of strong but not intense feeling of shame that we have in mind when we say someone is a little ashamed.

By considering these two differences we can better understand the relationship between shame and regret. Regret and shame do overlap: it may be true that we are feeling ashamed because we regret something of the right kind. However, shame is

77 As I described in section 3.2.2

not just regretting a certain sort of thing: it is regretting a certain sort of thing in a certain sort of way. Shame is always felt about an adverse self-evaluation, while regret can be felt about anything taken to be bad somehow. Shame always takes its cognition to be significant, but regret only sometimes does. Finally, shame is never a weak feeling, while regret can be weak or strong.

It is easier to distinguish shame from guilt. To feel guilt is to take oneself to have acted wrongly, to feel bad about this, and to be negatively motivated to respond to what one has done. This motivation is the distinguishing feature of guilt, as it is not essential to shame. However, the boundaries between guilt and shame can be blurred by our use of the term 'ashamed', which in some contexts seems to mean almost the same as saying one feels guilty. For instance “I'm ashamed of what I did” or “I'm so ashamed I didn't say anything” seem to mean almost the same as “I feel guilty about what I did” or “I feel so guilty for not saying anything”. There are two ways to interpret this. First, we may accept that guilt and shame can have overlapping intentional objects: that we sometimes do literally feel shame for our actions, because 'I acted wrongly' is a form of ethical self-evaluation, understood broadly. Second, we may hold that the sense of self-evaluation involved in shame is to be understood narrowly as an evaluation of one's character, so that we never literally feel shame for our actions.

If we take the first interpretation and accept that we can feel shame simply for our actions, shame and guilt must be distinguished by how they feel and by the rest of the cognition involved. The clearest difference is that guilt necessarily involves a motivation to make an appropriate normative response to what one did wrong, whereas the shameful person may not be motivated, for example if their shame simply leaves them miserable and dejected.

If we take the second interpretation, shame and guilt are clearly distinct because they involve a different sort of evaluative cognition: guilt an evaluation of an action as wrong, and shame an evaluation of oneself as vicious. This is less hospitable to common usage in which we do to talk of feeling ashamed of our actions; however, this talk can be made sense of as referring to shame that is felt as a result of reflecting on our actions, or to feeling shame for being the sort of person who could act that way.

I will adopt the first interpretation here: we do sometimes feel shame literally for our actions, but this is not the same as feeling guilty because of the differences in cognition and felt affect between shame and guilt. As well as the fact that the guilty person is distinctively motivated, the person who is ashamed must take the significant evaluative view of themselves that I discussed previously. Thus, it is not enough for us to be ashamed of our action to feel that the action was wrong and requires a response:

we must also take it seriously – seriously enough to affect how a life goes. The person who is ashamed of an action of theirs might feel that the action reveals them as vicious. Alternatively, they might view the simple fact that they committed the shameful act to be sufficient to mark them out as a certain sort of bad person: a thief, an adulterer, a killer, or suchlike. Either sort of self-evaluation is sufficient for shame.

This leaves us with the following analysis of shame:

Shame: To feel shame is to take an adverse ethical view of oneself, and to feel strongly bad about it.

An adverse ethical view is understood as any adverse view of oneself that one takes to be significant. The level of significance required is enough to affect the agent's eudaimonia, in the sense discussed in chapter four.

It is worth considering cases of vicarious shame, which may seem to challenge my analysis. It is not uncommon to feel ashamed of the behaviour of family members, friends, or one's compatriots. Do these feelings really always involve taking an adverse ethical view of oneself, not just of the other party?

My account does not require that feeling shame at the actions of another involves judging oneself to be bad in some way; it only requires that feeling shame involves taking oneself to be bad in some way in the very broad sense that it is a part of the cognition involved in the feeling. Thus, imagining being in the other person's position, considering what you would think of yourself in their position, or worrying about what people might think of you based on your relationship to the other person, would all be sufficient for shame under my account.

Furthermore, actually making a negative judgement regarding oneself on the basis of the actions of others is not necessarily unreasonable. When one realises that a friend habitually makes cruel jokes at the expense of others, it is natural to consider what it says about oneself that one enjoys this person's company, or whether one may be doing the same thing without realising it. If I think that my government's policy towards homelessness is shameful, it is worth asking to what extent am I complicit in it, and whether I am really doing as much as I should to try to change the policy or mitigate its effects. So it would not be surprising if vicarious shame involved explicit or implicit judgements about oneself in some cases.

My account of shame also explains the clear contrast between vicarious shame and other emotions that take a poor view of others' behaviour. If I simply resent the

government's policy on homelessness, the ill feeling involved in that emotion might be a similar felt affect to that of shame, but the emotions will be clearly distinct because in resentment my negative appraisal is solely and firmly directed at the government.

Finally, holding vicarious shame to involve some sort of self-evaluative cognition explains why we usually experience it when we have some sort of personal connection to the other party: the personal connection is often the reason it makes sense to ask how their action reflects on oneself. If I think a foreign government's policy on homelessness is shameful, there is much less pressure on me to explain why I'm not doing much of anything about it.

6.2 Why feel Shame?

I will begin my normative discussion of shame by arguing that we ought sometimes to feel ashamed, because feeling ashamed is sometimes a part of valuing one's ethical standing or of the virtue of self-respect. I will then draw on that defence of shame to provide an account of when shame is the appropriate emotion to feel.

6.2.1 Shame and Valuing

The first argument I make for feeling shame is an argument from valuing[78]. We ought to feel something when our self-evaluation is negative because doing so is a part of valuing those things for which we are ethically appraised: our good character, our good actions, and our living well. Call these things together our ethical standing. In some circumstances, shame is the only emotional reaction consistent with valuing our ethical standing in the appropriate way.

That we ought to value our ethical standing is very clear. It is certainly important that we live our lives well, and having a good character and acting well are important parts of a life well lived. They are also valuable for their own sakes. It is also very clear that valuing one's ethical standing involves one's emotional life as well as just one's desires or beliefs. Not only is our ethical standing very important, it is also substantially under our control: no-one is better placed to influence our actions and character than we are ourselves. It would be very strange indeed to value one's ethical standing, and to understand its importance and one's ability to influence it, and yet still not to experience emotional reactions to it – not to regret foolishly acting to put it at risk, nor ever being proud of it or happy with it, or worried or anxious about it.

To argue that shame in particular is part of properly valuing one's ethical standing, I

78 I introduced this form of argument in section 3.5

will consider in turn a variety of alternative emotional responses, and argue that for each alternative response there are some situations in which shame would be more appropriate.

6.2.2 Shame and Self-respect

A similar argument for shame can be provided by drawing upon Taylor's linking of shame with self-respect. As we saw previously, Taylor views self-respect as a matter of making certain normative judgements about one's behaviour and the way one is treated; thus, 'Certain kinds of behaviour and ... treatment will seem intolerable to the person of self-respect'. As with Scheffler's approach to valuing, emotional vulnerability is involved in self-respect – the self respecting person does not merely judge that certain behaviour or treatment is intolerable, but also feels something about this. For Taylor, what is felt is shame: 'the frustration of expectations in this area is precisely the occasion for feeling shame [...] if someone has self-respect then under certain specific circumstances he will be feeling shame.'[79] Taylor's view invites the argument that since self-respect is a virtue, and since part of self-respect is a disposition to feel shame in certain circumstances, it is virtuous and appropriate to feel shame in those circumstances.

Taylor's analysis is broadly correct. A person who lacked any strong convictions about either what treatment they deserved or what behaviour was demanded from them would be lacking in self-respect. The person who accepts any treatment is too passive to be called self-respecting, and the person who considers any behaviour of theirs permissible is too lacking in standards, too unwilling or unable to hold themselves to anything. We also have a strong intuition that the self-respecting person will feel shame if they fall short of the behavioural expectation they have of themselves. The expression 'have you no shame?' draws these considerations to mind. It asks us if we have any standards, if there is anything we consider beneath us, anything that we would not do. It is therefore very close to simply asking 'don't you have any self-respect?'

However, I am not convinced by Taylor's approach in the case of treatments. One sort of treatment that may provoke shame is to expose or report something shameful a person has done. This would be unlikely to work on someone who lacked any kind of self-respect; however, this sort of shaming isn't the sort of treatment that the person of self-respect is likely to consider intolerable. Someone who holds themselves and others to a high standard is likely to welcome scrutiny. Shame can alternatively be provoked by victimising, abusing, or humiliating a person. In this case, the treatment is clearly

79 Taylor pp78-80

the sort of thing that the self-respecting person would find intolerable. However, not feeling ashamed after this sort of treatment doesn't indicate a lack of self-respect: we wouldn't doubt the self-respect of someone who reacted instead with resentment or disgust. Nonetheless, the relation of shame for behaviour to self-respect is sufficient to argue that shame is sometimes appropriate.

To make this argument robust, it must be shown that it is shame in particular that is involved in self-respect, and that there are not other emotions that can appropriately fill the same role. As we consider the possible alternatives to shame, we should therefore ask of them both whether they provide an appropriate way of valuing one's ethical standing and whether they would be a sufficient reaction on the part of someone with genuine respect for themselves. This may be a similar task, because when self-respect is analysed as as a matter of holding strongly to certain views about what is demanded of one it is revealed to be closely related to valuing one's ethical standing. Nonetheless, considering the issue both in terms of valuing and of self-respect may provide some additional insight.

6.2.3 Ambition and acceptance

The first alternatives I wish to consider are those which do not feel bad, as shame does. First, I have in mind ambition, understood as a confident, positive, forward-looking feeling that motivates us to improve. The second alternative is harder to name, but I shall call it acceptance: I have in mind a humble, relaxed and untroubled awareness of one's limitations. The person who feels this way accepts their flaws and accepts that they are flaws, but is content to live with them. Acceptance is an emotion because it is something that is felt; although the feeling is a peaceful one there is more to accepting a failure than merely believing it. Acceptance is untroubled not just because troubled feelings are absent, but because a calm, tranquil feeling is present.

For a case where ambition is an appropriate alternative to shame, consider Thomas, a person who has recently allowed himself to become overweight, and who knows that he risks damaging his health. It seems that the appropriate thing for Thomas to focus on is the considerable improvement to his health that can be attained by exercise and healthier eating, and ambition is focused in this way. Ambition is appropriate because his vice is slight and improvement is a fairly straightforward matter; we would not doubt Thomas valued his health or that he was a self-respecting person if he felt this way. Indeed, ambition – a positive, honest, confident desire to do better – does seem to be a quality of the person of self-respect. For while Taylor is right not to equate self-respect to a simple positive self-image or self-appraisal, such attitudes can be appropriate for the self-respecting person, as they are not the sort of person to lose

sight of their potential and their goodness.

Acceptance can be appropriate in cases of less serious flaws. For example, suppose Laura is a mediocre pianist, because she doesn't practice very hard and loses her composure easily. Laura might plausibly consider her playing to be held back by these small vices, but be content to play casually without striving to be a better pianist. As long as Laura is not lazy or excessively anxious with regards to everything she does, it seems better for her to accept that her playing is held back in this way than it does for her to feel ashamed.

Acceptance can also be an appropriate reaction in cases where improvement is extremely difficult or impossible. If Laura remains only a modest pianist even after practising diligently for a long time, it may be that she simply lacks the potential to be an excellent player. It wouldn't be appropriate for Laura to feel ashamed about her inability to become a great pianist; that is something it would be better for her to accept.

Finally, both acceptance and ambition can be appropriate alternatives to shame as a response to failures of our projects, especially competitive ones. If Laura is passed over at a piano audition, she might feel ashamed of this, taking herself to be “a failure as a pianist”. But it would be more appropriate for her to either feel ambitious and try again, or to simply accept her failure.

Ambition and acceptance may appear to be generally more appropriate than shame because they are not unpleasant and distressing in the way that shame is. Why consider a distressing reaction more appropriate without a good reason? The answer is to be found by attending to cases where acceptance and ambition appear inappropriate in comparison to shame. These will have to be cases where it is appropriate both to focus on our failings and faults, rather than on our capacity to improve, and to be troubled by them, rather than content with them. Such cases come about where the reasons shame struck us as inappropriate no longer apply: cases of long unrealised potential, significant shortfalls from our potential, and serious ethical failures.

Ambition becomes inappropriate when our failing is serious or enduring. Returning to the case of Thomas, suppose that he consistently fails to follow through on his ambition and improve his fitness. After some time, though it persists, his ambition begins to seem somewhat hollow; it is not enough to motivate a sufficient response, so it appears either insincere or feeble. At the same time, let us suppose he is at fault: there is no question of genetics or illness or anything else putting the required efforts

out of reach. There comes a point where either Thomas will begin to feel ashamed that he lacks the resolve to align his actions with his goals, or else cease to really value his health. This is the way we talk of such cases: when a person persistently fails to act in a way that accords with what he says or what he thinks he values, we say that he “doesn't really care”.

It may be objected that it is equally possible for Thomas to feel ashamed of himself for a long time without doing anything to improve his health, for shame may equally well fail to motivate a sufficient response. Wouldn't we still say of Thomas in this case that he didn't really care about his health? I agree that, sooner or later, we would: shame alone is not enough to dissuade us from this judgement. However, this is consistent with the view that Thomas' shame can still be a way for him to value his health to some extent. If Thomas is indeed distraught at his recognition of his vice, it seems too strong to say that he doesn't value his health at all; it is better to say that he doesn't value it fully or that he doesn't value it in the best way. That would require both an emotional response and that he act. Understood this way, shame can be seen to be more appropriate than continued ambition in the face of inaction; the problem with such ambition is that it soon becomes idle fantasy, so that it would be more accurate to describe the agent merely as desiring or wishing to be healthier, rather than as valuing their health.

For a case where the agent's vice is too serious for ambition to be appropriate, consider someone who feels jealous of his position in his social circle and so acts spitefully to deter a newcomer from returning, but reacts with unashamed ambition – “Gosh! I could quite easily be a much better person by being friendly instead of spiteful, I ought to get on that right away”. This person fails to grasp the seriousness of their vice, or fails to value their virtue properly.

Acceptance is also inappropriate in these cases, because both agents are, and know they are, well able to take effective action to improve their position, and ought to do so. To feel acceptance here is to view friendliness or healthiness as something to be respected in others, and to be unfortunately lacking from oneself, but not to be troubled about lacking it. This is inappropriate because it does not take the self-evaluation sufficiently seriously.

Similar considerations apply when shame focuses on a particular action, or on being person with a certain sort of action on their record. If Laura fails at her audition, or is a failed pianist, this is not the sort of thing it is appropriate to be ashamed of; ambition to try again or acceptance of the failure is more appropriate. However, if Laura destroys an irreplaceable antique piano in a fit of rage after failing her audition, then

responses of ambition or acceptance to that would be flippant and inappropriate.

Agents who feel acceptance or ambition in serious cases also lack self-respect of the sort Taylor describes. Taylor's account of self-respect focuses on tight standards that are tied to our sense of self; this is why it is natural to speak of what the person of self-respect finds intolerable. The agent who responds with ambition or acceptance to a serious failure on their part to meet their own standards does not react to that failure as if they find it intolerable.

6.2.4: Guilt

The next alternative to consider is guilt. Guilt, as an overtly moral emotion and one which is distressing, certainly appears to take moral failure seriously. The question at hand is whether guilt might be more appropriate than shame in the sort of circumstances that at first sight seem to warrant shame. The primary reason we might think this to be the case is that guilt may seem to be a more appropriately focused emotion.

As noted by Williams[80], shame is sometimes considered to be too focused on distress at the way others see one, on the way one's image has gone awry. This doesn't seem to get at the crux of the matter in the way that guilt does, by focusing on the wrongdoing itself, the victim, or the harm caused. Kantians in particular, but by no means Kantians alone, may be concerned that shame is too much about losing face, heteronomous rather than autonomous, and secondary to the actual moral situation. However, Taylor and Williams both argue that shame is not simply about being seen badly, but rather about being seen in a way one considers inappropriate:

'Shame need not be just a matter of being seen, but of being seen by an observer with a certain view. Indeed, the view taken by the observer need not itself be critical: people can be ashamed of being admired by the wrong audience in the wrong way. Equally, they need not be ashamed of being poorly viewed, if the view is that of an observer for whom they feel contempt'.[81]

This allows us to say that when shame is a response to being seen badly, it is a matter of being seen badly by someone whom they respect, or at least whose judgement they respect. I have also argued that a concern for how one is seen is not essential to shame. Shame is therefore not problematically heteronomous. Furthermore, if we have a healthy respect for others and value their opinion of us, a distressed reaction will be

80 Williams pp77-78
81 Williams p82. See also Taylor, pp64-67

warranted when that opinion is rightfully adverse in a way that is significant. As for the need to focus on particular actions and their consequences we may note that shame may of course be felt in addition to guilt, or remorse, or anything else that is appropriate in the situation. Shame need not be the only emotion felt.

Moreover, the inward focus of shame on our character and flaws can just as easily be seen as an asset. We have already shown that sometimes it is appropriate to feel bad about our viciousness, because feeling that way is a part of what it is to care about our character, and is required by self-respect. Now, it does not seem to me that guilt is properly directed at these things: we feel guilt for our actions or omissions, not for being a bad person or possessing a vicious character trait.

This distinction can be seen in our practice of forgiveness. Guilt is often eased by another's forgiveness, while shame is usually not. This is because guilt is focused on wrong actions and what must be done in response to them, while shame focuses on an ethical self-evaluation, often by focusing on our vices. Firstly, it is actions that we ask forgiveness for: it is not appropriate to ask someone to forgive us for our character flaws. Asking forgiveness for an action of ours is asking forgiveness for something which occurred in the past, and which we and the forgiving party may want to move on from. To ask forgiveness for our flawed character is not like this, because our vice is a present concern; we cannot move on from it until we reform. Forgiveness for bad character seems inappropriate in the same way that forgiveness in advance for future wrongdoing seems inappropriate.

Secondly, we seek forgiveness from other people whom we judge to have had a stake in our actions – usually those who have been badly affected by them, but also sometimes from those who simply expected better of us. In cases that are purely or primarily self-regarding we tend not to seek forgiveness, even if we still feel guilty. If we feel guilty for eating too much cake, but see it as our own business, it doesn't seem appropriate to ask for anyone's forgiveness. So our guilt is only absolved by forgiveness when we see what we did as primarily somebody else's business. But we always take what we are ashamed of to be our own business: even in a case where we are ashamed of mistreating somebody, we wouldn't be feeling shame if we didn't take our wrongdoing to be an important personal failing.

Forgiveness frequently eases guilt because it is relevant to the motivation to respond that characterises guilt. As the response motivated by guilt is often owed to somebody, their forgiving the guilty agent is often intended to release them from that obligation. For example, when we forgive someone who is unable to repay their debt to us, in doing so we usually release them from the obligation to repay us when they are able.

Since continued guilt is inappropriate if one has already responded appropriately to one's wrongdoing, forgiveness of this sort makes continued guilt inappropriate. In the case of shame, however, we take ourselves to have fallen short of our own standards. Whether or not someone else is willing to forgive us is not directly relevant to whether or not we have let ourselves down, and so forgiveness is not enough to make one's shame inappropriate.

Since guilt focuses on our wrong actions and what must be done about them, it is sometimes appropriate to feel shame as well. This is because wrongdoing and the obligations it places on us are not the only things that are relevant to our self-evaluation. If we value our ethical standing and have a healthy sense of self-respect, we must also attend to what our actions say about us and whether our character is vicious or virtuous. It is just as important that we are emotionally vulnerable to these considerations as those that concern guilt. If the only negative feelings we have about our ethical failings focus on particular wrong actions and our responses to them then we are either inattentive to the significance of our vices themselves, or else we are feeling only acceptance of our vices or ambition to rid ourselves of them, which we have already seen cannot always be the appropriate reactions.

6.2.5: Regret

Perhaps the strongest alternative candidate to shame in the situations where shame seems appropriate is regret. However, regret and shame are not mutually exclusive. I will argue in chapter seven that to feel regret is to take it that something has gone or is going in some way wrong or badly, and to feel bad about this. To feel shame is to take an adverse ethical view of oneself, and to feel at least fairly strongly bad about it. Therefore if we take it that we are a cruel person and that in this way things are going badly, and feel at least fairly strongly distressed about this, we will be feeling both shame and regret. In considering whether regret is appropriate instead of shame, we must consider only instances of regret which are not also instances of shame. In these instances we either regret something without taking it to be an ethical matter or regret it only weakly.

To regret something without taking it to be an ethical matter will not seem appropriate in cases that *are* serious ethical matters, for similar reasons to why acceptance seemed inappropriate in those cases. In fact, not taking one's self-evaluation to be an ethical matter at all is to take it even less seriously than if one took it to be an ethical failing, but one which can be accepted. I shall therefore focus on whether feeling only a little bad about one's adverse ethical self-evaluation can be an appropriate alternative to shame.

Regret of this sort occupies a middle ground between shame (a strong, negative reaction to failure) on the one hand and acceptance or ambition (neutral or positive reactions to failure) on the other. For this reason, regret may appear more likely to keep our flaws in perspective than shame. Because of the strength of feeling involved, shame often prompts further bad feelings or displaces good feelings about ourselves. This is something we might worry about, and one of the reasons ambition seemed attractive: it isn't good for us to languish in a funk, only attending to the worst aspects of ourselves. Regret can provide a way of taking our failings more seriously than ambition, but without risking the downward spiral of bad feeling associated with shame.

There will be cases of moderate flaws which warrant regret rather than shame. In these cases a similarly modest emotional reaction is the best way of valuing one's ethical standing and showing one's self-respect. Just as the self-respecting person finds some behaviour on their part intolerable, surely there are also behaviours which they find disagreeable, but not intolerable. To feel ashamed of every failing, even those which are modest, is not the attitude we expect of the self-respecting person; sometimes, they will merely regret what they did. This is because they retain a healthy sense of their virtues as well as their vices.

Still, in some cases shame must be appropriate rather than regret. This is simply because it is not appropriate to react as if all of one's failings are modest, even those which are very serious. When our failings are serious, the tendency of shame to prompt further shame can be appropriate. For example, suppose we become ashamed of our jealousy, after experiencing strong possessive feelings we wouldn't have expected ourselves to feel. Because our character is far from transparent to us, and because of what we know about other jealous people, this experience really should prompt us to become more generally worried about our character and ethical standing. Perhaps we are also not as kind, friendly or faithful as we thought we were?

6.3: When is it appropriate to feel shame?

To summarise the position so far, to feel shame is to take an adverse ethical view of oneself, and to feel strongly bad about it. The idea of self-evaluation in play is broadly construed, so as to allow shame to be felt for actions, so long as they are taken to be significant. I have argued that shame is sometimes the appropriate emotional response to such a self-evaluation, because it is sometimes the proper way to value one's ethical standing or to maintain an attitude of self-respect. This was achieved by assuming, with Scheffler and Taylor, that some emotional reaction must be involved in valuing and in self-respect, and then showing the alternatives to shame to be in some

cases insufficient if shame is not felt as well.

Having established that shame is sometimes appropriate, the next step is to develop a more general account of when shame is appropriate. I will argue that shame is only appropriate if one has good reason to think it is fitting, that shame should be restricted to serious ethical failings, and that shame is usually not appropriate for vices that are, or actions that were, beyond our control.

6.3.1 Fittingness and appropriateness

For shame to be fitting, the adverse ethical self-evaluation involved in it must be accurate. Shame can fail to be fitting in two ways: either it is descriptively mistaken, or normatively mistaken. Suppose that Michael is ashamed of his unreliability. If Michael is actually reliable, then his shame is unfitting because it is descriptively mistaken. If unreliability is not actually vicious, then Michael's shame is unfitting because it is normatively mistaken.

Unfitting shame seems unlikely to be appropriate. Probably the most common circumstance in which we would tell somebody that they oughtn't to feel ashamed is that in which they have nothing to be ashamed of, either because they are not the sort of person they take themselves to be or because they are ashamed of something that it isn't correct to evaluate adversely, as when we say “that's nothing to be ashamed of”. However, we should ask whether shame follows the same pattern as guilt, where unfitting guilt can be appropriate so long as the agent has good reason to think that it is fitting.

Consider the following case:

Nora's friends and family all spend much more time working and studying than Nora, and criticise her for being lazy. Nora ignores them for a long time, because she doesn't agree: she thinks they are working too hard and need to learn to relax. At the end of the year, Nora performs very badly in her exams. She is very upset, and, thinking that her family and friends were right all along, she begins to feel ashamed of herself for being lazy, stubborn, and a failure. However, Nora isn't really lazy: her friends are indeed too hard-working, and her exam results were mixed up with another candidate's.

Supposing that laziness, stubbornness and failing exams are serious enough, Nora's shame is appropriate. She should be willing to re-evaluate her position when new evidence comes to light, and she should take others' opinions seriously. So appropriate shame, like appropriate guilt, requires that the agent has good reason to think that it is fitting, but not that it actually is fitting. That said, appropriate shame demands strong

evidence to think that it is fitting, because it is a strong feeling and involves making a significant adverse self-evaluation. Because of this, and because it is plausible that we are often in a better epistemic position to appraise our own character than others are, unfitting shame will be less commonly appropriate than unfitting guilt.

6.3.2 Seriousness and appropriateness

An ethical failing must be serious for shame to be an appropriate response. In part, this is a matter of fittingness: some things are so insignificant that it would be mistaken to consider them ethical failings at all. Henry's appearance in the photograph is an example of this. I've argued that something is significant enough to be an ethical matter if it affects the agent's eudaimonia (see section 5.1.1). However, we have also seen that some failings that reach this level of significance still aren't serious enough to make shame appropriate. Thomas's poor fitness provided an example of this: it isn't serious enough to make shame appropriate unless we also suppose that Thomas has repeatedly failed in his attempts to improve.

So, how serious does our failing have to be for shame to be appropriate, rather than just fitting? It must be a failing that doesn't just make a difference to our eudaimonia, but rather makes a large or important difference. As well as considering this, we can also make a judgement in a particular case by considering whether or not an alternative to shame such as regret, acceptance, or ambition would be consistent with the agent properly valuing their ethical standing and maintaining an attitude of self-respect. In the case of shame for actions, this will depend on how wrongful the action was and how significant it is to the agent's life. In the case of shame for vices, it will depend on how serious the vice is, and for how long the agent has possessed it.

Against my view that shame is appropriate only in the case of serious ethical failings it may be objected that we do not typically think weaker feelings of shame about small failings are inappropriate: we would not be quick to censure them. However, this thought can be accepted together with my view. We should only criticise someone for feeling shame that is inappropriate, and shame at less serious but still ethically significant failings is plausibly neither appropriate nor inappropriate: an understandable way to feel in the circumstances, but not required either, because experiencing another emotion, such as ambition, would also be acceptable.

6.3.3 Control and appropriateness

Finally, we saw that in some cases shame can be inappropriate because the agent lacks sufficient control over the failing they are ashamed of. For instance, feeling

shame for failing to reach an ambitious goal that might be beyond one's ability seems inappropriate. Similarly, feeling ashamed of a blamelessly acquired and untreatable illness is clearly inappropriate, even if we agree that the illness warrants an adverse ethical self-evaluation, for example if its symptoms make it very difficult to live a good life.

There are good reasons to think that shame for actions which were beyond our control tend not to be appropriate. First, for shame to be appropriate our failing must be serious. However, not being able to control something, or having only an attenuated control over it, often makes it less important to our self-evaluation. If I accidentally destroy your favourite vase, I will feel bad and wish that I hadn't done it, but it is best if I accept that accidents happen to everyone and don't take it too hard. If Laura is really not suited to the piano, it is best if she recognises that it may not be her fault, and is something she ought to learn to accept. Second, when we lack control over our actions, that often makes it inappropriate to draw inferences from them about our virtue or vice. If somebody is deliberately coughing during your speech then they are rude, and this may be something they ought to be ashamed of. But if they are ill and can't help but cough, it isn't correct to infer that they are rude, and so they shouldn't feel ashamed of themselves.

However, there are cases where these reasons do not apply, and where it may be appropriate to feel shame for things one did, but could not control. Some vices are revealed by actions that are not completely within our control. A person who cannot help but laugh at other people's misfortune is cruel, even if they never deliberately do cruel things. If the cruelty of their laughter is significant enough, they ought to be ashamed of themselves for it. It is also worth noting that a lack of control over something may not always be very important. As I considered in section 2.3.4, we may not have very much control over our beliefs or emotions. It may still be appropriate to feel ashamed if our beliefs or feelings are vicious. These considerations also explain why shame for things that are done to us may sometimes be appropriate: the way we are treated is sometimes revealing of how other people evaluate us, and the fact that one cannot control others' treatment of us isn't a good reason to discard an inference drawn this way. If we have good reasons to think that others are evaluating us correctly, then shame may be an appropriate response to their behaviour towards us. The appropriateness of this sort of shame may explain why some victims of abuse feel ashamed: they may wrongly infer, or simply feel as if, their abuse is inflicted on them because they are bad people in some way.

In the case of shame for vices, it is the degree of control one can exercise looking forwards that is important, rather than how much control we had over developing the

vice. This provides the best explanation of our intuitions regarding the cases. It is often appropriate to accept flaws when they are beyond one's control in the sense that there is nothing one can do about them. In these cases, since there is nothing we can do, acceptance does not usually call into doubt whether or not we value our ethical standing, or whether we are self-respecting people. Indeed, to feel ashamed in these cases is often to be too harsh on oneself, to view oneself too poorly, and perhaps in this way to show a lack of self-respect. This account of the relevance of our control to the appropriateness of shame can also explain why acceptance can be an appropriate response to a vice that is only difficult, not impossible, to correct, such as in the case where Laura accepts that she is a sloppy pianist as a result of her lack of composure or diligence. The reason shame is not appropriate here is not that there is nothing Laura can do about her lack of composure, but rather that there is nothing Laura ought to do about it, since what can be done is sufficiently hard and a lack of composure is a sufficiently minor failing. That she has given up on improving herself in this way doesn't mean that Laura lacks self-respect or doesn’t value living a good life properly – she is just sensibly prioritising. However, we would not so readily accept this reasoning when a more important virtue is involved. Some people find it very difficult to be brave, because they cannot seem to bring themselves to stand up to their fears. Other people struggle to be kind, because they find it very difficult to empathise with others. But since bravery and kindness are more important to living a good life than composure, accepting that one lacks these virtues is too drastic to be appropriate.

The degree to which one can exercise control over what one is ashamed of going forwards is also the important factor in cases of vicarious shame. Returning to the case in which I feel ashamed of the UK government's policies regarding homelessness, it seems that the reason it may be appropriate for me to take the government's failure to reflect badly on me is that I do have ways to influence the policy which I am not exercising. What seems important here is not whether I have sufficient influence to have the policy changed (this is rather unlikely), but whether my influence is great enough that how I use it is relevant to my ethical self-evaluation. As a contrast, it would be inappropriate for me to be ashamed of the US government's policies regarding homelessness: as I am neither a US citizen nor resident my influence there is not relevant in the same way.

These considerations together show that the appropriateness of shame is related to how much control we have over something: the more it is true that our failings were or are under our control, the more likely shame is to be an appropriate response to them. However, we cannot simply infer that it is inappropriate to be ashamed of something from the fact that we lack control over it, because there are exceptions to such a principle.

6.3.4 Summary

I have argued that shame is appropriate because feeling it is sometimes a part of what it is to properly value one's ethical standing and because it is required by the virtue of self-respect. These grounds make shame appropriate in cases where one has good reason to take oneself to have the ethical failing one is ashamed of, and where that failing is serious enough that regret, ambition or acceptance would be inappropriate. Shame that involves appraising oneself as vicious is more likely to be appropriate when there is something that one can do about the vice. Shame for past actions is more likely to be appropriate when the action was under our control at the time.

Chapter 7: Regret

7.1 What is Regret?

7.1.1 Regret as a broad emotion

I intend to use 'regret' broadly. We regret something when we take it that something has gone or is going in some way wrong or badly, and feel bad about it. This approach is similar to Bernard Williams' in *Moral Luck:* 'The constitutive thought of regret in general is something like 'how much better if it had been otherwise', and the feeling can in principle apply to anything'[82] the main difference being that Williams' phrasing suggests that regret involves an all-things considered judgement and a wish that things really had been otherwise. I prefer to use the 'in some way' construction to allow for ambivalent cases where we regret something even though we also feel that what has happened is for the best, all things considered. For example, if our child has been accepted into a university which is excellent and their first choice, we might feel glad for them but also regret that they will not be going to the same one as we did. Similarly, while in many cases of regret we wish that things were different, this is not essential. The university case shows this, as does a case in which we regret something but feel so despondently resigned to it that we do not actively wish it to be otherwise.

Under this broad definition, it is analytically true that anyone who feels guilt or shame feels regret too, since both emotions involve taking something to have gone badly, and both are distressing. When we feel guilt, what has gone badly is our acting wrongly; with shame, it could be our acting wrongly, being vicious, or our life going badly in some other way.

We can regret pretty much anything, including things that are entirely beyond our ability to influence. I could regret that the sky is blue, if I detest the colour blue, and I could regret living in the 21st Century, if I consider it dull compared to the others. However, we do consider such regrets a little odd; since regret must be painful or unpleasant, it seems strange to take such things so hard. It is more common to simply day-dream about being an American pioneer than to really regret not being one. Since we can regret something entirely beyond our realm of control, to regret something within one's realm of influence does not commit oneself to taking any sort of responsibility for it. If I think that you are overly sensitive, I can regret hurting your feelings without believing that I was at fault. I can regret that an oil spill is harming wildlife, without thinking that it is my responsibility to go and clean it up: I might think

82 Williams, Bernard, 'Moral Luck', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes,* Vol. 50 (1976), pp115-135.p123

that it is the oil company's responsibility.

I am stipulating here that regret is always an emotion, but it is worth noting that regret can also be used to refer only to the judgement that something has gone badly, without implying any feeling of sadness or distress. For example, it may be the case that when we say we regret our youthful indiscretions, we only mean that we think we acted badly, not that we are distressed by this thought. This may be what politicians intend when they say that they believe they did the right thing but also regret any harm caused: they simply want to acknowledge that their policy had some bad consequences, not to additionally express their distress. I will not draw any conclusions about this sort of regret; all of my arguments and conclusions will be about feelings of regret, not mere judgements. However, since my arguments will rely in places on intuitions about regret, we must remain vigilant that the intuitions we rely on are truly intuitions about feelings of regret, and not about mere judgements.

7.1.2 Agent-regret

What I have said so far does not account for all of the ways we use regret, even when not referring to mere judgements. This is because there are occasions where we would naturally say we regret something, but where it seems that what we are feeling is partly constituted by our feeling responsible in some way. For some, this is their primary use for the word. I believe that this feeling is the one Williams refers to as agent-regret:

'there is a particularly important species of regret, which I shall call 'agent-regret', which a person can feel only towards his own past actions (or, at most, actions in which he regards himself as a participant). In this case, the supposed possible difference is that one might have acted otherwise'.[83]

Williams is clear that agent-regret is not simply regret for something we have done:

'There can be cases directed towards one's own past actions which are not cases of agent-regret, because the past action is regarded purely externally, as one might regard anyone else's action'.[84]

What exactly is the difference between regret for what we have done and agent-regret? It cannot be that the person who feels agent-regret judges that they were at fault because Williams attributes feelings of agent-regret to agents who know they are

83 Williams, Moral Luck, p123
84 Williams, Moral Luck, p123

not at fault:

‘the lorry driver who, through no fault of his, runs over a child, will feel differently from any spectator [...] there is something special in his relation to this happening, something which cannot merely be eliminated by the consideration that it was not his fault’.[85]

Joseph Raz suggests the difference is that 'agent-regret relates to one's sense of who one is. When I agent-regret an action of mine I feel bad or sorry about being or having become a person who acted in that way.' Therefore, agent-regret 'is poignant in being not regret that there is such a person, but that *I* am such a person.'[86]

It is worth noting that Raz's suggestion does not imply that the agent-regretful person feels they have become in some way bad or vicious. They need only to feel bad about the way they have become. For example, suppose that a student is unsure whether they should study English or medicine. After choosing medicine, they come to regret their decision. They find studying medicine very stressful, and wish that they had chosen to study English. They do not feel like they will be happy as a doctor, and they find that they cannot write poetry anymore, because they suffer from stress-induced writer's block. This is a case of regret for the student's past action, it is not regarded purely externally, and it does seem to relate importantly to the student's sense of self. The student feels bad about having become someone who is often stressed and agitated, and who no longer writes poetry. But they need not blame themselves for their decision: it is not wrong to study medicine, and they had no way of knowing they would react that way to studying it.

The conditions Raz describes – regret for what we have done, because of its affect on our sense of self – are sufficient to mark a case out as agent-regret. However, I do not believe they mark the necessary conditions of agent-regret. This is because it seems to me that agent-regret is also felt in the following sort of case:

Sandra accidentally knocks over Rick's vase, breaking it. Sandra is not at fault, and everybody knows she was not at fault. Fred, who saw this happen, regrets that the vase was knocked over because he knows Rick liked the vase. Sandra regrets breaking the vase. Though Sandra doesn't feel guilty, since she knows she was not at fault, she does feel responsible for breaking the vase, and so she offers to pay for Rick to replace it. Fred doesn't feel this way at all; it doesn't occur to him to offer to replace it for Rick.

85 Williams, Moral Luck, p124
86 Raz, Jospeh, *From Normativity to Responsibility*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p233-234 (Raz's Emphasis)

Sandra is feeling a special sort of regret, different to Fred's and directed towards her own past action: she is feeling agent-regret. But we do not feel compelled to say that Sandra, given what we have said so far, must feel bad about having become the sort of person who has (accidentally) broken a vase. It seems more likely that she will pay Rick, recover her composure, and forget all about the incident without contemplating her sense of self at all. (If Sandra often broke things, that might be a different matter, but this was an isolated incident).

Cases of this sort are familiar from the literature on moral luck. When Sandra feels responsible in this way, she is thinking in terms of what Judith Andre calls the prosaic sense of responsibility, where 'to be responsible is to have an obligation to rectify bad consequences. If I break your vase, I must replace it. I can be responsible in [this] sense without being in the least blameworthy, although often the two coincide.'[87] In Sandra's case, it seems that she is exercising what Susan Wolf calls the nameless virtue. Similar to generosity, this is the virtue 'that would lead one to offer to pay for the vase that one broke even if one's fault in the incident was uncertain'.[88]

My belief is that when one regrets something and takes oneself to be responsible for it, one feels agent-regret. This includes, but is not limited to, prosaic responsibility, and can therefore account for Sandra's case. Raz's analysis provides sufficient conditions for agent-regret because his idea of our sense of ourselves is tied to the things we are responsible for, at least prosaically: 'When I agent-regret an action of mine I feel bad or sorry about being or having become a person *who acted in that way*'[89]. To think of ourselves as a person who acted is to think of ourselves as a person responsible in some way for that action.

7.2 Why feel Regret?

7.2.1 A fortiori arguments for regret

Since regret is a broad emotion and those who feel guilt and shame feel regret too, my arguments that we ought sometimes to feel guilty or ashamed are, a fortiori, arguments that we ought sometimes to feel regret. We should feel guilty if we owe somebody a response for our wrongdoing, so we should regret what we have done wrong in cases where guilt is appropriate. Similarly, we ought to feel ashamed of our serious ethical failings, so we ought to regret them. In each case, it is agent-regret that is shown to be appropriate, since we ought to see ourselves as either morally or

87 Andre, Judith, 'Nagel, Williams and Moral Luck', *Analysis*, 1983, pp202-207. p205
88 Wolf, Susan, 'The Moral of Moral Luck', *Philosophic Exchange*, Vol. 31, Issue 1, 2001, pp1-16. p10
89 Raz, p233 (My emphasis)

prosaically responsible for wrongdoing and failures of the sort that warrant guilt or shame.

This much is already established. I am interested now in whether there are other occasions in which regret is appropriate, for example in the way I considered in my discussion of alternatives to shame (section 6.2.5). I will proceed by considering Rüdiger Bittner's argument against feeling regret, and John Gardner's argument in favour of feeling regret.

7.2.2 Bittner's argument against regret

Bittner argues that it is never reasonable to feel regret for something bad that one has done. Bittner takes regret to be 'a painful feeling about something we did which we think was bad',[90] and notes that other feelings such as remorse, repentance and guilt can be considered as different kinds of regret. This view of regret is compatible with my broad account, but Bittner's claim that it must be some act of ours which we regret suggests he is thinking of agent-regret in particular. As well as this, Bittner is not explicit about whether we must feel as if our act was bad, all things considered, or just in some way bad. It is reasonable for Bittner to focus on cases of agent-regret and all things considered badness because such cases seem to be the most likely to be cases of reasonable regret. By rejecting them, he can claim that we ought to eliminate all forms of regret without needing to be exhaustive or to defend any comprehensive position about what regret is.

Bittner's argument against regret runs as follows: 'It is not reasonable, because one did something bad, to go and make things worse. But that is what regret is, double misery, the second for the sake of the first. So, regret is not reasonable.'[91] This is motivated by the fact that regret is a painful feeling. Its being painful means that being in a state of regret is always in that way bad; this is why to feel regret is to make things worse. That regret is in this way bad is taken to provide a standing reason against feeling it. Thus, for it to be reasonable to feel regret, we would need to identify something good about regret, something that outweighs its painfulness. The burden of proof is therefore on the person arguing for regret, and Bittner uses the rest of his paper to reject different attempts to discharge the burden.

This strategy is sensible, as it mirrors the way we consider other painful experiences. Suppose going for a one mile jog is pleasant, but going for a five mile jog would be painful. If that's the end of the story, we should only go for a one mile jog. To show that

90 Rüdiger Bittner, 'Is it reasonable to regret things one did?', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 89, No. 5, May 1992, pp262-273. p262
91 Bittner, p265

it is reasonable to go on the five mile jog, we need to be able to identify some other benefit we can only get from the longer jog. It needs to further our wish to run a marathon, or be better for our health than the shorter jog. This search for a benefit to regret expresses a frequent practical worry about negative feelings. When we say “there's no use crying over spilt milk”, we suggest that we oughtn't to cry, because there's no practical benefit to doing so.

The best way to respond to Bittner's argument is to accept and discharge the burden of proof he places on us. I have already shown that this can be done in those cases of regret which overlap with guilt or shame. A more general response of this kind is offered by John Gardner's argument that regret is often required for its own sake.

7.2.3 Gardner: The Continuity Thesis as an argument for regret

Gardner does not analyse regret directly, but he states that 'Regret is the rational response to any measure of non-conformity with any reason'[92] and also in a note that all regret 'reflects (what the regretter takes to be) incomplete conformity with reason'.[93] Since incomplete conformity with reason will plausibly always involve our doing something that is in some way bad (even if only because an opportunity for something good was missed) it seems that Gardner is identifying the same intentional object for regret as Bittner and I. Gardner goes on to explain that feeling regret 'may damage, and in extreme cases destroy'[94] a life, which makes clear that he takes regret to be a bad feeling, rather than a mere judgement. So Bittner, Gardner and I are not talking past each other.

I introduced Gardner's continuity thesis in Chapter Four as the idea that reasons await full conformity, so that a reason not conformed to now counts as a reason to do the next best thing[95]. When full conformity to a reason is impossible, the reason now counts as a reason to regret not having fully conformed. This will be the case whenever doing the next best thing is not as good as having done what we had reason to do in the first place: 'the reason for the regret is the very same reason that was incompletely conformed to (coupled, of course, with the fact of incomplete conformity to it)'. The further we are from fully conforming to the reason, the more regret is appropriate, until 'the point of maximal regret at which my non-conformity with the original reason is total'[96].

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92 Gardner p58
93 Gardner, p58 note 19,
94 Gardner, p60
95 Section 3.4.3; Gardner, pp57-58
96 Gardner, p58

This suggests a response to Bittner: when regret is appropriate, this is because we have failed to fully conform to some reason, and that very reason is the reason to feel regret. Thus, in every case where we have acted badly, and so failed to fully conform to some reason, we necessarily have a reason to feel regret that can be balanced against the pain the regret would cause us. As a result, regret will sometimes be reasonable, and sometimes not, depending on various factors such as how bad a thing we did. This position is contrary to Bittner's and plausible at first sight.

Gardner positions his view against the opposite view 'that at every moment we start again from *tabula rasa*, rationally speaking [...] Regret, apology, reparation, remorse, atonement, punishment: all this retrospectivity is irrational unless it now commends itself afresh, as a way of (say) reducing future suffering, or expressing renewed respect for others.'[97] And indeed, Gardner's argument is not anticipated by Bittner because Bittner does disregard past considerations in that way. Bittner argues against several possible justifications of regret, all of which depend on present or future considerations: that regret has good consequences for future behaviour[98], that regret is valuable now as a form of atonement or self-punishment[99], and various interpretations of Williams' arguments in favour of agent-regret.[100] He does not consider responses such as Gardner's which rely on past considerations.

However, in Chapter Four I argued against Gardner's Continuity Thesis. On Gardner's view, so long as a reason is categorical (that is, so long as it doesn't depend on our particular goals and interests), it will always provide a reason for regret if we fail to conform to it, even if the reason was a small one, and even if we failed to conform to it long ago. I argued that this resulted in an implausible over-abundance of reasons. Against this objection Gardner notes that such reasons will often be outweighed. However, if we rely on this response, Gardner's challenge is much less troubling for Bittner, who could argue that the reason to feel regret provided by the degree of non-conformity to a past reason will always be outweighed by the rather strong reason we have to avoid useless pain.

7.2.4 The Eudaimonia Principle and regret

To show that we have reasons to feel regret strong enough to outweigh our reason to avoid useless pain, we can employ the Eudaimonia Principle[101] in place of Gardner's

97 Gardner, p58
98 Bittner, pp266-267
99 Bittner, pp267-268
100 Bittner, pp268-272
101 The Eudaimonia Principle holds that a fact about the past matters to how we ought to feel if and only if it affects our eudaimonia. I defended this principle in chapter four.

Continuity Thesis. If our lack of conformity to a reason is serious enough to affect our eudaimonia, then in that case it will become a significant reason to feel regret. Because only significant mistakes affect our eudaimonia, and because whether we live well is a matter of great importance, it isn't plausible for Bittner to hold that our reasons to feel regret are always outweighed by painfulness in these cases. However, we should consider whether he could accept that the effect on our eudaimonia matters, while denying that it provides a reason to feel regret in particular. What about regret could make it such a widely appropriate response?

The broadness of regret is its first main advantage. I can regret anything I take to be in some way bad. Saying that I feel regret does not commit me to feeling guilt or shame or anything more specific, nor to believing myself to be at fault or to blame. I can also feel regret to more or less any degree; it makes sense to say either that I feel a tremendous regret or that I feel a slight regret. This broadness is important because it means that regret can always be a fitting response to our non-comformity to a reason, since in feeling regret, we take something to be bad in some way, and non-comformity to a reason is always in some way bad. Even if our non-conformity was accidental or justified, it must still be bad in some way: if it were not, there would have been no reason to begin with. This means that regret can be coherently and relevantly felt about reason-violation of any sort. As well as this, because we can feel regret to any degree, and in many different ways, so long as we ought to feel something about our reason-violation regret will never be an obvious under- or over-reaction.

The second advantage of regret is the very painfulness that Bittner criticises it for. Regret feels bad. In one sense, as Bittner notes, this is a reason not to feel it. But, when it is called for, that regret feels bad can be a reason in favour of feeling it too. We are considering cases in which something has gone bad in some way: it would be perverse to feel good about that.

Next, we should consider whether action is preferable as an alternative to regret as a response to what has gone wrong in the cases I am considering. Responding through action seems preferable at first sight if we are sympathetic to Bittner's assumption that our response should have some clear, practical benefit looking forward.

Whatever sort of action is recommended, it will need to be a coherent, relevant response in all the sorts of cases we are considering. The most direct sort of responses, like compensation, will not do, because there are some things that cannot be, or ought not to be, compensated for[102]. The best candidate would be the view that, to the degree that we have not conformed to them fully, important past reasons become

102 See section 5.2.1

reasons to perform supererogatory acts. We could view this as a way of balancing out the cosmic score: the fact that I failed to give a stranger directions yesterday is a reason today for me to go beyond the call of duty to make the world better in some way, though not in any particular way. I could satisfy this reason by making a larger than required donation to a worthy charity. This seems like a strange practice, but, especially in the light of Bittner's point about the painfulness of regret, it can seem in some ways a better practice than that of going around regretting things. After all, if this really were our practice, there would be far fewer painful feelings and many more good deeds in the world.

The problem with this sort of alternative to regret is that it makes our reasons take apparently arbitrary objects. Yesterday, the fact that you were lost was a reason to help you find your way. It is easy to see why helping you find your way would have been an appropriate response to the reason: it would have stopped you from being lost. Similarly, if today I apologise for not helping, we can still see the link between the reason and its object. I am apologising to you, because it is you who was lost, and you who I should have helped. It would not usually make sense to apologise to someone else! In the case of regret, there is still a non-arbitrary connection to the reason: I regret not helping you, because I should have helped you, because you were lost. Here we see the importance of regret's broadness: we can always feel regret *about* failing to fully conform to a reason, so regret will always in that way be relevant. However, if the reason instead became a reason to do a supererogatory good deed, there might be no specific connection left. The fact that you were lost and I didn't help you is supposed to become a reason to to a good deed, but it is hard to see what your needing directions has to do with my general do-gooding, or my donation to Deworm The World.

Perhaps we can respond to this objection by adding a clause to our supererogation principle: to the degree that we have not conformed to it fully, an old reason becomes a reason to perform a supererogatory act which is as related as possible to the original reason. Thus, the fact that I failed to give you directions yesterday is now a reason for me to go beyond the call of duty in helping prevent people from getting lost, or benefiting you, or something else as related as possible. This is an improvement; however, it is clear that this is still a long way off from the guarantee of relevance regret is able to provide. As well as this, the radical nature of this scheme makes it less persuasive than the Eudaimonia Principle it attempts to unseat.

7.2.5 Summary

I have argued that Gardner's view that reasons we can no longer conform to fully always become reasons for regret does not provide a response to Bittner on its own,

for, on its own, the view does not show that the reasons to feel regret will be significant enough to matter to how we ought to feel. However, by employing the Eudaimonia Principle, we can see that if our non-conformity to a reason affects our eudaimonia, the reason it provides us will matter. We ought to take these reasons to be reasons for regret in particular, because regret is the only response to non-comformity to a reason that will always be both available to the agent and relevant to the original reason.

7.3 When is it appropriate to feel regret?

I have now shown that when our non-comformity to our reasons affects our eudaimonia, this matters to how we ought to feel and calls for regret in particular. I've also argued that it is implausible to hold that this consideration is always outweighed by the painfulness of regret. Regret is therefore sometimes appropriate. I will now consider when it is appropriate.

I will argue that an adverse effect on our eudaimonia is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for appropriate regret. It is necessary, because regret for what affects someone else's eudaimonia but not our own is not appropriate. It is not sufficient, because it may be better for us to focus on other matters. Finally, I emphasise that regret being appropriate for an agent is not the same as the view that they ought to be feeling regret right now, or all the time, which helps us to answer the worry that the virtuous agent will live their life hounded by regret.

7.3.1 An effect on our eudaimonia is necessary for appropriate regret

The view that we should regret something only if it affects how well our life is going is the intuitive position that we shouldn't regret failures of ours if they don't matter to us: we shouldn't cry over spilt milk. This is true even if we had a good reason not to spill the milk. Regret about such insignificant failures is vulnerable to Bittner's objection: it is pointless pain, pain in the absence of any good reason to feel it.

However, what about the case in which our non-conformity to a reason affects somebody else's eudaimonia, but not our own? Surely the virtuous person is not only concerned about themselves?

Several points can be made in response to this objection. The first is a point that I made in section 4.5.2: that the virtues are not egoistic. When we affect other people's eudaimonia, that usually affects our own eudaimonia as well, even if not by as much. A good life has many positive effects on the lives of others, and a life with predominantly

negative effects on the lives of others is a bad one. Cases of wrongdoing with harmful effects will normally affect our own eudaimonia. The second is that while it is a necessary condition of appropriate regret that what we regret affects our eudaimonia, this does not imply that what we should regret is the fact that our eudaimonia is affected. When it is appropriate to regret hurting a friend's feelings, part of the reason why we should feel regret is that it matters to us how our friends feel and whether we are kind and tactful rather than cruel and callous. But what we regret is that we hurt our friend, not that our life is now worse for having done so, or that eudaimonia is so dependent on being a good friend. Finally, just because regret is not appropriate does not mean that it is inappropriate. An appropriate emotion is virtuous in that situation and feeling it is evidence of a virtuous character. This can fail to be the case without implying that the emotion is instead vicious.

For a clear example of the sort of case we are interested in, consider Diane:

Diane is an excellent teacher. Nonetheless, one of her students has done very poorly. Diane knows he will be devastated if he fails, and considers passing him, just barely. In her best judgement, he doesn't deserve to pass, but there's not a lot in it. Other markers might pass him, and it might get by moderation. Diane thinks about it carefully, then fails him. The student is devastated.

Now, perhaps the main thing reducing the student's eudaimonia is his poor performance, not failing the exam. Still, Diane might have let him pass anyway, and had the student just barely passed, this might have secured him a better job, spared his feelings, or in some other way meaningfully lessened the blow. Because of this, Diane had some reason, though outweighed, to pass him, which she did not conform to. Diane's eudaimonia is not affected: even the best teachers occasionally have some of their pupils fail.

Will Diane regret failing her student, or not, bearing in mind that we know she is an excellent teacher? I wouldn't be surprised either way. This suggests that regret is neither appropriate nor inappropriate in this sort of case, which is consistent with taking an effect on the agent's own eudaimonia to be a necessary condition for regret to be the appropriate response to their failing to fully conform to a reason.

The same sort of consideration applies to failures that have only small effects on our lives. If I am late for the bus and so miss the first act of a play I wanted to see, this is quite frustrating, but supposing it is an isolated incident it doesn't affect my eudaimonia. The play is not so spectacular that missing the beginning of it worsens my life! In such a situation, I expect I would feel regret: “Bother! If only I had left five minutes earlier,” I would think. Bittner would probably not feel this way: “Well, it's a

pity, but the best thing now is to enjoy the second half," he might think. Now, my regret is not appropriate: it is not a sign of my virtue that I am so cut up about missing the play. Nor is Bittner's lack of regret inappropriate: it is not vicious of him to take things so calmly. Whether or not my regret is inappropriate is a harder question. Quite possibly it is: Bittner's argument that it is pointless pain seems to apply. But the important point is that my regret cannot be appropriate because it doesn't affect my eudaimonia.

One small qualification is needed here, because I have been considering only cases of fitting regret so far. Unfitting regret may be appropriate, as was the case with guilt and shame, if the agent has good reason to think that they have failed to fully conform to a reason in a way that affects their eudaimonia, even if in fact the agent did conform to the reason, or the reason was never that important.

7.3.2 An affect on eudaimonia is not sufficient for appropriate regret

Gardner notes that there are frequently 'new reasons that militate powerfully in favour of getting on with our lives'[103], rather than feeling regret. Even when a past mistake of ours still matters to us, many of our present concerns will be more important and more urgent than dwelling on the past. For example, suppose that a few weeks ago, you badly let down a friend of yours: you didn't offer to help them when you clearly should have, because you were tired and irritable. Today the two of you are sharing a delicious meal together. Should you feel happy, regretful, or both? It seems clear to me that you should feel happy, unless your friend is still in need of help today – which would be regret brought on by a present consideration rather than regret about not helping weeks ago. It is perhaps less clear, but I think we would still get the same result if you are today dining with a different friend: it seems there doesn't need to be very much going on now for it to be more appropriate to focus on that.

However, this sort of consideration is usually a reason not to feel regret right now, occurrently, rather than a reason not to feel regret at all. As I discussed in section 3.3, to feel constant regret is unlikely to be appropriate. Imagine if you were to regret letting down your friend constantly, night and day, for several weeks. This would be an extraordinary amount of regret! It would be more appropriate for you to feel regret on a few occasions, for example in quiet moments when little else is going on, or when someone asks how your friend is doing, or at other times when it is called to your attention.

When we say that regret is not appropriate, we mean that we no longer think you

103Gardner, p59

ought to feel regret at all. This requires not some particular, more urgent, concern to displace regret at a particular moment, but some general reason to think that regret is no longer required, not even when nothing else is there to displace it. I've already argued that the object of your regret no longer mattering would be such a reason. What considerations might serve this role while the mistake you regret does still matter to you?

It is difficult to answer this question in the abstract, but we can point to the benefits that are often to be had in moving on from the past – what we would call “making a clean break” or “putting it behind us”. As well as freeing us from the pain of regret as Bittner notes, moving on can also be encouraging, leading us to act and feel better in future. It needn't mean a change in our judgement about the past, only our feelings about it. As long as moving on in this way isn't inappropriate, then regret will not be appropriate.

This attitude of moving on from a reason not fully conformed to is one of accepting one's failure to conform to it, or reacting to that failure with ambition rather than regret. I have considered such reactions before, in the previous chapter on shame[104]. There, I argued that such reactions become inappropriate if the failure they respond to is too serious or too enduring. In that case, regret and possibly shame is warranted: shame being in effect a strong regret when it comes to serious personal failings. If what one has done was very bad – if it is a very serious reason that one has not conformed to – then moving on either looks like running away or simply not caring, neither of which are attractive ways of responding. Ultimately, this leaves the appropriateness of regret depending on the severity of what you have done. This makes the appropriateness of regret a vague matter: there will be many borderline cases. This is a little unsatisfying, but as I argued in chapter two[105], we should be prepared to accept somewhat vague conclusions in ethics; it is the agent involved who judges borderline cases.

7.3.3 Summary

When it is appropriate to regret what we have done, the reason to feel regret is simply the same reason that we had to act otherwise in the first place. It is therefore mistaken to look for a justification based on present considerations as Bittner does. Gardner is correct that we do not begin each moment from a blank slate.

Nonetheless, we should not regret every mistake we make, nor do we always have pro

104Section 6.2.3
105Section 2.3.3

tanto reasons to regret our mistakes. Some mistakes are unimportant, and do not matter to us. Other mistakes are important, but are appropriately responded to with acceptance or ambition. The clearest cases where regret is appropriate are those in which guilt, shame or remorse (which I shall consider next) are appropriate; this is because those who feel these emotions necessarily feel regret too. Sometimes, regret will seem appropriate as a middle ground between these reactions and simple acceptance – when we regret something that is too important to simply accept, but not important enough to warrant shame. The borderlines here are vague, but this is not too much vagueness, not least because the difference between a strong regret for what we have done and a weak shame is not a large difference.

Chapter 8: Remorse

I've argued that appropriate regret is regulated by the Eudaimonia Principle. You should only regret your past wrongdoing if it affects your eudaimonia: how your life is going, considered as a whole. I considered the objection that we should often regret our wrongdoing because of its impact on other people, rather than on our own lives. I argued that in cases of this sort, one's own life is affected too; wrongfully harming other people makes for a bad life. This showed that cases of harming others are not counterexamples to the necessary condition I impose on the appropriateness of regret.

However, there is an important difference between regretting what we have done because of the harm we have caused to someone else and regretting what we have done because it has affected our own life, or simply because it was wrong. I will address that difference in this chapter, arguing that we ought to feel bad about the wrongful harm we have caused, specifically. The name I give to this sort of feeling is remorse.

8.1 What is remorse?

8.1.1 My stipulative approach to remorse

My analyses of guilt, shame and regret have all been partly stipulative, in order to achieve clarity and precision despite the nuances and ambiguities of ordinary language. However, my analysis of remorse will be particularly stipulative, because it is arrived at differently. Rather than beginning from interpretations of our uses of the term and moving towards a philosophical analysis, I begin with a clear analysis and argue that it fits well into the framework I have been constructing, and is close enough to common usage not to be misleading.

8.1.2 My analysis of remorse

To capture the difference between regretting our wrongdoing because of its effect on others rather than its effect on ourselves, remorse must take this effect as its object. As a sort of regret, remorse will of course feel bad. This gives us the following starting point:

First analysis: To feel remorse is to take it that someone has been harmed by one's wrongdoing, and to feel bad about this.

Next, we should specify that remorse involves agent-regret. This is because remorse, like agent-regret, is an emotion that a bystander – or someone who regards their own actions in the same way they would regard a bystander's ('purely externally'[106], as Williams puts it) – cannot feel. The key feature of agent-regret is that the agent feels responsible in some way, so this is what needs to be added to the analysis.

By making it explicit that the agent takes themselves to be responsible, we can remove the reference to the agent's own wrongdoing. Usually we feel responsible for wrongdoing because it was our own, but since we can also feel responsible for the wrongdoing of others, remorse for the harms caused by such wrongdoing is intelligible. They aren't paradigm cases of remorse but they are perfectly sensible: if a parent's child destroys another family's treasured heirloom the parent will feel terrible about the distress caused, and will feel differently from the other family's friends and neighbours, because unlike them the parent will feel responsible. Similarly, politicians and citizens can express remorse for atrocities committed by their country in the past, even though they were not personally involved. They are unlikely to feel morally responsible, but may still feel prosaically responsible in a way that would be strange for citizens of other countries to feel.

It is also important that the agent feels responsible for the harm itself, not just the wrongdoing that led to the harm. This is because sometimes harms are caused by wrongdoings while clearly not being the responsibility of the wrongdoer. For instance, if I wager my life savings on whether Andy keeps his promise to Betty I will be harmed if Andy breaks his promise. Andy is responsible for his promise, but he wouldn't feel remorse for what happened to me (unless he takes a strangely broad view of what he is responsible for) because it's not his fault that I made such a foolish bet. I will capture this by saying that remorse involves taking the harm to be wrongful harm, rather than just the result of wrongdoing.

We can also be more specific about the felt affect involved in remorse. The point of remorse is that it is focused on the victim rather than on oneself; however, there are ways of feeling bad about what has happened to someone else that show very little regard for them at all. For example, we can be distressed at the thought of someone's suffering in a way that repels us, and pushes our attention away – as if we were reacting to a taboo violation, or an ugly road-kill. To rule out this sort of feeling, I propose that remorse involves a sympathetic or empathetic feeling. The sympathetic person feels bad *for* the other person, rather than bad *about* them. This shows concern for the other person. It may not show very much, since their sympathy might be pity and they might view themselves as quite superior, but it certainly shows some

106Williams, Moral Luck, p123

concern: the sympathetic person cannot be feeling contemptuous, or indifferent, or repelled by the other person's suffering. The empathetic person feels bad in a way that mirrors how the other person feels. They must therefore pay them some attention or otherwise understand their reaction, so they are not indifferent or repelled, and because of their shared reaction they are not contemptuous either.

These changes give us:

Remorse: To feel remorse is to take it that someone has been wrongly harmed in a way one is responsible for, and to feel bad about this in a sympathetic or empathetic way.

Something should also be said about what harm is taken to be. As with the concept of an ethical self-evaluation involved in shame, the concept of harm involved in remorse has a significance threshold: there is no remorse for a harm taken to be unimportant. The concept of eudaimonia is to be used again to understand how significant the harm must be taken to be. When remorse is felt for a harm, the harm is taken to be significant enough to affect how the victim's life is going. However, as with shame, the agent needn't make such an analysis herself. She only needs to take the harm to be significant to that degree, she doesn't have to literally take the victim's life to be worsened.

That there is some significance threshold on remorse is very clear. No-one feels remorse after their inattentiveness causes them to short-change a customer by ten pence – not unless they are dramatically mistaken about how important ten pence is. That the significance threshold is that of affecting eudaimonia is not so clear, but is supported by the eudaimonia principle defended in Chapter Four: using eudaimonia as the significance threshold for remorse as well has the plausible implication that the consequences of our wrongdoing are significant enough to make remorse fitting if they also matter to how the wronged party should feel.

There is no immediate violence being done to our common usage of the word remorse on my analysis. I have analysed remorse as being felt for the harm an agent is responsible for, and we are happy to speak in that way. For instance, when I am offended by someone who is too cavalier about their behaviour, I can protest that “they show no remorse for the harm they caused!”. And although we are also happy to complain that “they show no remorse for their actions,” this way of talking is still sensible on my account: wrongful actions are well known to cause harm, and emphasising “their actions” emphasises that they are responsible, which is also important to remorse.

Having presented my account of remorse, I will now explain how it fits into the framework provided by the other emotions I have considered, taking them in turn. At the same time, I will argue that distinguishing these emotions from remorse is also not too far from ordinary usage.

8.1.3 Remorse and guilt

I have been positioning remorse as an emotion which shows concern for victims. Guilt is also an emotion which shows concern for victims, when it is felt appropriately. In these cases, guilt shows our concern to provide victims what we owe them. Often this will mean the guilty person wanting to compensate the victim, erasing as much of the harm as they can; other times it will involve wanting to apologise or ask for forgiveness. Because of this, it is unsurprising that those who feel guilty usually also feel bad about the harm that they have caused.

This raises the possibility of seeing remorse as a type of guilt. This would be faithful to common usage: we often take remorse to simply refer to strong guilt, or to feelings of guilt about something serious. So, while we can feel guilty about stealing a stick of gum or about stealing a person's retirement savings, we prefer to say that we feel remorse only about stealing the life savings, not about the stick of gum. My account of remorse also fits well with this aspect of common usage: remorse is a more obviously sensible reaction in the more serious case because it is serious cases that inflict harm, and remorse is felt about harms.

The reason I prefer to analyse remorse as a separate emotion from guilt is that the two emotions can each be felt separately, and can each be appropriate separately. It is therefore simplest to analyse them as two separate emotions.

Guilt is felt without remorse in several cases. First, the agent may feel that they have acted wrongly and ought to apologise without feeling that they have harmed anybody, such as when they have behaved rudely. Second, the agent may feel guilty when they have only harmed themselves, such as when they feel guilty about abandoning their New Year's resolutions. Third, an agent may feel that they have acted wrongly and ought to make amends, but nonetheless might not care much about the harm caused or what it means to the victim. For example, the agent might care about bad karma or divine retribution, rather than the effect on their victim.

Remorse is felt without guilt when the agent feels bad about the harm they have caused but isn't motivated by that feeling to respond somehow. The agent may not feel motivated because they realise there is nothing that can be done. Alternatively,

the remorse they feel could have a paralysing or overwhelming affect on them: if the victim feels overwhelmed and as if nothing could help them, the wrongdoer's empathetic response may leave them overwhelmed too. A very bad person may feel remorse without guilt if they are occasionally able to sympathise with their victims, but fail to realise that their suffering demands a response from them, or fail to be motivated to respond in that way.

As well as both guilt and remorse being sensibly felt on their own, they can each be appropriate on their own too. Appropriate guilt requires wrongdoing serious enough that the victim is owed a response, while remorse requires wrongdoing serious enough to harm the victim. It is clear that there are cases which are serious enough to warrant guilt but not remorse: if you treat somebody very rudely then you will owe them an apology and ought to feel guilty. But even very rude behaviour is not always harmful, especially to someone with a thick skin who is able to shrug it off. Remorse but not guilt is appropriate in a case in which the agent has already responded properly to what they have done, or in which there simply is no appropriate response.

8.1.4 Remorse and regret

When we regret something in the broad sense we take it something has gone or is going in some way wrong or badly, and feel bad about this. We agent-regret something if we also take ourselves to be in some way responsible for it. Remorse is therefore a type of agent-regret. Why not leave the analysis of remorse there? To feel remorse would just be to agent-regret a harm.

A similar case could be made for guilt and shame. Why not analyse guilt as agent-regretting wrongdoing that demands an appropriate response, and shame as agent-regretting one's adverse ethical self-evaluation? These analyses would be misleading because agent-regret admits of too broad a range of felt affect. Agent-regret simply feels bad. But guilt feels negatively motivating: guilt is a spur to action, and we aren’t really feeling guilty unless our feeling is motivating. Similarly, shame is a strong feeling: there is no such thing as feeble, fleeting shame. Remorse also requires a more specific felt affect: agent-regret simply feels bad, but remorse is always a sympathetic or empathetic feeling.

8.1.5 Remorse and shame

I have argued that we can feel ashamed of our actions so long as we take them seriously enough to affect our ethical self-evaluation – typically by taking them to be a stain on our record, or a sign of our vice. It seems just as reasonable to feel ashamed

of the consequences of our actions. Taking someone else's suffering to be seriously bad and one's own responsibility affects our self-evaluation too: it can just as reasonably be seen as a blot on our record, or a sign of our vice. Why consider remorse a distinct emotion from shame of this sort?

I distinguish them because their felt affect can be different. As we have just seen, shame is simply a strongly bad feeling, but remorse must be sympathetic or empathetic. Now, shame is often empathetic, because feeling exposed to the harsh judgements of others is a paradigm shameful feeling, and will often come about as an empathetic awareness of the actual harsh judgements of others. But shame does not have to be empathetic, and a feeling of sympathy would be an unusual way of experiencing shame.

Not only are the felt affects of shame and remorse different, but this difference is importantly relevant to the justification of remorse, and to my project. For as I have explained already, it is important that remorse shows concern for others, whereas shame shows concern for one's own ethical standing.

8.2 Why feel remorse?

8.2.1 Remorse shows respect and concern for victims

I will make an argument from valuing[107] to justify remorse: remorse is a part of what it is to be concerned for those we have wrongly harmed, we ought to be so concerned, and therefore remorse is appropriate.

We ought to be concerned for those we have wrongly harmed because it is disrespectful not to be. Concern is appropriate rather than valuing, because concern does not imply a favourable judgement about them. The victim might be a thoroughly vicious person; we should still be concerned for them and the suffering we have caused them, but we needn't start admiring them.

That we ought to be concerned about those who are suffering because of our wrongdoing is very clear. Perhaps we should simply care about everyone, and our wrongdoing is an occasion on which we ought to show the concern we have for everyone to the victim in particular. Or if that is too demanding, we should become concerned about a person when, and because, we have wrongfully harmed them. Either way, to wrongfully harm a person and then simply not to be concerned for them at all is clearly disrespectful.

107I introduced this form of argument in section 3.5

Because remorse is a way of feeling bad about another person's suffering, it is a way of being emotionally vulnerable to it, and caring about it. It is then a short step from being concerned about a person's suffering to being concerned for the person themselves: normally, one cares about a person's suffering because one cares about them. It would be a peculiar sort of concern if it didn't spread from the suffering to the person suffering. It would be, for example, the concern of someone who just finds the suffering unpleasant and wants it gone for the sake of their own comfort. It is to rule out such peculiar sorts of concern that remorse is limited to sympathetic or empathetic felt affect.

8.2.2 Unemotional reactions are disrespectful to victims

It may be objected that genuine concern does not always involve emotional vulnerability. Instead, concern should be understood as involving accurate judgement and right action. For example, consider a teacher who always takes a lot of time over their marking, grades papers accurately, and offers extra help to pupils who need it. Isn't this a description of a caring teacher, who is concerned about her pupils? Now imagine a wrongdoer who takes a lot of time to think about what he has done, and so is able to form an accurate judgement about the harm he has caused. He then does everything he ought to in response, such as offering compensation. Doesn't he seem to be concerned about his victim? After all, he is paying attention and acting rightly in the same way as the teacher.

The problem with this line of objection is that the cases are under-described. Suppose that I tell you some more about the teacher: she is never pleased, excited, or proud when her students do well. She is never upset, alarmed, or disappointed when her students do badly. She used to experience these reactions when she was new to the profession, but she doesn't any more. Her colleagues all agree that she is highly competent and hard-working, but they also think that she is jaded, that she doesn't care anymore. We are surprised when we add this description to the case, because we learn something new, something that we did not expect from the description of her actions. We learn that she doesn't really care about her students, she only acts like she does. The case of the wrongdoer is under-described in this same way. If we learn that he doesn't feel the least bit of remorse, nor any other sort of bad feeling, we are surprised. He acts like a person who cares, but he doesn't really.

However, I do not need to prove that a person who lacks emotional vulnerability lacks concern entirely. It is enough for my argument that emotional vulnerability makes an important difference to concern. We might put this by allowing that the teacher and wrongdoer are concerned, but less concerned than they should be. We should

acknowledge that the teacher and the wrongdoer are getting something right: they are doing the right things, and this is very important. But they are also missing something important. This is particularly clear in the case of the wrongdoer: someone else is suffering, it is their fault, and they know it; but still they don't feel bad. They are especially vulnerable to the charge that they don't care. While the teacher can reply that they always act correctly, and this shows that they care, this reply sounds hollow coming from the wrongdoer. They may now be acting correctly, but really they ought not to have harmed their victim in the first place.

8.2.3 Alternatives to remorse can be disrespectful to victims

The main reason that remorse is preferable to other ways of feeling bad is that remorse clearly shows concern for the victim as well as just the harm caused to them, because of its sympathetic or empathetic affect. As I explained in section 8.1.2, this sort of affect rules out the unusual cases in which a person may feel bad about the harm they have caused in a way that doesn't show concern for the victim. Since agent-regret and shame do not necessarily involve a sympathetic or empathetic feeling, they may fail to show proper respect and concern for the victim if remorse is not felt alongside them.

However, it is also worth considering whether a more neutral or positive feeling could show the wrongdoer's concern for their victim. Consider a case like this:

Richard is a vicious gossip. He betrays people's confidences and spreads lies and half-truths, stirring up trouble just because it amuses him. In one recent incident, he has gone much too far and a rumour he started has destroyed his friend Megan's marriage. Richard feels guilty, and comes clean, but this is not enough to save the marriage. Richard knows he has done Megan a great harm; but he also thinks that she is a good person and will surely be able to find someone else, and will one day be happy again. So, rather than feeling sorry for her, he confidently and hopefully looks forward to her future happiness.

Could Richard's response be appropriate? It is not fanciful: he is aware of the harm he has done, and we can suppose that his prediction that Megan will recover is correct. He doesn't seem to disregard Megan either, so long as we imagine he wants Megan to be happy for her own sake. Indeed, in so far as the basis for his hopefulness is that he admires Megan's good character, his attitude may appear respectful.

Our opinion of Richard should be determined by a further feature of the case: how does Megan feel about all this? If Megan also manages to feel a hopeful and confident anticipation of her future happiness, and if Richard knows this and is empathising with her, then Richard's reaction is acceptable. In these circumstances, the way he feels is

respectful because he is sensitive to Megan's feelings, and because his attitude is supportive of hers. If Megan felt confident and hopeful, and Richard knew this, but still felt unhopeful and terribly sorry for her, this would be a condescending attitude and in that way disrespectful and inappropriate (since, in the case we are imagining, Megan is right to be confident).

On the other hand, if Megan feels devastated, then it is inappropriate and cavalier for Richard to disregard that and feel ambitious and hopeful for her future happiness. Even though Richard's confidence is fitting, it is disrespectful for him to disregard the way Megan actually feels. After all, it is also fitting for Megan to be devastated: her marriage is over and this is very bad for her, despite what she may have to look forward to. If Richard is insensitive to this, his reaction is disrespectful because it does not show the right sort of concern for her. He ought to be feeling remorse, either instead of or as well as feeling hopeful.

If Megan's reaction is ambivalent – if she is very upset but also feels some hope, for instance – then it is appropriate for Richard to feel an ambivalent remorse. It would be disrespectful for him not to feel remorse, because Megan still feels, quite sensibly, bad about the harm Richard has caused her. But since Megan is also feeling hopeful, it would still be condescending if Richard felt completely hopeless about the harm he's caused her, since Megan's hopefulness is fitting.

The same considerations apply for more muted or neutral reactions, such as acceptance. Megan might come to regard the breakup of her marriage as something bad, but still make peace with it. If she does, then it is appropriate for Richard to regard things the same way: this is what would be most respectful to Megan. What would be disrespectful is for Richard to accept what has happened even though Megan is still devastated, and reasonably so.

In all these cases it seems important that Richard is sensitive to the way Megan feels. It may also be important that the way Megan feels is not inappropriate – if it were, perhaps Richard oughtn't to be sensitive to it. Are these the deciding factors in general?

Consider a variant in which Megan still feels devastated, even though it is clear to us and to Richard that feeling so bad is inappropriate, and feeling acceptance would be appropriate. For example, imagine that many years have passed, she has remarried, and most things are now going well for her. If things are going so well that it would be wrong to say that Richard had harmed her, remorse would no longer be appropriate. If things were that way, Megan would seem deluded, and Richard oughtn't to feel bad

about causing harm that he hasn't in fact caused. However, this is extremely unlikely to be an accurate description of the case. If Megan is devastated about the break up of her first marriage, her life seems to be going badly for the very reason that she is devastated; the fact that her feeling so bad is an inappropriate over-reaction doesn't change this. If this is how things are, there is still a strong case that Richard ought to feel remorse: Megan is still suffering because of his wrongdoing, she still feels bad, and he ought to be concerned by this. His feeling acceptance or hope without feeling any remorse is still to disrespectfully disregard how Megan is feeling. It may be objected here that it is unfair to Richard to describe Megan as suffering because of his wrongdoing. If she is only suffering because of her inappropriate reaction, maybe it is fairer to say that she is suffering only because of her feeling, which may no longer be Richard's fault. This is what the case turns on: if Megan is doing badly because of Richard's wrongdoing, so that Richard is responsible for it, and if Megan feels bad about it, then Richard should feel remorse. If Megan is doing badly for a different reason, remorse is not appropriate for Richard. So long as Megan is really wrongfully harmed by what Richard did, Richard ought to be sensitive to Megan's feeling bad about what has happened, even if Megan's reaction is inappropriate.

What of a case in which Megan feels hopeful or accepting, but where it is clear that this is an inappropriate reaction? For example, suppose she is hopeful not of finding happiness in a new marriage, but instead hopeful that she will remarry her first partner, even though it is clear that this is never going to happen. Her hope is grounded in utter delusion; her friends would be less worried about her if she were sad. In this case, remorse is still called for. It is no longer condescending for Richard to feel sorry for Megan, because her hopefulness is no longer a sensible response. Perhaps Richard might reasonably feel hopeful in a different way to Megan, but until Megan is in that position as well, feeling no remorse alongside such hopefulness disregards the bad position Richard has put Megan in, and is disrespectful. If Megan were upset because of what Richard did, it would be one of the ways in which his action affected her badly. Megan's inappropriate hope is also an adverse effect of Richard's wrongdoing, so he should respond to it in the same way.

8.3 When is remorse appropriate?

8.3.1 Remorse and suffering

Remorse is appropriate if the victim is suffering, if this is the wrongdoer's responsibility, and if the victim either actually feels bad, ought to feel bad, or would reasonably be believed to feel bad. If the victim is not suffering because of the wrong, then remorse is not appropriate because to feel remorse would be a mistaken over-

reaction. If the victim is suffering, but feels acceptance or hopefulness in a way that is not inappropriate, and the wrongdoer knows this, then remorse is not appropriate because it would be a condescending reaction. A wrongdoer shows the most respect and concern for the victim if their reaction is sensitive to the victim's reaction.

For my purposes here, whether a victim has been harmed or is suffering because of a wrong depends on whether the wrong has adversely affected their eudaimonia. This comes down to whether their life, seen as a whole, is made worse by the occurrence of the wrong. Often this will depend on the context: An isolated insult, even if very rude, does not usually worsen a person's life. Remorse would not be appropriate; though guilt would, as they would be owed an apology. But if the same insult is a part of a pattern of bullying or harassment, it may worsen the person's life; remorse would then be appropriate.

For this reason of context, remorse will often be appropriate soon after an offence, but will later cease to be appropriate. If a person is assaulted in public, it is likely to shake their faith in other people and make them anxious. But their faith and confidence will, probably, be recovered, assuming they are not assaulted again. Once enough time has passed that they, and we, can be confident it was an isolated incident with no lasting ill-effect, and not significant when viewing their life as a whole, they are no longer suffering. At this point, remorse is no longer appropriate.

However, some serious wrongs are enough to worsen one's life as a whole on their own, no matter the context; they will never be fully recovered from. If a person is murdered, their life is a worse one simply because it ended that way. If a painter's greatest creations are destroyed by a vandal, the painter's life goes worse for this. Hopefully they will produce excellent paintings again one day, but even if they do, it will always be true that their life would have been better but for the destruction of their previous works.

For wrongdoing this serious, remorse may be appropriate for the wrongdoer's whole life. If the victim is never able to accept what has happened, it will be. But if the victim can accept what has happened, and if that acceptance is not inappropriate, then the wrongdoer should accept it too. This is because the reason remorse is appropriate is the respect and concern it shows for the victim. To accept a harm that the victim does not shows a lack of concern because of its insensitivity to the victim's feeling. But this is no objection to accepting a harm together with the victim. That remorse might be appropriate for an agent's whole life is demanding, but not too demanding, because it would not be the case that the agent ought to feel constant remorse, every second of every day. They ought to feel remorse on the right sort of occasions and often enough

that it would always be true to say of them dispositionally that they feel remorse, but not so often that they never feel anything else.

It might be objected that making the appropriateness of remorse contingent on how the victim happens to react in this way makes it a matter of luck. Of two wrongdoers who no longer feel remorse, and who did the same thing wrong with the same effect on two different victims, only one might be blameworthy for their lack of remorse, if only one of the victims was able to accept what happened. My view does have this implication, but I am not troubled by it. How demanding it is to act rightly clearly depends on the context: you and I might go for the same walk by the same lake, but if there is only a child drowning on the day I go for the walk, only I am required to ruin my suit while attempting a rescue. This is bad luck for me, but it shouldn't undermine the intuition that I ought to attempt the rescue. The remorse case is analogous. If a lot of remorse is required of a wrongdoer because their victim was particularly frail, that is bad luck – for them, and for the victim – but that it is bad luck shouldn't undermine our belief that they ought to feel remorse.

Doesn't this response undermine the sense in which remorse is the appropriate response for wrongful harms that are one's responsibility? Just as Andy shouldn't feel remorse when I lose my life savings because of his broken promise, since it wasn't his fault, other wrongdoers shouldn't feel remorse when bad luck means that harms befall the victim for which they are not responsible. This much is correct, but the purpose of this condition was to rule out bizarre cases like Andy's, not to explain just how much remorse should be felt in an ordinary case. What we are interested in, ordinarily, is whether the wrongdoer is right to see the harm suffered as wrongful harm, and whether they are responsible for it, either morally or just prosaically. In most cases, this is true of the unlucky portion of a harm caused by wrongdoing. When Megan's marriage is ruined after Richard's gossip, this may be one of the worst possible outcomes, but it is still wrongful harm, and he is still responsible for it, so remorse is still appropriate.

Another objection is that actually being sensitive to the feelings of one's victim is often creepy or intrusive. If you are my friend and I have wronged you, it is reasonable for me to keep track of how you are feeling. But if you are a stranger to me, it would usually be better for me to butt out! This point can be accommodated: if the wrongdoer doesn't *know* how the victim is doing, and oughtn't to try to find ought, then they should feel remorse according to how we would reasonably *expect* the victim to be doing. This is the best way to be sensitive to the victim's feelings when one is not aware of them.

8.3.2 Summary

Remorse is appropriate because it is part of being properly concerned for the victims of our wrongdoing. Appropriate remorse is sensitive to the suffering and feelings of the victim: we should feel remorse if the victim is both suffering and feeling badly, or if they are suffering and clearly ought to feel bad. If the victim recovers, so that we would no longer say their life was made worse by our wrongdoing, then remorse is no longer appropriate. If the victim is able to accept what has happened to them (and if this acceptance is not inappropriate) then remorse is no longer appropriate. If the wrongdoer knows whether the victim is suffering and how they are feeling, their remorse should be sensitive to the victim's actual state. If the wrongdoer doesn't know, then their remorse should instead be sensitive to how the victim would reasonably be expected to be doing.

Part Three: Problem Cases

Chapter 9: The easy answer revisited

9.1 Overview of part two

9.1.1 Four emotional responses to wrongdoing

I have so far defended analyses of four emotions: guilt, shame, regret and remorse.

Guilt: To feel guilty is to take oneself to have acted wrongly, to feel bad about this, and to be negatively motivated to respond somehow to what one has done.

Shame: To feel shame is to take an adverse ethical view of oneself, and to feel strongly bad about it.

Regret: To feel regret is to take it that something has gone or is going in some way wrong or badly, and to feel bad about it. If one also takes oneself to be in some way responsible for what one regrets, one feels agent-regret.

Remorse: To feel remorse is to take it that someone has been wrongly harmed in a way one is responsible for, and to feel bad about this in a sympathetic or empathetic way.

The purpose of these analyses is to distinguish sharply between the different ways we can feel bad about our wrongdoing, since these will be appropriate in different circumstances and for different reasons. It is clear that my analyses of guilt, shame and remorse describe ways we can actually feel and which are actually distinct. There is a straightforward difference between bad feelings that motivate us somehow, those that focus on our self-evaluation, and those that concern the suffering of others. In turn, each of these are more specific than simply feeling regret.

It might be objected that the price of this conceptual clarity is to stray too far from ordinary use. Do our ordinary claims about guilt, shame and remorse really imply that everyone feeling guilty is motivated somehow, that shame always involves an ethical evaluation, or that remorse is always about the harm we have caused? There are two responses to be made here. First, the analyses can be defended as faithful to ordinary use because they classify cases correctly. This was a large part of my defence of the

analyses in Part Two. Second, the purpose of the analyses is to provide a clear conceptual framework for my normative arguments. This does not require complete faithfulness to ordinary usage: if ordinary usage is sometimes muddled, a revisionary way of thinking will be more useful, so long as it is not so revisionary as to mislead us by distorting our intuitions. My analyses are not misleading in this way. We have all experienced the emotions I have described. We have all felt an uncomfortable motivation to apologise for something we did wrong, we have all had strong, unpleasant feelings about our failures or vices, and we have all felt sorry about hurting somebody. By attending to these real experiences as well as our linguistic intuitions, we will not be mislead.

9.1.2 Why feel bad?

I have argued that each of these emotions is appropriate in the right circumstances.

Guilt is appropriate after wrongdoing if a response is owed to somebody else, because in such a case it would be disrespectful not to feel guilty. Once the agent has responded properly, further guilt is no longer appropriate. Guilt is not appropriate if no-one else is owed a response – for example after slight or self-regarding wrongdoing – because respectfulness doesn't require guilt in these cases.

Shame is the appropriate response to serious wrongdoing or vice. In such cases feeling shame is a part of what it is for the agent to value their ethical standing and to maintain an attitude of self-respect. In response to a less serious failing feelings of ambition, acceptance or regret can acceptably take the place of shame, so shame is not appropriate. Shame is less likely to be appropriate if the agent lacked control over their action or is unable to do anything to address their vice. This is because lacking control in this way often means that the agent's failing is less serious.

Remorse is the appropriate response to the harm caused by wrongdoing, and is part of being properly concerned for the victims of our wrongdoing. Remorse ought to be sensitive to the suffering and feelings of the victim: the agent should feel remorse if the victim is both suffering and feeling bad, or if they are suffering and clearly ought to feel bad. Harms serious enough to worsen the victim's life irrevocably will make remorse appropriate until the victim is able to accept what has happened, or if the victim cannot accept what has happened, forever.

Regret is the broadest emotion I have analysed. Someone who feels guilt, shame or remorse will also be feeling regret, because taking ourselves to have acted wrongly, failed ethically, or harmed someone are all ways of taking something to have gone

badly. Regret is therefore appropriate if guilt, shame or remorse is appropriate. Regret can also be an appropriate middle ground between the strong reaction of shame and the mild reactions of acceptance or ambition. When regret is appropriate in this way, the reason to feel regret is based on the same consideration that provided a reason for us to act correctly in the first place. If the consideration and our ignoring it could affect how our life goes, then that matters to how we should feel.

9.2 Easy cases explained

We are now in a position to defend and make rigorous the easy answer. The easy answer is that after you have acted wrongly you should feel bad, and the worse your wrongdoing, the worse you should feel. Then, you should return to normal feeling, either after reacting properly, or simply after enough time passes. I shall first apply the arguments of Part Two to an ordinary case where the easy answer seems to do well, to show that my position provides an explanation of the easy answer. This step will defend the easy answer from the worry that feeling bad is pointless, and will develop it into a more detailed account. The second step is to use my position to resolve the problem cases. Because my account explains the easy cases while also resolving the problem cases, we have good reason to endorse it.

Suppose Sue has broken her promise to Peter. Should she feel bad? This will depend on the details of the case, particularly on how important the promise was, what effect her breaking it had on Peter, and whether Sue is a faithful or unfaithful person generally.

If the promise was important enough then Sue will owe Peter some response. For example, if Sue had promised to repay money Peter had loaned her in time for him to pay his tax bill, but carelessly forgot to do so, landing Peter with a fine for late payment, then she ought to cover Peter's fine as well as just paying back the loan. Because Sue owes Peter a response, she ought to feel guilty. Not to feel that way would be disrespectful to Peter. On the other hand, if Sue's promise-breaking had no important effect – for example, if she promised to repay Peter by Friday, forgot, and promptly repaid him on Saturday morning, causing him no inconvenience – then she doesn't owe Peter a response to her wrongdoing, and so guilt is not appropriate. This is the result we expect: we agree that there's no need to feel guilty over every little thing we get wrong, but we do expect people to feel guilty in more serious cases. My account explains this: it is only in important cases that we owe somebody a response, and it is only when we do owe somebody a response that feeling guilty is required by reasons of respect.

The effect of breaking the promise is the main factor affecting whether or not remorse is appropriate: if Sue has made Peter's life turn for the worse, if she had caused him to suffer, then she ought to feel remorse, because she ought to be concerned about Peter after causing him harm. It's unlikely for her broken promise to have this sort of effect on Peter; small costs such as being fined by the tax office tend not to worsen our lives. But it is possible: imagine that Sue's late repayment means that Peter cannot service his mortgage, so that he loses his family home. In that extreme case, Sue should feel remorse. We can also imagine cases of broken promises that damage relationships, and worsen lives in that way; this is the sort of promise-breaking that we would call a betrayal. If Sue and Peter are close friends, but their friendship is badly damaged by her promise-breaking, then Sue ought to feel remorse. Once again, this is what we expect: it sounds odd to say that someone should feel remorse for a broken promise, but in a particularly serious case we agree that they should.

To decide whether shame is appropriate, we should consider both Sue's character and the seriousness of what has happened. If Sue is a thoroughly vicious liar shame will be appropriate. Such a vice is a serious failing, and if Sue is to maintain an attitude of self-respect and continue to care about her ethical standing, she must feel ashamed of such a failing. Sue should feel ashamed of her vice whether or not the particular promise made to Peter was an important one or not. Thinking of the particular promise, Sue should feel ashamed of breaking it if it is important enough to be considered a serious ethical failing on its own – serious enough that it would call into doubt Sue's self-respect or concern for living well if she were not ashamed of it. On the other hand, if the particular promise is not very serious, and if Sue broke her promise through the sort of occasional absent-mindedness that is an inescapable human frailty, shame is clearly an over-reaction. Sue should simply accept that she will never be perfect, and understand that her failing in this case is a small one. Between these two extremes are cases in which Sue is only a little vicious. For example, she might be generally an honest person, but with the tendency to make promises too lightly and to back out of them when she realises she oughtn't really have made them. Or she might have good intentions but frequently suffer from weakness of will regarding her promises. In these cases ambition or regret will be more appropriate than shame, unless Sue's small vice is very longstanding. This is what we expect: as with remorse, shame seems too strong a reaction for most cases of promise-breaking, but does seem appropriate if we imagine a very serious case, or if we imagine someone who is thoroughly unfaithful.

The account of Part Two also explains how long Sue should feel bad. Intuitively, we are confident that Sue should not feel bad forever, but we aren't sure how long she should feel bad for, or what determines when she should return to normal feeling. By considering the different ways in which Sue might feel bad and the reasons for them,

we can provide a clearer picture.

If guilt is appropriate for Sue, it will be for as long as she still owes a response to Peter. Once she has acted as she ought to, guilt is no longer appropriate. This means that if Sue reacts to her broken promise properly guilt will not be appropriate for very long (unless the response she owes Peter is difficult to carry out). Guilt will also cease to be appropriate if Peter chooses to forgive her and release her from her obligations to him. If Sue doesn't respond appropriately and Peter doesn't forgive her, then guilt will be appropriate for as long as she still owes Peter the response. Just how long this will be will depend on our account of what people are owed and why. One plausible option is that duties of recompense come with an expiry date. If Sue breaks her promise to repay Peter £5, once many years have passed it may not be true anymore to say that she ought to repay him. In this case, when Sue no longer owes Peter the money she no longer ought to feel guilty. Another plausible view is that even after many years have passed Sue still owes Peter the money, but it is no longer very important whether she returns it. In this case, she ought not to feel guilty, because her wrongdoing in continuing to keep the money is no longer serious enough. Both of these implications are plausible.

If remorse is appropriate for Sue, it will be until either Peter recovers or until he is able to accept what has happened. This will depend on the details of the case, but in general the worse the effect of Sue's broken promises, the longer remorse will be appropriate. If shame is appropriate because of Sue's vice, then she ought to feel ashamed until she is able to reform her character. If shame is appropriate because this particular promise-breaking was a very serious matter, then it will be appropriate for as long as this is true. This will depend on how the broken-promise fits into Sue's life: if she becomes and remains a virtuous, faithful person and puts her promise-breaking behind her, this makes the promises she broke less serious for her. We all sometimes fail to act as we should, but most failings, even quite serious ones, can be recovered from, and once one has recovered it is not appropriate still to evaluate oneself poorly.

In a case where guilt, shame and remorse are all appropriate, the fact that those different responses will be appropriate for different lengths of time explains our intuition that we ought to feel gradually less bad, until our bad feeling fades out. Suppose Sue acted viciously, destroying her friendship with Peter, and that she owed him an apology – a real, sincere apology, not just an admission of wrongdoing. At first, she ought to feel guilty, ashamed of herself, and remorseful for hurting Peter. If she apologises quickly, she oughtn't to feel guilty for long; however, if the apology cannot save the friendship, she still ought to feel remorse, and if she is still vicious, she still ought to feel ashamed. Seeing what her unfaithfulness can cause, Sue might work

hard to change her character. Once she has made enough progress at this that she has good reason to feel confident and ambitious, she oughtn't to feel ashamed any longer. But Sue's self-improvement doesn't mean Peter feels any better, so remorse is still appropriate. Once Peter recovers (or, if they are no longer in touch, once it would be reasonable to expect that Peter had recovered) then Sue oughtn't to feel remorse. It is true that, overall, Sue ought to feel less bad over time; this is because she has less to feel bad about. But it was not automatic or guaranteed that this would be the case: it depended on Sue responding well, improving herself, and on Peter being able to recover.

Chapter 10: Problem Cases

I will now consider two sorts of problem case. I will in each case explain why they are puzzling, present the resolution of them that my account provides, and then argue that this resolution is acceptable. There are two payoffs here: first, we learn what is appropriate in the problem cases. Second, showing that my account can resolve the problem cases provides further reason to endorse it.

10.1 The out-of-character killing

The first sort of problem case I will consider is one in which an agent has done something very badly wrong, but in which there is little to be done about it. The agent cannot do much to make up for what they have done because the wrongdoing is irreversible and not suitable to be compensated for. They don't need to do much to reform themselves, because their action is out-of-character:

Smith is an ordinarily decent person. He's no moral saint, but nobody would finger him as particularly vicious either. One day he witnesses a driver lose control of his vehicle outside a school, narrowly missing a child before crashing into a tree. Smith goes to help the driver and finds him reeking of alcohol. Smith, enraged, strikes the driver on the head with a nearby rock, killing him. When they find out what happened, Smith's friends are horrified. They can hardly believe it: such a violent outburst is completely unlike Smith.

Smith has clearly done something very badly wrong. It was reasonable to be angry at the driver, but obviously not to react by killing him. However, if we elaborate a little further on a few details, surprisingly little action is required by Smith. Suppose Smith's victim was a lonely man who left behind no friends or family. Smith isn't required to apologise or make amends to the victim; this is impossible now that he is dead. Since there are no family or friends in the picture, Smith cannot be required to apologise or make amends to them either. Smith can turn himself in to the police, and apologise to his own friends and family, but that seems to be all there is to do in direct response to the killing. Similarly, with a few further assumptions we can see that there is not much that Smith needs to do to reform his character and assure us he will not re-offend. We already know that Smith isn't generally prone to violence or excessive anger. Suppose also that Smith finds the killing itself viscerally unpleasant, that he realises how wrong it was straight away, resolves immediately never to do anything like it again, and that he does indeed turn himself in. If we knew all this, we would be confident that Smith will not kill again.

This is a problem case for the easy answer. We are confident that Smith should feel very bad, because his wrongdoing is so serious. But we are puzzled when it comes to

how long Smith should feel bad for. On the one hand, we think bad feeling should be connected to action, but everything Smith ought to do comes so quickly and easily that for him to return to normal feeling as a result seems too quick. On the other hand, the thought that Smith should feel bad forever, or for a very long time, is troubling if we cannot explain when and why normal feeling will be appropriate again (or why it never will be). It also appears disconnected to action, and prompts the worry that feeling bad is just futile, pointless suffering.

My account will resolve this difficulty by connecting some, but not all, of what Smith should be feeling to the actions he ought to take in response to his wrongdoing, and by providing an explanation of how he ought to feel in the longer term.

10.1.1 Guilt, Shame, Regret and Remorse in Smith's case

What does my account mean for Smith? In the immediate aftermath, many very intense feelings will be required of Smith. He ought to feel intense guilt. While there is not much Smith can do in response to the killing, it is very important that he does it. He also won't initially know that the driver has no family or friends. Just as important from the start will be an intense remorse: killing the stranger obviously causes them great and wrongful harm.

Smith will also be required at first to feel some intense shame. First, he has wrongly killed the driver, and even if this is completely uncharacteristic of Smith it is still a very significant failing. Secondly, while we can describe the case so that it is clear that Smith will be able to avoid future killing, this is not so transparently true for Smith, and so he should consider carefully whether the killing reveals something about himself: perhaps he has a hidden streak of wrath that he wasn't aware of before. For as long as this worry is reasonable, shame about it is appropriate because it is such a serious matter.

That so many intense and differently focused emotions are required of Smith in the immediate aftermath of his action is why we would expect him to be more or less a wreck at first. It also explains why our strongest intuition about the case is just that he should feel very bad.

How does the reaction required of Smith change as time passes?

If, after the killing, Smith acts as he should then he will be able to respond appropriately fairly soon. At this point, it will no longer be the case that he ought to feel guilty, because that would be for him to feel as if there were some further

response required of him which in fact there is not. Similarly, he will fairly swiftly be able to ensure and recognise that he will not commit any further killings. At this point, Smith can confidently judge that he does not have a murderous or wrathful character, and so shouldn't feel ashamed about his character anymore.

However, Smith still ought to be ashamed of what he has done. A wrongful killing like Smith's is a serious failure even if it is an isolated incident. Smith should continue to be ashamed of it, for so long as it is serious enough that it would call into doubt Smith's self-respect or concern for his ethical standing if he did not. Whether Smith could live the rest of his life well enough that it would one day be appropriate for him to accept what he did, or soften his attitude to regret rather than shame, is a difficult question. It is plausible that the answer is no; the issue turns on what it takes for Smith to maintain proper self-respect and concern for how his life goes.

The impact on the driver of being killed by Smith is permanent. He is dead, and so possibly beyond being affected at all. Even if one can be helped or harmed after one's death, it remains clear that nothing that occurs after the driver's death will make it true that he wasn't seriously harmed by Smith. Similarly, because he has been killed, the driver will not be able to accept what has happened to him (and nor would we expect him to if that were possible). Therefore, Smith will always be required to feel remorse.

10.1.2 Advantages of my account of Smith's case

The first advantage of my account is that the emotions it considers appropriate for Smith focus his attention on what is most important to him. Smith's case is an unusual case: he has done something seriously wrong with severe consequences, but he doesn't seem like a deeply vicious person, and there doesn't seem to be much to be done about it afterwards. On my account, in the medium term, Smith ought to feel remorseful and ashamed of what he has done, and so ought to be attentive to what he has done and the consequences it has had, particularly for the driver. But Smith ought not to feel guilty or ashamed of his character in the medium term, and so ought not to be focusing his attention on what there is to be done about the murder or on his character flaws. This distribution of attention, while it seems unusual at first, matches the unusual details of the case. Were Smith to feel guilty for longer, or ashamed of his character, he would be distracted by emotions that are unfitting in his case.

My account also finds a balance between our different intuitions about Smith's case: our confidence that he ought to feel very bad, and our worry that his feeling bad may be futile. It does so by expecting Smith to feel very bad, and for a long time, but

explaining that it is important that Smith feels bad in the right way.

My account does not allow Smith to ever fully leave behind what he did, because remorse, and perhaps shame for what he has done, will always be required of him. Smith must in these ways acknowledge and feel the weight of what he has done, and our confidence that he ought to feel very bad is vindicated. By focusing on these particular responses we can explain why they are not futile or pointless: they are required because Smith ought to be concerned for the driver, and for how his own life has gone. Smith can feel these emotions at the same time as recognising it is too late to do anything about them, because they are focused on what has happened, and the consequences of it.

On the other hand, my account does not require Smith to feel guilty, or ashamed of his character, except in the short term. This is because these feelings would be futile in Smith's case. We ought to feel guilty when we owe somebody a response for what we have done, because not to feel guilty in such a case would be disrespectful to them. Smith (once he has turned himself in) is not in such a case. There is nothing for him to do, so to be painfully trying to do something would be futile. We ought to feel ashamed of our character when it is bad, and when there is something we ought to do about that. But Smith's character is not bad, and once he is in a position to be confident of that, there is no reason for him to feel otherwise. This makes my account in a sense freeing for Smith: he is not required to torture himself with unfitting bad feelings that would spur him towards impossible responses. But we can make this point without letting him off the hook, because we are still in a position to insist, with good reason, that he feel remorse.

10.1.3 Objections to my account of Smith's case

I have claimed that Smith oughtn't to feel guilty for very long, (so long as he swiftly turns himself in). This is an odd-looking result. Is it really correct?

Part of this apparent oddness may arise because my analysis of guilt is of a narrower, more focused emotion than we might have expected. On a broader analysis of guilt, for instance of simply feeling bad about having acted wrongly, the remorse that my account requires of Smith would qualify as guilt. This part of the oddness is not problematic for my account. My analysis of guilt is narrow and somewhat revisionary, as revealed in Smith's case, but this is warranted because the added detail does capture something ethically important: whether we feel spurred to respond appropriately to what we have done. In many cases responding appropriately and simply feeling bad, for example by feeling regret, is not enough. The agent also ought

to feel driven to respond appropriately, which is to feel guilt as I have analysed it. This was the substance of my objection to Harman's arguments against guilt in Chapter Five.

Another part of the oddness is just the oddness of Smith's case, and this is also benign. Usually, when one has done something badly wrong, the proper response cannot be completed so quickly or easily. For example, were the driver to have had family and friends, Smith would have been required to apologise to them and perhaps to try to explain himself or seek forgiveness. This would not have been a simple matter or something that could be dealt with quickly; Smith would have to carefully consider what to say and how to approach them in order not to make things worse. If the family were to ask something reasonable of him – perhaps to do some work for the driver's favourite charity – Smith would have to do that too. Only once Smith had done everything he ought to in response would it be appropriate for him to stop feeling guilty.

The final part of the oddness is that, in a case of such a serious crime, it is better to err on the side of too much bad feeling rather than too little, which makes any suspicion of letting Smith off too lightly seem suspect. For Smith not to feel extremely bad after killing the driver would be highly vicious and something that we would condemn. For Smith to feel worse than is actually appropriate would be a much less serious vice, and we would be unlikely to criticise him much at all for this. This part of the oddness is relieved by attending to my whole account, which requires Smith to feel remorse and shame. These things considered, we can confidently say that guilt isn't required in Smith's case except as a short term response.

A related objection is that my account seems to make guilt less appropriate for more serious crimes. If Smith had only badly wounded the driver, leaving him hospitalised, this would not be so bad as killing him, but Smith would have been required to feel very guilty for a long period. Worse, this Smith could then get out of the requirement feeling guilty by killing the driver at a later date – because once he is dead, Smith doesn't owe him anything! My response is that it is only reasonable to expect more serious crimes to warrant more guilt if guilt is taken as a broad, catch-all emotional response to one's crime. But I am not taking guilt that way, and with good reason. We can consider on my account whether more serious crimes warrant more bad feeling by considering regret, which I understand to include guilt, shame, and remorse, as well as other ways of feeling bad. This gives the correct result that Smith ought to feel worse about killing the driver: while less guilt is required in this case, more remorse and more shame are required, and will be required for longer. The changes in remorse and shame are more significant, because these attend to what has been done, and the

harm it has caused, and we think that these are the more significant aspects of the situation, which ought to feature most prominently in Smith's emotional response.

On the other hand, it might be objected that my account asks for too much bad feeling from Smith, with no end in sight, because of the requirement for Smith to feel remorse forever. Despite the severity of what has occurred, we want Smith to be in some sense able to move on and live the rest of his life virtuously. Unending remorse seems to make this a difficult prospect.

To deal with this objection we must remember that feeling remorse forever doesn't mean feeling remorse constantly. It is not the case that in his every waking moment Smith ought to be feeling remorse. Not only would this be far more than would be required to show respect and concern for the driver, it would also crowd out other emotions that Smith ought to feel. The claim that remorse will always be appropriate for Smith is instead the claim that there won't come a point after which it is true that Smith oughtn't to feel any more remorse for the killing. This allows that sometimes Smith should feel not remorse but something else, or that sometimes Smith oughtn't to feel anything in particular. Over the long term Smith ought to feel remorse periodically, at times when nothing more urgent is demanding his attention, and certainly when he directs his attention towards what happened. Remorse should be a part of Smith's life, but it oughtn’t to prevent Smith from living the rest of it well.

Finally, it might be objected that I focus too much on remorse, in a way that makes my account hostage to some particular details of Smith's case. I've argued that remorse is appropriate only if we have wrongly harmed somebody, or at least have good reason to think that we did. But suppose we adjust the case so that killing the driver is not to harm him, or at least not to harm him very much. We can imagine that the reason he was drunk-driving is that he hoped he would be killed in an accident, that his life was going so poorly that he really did have good reason to want to die, and that Smith would realise this because of a suicide note left in his glove-compartment. Alternatively, suppose that the driver was already fatally wounded in the crash, so that he would have died anyway. If Smith really had killed the driver without harming him very much, he oughtn't to feel very much remorse on my account. But is this the right result?

First of all, we should keep in mind that Smith still ought to feel very bad on my account. He still wrongfully killed the driver, and that is still a serious ethical failing that he ought to be ashamed of for a long time, until his coming to accept what he did or to only regret it would be consistent with his self-respect and his concern about his ethical standing. This doesn't fully address the objection though, because remorse is a

big part of what Smith is feeling, and so a Smith who didn't feel much remorse would be feeling significantly less bad. However, this change is appropriate if Smith really didn't harm the driver very much. In support of this view, imagine how we would expect Smith to feel if he discovers in the glove compartment not a suicide note, but a picture of the driver with his three young children. Isn't it appropriate for this discovery to make Smith feel worse? This is explained by my account of remorse: Smith ought to be concerned for the driver's children as well as the driver himself, so he should feel remorse for the harm caused to them as well. The consequences of Smith's action are very important, and the worse they are, the worse he should feel.

10.2 Cases involving luck

I have in mind cases of what Nagel calls resultant luck, particularly where the agent's wrongdoing is modest, but will nonetheless have serious consequences if they are unlucky. I will draw on Nagel's example of a parent who leaves their child briefly unattended in the bath:

'If one negligently leaves the bath running with the baby in it, one will realize, as one bounds up the stairs toward the bathroom, that if the baby has drowned one has done something awful, whereas if it has not one has merely been careless.'[108]

How is the parent to feel about this? On the one hand, we expect the parent to feel drastically worse if the baby is drowned (not only because they will be grief-stricken, but because they will blame themselves more). But on the other hand, since the parent was just as careless even if their baby is unharmed, we feel uncomfortably pressured to say that they should blame themselves the same amount, however the case turns out.

10.2.1 My account applied to moral luck cases

Once again, I approach these cases by distinguishing the different ways in which the parent could feel bad about what they have done.

First of all, if the parent is unlucky and their baby drowns, they should feel a great deal of remorse, because they have greatly harmed their child. Even though the outcome is unlucky, they have wrongfully harmed their baby and they are responsible for this. However, the lucky parent, whose baby was not drowned, oughtn't to feel this remorse, because their baby wasn't harmed.

108Nagel, Thomas, 'Moral Luck', in his *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 24-38. p31

How much shame is appropriate will also depend on how things turn out. This is because having negligently drowned one's baby is a terrible thing to have done, and if that is what has happened the parent ought to be very ashamed of it. Having risked drowning one's baby is also a serious matter, but not to the same extent. What it means for the parent's life depends on its context: if it is part of a pattern of bad parenting it makes the parent's life much worse. If it is an isolated mistake quickly learnt from, the parent's life doesn't seem marred by it. If the baby is safe, the event seems like a shock that can be recovered from. This is the sense in which Nagel is right that if the baby is fine, one has been merely careless. What this means for the lucky parent is that they should feel ashamed of what they have done at first, but so long as they learn from their mistake that shame can soon be left behind. This is not the case if the baby drowns.

The parent may also feel ashamed about their character. In this regard, whether the baby drowns doesn't change how much shame is appropriate, for it doesn't change the parent's character. We know the parent is negligent to some degree. If their negligence is a serious vice, because it is extreme or longstanding, then they ought to be ashamed of it. Not to feel ashamed would be to lack self-respect and proper concern for their character. But if they are only a little negligent and have not been negligent for long, shame would not be appropriate. In the case that the baby is fine, an ambitious reaction of confidently wanting to improve would be better: “never again!”, the parent will resolve. But even in the event that the baby drowns, if the parent really is only a little negligent, they shouldn't feel ashamed of their negligence. They should feel remorse, and they should feel ashamed of drowning their baby, but it isn't appropriate for them to also feel ashamed of their slight negligence. This is because the minor negligence itself isn't shameworthy. However, we wouldn't say that they should feel ambition to improve, because we think that feeling should be crowded out by the remorse and shame they ought to feel. Our thought is that their character is not very important compared to what they have done, so they shouldn't feel anything about their character. (This all assumes that the parent knows how negligent they are. If this is not the case, the fact that they have just drowned, or nearly drowned, their baby gives them a good reason to think their negligence is serious, making shame about their negligence more appropriate.)

Guilt will be appropriate if there is something to be done in response to the parent's wrongdoing which they owe to somebody, so that it would be disrespectful not to feel guilty. For the lucky parent, the main thing to do is to ensure that the baby won't be forgotten in the bath again, for example by developing a new routine in which they bathe with their child, and then to curb their risk taking more generally if there is a wider problem. As well as this, the parent will owe an apology to anyone else who is

responsible for the child. How strong their guilt should be will depend on how negligent they were, since apologising and correcting for a worse negligence is more important. How long the parent should feel guilty for will depend on how difficult it is for them to get into better habits. For the unlucky parent, a more intense guilt will be required, because they will have something much worse to apologise for. They also ought to curb their risk taking, especially if they have other children, but as with Smith's case, and the case of the lucky parent, their guilt may not be required for very long. The apology can be offered quickly, and the shock of what has happened may mean that it is easy for them to change their habits.

10.2.2 Resolving the puzzles of moral luck cases

The overall picture is that the unlucky parent ought to feel much worse than the lucky parent. Only the unlucky parent ought to feel remorse, and the unlucky parent should feel more ashamed of what they have done, and for longer. Both parents should feel guilty, but the guilt of the unlucky parent ought to be more intensely felt. However, an important qualification is that both parents should feel equally ashamed of their character, and that neither parent should feel ashamed of their character if they know that they are only slightly careless.

This provides a clean resolution of the puzzling aspect of the case. Our thought that the unlucky parent should feel much worse is vindicated, but by acknowledging that both parents should feel the same way about their character we explain the pressure that we felt to say each parent should blame themselves just as much. Both parents should take the same view and feel the same way about their negligence. This is appropriate, because their negligence is the same in each case. But by distinguishing the different ways in which the parents ought to feel bad, my account makes clear that feeling the same way about their negligence doesn't imply that the parents ought to feel the same way about what has happened, about what they have done, or about what they ought to do next.

It might be objected that we are not really so confident that the unlucky parent should feel much worse, and that my treatment of the case is therefore too harsh on them. In support of this objection, consider that we would expect the unlucky parent's friends and family to try to console them and make them feel less bad, and perhaps in doing so to encourage them to see their case as more similar to the case of the lucky parent. We do have this expectation, but it doesn't support the conclusion that the unlucky parent ought to feel no worse than the lucky parent: it supports the conclusion that the unlucky parent ought not to feel too bad, but probably will, given the circumstances and what we know about parenting and human nature. It would not be surprising for

the unlucky parent to lose sight of the fact that they aren't really a terribly vicious person, and that their character is similar to the lucky parent's (and, given human frailty, quite similar to most parents'.) We would console the unlucky parent to try to make them feel less bad, but not to try to make them feel just the same as would have been appropriate if their child hadn't died. If the unlucky parent really didn't feel remorse or shame for what they had done, then we would either criticise them or worry about them. We wouldn't feel relieved that they were reacting much better than most parents would.

10.3 Conclusion

Though we are inclined to think those who have acted wrongly should feel bad, we also worry that feeling bad may be futile – that it may only make things worse. To deal with this worry, I have argued that we ought to feel bad not as a way to secure good outcomes, but because feeling bad is a part of what it is to be respectful and to value our ethical standing. My account is to be accepted because it explains the cases we are confident about and resolves the cases we find puzzling. My treatment of the problem cases revealed that it is important to carefully distinguish the different ways in which we feel bad about our wrongdoing.

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