

DOI:10.17951/k.2019.26.2.7-23

ANNALIS
UNIVERSITATIS MARIAE CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA
LUBLIN – POLONIA

VOL. XXVI, 2

SECTIO K

2019

University of Málaga, Spain. Department of Moral and Political Philosophy

MABEL HOLGADO

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2262-2647>*What's the Point of Silent Blame?**

ABSTRACT

In this article I thoroughly examine Miranda Fricker's account of blame based on Communicative Blame as a paradigm explanation of the practice by focusing my attention on a non-central case: silent blame. I argue that this kind of instance has not been successfully connected with her selected paradigm case so I propose a different "focal meaning" or rationale to better accommodate it as part of the entire range of cases of the practice of blaming. I begin my argument drawing upon Herbert L.A. Hart's methodology on central and borderline cases as a more accurate way to address the complex structure of the concept of blame, since this approach is sensitive to borderline cases as well. I also argue that, although marginal, silent blame fulfils a purpose which must too be vindicated. Thus, following Hart's suggestion on the value of studying borderline cases, I propose a more accurate reframing of the general point of the practice of blame as a mechanism to secure respect for ourselves.

Key words: Communicative Blame, central cases, borderline cases, practical point, respect

INTRODUCTION

Exploring what is or might be the purpose of blaming is not an easy task because this practice shows considerably disunified instances, as many participants in the

* I am indebted to Manuel Toscano for many conversations throughout this investigation, and specially for introducing me to the methodology of central and borderline cases. Earlier versions of this paper have been presented at the Recast Training School in the Humanities and the Social Sciences, "Framing Rights and Democracy" which took place at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Faculty of Political Science, at the Seminar in Ethics and Political Philosophy of the Project "Civic Constellation II Debating Democracy and Rights" in Malaga, and at the Research Seminar of the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø. I thank all the members of these groups who kindly commented and helped me to sharp some of the arguments of this paper.

debate on the concept of blame have also highlighted [Wolf 2011; Fricker 2016; Bagley 2017]. The reasons why we blame others or ourselves are as diverse as the range of emotions that can appear when we do so. Very often, when we blame, we also put into motion other human practices such as complaining, rebuking, growing indignant, and accusing someone of being liable or holding them as such. In addition, a wide variety of emotions of greater or lesser complexity may also arise. The most commonly mentioned are resentment, anger, outrage, disappointment and sadness. The diversity of blaming comes to light through selecting a few ordinary cases of this practice. For example, I blame a driver who has made several reckless manoeuvres with his car, endangering other road users. I blamed my close friend when she did not keep that secret when she knew it meant a lot to me, and I still blame the current government because it enforced that measure which I deem to be harmful to public schooling, regardless of the fact that it does not concern me directly. Modes, targets, intensity and duration are just a few conditions that may also shape the diversity of blame.

Precisely because it is such a disunified practice, a definition of blame, understood as an accurate expression of the concept with economy of means, cannot be an attainable goal given that it is not possible to find a sufficiently stable number of features displayed in all cases of blame.¹ Due to this fact, in the following pages, I will turn to and rely upon Herbert L.A. Hart's methodology of central and borderline cases, since this approach considers the peculiar value of debatable cases or grey zones of concepts which are referred to as intentional practices, which blame is. I will use these considerations as a way of examining Miranda Fricker's account of the concept and as a basis to propose a more accurate reframing of the theoretical approach to it.

Hart uses the name "open texture concepts"² to refer to those terms whose main feature is an essential vagueness.³ The attribution of meanings given to those notions, their conceptualisation, is characterised by revealing blurred boundaries. Insofar as all their meanings do not fall into a specific category or even share a group of common attributes, open texture concepts are resistant to definition. They are formed by a core of clear standard instances with similar characteristics and a wide variety of borderline cases related to the above by analogy in a peculiar and asymmetrical way called "focal meaning". This last group of cases is, in turn, divided into two types. Firstly, there are watered-down cases in which the reason why these instances do not adhere to the standard core is due to a matter of degree. A classic example is Paul Grice's [1989: 177] mention to the concept of being bald. There are clear standard instances of bald men and of men with full heads of hair. But what about

¹ I previously defended this thesis in *La textura abierta del concepto de culpa moral*, where I applied this methodology to Thomas M. Scanlon's account of blame [Holgado 2015: 69–84].

² While Friedrich Waismann first used the term in 1945, it became popular when Hart applied it to the concept of law in 1961.

³ For a conceptual clarification of different types of vagueness and its differentiation from ambiguity, see Manuel Toscano [2015].

men who are thinning on top? They are blurred instances. In such cases it is not clear if the concept is predicated or not. And secondly, there are anomalous cases: here the deviation from the core of standard instances is an absence of some of the common features of the clear cases. So, this generates a “penumbra of uncertainty” [Hart 1958]. One example Hart gives is the consideration of playing chess without a queen. Would it still be “chess”?

Thus, the methodological approach of a vague concept such as blame cannot be accomplished by a search for necessary and sufficient conditions because that would leave out many cases of blaming which do not meet those criteria. Therefore, so as to obtain a complete and significant description of this concept, we must pursue a double task. On the one hand, in order to offer a recognizable picture of blame, we have to be consistent enough with our everyday ways of carrying out this social practice. Although, and simultaneously, on the other hand, we should provide something more than a mere descriptive explanation of the uses of the concept. The goal is to elaborate a “rational reconstruction” of the concept, as Hart [1982: 164], following Jeremy Bentham, understands the fruitful conceptual analysis: as a critical and corrective description that goes beyond the vagueness and arbitrariness of the ordinary uses of the concept.

For that purpose, a methodology like the central and borderline cases proposed by Hart and further developed by John Finnis [2011: 3–19] would be a propitious tool to accommodate all these cases of blame. This method is based on three features. First, there is “the attention to practical point”. As human practices, they must be described by their intentionality, in that, as Finnis points out, they only make sense through their significance, through their value. Second, “the selection of central case and focal meaning”, which refers to the choice of the paradigm-case and the peculiar connection open-texture concepts necessarily have.⁴ Finally, “the selection of viewpoint”, which alludes to the criteria used to assess the degree of importance and significance among the meanings of a vague concept.

This last feature raises an important point. Insofar as the explanation of a social practice introduces us inescapably into the normative domain, into the field of giving reasons as the only way to reveal intentionality, we must assume, as Hart and Finnis suggest, that the appraisal of every specific case as principal or secondary cannot be a matter of logical deduction alone: it depends on the weight of the reasons which support that viewpoint. Debatable cases show a “penumbra of uncertainty” that causes us to question whether “deductive reasoning, which for generations has been cherished as the very perfection of human reasoning, cannot serve as a model for

⁴ The identification of the “focal meaning” is the act of uncovering the Aristotelian “homonymy *pros hen*” with which vague concepts necessarily are linked. Christopher Shields [1999: 103–106] called it “core-dependant homonymy”: “*x* and *y* are homonymously in a core-dependent way *F* iff: (i) they have their name in common, (ii) their definitions do not completely overlap, and (iii) there is a single source to which they are related, or they have something definitional in common”.

what judges, or indeed anyone, should do in bringing particular cases under general rules” [Hart 1958: 608].⁵

That is the reason why I believe that the only way of securing a full picture of a vague concept like blame is by taking a photo with a selective focus technique, that is, with little focal distance but keeping the objective wide open. Thus, by focussing the display on the clear, paradigmatic cases, it is possible to obtain a clear-cut image of them which serves as a reference. However, simultaneously, by keeping the objective wide open, the various peripheral cases will gradually fall out of focus until they reach those diffuse limits where one could argue an equal number of reasons for and against when considering those examples to be borderline cases. Although diffuse, the limits of the concept would be there, and the picture of its vagueness would be complete.

A methodological reflection of this kind is Fricker’s starting point in her article *What’s the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation* [2016] in so far she proposes that the best way to portray “an internally diverse” practice is by detecting its purpose in its most paradigmatic and successful case. Fricker selects second personal communicative interactions of blame, labelled as “Communicative Blame” cases, because they are instances where the blamer, by accusing the wrongdoer,⁶ makes him feel remorse so he finally aligns his moral understanding with the victim and the relationship is restored. Then, she tests if the other kinds of blame are effectively derived from the communicative cases. In this regard, it can be seen that, while she does not explicitly refer to the “central and borderline cases” methodology, Fricker’s approach is fully in keeping with the main guides given by Hart and Finnis, namely: “attention to practical point”, “selection of central case and focal meaning” and “selection of viewpoint”.

At the end of the first chapter of his work *The Concept of Law*, suggestively titled “Persistent Questions”, Hart [2012: 17] addresses the value of exploring non-central cases. Although they are not the ones which can reveal the main purpose of the practice, they are effective in helping us sharpen the general point of the practice given its necessary core-dependant connection with central cases: they inform us of its “distinctive structure” and they also help us to clarify the focal meaning of the concept.

This appeal to a *necessary* internal connection between non-central and central cases might sound conflicting after having established that the kind of rationality that comes into play when selecting the viewpoint of an open texture concept cannot be a matter of logical deduction but, actually, it is not. Indeed, the selection of the

⁵ Hart reflects about this issue with regard to the debatable cases of the open texture concept of law: “[i]n this area men cannot live by deduction alone. And it follows that if legal arguments and legal decisions of penumbral questions are to be rational, their rationality must lie in something other than logical relation to premises” [Hart 1958: 608].

⁶ I will use “wrongdoer”, “blamed” and “blamee” as synonyms due to the fact that I will presuppose that the blamer is doing an appropriate judgement of blameworthiness.

viewpoint lies in its reasonableness, on the strength of the reasons given to support it, so at this level the logical relation to premises does not work. However, once we have embraced a particular viewpoint, and, therefore, we have upheld a particular case as central, the remaining cases *must necessarily be derived* from it, either by simple analogy or by “core-dependant homonymy”. Therefore, if we cannot find a suitable derivation of a borderline case or there are reasons to vindicate the purpose of any non-central case, then a reshape of the focal meaning is required and, consequently a reframing of the general point of this practice is also necessary.

Therefore, in this paper, I will draw upon Fricker’s Communicative Blame as a paradigm-based explanation in order to focus my attention on the non-central cases labelled as “silent blame”. Given that these non-communicative cases are considered marginal in this account, I will test if their derivation fulfils the focal meaning proposed by Fricker and explore what might be the point of silent blame. I will argue that, although marginal, silent blame fulfils a purpose that has to be vindicated too, so, following Hart’s suggestion on the value of studying borderline cases, I will propose a more accurate reframing of the general point of the practice of blame.

Thus, in Section 1, I will thoroughly set out the key features of Fricker’s Communicative Blame paradigm-based account of blame. Then, I will examine her derivation of the remaining cases of blame from the central case (Section 2). Thirdly, I will tackle the scope of Communicative Blame to argue that a group of instances within this paradigm are not central but rather watered-down cases of the practice: the non-verbal communicative ones (Section 3). After that, in Section 4, I address the point of silent blame and its coordination with the reshaped paradigm. Lastly, on the fifth section, I conclude with my proposal of reframing the general point of blame.

MIRANDA FRICKER’S ACCOUNT OF BLAME

After introductory methodological considerations, Fricker [2016: 166–167] displays various types of blame in order to show the diversity of the concept, and does so according to the position of the blamed person. She distinguishes three groups that, in turn, can also appear with a more or less added negative emotional charge in the blamer: (a) the “first-personal reflexive mode” cases, where the blamed and the blamer are the same person (“I blame myself for the failure of the marriage”); (b) “second-personal interactions”, where the blamed is the person who listens to the statement and where the wronged person may be the blamer or someone else, distant or close (“It’s not okay to make fun of me/him/them/others like that”); and, finally, “third-personal cases”, where the blamed party is a person, a group of people or even an institution that does not hear the statement (“I blame the doctors/the parents/the school/the government for what happened”).

This initial classification and the suggested examples reveal the selection of viewpoint which this philosopher has in mind. All are examples of uttered blame,

even in the self-blame case. In fact, this feature marks the difference from other previous approaches to this practice. Unlike supporters of “cognitive accounts of blame”, who stress the negative judgment an agent makes towards the actions or attitudes of others in the practice of blame, or advocates of “emotional and conative accounts of blame”,⁷ who highlight a negative reactive emotion or attitude, respectively, Fricker [2016: 172] emphasizes the basic illocutionary aspect of this practice: blame happens successfully only when the receiver uptakes the message.⁸ That would be her choice of focal meaning. Thus, she proposes as paradigm cases what she labels “Communicative Blame”: “second personal communications of fault, backed up by the force of some reproving emotion with which the blamer tries to inspire remorse in the wrongdoer”.⁹

However, what would be the purpose of causing that pained perception in the blamed party? According to Fricker, the blamer transmits something more than merely pointing out her pain, hurt or bewilderment: what she seeks is to accuse the wrongdoer, to admonish her by putting psychological pressure on her from a position of certain moral authority. And she does so because he pursues an ulterior end: a double moral alignment. On the one hand, she does it to push the blamed to agree with her on the moral interpretation of what happened (“increased alignment of the moral understandings”) and, on the other, to alter the reasons the wrongdoer had for the action (“increased alignment of moral reasons”).

These two alignments are the keystone of this account. Firstly, they explain the ultimate point of blame. Secondly, they also show the power of this practice as a transformative activity that “functions as a perpetual (re)generator of shared moral reasons” even in reluctant blamees [Fricker 2016: 176–177].

The first alignment occurs when the blamer faces the wrongdoer and accuses her with “the added force of some emotional charge” [Fricker 2016: 172]. This psychological pressure puts the former in a position of certain authority to make the blamee feel bad. It pushes the latter to be aware of the fault so that she admits and acknowledges what she did, assuming the blamer’s interpretation of what happened.

However, this alignment, in so far as it is achieved dialogically, may lead to a shift in the way the blamer interprets what has happened if the blamed offers convincing counter-arguments that persuade the former to revise his view. Even in this case, as Fricker points out, an increased alignment of moral understanding is produced.

⁷ Here I follow the labels proposed by D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini [2013: 3–26] in their classification of the different types of blame.

⁸ “Now, in order to uncover the point and purpose of this practice of blame, we should ask by what sort of speech act Communicative Blame gains verbal expression. It is clearly one among the broad category of illocutionary speech acts, whose distinctive feature is that they cannot be fully successfully performed without the *uptake* of the hearer – that is, without *the hearer recognizing the speaker’s intention* to perform just that speech act” [Fricker 2016: 172, emphasis added].

⁹ Here Fricker [2016: 172–173], following Raimond Gaita [2004, Ch. 4], conceives remorse as a “cognitively charged moral emotion”, “a moral perception that delivers a pained understanding of the wrong we have done”.

Although in those cases, given that the shift happens on the part of the blamer, it would mean that the blame was not entirely appropriate or was excessive.

This leads us to consider what the conditions are for blaming communicatively in an appropriate way, since it is likely that the bad reputation of this practice comes from the fact that it has often been used incorrectly, driven by censorious, vindictive, cruel or excessive moralistic reasons. Fricker [2016: 168–170] labels those instances of bad practice of blame “pathologies of blame”. Given that Communicative Blame pushes the blamed party to align his interpretation with the blamer, this needs to be properly justified. She points out six conditions that work as an ethics of Communicative Blame.

The second function of blame is the increased alignment of moral reasons. It consists of a transformative power of altering the blamee’s perception of what happened even when she does not recognize any of the reasons offered by the blamer to have behaved in a different manner as she did. This convergence is particularly important because it explains why Communicative Blame plays a role in reluctant targets. Here, Fricker makes use of Bernard Williams’s idea of blame as a “proleptic mechanism”.

Exploiting the envisaged proleptic mechanism involves treating the blamed party as if they recognised the motivating reason when in fact they didn’t (or at least they failed to give it appropriate deliberative priority). Treating them in this as-if manner stands to gain some psychological traction in the as yet recalcitrant wrongdoer, *provided that they possess a more general motive to be the sort of person that you respect*. If they are thus susceptible to your admonitions at this baseline level, then the blame communicated may gain some psychological purchase [Fricker 2016: 176, italicized in the original].

When the blamee recognizes that you respect him by admonishing her in a way “backed up by the force of some reproving emotion”, a psychological pressure is exerted which pushes the blamee to begin questioning whether she may have been wrong. This is the reason why Fricker [2016: 176–177] considers that the power of blame lies in it being “a perpetual (re)generator of shared moral reasons”. However, this “proleptic” transformative power that blame gains through its communication of fault with feeling is also a danger, as Fricker points out. Used by people with bad intentions, it can become a technique of control:¹⁰ “it may generate bogus moral reasons that motivate people against their proper interests and actively promote a morally corrupt outlook”. Thus, she alerts us to the risk of misuse of this practice in the hands of the fanatical, the corrupt or the bullying.

¹⁰ “[B]y elaborating the point of Communicative Blame in this way is that blame is among other things a technique of control, and the candid will to power that drives the desire to make the wrongdoer remorseful for what she has done has been revealed as having a significant social constructive potential” [Fricker 2016: 181].

THE PARADIGM CANDIDATE AND THE DERIVATION OF THE OTHER CASES
OF BLAME

Thus, so far, the main lines of Fricker's account have been set out. She proposes Communicative Blame as the paradigm candidate with which respond to: first, what the main point of this general practice is (in so far as she does not deny that there might be more than one point); second, how non-paradigmatic cases can be derived from it; and, lastly, the extent to which we must vindicate this purpose. She finds the focal meaning of blame in its illocutionary aspect, namely, to inspire remorse in the wrongdoer. So, the practical point of blame, and therefore the reason for its vindication, is to be a transformative activity by which to gain an alignment of moral understandings and moral reasons, providing a person who has been wronged (the blamer) the possibility of bringing the wrongdoer (the blamed) to acknowledge the former's interpretation of what happened and also to alter her reasons for that faulty action or attitude accordingly.

Why does Fricker see this double alignment as susceptible to vindication? Or reformulated in another way: What is the reason why she selects this viewpoint? Firstly, because it tends to the ideal of shared moral reasons: "We may comprehend the point of blame through the lens of *an ideal of converging moral understandings*, while acknowledging of course that moral conflict is often too difficult and fraught for this kind of convergence to be possible" [Fricker 2016: 173, stress added]. If this is the end to be pursued, then there is no more successful way to achieve it than through Communicative Blame since it appears to be the best way to show somebody that she is wrong and to cause her to have a change of heart.

Secondly, because she thinks Communicative Blame has an explanatory priority over the remaining cases of this practice. Thus, she argues that first-personal reflexive modes are derived from the paradigm case in a direct way: as John Tasioulas has noted, "remorse entails self-blame" [Fricker 2016: 177, note 24]. According to Fricker [2016: 177], this fact also invites us to consider whether the activity of blaming ourselves may stem precisely from our own learning and experience of second-personal blame interactions, since it seems that individually we hold ourselves responsible, we accuse ourselves and we feel remorse for our faulty actions because we have the way we blame others as a reference.

In contrast, the derivation of the other type of blame that Fricker mentions in her preliminary taxonomy, namely the third-personal cases, is not by way of remorse but by a peculiar version of the ultimate practical point of Communicative Blame. When, for example, with indignation I tell my friend my accusation that a politician has taken a reckless measure that will have serious consequences for a section of society, I do not seek my friend to feel remorse given that she is not at fault. At the same time, however, I do not address my accusation to the blameworthy politician because she is a distant agent. What I actually do, as Fricker [2016: 178] highlights, is to make "a vicarious application" of the ultimate purpose of Communicative Blame:

I express my judgement of blame to a third party with the intention that he aligns his interpretation of the fact or event to mine. This is, therefore, the core-dependant connection of this kind of instances with the paradigm case: the purpose of third-personal blame is to persuade the hearer to converge with me about this action committed by a third party whom I do consider blameworthy.

However, the most interesting derivation which Fricker addresses relating to the thesis that concerns us is silent blame cases, namely those instances of blame in which an agent blames another but he does not say anything or complain about it, he simply changes his attitude towards the wrongdoer with regard to the future. For example, withdrawing his trust from the wrongdoer in respect of that faulty action or keeping a distance from him. It is quite striking that Fricker pays attention to those cases here, given that she did not include this type of blame in her initial taxonomy of the different kinds of blame.

Silent blame may occur in first, second or third person and several authors have given it certain relevance in their approaches. Although not the only writers who have reflected on the subject, two stand out: George Sher and Thomas M. Scanlon. Their approaches have been labelled as “conative accounts” by Coates and Tognazzini [2013: 10–13] due to the fact that both explain the practice of blame paying attention to the blamer’s intentions, expectations and dispositions.

Sher, who offers an explanation of blame committed with the view of practical reasons as internal,¹¹ calls this type of blame “private”:

Far from always being public, as deterrent punishment necessarily is, the blame that we direct at wrongdoers can be kept entirely private. As Richard Brandt once noted, “a cool handshake, a reproachful glance, would ordinarily be described rather as symptoms of blaming than as cases of it.” This does not mean that blaming someone cannot affect his behavior, but it does mean that the blame itself must be distinct from any utterance or action through which it is expressed. To blame someone is one thing, to communicate one’s blame, another [Sher 2006: 74].

For his part, Scanlon, who is committed to the view of practical reasons as external, considers that when we blame, we adjust our attitude after damage to a relationship. “[B]lame, as I interpret it, is more personal. Because it involves taking the view that a person’s attitudes (usually, the attitudes revealed in what that person has done) impair one’s relations with him or her, the content of blame varies, depending on what those relations are” [Scanlon 2008: 175]. Therefore, according to Scanlon, this adjustment may be carried out in different ways, so it does not necessarily require its communication.

¹¹ The Theory of Normative Reasons for an action comprises different positions regarding the relationship between (good) reasons for an action and motivation. For an internalist, a statement of reasons is true only if a necessary condition is fulfilled: when that statement is related to the agent’s motivational set. An externalist, however, conceives that, in some cases, an agent has reasons for an action regardless of his wishes or beliefs.

Fricker thinks that this kind of silent instances “can readily be accommodated”, in so far that “sometimes it is better all things considered not to communicate a judgement even while it is of a type that is best understood as essentially apt for communication”. So, in which core-dependant way might these cases be accommodated? In that “it is a straightforward feature of communicative acts in general – telling, warning, arguing etc.– that they can be withheld, kept private”. And immediately thereafter she enumerates reasons to withhold Communicative Blame: “[O]ne might be afraid of the response, one might know the communication would be pointless because the wrongdoer will never understand, one might judge that it would do more harm than good, or, more dramatically, maybe the wrong is so serious that you simply want no more to do with her” [Fricker 2016: 179]. Thus, according to Fricker, the derivation would come from the fact that communicative acts are voluntarily performed: if we want, we carry them out, otherwise communicative acts do not exist. For example, I can decide to warn somebody about something, but if I choose not to give a warning, there is none. The problem that silent blame poses is that, although communication is withheld, there is still blame. That is to say, blaming is not just an illocutionary act. Consequently, the answer regarding its practical point must consider something more than its mere manifestation. That is my thesis: even if we agreed that the central cases of blame are communicative, the focal meaning which coordinates all the instances of blame cannot be the illocutionary aspect and, therefore, the dependent purpose of the double alignment proposed by Fricker cannot be the general point of the practice.

Moreover, if there are reasons to blame silently, as Fricker asserts, it means that there is a kind of previous “decaffeinated” activity that is still blame although it is not a speech act. And, on the other hand, if there are reasons in favour of not communicating blame, then, in some sense silent blame also plays a role. However, what is that non-illocutionary point of blame? Further and finally, if there is a purpose that emerges from the expressive aspect of the central cases – namely the double alignment – and there is another purpose which arises from the silent aspect of the borderline cases, then, what is the point of blame (in general)?

If we assume that the silent blame cases form part of this practice, even though they may be precarious, troubled or borderline, somehow they have to be coordinated with the central core of cases, either by simple analogy or by core-dependant homonymy. If we did not find that coordination, it would imply one of those three possibilities: (a) the methodological approach used to describe this practice is wrong and therefore the only aim to which we can aspire is to find an analogy of “family resemblances” where we can only see “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing” [Wittgenstein 2009: 36]; (b) silent blame instances are not (legitimate) cases of blame and therefore we would must explain what they are and to which other practice they belong; or, (c) on the contrary, we would have to revise the general purpose of this practice so that we can integrate such cases in a different way apart from the illocutionary aspect of the central cases.

I shall opt for the third. It consists of reconciling Fricker and Scanlon's proposals so as to see Communicative Blame as the most successful and fruitful case of this practice while also understanding blame as a mechanism of adjustment of one's attitudes after damage to relationships with others.

Accordingly, my goal in the following sections will be to explore the role and purpose of silent blame and its core-coordination with Communicative Blame. However, beforehand I will argue that even within instances of Communicative Blame we can find a lack of intensity as regards Fricker's focal meaning, that is to say, the illocutionary aspect.

WHAT COUNTS AS COMMUNICATIVE BLAME?

As mentioned above, the achievement of the double moral alignment that Communicative Blame provides comes from its illocutionary aspect. The uptake of the wrongdoer is, therefore, needed to get the point of blame. However, the content of this uptake is variable, given that Communicative Blame as Fricker conceives it can be verbal and non-verbal [2016: 171]. She also includes within these central cases a wide range of gestures or behaviours, like "leaving the room" or "keeping a stony silence".¹² In addition, she mentions that the communication of blame "might be explicit or implied, fulsome or partially suppressed".

How does the wrongdoer capture the two alignments from a non-verbal Communicative Blame case? The information that a blamed person may get from, for example, other leaving the room is certainly expressive: she will probably uptake the blamer's reprobation, disapproval, censure, anger or annoyance. So "the intrinsically interpersonal conception of blame that is embedded in Communicative Blame" is there: "you wrong me (or someone else I care about), and I let you know, with feeling, that you were at fault" [Fricker 2016: 176]. Nevertheless, in contrast with explicitly verbal cases of Communicative Blame, in non-verbal ones there is no exposition of the specific blamer's interpretation of what had happened (first alignment) and much less of the blamer's moral reasons (second alignment) to push the wrongdoer to converge with him accordingly.

I think that non-verbal examples of Communicative Blame illustrate quite well that within the group of paradigmatic cases selected by Fricker there is a spectrum of gradation regarding the guarantee of success of the double alignment: the information the blamed receives in order to align her moral understanding with the blamer is quite variable amongst the central instances. At one end of the gradation there are the cases where I express my blame explicitly in a verbal way and where, hence, I communicate the wrongdoer exactly what she did wrong and the reasons she

¹² Since this gesture is overacted and dramatic, and therefore, highly expressive, she does not consider it as an instance of silent blame.

actually had for acting (reasons that she obviously did not choose). However, at the other end of the gradation, there are the cases where I express my blame non-verbally with, for example, a stony silence or by leaving the room. At the top of the scale, the blamer sets out all the information regarding the fault so the blamed simply has to accept and make the shift, altering her moral reasons accordingly (and with sincere remorse), whereas at the bottom of the scale, the blamee only receives reprobation. That said, the wrongdoer also receives information that she is required to regret, but she must be the one who guesses exactly what the wrong was and identifies why her reasons for her action were not the best.

I believe it is important to consider this gradation insofar as it is related with the more passive or more active role the blamed play. In fact, I have the feeling that we very often blame in this gestural or behavioural way because we consider that the blamee owes us the effort of identifying our reasons for complaint by herself and not having seen those reasons is precisely a relevant part of her fault. In other words, we think she is faulty for what he did, but also for not having seen afterwards she was blameworthy doing so.

In that sense, I believe non-verbal cases of blame should be better considered like watered-down cases, given that they mostly share the features of verbal communicative cases, but not with the same intensity, guarantee of success, and thoroughness. Despite that fact, it seems that there is still something that the blamed perceives in every case of Communicative Blame from the more explicit to the more subtle: she always uptakes a negative reactive attitude of withdrawal of good will from the blamer's behalf and a kind of adjustment is demanded.¹³

THE POINT AND COORDINATION OF SILENT BLAME

Silent blame occurs when an agent blames another but she does not say anything or complain about it. She modifies her attitude towards the wrongdoer from that time onwards with regard to the damage caused.¹⁴ This kind of blame response represents an anomalous case from the point of view of Fricker's account due to the fact that the practice starts and ends in the blamer, so there is no uptake in the blamee's side when the practice is carried out.¹⁵

And in which circumstances would we blame silently? I see three different groups of situations. First, as Fricker mentions, we would have those instances where "the

¹³ This is the basis of Peter Strawson's [1962] proposal and it can be found also in latter approaches inspired by him, like in Ray J. Wallace [1994; 2011] or Scanlon's accounts of blame [2008; 2013].

¹⁴ That is how Scanlon [2008: 129] understands this kind of blame.

¹⁵ Although it is possible that from the attitudes revealed in the future behaviour of the agent who blamed, the other party might perceive the resulting impairment of their relationship silent blame brought in. This would open the door to the restoration of the relationship from the blamee's initiative.

risks and costs of communication” defeat the reasons that we have to try to make restitution of the damage we suffered, for example, when the person with whom we have a relationship has an intransigent character or is our superior. Given that Communicative Blame demands from the blamer that she occupies a position of a certain authority,¹⁶ it will probably not be as effective if the person who exercises it occupies an inferior position. This last idea also tells us something about the guarantees of success of Communicative Blame: it is more prone to be effective in symmetrical and well-established relationships.¹⁷ However, all these cases, as Fricker [2016: 179] says, are not proper instances of silent blame, since they are exceptional cases where we arrive at this course of action just because of the fact that “sometimes it is better all things considered not to communicate a judgement even while it is of a type that is best understood as essentially apt for communication”.

The second group of circumstances are those cases in which we do not feel compelled to point out the error of the blamee’s ways. Communicative Blame is an unpleasant experience for both parties, so it is likely that, if the wrongdoer is an acquaintance, we might not feel compelled to fulfil the perlocutionary point of Communicative Blame, namely “to prompt a change for the better in the behaviour (inner and outer) of the wrongdoer” [Fricker 2016: 173].

Lastly, there is a group of situations that I clearly consider to be cases of silent blame. They are instances where the fault is so serious or the wrongdoer’s behaviour is so repeatedly faulty that we feel justified not to restore the relationship. In those cases, the blamer feels entitled to lower or, more dramatically, to put an end to the normative standards that govern the specific relationship that she holds with the wrongdoer, so she blames adjusting her attitudes towards the faulty party: maybe by withdrawing her trust from the wrongdoer with regard to that faulty action or keeping a distance from him.

Hence, silent blame asks for the convenience of not restoring a relationship. Its purpose is not illocutionary, because it appeals to the blamer’s right to lower his moral commitments to the wrongdoer with regard to the future or even to reject them completely. The point of this kind of blame case rests on the view that the ideal of shared moral reasons is not always possible and it faces the discomfiting, although, on the other hand, realistic idea, that it is not possible to align our moral reasons with everybody for all kinds of situations.

¹⁶ Fricker does not explicitly assume this feature of Communicative Blame, but it seems clear to me that to accuse someone you must stand in this position of certain authority to succeed with its perlocutionary point. In this sense, it would share that feature with other speech acts like testifying. Fricker writes: “Regarding any illocutionary act, we may seek to understand it better by asking, What is its illocutionary point? C.A.J. Coody [1992 – M.H.], for instance, in his seminal treatment of testimony, asks this of the speech act of testifying, and answers that its particular illocutionary point is to offer evidence *from a position of relative authority* to someone who wants to know” [Fricker 2016: 172, emphasis added]. Furthermore, the fact that the danger of Communicative Blame is to become a technique of control supports also my view.

¹⁷ Susan Wolf [2011] for instance, selects as typical examples of her communicative account of blame, the ones that happen in her day-to-day family life.

Therefore, I believe that marginal cases, like silent blame are, fulfil a practical point that must also be vindicated for restricted situations. Consequently, I will rather propose a different purpose of the general practice of blame: it would be an activity by which we secure respect for ourselves. I have taken this idea, interestingly, from Fricker's own reflection when she tackles the positive conditions on appropriate blame. There, she says that "[t]o blame is not only to condemn but also thereby *to demand respect*, which is why it is as disproportionate to be a doormat as it is to be a moral tyrant" [2016: 169, emphasis added].

WHAT IS THEN THE POINT OF BLAME?

I see the practice of blame as a mechanism to secure respect for ourselves after a wrongdoing that we have previously judged to be blameworthy. It starts with a negative judgement in the blamer. Scanlon writes:

To blame a person is to judge that person to be blameworthy and, as a consequence, to modify one's understanding of one's relationship with that person (that is, to alter or withhold intentions and expectations that that relationship would normally involve) in the particular ways that that judgment of blameworthiness makes appropriate, given one's relation with the person and the significance for one of what that person has done. *The modification that is appropriate will vary* depending on how one is related to the person in question and to his or her action. It will depend, for example, on whether one is a member of the agent's community or a stranger, and whether one is the victim of the agent's action, a relative of the victim, or a bystander [Scanlon 2013: 89, emphasis added].

This goal can be achieved in different ways. Firstly, we can secure respect for ourselves by trying to reverse the cause of that damage as much as possible, since the past cannot be undone. This is achieved through pushing the wrongdoer to align her moral understanding and her moral reasons with us in order to restore the previous normative terms of the relationship. These are the central cases of blame, performed through verbal Communicative Blame. The blamer here actively works to get the wrongdoer on the right track. If he succeeds, she avoids being damaged in the future, since she has prompted "a change for the better in the behaviour (inner and outer) of the wrongdoer". As Frickers says, these are the most successful cases of blame.

The second way to secure respect for ourselves after being victims of a wrongdoing is by demanding the alignment but simply by showing our reprobation to the wrongdoer, since the restoration of the damage is conditioned to the disposition of the wrongdoer to see by herself the reasons of her blameworthy action or attitude. The guarantees of success on achieving the double alignment rest partially on the blamed, in so far as in these cases the blamer shows her reprobation by a negative gesture or behaviour and nothing more. These are watered-down cases of blame and they are typically performed by non-verbal Communicative Blame.

And, finally, the third way of securing respect for ourselves is by adjusting our attitudes according to the faulty action, lowering or rejecting the normative standards governing our relationship with the wrongdoer due to the fact that she has violated them seriously or repeatedly. In these cases, the wrongdoer is not called upon to make the shift that allows the adjustment. On the contrary, it is the victim who makes an attitudinal adjustment to protect her normative status. This kind of blame is carried out silently, it does not need the illocutionary point to be successful, but it is definitely restricted to serious wrongdoing in well-established relationships or relationships with less normative commitments, such as acquaintances.

So, blame may cover a wide scope of results that runs from the achievement of the restoration of the normative standards that previously governed the relationship between blamer and blamed person to the justified deterioration of the relationship with the wrongdoer by the blamer. And, hence, it materializes with a wide range of actions and states: from rebuke, complaint or accusation to distancing in or impairment of the relationship.

Therefore, the focal meaning of blame in my proposal is an attitudinal-behavioural adjustment. On the one hand, this adjustment might be expected to happen in the wrongdoer in communicative cases, and satisfies the blamer's demand for respect through the subsequent inner and outer change for the better in the blamee's attitude and behaviour after feeling remorse. On the other hand, the adjustment may happen in the blamer, and the securing of respect is a protective reaction to avoid being wronged in the future.

I believe that this focal meaning can also be found in first-personal reflexive and third-personal blame modes, in so far as this core-dependant connection has been successfully explained by the Communicative Blame paradigm and my proposal integrates it in a wider and more general practical point. This tentative proposal would have to be developed with an exposition of the positive conditions to blame appropriately, whether communicatively or silently. To do that, we would have to establish how to approach to the optimal point between the two positions, the point at which we, not being doormats, could blame others without becoming moral tyrants.

And, finally, it is important not to forget that it does not follow from the fact that a practice (such as blame) may be vindicated under certain circumstances that we should be encouraged to have it ever present in our lives. As Fricker rightly highlights,

[i]nstead of staying permanently alert to patterns of culpability, one can sometimes adopt a more accepting and more passive stance according to which one might simply observe that people do the things they do – often things it is deeply in their nature to do – and that whatever we may make of these actions, we are not compelled to mobilise our interpersonal moral attitudes in relation to them [Fricker 2016: 180].

However, inevitably, those words lead us to consider in which ways or through which other practices we might secure respect for ourselves.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bagley, B. 2017. *Properly Proleptic Blame*, “Ethics”, vol. 127, pp. 852–882, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/691626>.
- Coady, C.A.J. 1992. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, Clarendon University Press, Oxford.
- Coates, D.J., Tognazzini, N.A. (eds.) 2013. *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Finnis, J. 2011 [1980]. *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Clarendon Press, New York.
- Fricke, M. 2016. *What’s the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation*, “Noûs”, vol. 15(1).
- Gaita, R. 2004. *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, Routledge, London.
- Grice, P. 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Hart, H.L.A. 2012 [1961]. *The Concept of Law*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Hart, H.L.A. 1982. *Essays on Bentham. Jurisprudence and Political Theory*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Hart, H.L.A. 1958. *Positivism and the Separation of Law and Morals*, “Harvard Law Review”, vol. 71, pp. 593–629.
- Holgado, M. 2015. *La textura abierta del concepto de culpa moral*, “Revista Laguna”, vol. 37, pp. 69–84.
- Scanlon, T.M. 2013. *Interpreting Blame*, [in:] *Blame, Its Nature and Norms*, D.J. Coates, N.A. Tognazzini (eds.), Oxford University Press, New York.
- Scanlon, T.M. 2008. *Moral Dimensions. Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Sher, G. 2006. *In Praise of Blame*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Shields, C. 1999. *Order in Multiplicity. Homonymy in the Philosophy of Aristotle*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Strawson, P. 1962. *Freedom and Resentment*, reprinted in G. Watson 1982, *Free Will*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Toscano, M. 2015. *Conceptos vagos, ambigüedad y textura abierta. La reflexión de Gabriel Bello sobre el concepto de vida humana*, [in:] *Éticas y políticas de la alteridad. En torno al pensamiento de Gabriel Bello*, M.J. Guerra, A. Hernández (eds.), Plaza & Valdés, Madrid.
- Wallace, R.J. 1994. *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Wallace, R.J. 2011. *Dispassionate Opprobrium: On Blame and the Reactive Sentiments*, [in:] *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T.M. Scanlon*, R.J. Wallace, R. Kumar, S. Freeman (eds.), Oxford University Press, New York.
- Wittgenstein, L. 2009 [1953]. *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Wolf, S. 2011. *Blame Italian Style*, [in:] *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T.M. Scanlon*, R.J. Wallace, R. Kumar, S. Freeman (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford.

BIOGRAPHY

Mabel Holgado is a PhD candidate at the University of Malaga, Spain, where she is researching the practice of blame, with the working title “The Concept of Blame and Its Methodology”, supervised by Manuel Toscano. In 2015, she was awarded a pre-doctoral research grant by Spain’s Ministry for the Economy and Competitiveness within the project “Civic Constellation II: Debating Democracy and Rights”. She has two bachelor degrees, one in Philosophy and the other in Communication Sciences, and a master’s degree in Philosophy from the University of Málaga. Her main

research interest is the study of the practical point and methodology of social practices for their conceptual clarification. Currently, she is specialising in moral blame, which perhaps inevitably has led her to ponder connected issues such as forgiveness, anger, moral responsibility, collective action and collective responsibility. She works at the Department of Moral and Political Philosophy of the University of Málaga. E-mail: mholgado@uma.es