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Proleptic praise: A social function analysis

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Abstract

What is praise? I argue that we can make progress by examining what praise does. Functionalist views of praise are emerging, but I here argue that by foregrounding cases in which expressions of praise are rejected by their direct target, we see that praise has a wider, and largely overlooked, social function. I introduce cases in which praise is rejected, and develop a functionalist account of praise that is well placed to make sense of the contours of these cases. My claim is that praise functions to affirm and entrench values, exerting pressure in praise's audiences to affirm the values expressed. I show how my account overcomes some of the limitations of recently developed accounts of praise.

What is praise? I argue that we can make progress by examining what praise *does*. Functionalist views of praise are emerging, but I here argue that by foregrounding cases in which expressions of praise are rejected by their direct target, we see that praise has a wider, and largely overlooked, social function. In section 1 I introduce cases in which praise is rejected. In section 2, I develop a functionalist account of praise. My claim is that praise functions to affirm and entrench values, exerting pressure in praise's audiences to affirm the values expressed. In section 3, I show how my account overcomes some of the limitations of recently developed accounts of praise. In contrast to these accounts, my functionalist account is responsive to, and places at the foreground of our analysis, the possibility that praise can be used for bad and oppressive ends.

1 | CASES: OPPRESSIVE PRAISE

Praise has a dark side. Whilst many authors have focused their analyses of praise on cases of 'fitting' praise, or cases in which its expression receives 'successful' uptake (Telech, 2021,

Macnamara, 2015), other authors have more recently focused on instances where praise is painful or harmful for the recipient (Stout, 2020), or patronising (Jeppsson & Brandeburg, 2022), or oppressive (Holroyd, 2021). My contention is that focusing on cases in which praise is problematic, and is rejected by its direct target, is a fruitful way of bringing to light some key aspects of what praise does; its function.[1]

1.1 | The Daddy Dividend

I have presented Khader and Lindauer's example of 'the daddy dividend' (2020) as an instance of oppressive praise (Holroyd, 2021). Khader and Lindauer describe the discrepancies in praise they experienced in parenting, attributed to both gender and racial dynamics:

> We coined the term "daddy dividend" on one of the many days a stranger on the subway told Matt (a white man) that he was the "best daddy ever." The thing he had done to receive this accolade was to wear his baby in a carrier, and perhaps not seem utterly miserable doing so. By contrast, Serene (a brown woman) has never been told by a stranger that she's the best mom ever, or even a decent one (2020:6).

Part of what is going wrong here is a comparative matter: fathers are praised when commensurately praiseworthy mothers are not. But the diagnosis of what is going wrong here also concerns the fact that the praise tacitly expresses low normative expectations for fathers, such that merely performing basic parenting tasks is seen as exceeding those expectations in ways that render fathers' parenting especially creditable; praiseworthy. Notably, in their critical piece of writing - if not in the moment on the subway - Khader and Lindauer reject the praise. They don't endorse Lindauer's publicly accoladed status as 'the best daddy ever'.

1.2 | Anti-fat appraisals

The author Aubrey Gordon, formerly writing under the pseudonym 'Your Fat Friend', objects to being praised by a colleague for her 'bravery' in wearing an "unremarkable, standard" dress:

> I was only *brave* if my body was meant to be a source of shame, something to be shut away, covered up, rarely seen and never discussed. And she [the appraiser] simply couldn't conceive of someone with a body like mine daring to get dressed, daring to be seen, daring to show up in the same places as someone with a body like hers (2020).

Part of what is problematic here is that the praiser is mistakenly crediting Gordon with demonstrating excellences of character (bravery) where (by Gordon's own lights) none was manifested.[2] This is underpinned by the tacitly expressed normative expectations: that Gordon ought to feel

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[1] In examining cases where praise is rejected, I follow Millikan's (1989) suggestion that attention to defective cases is instructive for adequately analysing function.

[2] Note that there are other possible interpretations of this case: on one, the appraiser is really just using the appraisal as a cover for insult; on another the praiser may be someone close enough to the target of the praise to understand well the challenges and obstacles they might face, and are able to praise in a way that does not express nor imply oppressive norms (for example, knowing that the person has endeavoured to ignore oppressive norms of appearance). It is important to my

ashamed of her body, that great courage is required to overcome this shame. Gordon's writings reject this praise: she does not share her colleague's positive appraisal of her actions as 'brave', exhorting others to also desist from using praise in this way. The title of her piece is: "Please Don't Call Fat People 'Brave' Just for Existing".

1.3 | Ableist appraisals

Disability activist Stella Young articulates the ableist dimensions of being "approached by strangers wanting to tell me that they think I'm brave or inspirational" and objects to being credited as brave for simply existing (2014:timestamp 04.35). Significantly, the target of Young's objection is not only the instances in which individuals offer praise, but also instances in which praise is formalised, within institutional award structures. Young recounts that:

> when I was 15, a member of my local community approached my parents and wanted to nominate me for a community achievement award. And my parents said, "Hm, that's really nice, but there's kind of one glaring problem with that. She hasn't actually achieved anything." … But they were right, you know. I wasn't doing anything that was out of the ordinary at all. I wasn't doing anything that could be considered an achievement if you took disability out of the equation (2014:timestamp 00.22).

Praise in both its individual and institutionalised forms presumptively credits Young with bravery and inspirational forms of agency, but only on the assumption that ordinary activities are heroic achievements for disabled people. Such praise tacitly expresses low expectations of Young qua disabled person. Notably these assumptions are present both in the case of dyadic, directed praise (the strangers approaching Young), but also where the praiser intends to celebrate Young's presumptive 'achievements' to the wider community, in the form of community awards. Young rejects both accolades.

The limited existing literature to date has focused on cases in which praise is rejected because the recipient rejects a) that the target of the praise did the act; b) that the act is morally good;[3] c) that the act is praiseworthy (because the equivalent of excusing conditions hold) (Lippert-Rasmussen calls these 'direct' rejections, 2022:233); or d) because one regards the praiser as lacking standing to praise ('indirect' rejections, 2021:234; see also Jeppsson & Brandeburg on hypocritical praise, 2022). The three examples I have introduced demonstrate a novel basis for rejecting praise: the recipients reject praise because they reject the norms and values upon which the praise rests (I return to unpack these rejections in section 2).

Notwithstanding these rejections, it is commonplace to identify these expressions as praise.[4] But in virtue of what? What is being expressed when Lindauer is praised for his role in parenting, and when Gordon and Young are praised for their putative bravery, such that it is correct to identify these expressions as *praise*? And what is the speech, in which that expression is made, doing?

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point that these are not the interpretations I work with. The understanding I work with is supported by Gordon's critical interpretation of the interaction (in other scenarios other interpretations may better fit the particulars of the situation).

[3] One might think that on these grounds the praise is rejected: but this is not quite right. One can accept that e.g. Lindauer does something morally good (share parenting) whilst rejecting the praise. See sections 3.2 and 3.3 for further discussion.

[4] It is important that these examples are cases of genuine, intended praise; to be distinguished from cases that are superficially praise, but are in fact insults, such as backhanded praise. For a fascinating discussion of the tradition of using what looks like praise to insult, see Macphail (2022).

What forms of uptake are sought by the praise - even where it is not achieved? Analyses of praise have asked about what the *content* of praise is, and about the *form* of its expression. These analyses have addressed, and have implications for, other questions about praise also: when is praise apt? What is the relationship between the praiser and the praised? Does praise primarily express something to the praised, or to third parties?

Using the examples I have introduced, I next develop a functionalist account of praise. I first articulate the contours of this account and the explanatory work it can do in relation to these three examples (section 2). In the following section (3), I consider some recent analyses of praise and show the limitations of these accounts, compared to the functionalist account I develop.

It is worth noting that many of the theorists with whom I engage would likely consider the examples of oppressive praise as cases in which praise is *not* apt, nor warranted, even if it is fitting (because, on some basis, deserved).[5] And indeed, that the targets respectively *reject* the praise speaks to this inaptness. As such, these cases are often not the intended targets of their analysis. Nonetheless, the examples are recognisable cases of praise. Any adequate analysis should be able to accommodate them - as well as explain why they are inapt or unfitting. Moreover, we will see that considering cases in which praise goes wrong - cases of oppressive praise - is particularly fruitful in developing this functionalist account. This resonates with Helm's recent proposal that consideration of 'abnormal cases' (2019:188), can be illuminating in helping us understand the social functions of the reactive attitudes.[6]

2 | PROLEPTIC PRAISE: A FUNCTIONALIST ACCOUNT

In this section, I develop a functionalist account that articulates one of the things (perhaps amongst others) that praise does. Other functionalist accounts have been developed - that the function of praise is to communicate something to the target of the praise (I consider the details of these accounts, contrasting them in more detail with my own, in section 3). My contention is that the focus on second-personal dyadic praise has meant that these accounts have been restricted to analysing what praise *does* for its direct target. This means that philosophical approaches have neglected one of the wider social functions of praise: to entrench norms and values, and exert social pressure in a moral community. Little attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which social pressure is exerted by praise on any of its audiences. I develop my functionalist account and articulate some of these mechanisms. There are three key steps in my argument: first, that praise functions to entrench norms and values, and exert pressure in relation to those norms and values; second, that praise serves this function by signalling the commitments of the praiser; thirdly, that the presuppositions of the praise are an important mechanism by which commitments are signalled, and an effective means of entrenching norms and values - for better or worse.

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[5] I do not claim that the praise is unfitting - there may be something praiseworthy in the target's actions, even if not what the praiser supposes it to be. So the diagnosis must focus on what else makes the praise unwarranted or inapt (see also Holroyd (2021) for a rejection of desert as the grounds on which oppressive praise is problematic; and D'Arms and Jacobsen (2000), Smith (2007) for the distinction between the fittingness of a moral response versus the propriety of expressing it).

[6] Helm is focusing on gratitude, rather than praise. Two qualifications: first, gratitude may be a (partially overlapping) sub-type of praise, but I take it they are distinct: none of the examples of praise above express gratitude. Second, the sorts of 'abnormal cases' Helm has in mind are those in which it is unclear that the behaviour really was worthy of positive appraisal - where done from ulterior motives, or where any positive impact was merely accidental - so distinct from the sorts of cases that are my concern. I focus more on Helm's claims about the social functions of the positive reactive attitudes in section 2.1.

2.1 | A *social* function of praise

Bennett Helm argues that positive reactive attitudes (his focus is on gratitude) can serve an important *social* function. An expression of the positive reactive attitudes, he proposes, "calls on the benefactor to affirm the norm and hence the recognition respect toward the beneficiary the norm requires" (2019:188). This idea is not a new one. As Delin and Baumeister write in their early survey of empirical work on praise: "praise reveals something about the values and standards of the praiser" (1994:223). Moreover, the idea that the reactive attitudes have a role in affirming values has been articulated by Wallace, who writes that when we express the reactive attitudes:

> we are demonstrating our commitment to certain moral standards, as regulative of social life… [the reactive attitudes] can be seen to have a positive, perhaps irreplaceable contribution to make to the constitution and maintenance of moral communities: by giving voice to the reactive emotions, these responses help to articulate, and thereby to affirm and deepen, our commitment to a common set of moral obligations (1994:69).[7]

However, there is an underexplored idea in Wallace's claim, namely, that the reactive attitudes maintain moral *communities*, and affirm commitment to a *common* set of moral norms. This implies affirmation beyond the dyadic, directed relationship between (e.g.) the praiser and the praised that has been the focus of other functionalist accounts. It is towards this wider social function that Helm gestures, in writing that the positive reactive attitudes:

> can help resolve indeterminacy in communal norms or even institute new norms… they [a benefactor] may break new ground, where it may be indeterminate in advance whether the benefactor's action follows any existing norm. In feeling gratitude, the beneficiary thereby commits to a new norm or to a more determinate delineation of an existing norm, thereby inviting others, including the benefactor, to do likewise (2019:188-189).

The idea here is that in expressing a positive reactive attitude - such as gratitude (Helm's focus), or praise (our concern) - the expresser affirms the norms or values that the target has seemingly acted in accordance with. In doing this, they show their commitment to that norm, and invite others to similarly commit. Crucially, the affirmation concerns others - including, but not limited to, the target of the reactive attitude. This gets the wider audience in view. Helm's focus is on cases where norms are indeterminate or in contention - but my proposal is that praise has this function in all cases, even though it may be most visible where the norms are disputed, as in the cases of oppressive praise. Note that the role of social pressure I articulate is quite distinct from the idea of praise as post hoc reinforcement or reward. This idea has been rejected (see Delin & Baumeister (1994), Holroyd (2007)). Rather, I draw attention to the *proleptic* dimension of praise: that anticipates and entrenches, by presupposing, the instantiation in agency of the values that it celebrates.[8]

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[7] Wallace's primary focus of course is on blame: praise does not have the central role that blame does in our responsibility practices, according to Wallace.

[8] For other discussions of the proleptic dimensions of the reactive attitudes, see Fricker (2016) and McGeer (2019, 2015), McGeer & Pettit (2015).

In the following, I articulate the mechanisms by which praise can entrench values and norms, and exert - for better or for worse - social pressure. I set out the commitments of this view of praise, before, in the following section, showing its strengths relative to existing approaches in the literature.

2.2 | Signalling

How might this social function of praise be served? In a recent functionalist account of blame, Shoemaker and Vargas (2019) have argued that the disparate cases and kinds of blame are best unified by understanding blame as a kind of signal. On their view, the function of blame (in its various forms) is to signal the agent's competence and commitment: competence, qua moral agent, in recognising violations of the relevant norms, and in understanding the norms in order to police them. And expressing blame signals the agent's commitment to those moral norms and to enforcing them. Crucially, any particular expression of blame might signal multiple things to multiple audiences: blame to the direct audience;[9] solidarity to the victim, warning to would-be norm violators, affirmation of the norm and community with those who endorse it (2019:10). These signals need not be intended.

Since praise is part of our responsibility practices alongside blame, we can consider what praise might signal. Abstractly, we can say that expressions of praise signal the praiser's competence in identifying when certain norms or values have been promoted; and their commitment to and affirmation of those values or norms (in particular a commitment to promoting them, and celebrating other's promotion of them). Less abstractly, let us again consider what is signalled in the cases of praise from section 1.

In the 'daddy dividend case', the praiser signals their commitment to certain values and norms: celebrating men's role in parenting. Where Gordon's colleague praises Gordon's putative bravery, the praiser signals her commitment to certain values and norms: norms according to which bravery is valued, and the promotion of such values. Where Young is praised, the praiser signals their commitment to values and norms: bravery, and its celebration. If analogous to blame, as analysed by Shoemaker and Vargas, the praisers might also signal their competence in identifying where these values are promoted (though of course, in our examples this competence is not demonstrated - the signal is not a reliable one, due to the influence of oppressive norms). This is not all that is signalled, as we will see when I articulate what is presupposed in these expressions of praise: namely, a wider set of assumptions and normative expectations. First, it is worth noting the commitments of this functionalist account in terms of the content of praise, and its form.

On content: one of the putative merits of a functionalist account is that it can prescind from questions on the particular mental states or attitudes that are essential to or constitutive of praise, since many different expressions (of judgement, emotions, desires) can play the role of signalling competence and commitment to the relevant values. Accordingly, this account is not committed to the idea that praise takes any one characteristic content. This gains support from observations about the variegated ways in which praise might be expressed: thus a functionalist account can sidestep debates about whether praisers (should) represent their targets as meeting or exceeding normative expectations (Stout, 2020; Telech, 2020).[10] Likewise, a functionalist

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[9] Though on their view, there need not be any dyadic communicative relationship between the blamer and the blamed: as when we blame the dead, or blame absent parties. One can also blame oneself, or engage in private blame.

[10] The view that praise is concerned with exceeding expectations falls out of an assumed symmetry with blame: where blame is concerned with failures to meet some normative expectation, praise is concerned with exceeding those

can accommodate that praise might be expressed in dispassionate judgements of worthiness - even what Stout refers to as "begrudging praise" (2020:217) - or emotive expressions, such as profuse expressions of esteem. What unifies a range of expressions and contents as praise is their signalling of competence in detecting where values have been promoted, and commitment to (at least sometimes) celebrating their promotion.

That said, in developing their functionalist account of blame, Shoemaker and Vargas attend to some paradigmatic instances of blame to explain how it can effectively and stably function as a signal. In particular, blame paradigmatically has hard-to-fake emotional components (anger, resentment) which convey difficult-to-access information about what matters to the blamer; this partially explains how such expressions can become stable parts of a communication system. Such expressions are costly, both in their unpleasant emotional components, and in the risks that they take on: one could be wrong about whether a norm really was (culpably) violated, or about the norms themselves.[11] Thus blamers have reason to take care that their signals are reliable ones.

It will be useful to consider how the features of paradigmatic cases of praise can explain how such expressions effectively and stably function as a signal. Praise in its paradigmatic expression will not be accompanied by *unpleasant* hard-to-fake emotions. Rather, expressions of praise are typically (if not always, as per dispassionate or begrudging praise) accompanied by positive attitudes or emotions - such as feelings of admiration or attitudes esteem (see e.g. Telech, forthcoming:3-5), where such attitudes involve "the recognition of particular qualities of individuals" (Jütten, 2017:259).[12] Such expressions are capable of conveying information about what the praiser cares about, and is committed to celebrating. Our familiarity with flattering and sycophantic praise suggests that such expressions are, like those involved in the negative reactive attitudes, hard to fake.

Whilst not costly in the way that some emotionally difficult expressions of blame may be, there are still aspects of expressing praise that are properly understood as costly. Signalling one's competence and commitment in relation to values is a way of 'standing for something', in the sense articulated by Chesire Calhoun. As Calhoun puts it, standing for something involves "viewing oneself as a member of an evaluating community and … caring about what that community endorses" (1995:254). In so taking a stand, the praiser puts some normative pressure on their audiences, since by signalling their commitments the praiser says that those values are "in some important sense for us, for the sake of *what ought to be our project or character as a people*" (1995:257, my italics).[13] In relation to our examples, Lindauer's praiser conveys their commitment to fathers' participation in parenting, signalling this *ought to be* valued by others. Gordon and Young's praisers, respectively, show their commitment to celebrating bravery, signalling that others ought also to value this. In part because of what is implied for what audiences ought to value, it

expectations. For views that assume such symmetry, see Helm (2017), Shoemaker (2007), Vargas (2013), McGeer (2019). For discussion, see Telech (2020) (2022), Macnamara (2013). A number of theorists reject this symmetry: in at least some cases, merely meeting normative expectations can be praiseworthy. Stout's example: saving a drowning child at moderate cost to oneself might justifiably be lavishly praised, not least by the child's parents (2020:216-217). See also Eshleman (2014:222). Similarly, Helm presents a case in which a person merely doing what is required of them (a professor correcting themselves to respect a student's non-binary pronouns) renders positive reactive attitudes apt (2019:179). Note that Helm's focus is on gratitude, rather than praise.

[11] Familiarity with the norms is itself costly, they suggest, requiring internalisation and updating of norms (2019:7).

[12] I take it that 'recognition' here is not factive, but is better understood in terms of *calling for* recognition, that is, for others to also esteem the target.

[13] Notably, Calhoun is concerned specifically with integrity, rather than praise. But this is highly relevant to the praiser's ability to signal *reliably* their competence and commitments.

is always the case - and perhaps most visible in cases where praise is rejected - that expressions of esteem put the praiser in a position to be challenged. Perhaps others think the target didn't display that quality, isn't worthy of esteem, or that the values celebrated are not worthy ones. In praising Lindauer, the stranger on the subway opens themselves up to criticism for this expression. In praising Gordon's bravery, the colleague faces (*post hoc*) challenge about whether that value really was instantiated. In offering accolades to Young, the strangers who do so are open to critique about whether they are competent in detecting bravery. So expressing praise is somewhat risky.[14] Praise signals what matters to the agent, and what they think should matter to others; and it matters that they get praise right. Praisers have reason to take care that their signals are reliable ones.

This brings us to the question of the *form* of praise: much of the literature has focused on the form of praise as a second personal communicative act: as addressed to someone of whom a demand is made, or invitation is extended. I will explore such accounts in more detail in section 3. However, here I want to draw attention to an aspect of praise that is overlooked or obscured by the focus on its form: what expressions of praise presuppose. Presupposition, I argue, is one key mechanism through which praise signals one's commitments. It is a mechanism via which praise conveys fine-grained information about normative expectations, of an agent in a context, and exerts social pressure to accept and conform to those normative expectations. Through presupposition praise signals the evaluative commitments of the praiser, both to the recipient of the praise and to a wider audience.

2.3 | Presupposition

How might expressions of praise play this wider social function - how does it signal these commitments and values? One way, in paradigmatic expressions of praise, is by explicitly esteeming certain values: bravery, kindness and so on. But there are more tacit affirmations involved in praise. By looking again at our examples of oppressive praise we can see a further mechanism by which praise might serve the function. This helps us to see why praise is a particularly effective method for exerting social pressure, and how it can do so in relation to fine-grained normative expectations.

We can distinguish between the values explicitly celebrated by a praiser, and the wider 'evaluative framework' of the praiser: the presuppositions expressed, which are assumed to be part of the 'common ground' - the shared assumptions that the recipient of the praise and the wider audiences accept (Stalnaker 2002:716).[15] Consider what the instances of oppressive praise presuppose. In 'the daddy dividend' case, the stranger on the subway not only signals commitment to celebrating men's role in parenting; but also to an evaluative framework that contains gendered assumptions about what is to be expected or required of fathers. The praiser, tacitly and perhaps unintentionally, is expressing something about the social meaning of the behaviour for them: that it has exceeded their normative expectations for fathers, given their expectations about the gendered roles within families. In expressing praise for Lindauer, this wider evaluative framework, with low normative expectations for fathers, is presupposed. Lindauer cannot accept

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[14] Shoemaker and Vargas also mention the costs involved in internalisation of norms, violations of which call for blame (2019:7). Perhaps analogous in the case of praise are Wallace's remarks about the costs of valuing: that taking on evaluative commitments renders us vulnerable to the emotional investments of caring about those things (Wallace, 2013:23-33).

[15] Note that the evaluative framework might contain propositions or commitments that the praiser would not, if made explicit, endorse. Hence a key task of social critique is that of identifying latent or tacit commitments.

the praise without accepting these presuppositions, and endorsing those gendered values.[16] And, unless challenged, these presuppositions are assumed to be part of the 'common ground': shared by parties to the praise, including the direct target and the wider audiences. Hence Khader and Lindauer's critique of the praise: accepting it would signal endorsement of and commitment to, the gendered evaluative frameworks signalled by the praise.

Where Gordon's colleague praises Gordon's putative bravery, the praiser not only signals her commitment to bravery and celebrating it's display. Gordon writes that:

> Praising fat people's "bravery" and "confidence" is a subtle kind of othering, a reflection of the speaker's values, biases, and limited understanding of fat people's experiences (2020).

The praiser also signals, via presupposition, commitment to the presumptive evaluative framework according to which fat bodies carry shame that requires bravery to overcome. The praiser communicates the normative expectation that Gordon feels shame about her body, and presupposes that this shame is apt. The praiser's wider evaluative framework - which assumes a fear of fatness, that fat bodies are shameful, and Gordon's relationship to her body a negative one - are expressed in the presuppositions about what makes Gordon's attire 'brave'. Gordon cannot accept the praise without accepting these presuppositions, and endorsing these evaluative assumptions. And, unless these presuppositions are challenged, they are taken to be part of the shared values of audiences to the praise. Hence Gordon's discomfort with - and ultimate rejection of - the praise: accepting it would signal commitment to values that she rejects, and indeed, values which denigrate and degrade her.

Finally, Young's praiser signals commitments to valuing the bravery instantiated in Young's 'overcoming' her disability and to feel pride in so doing. The praise also signals, via presupposition, an evaluative framework according to which disabled bodies are burdensome, and disabled people held to insultingly low expectations; the respective overcoming, and meeting of these displays inspirational levels of courage. Thus the praiser communicates, via presupposition, the normative expectation that Young's embodied existence is a burden, and assumes that this will be Young's attitude also. In nominating for a community award, the praiser would presuppose that this evaluative framework is shared by the wider community. Young cannot accept the praise and co-value her putative achievements without accepting these presuppositions. Unless the presuppositions are challenged, they are taken to be part of the shared assumptions and values of the moral community. Hence Young's critical remarks, which target some of these presuppositions:

> Life as a disabled person is actually somewhat difficult, we do overcome some things. But the things that we're overcoming are not the things that you think they are. They are not things to do with our bodies (2014:timestamp 05.12).[17]

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[16] There are other possible interpretations of this case: that the praiser is assuming that Lindauer is in a state of moral development, and is praising by way of helping to develop his capacities and sensibilities. The presupposition of this praise is quite different, but still problematic: that qua father (and in contrast to those of mothers), Lindauer's parenting capacities are naive and in development. Thus the praise has patronising presuppositions. See Jeppsson and Brandeburg (2022) for discussion of patronising praise.

[17] Note that this is not the view of all disabled scholars or activists: some have argued that one defect with the social model is that it reduces disability only to social obstacles, obscuring from view some of the kinds of physical difficulty that arise, e.g. chronic pain (see Barnes (2016)).

Young rejects the praise: accepting it would signal commitment to values which, in her terms, objectify herself and other disabled people (timestamp 04.54).

What is signalled, then, is not simply a commitment to the values that are expressly celebrated in the praise. Praise also signals commitment to the evaluative frameworks - the propositions and norms - that the praise presupposes. It is also via presupposition that praise expresses certain values, and how these values are affirmed. This is a particularly effective way of entrenching norms and exerting social pressure, since the evaluative frameworks are assumed to be part of the shared 'common ground'. Moreover, as we will see, presuppositions are difficult to reject. And, unless the expression of praise is challenged, these presuppositions are presumed to stand as part of the shared commitments of the audience. In such cases, the values explicitly expressed and tacitly presupposed are more widely affirmed. Unless challenged, the presuppositions of the praise are assumed to be part of the values shared by the audiences to the praise; the interaction proceeds as if the presupposed assumptions and norms are endorsed.

In sum: praise serves an important function in our social practices. It functions to signal the commitments of the praiser. In so signalling, praise exerts social pressure (sometimes tacitly, by way of presupposition) towards accepting certain values and expectations. But since those values and expectations may sometimes embody oppressive values and norms, praise may function to entrench oppressive values. Moreover, it may do this even if it is rejected by the direct recipient of the praise, since the praiser themselves, and members of wider audiences, may nonetheless affirm those values presupposed, and proceed as if those values are shared. And, there are reasons for which it can be particularly difficult for the direct recipient of the praise to challenge its presuppositions.

2.4 | Rejecting praise

I have argued that one function of praise is to exert social pressure towards the affirmation and endorsement of the values it expresses. It does this by signalling the commitments of the praiser. These commitments are signalled not only by the praiser's exaltation of values explicitly; but also by what is presupposed by the praise. Of course, there are other ways of exerting social pressure: persuasion, coercion, argumentation. In this section, I tease out the ways in which the presuppositions of praise are a particularly effective and difficult to resist mechanism for entrenching norms, and hence an effective source of social pressure.

First, if the evaluative frameworks expressed and affirmed by the praiser are presupposed, then since those commitments are introduced via presupposition, they are therefore harder to challenge.[18] As Langton and West write:

> … when something is introduced as a presupposition it may be harder to challenge than something which is asserted outright. A speaker who introduces a proposition as a presupposition thereby suggests that it can be taken for granted: that it is widely known, a matter of shared belief among the participants in the conversation, which does not need to be asserted outright (1999:309).

The assumption is that the evaluative framework is shared. It is easier to deny the explicitly communicated content of the praise ("Oh, what I did wasn't really brave") than to challenge the

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[18] See Langton & West (1999), following Lewis (1979), Stalnaker (2002).

evaluative presuppositions of the praise ("Well, you're assuming that it requires bravery to wear that, and that's on the assumption that my body is a source of shame that it requires bravery to overcome"). The praiser assumes that the norms and values presupposed can be taken for granted, and are shared amongst the participants in the interaction, including the wider audiences.

Second, challenging the evaluative presuppositions means drawing into the foreground evaluative differences one has with the praiser, which can turn a light-hearted exchange into disruptive contestation. There are various reasons, across various different contexts, for which one might seek to avoid this: to avoid disrupting norms of friendship, familial harmony, or collegiality; to avoid being on the wrong end of power dynamics in the exchange; to avoid perpetuating power dynamics in an exchange; constraints on time and energy. There are many reasons for which legitimate disagreement and disruptive contestations are avoided.[19]

Third, one of the difficulties with challenging the presuppositions of praise is that doing so violates supposed norms of courtesy. The praiser was trying to do something *nice*, and here you are criticising them! This makes praise in particular difficult to challenge and reject - in particular in the case of interpersonal exchanges (see also Jeppsson & Brandenburg, 2022:8,15).[20] It is no surprise, I think, that in two of the three cases of praise, the authors express their rejection of praise in writings rather than directly in the interpersonal exchanges, to the persons expressing praise to them.[21]

Fourth, there is something risky about rejecting praise on the grounds that one rejects the evaluative presuppositions of the praise, since those presuppositions are deniable. Consider that multiple interpretations of praise are available (if not plausible) (see the alternative interpretations considered in footnotes 2 and 16). Since the praiser can deny that their expression presupposes oppressive values, challengers put themselves in the position not only of disrupting an exchange that was supposed to be nice, but of doing so on the basis of deniable evidence. They *know* what happened, but establishing it definitively is hard.[22] They risk being gaslighted by the praiser's insistence that there was *nothing wrong* with the praise (Manne, 2023; McKinnon, 2017).

Finally, effective challenge requires having certain skills and being afforded certain authority. As Lepoutre remarks, a successful challenge:

> depends on having various skills and abilities, including (amongst other things): the epistemic ability to identify the presuppositions; the clarity to challenge them in a way that makes it more difficult for others to twist one's words; and the authority which enables one to speak publicly and be taken seriously when one battles over words (2017:869).

If one lacks these abilities and privileges, or has but lacks confidence in them, then successful challenges to oppressive praise will be thwarted.

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[19] See also Berenstain (2016).

[20] One might object: praise isn't hard to reject, since there is a norm of modesty that positively encourages targets of praise to do so: "Oh, I did nothing special!", or "Oh, anyone would have done the same". Such responses don't, I think, *reject* the praise, and certainly not its evaluative presuppositions. Rather these responses accept praise in a modest way, downplaying one's worthiness to be the recipient of it (see Mason, 2019:108).

[21] And note that, in another example, the direct rejection is performed by a third party: Young's parents. My thinking about the interpersonal dynamics of doing so - in particular the power relations - has been informed by written exchanges with Matt Lindauer.

[22] See Sue et al (2007), and discussion in Holroyd and Puddifoot (2020), on deniability in response to challenges.

The social function account I have developed highlights the various ways in which praise might be accepted or rejected: privately or publicly; in the moment or post hoc; by the direct second-personal target or by (some) third party audiences.[23] Each of these variables will affect the success of the expression in exerting social pressure. But even when praise fails to in fact exert social pressure, this does not mean that it lacks that function; just that on this occasion it has fulfilled its function suboptimally - or in rare cases, not at all.

3 | OTHER FUNCTIONS

Other analyses of reactive attitudes have tended to stipulatively focus on dyadic communicative acts, between the expresser and their direct target. On these views, the reactive attitudes in general (and praise in particular) are communicative entities in that they have representational content, and seek appropriate uptake of that content (Macnamara, 2013:555-557). The key details, on these communicative accounts, concerns precisely what representational content there is, in what form it is conveyed, and what uptake is sought, from whom. What these views share is a commitment to the idea that praise functions to communicate something to the recipient of praise: it is a dyadic, second personal interaction. In this section, I compare my account to two versions of this approach, from Telech and Macnamara, and show the limitations of their views. I present my view not so much as a competitor, but as an essential supplement that any complete account of the functions of praise should endorse.

3.1 | (Not) Demands

To understand the communicative functions of praise that have been posited, it is useful to briefly see what has been said about what praise is surely *not*. Daniel Telech has argued that it is highly implausible that praise is symmetrical with blame in its form. The form of blame might be a demand which "provides imperatival reasons for compliance (e.g. to acknowledge wrongdoing, offer redress" (2021:8); but praise cannot be modelled as issuing a demand (see also Telech, 2022:155; Macnamara, 2013:903, contra Darwall, 2007:120). As Macnamara puts it, it would be strange for positive reactive attitudes to be demands for compliance, since the target has already shown themselves to be in compliance with - and perhaps exceeding - normative expectation (2013:903).[24] Thinking about our cases, for example, it is clear that when Gordon is praised for her bravery, she is not being subjected to a demand to comply with reasons to be brave, now or in future. If anything, the oppressive anti-fat presuppositions of the praise might be read as *discouraging* Gordon from such demonstrations of putative bravery in future. Nor is Lindauer subjected to a demand to comply with reasons to participate in parenting. Rather, he is being praised for already comporting himself in accordance with those reasons. (If he's 'the best daddy ever!', what more could possibly be demanded of him?)

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[23] An extremely interesting question for future attention concerns which third parties are well placed to accept or reject praise on one's behalf.

[24] Macnamara thinks that there are oddities also with modelling blame as such a demand: blame is not adequately responded to with a commitment to comply with normative demands in future. This sort of future-directed demand does not capture the backward-looking element of blame, she argues (2013:902).

If praise is not demanding compliance, is it demanding something else? One suggestion might be that the reactive attitudes demand appropriate emotional response: acknowledgement of wrong and feelings of guilt; or acknowledgement of good done and feelings of self-approbation or pride, for example.[25] But, Macnamara claims, insofar as reactive attitudes (positive and negative) seek uptake in some emotional response - such as pride or guilt - it is odd to model them as demands. Emotional responses, she claims, given the kind of things they are, with fittingness conditions, cannot simply be demanded: "We can no more feel an emotion on command than we can digest our food on command" (2013:902).[26] Thus, even if Gordon's praiser were sincerely demanding that she feel pride for her courage (rather than, or alongside, shame of her body), Young's praiser that she feel pride for her putatively inspirational behaviour, or Lindauer's praiser were demanding that he feel pride for his role in parenting, Macnamara's point is that such feelings are not felicitously demanded. They can't be felt on command. Modelling the reactive attitudes in this way renders them infelicitous. These considerations have led some authors to offer alternative accounts of what kinds of communicative act expressions of praise are.

3.2 | Recognitives

Macnamara's proposed account sees both blame and praise as *recognitives*: that is, forms of expression that recognise their target under an evaluative guise, and seek in their target commensurate recognition. In particular, the reactive attitudes thus recognise their targets "as having done something morally significant: something good, bad, right or wrong (the evaluative guise)" (2013:903). For example, on this view, blame would recognise someone as having done something wrong, and call for the target of blame to recognise that they have acted wrongly. The called-for recognition should occasion - and is in part constituted by, on Macnamara's view - feelings of guilt and motives for repair. Praise, on the other hand, would recognise someone as having done something good, and call for the target of praise to recognise that they have acted in morally positive ways - as having done a good thing, or the right thing (note though that Macnamara's focus is primarily on gratitude and approval; praise is not the explicit target of her analysis). That recognition should occasion, in the target - and is in part constituted by, on Macnamara's view - feelings of pride (see 2013:907-909). What the reactive attitudes *do* on this view - their function - is to recognise the moral quality of the target's deeds, and they are successful in doing this where the target shares in this recognition.

When Lindauer is praised, for example, Mcnamara's view would model the praise as recognising that something good has happened: a father has played some role in parenting! This recognition seeks uptake from the target, whereby Lindauer too would recognise his deeds as good; this recognition should occasion (be constituted by) feelings of pride or self-approbation. Or, when Gordon and Young are praised for bravery, what is expressed is the recognition of some good thing happening. As understood by Gordon, the praiser is expressing something like: "such bravery, being fat in public!" Young construes the praise she is target of as expressing something like: "performing everyday tasks is a monumental and brave achievement for you, a disabled person!" This recognition seeks uptake in the target, whereby Gordon and Young too would recognise their behaviour under an evaluative guise, as good; this recognition in turn should occasion (or

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[25] For a recent articulation of praise in terms of a demand, see Mason (2019:111). What is demanded, on Mason's view, is that the praisee recognise the praise, and take some pleasure in it (see 108-109).

[26] This concern from Macnamara also applies as much to blame as to praise.

be constituted by) feelings of pride and self-approbation. Of course, in these cases, the praise is rejected: neither Lindauer nor Gordon nor Young provide uptake for the praise. Can Macnamara's view make sense of this?

Notably, there is something insufficiently precise in Macnamara's analysis of *what* is recognised: as she has it, something morally significant; a good or right thing (2013:907-908, 910). This analysis renders it difficult to make sense of what is inapt in at least some of the cases of oppressive praise, and what is going on when the targets reject the praise. For example, where Lindauer is praised, it is hard to deny (and surely Lindauer does not deny) that a good thing has been done: fathers parenting is a good thing. Lots of good things happen; lots of good things are done; not all of them warrant praise. The reason for which praise in the Daddy Dividend case strikes us as problematic, however, is that the praise seemingly expresses something more: it expresses in its presuppositions the view that normative expectations - low ones, for fathers who parent - have been exceeded.[27] We need to accept the claim that praise presupposes these normative expectations that are ridiculously, insultingly low, in order to make sense of why Khader and Lindauer reject it.

When Gordon rejects the praise, she need not be denying that 'a good thing has happened', nor that her behaviour has moral significance. Gordon embraces the idea that people wearing what they like is a good thing. In contention are the more fine-grained evaluative presuppositions of the praise: the specific interpretation of the good thing which depends upon the supposedly shared assumption that Gordon feel shame of her body, and bravery in overcoming it. Gordon does not share this specific conception of how she should relate to her body, and so feels no shame, requiring no bravery to overcome it.

When Young rejects praise, she need not be denying that there is some evaluative guise under which her behaviour is positively recognised. Young advocates for the positive value of disabled lives. But the praiser expresses, via presupposition, a specific interpretation of the positive thing, an interpretation that Young rejects: the expectation of incompetence, or a burdensome relationship with one's body, in relation to which mere functioning indicates heroic bravery. Moreover, in all three examples, there would be expressions of praise that construe what has been done as good that could be unobjectionable: praise for challenging oppressive (gendered, anti-fat, ableist) norms.

The evaluative guises under which behaviours and character traits are understood and communicated about, in praise, are much more specific than those modelled by Macnamara: simple recognitions of good or right things done. The role of specific, fine-grained normative expectations, communicated in the presuppositions of the expression, and how they shape the evaluative guises under which behaviours are interpreted, is absent from Macnamara's analysis, and this means it lacks the apparatus to diagnose what is going wrong in these cases. Appeal to the evaluative presuppositions of the praise, as articulated in section 2, needed.

3.3 | Invites

An alternative analysis of what is done in - the function of - expressing praise shares with analyses of blame the idea that it is a form of moral address: it addresses its target and seeks uptake and response. The form of praise, according to Telech, is that of an *invitation*. On Telech's view, praise is a kind of moral invitation: it invites the target of the praise to share in the valuing of the good thing

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[27] Or that meeting expectations was unusually burdensome for him, qua father.

done - and specifically, the regard this showed, for the person delivering the praise or for another, and the significance of this to the praiser: "what the praiseworthy agent's manifestation of regard meant for the praising agent" (2021:160). Note the following features of Telech's account: first, that the praiser is inviting the target of the praise to do something with them (the praiser), namely co-value together. Secondly, what the target of the praise is asked to co-value is "the praiseworthy agent's manifestation of good will" (2021:156), under a particular guise, namely "the significance of that action for the praiser" (forthcoming:14). Expressions of praise seek uptake in the form of acceptance - acceptance of the invitation to co-value, and hence acceptance of credit that the praise presupposes. This acceptance emotionally registers for the target of praise in self-directed pride (2021:160).

Applied to our examples, we would say that when Lindauer is praised, the praiser is inviting him to co-value what he has done (parenting), accept credit, and emotionally register this in feelings of pride. When Gordon is praised, the praiser is inviting her to join in the valuing of her (putatively) brave behaviour, accept credit, and emotionally give uptake for the praise in self-directed pride. When Young is praised, the praiser is inviting her to co-value the (putatively) brave behaviour, accept credit, and give uptake in pride. Of course, neither Lindauer nor Gordon nor Young seek to give uptake: none want to accept the credit directed towards them on the bases that are intended by the praisers.

One thing to notice here is that Telech's analysis is not a great fit for what is praised in these cases. Telech's emphasis, in Strawsonian mode, is on praise being for the regard that the target has manifested: "what the praiseworthy agent's manifestation of regard meant for the praising agent" (2021:160). But in our examples of common-place and easily understood cases of praise, the thing being praised has little or nothing to do with the regard or quality of will of the target, nor (e.g.) the significance of the parenting or bravery for the praiser. The praise focuses, respectively, on the supposedly creditable conduct of their target *qua* parent, and on the putative excellences of character displayed by Gordon and Young. These cases are not unusual with respect to *for what* the targets are praised: yet it requires quite a bit of interpretative licence to understand these cases in terms of the quality of will of the target, or the significance of their action for the praiser. That seems to stretch interpretative credulity: a more expansive understanding of what the praiser values better accommodates these cases.

Further, I argued that a key component of what praise does - visible in the cases of oppressive praise - concerns what is signalled via presupposition: the wider evaluative framework that - it is assumed - is shared by the audiences to the praise. Thus praise concerns not so much the significance of the praised action for the praiser, but its wider social meaning, for the moral community. This brings us to a further limitation of both Macnamara and Telech's views of praise.

3.4 | Second personal communicative acts

Both Macnamara and Telech see praise as a second personal communicative act. There is a limitation in this stipulative focus. First, it misses out the wider audiences of the praise. Second, it fails to accommodate the kind of pressure that praise exerts, both on the direct target and on the wider audiences. On the first point, Telech writes that praise that is "personally directed" (2021:160);

> to the extent that [an instance of praise] does not seek uptake from the praiseworthy agents, it will not be an instance of praise in the moral address sense of interest to the communicative theorist (2021:166).

From this perspective, the role of third parties or wider audiences is set aside, since Telech stipulatively claims to be focused only on communications of praise that seek uptake from the (putatively) praiseworthy agents (2021:166). This is in keeping with a range of approaches to the (positive) reactive attitudes that focus primarily on dyadic, second-personal interactions (see in particular Macnamara (2013), (2015); Telech (2020), (2021), (2022), Calhoun (2022) (forthcoming)). Reflecting on the attempts to praise Young, in particular, suggests that this is an unhelpful narrowing. In the praise directed towards Young, some of the intended praise is directed not only towards Young (the dyadic directed praise from strangers); it is also directed towards the wider community: the community award would communicate Young's putative praiseworthiness not only to Young, but also to others in the community. This dimension of praise is explicitly occluded from view by accounts which stipulatively focus on dyadic interactions.

Moreover, even in the instances of praise in which the praise is second-personally directed (towards Lindauer, and Gordon, respectively), praise still has a wider audience, and has a social function in relation to those audiences. The presuppositions of praise are assumed to be shared by those in the wider audiences, and for them too, the values and norms are entrenched and affirmed. The praiser communicates to wider audiences - others on the subway with Khader and Lindauer, and colleagues in Gordon's workplace - the assumption that they share the presuppositions of the praise. This can be so even if the praiser does not intend to communicate anything to the wider audiences, and even if they are unable to explicitly articulate all of the propositions and values they presuppose. Multiple things may be signalled to multiple audiences.

This brings us to the second point: by focusing only on what praise does for its direct target, qua recipient of second personal praise, these accounts overlook the social function of praise. They focus on the significance of praise for the target only. But praise does more than this, as I argued in section 2: it signals the values of the praiser to wider audiences, and in particular presupposes evaluative frameworks, exerting pressure to affirm those norms and values. The stipulative focus on second-personal communicative acts, and on their form rather than their presuppositions, obscures the social function of praise in affirming and entrenching values for the wider audiences of praise. This renders accounts of praise as second personal communicative acts vulnerable to a challenge that the functionalist account I propose is better placed to meet.

3.5 | The point of praise

Cheshire Calhoun (2022, forthcoming) challenges Telech and Macnamara's views on account of their being ill-placed to explain what the point of praise would be. She remarks that Telech and Macnamara's ways of modelling praise are odd, since the person praised is often quite well aware that they have done a good thing, and is often praiseworthy precisely because of their having done the good thing for the right kinds of reasons. What is the point, then, of praise pointing to the relevant properties? As Calhoun puts it: "expressions of gratitude and praise do something. But what they don't generally do is focus the target's attention on something they weren't already aware of in the first place" (forthcoming:58). And elsewhere, in relation to the positive reactive attitudes of appreciation or gratitude, Calhoun writes: "Any message whose gist is 'You did a good thing' simply affirms what the appreciative or grateful person must assume the target already knows" (2022:25).[28] Lindauer's praiser must assume he parents because he believes it a good thing;

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[28] In contrast, it may make sense to draw the attention of wrong-doers to the relevant features for which they are blameworthy, since the aim is that they dwell on this and accept wrongdoing

Gordon's and Young's respective praisers must assume that they (Gordon and Young, in turn) believe bravery to be a good thing. So why draw their attention to what it is assumed the targets already know to be good?

Likewise, the idea that emotional uptake sought by praise - in the praised person feeling pride - is also misplaced, Calhoun claims. Rather, the grounds for pride are already in existence (in the praiseworthy thing), and so precede the expression of praise: "the agent's emotional "uptake" typically precedes communicative exchanges; it is not reasonably an aimed-for effect of them" (forthcoming:58; see also 2022:24-26). To the extent that there are grounds for pride, it is in the already performed actions of Lindauer, Gordon and Young - not in the praise they receive.

Telech's view is supposed to have some resources to address this worry: responding to Calhoun, he emphasises that expressions of praise present the target with an opportunity to do something they otherwise could not (take up the praiser's invitation to co-value the good thing done); and to do so in light of some new information about the praiseworthy action (the meaning of the action for the praiser in particular). Can these moves adequately respond to concerns about the point of the praise?

The first thing to note is that these moves will only be available in a limited number of cases - those in which the praise really is to do with the meaning of the action for the praiser. As I have suggested, there are some cases of praise - such as the examples of oppressive praise - in which the social meaning of the action, rather than its meaning for the praiser, appears to be at stake. The second thing to note is that insofar as these further things are supposed to have a role in affirming values, the social function account I have developed is much better placed to articulate the role of praise in affirming values and entrenching norms.

Expressions of praise affirm and entrench values by signalling the praiser's commitment to those values. The evaluative framework in which the praise is embedded - the assumptions and norms presupposed by the expression of praise - are also affirmed and entrenched by the expression of praise. My positive account is better placed to account for the point of praise than those views which stipulatively restrict themselves to second personal communicative acts. My account can explain why there is a point in expressing praise even if one does not know whether the recipient will accept the praise - or even if one is quite sure that they will not. In such cases, the praise will still serve an important function for wider audiences to the praise, as well as to the praiser themselves: to entrench values and norms, and (by assuming their acceptance) exert pressure to affirm them.

The idea that praise involves normative pressure is not wholly absent from Telech's account, so perhaps Telech could appeal to that aspect of his account to respond to Calhoun's challenge? Since praise is a kind of invitation, Telech claims, some normative pressure is present in praise's invitation - the pressure to accept, unless there are good reasons not to do so. Quoting Martin ([2021, 75]), Telech points out that "Valid invitations... 'carry with them a certain legitimate pressure to accept, where the invitee needs a good reason to refuse (beyond say "I don't feel like it")'" (2021:171, see also Telech, forthcoming:11).[29] But all the pressure, on Telech's view, comes from the form of the invitation itself: the request which requires reasons to be given if refused (otherwise, "why don't you want to co-value that good deed with me?"). This is insufficient to capture the pressure not simply to accept credit, but to affirm the evaluative framework expressed in the praise. This pressure derives not from the form of praise (qua, e.g. invitation), but from the assumption that the wider audiences of the praise share the assumptions and values of the praiser. The expression

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[29] But note that Martin argues that what she calls "pure invitations" are not like that: they do not exert this sort of pressure (2021:75). If that is right, praise will not be a pure invitation in Martin's sense.

of praise exerts social pressure to accept the presuppositions of the praise: that Gordon should be ashamed of her body, that Young should be held to insultingly low expectations, that fathers' basic parenting is exceptional.

This form of pressure is rendered invisible on Telech's analysis, which abstracts from the particular values operative, instead "employ[ing] as a placeholder the term 'laudable standard'" (2021:162). But the detail is significant, as I have argued. A coarse-grained articulation of the 'laudable standards', or even 'the good thing done', is insufficiently fine-grained to make sense of why praise is sometimes - as in the instances of oppressive praise - rejected. What is of crucial significance on my account is not simply that the praise exerts pressure to do a good thing: but that it does so in relation to the fine-grained assumptions and expectations that are the presuppositions of praise.

3.6 | The targets of praise

Accounts of praise that construct it as a communicative entity tend to emphasise that praise (and other reactive attitudes) comes with certain intelligibility conditions - that is, they require that their target have the appropriate capacities to understand and give uptake to the communicative act. There is disagreement about the necessary capacity conditions for praise. I here argue that my functionalist account can accommodate the claim that the proper targets of praise may manifest a diverse range of capacities.

Calhoun argues that praise responds to a conception of responsibility that is concerned with a person's capacity to *take responsibility* (2022:18-23; forthcoming:50-53).[30] This involves not only the capacity to understand normative expectations, but to understand the values underpinning them and being capable and disposed to, at least sometimes, electively promote those values. It is the kind of responsibility exemplified when people volunteer, do favours, go beyond the bare minimum.

Eshleman too argues that there are "important enhancements to freedom often exhibited in exemplary agency, enhancements that, in part, may constitute the grounds for praise" (2014:233). Being an apt target of praise, Eshleman argues involves having capacities for a certain kind of practical wisdom - a kind of distinctive knack for being attuned to the personal and context-sensitive ways of promoting others' welfare, and forms of attentiveness unimpeded by excessive deliberation or self-consciousness.[31]

Notably, Eshleman contrasts this kind of responsibility - which he calls "aretaic attributability" - with the kind of attributability that we might find in the agency of young children. This kind of attributability, Eshleman claims, concerns whether the action is the agent's own, and we can often engage that question well before we can engage questions of attributability in the aretaic sense (2014:230-231).

On these views, the kinds of capacities that are apt targets of praise are the capacities involved in taking responsibility - promoting values - or in demonstrating practical wisdom and excellences of agency: the bar for praiseworthy agency is high. On these views, what would make the behaviours and characters of Lindauer, Gordon and Young praiseworthy is their exemplifying some enhanced

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[30] Crucially, this is distinct from the capacities required for being held accountable.

[31] This goes beyond what is required for being an apt target of blame. Moreover, Eshleman thinks that praise responds to the agent's sensitivity to welfare-, rather than respect- based reasons, as blame does.

forms of agency: those forms involved in taking responsibility, or demonstrating excellences of character only seen in well-developed moral agents.

This is in stark contrast to the view from Coates (and echoed by Telech, 2021:168), according to which very young children - as young as three years old - might have the sorts of "incipient appreciation for others' moral significance" (2019:167) that renders apt the positive reactive attitudes. Coates draws on examples of empirical studies in which such young children behave in ways we might praise as kind and considerate: giving a toy to another crying child; making efforts to get an unbroken cup for another. Any such praise need not be conceived of as merely instrumental, and directed only at inculcating apt moral sensibilities, Coates claims. Of course such children are much less developed in their moral sensibilities than we hope they will eventually become. But this fact, Coates argues, "doesn't mean that their very rudimentary understanding of what's important in these particular cases isn't a real achievement on their parts" (2019:168), and thus creditable to them. They may be genuinely praiseworthy (even if it is inappropriate to hold them to be fully accountable). On this view, the bar for praiseworthy agency is low - indeed, lower than that for blameworthy agency.

The second-personal communicative accounts are committed to a somewhat demanding picture of the capacities involved in being an apt target of praise: the recipient must have the capacities to enable them to give uptake to the communicative act - to accept the recognitive or invitation extended. In contrast, the social function account can explain why a much broader range of agents' capacities are apt targets of praise. All that is required for that social function of praise to be apt is that the recipient is capable of responding to social pressure to affirm and endorse values. Those with capacities in development, and not yet exhibiting exalted forms of agency, may be apt targets of social pressure to affirm values. Indeed, some evidence suggests that positive forms of feedback, such as praise, are particularly helpful in cultivating behaviour in learners - those with 'incipient competence'. Various strands of empirical research have focused on the ways in which praise can communicate important information about competence, increase motivation and foster the development of one's capacities (see summaries in Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2020; Corpus & Good, 2020; Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020).[32] For example, Eskreis-Winkler and Fishbach remark on the finding that non-experts engage more - are more attentive, demonstrate more learning - when they get positive rather than negative feedback (2020:51). So praise is a particularly effective form of feedback for those whose capacities are in development. Conversely, the social function account can also make sense of what the point of praising those with enhanced forms of agency is and why doing so is apt: to affirm those values in the praiser, the praised, and wider audiences. As such, the functionalist account I develop can take a more permissive view on the range of capacities that apt targets of praise may have.

4 | CONCLUSION

I think it is striking that analyses of praise (and the reactive attitudes in general) have given little attention to the role of reactive attitudes as norm enforcement mechanisms.[33] Perhaps one reason

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[32] Though some studies have also highlighted ways in which some kinds of praise - depending on what it expresses - can be problematic: decreasing motivation, self-esteem and perceptions of competence. See discussion in Corpus & Good (2020).

[33] Though in fact, Calhoun's (1989) distinction between justification and point in the context of moral responsibility ascriptions and responses, gets just at this social pressure, I think: that there might sometimes be a point in reproaching (moral education, in entrenching and motivating adherence to norms), independently of the justification for doing so (405-406).

for this is the tendency to move away from understandings of our responses to good and bad doings in crudely consequentialist terms, whereby praise and blame are seen as carrot and stick, reward and sanction.[34] Instead, the emphasis has been on the ways in which praise (and blame) interacts with the agential features of their targets: seeking uptake of recognitives, or invitations to co-value, say. However, I hope that attention in particular to the social function of praise, and its oppressive manifestations, shows that it is worth attending to the more mundane parts of our responsibility practices: the parts that function as the levers of social pressure, entrenching values and norms, for better or for worse. This might better enable us to articulate, and where needed, change them.

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[34] Indeed, I think there are good reasons to move away from such crudely construed models (see Holroyd (2007), Vargas (2013), Jefferson (2019)).

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