ORIGINAL ARTICLE

European Journal of Philosophy **WILEY**

Moral praise and moral performance

Hallvard Lillehammer[1,2]

[1]School of Historical Studies, Birkbeck, University of London, UK

[2]School of History, Philosophy and Digital Humanities, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

Correspondence
Hallvard Lillehammer, School of History, Philosophy and Digital Humanities, The University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK.
Email: h.lillehammer@sheffield.ac.uk

Abstract

According to some, luck forms an inevitable part of admirable moral agency. According to others, it is incompatible with a basic principle of moral worth. What's the issue? Is there a 'problem' of moral luck; or are there many, or none? With reference to the practice of moral praise, I suggest that there is no single problem of moral luck as traditionally understood. Instead, there is a family of issues regarding the interpretation and assessment of moral performance. In the background is a mixture of descriptive and normative issues, including how to understand the legitimacy of social expectations, the value of effort, and the duties of communities to enable their members to live good and virtuous lives.

KEYWORDS

Blame, Moral Luck, Moral Responsibility, Praise

1 | SOME BASIC TERMS

By 'moral praise', in what follows I shall refer to expressions of moral assessment that have an essentially favorable nature, and involving either 'thick' (as in 'What a kind thing to do!') or 'thin' (as; 'That was so good of you!') moral concepts; and of either 'deontic' (as in 'You did the right thing') or teleological (as in 'That was a very generous thing to do') form.[1] In contrast to much of the literature to which this paper is addressed, I shall not be primarily concerned with moral assessments involving ether censure or disapproval, such as judgements involving blame or other punitive attitudes (see e.g. Adams 1982; Strawson 1962; Smith 1983; Oshana 2006; Fricker 2016). This is not to imply that none of the claims made in this paper also apply to expressions of blame and the like. It is rather that the task of showing that either some, and if so which, of them do would involve addressing a set of issues that go beyond the considerations relating to praise that I am concerned to address here; blame being a matter not only of the *absence of praise* (see e.g. Nelkin 2011; Eshleman 2014; Stout 2020; Alfonso Locon 2021; Pummer 2021; Telech 2021;

Lippert-Rasmussen 2022; Shoemaker 2024). If any of the suggestions made below about praise *were* to apply *mutatis mutandis* to blame this would have important implications for our understanding of moral responsibility, the retributive emotions, and the limits of justified punishment (see e.g. Athanassoulis 2005; Hanna 2014; Hartmann 2017; Nagel 1979; Rosebury 1995; Scanlon 2008; Slote 1994; Urban Walker 1991; Williams 1981, 1995; Zagzebski 1996; Zimmermann 1987). Yet even if they do not, the suggestions I shall make about praise in what follows would retain their independent interest. The upshot would then be that praise and blame constitute overlapping, but not perfectly complimentary, dimensions of moral assessment and criticism. The argument of this paper is consistent with this broadly pluralistic conclusion, although it does not entail it.

By 'moral performance' I shall refer to any manifestation of a moral capacity, including attitudes, judgements, intentions, acts of will, physical behaviors and their consequences. In other words, and crucially for present purposes, the moral performance of a given individual on a given occasion is not exhausted by their individual attitudes, judgements or acts of will; even individual acts of will *as manifested in intentional action*. To assess a person's performance is to assess the entirety of the performance on display, as might be exemplified on a given occasion by an absent-minded slip of tongue, an unreflective act of beneficence, an act of well-intentioned rudeness, or a sincere act of genuflection. On one currently familiar way of thinking about it, an agent's moral performance includes, even if it is not exhausted by, those facts about them and their behavior that would ground attributions to that behavior of a distinctive kind of 'meaning' (Scanlon 2008; see also Dewey & Tufts 1932).

By 'interpretation' I shall refer to any morally salient description of a given moral performance, including but not exhausted by social descriptions employing moral concepts. Thus, it could be a correct interpretation of an individual speech act that it contained the words (in that order) 'You are fired'; that it expressed a decision to let someone go; that it effectively ended someone's employment; that it destroyed someone's life; that it was an act of callous ethnic discrimination; that it constituted wrongful dismissal; that it was cowardly; that it was wrong; or that is was contrary to law. As I shall be using the term, each of these descriptions may equally count as a correct interpretation of the event in question and thereby reveal its meaning or significance in a recognizably moral sense. One salient feature of such interpretations is that at least some of them might not be easily available to the groups or individuals whose behavior they correctly describe (e.g. that my act constituted wrongful dismissal). Indeed, although this is not strictly speaking necessary for the discussion in what follows, some of the interpretations in question may not even be rationally or otherwise intelligently accessible from the deliberative point of view of the individuals in question at all (e.g. where the operative notions in the relevant interpretation are either not understood by the agents to whom they apply, or where the concepts these notions express are not readily available to them in the relevant context.)[2]

My main suggestion in this paper is that there is a coherent way to morally praise the moral performance of normally competent individuals in light of correct interpretations of that performance that draw on features of that performance that transcend the limits of what those individuals either do, or can, individually control; either in virtue of limitations to their *power*, or in virtue of limitations to their *knowledge*.[3] (The second of these may, of course, be a cause of the latter.) It follows that some coherent moral assessments are subject to a significant degree of moral luck, as a result of which some evaluation and criticism of moral performance is essentially a socially and historically contextual matter that transcends the intrinsic qualities of individual understanding and will.[4] Or at least it transcends the intrinsic qualities of individual understanding and will as those qualities are often understood.[5]

2 | THREE SCENARIOS

My suggestion is based on reflection on three scenarios involving moral praise in various degrees (or its complete absence) and how one natural way to describe these scenarios appears to conflict with an allegedly basic principle of moral assessment (henceforth 'the Control Condition') that constrains such assessments by what is within an agent's control. According to a standard definition of the Control Condition (CC), individuals are morally assessable only and to the extent that what they are morally assessed for depends on factors of their situation that are under their

control.[6] Some version or other of (CC) is present – whether explicitly or implicitly - in a wide range of contributions to the literature on freedom and responsibility, and is often (even if not universally) associated with Immanuel Kant's (in)famous claim that the only thing that is good without qualification is a good will (See Kant 1785/1981; c.f. Hartman 2019).

The three scenarios can be briefly outlined as follows.

In the first kind of scenario, which I shall refer to as 'consequence cases', the appropriateness of praise (or its degree) is contingent on some aspect of what has come to be known in the literature as 'consequential luck' (see e.g. Nagel 1979). Consider a situation in which you attend a party wearing a shiny white suit. As you go to pick up your drink you happen to slip and swerve toward a large jug of Sangria your hitting of which will irrecoverably stain your suit. Fortunately for you, I spot the danger and step in to support you, thereby preventing your collision with said jug. After regaining your composure, you gratefully turn to me and say: 'Thank you for saving my suit: that's so kind!' I gratefully welcome your gratitude.[7] Yet things need not have been thus. Suppose that, in my valiant effort to interpose myself between you and the jug I had accidentally slipped and thereby sent the jug straight at you. In that case, you might well not have expressed yourself in the same way. I would certainly not expect you to. Perhaps it would have been unfair if you had blamed me for the incident (after all, you were swerving, and I was only trying to help). Yet a stiff upper lip on your part, and an insincere 'Don't worry about it, it was my own fault' might be the best I could hope for. And that, you might think, is fair enough. Nice try, but no prizes. Of course, we safely assume (if only because I have stipulated it), it was all down to luck. But so (in at least some cases) is winning or losing a lottery or being successful or not on a rational bet.[8]

In the second kind of scenario, which I shall refer to as 'opportunity cases', the appropriateness of praise (or its degree) is contingent on the individuals involved being presented with (or not being presented with) some opportunity to display an intrinsically admirable disposition. Although less frequently seen in the literature than consequence cases, opportunity cases sometimes feature in discussions of what has come to be known as 'circumstantial luck' (c.f. Nussbaum 1986; Thomson 1989; Urban Walker 1991). Consider, once again, a situation in which you attend a party wearing a shiny white suit. As you go to pick up your drink you happen to slip and swerve toward a large jug of *Sangria* your hitting of which will irrecoverably stain said suit. Fortunately for you, I spot the danger and step in to support you, thereby preventing your collision with said jug. After regaining your composure, you gratefully turn to me and say: 'Thank you for saving my suit: that's so kind!' I gratefully welcome your gratitude.[9] Yet things need not have been thus. Suppose that as you go to pick up your drink you notice that you are about to slip and swerve toward a large jug of *Sangria* your hitting of which will irrecoverably stain your suit, but you quickly manage to regain your balance. Once more, I have spotted the danger and I am ready to step in to support you, thereby preventing your collision with said jug. Yet in this case there is no need for me to do so, so I stand back and watch you confidently help yourself to a glass of *Sangria*. It is arguably less likely that you would turn around and express your gratitude. I would certainly not expect you to. Perhaps it would be polite of you to acknowledge my readiness to step in. That is assuming that you have noticed and that you don't consider it patronizing or otherwise inappropriate for me to step in. (see e.g. Jeppson & Brandenburg 2022). There is obviously a range of different ways in which our interactions might go here, depending on context. Yet a simple recognition on your part is probably the best I could hope for. Anything more congratulatory in the circumstances and I might start wondering what your game is. Be prepared, yes, but no prize without performance. Of course, we both understand (if only because I have stipulated it), that my failure to effectively display my gallantry was all down to luck. But so (in at least some cases) is being the life-saving lifeguard closest to the drowning tourist; or being the player who scores the winning goal.[10]

Both 'consequence cases' and 'opportunity cases' are composed of relatively simple elements that require a minimum of social context to get off the ground. The third kind of scenario, which I shall refer to as 'expectation cases', are somewhat different in this respect, and consequently both more difficult to convincingly describe and more controversial to take at their face value. Having said that, with respect to their formal structure, an 'expectation case' is just a socially or historically more textured form of opportunity case. Furthermore, 'expectation cases' raise some of the most complex, deep and troubling questions about moral luck, so I include them here even if my main

suggestion in this paper does not depend on their cogency as here described (c.f. Dan Cohen 1992; Enoch 2011; Freyenhagen 2013; Morris 1974).

The key idea behind 'expectation cases' is that there are legitimate moral expectations made of individuals that bear at best a contingent relation to the capacity of those individuals to grasp and respond to their significance. In schematic form, an expectation case could take the following – historically not unimaginable -form. Suppose that, having inspected your cultural biases in the solitude of your study, you have, without making any great effort, been able to not downgrade, exclude, or otherwise discriminate against people whose names look strange when you sift through the piles of candidate CVs for jobs in your organization, and when you see evidence of such discrimination you effortlessly call it out.[11] You do so in the context of a professional culture where such discrimination is rife. When you and your colleagues look back at this time from the comfort of your retirement, not only may you retrospectively approve of your past self. You may even applaud it and feel a sense of pride. Yet things need not have been thus. Suppose instead that, having inspected your cultural biases in the solitude of your study, you have, without making any great effort, been able to not downgrade, exclude, or otherwise discriminate against people whose names look strange when you sift through the piles of candidate CVs for jobs in your organization, and when you see evidence of such discrimination you effortlessly call it out. Yet you do so in the context of a professional culture where such discrimination has long become generally frowned upon. When you and your colleagues look back on this time from the comfort of your retirement, you will no doubt retrospectively approve of your past self. Perhaps you may even, in some recognizable sense of the word, applaud it. But would you feel justified in applauding and feeling proud of yourself to the extent that you would in the first scenario just described? Arguably not, or at least not to the same extent. Beyond registering a basic recognition of the moral significance of what you have done, feeling pride in this instance would instead be a symptom of diffidence, narcissism, or having unacceptably low self-expectations (c.f. Holroyd 2021). Of course, we can safely assume (if only because I have stipulated it) that the difference between the two cases here is purely a matter of luck. But so (in at least some cases) is the difference between having a novel or familiar philosophical idea; or making an original or unoriginal artwork (such as painting a blank, monochrome canvas).[12]

I have so far suggested that moral praise (in at least some of its aspects) tracks moral performance (in a wide range of its aspects) in at least some of the three kinds of scenarios I have described. What could possibly be wrong with that? The problem, in a nutshell, is that so understood the practice of moral praise is prima facie inconsistent with the Control Condition (CC), and thereby potentially with some of the core aspects of our moral responsibility practices as these have sometimes been described in the philosophical literature (Wolf 1980; Scanlon 2008; McKenna 2012; Mason 2019; But see Nelkin 2011).

3 | INTERPRETING THE CONTROL CONDITION

According to one (which I shall refer to as the 'strict') formulation, the Control Condition (CC) on moral assessment states the following:

> CC: *Genuine moral assessments* of *individual moral agents* are *constitutively restricted to aspects of their situation* that are *within their individual control*.

On the strict reading, CC is inconsistent with the suggestion made in the previous section that some genuine moral assessments consist in moral praise for moral performance in a wide range of its aspects, from the quality of an agent's will to the actual consequences of their intentional action. Given that moral praise thus interpreted runs directly foul of CC interpreted strictly, what should we conclude?

One option is to reject the suggestion made in the previous section and insist that the interpretations given of consequence cases, opportunity cases and expectation cases therein are based on a mistake. This would be the

natural option for anyone who is deeply hostile to the existence of moral luck of any kind, whether as applied to praise-focused or blame-focused aspects of moral assessment (see e.g. Kant 1785/1981). The reverse option is to consider these cases as direct counterexamples to CC, and thereby reject CC outright, at least for the praise-focused aspect of moral assessment (c.f. Nelkin 2011; Lang 2021). Neither option will be pursued in what follows. With respect to the first option, whatever the above discussion of consequence cases, opportunity cases and expectation cases shows about CC, the reactions described in those cases do present a minimally cogent and recognizable form of normative assessment _of some kind or other_ (moral or otherwise). To simply dismiss these cases out of hand fails to provide any explanatory leverage on what goes on when agents are knowingly praised (with respect to elements of fortune) for their performance in the way described, whichever taxonomy we use to conceptually classify it. With respect to the second option, whatever the defects of CC as stated above the idea that key aspects of moral assessments are guided by some form of control condition is independently plausible and intuitively deep. More specifically, the need for some kind of control condition is easily rationalized with reference to what I shall refer to as 'the fairness intuition', which as formulated with respect to praise-focused aspects of moral assessment holds that to distinguish between people in respect of praising behaviour is _unfair_ to the extent that it based on facts about themselves or their situation that they can do little or nothing about.[13] In what follows, I therefore prefer to explore the apparent tension between CC and moral praise of lucky moral performance by trying to keep both ideas in play and see to what extent, if any, they can be reconciled.

In pursuing this conciliatory path, I shall make three further (and clearly not innocent) assumptions. First, I shall assume that the apparent tension in question does not derive from some inexcusable historical oversight on behalf of contemporary philosophers, such as a simple failure to notice that a basically 'Kantian' view of moral worth that implies CC in some form is tension with a broadly 'Aristotelian' theory of virtue that does not (c.f. Nussbaum 1986; Williams 1995). Second, and as previously noted, I shall assume that no real headway on this issue will be made by pursuing an essentially taxonomical (or terminological) dispute about the proper use of the term 'moral' (in contrast to the term 'ethical', for example (c.f. Williams 1985). Third, and perhaps more controversially, I shall assume that the resolution of this apparent inconsistency does not consist in a 'no-accommodation' view, according to which the legitimacy of any moral praise that is demonstrably incompatible with CC strictly interpreted is best explained on either purely _instrumental_ terms (as in being 'useful' for the promotion of desirable states of affairs, including desirable acts of moral performance), or on purely _fictionalist_ terms (as in being literally false or incoherent, but still 'useful' for the promotion or desirable states of affairs, including desirable acts of moral performance). On the contrary, I shall be working on the assumption that whatever the resolution of the apparent tension consists in, it will take the form of a correctness-preserving appreciation of the intrinsic moral merits of praiseworthy moral performance (c.f. Calhoun 2021).

4 | ONE ECUMENICAL RESPONSE

In the remainder of this paper, I consider one broadly ecumenical response to the apparent tension between CC and the moral praise of lucky moral performance. I shall refer to this as the '_moderation, not denial_' response. This ecumenical response is neutral with respect to whether a parallel set of considerations can be applied to blame-focused aspects of moral assessments, a question that will not be at issue in what follows.[14]

The key to the 'moderation, not denial' response is to make the absence of control a _moderating_ condition on the praise-focused aspects of moral assessment. The rationale for this restriction is to accommodate the fairness intuition while retaining a commitment to the aptness of moral assessments of lucky actual performance. By analogy with non-moral cases of praise, this restriction is consistent with the moderating conditions of praise being multiply realizable in different social and historical circumstances. Thus, there could be circumstances in which the absence of control functions like the failure to meet a necessary condition on appraisal and hence makes an act of praise inappropriate altogether (e.g. if it is known that the target of appraisal is generally incapable of becoming a reliably

virtuous person). Alternatively, there could be circumstances in which the absence of control functions like one among a plurality of 'marks' of praiseworthy behavior, the relationship and priority between which is a matter of a broadly 'holistic' assessment (as when certain properties of student work are said to 'normally' characterize work that is of 'A standard'; 'First Class', or 'at Distinction level'). An accordingly revised version of CC, as applied to moral praise, might now say something like this:

> CC2: *Genuine moral assessments* of *individual moral agents* are *constitutively restricted* **by** *aspects of their situation* that are *within their individual control*.

Thus formulated, CC2 is arguably plausible enough to broadly capture both the fairness intuition and the apparently conflicting assessments expressed in the consequence, opportunity and expectation cases discussed earlier. Yet there is at least one critical observation to make about CC2 as just stated. This is that by *moderating* praise only by what is within the *individual's* control, it fails to address the moral relevance of *social expectations* the grounds of which often transcend facts about individual agency alone. The problem is most vividly in evidence in the case of 'expectation cases,' where what seems to make the moral difference between the cases has relatively little to do with the intrinsic features of the person judged, as opposed to the legitimate social expectations operative in her or his social environment at a given time and place. It follows that if we are to take the above description of these cases at face value (which for the purposes of argument I assume that we should), the original revision of CC may need to be further revised to accommodate the extent to which at least some genuine moral assessments are dependent on irreducibly 'social' facts in addition to facts about any single individual. Hence:

> Revision 1: *the moral is social*.

The key to this revision of CC is to make the absence of either individual *or social* control a *moderating* condition on praise. The rationale for this restriction is to accommodate the fairness intuition, the moral assessment of lucky actual performance, and the moral relevance of social expectations. An accordingly revised version of CC, as applied to moral praise, might now say something like this:

> CC2*: *Genuine moral assessments* of *individual moral agents* are *constitutively restricted* **by** *aspects of their situation* that are *within their individual control*, or **within the control of some social group of which they are a part**.

Once more, CC2* is arguably plausible enough to broadly capture both the fairness intuition and the apparently conflicting assessments expressed in the consequence, opportunity and expectation cases discussed earlier, with the caveat that the way CC2* captures the fairness intuition now qualifies the insight expressed by that intuition to such an extent that it is clearly in conflict with any strongly individualist account of the grounds of moral assessment. The question whether this is an intolerable implication of CC2* is not an issue to which I can do justice here (but see e.g. Dan Cohen 1992; Morris 1974; Oshana 2006; Holroyd 2021; Lang 2021). Yet even assuming for the sake of argument that this further relaxation of CC is a reasonable one, there is still one critical observation to make about it as formulated here. This is that an exclusive focus on *control* may underplay the extent to which, although moral assessments may be moderated by limits of what is within the individual or collective control of the relevant objects of those assessments, the various ways in which such limits are manifested arguably makes it less misleading to describe the restriction in terms of what someone can 'affect', 'influence', 'or 'make a difference to', as opposed to literally 'control' (where making a difference to something could in principle involve no more than expressing some attitude towards a state of affairs the agent can do little or nothing about). If we pick up on this suggestion, it follows that the original revision of CC may need to be further revised to accommodate the extent to which at least some genuine moral assessments involving praise are targeted not so much at what people are able to control or

bring about, as at what they are able to take an attitude towards, aspire to, or otherwise engage with 'agentially'. Hence:

> *Revision 2: the moral is aspirational.*

The key to this revision is to make *absence of the ability of anyone (individually or collectively) to aspire to* moral excellence or virtue a moderating condition on praise. The rationale for this restriction would be to accommodate the fairness intuition; the appropriateness of moral assessments of lucky actual performance; the legitimacy of social expectations; and the moral relevance of the fact that absence of ability to *control* does not imply the absence of ability to *react*. An accordingly revised version of CC, as applied to moral praise, might say something like this:

> CC2**: *Genuine moral assessments* of *individual moral agents* are *constitutively restricted* **by** *aspects of their situation* **to which either they individually, or some social group of which they are a part, can intentionally respond**.[15]

Once more, CC2** is arguably plausible enough to broadly capture both the fairness intuition and the apparently conflicting assessments expressed in the consequence, opportunity and expectation cases discussed earlier. Having said that, there are two critical points that might immediately be made about this further relaxation of CC as applied to moral praise, and which together might lead one to suspect that something of the essence in the fairness condition has been lost along the way. The first is that agreeing to this further relaxation threatens to make CC as applied to moral praise both explanatorily and normatively toothless (because subject to excessive qualification). Whether this is a serious criticism or not will depend on what we make of the alternative hypothesis that the endorsement of CC2** is a symptom of the recognition, briefly noted above, that the place of the control condition in moral assessment should be construed holistically, and that the terms on which the standard discussion of moral luck in the philosophical literature has traditionally been conducted are therefore misguided. This is a very large topic, and therefore one to be left for another occasion. The second critical observation is that thus revised, CC as applied to praise fails to do adequate justice to the culturally and historically widespread moral phenomenology that drives the intuitions (such as the fairness intuition) that make it attractive in the first place. On reflection, I think the appropriate answer to this criticism is a qualified 'Yes', and a qualified No'. A qualified 'Yes', insofar as some of the concerns that have historically motivated the control condition (and some of which are laden with heavy theoretical baggage) are simply not addressed (or are 'contextualized away') in the revised versions of CC discussed above (c.f. Kant 1785/1981). A qualified 'No', insofar as those historical concerns could be either morally or theoretically misguided, at least as applied to praise (c.f. Nelkin 2011). Once more, this is a very large topic, and one on which I shall make no attempt to adjudicate here, except to make one point that is arguably not widely enough recognized.

True, when looked at from a theoretical perspective, the Control Condition may express a sense of due respect for the limitations of individual moral agents who are doing their best to act virtuously in their contingently given physical, social and historical circumstances. But this theoretical insight has a practical flipside. For by so strictly circumscribing the domain of legitimate moral assessment, the Control Condition may, non-intentionally or otherwise, result in a failure to duly respect those agents by falsely suggesting that *moral excellence or virtue is always within individual reach*, when sometimes (for contingent personal, social and historical reasons) it isn't.[16] In this way, what may initially be thought of as a morally innocent restriction on moral assessment that is meant to be protective of the individual and her or his 'dignity' could potentially turn out to undermine that protection by suggesting that the moral excellence or virtue of individuals can be left to their own devices, as opposed to considering the fact that some individuals may have had their path to moral excellence or virtue blocked (or never provided for) as a reason for the wider moral community to either encourage or otherwise give them a better chance of achieving it (or at least make it the case that there is some point in aspiring to it).[17] In other words, insisting on the application of a strict

interpretation of CC to moral praise could stand in the way of recognizing that others might have a duty to enable someone to reach a condition in which they *become* apt targets of moral praise.[18] The social and political implications of this are legion and too wide-ranging to permit further elaboration here.[19]

ORCID

Hallvard Lillehammer https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3775-1396

ENDNOTES

[1] The question will inevitably arise of what, if anything, distinguishes the species *moral praise* from the genus *praise* in general. (By analogy, it might be asked what, if anything, distinguishes the species *moral blame* from the genus *blame* in general.) In what follows, I shall have very little to say about this or other questions of conceptual demarcation. Instead, I shall assume that an act of praise involving paradigmatically moral terms will normally be correctly interpretable as an act of genuine moral praise; that such acts are ubiquitous and readily recognizable; and that we have a relatively stable pre-theoretical grasp of the distinction between moral and at least some other forms of praise in virtue of being able to identify obvious contrast classes (such as praise that is purely instrumental and neutral with respect to content). I briefly pick up on this issue again below. For two recent attempts to provide an empirically informed analysis of praise, including praise that is recognizably moral, see Anderson et al. 2020; Holroyd 2023.

[2] Relevant examples here are concepts the articulation of which derives from particular historical events or movements (such as 'sexual harassment'), or actions that depend on the development of new technologies at some specific time (such as 'doxing' or 'online trolling') See e.g. Fricker 2007; c.f. Moody-Adams 1997).

[3] The claims made in this paper are consistent with those made about praise and the ability to do otherwise in Nelkin 2011, Chapter 5; although in contrast to Nelkin's argument the discussion that follows is not articulated against the background of considerations deriving from the metaphysics of freedom.

[4] By 'evaluation' I mean the assessment of the moral quality of some performance, where that assessment is in principle detachable from any form of direct or communicative contact with its object (as in the classification of a historically distant performance as 'barbarous' or 'wrongheaded'.) By 'criticism' I mean the assessment of the moral quality of some performance, where that assessment involves direct and communicative contact with its object (as in 'giving someone their just reward', or 'putting them in their place'. I resist the temptation to treat these cases separately in virtue of the fact that in the first kind of assessment there need be no assumption that it could make any difference to its object (e.g. by affecting its consequent behavior.) I resist this temptation because: i) I make no assumption that any given act of moral praise, merely as such, need have any interesting practical consequences (at least for its object), and ii) in judging our own moral performance over time (e.g. in memory) we frequently seem to be able to switch quite effortlessly between these two perspectives without recognizing any change of subject matter in the process. The point just made in ii) will be further illustrated in the discussion of 'expectation cases' below.

[5] For a 'thoroughly' externalist interpretation of some of the character traits relevant to the attribution of praise and blame that might necessitate a or refinement of this claim, see Lang 2021; Chs. 2–4.

[6] This definition is a paraphrase of the Control Condition (there called the 'Control Principle') as described in the entry on 'Moral Luck' in one standard reference work (*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Nelkin 2019)). See also Nagel 1979; Williams 1981.

[7] In making this claim, I am assuming that expressions of gratitude can at least involve praise, even if gratitude (e.g. as privately felt) is not itself a form of praise. This assumption is neutral with respect to the question of whether my response to your praise is said to be either 'demanded' or 'invited'. For discussion of the latter question, see Telech 2021.

[8] The analogy drawn between moral performance and bets may seem irresponsible or beside the point. On the contrary, I suggest it is potentially illuminating in a number of ways, given how the institutional structures around lotteries and bets are sometimes deliberately designed to divide or redistribute resources to those who are less fortunate (both among participants and others), e.g. by offering consolation prizes; distributing profits among good causes, or taxing the rewards received by those who win.

[9] It has been suggested to me in conversation that expressing one's gratitude is not yet to enter praise that is substantially moral. For reasons I have partly articulated in Footnotes 1. and 7. above, I don't pursue that issue further here.

[10] The analogy drawn between moral performance on the one hand, and rescue teams and sports on the other may seem irresponsible and beside the point. On the contrary, I suggest it is potentially illuminating, given the different ways that actual institutions distribute prizes or accolades to participants, team members and other stakeholders in a supporting

European Journal of Philosophy ⎯WILEY⎯

role (e.g. by rewarding the entire team; all team members present; everyone who has contributed to the collective effort above some minimal threshold, or the like).

[11] I am grateful to Emily McTernan for help in describing this case in such a way as not to invoke orthogonal intuitions about the moral significance of effort. For discussion of the moral significance of effort, see e.g. Nelkin 2014.

[12] The analogy between moral performance on the one hand, and philosophical ideas and artistic achievements on the other may seem irresponsible and beside the point. On the contrary, I suggest it is potentially illuminating, given the ways in which rewards for originality and innovation are differently instantiated across different areas of creative performance, of which some cases of moral performance could sometimes be seen as a distinctive or constitutive instance (e.g. in the context of progressive or socially critical art).

[13] See e.g. Brink 2021; Lang 2021. As previously noted, one of the most vivid (and perhaps also historically most influential) drivers of this thought is the idea that the decision between being rewarded with an eternal life of bliss or not should, when push comes to shove, be made on the basis of what the person so rewarded (or not) could themselves freely (or otherwise realistically) have chosen. One secular *locus classicus* or what is essentially the same intuition is Kant's *Groundwork* (Kant 1785/1981). Is the difference between being punished by eternal torture and not being so punished greater or less than the difference between being rewarded with eternal bliss or not being so rewarded? I shall not pursue this issue further here.

[14] The following discussion is consistent with the hypothesis that attributions of praise and blame are 'hermeneutically' connected in such a way as to undermine the claim that praise and blame should be treated in a radically asymmetrical way with respect to their relationship with CC. Among the potential connections in question are the ways in which some instances of blame are arguably no more punitive or deprecatory for their objects than instances of praise are rewarding or complimentary; that blame - like praise – can be both aspirational and enabling; and that some uses of praise – like blame – can be punitive or deprecatory. For relevant discussion, see e.g. Fricker 2016; Holroyd 2021; Jeppson and Brandenburg 2022.

[15] There is a legitimate question to be raised here about whether the revision of CC represented by CC2** is effectively made redundant by the revision of CC already contained in CC2, given that CC2** remains consistent with the claim that control matters, but matters only *pro tanto*; thereby leaving it open that attributions of praise are also sensitive to aspects of an agent's situation to which they can react, even if they are not within the agent's control. On reflection, I think the answer to this question is negative. What CC2 is merely consistent with, CC2** actually entails.

[16] On one natural interpretation of its standard formulation, CC claims that some aspect of a situation can legitimately be cited as making an agent praiseworthy *only if* that aspect of the situation is within that agent's control. The suggestion in this paragraph is based on the observation that although this claim does not in itself imply that some aspect of a situation can legitimately be cited as making an agent praiseworthy *if* that aspect of the situation is within that agent's control, it is not only rare to see these two claims considered separately; it is also rare to see the first claim affirmed about any given case while the second is either denied or deliberately not asserted. One potential consequence of this is a potentially problematic disposition to judge the fact that someone actually did something morally desirable (intentionally and voluntarily) in a controlled manner as decisive in settling the question of the aptness of praising them for that thing.

[17] Using the word 'dignity' to articulate the control condition could be one key to prizing apart the genuine moral insight expressed by that condition from its articulation on the strict interpretation of CC. Treating all individuals as equal in their capacity to exercise moral agency could be, in some sense, a necessary condition for respecting their moral dignity. If the suggestion made in this paper is correct, however, it is not a necessary condition for respecting someone's dignity that they be regarded as equal candidates for moral praise.

[18] Consider, for example, the social and political implications of being categorized among either the 'deserving' or the 'underserving' poor. See also Note 13 above.

[19] I am grateful to audiences at Birkbeck, University of London, a John Austin seminar at UCL Laws, and an anonymous referee for helpful comments and questions about this material.

REFERENCES

Adams, R. M. (1985), 'Involuntary Sins', *The Philosophical Review XCIV*: 3–31.

Alfonso Licon, J. (2023), 'The Epistemology of Moral Praise and Moral Criticism', *Episteme 20*: 337–348.

Anderson, R. A., Crockett, M. J., & Pizarro, D. A. (2020), 'A Theory of Moral Praise' *Trends in Cognitive Sciences 24*: 694–703.

Athanassoulis, N. (2005), *Fortune's Web: Morality, Moral Luck, and Responsibility*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brink, D. O. (2021), *Fair Opportunity and Responsibility*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Calhoun, C. (2021), 'Appreciating Responsible Persons', *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics 11*: 9–28.

Dan-Cohen, M. (1992), 'Responsibility and the Boundaries of the Self', *Harvard Law Review 105*: 959–1003.

Dewey, J. and Tufts J. (1932/2010), *Ethics*, London: Forgotten Books.

Enoch, D. (2011), 'Being Responsible: Taking Responsibility, and Penumbral Agency', in Heuer, U. & Lang, G (eds.) *Luck, Value, and Commitment: Themes from the Ethics of Bernard Williams*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 95–132.

Eshleman, A. S. (2014), 'Worthy of Praise: Responsibility and Better-than-Minimally-Decent Agency', *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility 2*: 216–242.

Freyenhagen, F. (2013), *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fricker, M. (2007), *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fricker, M. (2016), 'What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation', *Nous 50*: 165–183.

Hanna, N. (2014), 'Moral Luck Defended', *Nous 48*: 683–698.

Hartmann, R. J., 2017, *In Defense of Moral Luck: Why Often Affects Praiseworthiness and Blameworthiness*, London: Routledge.

Hartmann, R. J. (2019), 'Kant Does Not Deny Resultant Moral Luck', *Midwest Studies of Philosophy 43*: 136–150.

Holroyd, J. (2021), 'Oppressive Praise', *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly 7*(4).

Holroyd, J. (2023), 'Proleptic Praise: A Social Function Analysis', *Nous 58*: 905–926.

Jeppson, S., & Brandenburg, D. (2022), 'Patronizing Praise', *The Journal of Ethics 26*: 663–682.

Kant, I. (1785/1981) *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Second Edition, Indianapolis: Hackett.

Lang. G. (2021), *Strokes of Luck: A Study in Moral and Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lippert-Rasmussen, K. (2022), 'Praise without Standing', *The Journal of Ethics 26*: 229–246.

Mason, E. (2019), *Ways to be Blameworthy: Rightness, Wrongness, and Responsibility*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McKenna, M. (2012), *Conversation and Responsibility*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moody-Adams, M. (1997), *Fieldwork in Familiar Places: Morality, Culture and Philosophy*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Nagel, T. (1979), 'Moral Luck', in his *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 24–38.

Nussbaum, M. (1986), *The Fragility of Goodness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nelkin, D. K. (2011), *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nelkin, D. K. (2014), 'Difficulty and Degrees of Moral Praiseworthiness and Blameworthiness', *Nous 50*: 356–378.

Nelkin, D. K. (2019), 'Moral Luck', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-luck/ Accessed 2 December 2024.

Nelkin, D. K. (2020), 'Equal Opportunity: A Unifying Framework for Moral, Aesthetic and Epistemic Responsibility', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 120*: 203–235.

Morris, H. (1974), 'Shared Guilt', in R. Bambrough (ed.), *Wisdom: Twelve Essays*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Oshana, M. (2006), 'Moral Taint', *Metaphilosophy 37*: 353–375.

Pummer, T. (2021), 'Impermissible, yet Praiseworthy', *Ethics 131*: 697–726.

Rosebury, B. (1995), 'Moral Responsibility and 'Moral Luck'', *The Philosophical Review 104*: 499–524.

Scanlon, T. M. (2008), *Moral Dimensions: permissibility, meaning, blame*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Shoemaker, D. (2024), *The Architecture of Blame and Praise: An Interdisciplinary Investigation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Slote, M. (1994), 'The Problem of Moral Luck', *Philosophical Topics 22*: 397–409.

Smith, H. (1983), 'Culpable Ignorance', *The Philosophical Review 92*: 543–571.

Strawson, P. (1962), 'Freedom and Resentment', *Proceedings of the British Academy XLVIII*: 1–25.

Stout, N. (2020), 'On the Significance of Praise', *American Philosophical Quarterly 57*: 215–226.

Telech, D. (2021), 'Praise as Moral Address', *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility 7*: 154–181.

Thomson, J. J. (1989), 'Morality and Luck', *Metaphilosophy 20*: 203–221.

Urban Walker, M. (1991), 'Moral Luck and the Virtues of Impure Agency', *Metaphilosophy 22*: 14–27.

Williams, B. (1981), 'Moral Luck', in his *Moral Luck*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 20–39.

Williams, B. (1985), *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, London: Fontana.

Williams, B. (1995), 'Moral Luck: a Postscript', in his *Making Sense of Humanity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 241–247.

Wolf, S. (1980), 'Asymmetrical Freedom', *The Journal of Philosophy 77*: 151–166.

Zagzebski, L. (1996), *Virtues of the Mind*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zimmerman, M. J. 1987, 'Luck and Moral Responsibility', *Ethics 97*: 374–386.