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Blame: A Necessary Vice?

I explore blame's punitive or sanctioning aspect, locating it in a central form of blame. Directed blame outwardly expresses the reactive sentiments, and is communicated to the blamed individual (second-personally). Acts of blame in this sense include censuring and reproaching someone. An important aim of directed blame is to make the blamed agent feel bad about herself in a particular way: to experience guilt, remorse, or shame while acknowledging her moral failing. Insofar as it has this aim, directed blame, as a feature of individual character, is not a moral virtue—and may be a vice. But the practice of blame is crucial to sustaining a moral community, and its capacity to do so seems to depend (at least in part) on directed blame's special aim of generating emotional distress in its target. For these reasons, directed blame may be a necessary vice.