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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Ethics*, Vol. 122, No. 3 (April 2012), pp. 575-589

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/664752>

Accessed: 29/06/2012 17:30

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Attributability, Answerability, and Accountability: In Defense of a Unified Account*

Angela M. Smith

In his recent article “Attributability, Answerability, and Accountability: Toward a Wider Theory of Moral Responsibility,” David Shoemaker argues that our actual moral practices embody three distinct conceptions of responsibility and that some recent accounts of moral responsibility that draw their inspiration from the work of T. M. Scanlon fail to capture these distinct conceptions. My aim in this essay is to argue that our moral practices do not, in fact, embody three different conceptions of moral responsibility and that what Shoemaker aptly calls “responsibility as answerability” is indeed the only kind of moral responsibility there is.

I. INTRODUCTION

In his recent article “Attributability, Answerability, and Accountability: Toward a Wider Theory of Moral Responsibility,”¹ David Shoemaker argues that our actual moral practices embody three distinct conceptions of responsibility and that some recent accounts of moral responsibility that draw their inspiration from the work of T. M. Scanlon fail to capture these distinct conceptions. More specifically, he argues that these accounts capture only one sense of moral responsibility, which he calls “responsibility as answerability,” and that they neglect two other important senses of moral responsibility, which he calls “responsibility as attributability” and “responsibility as accountability.”

* I am very grateful to David Shoemaker and two anonymous editors of *Ethics* for extremely helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. My work on this essay was supported by a summer Lenfest Grant from Washington and Lee University, for which I am very grateful.

1. David Shoemaker, “Attributability, Answerability, and Accountability: Toward a Wider Theory of Moral Responsibility,” *Ethics* 121 (2011): 603–32.

Ethics 122 (April 2012): 575–589

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There are many things to admire about this careful, penetrating critique, but what I find most valuable about Shoemaker's discussion is the fact that it puts to rest an increasingly common misconception about what Shoemaker calls "Scanlonian [conceptions of] responsibility," namely, that these accounts are intended to provide only the conditions of "aretaic appraisal"² and are not meant to provide the conditions of more robust forms of moral response.³ As Shoemaker correctly notes, defenders of Scanlonian responsibility⁴ take themselves to be providing the conditions for forms of moral response that go well beyond mere aretaic appraisal, and for that reason I welcome his label of my own view as an account of "responsibility as answerability." Even if Shoemaker should turn out to be right that my view cannot capture some other important senses of moral responsibility, I am content with his characterization of the central type of moral responsibility that my view does seek to illuminate.

Having said that, however, my aim in this essay is to argue that our moral practices do not, in fact, embody three different conceptions of moral responsibility and that "responsibility as answerability" is indeed the only kind of moral responsibility there is. This is not, of course, to say that there are no disagreements among philosophers

2. The notion of "aretaic appraisal" was first introduced by Gary Watson in his article "Two Faces of Responsibility," *Philosophical Topics* 24 (1996): 227–48; reprinted in Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 260–88. Watson describes aretaic appraisal as an evaluation of an agent's "excellences and faults—or virtues and vices—as manifested in thought and action" (*Agency and Answerability*, 10).

3. Neil Levy was one of the first to raise this objection in "The Good, The Bad, and the Blameworthy," *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 1 (2005): 2–16. He has since raised it in several other contexts, including "Restoring Control: Comments on George Sher," *Philosophia* 36 (2008): 213–21, "The Responsibility of the Psychopath Revisited," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology* 14 (2007): 129–38, and "Doxastic Responsibility," *Synthese* 155 (2007): 127–55. Similar claims have been made in Neil Levy and Michael McKenna, "Recent Work on Moral Responsibility," *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009): 96–133; and Michael Zimmerman, "Responsibility and Awareness," *Philosophical Books* 50 (2009): 248–61, esp. 259–60.

4. Though it is certainly true that the account of moral responsibility I defend draws much of its inspiration from Scanlon's discussion of moral responsibility in *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), it should be pointed out that the view Scanlon defends in his more recent book, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) appears to have changed in a number of significant respects. In particular, it is not entirely clear to me that Scanlon still holds that responsibility presupposes judgment sensitivity (he now emphasizes "relational significance" rather than judgment sensitivity), and he has certainly backed away from an understanding of "moral appraisal" that ties it to any kind of even implicit communicative demand for justification (see especially *Moral Dimensions*, 234–35 n. 54). Since I do not embrace these changes, it might be misleading to describe my view as "Scanlonian" at this point. But the label seems harmless so long as this point is kept in mind.

about how to interpret the kinds of moral response at issue when we discuss the conditions of moral responsibility or that there are no disagreements about the conditions that must be met in order for agents to be the legitimate target of these forms of moral response. I will argue, however, that these are all debates over how best to understand what it takes for an agent to be morally answerable for her attitudes and conduct. What Shoemaker calls “responsibility as attributability,” I will argue, is not a form of responsibility at all, and what he calls “responsibility as accountability” is just responsibility as answerability in contexts where an agent has violated a specific moral obligation to others.

My strategy will be as follows. In Section II, I will examine Shoemaker’s attempt to draw a distinction between responsibility as attributability and responsibility as answerability. Shoemaker’s argument for this distinction has two parts: first, he gives examples to show that morally significant things may be attributable to an agent even though she is not answerable for them; second, he argues that attributability without answerability is still a form of moral responsibility. I will argue against both of these claims. In Section III, I will turn to Shoemaker’s attempt to draw a distinction between responsibility as answerability and responsibility as accountability. Here again, his argument for this distinction has two parts: first, he considers some examples that are meant to illustrate the distinction between responsibility as answerability and responsibility as accountability; second, he argues that accountability is a distinct form of moral responsibility that has more robust preconditions than answerability. I will also argue against both of these claims. I will conclude with some more general reflections about the current state of the literature on these topics.

II. ATTRIBUTABILITY AND ANSWERABILITY

In the first part of his essay, Shoemaker provides a careful and charitable summary of my own account of moral responsibility (which I call “the rational relations view”), according to which an agent is responsible for Φ just in case Φ bears a rational connection to the agent’s evaluative judgments.⁵ In my view, to say that an agent is morally responsible for some thing is to say that that agent is open, in

5. I defend this view in “Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life,” *Ethics* 115 (2005): 236–71, and further clarify it in “Control, Responsibility, and Moral Assessment,” *Philosophical Studies* 138 (2008): 367–92, and “Conflicting Attitudes, Moral Agency, and Conceptions of the Self,” *Philosophical Topics* 32 (2004): 331–52.

principle, to demands for justification regarding that thing.⁶ To blame or criticize an agent morally for something, then, always embodies (at least implicitly) a demand to her to justify herself, and therefore it only makes sense to direct these forms of moral response to an agent on the basis of things that reflect her evaluative judgments. I have argued that this condition of moral responsibility implies that we are morally responsible not only for our intentional actions but also for the majority of our attitudes (our beliefs, desires, emotions, etc.) as well as for our patterns of awareness and many unintentional omissions, since these generally reflect our (often spontaneous and misguided) evaluation of reasons.

Given this quick summary of my position, we can see why it makes sense for Shoemaker to claim that I am giving an account of moral responsibility understood as answerability. In order for something to be attributable to an agent for purposes of moral appraisal, in my view, we must show that the agent is connected to that thing in a way that makes these answerability demands intelligible. I am not morally responsible for my height, for my intelligence, or for my heartbeat, because it would make no sense to demand that I justify these things. (At most, the question “Why are you so short?” could be a request for explanatory reasons, not justificatory reasons.) But answerability of this sort is not, of course, sufficient to show that an agent is open to any particular moral appraisal on the basis of an attitude, omission, or action. That will depend, as well, on whether the attitude, omission, or action in question violates any moral norms. To say that I am “morally responsible for Φ ” is just to say that I am “answerable” for Φ and therefore open to legitimate moral criticism if it should turn out that Φ violates any moral norms or expectations.

Shoemaker’s basic objection to this view is that certain morally significant things may be properly “attributable” to an agent, and therefore open her to certain distinctive forms of moral appraisal, without that agent being “answerable” for those things. Shoemaker apparently accepts my claim that moral answerability requires judgment sensitivity: we can be answerable only for those things that reflect our evaluative judgments. The problem, in his view, is that there appear to be many things that clearly reflect on an agent morally but

6. I say open “in principle” to mark the fact that there may not in fact be anyone in a position to legitimately make such a demand of the agent in the circumstances. What matters, though, is that the thing in question is of a sort that such demands would make sense, or be intelligible. For such a demand to make sense, the agent herself need not have consciously reflected on or remember the reasons she took to justify the thing in question; it need only be the case that there were such reasons, and that it is reasonable to expect the agent to defend them. I am grateful to an editor of *Ethics* for urging me to clarify my position on this point.

that do not reflect an agent's evaluative judgments. These appear, then, to be cases of attributability without answerability. Shoemaker considers two cases of this sort: cases of irrationality and cases of non-rational emotional commitment.

Consider, for example, an agent who both fears spiders (which reflects a judgment that spiders are dangerous) and also sincerely claims that he does not believe spiders to be dangerous. Such an agent appears to be guilty of irrationality.⁷ He holds, simultaneously, two attitudes that embody conflicting evaluative judgments. The rational relations view can say that he is answerable for each of these attitudes (since each of the attitudes is itself judgment-sensitive). But, it appears, it cannot say that he is answerable for his irrationality itself (since it cannot reasonably be said that his irrationality reflects any judgments about reasons). Therefore, if responsibility just is answerability, then it seems to follow that, on my view, agents are not responsible for their irrationality. But this, Shoemaker claims, is deeply implausible. We regularly hold agents responsible for "being irrational," so any view that implies agents cannot be responsible for their irrationality must be mistaken. In fact, Shoemaker argues, we must recognize that irrationality is the sort of thing that can be "attributable" to an agent even though she is not answerable for it; this is a case of responsibility without answerability.

In response to this objection, I am inclined to draw a distinction between two different ways of interpreting the claim that an agent is "responsible for her irrationality." Shoemaker is quite right that one way of interpreting such a claim is that an agent is responsible for "the simultaneous presence within [her] psychology of . . . two conflicting attitudes" (608). That is, she is responsible for a certain configuration of her psychic system. Interpreted in this way, it is quite implausible to think that an agent could be answerable for this state of affairs. To say such a thing, on the rational relations view, would be to say that this configuration of the agent's psychic system reflects some judgment on her part about the worth or value of holding conflicting attitudes, which I agree is highly implausible. But I think it is equally implausible to say that this is, in fact, what we usually mean when we say that an agent is "responsible for her irrationality." What we usually mean when we make such a claim, I submit, is that an agent is responsible for holding each of two attitudes that, together, make it the case that she is guilty of irrationality. Her responsibility

7. I give this example in "Responsibility for Attitudes," 253. Unfortunately, Shoemaker assumes that I am describing a phobia here, when I meant to be describing simply an ordinary case of irrationality. I do not take agents to be morally responsible for genuinely phobic attitudes. On this point, see especially my "Conflicting Attitudes," 352 n. 37.

for her irrationality is, in effect, simply a consequence of her responsibility for the attitudes that together constitute her irrationality.

We might compare this to the claim that an agent is responsible for her racism or for her selfishness. When we make a claim of this sort, I do not think we are attributing to her a distinct psychological state (called her “racism” or her “selfishness”) and saying that this state reflects an evaluative judgment on her part about the worth or value of possessing such a psychological trait. (Most racists and egoists, after all, do not think of themselves as racist or selfish, so it is implausible to think that they hold evaluative judgments about the value of these psychological conditions.) Rather, we are saying that her particular attitudes—her contempt toward nonwhites, her obsession with advancing her own interests, and so on—make a certain kind of negative evaluation appropriate: she is a racist, she is selfish. We need not say that there is some additional thing, over and above the attitudes that constitute her racism or her selfishness, that is potentially morally attributable to her and for which we can raise questions about moral responsibility.⁸ “Yes, I see that she is responsible for her contempt toward nonwhites and for her refusal to hire Blacks, but is she responsible for her racism?” makes little sense. Likewise, “Yes, I see that she is responsible for her fear of spiders and for her belief that spiders are not dangerous, but is she responsible for her irrationality?” makes little sense. She is responsible for her irrationality in virtue of her responsibility for the attitudes that together constitute her irrationality.⁹

If this is correct, then I do not think cases of irrationality in fact support the distinction Shoemaker wants to draw between responsibility as attributability and responsibility as answerability. An agent is answerable for her irrationality because she is answerable for the attitudes that together constitute her irrationality. I think this interpretation is supported by the fact that, when we criticize someone for irrationality, we appear to be addressing an answerability demand to

8. Or we might say: Even if there is a distinct trait that supervenes on these attitudes, it is not that trait for which we hold agents responsible when we blame them for being racist, selfish, or irrational. Thanks to an editor of *Ethics* for this suggestion.

9. There may, however, be a disanalogy between cases of irrationality and cases of racism/sexism, in that in the latter cases we can point to particular attitudes with objectionable content, while in the former case neither of the conflicting attitudes need itself be objectionable (what is objectionable is the simultaneous possession of both attitudes). So there is still something puzzling about what we are holding the agent responsible for when we charge her with irrationality. In response, it could be argued that in cases of genuine irrationality, one of the conflicting attitudes must be mistaken, and thus we are holding her responsible for holding an unjustified attitude (though we may not always know which of her attitudes is the mistaken one). I am grateful to David Shoemaker for raising this objection.

her, and not merely evaluating her aretaically (which is the kind of appraisal Shoemaker associates with attributability). We are saying, in effect, “You need to reconsider the judgments you take to support each of your conflicting attitudes, because those judgments conflict and therefore they cannot both be correct.”

The second sort of example Shoemaker takes to support the distinction between responsibility as attributability and responsibility as answerability involves certain (allegedly) nonrational emotional commitments. Though Shoemaker concedes that many of our attitudes are based on and reflect underlying evaluative judgments (for which we are answerable), he suggests that many other attitudes are “deep-seated emotional commitments [that] are without, or even contrary to, reason” (610). For example, our cares for our children and our loved ones do not, in general, seem to be based on evaluative judgments of any sort and are typically immune to reason-based demands for justification or modification. Thus the mother of a serial killer might be unable to stop caring for him, even though she judges him to be a “worthless human being,” and an ex-wife may be unable to stop caring about her former husband even though she knows that he “treated her horribly.” In these sorts of cases, Shoemaker suggests, it would be pointless to address an “answerability demand” to the agents in question, for they are “simply devoid of the resources necessary to engage with your communicative attempt” (611). This does not mean, however, that these agents are not responsible for these attitudes in a distinct attributability sense. Speaking of himself, Shoemaker notes that his deepest emotional commitments “reflect on me, on my deep self, and in particular on who I am as an agent in the world, but they are not grounded in any evaluative reasons (at least of the sort I take to justify my attitudes or actions)” (611–12). What we have, in other words, is attributability without answerability.

My first, admittedly unsatisfying, response to this objection is that I do not find the examples that are meant to motivate this distinction compelling. That is, I am simply not convinced that in the sorts of cases Shoemaker has in mind, the agents’ attitudes are not based on evaluative judgments that the agent, at some level, takes as justificatory.¹⁰ A mother who simply gave birth to a serial killer but put him

10. Shoemaker suggests that in order for an answerability demand to be intelligible, the agent herself must be consciously aware of and endorse the evaluative judgments implicit in her attitudes. I think it is often the case, however, that we simply take or see certain things as counting in favor of certain attitudes without being fully aware of these reasons or the role they play in justifying our attitudes. And I think these normative “takings” or “seemings” can sometimes operate alongside more consciously formulated judgments to the effect that such considerations do not serve to justify our attitudes. So, for example, a person may consciously hold egalitarian views and yet still find herself

up immediately for adoption and had no further contact with him would presumably not feel these unshakeable attitudes of care and concern for him, nor (likely) would a mother who never received a drop of loving kindness from such a son. Our cares are deeply shaped by and responsive to facts about our shared history and experiences with other people, and these facts provide evaluative reasons for our continuing attitudes of care, love, loyalty, and so on. When people are asked to defend their deepest emotional commitments, they are generally not mute: they can and do point to what they take to be justifying reasons. While I certainly grant that in many cases people continue to care for people that the overall balance of reasons indicates are no longer deserving of care (such as serial killers and wife beaters), that does not itself show that the persisting cares these agents feel are not themselves still based on underlying evaluative judgments.

I say this is an unsatisfying response to Shoemaker's objection, however, because I do not see any way of rationally adjudicating our disagreement over these sorts of cases.¹¹ Shoemaker himself briefly considers the objection raised above (i.e., that the mother's and ex-spouse's continuing care might be based on reasons having to do with a shared history with the object of care) but dismisses it on the

taking the fact of a person's race as a reason not to trust her or not to hire her. In these cases, I think an answerability demand directed toward her racist reactions still makes perfect sense—a person's explicitly avowed beliefs do not settle the question of what she regards as a justifying consideration. I discuss these sorts of cases in more detail in "Conflicting Attitudes, Moral Agency, and Conceptions of the Self." I am grateful to an editor of *Ethics* for urging me to say more about this important issue.

11. Both Shoemaker and an editor of *Ethics* have suggested to me that some recent social psychological literature appears to support Shoemaker's position, particularly the work of Jonathan Haidt, who has argued that the justifications people give for their (moral) attitudes are often post hoc rationalizations rather than accurate representations of independent evaluative judgments. (See especially Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment," *Psychological Review* 108 [2001]: 814–34.) As I understand Haidt's position, however, he does not in fact deny that our spontaneous reactions are "cognitive" or that they may embody subconscious evaluative judgments or appraisals; what he denies is that most of our moral judgments are based on conscious mental activity that involves "intentional, effortful, and controllable" processes of deliberate reasoning ("Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail," 818). He describes his central social intuitionist thesis as follows: "That moral judgment is caused by quick moral intuitions and is followed (when needed) by slow ex post facto moral reasoning" (817). My thesis is fully compatible with these findings—indeed, the possibility broached in the previous footnote of subconscious racist reactions co-existing alongside consciously endorsed egalitarian views seems to illustrate the two different forms of moral cognition Haidt's research has uncovered. The debate between Shoemaker and myself, then, might be understood as a debate over whether our more spontaneous "moral intuitions" can really be said to embody evaluative judgments. I don't think we (yet?) have convincing experimental evidence that can settle this question one way or another.

grounds that it is likely that such reasons are either mere explanatory reasons or simply not present in the case of most care-based motivations (611). Since I see no way of proving that all of our emotional commitments must be founded on evaluative judgments (and no way of proving that some of them may not be so founded), I do not think our disagreement can be settled by appeal to examples.

I think there may be grounds for a more forceful objection to Shoemaker, however, if we turn from his claim that some emotional commitments may be attributable to agents without satisfying the conditions of answerability to his claim that attributability of this sort still constitutes a form of moral responsibility. Shoemaker himself bravely faces up to this challenge when he writes, "If responsibility is really about answerability—the ability to answer for one's actions and attitudes—and if there are case in which attributability doesn't deliver that, then it may be difficult to see what it has to do with responsibility at all" (612).

In response, Shoemaker argues that attributability of this sort does constitute a form of moral responsibility, because being morally responsible consists in being open to a range of moral responses, and our responsibility practices include a distinctive set of moral responses to mere attributability. The responses in question are "aretaic appraisals," which are "judgments about the morally relevant aspects of an agent's character in light of the agent's attitudes or actions" (612–13). Evaluations of agents as "cowardly," "generous," "cruel," or "a hopeless romantic," Shoemaker claims, are distinctively moral evaluations that presuppose a kind of moral responsibility that is different from answerability. To see this, we must recognize the way in which such evaluations differ from mere superficial assessments, such as the evaluation of someone as "tall" or "skinny." Aretiac appraisals, unlike such physical descriptions, "go to the heart of one's actual motivations qua self-expressing agent, implicating the set of psychological elements that provide an explanation of one's motives and attitudes in normative domains. These are the elements with which one is identified, whether or not one is conscious of, or endorses, the identification in question" (613). Because these assessments concern an agent's "authentic agential nature" (614), and because they have a wide "practical payoff" in terms of our decisions about whom to interact with and how (615), they have a real depth that goes beyond mere description. Yet because they do not involve any answerability demands, Shoemaker insists that they correspond to a distinct conception of moral responsibility.

I have argued at length elsewhere against the claim that there is conceptual space for interpreting aretaic appraisal as a distinct type of moral appraisal that falls in between mere unwelcome description

and full-blooded (answerability-implying) moral criticism, so I will not rehearse those arguments again here.¹² Instead, I want to raise two distinct problems for Shoemaker's claim that our actual moral practices embody the recognition of two different types of moral responsibility. The first problem concerns his definition of the conditions of attributability, which I will argue would imply that agents are morally responsible for many things for which, intuitively, they are not. The second problem concerns his interpretation of what is going on when people deploy aretaic appraisals in actual moral practice.

Beginning with the first concern, Shoemaker suggests that it is sufficient for "responsibility as attributability" that an agential feature "[go] to the heart of one's actual motivations qua self-expressing agent, implicating the set of psychological elements that provide an explanation of one's motives and attitudes in normative domains" (613). What is important here is that the feature in question explain one's behavior, not that it be the sort of thing one can reasonably be asked to *justify* (indeed, this is precisely what distinguishes attributability from answerability). Thus our unreasoned emotional commitments can be cited as an explanation for our motives and attitudes, and we can be aretaically assessed on the basis of them; we are responsible (in an attributability sense) but not answerable for these commitments.

The problem, however, is that there are many, many other psychological features of agents that quite clearly help to explain their motives and attitudes in normative domains but for which we clearly do not regard them as responsible in any sense. For example, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a psychological condition that deeply affects an agent's motives and attitudes in normative domains. An agent who suffers from this condition often cannot have normal relationships with others, for she is constantly obsessed with keeping clean or checking over and over again to make sure she has completed certain tasks. It seems that she is open to certain aretaic appraisals on the basis of this condition (she is "neurotic," "compulsive," "obsessively organized"), and these appraisals have a "wide-ranging practical payoff" in the sense that we make all sorts of decisions about whether and how to interact with such a person based on these assessments. Yet most of us, I submit, do not think such agents are responsible for this condition or for the behavior it motivates. Conditions like Tourette Syndrome or severe depression will also deeply affect an agent's

12. See Smith, "Control, Responsibility, and Moral Assessment," 375–80.

motives and attitudes in normative domains. But, once again, most of us would not say that agents are responsible for these conditions.¹³

The first worry, then, is that Shoemaker's interpretation of what makes something attributable to an agent for purposes of aretaic appraisal (i.e., that the feature in question helps to "explain her attitudes and behavior in normative domains") would seem to allow in things for which we do not take people to be morally responsible. And if we go on to ask why we do not think the agents described above are morally responsible for their psychological conditions (even though these conditions play such an important role in explaining their attitudes and behavior), I believe the answer is that we do not view them as answerable for these conditions.

This conclusion is reinforced, I think, if we look more carefully at what we are doing when we deploy aretaic appraisals in our actual moral practices (this brings me to my second worry). Though I suggested above that a victim of OCD would be a legitimate target of aretaic appraisal on Shoemaker's definition of the conditions of attributability, the fact of the matter is that we simply do not apply paradigmatic aretaic predicates to such agents in our actual moral practices. We do not call the OCD agent "cowardly," after all, when she finds herself unable to leave the house because she fears becoming contaminated. We reserve labels of this sort for agents whom we regard as answerable for the judgments reflected in their attitudes and behavior.¹⁴ Calling someone "cowardly" is like calling her a "racist": we are not merely saying that some morally significant psychological state is attributable to her that explains her behavior in normative domains. We are saying that her attitudes and behavior reflect her own evaluation of reasons, that these evaluations are mistaken and cannot be justified, and that she is answerable for those evaluations. Thus I disagree with Shoemaker's claim that aretaic appraisal does not presuppose answerability.

At the end of the day, then, I do not see the evidence, from

13. It might be thought that my view is open to a similar objection. The attitudes of the OCD agent, after all, appear to reflect her own (albeit mistaken) evaluative judgments. Does it not follow that such an agent is "answerable" for such attitudes on my view? This is a serious concern that requires a much fuller discussion than I can give it here. But my general approach would be to show that the requisite "rational relation" to an agent's judgments does not, in fact, hold in the case of genuinely phobic attitudes and similar psychological disorders. I am grateful to an editor of *Ethics* for raising this concern.

14. Consider the following exchange: Speaker A: "Joe is a coward (or a jerk or a disloyal friend) for not visiting Bill in the hospital after his gruesome accident." Speaker B: "But don't you realize he suffers from severe OCD?" Speaker A: "Oh, really? Geez, I didn't know. I guess I was wrong about him." These morally thick aretaic appraisals are viewed as inappropriate once it is suggested that Joe is not answerable for the underlying attitudes motivating his behavior.

within our moral practices, for the distinction Shoemaker wants to draw between responsibility as attributability and responsibility as answerability. While it may seem that we do sometimes make aretaic appraisals that do not imply answerability, I think a more careful look at these cases will reveal that we are willing to apply these aretaic predicates to agents only in cases where we regard the agent as answerable for the attitudes and conduct on which these appraisals are based. And I fear that if we deny this presupposition, then we will have to regard agents as morally responsible for many psychological conditions for which, intuitively, they do not appear to be responsible in any sense.

III. ANSWERABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In the second part of his article, Shoemaker tries to show that accounts of responsibility as answerability also fail to capture a third distinct conception of responsibility, which he calls responsibility as accountability. I will have less to say about his arguments here, since they are focused more specifically on Scanlon's recent account of blame, which I do not fully embrace. Even so, his arguments, if successful, might be thought to tell against the rational relations view, and therefore I should say something about how I would respond to them.

His strategy here, as with his earlier critique, is to use examples to show that our moral practices embody two quite different ways of "holding [others] responsible" and that these different ways of holding responsible correspond to different conceptions of moral responsibility. Before looking at these examples, we should consider how Shoemaker describes the basic difference between these two conceptions of moral responsibility: "To be answerable . . . is to be susceptible for assessment of, and response to, the reasons one takes to justify one's actions. The sorts of answers one gives will reveal one's ends, the things one takes to be important, and so the concomitant responses may take the form of aretaic appraisals (predications attaching to one's character qua deliberator and tracker of reasons) or (mere) modification of attitudes and dispositions regarding future interactions. To be accountable, on the other hand, is to be susceptible to being held to account if one flouts relationship-defining demands" (623). To "hold someone to account," in turn, "is precisely to sanction that person, whether it be via the expression of a reactive attitude, public shaming, or something more psychologically or physically damaging" (623). In short, answerability appears to differ from accountability primarily on the grounds that answerability licenses only aretaic appraisals and other nonsanctioning modifications to

one's actions and attitudes toward the agent,¹⁵ while accountability licenses more explicit forms of sanctioning activity.

Shoemaker tries to illustrate this distinction with two examples, which he calls *Anniversary* and *Cheating*. *Anniversary* describes the relationship of George and Martha, a couple who have been married for several years. Each year, as their anniversary approaches, Martha drops (increasingly forceful) hints about the sort of gift she would like to receive from George; and, each year, George misses the hints, and gets her a bouquet of her least favorite flowers—carnations. After a while, Martha ceases to look forward to their anniversary and stops dropping hints, giving up out of disappointment with George (620). In *Cheating*, George and Martha have again been married for several years, but in this case Martha finds conclusive evidence that he has been carrying on multiple affairs. Martha is furious and swings a golf club at him (620–21). In *Anniversary*, Shoemaker claims, “Martha’s blame is private, involves no resentment, and seeks no sanctions. She is really just disappointed in him” (621). In *Cheating*, by contrast, “Martha’s blame is expressed, robustly resentful, and aims squarely at sanctions” (621). This corresponds, in Shoemaker’s view, to two different ways in which Martha “holds George responsible”: in the first case, she holds him answerability responsible for failing to live up to her hopes for the relationship, whereas in the second case, she holds him accountability responsible for positively violating the minimal demands of their relationship.

Now, while I certainly agree with Shoemaker that the types of “failure” George exhibits in each of these cases warrant very different reactions from Martha, I fail to see how or why this fact should be taken to show that there are different senses of moral responsibility at issue in each of these cases. In both cases, it seems to me, George is simply answerable for his conduct, because that conduct reflects his evaluative judgments. The differing reactions warranted by his conduct have nothing at all to do with his bearing a different sort of responsibility for what he has done in each case but rather with the relative seriousness of the failures his conduct reveals in each case. *Anniversary* reveals him to be a husband who does not place much importance on his wife’s likes and dislikes (or on the importance of the occasion itself—getting the same gift every year indicates that he

15. It is not entirely clear whether Shoemaker thinks unexpressed (i.e., nonsanctioning) reactive attitudes could be licensed by answerability. He defines “accountability” (confusingly, in my view) both in terms of “liability to sanctions” and in terms of what kinds of relationship norms an agent has violated (norms specifying the potential of a relationship vs. norms specifying basic normative demands defining the relationship itself). At certain points, Shoemaker implies that resentment presupposes accountability (in the latter sense) and therefore even private resentment requires accountability.

does not regard the occasion as particularly significant). This is certainly a failing, though perhaps not one that would justify an attack with a golf club. *Cheating*, by contrast, reveals George to be a husband who flouts the most basic demands of marital love and fidelity. We need not say that he bears a different sort of moral responsibility for that failure to understand why Martha would have reason to respond to this failing in a much more serious way.

Another way of bringing out the force of this objection is to consider a slightly different version of *Anniversary*. In this version, Martha becomes so exasperated with George's attitudinal failure that she finally decides to do something about it. She might, for example, start getting him the same gift every year—a tiepin, say—and see what his reaction is. Or she might at some point blurt out, with evident frustration and resentment (since she always puts a great deal of thought into the gifts she gets him), “Why do you bother, George?—don’t you see, I simply don’t like carnations!” Now, Shoemaker might respond that I have simply changed his story—turning it into a case in which Martha is holding George accountable and not merely answerable. But my point is that nothing at all has changed about George, about the nature of his actions, or about the nature of their relationship between his case and my case that could possibly explain why George is (merely) “answerable” in the first case but “accountable” in the second. Why should *Martha’s* reactions determine whether George is responsible in the answerability sense or in the accountability sense? He’s the same guy, doing the same thing, in the same way; all that has changed in these two cases is Martha’s reaction to his failure.

In saying this, I do not mean to deny that it matters how we understand the moral responses at issue in attributions of moral responsibility, or to suggest that our understanding of these moral responses can never affect our understanding of the conditions that must be met in order for an agent to be a legitimate target of these responses. If we construe “being morally responsible for X” as “being a legitimate target of eternal damnation or reward on the basis of X,” for example, then this would almost certainly lead us to adopt a much more stringent account of the conditions of moral responsibility. (This interpretation of the nature of moral responsibility might well constitute a distinct “conception” of moral responsibility—perhaps “responsibility as eternal comeuppance.”) But the sorts of moral responses Shoemaker rightly identifies throughout his paper as key elements of our actual moral practices—*aretaic* appraisals; feelings of disappointment, resentment, or indignation; modifications to our attitudes and actions in response to perceived relational impairments; explicit acts of reproach or censure—are all of a piece, in my view, in the sense that they belong to a single continuum of moral responses that all share

the basic precondition of answerability.¹⁶ While the nature and severity of our moral responses can and should differ depending on (1) the seriousness of the moral failure, (2) the nature of our relationship with the agent, and perhaps even (3) our own moral standing, these considerations all have to do with what Scanlon has called “the ethics of blame” and not with the basic conditions of moral responsibility.¹⁷

IV. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have argued that our actual moral practices do not, in fact, embody three distinct conceptions of moral responsibility. Shoemaker may, of course, still argue that they should do so: that is, even if our moral responses are not currently sensitive to these distinctions, they should be. I would still be skeptical of this claim, however, for I think our moral responses hang together in a theoretically unified and satisfying way around the notion of answerability. Answerability really is the core of moral responsibility, in my view, but there is still plenty of room for meaningful debate over what it takes for an agent to be “answerable” in the relevant sense for some thing. Must she have chosen it? Must it be or result from an intentional action? Must it reflect an evaluative judgment? Must it express a morally significant quality of will? These are the difficult questions we are still left with, even if I am correct that our moral practices are far more conceptually unified than Shoemaker takes them to be.

16. Of course, there may well be additional or distinct conditions that must be met in order to be liable to legal punishment. But that would mark a distinct conception not of moral responsibility but of legal responsibility.

17. See Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 166–79. I make a similar point in my article “On Being Responsible and Holding Responsible,” *Journal of Ethics* 11 (2007): 465–84.