

## Blame and Patronizing

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I present three cases of someone—or some group—raising moral objection to an agent's failure to blame. This is surprising, given that we are used to thinking of being blamed as a harmful thing, and of withholding blame from someone thereby as sparing them harm. Philosophers have argued that we can wrong an agent by blaming her too hastily, or on the basis of insufficient evidence, and that we ought therefore carefully avoid over-blaming. Yet here are cases in which people have the intuition that there can be something harmful about being spared blame, too. I share this intuition—I feel that there are cases in which one agent wrongs another agent by failing to blame her. How can we explain this?

I will argue in this paper that the way blame is withheld from these agents patronizes these agents. This is because blame involves an important kind of respect: in particular, it involves the respect that is judging someone to be a fellow rational agent in a particular way. To fail to blame someone through failing to judge her to have these rational capacities, then, is to disrespect her. Blame has a characteristic sting, but so does patronizing. There is, then, a wrong not only to over-blaming but to *under-blaming*.