

IN DEFENSE OF GUILT-TRIPPING

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ABSTRACT: It is tempting to hold that guilt-tripping is morally wrong, either because it is objectionably manipulative, or because it involves gratuitously aiming to make another person suffer, or both. In this article, I develop a picture of guilt according to which guilt is a type of pain that incorporates a commitment to its own justification on the basis of the subject's wrongdoing. This picture supports the hypothesis that feeling guilty is an especially efficient means for a wrongdoer to come to more deeply understand why her behavior was wrong; it is precisely because guilt is painful and involves a self-reflexive justificatory element that it is able to play this role. Such a picture, moreover, preserves the possibility that deliberately making others feel guilty needn't involve aiming gratuitously to harm them and needn't be objectionably manipulative. It follows that we should be surprisingly sanguine about the practice of inducing guilt in wrongdoers as a means of facilitating their moral edification.

I. Introduction

The transitive verb *to guilt-trip* means *to deliberately make someone feel guilty, usually in order to influence his thoughts or future behavior*. One may guilt-trip by making a passive-aggressive remark, as when my mother says that it was just fine that I canceled my plans with her because "TV dinners for one really aren't so bad." Alternatively, one may guilt-trip by making an overtly aggressive remark – but also just via a sigh, or pained facial expression, or frustrated gesture. No matter the precise method one uses, however, guilt-tripping always involves aiming to make someone feel guilt.

There are several reasons to be suspicious about the moral permissibility of guilt-tripping, even in cases where the person being guilt-tripped is, in fact, guilty as charged.¹ Guilt-tripping typically involves aiming to influence another person via his feelings. Thus, one might suspect that guilt-

¹ When asked to give examples of "guilt-tripping," one may be inclined to point to cases of aiming to cause guilt that are clearly morally wrong: cases that involve trying to make people feel guilty about things they shouldn't feel guilty about – or guiltier than they should – as a way of serving particularly selfish-seeming ends. If "guilt-tripping" referred *only* to such cases, then the question of whether it's morally permitted to guilt-trip wouldn't be very interesting; the answer would be that it basically never is. But although "guilt-tripping" has negative connotations, the term is properly applied to *any* case of trying to make another person feel guilt – including, importantly, attempts to induce proportionate feelings of guilt in culpable wrongdoers. (Consider: My mother's remark about TV dinners still counts naturally as "guilt-tripping," even if I really *oughtn't* to have canceled our plans and she just wants my guilt feelings to prompt further reflection on this.) Given this *correct* understanding, moreover, questions about the moral status of guilt-tripping *are* interesting. For, although guilt-tripping is not wrong *by definition*, there are still good reasons to think it morally odious – reasons strikingly similar to worries one might raise about the justification of "hard treatment" in punishment.

tripping is almost always morally wrong because it involves seeking to manipulate others in a way that circumvents their capacity to respond to reasons. Moreover, to deliberately aim to make another person feel guilty is to aim to make that person feel pain. And, even if one imagines that guilt-tripping can sometimes have worthwhile effects, one may worry that these effects could always be equally as well achieved via gentler means, such as tactfully explaining to a person why he ought not to engage in a particular form of conduct *without* trying to make him feel bad. Thus, one might also suspect that guilt-tripping is almost always morally wrong because it involves gratuitously trying to make another person suffer – and not merely as a foreseeable side effect of one’s efforts, but rather *in the very end that one is aiming to achieve*.

Nevertheless, in this article I’ll defend a victim’s permission to guilt-trip the person who has wronged her. Guilt, I will argue, is a type of *pain that involves a commitment to its own justification*, and, because this is guilt’s nature, feeling guilty can enable a wrongdoer to better understand why what he has done was wrong. Properly grasping how guilt’s features give rise to its edifying powers, moreover, in turn reveals that guilt-tripping is often the best means of facilitating such understanding and needn’t be objectionably manipulative. It follows that a victim guilt-tripping a wrongdoer is often justified in the name of enriching that wrongdoer’s moral understanding. Indeed, given the picture of guilt that I aim to paint here, I hope the practice of guilt-tripping will come to look not merely permitted, but also like a valuable tool for facilitating relational repair – one which deserves our appreciation as such.

We’ll begin with a close examination of the feeling of guilt but let me first make one further orienting comment. Although I hope this paper’s investigation of our moral psychology will be of interest to everyone, I also see its overarching argument as addressed primarily to those with a certain philosophical temperament, namely: those who regard the idea of any person’s being made to suffer as inherently morally suspect. Other philosophers with more retributivist-friendly intuitions will likely wonder whether there isn’t a faster argument for the permissibility of guilt-tripping than one that turns

on guilt's educative effects.

For instance, one might suggest that, when it comes to culpable wrongdoers, guilt-tripping is morally permitted because such people *basically deserve* to feel guilt. *Basic desert*, I am presently inclined to think, is a species of fittingness – a species of the relation that holds between admiration and the admirable, amusement and the amusing, and, for that matter, between guilt and a transgression that one is guilty of oneself. But, while a response's fittingness does not, in general, have straightforward bearing on its moral appropriateness², *basic desert* is a special type of fittingness that has implications about what's non-instrumentally good and, more specifically, about what's just: It is just that persons get what they deserve.³ If culpable wrongdoers did, indeed, basically deserve to feel guilty, then this would imply that it is, in some respect, good and just that they have such feelings – which, in turn, might plausibly be thought to underlie a moral permission to guilt-trip (Carlsson 2017: 108 and Portmore 2022: 62).

However, the claim that wrongdoers basically deserve to feel guilty is controversial and difficult to defend; recent attempts to offer arguments in its favor have been met with swift resistance.⁴ Moreover, the question of whether wrongdoers basically deserve to feel guilty promises to remain a site of philosophical impasse because the premises which support the affirmative view tend to be unacceptable to some philosophers. Non-retributivists, who find the idea that there is non-instrumental goodness or justice in anyone's suffering to be “morally repugnant” (Scanlon 2013: 102) and “completely implausible or even abhorrent” (Menges ms: 27), don't tend to share the intuitions that undergird claims of guilt's basic desert.⁵

² That amusement at a cruel yet funny joke is fitting, for example, counts clearly neither towards the permissibility of laughing nor of bringing it about that one laughs (D'Arms & Jacobson 2000).

³ For reasons to think about desert in this way, see, e.g. Clarke (2013, 2016); McKenna (2019); and Macnamara (2020).

⁴ For considerations in support of the basic desert thesis, see Clarke (2013, 2016); McKenna (2019); and Clarke & Rawling (2022). For – to my mind – compelling doubts about these arguments, see Nelkin (2019); Macnamara (2020); and, most recently, Menges (ms).

⁵ For example, one argument for basic desert, which can be reconstructed in Carlsson (2017) and Portmore (2022), *begins* with the intuition that it is *pro tanto* morally permissible to induce guilt in culpable wrongdoers, and holds that the best

I am, myself, moderately skeptical of the idea that wrongdoers basically deserve to suffer guilt, and so unwilling to rest content with arguments that rely on claiming that they do. I also think it worth making a case for guilt-tripping that doesn't depend on basic desert, precisely because I suspect that many philosophers will continue to find the notion that there is non-instrumental goodness in anyone's suffering to be distasteful. One should thus view my arguments here as aiming to convince even those who *deny* that guilt can be basically deserved that guilt-tripping can be morally permissible.⁶

II. A Picture of Guilt

Guilt is an emotion which R. Jay Wallace (2019: 101) describes as reflecting “an understanding of oneself...as having violated obligations or practical requirements,” which Randolph Clarke (2013: 157) describes as involving the “constitutive thought” that “one is blameworthy for some wrongdoing,” and which Patricia Greenspan holds to involve an agent's “thought of himself as responsible for a wrong” (1992: 293). Guilt, in other words, is an emotion which is experienced by a subject as being about the (putative) fact that he is responsible for some wrongdoing.⁷ Indeed, guilt is

explanation of this intuition is that wrongdoers basically deserve to feel guilt. But, as someone who is, herself, skeptical of guilt's basic desert, this intuition is not one that I share, and certainly not one whose content I'm willing to affirm as a philosophical starting point. Indeed, precisely what is motivating this article is the thought that, because guilt is inherently painful, deliberately aiming to induce it, even in wrongdoers, looks initially *im*permissible.

Another strategy for arguing that guilt can be basically deserved is via “cross-world” comparison – roughly appealing to the intuition that worlds in which culpable wrongdoers suffer guilt are comparatively better than worlds in which they don't and everything else is held fixed. But even philosophers who employ this strategy admit that “reasonable minds can differ” about the relevant intuitions (McKenna 2019: 269). And, indeed, they do differ. (See, e.g., Nelkin (2019) and Menges (ms)).

Alternative arguments for wrongdoers deserving guilt don't rely on retributivist intuitions (but rather on, e.g., claims about a connection between guilt and caring and/or virtue). But I think compelling objections to these arguments have been raised. (See, e.g., Nelkin (2019); Macnamara (2020); and Menges, (ms).)

⁶ That said, I also take comfort in the thought that, even if I am *wrong* about basic desert, it is still worth making the case for guilt's educative import. Say, for instance, that it is right that wrongdoers' deserving to feel guilty underlies a *pro tanto* moral permission to guilt-trip. Perhaps then guilt's educative value is precisely what is needed to tip the balance from *pro tanto* to all-things-considered permitted in many cases!

⁷ From henceforth I'll leave the qualification about responsibility implicit. Michael Zhao (2020) has recently argued that guilt essentially involves representing oneself not necessarily as having done wrong, but rather as “being implicated in a bad state-of-affairs” (307). I disagree that this is the representational content of our common conception of guilt and think that the cases Zhao uses to support his argument are mostly ones in which agents are experiencing guilt that *mis*represents their situation, sometimes by those agents' own lights. But I'll also note that my argument here would still go through on a different conception of what guilt represents, so long as that conception weren't *as* divergent from mine as Zhao's is.

always experienced as about a *particular* wrongdoing, although, aside from representing it *as* a wrongdoing, the subject may have only a very inchoate conception of the wrongdoing that his guilt is about. He may, for instance, represent his misdeed only via a general sense of when it took place (“something I said yesterday”). Or he may represent it largely through its effects, as when one feels guilty for letting some bad event occur, without being able to describe in further detail the particular omission in which this “letting” consisted.⁸ The purpose of this section is to develop a more detailed picture of what’s involved in this emotion – a picture on which I’ll subsequently rely in defending the practice of guilt-tripping.

I’ll take it that guilt, like all emotions, is an affective syndrome that usually involves a number of different elements, including: a physiological response; a phenomenological feel; cognitive components, such as effects on a subject’s thoughts and attention; and motivational components, such as effects on what the subject is inclined to do and say. But there are two aspects of guilt that will be central to my argument and that I therefore want particularly to highlight.

The first I take to be a conceptual truth, namely: that guilt is affectively painful.⁹ It is important that this feature of guilt should figure prominently in our picture of it, since the painfulness of guilt was one of the primary reasons we had to be concerned about the permissibility of guilt-tripping in the first place. Indeed, the worry, as I see it, is not simply that, in guilt-tripping, one might foreseeably cause pain that it isn’t necessary to cause (although this is a concern). It is also that, because guilt is,

For example, if one thought that, while guilt does represent a subject as *blameworthy*, what this really amounts to is not being responsible for a wrongdoing but rather, say, having relationship-impairing attitudes, one could just make appropriate substitutions throughout what follows and end up with basically the same results.

⁸ Clarke (2013: 164) holds that guilt “need not be about any specific misdeed” because “[o]ne can feel guilty without knowing why.” Certainly, one can profess not to know why one feels guilty, but I think such an expression usually indicates that one lacks a *determinate* conception of the misdeed one feels guilty about. I doubt that one can feel guilty without having *any idea at all* as to what one’s guilt is about.

⁹ Herbert Morris (1971: 427) agrees that “feeling guilty is partly defined by its being a painful condition.” Note that Morris and I both use the term “pain” in a broad sense, inclusive of physical *and* emotional discomfort. Those who prefer to reserve “pain” for a physical sensation, or who think that cases of pain asymbolia are cases of “pain” that are not unpleasant, should just read all talk of “pain” (and “suffering”) here as referring to *negative affect* or *unpleasant experience*. It is pain’s *feeling unpleasant* that I take to ground our moral objections to causing it.

as a matter of conceptual truth, a type of pain, one cannot *aim* at making another person feel guilty without making that person's suffering part of one's *end* – which, in turn, suggests that we won't have succeeded in justifying guilt-tripping unless we can make out how the painfulness of guilt itself plays a role in making guilt valuable. For otherwise, we should worry that we've merely defended aiming at the aspects of guilt that *do* make it good but failed to justify aiming at guilt itself. So let us take one crucial aspect of guilt to be that it *hurts*.¹⁰

The second aspect of guilt that I want to highlight is a feature I think we can infer guilt to possess by reflecting on how one regards the (putative) wrongdoing one's guilt is about from within the throes of that guilty feeling. When one feels guilty, the wrongdoing that one's guilt is about does not appear arbitrarily conjoined to one's guilty feeling, but rather appears to in some way make sense of or explain that guilt. One feels guilty, it is natural to say, *because* of the wrongdoing that one's guilt is about.¹¹ Yet the sense in which one's wrongdoing appears to explain one's guilt is also not merely a causal or psychological one. If a pill were invented that could make people feel guilt, one might, upon ingesting it and feeling its effects, say that one feels guilty because of the pill. But the sense of “because” in such an expression would be different from the sense in which one says that one feels guilty “because” of the wrongdoing that one feels one's guilt to be about.

The difference is that, from the perspective of guilt, one regards the behavior that one's guilt is about as a *reason* for one's guilt, in the way in which we generally perceive the rational bases of our

¹⁰ The question of the role of pain itself, which arises when and because suffering is an *aim*, of course also comes up in the justification of punishment – and, here, too, some will eschew justifications that appeal to basic desert (see, e.g., Hampton (1984)). For a discussion which explicitly draws parallels between the permissibility of inducing guilt and the permissibility of punishment (but which, I think, ultimately fails to adequately defend the importance of pain in the interpersonal case), see Holroyd (2010).

¹¹ Other philosophers make similar phenomenological claims about both how the object of guilt, and the objects of one's emotions generally, appear from the inside. “The thought that one is blameworthy for something would seem to explain [the] affect, when one feels guilty,” writes Clarke (2016: 124), “The thought might then be said thereby to explain the feeling of guilt, for without such affect, one lacks that feeling.” And “in the grip of an emotion,” writes Elgin (2007: 35), I do not “consider the connection between my occurrent emotions and beliefs accidental. I am frightened, I believe, *because* the situation is dangerous. I adore him, I believe, *because* he is wonderful.”

attitudes from the inside. One regards one's wrongdoing as a reason for one's guilt, in other words, in the sense of both explaining why one feels guilty *and* providing normative support for one's guilt, and, indeed, of explaining why one feels guilty because of the normative support it provides. One regards one's wrongdoing as rendering one's guilt justificatorily supported.

Consider, in support of the observation that guilt involves regarding one's wrongdoing as this sort of reason, that guilt is an attitude for which we are answerable: It is linguistically permissible to ask of a person *why* he feels guilty, where what one is asking is not *how it came to be* that he feels guilty, but rather for the justificatory basis of his guilt.¹² The natural response to such a question, moreover, is to look to the (putative) wrongdoing that one's guilt is about, and, if further pressed, to facts that demonstrate *that* it's a wrongdoing, in order to offer justification for one's feelings. That it is so natural to cite the wrongdoing one's guilt is about as the reason on the basis of which one's guilt is justified suggests that feeling guilty involves regarding the wrongdoing one's guilt is about as a reason on the basis of which one's guilt is justified. Indeed, that it is natural, when pressed, to cite facts demonstrating that one's wrongdoing is a wrongdoing suggests furthermore that feeling guilty involves taking one's wrongdoing *qua wrongdoing* to be a reason on the basis of which one's guilt is justified.¹³

The feature I thus think that we can infer guilt possesses is that guilt involves a certain sort of rational commitment, one which I've elsewhere called *reflexive endorsement*: Guilt involves the subject taking his guilt to be justified on the basis that some behavior of his was wrong.¹⁴

¹² The idea that we are answerable for certain attitudes in this sense is a major theme of Pamela Hieronymi's work. See, for example, Hieronymi (2005: 454).

¹³ Although I do think it is linguistically permissible, it is pretty odd to inquire in an entirely open-endedly way about the justificatory bases of a person's guilt ("Why do you feel guilty?"). However, it is much less odd to inquire about the reasons on the basis of which a subject feels guilty *about* something ("Why do you feel guilty about leaving?"). This is because, in recognizing that a person feels guilty, a speaker almost always *already* has grasped *some* way of characterizing what the addressee's guilt is about, and so is almost always looking for further clarification about what makes that thing a reason for guilt. That the addressee's response (insofar as he agrees with the speaker's characterization of his guilt) is often to adduce considerations which show that what he feels guilty about *is a wrongdoing* supports the view that guilt involves taking the (putative) fact that one has behaved wrongfully to be a reason on the basis of which one's guilt is justified.

¹⁴ In Achs (2022), I offer a sustained defense of the view that blame involves reflexive endorsement: a subject taking his blame to be justified on the basis that the target of his blame has done something that is wrong. Here, I claim that guilt

To say that guilt involves this commitment, I should clarify, is not to claim that guilt involves the subject taking his guilt to be a good attitude to have. The subject's wrongdoing appears to the subject to be a reason for his guilt, not, I believe, in the sense of suggesting that it would be a good thing if the subject felt guilty, but rather in the sense of appearing to render his guilt fitting – to render it justified, that is, in the sense of being *called for* by his wrongdoing, or of his wrongdoing being *worthy of* his guilt response.¹⁵ Guilt, I thus think we should hold, involves a commitment to its own justification in this sense.¹⁶

To say that guilt involves this sort of commitment, I must stress, is also not to deny that a person can feel guilt while simultaneously issuing a considered judgment that his guilt *isn't* actually fitting – perhaps because he thinks that what he feels guilty about *wasn't* actually wrong. (The reflexive endorsement at issue is not a reflective endorsement, in the sense of representing the subject's considered judgment.) My idea is rather that, because guilt itself is always about one's wrongdoing, and because what it is like for guilt to be *about* one's wrongdoing involves regarding that wrongdoing as rendering one's guilt rationally supported (with respect to fit), guilt *internally* involves a commitment to its own fittingness, and thus *internally* involves the subject's endorsement of his guilt – even if the subject does also simultaneously judge such a commitment to be incorrect. A person who feels guilty

involves a self-directed version of the same commitment: a subject taking his guilt to be justified on the basis that he, himself, has done something that is wrong.

¹⁵ This is the sense in which admiration is justified in response to the admirable, and embarrassment is justified in response to the embarrassing. For an overview of the normative relation of fit, see Howard (2018); Howard & Rowland (2022); and Berker (2022). Although I agree with Berker (2022) that “justified” is most naturally heard as a fittingness term, I also recognize that some philosophers are inclined to use it interchangeably with “morally permissible.” I suggest that any readers in the latter group substitute “justified” with some other word for “fitting” (e.g., “warranted” or “merited”) in what follows.

¹⁶ As I also clarify in Achs (2022), the relevant commitment doesn't require a subject to regard his wrongdoing as justifying his guilt *no matter what*. Rather, the subject may regard his commitment as contingent on the satisfaction of various conditions that *enable* (or the dissatisfaction of conditions that *disable*) his wrongdoing to justify his guilt. Hence my view allows considerations other than one's wrongdoing – such as, for instance, whether one has made sufficient amends for one's wrong – to be among the background conditions that bear on guilt's fittingness. (For discussion of enabling and disabling conditions on our attitudes' fittingness, and of how the content of our attitudes can accommodate such conditions, see Na'aman (2021); Howard (2022); and Achs (fc).)

may not *wholeheartedly* endorse that feeling; he may judge with reflective distance from his guilt that it isn't warranted all. But if we are to capture the sort of response to wrongdoing that guilt is unavoidably experienced as being, then we should acknowledge a commitment to one's wrongdoing justifying one's feeling as a component of the feeling itself.¹⁷

I've said that guilt is painful, and that guilt involves a subject taking his guilt to be justified on the basis that some behavior of his was wrong. But how do these two aspects of guilt relate to one another? Does whatever the subject's commitment to the fittingness of his guilt represents that guilt as consisting in *include* the feeling of painfulness? On the one hand, the phenomenology of guilt would suggest that the answer is yes. When one feels guilty, one's *pain* feels to be about something wrong that one has done. Indeed, I think it is a recognizable aspect of feeling guilty that one feels as if the pain one is feeling is warranted.¹⁸ On the other hand, it may seem odd to think that guilt involves a subject taking *a feeling of pain* to be justified on the basis of reasons. After all, we do not always think of pain as the sort of thing that *can* be justified on the basis of reasons. So how is it that one is able to take one's pain to be warranted in this case? The solution to this puzzle, I believe, is to think of the subject's commitment to the fittingness of his guilt as representing that guilt as involving all of the components that are cognizably part of his emotional experience as joined together in an inseparable unity, where this unity includes his pain and, crucially, includes even his reflexive endorsement itself. Thus, the idea is that the guilty subject *can* experience even his feeling of pain as justified on the basis of his wrongdoing, because what he takes to be justified is not a *mere* painful feeling, but rather a painful feeling transformed into pain felt *for* his wrongdoing by his own present endorsement of it as

¹⁷ One may, if one wishes, hold that the cognitive commitment internal to guilt is a perception-like "construal" (Roberts 1988) or "seeming" (Rosen 2015). I, myself, prefer just to think of it as a type of rational commitment that is not a judgment. It is the type of commitment that is constitutive of guilt *as opposed to* the type of commitment that is constitutive of judgment.

¹⁸ On guilt as involving the feeling that one's pain is appropriate, see also Morris (1971: 419).

justified on that very basis. This is pain given rational form as *pain about wrongdoing* – pain given form as *guilt*.¹⁹

In the section that follows, I will argue that a picture of guilt on which it involves the two aspects that I've highlighted – that it is a painful feeling and that it involves reflexive endorsement – supports the hypothesis that feeling guilty enables a wrongdoer to learn. However, although I will consider each of these aspects of guilt in turn, I want to stress that I do not really think of them as separable. Guilt is not a brute pain, nor does it even contain brute pain. Rather, guilt is a type of pain that is experienced as justified.

III. How Guilt Facilitates Moral Understanding

But what, precisely, does feeling guilty enable a wrongdoer to learn? In the long term I think feeling guilty enables a wrongdoer to learn several things vital to repairing relations with the person he's wronged, including what steps can be taken to mitigate the damage he's done, and how to avoid making similar mistakes in the future. But such insight is garnered, at least in part, via what I believe feeling guilty facilitates most immediately: a wrongdoer's coming to more deeply understand *why* what he has done was wrong. (For brevity, I'll sometimes refer to this sort of understanding as “understanding one's wrongdoing” or “moral understanding.”²⁰)

I should note that understanding why some behavior was wrong is a complex epistemic state to which there are likely a number of different aspects, and there is some controversy among philosophers surrounding precisely what it involves in its entirety.²¹ But I think it is not so

¹⁹ It is because I take the commitment involved in guilt (and in blame) to involve the endorsement of a unified entity which includes *that very endorsement* that I call this commitment a “reflexive” endorsement. I elaborate further on this aspect of the commitment in Achs (2022).

²⁰ But note that “understanding one's wrongdoing” may mean several things, including (i) understanding *that* what one has done was wrong and (ii) understanding *why* it was wrong. I am advocating that feeling guilty facilitates (ii).

²¹ For example, Alison Hills (2009) and Paulina Sliwa (2017) disagree about whether such understanding requires the ability to reason one's way to further moral conclusions.

controversial to hold that understanding why one's behavior was wrong consists, at least in part, in grasping which aspects of one's behavior and the surrounding circumstances made it wrong – in having some grasp, that is, of the wrong-making features of one's behavior (as well as of the fact that those features were wrong-making). For present purposes, I'll take a wrongdoer's "understanding why his behavior was wrong" to mean just this.²²

Say, for instance, that I thoughtlessly divulge a piece of sensitive information about you that you prefer others don't know. Perhaps, not attuned to how mental health issues are sometimes stigmatized, I unthinkingly mention to your boss that you had a therapy appointment yesterday afternoon. Although I didn't really know any better, you correctly think I *ought* to have known, and ought to have kept my mouth shut. In blabbing to your boss, I have therefore behaved wrongfully. I would subsequently qualify as possessing an "understanding of why my behavior was wrong," in our current sense of the phrase, if I attained some grasp of which features of that behavior and/or the surrounding circumstances made that behavior wrong. For example, I would possess such understanding if I grasped that my behavior was wrong because it *revealed medical information about you without your consent* or wrong because it *gave you cause to worry about your boss's perception of you*. Plainly, an understanding of why one's behavior was wrong can be possessed to a greater or lesser degree. The

²² I use the term "grasp" here so as to avoid taking sides in a disagreement between Sliwa (2017) and Hills (2009), among others, about whether *knowing* why *x* is wrong is necessary for *understanding* why *x* is wrong. Hills thinks that understanding has a different relationship to luck than knowledge does, and thus that moral knowledge is not only *insufficient* for moral understanding but also *unnecessary* for it. But it seems that even Hills wants to understand moral understanding of why *x* is wrong as necessarily involving grasping *x*'s wrong-making features in *some* sense (perhaps as involving having some justified, true beliefs about *x*'s wrong-making features which don't amount to knowledge). In addition to Sliwa and Hills, other philosophers who hold that understanding why one's behavior was wrong involves grasping its wrong-making features include McGrath (2011), Markovits (2012), and Brady (2013). Not all these philosophers are explicit that grasping *that the wrong-making features were wrong-making* must be part of that understanding too, although Brady (2013: 142) is.

Note also that my claim here is that feeling guilty *facilitates* moral understanding. An alternative strategy for defending guilt-tripping by way of a connection between guilt and moral understanding might be to argue that feeling guilty is at least partially *constitutive* of moral understanding. But this is not the strategy I've elected to pursue, since it depends on a much more controversial thesis about what moral understanding involves. To claim that moral understanding is partially *constituted* by affect, it seems to me that one would have to hold that *affect itself* has non-instrumental, epistemic value – and I'm honestly not sure what I make of this claim. In any case, I think the topic would deserve its own article.

more I grasp regarding what made my behavior wrong, the *richer* an understanding of why my behavior was wrong I possess.

The proposal I now wish to defend is that when a target of guilt-tripping *has*, in fact, behaved wrongfully, the picture of guilt that we've built thus far supports the hypothesis that feeling guilty facilitates a wrongdoer's coming to a richer understanding of why what he's done was wrong. It serves this function because of the two aspects of guilt we've identified: that guilt is (i) a *painful* affective response which (ii) involves the subject taking his guilt to be justified on the basis that the way he has behaved was wrong.²³

Let us start by considering guilt's painfulness. In general, it is a familiar fact that emotional experiences involve changes in how a subject's attention is directed.²⁴ The key idea I want to defend about the fact that guilt is painful is that the way in which guilt is painful helps to conduce to a wrongdoer's understanding of his wrongdoing by contributing to the way in which guilt causes a subject to direct his attention. Pain motivates a subject to seek relief. But it is difficult to find reprieve from pain about one's own wrongdoing without paying attention to what one has done.²⁵

I thus maintain that the pain of guilt has at least two attentional effects both of which it bears in common with the pain of bodily injury. The first is that it directs the subject's attention to the location of his pain, with an eye towards pinpointing its source more precisely and towards, thereby, finding a means of alleviating it.²⁶ Just as a throb in one's knee might cause one to examine the joint, perhaps poking at it or bending it back and forth to better locate the specific area of damage, so too does guilt direct a wrongdoer towards the location from which his pain appears to be emanating, also

²³ Brady (2013, 2018) also argues that guilt can facilitate moral understanding. But to justify *inducing* guilt, which Brady does not do, I think one needs the specific details about how this facilitation works that I posit here.

²⁴ See, for example, Brady (2013); de Sousa (1987); Elgin (2007); and Tappolet (2016).

²⁵ Perhaps it is true that some temporary solace can be sought by simply putting one's bad deed out of mind. Thinking of one's wrongdoing, after all, does tend to exacerbate the pain of guilt. And yet one finds, in guilt, that one *can't* really make the pain subside by simply ignoring it; it nags, demanding our efforts for its resolution.

²⁶ On how physical pain directs attention toward its location, see Van Damme, Crombez, & Lorenz (2007).

in the spirit of more thorough examination and of, hopefully, discovering a means of relief. Of course, the “location” of his pain is mostly metaphorical in the case of guilt: What I mean is that the subject’s attention is drawn to things related to the behavior that his guilt is about, including the behavior itself, of which the subject may have only a barely determinate conception, and toward temporally adjacent events, its potential causes and consequences, etc. – with the idea being to more precisely “locate” the source of his pain by building a *more* determinate conception of it. The second way in which the pain of guilt affects a subject’s attention is by making it difficult for the subject to concentrate for long on anything *other* than the source of his guilt. Instead, his thoughts keep returning to the direction from which his pain is emanating, again just as the pain of bodily injury makes it difficult to concentrate on other things.²⁷

The painfulness of guilt both directs a subject’s attention towards and keeps it directed towards things related to the behavior that his guilt is about. But one may wonder how it is that such attentional effects could really conduce to moral understanding *given* that pain motivates a subject to find relief. If pain motivates a subject to find relief, then why shouldn’t a subject who feels pain at the

²⁷ On how physical pain makes it difficult to disengage attention, see Eccleston & Crombez (1999); Pincus & Morley (2001); and Roelofs et al. (2002). Beyond the analogy with physical pain, the idea that guilt’s *painfulness* may help to ground a subject’s tendency to focus on and examine the source of her guilt is given support by a body of empirical work which shows that “positive emotions broaden the scopes of attention, cognition, and action, widening the array of percepts, thoughts, and actions presently in mind,” while “negative emotions shrink these same arrays” (Fredrickson & Branigan 2005: 315). (For reviews, see Derryberry & Tucker (1994) and Fredrickson (1998, 2013.)) The proposed explanation for this difference is evolutionary: In the case of negative emotions, a narrowing of focus to an emotion’s object and strategies for coping with it likely helped our ancestors to alleviate specific problems or threats; whereas broadening attentional focus in the case of positive emotions likely facilitated exploration and creative thinking, and, thereby, the building of mental and physical resources, during times when our ancestors were safe and satiated (Fredrickson 1998: 312 and Fredrickson & Branigan 2005: 314-315). Still, the correlation between negative affect and sustained attention to an emotion’s object is not perfect. When disgusted by a rotten fruit, for example, we tend to direct attention *away* from the object of disgust (Tappolet 2016: 34). So I think really that it is guilt’s painfulness, which involves the motivation to relieve one’s pain, *paired with* emotion-specific facts about how relief is possible in the case of guilt, which help to explain why guilt involves an examination of one’s wrongdoing. It is *easy* to resolve (certain types of) disgust by simply distancing ourselves (and thus attention) from the objects of our disgust, presumably because we evolved to feel negative affect towards disgusting objects precisely so that we would solve the problem of being in too close proximity to unhealthy objects. But it is much harder to make guilt go away by simply putting *physical distance* between ourselves and what we have done, presumably because we evolved to feel negative affect towards our own wrongdoings so that we would solve a problem that requires more attention to solve: the problem of having damaged a relationship. In the case of guilt then, the motivation to relieve our pain produces more sustained attention towards our wrongdoing, because it’s difficult to figure out how to make the pain go away *without* sustained attention.

wrongfulness of his behavior just be disposed to redescribe that behavior to himself in ways that cast it as *not wrong after all* in an attempt to diminish its painful associations? The answer is that guilt of course *does* contain this motivational pull, but it is often quite difficult for this motivation to become fully efficacious, because it is counteracted precisely by that element of guilt which renders guilt not a mere pain, but rather a pain about a wrongdoing: that guilt involves a commitment to its own justification on the basis that the subject has behaved in a way that was wrong. This commitment, on my view, this reflexive endorsement, shapes the course of the subject's investigation of the source of his pain by inclining him to attend to considerations that he can interpret as *confirming* the take that the way he has behaved was wrongful – and inclining him to interpret those features as in fact supporting the view that his behavior was wrong.²⁸

The idea, in other words, is that having engendered a commitment to the wrongfulness of the behavior he is investigating *also* contributes to how the subject directs his attention by making considerations that can confirm such a commitment more salient to him: considerations like the particular ways in which his behavior caused harm, or the moments at which he could have but failed to make better choices. Moreover, the subject's commitment inclines him to hold that those considerations *do* confirm the view that his behavior was wrongful, which he can do by holding that such considerations *made* his behavior wrong. But, when the subject's feeling of guilt really is fitting, the features of the situation that he can interpret as confirming the wrongfulness of how he has behaved are generally features in virtue of which that behavior *was* wrong.²⁹ Thus, if the situation really

²⁸ The claim that feeling guilty makes people focus on their wrongdoings is also empirically supported. "People in the midst of a guilt experience," recounts psychologist June Tangney (1995: 117-118), "often report a nagging focus or preoccupation with the specific transgression – thinking of it over and over, wishing they had behaved differently or could somehow undo the bad deed done." See also Niedenthal, Tangney, & Gavanski (1994); Tangney (2001); and Tangney & Salovey (2010).

²⁹ Generally, but not always: Some of the features of his situation that confirm the take that his behavior was wrong will just be *evidence* for that assessment, without being wrong-making features of his behavior. (For example, that the person the subject has wronged appears to be extremely angry with him might be evidence that he has done wrong without itself being a wrong-making feature of his behavior.) Still, I think the mechanism I describe here should draw attention to enough wrong-making features that it functions to promote understanding (in cases of genuine wrongdoing).

is one in which the subject did something wrong, feeling guilty should help the subject come to an understanding of why his behavior was wrongful by both orienting the subject's attention towards considerations in virtue of which his behavior was wrong and inclining him to interpret those considerations as indeed having made his behavior wrongful.

Moreover, I think this influence of guilt on what the subject is inclined to attend to and accept is compounded by the fact that reflexive endorsement isn't merely a commitment to the subject's behavior having been wrongful, but rather to the subject's present, painful affective response – her guilt – being *justified* on the basis that the subject's behavior was wrong. I believe the content of the subject's commitment has this compounding effect because, in general, it seems plausible that taking some consideration to be the reason for an activity or response that one knows oneself to be presently undergoing makes one's commitment to its truth even more robust than merely taking it to be the case. A conviction, for instance, that the value of philosophy both explains and justifies my pursuit of an academic career seems to make me even more inclined to interpret the world in a way that supports my stance on philosophy's value than I would be if I simply believed that philosophy had value but hadn't chosen it as a career path. I suspect that, in the former case, the way in which I know myself to be engaged in activity which *relies* on philosophy's value serves to make my commitment to the value of philosophy more rationally entrenched. My suggestion is that taking the wrongfulness of one's behavior to justify one's guilt is similar, because it involves awareness of one's affect as a response *to* one's wrongful behavior which, in turn, makes one's commitment to the wrongfulness of that behavior particularly entrenched. A subject who feels guilty will thus be even *more* inclined to interpret the world as confirming that he has behaved wrongfully than a subject who merely believes that he has behaved wrongfully yet isn't responding to his wrongful behavior with guilty feelings.

Imagine then that I do feel guilty about revealing your therapy appointment to your boss. I feel troubled about what's passed, and ill at ease with myself, and I take the situation to warrant this

response. My gnawing pain at what I've done is impossible to ignore, and so I keep going over what has happened in my head. Maybe if I pinpoint the exact source of my feeling, I can figure out how to make it go away. In considering what I've done, my attention fixes on some details and slides over others: If only I could for once remember to think before speaking. I really should work on being more considerate of my friends. My thoughts keep returning to how embarrassed and anxious you seemed, and so I begin to empathize with those feelings, putting myself in your shoes. Some people aren't as blasé about counseling as I am, and may even perceive going to therapy as evidence of unreliability. You are probably concerned that I've caused your boss to think of you this way. And you had mentioned just the other day that you hoped to be assigned to a new project at work. Are you worried that I've spoiled your chances at this assignment? And then I feel another sharp pang of remorse. It's my own thoughtlessness that is the cause of your worries. You've always seemed reluctant to speak publicly about therapy. I should have just considered this before speaking.

So things seem through the lens of guilt, and in this way I grasp more about what was wrong with my behavior. Now, for instance, I understand that I may have endangered your chances of being assigned to a desirable work project, or at least that this may be a concern. I have realized that your reticence about therapy is indicative of anxiety you feel about how mental health issues can be stigmatized, and I have some sense of what it's like for you to feel this sort of anxiety. And I'm aware that I must take more care to remember my friends' insecurities, especially when speaking to people who hold power over them.

None of this is to say that a wrongdoer can't come to grasp what made his behavior wrong via other means. You may simply tell me that revealing your therapy appointment to your boss made you anxious that she would think ill of you, and I may thereby understand my wrongdoing a bit better. But the picture of guilt I've described gives us reason to think that there are at least two respects in which a wrongdoer's feeling guilty is an especially efficient means of that person's gaining moral

understanding. First, it seems likely that the mechanisms via which guilt facilitates moral understanding allows wrongdoers to learn *more* about what made their behavior wrong *more quickly* than they would simply from having their behavior's wrong-making features recounted to them. Guilt, I have suggested (i) orients a subject's attention towards the direction of his wrongdoing with an eye towards pinpointing the location of, and then alleviating, his pain; (ii) keeps his attention from veering elsewhere; (iii) makes salient considerations that may have made his behavior wrong; and (iv) motivates him to accept that those considerations did make his behavior wrongful. Thus, we may think of the guilty person as an especially attentive and especially motivated student, someone primed to learn more at a faster pace.

Second, a wrongdoer's feeling guilty is an especially efficient means to facilitating his understanding, in the respect that a wrongdoer's learning in this way consumes few, if any, of anyone *else's* resources. While a victim can, in many instances, make the person who has wronged her understand his wrongdoing better by explaining to him what was wrong with his behavior without trying to make him feel bad, feeling guilty, via the ways in which it directs and motivates a subject's reflection, is an affective response that enables a wrongdoer to come to a deeper understanding of his wrongdoing on his own. Thus, the difference between patiently talking to a wrongdoer and making him feel guilty is like the difference between giving a man a fish and teaching him *to* fish.

IV. Weighing the Reasons

I'll now defend the view that guilt-tripping can be morally justified in the name of facilitating a wrongdoer's moral understanding. To do so, I want to first explain why I don't think that the form of guilt-tripping I've set out to defend – guilt-tripping of a genuinely culpable wrongdoer by a victim – need involve any sort of objectionable manipulation on the victim's part. Recall that the worry about objectionable manipulation was the worry that, because guilt-tripping typically involves aiming to

affect another person's thoughts or behavior via his feelings, guilt-tripping seeks to influence a person in a manner that bypasses his rational faculties. The worry, in essence, is that guilt-tripping involves treating a person as a mere means.

However, I think it would be a mistake to assume that, just because guilt-tripping involves influencing a person via his feelings, it thereby involves *bypassing* his rational faculties. Emotional responses, in general, can be formed on the basis of reasons. Moreover, in the case where a victim guilt-trips a culpable wrongdoer, we have no reason to think that anything less than this must be happening. In the sort of case that interests us, the guilt-tripper, usually through a pointed remark, draws attention to the wrongness of the offender's behavior, and the offender then feels guilty – where this partially consists in recognizing the wrongness of his behavior as providing justificatory support for his guilt. There is nothing about this story that should make us think that anything a-rational (or even irrational) must be happening here. On the contrary, it appears as if what is happening is that the victim presents to the wrongdoer a reason for that person to feel guilty – one which, does, in fact, warrant his guilt – and the wrongdoer feels guilty on the basis of that reason. This is exactly how we form attitudes when we are using our rational faculties and using them properly.

Nor should the fact that guilt feels painful, or that its painfulness plays a role in facilitating a wrongdoer's understanding, make us think that the process of guilt-tripping a wrongdoer must be a manipulative one. This is because the pain of guilt, on our picture, is not separable from the subject's reflexive endorsement, not separable from the subject's guilt itself. It is not as if the victim sticks the offender with a hot poker to make him pay attention, and then tells him that the reason he has been stuck was his bad behavior. Rather, the pain that the offender feels is never a pain that is experienced as senseless, but rather always known to the subject as a pain that is *about* his wrongdoing, a pain that is experienced as existing for a reason which does, in fact, justify it.

But even if guilt-tripping a culpable wrongdoer needn't be manipulative, it still involves aiming to cause that person pain. So in order to make the case that victims can be permitted to guilt-trip those who wrong them, I need make out that moral injunctions against deliberately causing pain can be outweighed in the cases of guilt-tripping that concern us. I'll start by noting four respects in which it can be valuable that a wrongdoer come to a richer understanding of why what he has done was wrong. Each of these respects in which such understanding is valuable is integral to restoring the relationship between the wrongdoer and victim and should thus be of particular importance to the victim.³⁰

First, and perhaps most obviously, a wrongdoer's gaining such understanding is valuable insofar as it enables him to avoid similar wrongdoing in the future, since recognizing which features of one's behavior made it wrong is crucial for refraining from future behaviors that possess the same features. Grasping that it was wrong to say what I did to your boss because, in doing so, I revealed your private medical information without your consent will help me to avoid the wrong of such unlicensed revelations going forward. Moreover, a wrongdoer's ability to avoid repeating his mistakes is crucial to relational repair, since nothing has been properly fixed if it is still prone to break easily again.

Second, a wrongdoer's coming to understand his wrongdoing can be valuable in helping that person to figure out how to acknowledge and mitigate the damage he has done. Understanding exactly why one's behavior was problematic can help one to make out both the most appropriate form of apology and what compensation is owed.

³⁰ I focus on the respects in which a wrongdoer's gaining understanding holds value by way of helping to restore his relationship with the victim because these respects in which understanding is valuable are of special significance to the victim, and what I'm interested in showing here is that a victim can be justified in guilt-tripping.

Can third parties can be justified in guilt-tripping too? In principle, I think yes. But the case is strongest for the victim herself, both because guilt-tripping can help to repair the *victim's* relationship with the wrongdoer and she has particularly strong reasons to see to this, and because some of the considerations that speak for a victim guilt-tripping – such as that doing so can relieve her of an unfair burden of lengthy explanation – don't factor into third-party cases.

Third, insofar as his understanding is a means to his avoiding similar behavior in the future and to his acknowledging and compensating for the damage he has wrought, it is also thereby a means of providing *reassurance* to others that he will indeed do these very things. It can be comforting to know that a wrongdoer understands his wrongdoing, because his doing so makes the prospects of repeat offense or uncompensated damage that much less likely. Such reassurance will be of special significance to the victim of a wrongdoing, as the person who is most intimately acquainted with the damage caused by that wrongdoing, often most in danger of being wronged again, and the person to whom compensation and amends are owed.

Fourth and finally, a wrongdoer's understanding what he has done wrong can amount to the restoration of a valuable type of *recognition*. There is, I think, a type of recognition of others as mattering that consists in being oriented so as to give appropriate weight to how one's actions may affect those people. Such recognition involves both grasping how the effects of one's actions on others ought to factor in one's deliberations and actually allowing those facts about the effects of one's actions on others to have the influence on one's choices that they ought to. (It consists, we might say, in giving both the right normative weight and the right motivational weight to facts about others. How much these two aspects of recognition can come apart will depend on how close we take the connection between moral apprehension and moral motivation to be.) Wrongdoing, insofar as it has a victim, is a failure of this sort of recognition. It is a failure to give facts about how one's actions will affect that person either appropriate consideration, or appropriate influence on one's choices, or both.

But understanding why one's behavior was wrong, because it consists in grasping how facts about a person *should* weigh in one's practical deliberation, can thus be a way of at least partially restoring this recognition. (Whether it can amount to a full, or only a partial, restoration will again depend on how close we take the connection between moral apprehension and moral motivation to be.) In grasping, for example, that I did wrong by revealing your private medical information to others,

I grasp how the fact that my behavior will reveal your private medical information ought to weigh in my decisions about what to do. I thereby (at least partially) restore my recognition of how you matter by giving appropriate normative weight to this fact about how my actions effect you.

I think that recognizing others as mattering in the way I have just described has final value. It is, itself, a form of respect.³¹ Thus I think that understanding one's wrongdoing, insofar as it partially constitutes this form of recognition, can be finally valuable as well. Moreover, because wronging someone amounts to a failure of this sort of recognition, or respect, on the part of the wrongdoer, it will be especially important that this respect is restored post wrongdoing, and especially important, in particular, to the victim. Indeed, such recognition is an essential constituent of any relationship of mutual regard, and thus not just a means to a repaired relationship but rather a requisite part of it.

All told, then, a wrongdoer's coming to more richly understand what he has done wrong has the potential to be very valuable, both instrumentally, as a means to the repair of a valuable relationship, and finally, as an essential constituent of respect and respectful relationships. Moreover, although we might help a wrongdoer better understand why his behavior was wrong by explaining calmly and patiently to him what made certain aspects of his behavior objectionable, we also have good reason to think that patient explanation is often *not*, in all other respects, equally as good a means of enriching his understanding as guilt-tripping is. In particular, as we have seen, we have reason to think that guilt-tripping can be an especially efficient means of facilitating the relevant sort of moral understanding both in the sense that it can enable a wrongdoer to learn *more, faster*, and in the sense that it can enable the wrongdoer to learn *without* the victim undertaking the burden of enlightening the wrongdoer herself (aside from an initial pointed remark or gesture). Both these senses in which guilt-tripping can be more efficient are significant. The first is significant because it is not merely the case that a wrongdoer's understanding what he has done wrong can be valuable. Rather, it is also the case

³¹ In fact, I think it is just what Darwall (1977: 40) calls "moral recognition respect."

that victims have an interest in seeing that the value of a wrongdoer's understanding what he has done is realized quickly. In particular, the matters of restoring a wrongdoer's recognition of the victim, and of providing reassurance both of compensation and against the possibility of re-offense are legitimately *pressing* needs of victims within a healthful relationship. The second is significant because it is unfair that restoring order after they have been wronged should require painstaking efforts from victims. And this is especially true in cases where a victim prefers not to relive the harm that was done.

What follows then, is how it seems to me that the balance of reasons shakes out in a general way, when we are considering whether it's permissible for victims to guilt-trip wrongdoers: We needn't worry about overcoming any constraints against manipulation in the cases that concern us, since guilt-tripping a culpable wrongdoer needn't be manipulative. Nevertheless, there is still a general moral injunction against deliberately aiming to cause others pain. But it is also true that it is important, and of special importance to victims, that a wrongdoer come to understand why what he has done was wrong, because of the numerous ways in which such understanding is crucial to restoring the relationship between wrongdoer and victim. Moreover, although there are other means of facilitating a wrongdoer's understanding, guilt-tripping can plausibly be an especially efficient means of moral elucidation – where this is due partially to guilt's painfulness itself. And this efficiency matters both because victims shouldn't have to *wait* for the person who has wronged them to achieve a requisite grasp of what he's done, and because victims shouldn't have to undertake significant explanatory burdens themselves. Thus, all things considered, the importance of a wrongdoer's coming to understand why what he has done was wrong, paired with the efficiency of feeling guilty as a tool for facilitating such understanding, will sometimes outweigh moral considerations that generally speak against aiming to cause others pain. It can be morally justified for a victim to guilt-trip a wrongdoer.

V. Pathologies of Guilt

One may object that there are several considerations relevant to the permissibility of guilt-tripping that I haven't factored into this accounting. This is true. But I've at this point concluded just that victims *can* be justified in guilt-tripping wrongdoers – not that they always are. And what the additional considerations show, I believe, is just that it's *sometimes* morally impermissible for victims to guilt-trip wrongdoers – not that it's *always* morally impermissible to do so. In fact, I believe that, on the whole, further reflection supports the view that guilt-tripping is justified relatively often.³² Of course, I cannot here discuss every one of the possibly infinite number of factors that may be relevant to each particular case. So, to support my contention that guilt-tripping is justified relatively often, I will end by discussing the pair of considerations that I think one should worry would be *most* capable of tipping the balance of reasons against guilt-tripping a significant amount of the time. I will explain why I don't think these considerations do tip the balance as often as one might have thought.

The pair of considerations that I have in mind concern what we might regard as two pathologies associated with guilt. I think each of these pathologies can be seen as stemming from one of the two aspects of guilt on which I've focused and from the effects on a subject's thoughts that I've described as associated with the relevant aspect of guilt. First, there is the pathology of *defensiveness*, which stems from the fact that guilt is a type of pain. Pain directs a subject's attention toward its location, but *with an eye to its own relief*. And sometimes a subject will try to find such relief not, as it were, by going *through* his guilt, in a process of understanding his wrongdoing and then making amends for it, but rather by grasping at any and all means he can find in order to suppress his guilty feeling. Thus, my accounting of the reasons may seem to have overlooked the possibility that, due to defensive pathologies, guilt-tripping may not succeed in making a person feel guilty for long enough for guilt to generate educative effects.

³² And that this is so even if guilt *isn't* sometimes simply deserved.

The second pathology, which I'll call the pathology of *fixation*, stems, in my view, from the fact that guilt involves reflexive endorsement. A fixated subject is one who becomes so overwhelmed by the fittingness of his pain, and, indeed, the fittingness of taking that pain to be fitting, that he doesn't even attempt to relieve it through a process of amends and reconciliation. He thinks about and learns more of the wrong-making features of his behavior but only ever in the service of continuing his own self-flagellation. In such a subject, the motivation to respond rightly to wrongdoing by making genuine efforts towards relational repair becomes drowned out by an obsession with feeling guilt itself. Thus, my accounting of the reasons may seem to have overlooked how the feeling of guilt's own appropriateness can sometimes cripple and, at other times, supplant, genuinely other-regarding, reparative motivation.³³

A first reply to these worries is just to note that, while defensiveness and fixation are common enough to be recognizable as pathologies associated with guilt, experience does not support the view that people react to guilt in one of these pathological ways all the time. While it is of course true that some people sometimes react to guilt-tripping *not* by feeling bad for any significant duration of time, but rather by quickly becoming defensive, it is also clear that guilt-tripping often makes people feel lingering guilt. We *know* that guilt-tripping does produce more lingering guilt in many instances because millions of parents have perfected this art! And, similarly, while it is true that people sometimes become fixated in their guilt, it is also very common that people who report feeling guilty then go on to make genuine attempts at amends.³⁴

³³ Insofar as what distinguishes guilt from *shame* is that the former involves more of a focus on the badness of the mistake made, while the latter involves more of a focus on the badness of the self, one might also think of the fixated person whose moral drive becomes *crippled* as one who, wrapped up in the conviction that it is fitting for him to feel bad, lets fitting guilt devolve into unfitting shame.

³⁴ On guilt's tendency to motivate reparative behaviors, see Tangney (1995: 119-120) and Tangney & Salovey (2010: 254). Also of relevance here is psychological research which suggests that, while proneness to *shame* is correlated with hostility and a tendency to direct blame away from the self, proneness to *guilt* is "negatively or negligibly correlated with the externalization of blame" (Tangney 1995: 122). Similarly, "a tendency to experience 'shame-free' guilt is negatively associated with the externalization of blame," and "guilt has been associated...if anything, with a somewhat decreased tendency toward interpersonal anger and hostility" (ibid.: 123, 124). See also Tangney (2001) and Tangney & Salovey

Indeed, the picture of guilt that I've drawn in this article doesn't merely help to locate the sources of guilt's pathologies but also actually helps to explain *why* guilt isn't pathological in all, or even in the majority, of cases. For that picture reveals that the pathologies of guilt stem from propensities of guilt that tend to pull against one another. Guilt is a feeling that makes us interpret ourselves as having done wrong, and yet at the same time seeks relief from itself. But it is *because* guilt makes us interpret ourselves as having done wrong that it also pulls against overly hasty relief-seeking, and *because* guilt makes us seek relief that it also pulls against an overly obsessive focus on interpreting ourselves as having done wrong. Trying to better *understand* one's wrongdoing, and to thereby figure out how to make reparations for it, is the happy medium that satisfies both of guilt's opposing forces.

Still, even if these pathologies of guilt aren't *so* common, they are also common enough so as to be immediately recognizable. And thus, if the mere prospect of provoking them were enough to render guilt-tripping impermissible, then I would think that we *should* conclude that guilt-tripping isn't morally justified that often (and perhaps that it is only justified in cases where we have positive reason to think that a wrongdoer *won't* respond pathologically to being guilt-tripped). But I actually don't think the mere prospect of provoking a pathological response is a consideration that renders guilt-tripping impermissible, because I don't think that the *mere prospect* of provoking a pathological response should be weighed against the permissibility of guilt-tripping at all.

How a person responds to feeling guilty, after all, is not entirely beyond his control. Moreover, when it is within a person's control how he responds to feeling guilty, both reacting too strongly *against* and leaning too strongly *into* feeling guilty are responses that exhibit morally objectionable orientations. To rush to deny the possibility that one has done wrong, in lieu of honestly attempting to take stock of what one has done, amounts to a distasteful and morally suspect abdication of one's responsibility

(2010). These results may point to the conclusion that some *methods* of guilt-tripping are preferable to others. We might surmise that guilt-trippers should seek to induce guilt in ways that avoid making wrongdoers feel bad about themselves as opposed to just bad about their behavior.

to others simply in order to preserve one's own ego. And to ruminate so obsessively on one's own failings that one forgets the people affected by them is to let narcissism inhibit doing right by others in yet a different way. So, at least in cases where a wrongdoer has full agency, it seems wrong to me to count such predilections of character against the moral permissibility of guilt-tripping, for at least two reasons.

First, that a person might react pathologically to guilt-tripping is not clearly a consideration that *he* could reasonably raise as an objection to being guilt-tripped. A person who said, "Don't try to guilt-trip me, for you'll just make me get defensive," would seem to be speaking in bad faith. (And the natural reply to such a person would be, "Well, *don't*.") Second, to count such predilections of character as reasons not to guilt-trip is a way *enabling* narcissistic responses to guilt. And by lending legitimacy to such wrongful responses, one thereby allows guilt to lose the power that it naturally has. So my own view is that considerations about how guilt's potential pathologies might undermine its value should only be taken to render guilt-tripping impermissible when we have positive evidence, based on knowledge of a particular wrongdoer's character, that he cannot help but respond pathologically to guilt-tripping.³⁵ The mere possibility of defensiveness or fixation shouldn't stop us from guilt-tripping where we *don't* have reason to think that the person who has wronged us cannot prevent himself from reacting unhealthily to guilt.

In this article, I've defended a victim's permission to guilt-trip a wrongdoer as a means to facilitating that person's moral understanding. Indeed, I have tried to show in this final section that we should not even think it particularly *rare* for victims to be morally permitted to guilt-trip in this way. So, in the end, given both the permissibility and efficacy of the practice, I suggest we recognize the positive contributions guilt-tripping can make to the maintenance of a healthy relationship – rather

³⁵ Or really, that he cannot help but respond pathologically to guilt-tripping, and that his inability to respond pathologically itself came about through no fault of his own – since one also enables pathological responses to guilt-tripping by allowing subjects to *develop* the inability to respond to guilt-tripping in healthy ways.

than just treating any attempt to induce guilt with immediate derision.

Still, even if guilt-tripping were permitted less often than I suspect, I think it should still be of interest just that there are powerful moral considerations in favor of the practice – and ones that don't go by way of claims to basic desert. Guilt-tripping has a bad reputation. We should be interested to learn of the possibility that this reputation isn't entirely earned. Moreover, although it is a very natural response to being wronged to want the person responsible to suffer, some philosophers have expressed skepticism that such a tendency in ourselves is one we could ever have moral reason to endorse.³⁶ But if there are powerful reasons that favor a wrongdoer's suffering guilt, then perhaps the inclination to make wrongdoers suffer, at least in *that* way, isn't one from which we need feel so alienated.³⁷

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³⁶ Nussbaum (2016) sounds such a skeptical note.

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