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978-1-108-83606-7 — The Ethics of Social Punishment
Linda Radzik, Christopher Bennett, Glen Pettigrove, George Sher
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THE ETHICS OF SOCIAL PUNISHMENT

How do we punish others socially, and should we do so? In her 2018 Descartes Lectures for Tilburg University, Linda Radzik explores the informal methods ordinary people use to enforce moral norms, such as telling people off, boycotting businesses, and publicly shaming wrongdoers on social media. Over three lectures, Radzik develops an account of what social punishment is, why it is sometimes permissible, and when it must be withheld. She argues that the proper aim of social punishment is to put moral pressure on wrongdoers to make amends. Yet the permissibility of applying such pressure turns on the tension between individual desert and social good, as well as the possession of an authority to punish. Responses from Christopher Bennett, George Sher, and Glen Pettigrove challenge Radzik's account of social punishment while also offering alternative perspectives on the possible meanings of our responses to wrongdoing. Radzik replies in the closing essay.

LINDA RADZIK is Professor of Philosophy at Texas A&M University. She is the author of *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law and Politics* (2009), as well as a series of articles on the normative issues that arise in the aftermath of wrongdoing.

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THE ETHICS OF SOCIAL PUNISHMENT

The Enforcement of Morality in Everyday Life

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with

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GLEN PETTIGROVE

University of Glasgow

GEORGE SHER

Rice University



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Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
PART I THE DESCARTES LECTURES 2018	I
1 Defining Social Punishment <i>Linda Radzik</i>	3
2 Justifying Social Punishment <i>Linda Radzik</i>	24
3 Practicing Social Punishment <i>Linda Radzik</i>	47
PART II COMMENTARIES	73
4 How to Do Things with Blame (and Social Punishment) <i>Christopher Bennett</i>	75
5 On Social Punishment <i>George Sher</i>	99
6 Punishment and Protest <i>Glen Pettigrove</i>	113

PART III REPLIES	135
7 Response to Bennett, Sher, and Pettigrove <i>Linda Radzik</i>	137
<i>Bibliography</i>	157
<i>Index</i>	164

Notes on Contributors

LINDA RADZIK is Professor of Philosophy at Texas A&M University. She is the author of *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law and Politics* (2009), as well as a series of articles on the normative issues that arise in the aftermath of wrongdoing.

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Preface

The theme of my research for many years now has been the aftermath of wrongdoing and the moral decisions faced at those times by victims, wrongdoers, and third-party witnesses. What should we do after things have already gone wrong? I have studied these issues in legal and political contexts. But I am especially drawn to questions about the aftermath of wrongdoing in everyday life. What are morally appropriate responses to deceptions and betrayals among friends and family, or bullying in schools and workplaces, or racism and other forms of nastiness among neighbors, strangers on the street, or strangers on the Internet?

Sometimes, in cases like these, victims and witnesses tell the wrongdoers off, give them the cold shoulder, talk about them behind their backs, or even denounce them publicly on social media. Sometimes victims and witnesses to wrongdoing do nothing, of course; and sometimes they do nothing *for moral reasons*, believing it would be wrong to act. In recent years, I have written papers reflecting on each of these modes of response to wrongdoing: gossiping, boycotting, overtly criticizing, socially avoiding, and minding your own business. What I discovered was a surprising amount of complexity. Gossiping, boycotting, criticizing, avoiding, and minding one's own business simply do not hold together very well as action-types. The meanings and functions of token actions within these types vary widely. So, the considerations that seem relevant to justifying any particular instance of gossiping, boycotting, and so on vary widely as well. I have become convinced that I need a new strategy for thinking through these issues.

One theme that has cropped up continually in my research is punishment. Some instances of gossip seem to be punitive, although most are not. Some consumer boycotts look like attempts to punish wrongdoing businesses, although others seem to have different functions altogether, such as the avoidance of complicity. Sometimes we emotionally withdraw from friends and family members who have mistreated us in order to

punish them, but at other times we do so simply for the sake of our own health and happiness.

This volume makes social punishment the central category of analysis. The philosophical literature on punishment is so wholly concentrated on the state's responses to crime that authors sometimes dismiss talk of punishment in everyday life as merely metaphorical. But this is mistaken. Legal norms are not the only ones that society enforces, and the mechanisms of law are not the only methods of enforcement that society uses. Chapter 1 defends a definition of punishment that can recognize and shed light on nonstate forms of punishment. Chapter 2 develops an account of what justifies using social punishment against another person that I call the "moral pressure theory." Chapter 3 considers a broad variety of ways in which social punishment can go wrong and proposes a set of ethical principles for limiting socially punitive behavior.

The invitation from the Tilburg Center for Moral Philosophy, Epistemology and Philosophy of Science (TiLPS) to deliver the Descartes Lectures in 2018 presented the perfect opportunity to organize my thoughts about punishment in everyday life. In December of that year, TiLPS hosted a conference on this theme, which included contributions from a talented and generous group of scholars. The Center also invited three philosophers whose work I have admired for years to respond directly to my lectures: Christopher Bennett, George Sher, and Glen Pettigrove. Their essays and my response are included in this volume.

In Chapter 4, Bennett both critiques my definition of punishment and offers a genealogical account of social responses to wrongdoing that points toward an alternative interpretation of the meaning and role of social punishment. Sher puts pressure on my theory of justification in Chapter 5, including both the desert condition and the instrumental condition that form the two halves of the moral pressure theory of punishment. In Chapter 6, Pettigrove offers an alternative lens for interpreting some of the phenomena that I classify as social punishment. Along the way, he develops a theory of protest as a response to wrongdoing. Each of these contributions leads me to alter and, I hope, improve my account of social punishment in some way, as I explain in Chapter 7.

I would like to express my most sincere and grateful appreciation to TiLPS, the Department of Philosophy at Tilburg University, and the organizers of the Descartes Lectures: Alfred Archer, Amanda Cawston, Bart Engelen, and Maureen Sie. This series of lectures builds on many years of research that has, at different times, received financial support from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the Social Philosophy &

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Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Preface

xiii

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