Abstract: Unlike much work on responsibility, George Sher’s new book, *Who Knew?: Responsibility Without Awareness*, focuses on the relationship between knowledge and responsibility. Sher argues against the view that responsibility depends on an agent’s awareness of the nature and consequences of her action. According to Sher’s alternative proposal, even agents who are unaware of important features of their actions may be morally or prudentially responsible for their behavior. While I agree with many of Sher’s central conclusions, I explore the worry that, as it stands, his account may only justify ascriptions of a relatively superficial form of responsibility.

Keywords: George Sher, Knowledge Condition, Responsibility, Blame, Evaluative Judgments

Philosophers have devoted a great deal of attention to debates about whether factors like causal determinism are compatible with moral responsibility, but until recently, detailed discussions about the relationship between knowledge and responsibility have been rare. This lack of attention is regrettable, for while it is clear that moral responsibility often depends on what an agent knew (or should have known) about the moral status and likely consequences of her behavior, the exact nature of this dependence is not obvious.
Consider the following example (adapted from a recent paper by Gideon Rosen).\textsuperscript{1} I have put arsenic in the sweet tea I serve to Smith, and the question is whether I am morally responsible for poisoning him. In part, the answer depends on whether I was aware of what I was doing. In some cases, a lack of awareness on my part would undermine an ascription of moral responsibility: I would probably not be responsible if I did not know about the poison because a third party had secretly put arsenic in my sugar bowl, hoping that I would serve it to Smith. However, in other cases, lack of awareness on my part may not undermine moral responsibility: suppose that I was unaware of the poison in Smith’s tea because I foolishly keep my arsenic and my sugar in identical containers, and, as sometimes happens, I confused the two. In this second case, I may bear some responsibility for poisoning Smith even though I was unaware of what I was doing. An adequate theory of moral responsibility should explain why lack of awareness saves an agent from responsibility in some cases, but not in others.

This essay is devoted to George Sher's recent book, \textit{Who Knew?: Responsibility Without Awareness}, which offers the most detailed account available of the relationship between knowledge and responsibility. Sher’s book includes a forceful argument against the view that responsibility \textit{must be} rooted in an agent’s awareness of the nature and consequences of her action. Against this view, Sher argues that even an actor who lacks such awareness may be responsible for his unwitting behavior if his lack of awareness is “explicable in terms of the interactions among innumerable

desires, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions, many of them unconscious, that together make him the individual he is” (p. 20).

In the first section below, I lay out Sher’s critique of the view that responsibility requires awareness. In the second section, I explain the main features of Sher’s own version of the knowledge condition on responsibility. Finally, in the third section, I develop a criticism of Sher’s account of responsibility. I should note that while most of Sher’s discussion focuses on moral responsibility for unwitting action, he draws related conclusions about prudential responsibility. Moreover, while Sher mostly engages questions about responsibility for wrong (or imprudent) behavior, he expands his account in the last chapter of the book to cover cases of right (or prudent) behavior. My discussion focuses on Sher’s account of moral responsibility for unwitting wrongdoing.

1. Counterexamples to The Searchlight View

In the first chapter of Who Knew?, Sher introduces the version of the knowledge condition on responsibility to which he is opposed. Sher calls this the “searchlight view” because it holds that responsibility extends only as far as the illumination provided by an agent's awareness. According to the searchlight view, an agent “is responsible only for those acts he consciously chooses to perform, only for those omissions he consciously chooses to allow, and only for those outcomes he consciously chooses to bring about” (p. 4).2

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2 Rosen in “Skepticism about Moral Responsibility” and Michael Zimmerman in “Moral Responsibility and Ignorance” (Ethics 107 [1997], pp. 410-426) both offer accounts of responsibility that have features in
The searchlight view is a simple way of spelling out the connection between knowledge and responsibility, but it is not an account that has been worked out in great detail. Indeed, Sher describes the view as an under-scrutinized “default position to which we gravitate when we are not thinking hard about the knowledge requirement” (p. 7). And when we do scrutinize the searchlight view, we find, Sher says, that it conflicts with many intuitive judgments about responsibility. Sher exploits this conflict in his second chapter by introducing three sets of cases featuring wrongdoers who are morally responsible—in the sense of being open to moral blame—for their behavior even though they are, for different reasons, unaware of important aspects of their behavior.³

The agents in the first set of cases “seem responsible for wrong acts that they performed because they forgot or otherwise lost track of crucial elements of their situation” (p. 24). In Hot Dog—the case to which Sher returns most frequently—Alessandra leaves her dog Sheba in the car when she picks her children up at school. This is Alessandra’s regular practice, and previous pick-ups have gone smoothly, but this time Alessandra encounters “a tangled tale of misbehavior, ill-considered punishment, and administrative bungling which requires several hours of indignant sorting out” (p. 24). Because of these unexpected difficulties, Alessandra forgets that
Sheba is in the car, and the dog suffers heat prostration. Sher says that Alessandra and the other two agents in this set of cases “would definitely be blamed and might well be liable to punishment” even though none of them knowingly chose to ignore morally relevant features of their actions (p. 24).

The next set of cases involves agents who “act wrongly because they display poor judgment” (p. 25). In *Colicky Baby*, twenty-three year old Scout is looking after a baby with colic. The baby has cried for hours, and in an effort to make it sleep, Scout gives the baby vodka. As a result, the baby is hospitalized. Again, Scout and the other two agents in this set of cases “would definitely be blamed,” despite the fact that none of them “has chosen to do anything that he thinks wrong, and none has chosen to harm any innocent person” (p. 26). While Scout chose to give the baby vodka, and this certainly harmed it, she did not judge that her act would be harmful: for the agents in this second set of cases, “the harm that each one does is due not to his bad will but rather to the poor judgment that *informs* his will” (p. 26).

In Sher’s final set of cases, each of three agents “willingly performs an act which is in fact wrong, but whose wrongness he does not recognize because he lacks some form of moral insight or imagination” (pp. 27-28). Thus, in *Bad Weather*, a member of the Weather Underground—acting under the *nom de guerre* “amerika”—takes part in a fatal bank robbery that he regards as a justified means to social revolution. Sher says that amerika and the other agents are blameworthy (and that amerika deserves punishment) even though their lack of moral insight means that
“none of the agents willingly acts wrongly”; that is, none of the agents willingly does an act he regards as wrong (p. 28). Each of Sher’s agents is, in some way, unaware of what she does, so if we agree with Sher about the blameworthiness of these agents, then his examples tell against the searchlight view. The searchlight view can, however, be defended by arguing that these agents are responsible for their unwitting wrongdoing only because of earlier witting actions. Suppose, for example, that at some earlier time, Alessandra knowingly impaired (or failed to improve) her cognitive position in a way that led to her subsequent wrongdoing (pp. 34-35). In this case, Alessandra would be morally responsible for the earlier “benighting act” on searchlight grounds, and her moral responsibility for the subsequent unwitting act might be thought to derive from her earlier knowing action.

Sher finds this proposal unpersuasive. After all, since Alessandra finds herself in an unexpected situation, she had little reason to take precautions against forgetting Sheba; thus, “on the most natural reconstruction of Hot Dog, there was no previous point at which Alessandra negligently failed to do something that would have prevented her from forgetting Sheba” (p. 36). The point here is not that Alessandra could not have done anything to make herself less likely to forget Sheba, it is that her failure to do these things was not itself wrong and therefore cannot anchor her later

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4 Sher modifies each of his nine original cases so that they involve instances of prudential rather than moral responsibility. In each case, the relevant moral wrong (an injury to others) is replaced with an imprudent self-inflicted harm. So, instead of forgetting about her dog in the car, Alessandra forgets about her dinner on the stove, and instead of Scout’s poor judgment leading her to give a baby vodka, it leads her to “ingesting the contents of her sister’s pharmacopia” (p. 29).

5 Holly Smith introduces the concept of a “benighting act” in “Culpable Ignorance” (The Philosophical Review 92 [1983], pp. 543-571), and Sher draws on her account.
blameworthiness. And even if we think that Scout, for example, should have improved her epistemic position by learning about the effects of alcohol on babies, she need not have *knowingly* neglected this improvement in a way that would support a searchlight based ascription of responsibility (pp. 36-37).\(^6\)

Before leaving these examples, I should note that it was not always clear to me what Sher takes the agents he discusses to be morally responsible and blameworthy *for*. Is Alessandra to blame just for forgetting Sheba, or also for what happened to the dog because it was forgotten?\(^7\) This is an interesting question because Alessandra’s inadvertence might not have caused any unfortunate consequences. Suppose, for example, that when Alessandra left Sheba in the car, she also inadvertently left her car windows partially open so that Sheba did not, in fact, suffer too much from the heat. On the other hand, the consequences might have been much worse: if it had been a particularly hot day on which Alessandra forgot Sheba, the dog might have been killed (rather than merely prostrated) by the heat. Would we say that in the case in which the dog was uninjured, Alessandra is morally responsible for a lesser wrong and worthy of less blame, but that in the case in which Sheba dies, Alessandra is guilty of a greater wrong? Or should we say that it is Alessandra’s forgetting that is really important, so she is equivalently blameworthy in all these cases?

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\(^7\) Some readers may feel that Alessandra’s real wrong is deciding to leave Sheba in the car in the first place. If we focus on this aspect of Alessandra’s behavior, then we should regard her case as resembling Scout’s since both agents would be guilty of exercising faulty judgment. The question, with respect to this version of *Hot Dog*, would be whether Alessandra is responsible for her wrongdoing given that she was not aware that her decision to leave Sheba in the car was morally inappropriate.
While answering these questions is not vital to Sher’s project of engaging the searchlight view, more guidance on how he would answer them might help the reader decide how far she agrees with Sher’s intuitions about responsibility in the examples at hand.

2. The Partial Epistemic Condition

If Scout, in *Colicky Baby*, tried to avoid blame by saying that she did not know that giving alcohol to a baby was harmful, we might be tempted to respond that she *should have* anticipated this feature of her action. While this claim about what Scout should have known is no doubt related to the claim that she is morally responsible for her behavior, the relationship between the two claims is not straightforward. According to Sher, an agent’s failure to be aware of salient features of his action “cannot by itself render him responsible because it is a mere nonevent that involves no positive facts about him” (pp. 85-6); such a failure “provides us with no basis upon which to connect his act’s wrongness or foolishness to him” (p. 80). In response to this difficulty, Sher hopes to explain how the fact that a wrongdoer *should have known better* can be combined with an account that links her to the wrongness of her action in a way that grounds moral responsibility.

Sher finds the link he seeks in the *causes* of the unwitting wrongdoer’s ignorance about the nature of his behavior. According to the view Sher develops in Chapter Six (and throughout the rest of the book), a broad range of internal factors can ground an unwitting wrongdoer’s responsibility when these factors cause the wrongdoer to be unaware of the moral status of her action. The internal causal factors
that Sher has in mind here are features in terms of which the agent is identified, and for the purposes of responsibility assessment, Sher says that an agent should be identified “with whatever psychological and physical structures sustain his normal patterns of intellectual functioning” (p. 122).

So, on Sher’s view, an unwitting wrongdoer’s moral responsibility will depend on whether she should have been aware of the wrongness of her behavior and on whether her failure to be so aware was caused by factors that contribute to making her the person she is. Sher brings these thoughts together in his statement of the partial epistemic condition (PEC) on moral responsibility:

(PEC): When someone performs a wrong or foolish act in a way that satisfies the voluntariness condition, and when he also satisfies any other conditions for responsibility that are independent of the epistemic condition, he is responsible for his act’s wrongness or foolishness if, but only if, he either:

1. is aware that the act is wrong or foolish when he performs it, or else
2. is unaware that the act is wrong or foolish despite having evidence for its wrongness or foolishness his failure to recognize which
   (a) falls below some applicable standard, and
   (b) is caused by the interaction of some combination of his constitutive attitudes, dispositions, and traits (p. 88).

Thus, part of the reason Scout is morally responsible is that we can appeal to facts about her—“her impulsiveness, perhaps, or her tendency not to consider the consequences of what she does”—to explain why it did not occur to her that she should not give alcohol to a baby (p. 91). A similar account can be given of Alessandra’s failure to remember Sheba, though Sher uses Alessandra’s particular case to illustrate his claim that the internal factors that ground blameworthiness for

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8 This is a partial version of the epistemic condition because it addresses only responsibility for wrong and imprudent actions. In the final chapter of *Who Knew?*, Sher offers an expanded version of the condition that also covers responsibility for unwitting right and prudent behavior.
wrongdoing need not themselves be moral flaws. Sher points out that if “Alessandra were less solicitous of her children, or was made less anxious by conflict,” she might have remembered Sheba (p. 92). So Alessandra is morally responsible if her concern for her children, or her proneness to anxiety, caused her to forget the dog, but neither of these factors is a moral flaw.

Of course, it is not enough for moral responsibility that an unwitting wrongdoing’s constitutive features cause her lack of awareness; in addition, as specified in (2a), the wrongdoing’s failure of awareness must also fall below an “applicable standard.” Without this requirement, the epistemic condition would be too easy to satisfy because almost any failure of awareness can be traced, in one way or another, to constitutive facts about the agent whose failure it is. According to Sher, without the sort of restriction given in (2a), we might have to

count as responsible the victim of a sudden heart attack (since someone more attuned to his body would have realized that something was amiss and sought medical attention), the teacher whose chance remark precipitates a suicide (since someone with greater psychological insight would have recognized the warning signs), and perhaps even the pedestrian who is swallowed by the sinkhole (since someone with X-ray eyes would have seen the earth opening). What separates these agents from, for example, the Scout of Colicky Baby is not that their failures to realize that they are acting wrongly or foolishly cannot be traced to their constitutive attitudes, dispositions, and traits, but rather that the states of awareness to which those attitudes, traits, and dispositions give rise are in no way defective (p. 88).

This passage indicates how broad Sher takes the class of agent-constituting, responsibility-grounding, factors to be. Because of this breadth, it seems that most unwitting agents satisfy (2b) of PEC. Thus, the “applicable standards” of awareness in

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9 For more on this aspect of Sher’s view, see the second and third chapters of his earlier book, In Praise of Blame (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
(2a) do a lot of work separating responsible agents from non-responsible agents. In Chapter Seven, Sher says that these standards are partly set by an agent’s “current cognitive capacities” (p. 109), and that the notion of capacity should be analyzed largely in counterfactual terms.10 Thus we are to make sense of the claim that “Alessandra was capable of remembering Sheba . . . by appealing to some combination of (a) counterfactuals about what she would then have remembered under alternative conditions and (b) claims about the physical mechanisms of memory” (p. 109).

Note, however, that while Alessandra is engaged at the school, she is able to remember many trivial facts about the contents of her car in addition to the important fact Sheba is in the car (p. 111). And while we may be inclined to say that Alessandra should have remembered Sheba, we would probably not say the same thing about the other trivial things she could have remembered. The difference is that Alessandra “was under an obligation to protect the dog that she could not fulfill without remembering where the dog was,” but remembering the other trivial details would not have played a role in fulfilling Alessandra’s obligations (p. 111). The standards that determine what an agent should have been aware of are, then, “a joint function of (a) the agent’s cognitive capacities, and (b) the moral and prudential requirements that apply to him” (p. 113).

10 The claim that responsibility requires certain cognitive capacities might also follow from the stipulation in PEC (2) that a responsible agent must have evidence of her action’s wrongness. While (2) suggests that an agent can have such evidence without being aware of the facts that compose it, we might think that she should at least have the capacity to be aware of, and to respond appropriately to, these facts before she can be usefully described as having evidence of her action’s wrongness.
Though Sher does not make the point, it is worth noting that his general framework can be deployed by people who disagree about what moral obligations we have. Suppose that it does not occur to me to hold a door open for a person struggling with several packages. Two onlookers could agree with Sher about when a person is morally responsible for an unwitting moral failure, but disagree about whether I am morally responsible because they disagree about whether I was under an obligation to hold the door open.

A similar point applies to disagreements about how much attention people are required to give to fulfilling their moral obligations. Two onlookers may agree that Alessandra has an obligation to protect Sheba, but disagree about how attentive she must be to fulfilling this obligation. These onlookers would therefore disagree about whether Alessandra is morally responsible but not because they disagree about the general conditions of responsibility for unwitting behavior or about the content of our moral obligations.

This raises the issue of when a person should be excused for her inattentiveness—a subject to which Sher does not give detailed attention. Sher notes that seriously impaired agents are not responsible for their inadvertences if they lack the relevant capacities for awareness (p. 110), and we saw that some failures of awareness—like that of the pedestrian who, lacking X-ray vision, falls into a sinkhole—are not to be regarded as defective. But Sher does not address the familiar way in which we make allowances for the heedlessness or forgetfulness of normal agents when they are exposed to a variety of prosaic stressors. When we learn that a person has recently lost a loved one, or has been laid off from her job, we tend to
adjust our view of what can reasonably be expected of that person, both in terms of their positive behavior and in terms of what they notice or disregard.

In *Hot Dog*, we are evidently meant to suppose that the administrative hassles that Alessandra confronts are not enough to excuse her for forgetting Sheba. But the case can easily be changed in ways that might incline us to regard Alessandra as excused for her inattentiveness. Suppose, for example, that when Alessandra arrived to retrieve her children, she learned that they had been taken hostage by terrorists who attacked the school. We might think that this is just the sort of case in which it is understandable that a person might forget about a dog in the car.

And note that in this altered version of *Hot Dog*, we might still believe (i) that Alessandra’s forgetting Sheba results from facts about her, (ii) that she retains the general capacity to remember Sheba, and (iii) that it remains Alessandra’s obligation to care for the dog. So perhaps Alessandra will still count as blameworthy on Sher’s account, even though—depending on the changes we make to *Hot Dog*—there may be great intuitive pressure to say that she should be excused. I suspect, however, that Sher can account for the way that various stressors help to excuse agents for inadvertence. For one thing, we might say that in the case in which Alessandra’s children have been kidnapped, her capacity for remembering Sheba—though not eliminated—is too diminished to reasonably expect her to remember the dog.¹¹

Alternatively, though perhaps less plausibly, we might focus on the stringency of the

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¹¹ I suspect, however, that Sher *cannot* say that Alessandra’s excuse depends on the fact that she does not satisfy PEC (2b) because her forgetting Sheba is explained by facts about her situation rather than by facts about her constitutive features. As earlier quotations should indicate, Sher’s account of the constitutive features of the agent, and the way these features are causally connected to inadvertence, is too broad to allow for this approach. Sher takes up the issue of separating facts about an agent from facts about her situation in Chapter Seven.
obligation Alessandra is under: perhaps her obligations toward Sheba apply only in roughly normal situations.

A related question of some interest is what to say about Alessandra if we regard her as excused for forgetting Sheba. Even if we regard her as excused, it would still be the case that facts about Alessandra caused her not to remember that Sheba was locked in the car. Since this causal relation is so important to Sher's account, we might wonder what should be said about an agent who satisfies this condition on responsibility but who does not, for instance, violate an obligation. If I believe that Alessandra has no moral obligations toward Sheba, then, on Sher's account, I will not regard her as morally responsible, and certainly not as blameworthy, but should I still say that she is *causally* responsible for forgetting Sheba and for what befalls the dog? This is a minor point, but knowing what to say in such cases would help to round out Sher's picture of responsibility.

3. Evaluative Judgments and Blame

As we have seen, Sher identifies the moral agent with “whatever psychological and physical structures sustain his normal patterns of intellectual functioning” and he argues that unwitting wrongdoers can be morally responsible if their lack of awareness arises out of these constitutive structures (p. 122). While I agree with Sher that responsibility is possible without awareness, I worry that if all we know about an agent’s lack of awareness is that it stems from a broad range of internal structures, then this justifies regarding the agent as responsible only in a superficial sense. Sher means to give an account of responsibility that supports reactions such as moral
blame and punishment, but it seems to me that the offended responses involved in these reactions are not justified by lapses in awareness that originate from just any internal features of the agent. Rather, as I shall argue, in order to support moral blame, an agent’s lapses should issue from morally salient facts about her.

I suspect, in fact, that some version of the view Sher calls “attributionism” may fair better than Sher’s own account in explaining how unwitting wrongdoers can be open to moral blame. In referring to attributionism, Sher has in mind the accounts of T. M. Scanlon and Angela Smith, both of whom argue that “agents are responsible for all of the actions, beliefs, and attitudes, conscious or not, that reflect their judgments about what they have reason to do, believe, or feel” (p. 120).12

One reason Scanlon and Smith focus on the role of judgment in their accounts of moral responsibility is that our judgments about reasons can have great moral significance for others. Suppose, for example, that I know that an action of mine will seriously injure you, but I perform the action anyway because it achieves some trivial aim that I have. In this case, my action seems to express the judgment that your welfare is less important than whether I achieve my trivial goal. The presence of this judgment is one reason you would likely view my action as unjustifiable and morally offensive—in addition to being injurious. This general approach has, I think, great promise for explaining how an action can be related to a wrongdoer in such a way that the offended responses involved in moral blame make sense.

A similar point can be made in cases of unwitting wrongdoing. As Angela Smith notes, “we often take what a person notices and neglects to have an enormous amount of expressive significance” even when what a person notices is not under her control.\(^\text{13}\) What we pay attention to, and what we fail to notice, has expressive significance because there is, as Smith says, a \textit{rational relation} “between what we notice and what we evaluate or judge to be important or significant.”\(^\text{14}\) Smith offers the following characterization of this rational relation:

“if one judges some thing or person to be important or significant in some way, this should (rationally) have an influence on one’s tendency to notice factors which pertain to the existence, welfare, or flourishing of that thing or person. If this is so, then the fact that a person fails to take note of such factors . . . is at least some indication that she does not accept this evaluative judgment.”\(^\text{15}\)

If, as Smith suggests, an unwitting action can provide evidence that the actor does not accept the judgment that another’s welfare is a normatively weighty consideration, it is easy to see how such an action can be an appropriate basis for the hard feelings and condemnation involved in blame.

On this \textit{rational relations view}, as Smith calls it, whether an unwitting wrongdoer is blameworthy has to do, in large part, with the plausibility of interpreting her cognitive lapse as arising from interpersonally significant judgments about reasons.\(^\text{16}\) Against Smith’s approach, Sher argues that there can be “failures to notice morally relevant features of acts that are \textit{not} themselves judgment-based” (p. 


\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 244.

\(^{15}\) Ibid. Sher quotes this passage on p. 131.

\(^{16}\) I develop a similar approach to argue that even agents who are \textit{incapable} of full awareness of the moral nature of their actions may sometimes be appropriate targets for moral blame: “Blame and Responsiveness to Moral Reasons: Are Psychopaths Blameworthy?, \textit{Pacific Philosophical Quarterly}, 89 (2008), pp. 516-35.
For example, “in Alessandra’s case . . . the urgency of the dispute, and its high emotional volume, seem by themselves to be quite sufficient to explain her failure to notice her act’s wrong-making feature” (p. 131). Sher’s point is that if Alessandra’s lapse issues from facts about her characteristic responses to urgent, emotionally charged situations, and not from judgments about the importance of Sheba’s welfare, then he is in a position to explain Alessandra’s moral responsibility while Smith is not.\footnote{For Smith’s own response to Sher, see her review of Who Knew? forthcoming in Social Theory and Practice 36:3 (2010).}

Clearly, this argument is effective only if we agree with Sher about Alessandra’s moral responsibility. However, I suspect that my inclination to hold Alessandra morally responsible—in the sense of regarding her as open to blame—would vary with my confidence that her failure to remember Sheba arose from a condemnable lack of concern about Sheba’s welfare. If, on the other hand, all I knew about Alessandra’s lapse was that it issued from “psychological and physical structures” that support her “normal patterns of intellectual functioning” (p. 122), I would not necessarily find the morally offended responses involved in blame to have an appropriate foundation. After all, merely noting that Alessandra’s lapse was caused by internal psychological and physical structures does not add much to simply stipulating that Alessandra forgot about Sheba. This analysis of Alessandra’s inadvertence may substantiate some form of responsibility, since it gives us reason to attribute the forgetting to Alessandra, but without knowing more about why she forgot Sheba, I would be reluctant to say that she is blameworthy.
Of course, in *Hot Dog*, we know more than that Alessandra’s failure to remember Sheba was caused by facts about Alessandra. We are also meant to interpret Alessandra’s forgetting as falling below a relevant standard: Alessandra *should have* remembered that Sheba was in the car. The fact that Alessandra should have remembered Sheba is, I take it, Sher’s basis for depicting Alessandra as a moral wrongdoer. Perhaps, then, it is the fact that Alessandra does a moral wrong, together with the fact that her mental lapse is attributable to her, that makes Alessandra an appropriate target for blame.

However, while I agree that Alessandra should have remembered Sheba, her lapse is a case of “moral wrongdoing” in a relatively weak sense—at least given Sher’s suggestions about the factors that played a role in her lapse. Alessandra’s action would be both a more serious instance of wrongdoing, and provide clearer grounds for blame, if her failure to fulfill her obligation toward Sheba flowed from a lack of interest in Sheba’s welfare (or from a lack of concern on Alessandra’s part about whether she was fulfilling her obligations). If, however, Alessandra’s forgetting merely stems from facts about how she processes information, but does not indicate anything relevant about what she judges to be worth caring about, then Alessandra’s failure to remember Sheba seems to me more tragic than an instance of blameworthy moral wrongdoing.

Various alterations of *Hot Dog* can also highlight the relevance of an agent’s evaluative judgments for assessing her degree of moral responsibility. If Alessandra had been aware that she was likely to forget Sheba in the car, or if she had remembered Sheba but decided not to retrieve her, she would have been especially
blameworthy because of the profound lack of concern for Sheba’s welfare that such actions would have demonstrated. Correspondingly, one reason we might excuse Alessandra in the case in which her children have been kidnapped is that, in such a case, Alessandra’s lapse would not plausibly be interpreted as stemming from an objectionable lack of concern for Sheba.

It is worth noting, finally, that the wrong done by Alessandra is very different from that done by someone like amerika (the bank robber in Bad Weather). Both agents are unaware that they do wrong, but this lack of awareness takes different forms: while Alessandra is not aware of the harmful nature of her actions, amerika is presumably aware of the potential for injuries in an armed robbery, but he regards the robbery as morally justified. Thus, for a wrongdoer like amerika—but not for someone like Alessandra—the facts about his action that make it morally objectionable can enter into the deliberative process that leads to action.

Amerika’s action, then, seems to straightforwardly engage the kind of evaluative processes that I have suggested play a crucial role in grounding blame. It would be quite reasonable for those injured in amerika’s robbery to interpret his action as issuing from morally offensive judgments that did not assign sufficient normative weight to the prospect of their injuries. I would argue, then, that amerika’s blameworthiness depends on more than whether his failure to understand that he does wrong stems from internal constitutive features, it also depends on the way his actions and false moral beliefs arise from objectionable evaluative judgments.
Conclusion

Who Knew? is an important book that will have a large impact on the debates in which Sher is engaged. Sher’s forceful argument against the searchlight view is especially valuable, and, despite the reservation discussed in the last section, his development of an alternative conception of the knowledge condition reveals important truths about the responsibility of unwitting agents. A reader with less sympathy for Sher’s general outlook might have more fundamental objections, but my criticism is made more in the spirit of a friendly amendment to an account that might benefit from emphasizing the way in which the internal sources of unwitting behavior are not on an equal footing when it comes to grounding moral responsibility.  

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