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Decisions about Blame and Punishment

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Abstract

There is evidence that blaming somebody is only appropriate when one knows (or justifiably believes) that the object of one's blame actually did the deed. For example, Lara Buchak (2014) suggests that we cannot blame somebody on statistical grounds alone for having stolen one's phone. For Buchak, this indicates that belief and credence may be attitudes designed for different kinds of domains. We may have to look at what we believe when deciding whether to blame somebody. But we may have to look at our credences when deciding whether to invest in a start-up, say. In my talk, I am going to criticize this picture. I argue that norms about reasons for blame have two readings depending on whether these reasons are assumed to be possessed or not. On the reading I favor, there won't be a need for dividing the realm of our choices into two classes – decisions about blame can be made in the same way as decisions about where to invest one's money.