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On: 18 February 2014, At: 03:36

Publisher: Routledge

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The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cele20>

Credit and Blame

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Published online: 02 Sep 2013.

To cite this article: John Thrasher & David Schmitz (2013) Credit and Blame, The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms, 18:7, 967-967, DOI: [10.1080/10848770.2013.836821](https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2013.836821)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2013.836821>

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which combination both fascinates and discomforts his followers. Larson recognizes that Hawking is best understood in this uneasy blending of public persona and private life, and her book offers a useful guide for a deeper understanding of Hawking's intellectual legacy and his role as a cultural icon.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2013.828909>

Credit and Blame. By Charles Tilly (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), x + 183 pp. \$14.95 cloth.

The late Charles Tilly published dozens of books and hundreds of scholarly articles. *Credit and Blame* complements his 2006 book *Why?*, which was a sociological examination of the reasons we construct to explain ourselves and our world, by asking how we explain what people deserve by way of credit or blame. He treats credit and blame not as concepts calling for philosophical analysis so much as ingredients of social life that can be understood only in context.

We are, Tilly notes, social animals. Humans owe their evolutionary success to the fact that they function effectively in groups—partly the product of psychological drives and needs and selected for over eons—where they seek credit and avoid blame: most people, he states, “prefer to behave in ways that get approval from their fellows” (7). Tilly addresses three questions: (1) How do we single out people for praise or blame? (2) Once we single someone out as creditworthy or blameworthy, what do we do about it? (3) What is the effect on those involved?

The book focuses mainly on the first question. Part of Tilly's argument is that if we are concerned with the three questions he is asking, we should focus on the practice of *holding* others responsible rather than on *being* responsible. While holding another responsible is a social practice, being responsible is a metaphysical state.

We tend to think of responsibility in terms of stories. Such stories, however, “radically simplify” processes of cause and effect that actu-

ally produce events. They “inevitably minimize or ignore the intricate webs of cause and effect that actually produce human social life” (21).

Tilly distinguishes four social contexts of credit and blame: tournaments, honors, promotions, and networks. He notes that there are norms for accepting credit gracefully. Athletes give credit to their parents, God, coaches, and teammates. Actors and Nobel Prize recipients likewise spread the credit around. Regarding credit, “evaluators often err on the side of generosity.” In cases of blame, by contrast, evaluators make “fine calculations” of the agent's contribution to the bad outcome (103). Thus, “blame isn't simply credit upside down” (102).

Tilly's work alerts us to complex phenomena we understand intuitively but tend to forget when theorizing. He also alerts us to the danger of drawing a sharp boundary between those who assign blame or credit and those who are the objects of their judgment. “Us-them boundaries,” Tilly worries, create a “presumption of blameworthiness” (54). They also lead to mutual incomprehension that escalates into blood feuds when one clan's retaliation is perceived by the other clan as drawing first blood (147). Us-them boundaries problematize democracy too, as we try to recruit courts and legislatures to our side. He closes by warning us to “be very careful when you call for the authorities to back up your assignments of credit and blame” (151).

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2013.836821>

Anglo-America Idealism: Thinkers and Ideas. Edited by James Connelly and Stamatoula Panagakou (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), xi + 389 pp. £78.00 cloth.

The key theme of this volume, dexterously edited by James Connelly and Stamatoula