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The Commitment Account of Hypocrisy

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Abstract

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Hypocrisy is widely thought to be morally objectionable in a way that undermines the hypocrite's moral standing to blame others. To wit, we seem to intuitively accept the "Nonhypocrisy Condition:" *R* has the standing to blame *S* for some violation of a moral norm *N* only if *R*'s blaming *S* is not hypocritical. This claim has been the subject of intensifying philosophical investigation in recent years. However, we can only understand why hypocrisy is morally objectionable and has an effect on standing to blame if we can correctly characterize hypocrisy itself. Unfortunately, some recent discussions fail to do this, which fatally undermines subsequent arguments concerning the effect of hypocrisy on the standing to blame. This paper's central aim is to develop and defend a better account of hypocrisy. The hope is that with such an account in hand, we can explain and perhaps justify our moral aversion to hypocrisy in general as well as the Nonhypocrisy Condition in particular.

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Hypocrisy is widely thought to be morally objectionable in a way that undermines the hypocrite's moral standing to blame others. To wit, we seem to intuitively accept the "Nonhypocrisy Condition:" *R* has the standing to blame *S* for some violation of a moral norm *N* only if *R*'s blaming *S* is not hypocritical. This claim has been the subject of intensifying philosophical investigation in recent years.¹ However, we can only understand why hypocrisy is morally objectionable and has an effect on standing to blame if we can correctly characterize hypocrisy itself. Unfortunately, some recent discussions fail to do this, which fatally undermines subsequent arguments concerning the effect of hypocrisy on the standing to blame.² This paper's central aim is to develop and defend a better account of hypocrisy. The hope is

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¹See Crisp and Cowton 1994, Cohen 2006, Wallace 2010, Duff 2010, Bell 2013, King 2015, Fritz and Miller 2015, Isserow and Klein 2017, Todd 2017, and Roedevlin, 2018 for discussion.

²I refer to Fritz and Miller 2015 in particular, but see also King 2015. I discuss in some detail why Fritz and Miller's faulty definition of hypocrisy undermines their argument for the Nonhypocrisy Condition in section two.

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that with such an account in hand, we can explain and perhaps justify our moral aversion to hypocrisy as well as the Nonhypocrisy Condition. 33
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This paper is structured as follows. In section one I outline an account of moral blame that will play an important role in the subsequent discussion of hypocrisy. In section two I use Kyle Fritz and Daniel Miller's account of hypocrisy as a critical foil for developing my own view. Briefly, my view is that the essence of hypocrisy is the hypocrite's disposition to communicate commitment to some norm, good, or ideal, together with a history of failure to respond appropriately to that norm, good, or ideal, and an unjustified lack of a disposition to accept blame from others for those failures. Finally, in section three I defend my account against some objections. 35
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1 The Nature of Blame 42

Much of my discussion of the nature of hypocrisy will hinge on a certain understanding of blame. There are two primary reasons for this. First, the discussion of hypocrisy's effect on the standing to blame understandably focuses on hypocritical *blame*, rather than, say, hypocritical *advice*. Hence, I will develop my account of hypocrisy with an eye toward its application to hypocritical blame in particular. Second, the account of hypocrisy that is my critical foil incorporates blame in its definition. Hence, before launching into my main discussion of hypocrisy, I must clarify what I mean by "blame." 43
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According to one prominent view, which we can call the Hostile Attitudes Account, blaming is constituted by a complex collection of attitudes. Roughly, where R and S are agents and A is an action, R blames S for A -ing only if³: 50
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- 1) R believes S is an agent of A . 53
- 2) R believes that S 's A -ing is wrong or bad. 54
- 3) R believes that S is blameworthy for A -ing.⁴ 55
- 4) R experiences negative emotions (indignation, resentment, contempt, guilt) on account of (1), (2), and (3).⁵ 56
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Notice that according to this view, a person does not blame unless she *experiences* some negative emotion. As a consequence, (1)–(3) together with, say, the judgment that a negative emotion is warranted does not constitute blame. Furthermore, insincere expressions of (1)–(4) do not constitute blame; rather, they amount to what I call *false* blame. This will be important in our later discussion of types of hypocrisy. 58
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I cannot offer a full defense of the Hostile Attitudes Account here, and some of the reasons for preferring it to prominent rival accounts have been ably articulated elsewhere.⁶ What I hope to show in the next section is that the Hostile Attitudes Account is supported by our intuitions about cases of what I call "clear-eyed hypocrisy," but I cannot do that until I examine 63
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³ This conception of blame combines cognitive and emotional elements along lines similar to Fritz and Miller (2015), Bell (2013), Scanlon (2008), and Wallace (2010). Unlike Bell, I do not build into my account of blame the requirement that the blame is "overt" or communicated. For an account of blame that emphasizes conative states, see Sher (2006). For a functionalist account, see McKenna (2012).

⁴ This condition can be satisfied if R does not believe that S is excused or exempted from blame for A -ing.

⁵ Some, but not all, of these emotions are examples of what Strawson calls "reactive attitudes."

⁶ Some prominent rival accounts include Scanlon's (2008) relational account and Sher's (2006) belief-desire account. See Bell 2013, 266 for a discussion of reasons to prefer the Hostile Attitude Account over these views.

the nature of hypocrisy. If the reader is not convinced of the correctness of this account of blame, then she can interpret this paper as an examination of the implications of this account for theorizing about hypocrisy and the ethics of blame. If these implications seem unacceptable, then this is one more reason to reject the Hostile Attitudes Account; on the other hand, if these implications seem plausible, then perhaps this account deserves another look.

As Michael McKenna helpfully points out, blame can be private or overt (McKenna, 2012, 121). “Overt” blame involves the verbal or non-verbal communication of (at least) the attitudes listed in (4). One species of overt blame is directed blame, which is expressed *to* the target of blame.⁷ However, some overt blame is nondirected, *concerning* the target of blame but *expressed* to a third party. Finally, overt blame may be communicated intentionally or unintentionally. “Private” blame is “un-expressed,” involving merely the possession of these attitudes but not their communication.

Many philosophical discussions of hypocrisy and its effect on the standing to blame focus on overt rather than private blame, and it is not hard to see why this is the case. There is almost always more at stake, morally speaking, when blame is overt. Indeed, the arguments in some discussions of hypocrisy and its effect on standing to blame hinge on the effects of overt blame on its target.⁸ On the other hand, questions of standing seem to arise in cases of both private and overt blame, and it is for this reason that more recent discussions of hypocrisy and standing attempt to delineate conditions of standing both to privately and overtly blame.⁹ Hence, unless otherwise noted, in what follows when I use the term ‘blame’ I mean to designate either overt or private blame.

2 The Nature of Hypocrisy 88

In this section I argue for an original account of hypocrisy that I call the “Commitment Account of Hypocrisy.” I do this through an examination of a rival account developed by Kyle Fritz and Daniel Miller. In section 2.1, I explain why this account is inadequate, as well as why its inadequacies undermine the authors’ argument for the Nonhypocrisy Condition. In section 2.2, I make the case for the Commitment Account of Hypocrisy. 89
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2.1 The Differential Blaming Disposition Account of Hypocrisy 94

Fritz and Miller offer the following account of hypocrisy, which I will call the Differential Blaming Disposition (DBD) account of hypocrisy: 95 Q2
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DBD Account of Hypocrisy: R is hypocritical with respect to violations of moral norm N iff R is blameworthy for a violation of N and R has a differential blaming disposition with respect to violations of N (Fritz and Miller 2015, 5). 98
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⁷ Duff 2010, 124 calls this kind of blame *second-personal*.

⁸ See Wallace 2010. His argument is that hypocrisy is morally objectionable, and so undermines standing, because the hypocritical blamer shields herself from the moral criticism she directs at others. Since we all have an interest in being protected from moral criticism, hypocritical blame in effect treats the blamer’s interests as more important than the interests of others. As Fritz and Miller point out, this argument only makes sense if restricted to cases of overt hypocritical blame (Fritz and Miller 2015, 7).

⁹ Cf. Fritz and Miller 2015, Todd 2017.

Roughly, an agent is hypocritical with respect to violations of some moral norm just in case she is blameworthy for violations of that norm and is disposed to blame others, but not herself, for such violations. According to Fritz and Miller, *R* has a *differential blaming disposition* with respect to violations of *N* just in case under normal conditions, *R* is disposed to blame others for violations of *N*, is not disposed to blame herself for violations of *N*, and there is no good reason for this difference.

This account handles some of our intuitions about hypocrisy admirably well. First, it explains why the accusation of hypocrisy can be defeated if the putative hypocrite can show that she genuinely blames herself for her wrongdoing.¹⁰ It also explains why the failure of the putative hypocrite to blame herself *at some point in the past* for violations of *N* doesn't necessarily establish that she is at the present moment a hypocrite with respect to violations of *N*. Suppose Ronnie was heedless of the feelings of others when he was a teenager and did not appropriately blame himself for it, but since then his character has changed such that he is now disposed to blame himself for his past heedlessness and for any future manifestations of heedlessness. If he blames someone for being heedless now, he can plausibly say that he is not being hypocritical even though at some point in the past he failed to appropriately blame himself for violations of the same norm. Finally, and in line with intuition, this account entails that facts about how *recent*, *frequent*, or *significant* the putative hypocrite's norm violations are may be relevant to our judgments of hypocrisy. This is because, on this account, these facts will serve as evidence for or against the claim that the putative hypocrite possesses a DBD (Fritz and Miller 2015, 12).

However, I think this theory fails to account for a number of paradigm cases of hypocrisy. To see this, let's distinguish between two kinds of hypocrite.¹¹ The first is the "exception-seeking" hypocrite. This kind of hypocrite genuinely cares about moral norms, and may genuinely blame others for violating them. Nevertheless, she violates these norms and is not disposed to blame herself for doing so because she falsely sees her actions as morally justified, as not falling under the relevant norm, or she thinks she has a legitimate excuse or exemption from blame.

This seems to be a good description of King David's hypocrisy as related in 2 Samuel 12: 1–15. Nathan tells David a story about a rich man who killed a poor man's only lamb. When David expresses apparently genuine indignation on behalf of the poor man, Nathan replies, "You are the man." David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and knowingly caused her husband's death, which by the lights of the biblical code of ethics constitutes a violation of the same norm as the one the rich man violates. We can imagine the psychology underlying the narrative: David has somehow convinced himself that his actions were morally justified—not a difficult thing to do in such a position of power—yet he possesses a genuine commitment to moral norms, as evinced by his response to Nathan's story. David is an exception-seeking hypocrite, and in the process of seeking an exception for himself, he has succeeded in deceiving himself. This kind of hypocrite seems to be aptly described by Fritz and Miller's theory. The exception-seeking hypocrite will, at least typically, have a differential blaming disposition with respect to violations of some norm—that's just what it is, at least in part, for the hypocrite to seek exceptions for herself.

¹⁰ See Jordan et al. 2017 for some empirical evidence of broad assent to this intuition. Note that I am not claiming genuine self-blame necessarily defeats the accusation of hypocrisy.

¹¹ I borrow these labels from Bell 2013, 275–276.

We can contrast the exception-seeking hypocrite with the “clear-eyed” hypocrite. This hypocrite either doesn’t care about the specific norms with respect to which she is hypocritical or she does not believe they are the *correct* moral norms. Crucially for our purposes, as a result of her attitudes toward the relevant norms, the Hostile Attitudes Account of blame entails that clear-eyed hypocrites do not *actually* blame their targets. Recall that on this account, a necessary condition for blame is experiencing negative attitudes and having certain beliefs. Yet the clear-eyed hypocrite either does not experience such attitudes because she does not care about the moral norms in question, or she does not evaluate the actions she pretends to blame as morally bad or wrong because she does not think the moral norms that proscribe these actions are the correct ones. Rather, the clear-eyed hypocrite merely *pretends* to blame others. Typically, this pretense is motivated by the desire to reap the social benefits of appearing to be morally virtuous in the eyes of those who endorse the norms in question; this is one interpretation of Francois La Rochefoucauld’s claim that “hypocrisy is the tribute that virtue pays to vice” (La Rochefoucauld 2007). Hence, the clear-eyed hypocrite recognizes the non-moral benefits of appearing virtuous and pretends to be virtuous by, *inter alia*, pretending to blame others for violations of moral norms.

Moliere’s *Tartuffe* is an excellent example of this kind of hypocrite (the complete title of the play is *Tartuffe, or the Imposter, or the Hypocrite*).¹² *Tartuffe* is a clear-eyed hypocrite with respect to, in particular, religious norms who feigns religiosity in order to improve his social standing and seduce his benefactor’s wife. Part of *Tartuffe*’s ruse involves castigating others for their religious shortcomings. *Tartuffe* is undeniably a hypocrite, yet if the Hostile Attitudes Account of blame is true, *Tartuffe* does not have a differential blaming disposition: he is neither disposed to blame himself for his furtive transgression of religious norms, nor disposed to *genuinely* blame others for *their* transgressions. Given the Hostile Attitudes Account of blame, he therefore fails to meet a necessary condition for hypocrisy according to the DBD account. If *Tartuffe* does not count as a hypocrite according to the DBD account, then the DBD account ought to be rejected.¹³

One way to address this problem is to reject the Hostile Attitudes Account of blame, since it is only the DBD account together with this account of blame that entails that the clear-eyed hypocrite is not a hypocrite. Some other accounts of blame might entail that the clear-eyed hypocrite does blame others, but not herself, for violating moral norms. For example, an account according to which the essence of blame is its function, and its function is to regulate behavior, may not draw a distinction between blame and false blame insofar as both fulfill the relevant function. Thus, on some alternative accounts, the clear-eyed hypocrite would count as possessing a DBD. However, the thought that the clear-hypocrite doesn’t *really* blame others is intuitive independent of the Hostile Attitudes Account. Plausibly, to discover that someone is a clear-eyed hypocritical “blamer” is to discover that what she is doing is not really *blaming* at all, but something else *in the guise* of blame—moral grandstanding, perhaps.¹⁴ This leads me

¹² Indeed, the figure of *Tartuffe* haunts the philosophical literature on hypocrisy. Cf. Crisp and Cowton 1994; Wallace, 2010, 309; Bell 2013, 275; Isserow and Klein, 2017, 210.

¹³ Additional evidence that the clear-eyed hypocrite is, indeed, a hypocrite can be found in the etymology and dictionary definition of the word. The word “hypocrisy” is derived from the Greek *hupokrisis*, meaning “acting of a theatrical part”; this certainly suggests an emphasis on the *intentional* play-acting or pretense of a clear-eyed hypocrite rather than the self-deception of the exception-seeking hypocrite. In addition, Merriam-Webster lists as synonyms for hypocrisy “dissimulation, insincerity, dissembling.”

¹⁴ See Tosi and Warmke 2016 for an articulation of the notion of moral grandstanding.

to think that even if the Hostile Attitudes Account of blame is false, we should also reject any account that fails to distinguish between false blame and the genuine article.

Another important reason for denying that possession of a DBD is necessary for hypocrisy is that some hypocrites of both the clear-eyed and exception-seeking varieties may not be disposed to blame others for violations of moral norms even if they are disposed to address others about their moral violations in other ways—for example, in the mode of advice. Consider the hypocrisy of the lecherous priest who calmly preaches the immorality of premarital sex, all the while counseling his parishioners to love the sinner and address and regard her with compassion rather than condemnation. The priest models this non-condemnatory mode of moral regard and address in his own interactions with teenage “sinners.” He does not blame them for their violations of the relevant sexual norms, but advises them on how to overcome sexual temptation with compassion and concern. This is a case of hypocrisy that, with the provision of relevant psychological detail, could be either a case of clear-eyed or exception-seeking hypocrisy. In either case, it is hypocrisy without a disposition to blame others for norm violations, and it underscores the point that there are many ways in which hypocrites may address and regard others as violators of moral norms and, in so doing, generate the appearance of moral rectitude that I will suggest is essential to hypocrisy.

It might appear that the best account of hypocrisy simply omits the part of the DBD that we found to be absent in the clear-eyed hypocrite and some exception-seeking hypocrites: the disposition to blame others. After all, while possession of a DBD is not necessary for hypocrisy, there is something even the clear-eyed hypocrite is not disposed to do: she is not disposed to blame herself for violations of *N*. Moreover, she has no good reason for being so disposed—she has no valid excuse or justification for not blaming herself. The exception-seeking hypocrite is also not disposed to blame herself for violations of *N*. As we’ve already noted, the exception-seeking hypocrite often has a DBD on account of self-deception, and this entails that, without good reason, she is not disposed to blame herself for violations of *N*. Furthermore, even exception-seeking hypocrites who *lack* a disposition to blame others also lack a disposition to blame themselves.

However, Macalaster Bell describes another kind of hypocrite that, for another reason, isn’t captured by the DBD account:

Some hypocrites do care about the norms they blame others for violating, but they are weak-willed and don’t, due to their weakness, act in accordance with their values. This sort of hypocrite feels remorse and shame in response to her moral failings and strives to improve herself (Bell 2013, 275).

Although such “weak-willed” hypocrites may be disposed to blame others, because they are disposed to blame themselves, they do not count as hypocrites according to the DBD account. While it might be acceptable for a definition of an ordinary language term like “hypocrisy” to exclude borderline cases, the weak-willed hypocrite, like the clear-eyed hypocrite, appears to be a paradigm case that any account of hypocrisy worth its salt ought to capture.

To see this, consider the case of Ted Haggard, an evangelical preacher who publicly supported a same-sex marriage ban on the grounds of the immorality of homosexuality while also engaging in homosexual acts with his escort and masseur. The latter, who exposed Haggard after learning of his support for the ban, was quoted as saying that “I had to expose the hypocrisy. He is in the position of influence of millions of followers, and he’s preaching against gay marriage. But behind everybody’s back [he’s] doing what he’s preached against” (Harris, 2017). After initially denying the allegations, Haggard confirmed them and was subsequently removed from his leadership position in the New Life Church on the grounds

of “sexually immoral conduct.” He later submitted to extensive “counseling” aimed at rooting out his homosexual “tendencies.” 230
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Suppose that Haggard had a genuine commitment to the relevant religious-cum-moral sexual norm but found his better judgment frequently overcome by temptation. Far from making an exception for himself, his genuine commitment to the norm caused him to experience intense episodes of private self-blame throughout the time he secretly engaged in homosexual conduct. I submit that this added bit of psychological detail does not alter our judgment that Haggard behaved hypocritically in preaching against homosexuality while secretly cavorting with his masseuse. This case suggests that there are weak-willed, self-blaming hypocrites.¹⁵ Yet if the DBD account is correct, Haggard does not count as a hypocrite since he is disposed to blame himself. 232
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To conclude, the DBD account fails to capture clear-eyed hypocrisy because in these cases the hypocrite lacks the disposition to blame others. It also fails to capture cases in which the hypocrite is not disposed to address or regard others who have violated the relevant norm by blaming them. Finally, the existence of weak-willed hypocrisy suggests that the lack of a disposition to blame oneself, interpreted as the lack of a disposition to privately experience self-directed blame, is not necessary for hypocrisy. 241
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The failure of the DBD account has serious consequences for Fritz and Miller’s argument for the Nonhypocrisy Condition—the claim that *R* has the standing to blame *S* for some violation of a moral norm *N* only if *R*’s blaming *S* is not hypocritical—because the argument presupposes that the hypocrite, as such, has a DBD. To summarize their argument briefly: they claim that the attitudinal stance of hypocrites embodied by their DBD is morally objectionable because morality is impartial. The impartiality of morality requires that moral agents apply moral norms to cases consistently, so that where there is no morally relevant factual difference between two cases, we should apply the same moral norms in the same way to both cases. Because moral norms govern not only our moral expectations of others but also our blaming attitudes, when *R* hypocritically blames *S* but exempts himself from blame—to wit, when he possesses a DBD—he fails to consistently apply the norm of blaming for violations of *N*. In failing to consistently apply the norm, *R* fails to be morally impartial with respect to blaming for violations of *N*. Because the impartiality of morality is an expression of, and partly constitutes, the moral equality of persons, hypocrisy turns out to involve the rejection of a fundamental moral principle. 247
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Having explained why hypocrisy is morally objectionable, Fritz and Miller go on to explain why the particular *kind* of moral objectionableness characteristic of hypocrisy undermines the hypocritical blamer’s standing to blame.¹⁶ Their argument for the hypocrite’s lack of standing highlights the relationship between the *ground* of the her standing and her failure to be morally impartial with respect to blaming norms. The argument proceeds as follows¹⁷: 262
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¹⁵ Note that inclusion in the category of “hypocrites” does not force a moral equivalence between weak-willed, clear-eyed, and exception-seeking hypocrites. I am sympathetic to the intuition that many cases of weak-willed hypocrisy are not morally objectionable, or at least are not *as* morally objectionable as paradigm cases of exception-seeking or clear-eyed hypocrisy.

¹⁶ As Bell points out, not all kinds of morally objectionable blame undermine standing (Bell 2013, 275). In light of this point, Fritz and Miller understand themselves to be showing not just that hypocrisy is morally objectionable, but that it is morally objectionable in a way that undermines standing.

¹⁷ Cf. Fritz and Miller 2015, 8.

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|--|------------|
| 1) If <i>R</i> is hypocritical with respect to violations of <i>N</i> , then <i>R</i> has a DBD with respect to violations of <i>N</i> . | 267
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| 2) If <i>R</i> has a DBD with respect to violations of <i>N</i> , then <i>R</i> rejects the impartiality of morality with respect to violations of <i>N</i> . | 269
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| 3) If <i>R</i> rejects the impartiality of morality with respect to violations of <i>N</i> , then <i>R</i> rejects the equality of persons with respect to violations of <i>N</i> . | 271
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| 4) If <i>R</i> rejects the equality of persons with respect to violations of <i>N</i> , then <i>R</i> rejects the grounding that gives <i>R</i> the right to blame <i>S</i> for violations of <i>N</i> . | 273
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| 5) If <i>R</i> rejects the grounding that gives <i>R</i> the right to blame <i>S</i> for violations of <i>N</i> , then <i>R</i> forfeits the right to blame <i>S</i> for violations of <i>N</i> . | 275
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| 6) If <i>R</i> forfeits the right to blame <i>S</i> for violations of <i>N</i> , then <i>R</i> does not have the standing to blame <i>S</i> for violations of <i>N</i> . ¹⁸ | 277
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| | |
| C) So, if <i>R</i> is hypocritical with respect to violations of <i>N</i> , then <i>R</i> does not have the standing to blame <i>S</i> for violations of <i>N</i> . | 279
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The trouble with this argument, of course, is that it requires that the hypocrite as such have a DBD. I have argued that many cases of hypocrisy do not involve the possession of a DBD. This is not only because, given the Hostile Attitudes Account of blame, clear-eyed hypocrisy does not involve a DBD, but also because not all exception-seeking or weak-willed hypocrites have a DBD. Exception-seeking hypocrites may be disposed to address and regard violators of moral norms in other ways than blaming them, while weak-willed hypocrites are disposed to blame themselves. Thus, the argument is unsound. Moreover, there seems to be no reason to deny that clear-eyed, exception-seeking, or weak-willed hypocrites who lack a DBD also lack standing; for example, it is surely the case that Tartuffe's standing to blame others for violations of religious norms is severely compromised by his clear-eyed hypocrisy. So even if the argument were restricted to those hypocrites that possess a DBD, it would provide at best only a partial explanation for why hypocrisy undermines standing.

There is another problem with Fritz and Miller's formulation that must be addressed and corrected if we aim to formulate an account of hypocrisy that captures all the cases relevant to the standing to blame. Recall that their account of hypocrisy presupposes that *R* has violated some *moral* norm; indeed, in this sense, their account assumes that hypocrisy with respect to some moral norm is equivalent to hypocrisy *tout court*. But this assumption seems unwarranted. One may be liable to the charge of hypocrisy if one claims adherence to vegetarianism on health grounds while secretly frequenting a Brazilian steakhouse, or if one is a private atheist while simultaneously publicly conveying one's commitment to religious practice and affirmation of religious claims. Yet in neither case is one hypocritical with respect to some *moral* norm: vegetarianism undertaken for health reasons is not as such a *moral* good, but a *personal* good; and religious piety need not be as such a moral good. To be sure, both cases *may* involve intentional deception, the violation of a truth-telling norm of some kind. Even so, in these cases one is not being hypocritical *about* the truth-telling norm, but about one's vegetarianism or piety. The hypocrisy here consists in how one *disposes oneself* towards non-moral goods or ideals, or how one's attitudes and behaviors with respect to these goods and ideals are inconsistent in a hypocrisy-making way.

¹⁸ I include premise (6) to make explicit the argument's dependence on the notion of standing as a right.

This might not matter if the kind of hypocrisy described in the last paragraph were not relevant to the standing to blame. But I see no reason why we may not say that under suitable conditions, the hypocritical pseudo-vegetarian lacks standing to blame others for their failures to adopt vegetarianism on the same non-moral ground, or why the hypocritical atheist lacks standing to blame others for their lack of piety. To be clear, I am not assuming that such hypocrites lack standing under some conditions and arguing from this premise that our definition of hypocrisy must account for them. This would be to assume that the Nonhypocrisy condition is true for some cases of hypocrisy. Rather, I am claiming that, *if anyone* lacks standing to blame on account of hypocrisy, there is no *obvious* reason why these hypocrites would not lack standing as well. It might be objected here that blame is an intrinsically moral notion, so that it makes no sense to talk about blaming someone for lapses of attitude or conduct in the non-moral realm. Indeed, it is sometimes taken as definitional of moral standards or moral judgments that they involve the deployment of blame-attitudes.¹⁹ Conversely, some theorists of blame appear to *assume* that blame is an intrinsically moral notion.²⁰ Yet it seems more plausible to think that while blame is indeed bound up with normative judgments, those judgments need not be *moral* in character. Gary Watson recognizes one form of blame, *aretaic* blame, that consists in a judgment that the target of blame has failed according to *some* standard of excellence. While Watson allows that these standards may all be moral “in a broad sense,” he insists that they are “independent of the particular moral norms that are invoked in accountability.”²¹ To be clear, I am not endorsing Watson’s view about the “two faces” of responsibility here, nor claiming that *only* attributability-responsibility can be non-moral. I am simply pointing out the possibility that blame can be deployed in non-moral contexts, a possibility that has not gone unnoticed by prominent theorists of blame and responsibility. Because it seems possible to be a hypocrite with respect to non-moral norms, goods, or ideals, and such hypocrites may lack the standing to blame, we cannot simply build into our definition of hypocrisy the assumption that all hypocrisy is hypocrisy with respect to some moral norm. Instead, I propose that we define hypocrisy with reference to norms, goods, or ideals of a moral or non-moral character; hence, the account of hypocrisy I propose will be hypocrisy *with respect to* some norm, good, or ideal *N*.

The foregoing discussion also suggests that we should not characterize the Nonhypocrisy condition in terms of the standing to blame for violation of a specifically *moral* norm, as I did in the introduction. Instead, we should understand this condition as the claim that *R* has the standing to blame *S* for some failure to promote, obtain, act in accordance with, or express respect for a norm, good, or ideal only if *R*’s blaming *S* is not hypocritical.²²

2.2 The Commitment Account of Hypocrisy

As I noted, the word “hypocrisy” is derived from the Greek *hupokrisis*—“acting of a theatrical part”—and it is this element of *appearing* to be something that one is not that seems essential

¹⁹ For example, Alan Gibbard (1990, 40–41 and 47–49) once argued that morality consists of norms governing when it makes sense to feel resentment or guilt. David Copp (1995, 84–85) claims that what makes certain *standards* moral is, at least in part, that they are *taken to be* moral standards, where this involves the tendency to have a characteristic negative response toward failures to conform to those standards.

²⁰ Cf. Sher 2006, esp. ch. 7; Watson 1994, 75; Zimmerman 1988, 38; Glover 1970, 64.

²¹ Watson 1996, 231.

²² This revision should not be taken to suggest that standing to blame is not a moral notion. Rather, the point is that we can have or lack a moral standing to blame others for non-moral failures.

to hypocrisy. In particular, the specious appearance of conformity to some set of norms, goods, or ideals is characteristic of hypocrisy.²³ One way of generating such an appearance is pretending to blame others, as in the case of clear-eyed hypocrisy, or of genuinely blaming others, as in some cases of exception-seeking or weak-willed hypocrisy.²⁴ But I have noted that this is only one of a number of ways of creating a false appearance of goodness. Another way is by advice-giving, which may pragmatically imply commitment to the norms, goods, or ideals that are bound up with the advice given. For example, the lecherous priest's counseling of his teenage parishioners surely invites the conclusion that he is committed to the relevant religious-cum-moral sexual norms. In this regard, it is notable that where such an implicature is absent, the charge of hypocrisy in advice-giving significantly loses its force. In some cases, the ostentatious display of appropriate response to some norm, good, or ideal can itself amount to a communicative act.

Thus, whether through blame or some other communicative, verbal or non-verbal act, many hypocrites *communicate their commitment* to norms, goods, or ideals, thereby creating the appearance of a desire to conform to, promote, obtain, act in accordance with, or express respect for them—in short, to *respond appropriately* to them.²⁵ As already noted, the appearance of commitment to these norms, goods, and ideals is not always simply false: the exception-seeking or weak-willed hypocrite *does* endorse them. The key point is that the impression created by the hypocrite's communication of commitment, whether genuine or false, is at odds with the hypocrite's actual behavior.

I have so far discussed hypocrisy in terms of the communication of commitment, which is by its very nature *overt*. This seems to imply that hypocrisy cannot be private. Yet it seems possible that hypocrisy need not involve any overt communication of one's commitment to a norm, good, or ideal.²⁶ King David would have been hypocritical even if he had merely *felt*, and not *expressed*, his indignation over the rich man's depredations as Nathan recounted them. Hence, his hypocrisy did not fundamentally consist in his *communication* of his endorsement of the relevant norm. Furthermore, since *blame* can be private, it seems possible that one can be hypocritical precisely in one's *private* blame of someone else, and that this might undermine one's standing to *privately* blame. But again, such private blame does not necessarily communicate commitment to a norm, good, or ideal. At the same time, the creation, whether intentional or not, of a specious *outward appearance* of 'goodness' seems crucial to hypocrisy. Moreover, it seems that a version of King David who *never*, by word or deed, communicated commitment to the relevant norm would be a limiting case. To resolve this tension, I propose that we make further recourse to the notion of a disposition. In this case, what is crucial for hypocrisy is that the hypocrite is disposed to communicate endorsement of a norm, good, or

²³ See Jordan et al. 2017 for some empirical evidence that the moral objectionableness of hypocrisy lies in its sending a "false signal" about the hypocrite's personal moral conduct.

²⁴ Note that the exception-seeking hypocrite does not *intentionally* create a specious appearance of virtue, but intentionality is not strictly required by the notion of 'playing a part' or 'creating an appearance.' Nevertheless, as I have noted, the *connotations* of the idea of 'playing a part' suggest that the clear-eyed hypocrite is perhaps a more prototypical example of hypocrisy than the exception-seeking hypocrite. This would further support my argument that Fritz and Miller's account of hypocrisy fails to capture a central case of hypocrisy.

²⁵ The *appropriate response* should not be understood in an objective sense, which would imply that the norm, good, or ideal of which the hypocrite communicates endorsement objectively warrants promotion, obtainment, and so on. Rather, we should understand "appropriate response" as the response that *would be* objectively warranted were the norm, good, or ideal in question objectively correct.

²⁶ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* for pushing me to say more about this issue.

ideal. He is so disposed if he tends to communicate endorsement when prompted, or upon thinking about the norm, good, or ideal or matters he associates with them. Using this notion of a disposition to communicate endorsement, we can make sense of private hypocrisy. We can be privately hypocritical with respect to some norm, good, or ideal so long as we have attitudes that tend to prompt us to communicate commitment to them under normal conditions.

In addition, the case of the weak-willed hypocrite suggests that we ought to sharpen our understanding of what it means for the hypocrite to lack a disposition to blame herself. In particular, we should ask how the possibility of weak-willed hypocrisy is consistent with the observation that accusations of hypocrisy can sometimes be defeated if the hypocrite can show that she blames herself—an intuition that I claimed the DBD account could explain. I think the existence of the weak-willed hypocrite shows that the disposition that the hypocrite crucially lacks is not a disposition to blame herself *privately*, but rather a disposition to *accept blame from others* for failures to respond appropriately to the relevant norm, good, or ideal under normal conditions. The hypocrite, whether weak-willed, exception-seeking, or clear-eyed, will deflect accusations of wrongdoing rather than “own up” to what she has done (Cf. Duff 2010, 128–129).²⁷ Thus, Haggard’s masseuse describes Haggard as being hypocritical in virtue of committing the same violations of a norm he preached against “behind everyone’s backs.” This is consistent with Haggard experiencing episodes of private self-blame; however, it shows that Haggard was not willing to accept blame from others. Of course, in all cases in which she is not disposed to blame herself privately, the hypocrite will not be disposed to accept blame from others; but as the case of the weak-willed hypocrite shows, the converse is not always the case. Finally, that the lack of the disposition specifically to accept blame is constitutive of hypocrisy is consistent with the intuition that the accusation of hypocrisy can be defeated if the “hypocrite” can show that she is disposed to blame herself. If she does this, she is *publicly* presenting evidence that she accepts she has done something wrong, thereby demonstrating that she is disposed to accept blame from others.

With these points in view, I propose the following account of hypocrisy:

Commitment Account of Hypocrisy (CAH): *R* is hypocritical with respect to norm, good, or ideal *N* iff *R* is responsible for failing to respond appropriately to *N*; *R* is, without good reason, not disposed to accept blame from others for failing to respond appropriately to *N*; and *R* is disposed to communicate commitment to *N*.

In other words, an agent is hypocritical with respect to some norm, good, or ideal just in case the agent is responsible for failing to respond appropriately to it, is unjustifiably not disposed or is indisposed to accept blame from others for such failures²⁸; and is disposed to communicate commitment to the relevant norm, good, or ideal—which, again, can be accomplished in a number of different ways, including overt blaming and advice-giving.

Two important concepts that figure in the CAH require additional clarification: the notion of “responsibility” and the notion of a “good reason.” Notice that Fritz and Miller employ the notion of “blameworthiness” where I have opted for “responsibility.” My reason for this

²⁷ This discussion implies that weak-willed people who *are* disposed to accept blame from others are not hypocrites. I think this result accords with our intuition. My claim is merely that, insofar as someone satisfies the conditions of hypocrisy due to weakness of will, he will not, by definition, be disposed to accept blame from others. If he becomes so disposed, he no longer *counts* as a hypocrite.

²⁸ For our purposes, nothing hinges on the distinction between being *not disposed* to ϕ and being *indisposed* to ϕ , but I should point out that an agent who satisfies either description with respect to accepting blame satisfies the CAH condition.

alteration is that “blameworthiness” implies that *R* lacks moral justification for failing to respond appropriately *N*; to wit, that *R*’s failure to respond appropriately to *N* is bad or wrong. But this seems false as a description of some clear cases of hypocrisy. For example, Ted Haggard counts as a hypocrite even if it’s false that homosexuality is morally bad or wrong. By contrast, that *R* is responsible for failing to respond appropriately to *N* requires merely that *R* lacks excuse or exemption—*R* was not, e.g., sleepwalking or drunk when he failed to respond appropriately to *N*. In this sense, Haggard certainly is responsible for his violations of the homophobic norm.

In addition, the notion of a “good reason” connects with the distinction between responsibility and blameworthiness in the following way. *R* may have good reason not to accept blame for failing to respond appropriately to *N* precisely because such a failure is not blameworthy and *R* justifiably believes it is not blameworthy. That failing to respond appropriately to *N* is not blameworthy constitutes one kind of good reason in the context of the CAH, but in my discussion of objections to the CAH in the next section I will describe at least one other kind of good reason why *R* may not be disposed to accept blame for failing to respond appropriately to *N*, and so does not count as hypocritical.

The CAH retains the advantages of Fritz and Miller’s view while better capturing the case of the clear-eyed and weak-willed hypocrite and allowing for other ways in which hypocrites may express their commitment to *N* besides via blame. As already mentioned, CAH can explain the intuition that the attribution of hypocrisy can be defeated if it can be established that the putative hypocrite blames herself for her wrongdoing. It also explains why someone’s failure to respond appropriately to *N* at some past point, or her failure to blame herself at that point, do not conclusively establish that she is at the present moment a hypocrite with respect to *N*. In order to be a hypocrite with respect to *N*, one must lack a disposition to accept blame from others for failing to respond appropriately to *N* at the same moment as one is disposed to communicate commitment to *N*. A past failure with respect to *N* or failure to accept blame for this failure does not conclusively establish that one’s commitment to *N* at a later point in time is unaccompanied by the appropriate blame-accepting disposition. Finally, and in line with intuition, this account entails that facts about how recent, frequent, or significant the putative hypocrite’s failures of response are may be relevant to our judgments of hypocrisy. This is because, on this account, these facts will serve as evidence for or against the claim that the putative hypocrite lacks a disposition to accept blame from others for failures to respond appropriately to these norms, goods, or ideals.

3 Objections and Replies

It might be objected that, contrary to what I have argued, Ted Haggard was actually disposed to accept blame from others. If true, this would entail that what I have characterized as a clear case of hypocrisy doesn’t qualify as such under the CAH. Two pieces of evidence support this suggestion. The first is that Haggard hid his “immoral” conduct from others, which suggests that he would have agreed with parishioners that his conduct was immoral. But if he would have agreed with this proposition, surely that implies that he would have accepted their blame. Second, Haggard eventually did accept the judgment of his church and voluntarily submitted to counseling. Again, this suggests that, at least under certain conditions, he was prepared to accept blame from others.

This objection usefully pushes me to say more about the nature of “acceptance” as it figures in the CAH. In one sense of acceptance, Haggard was indeed disposed to accept blame from others: he was inclined to affirm the proposition that he was blameworthy for violating the relevant norm. After all, I have already described Haggard as privately blaming himself, which, on the Hostile Attitudes Account of blame, he could do only if he believed that he is blameworthy for his conduct. Yet Haggard’s furtiveness also suggests that he wanted to avoid the public censure of others; he wanted to evade the penalties that his community attaches to such conduct, which include the reputational damage attendant on being publicly condemned. It is in the sense of “acceptance” meaning “tolerate or submit to,” rather than “affirm the truth or correctness of,” that Haggard was not disposed to accept the blame of others. The former sense is the one operative in the CAH.

The objection is also correct to point out that, as the history of the case shows, Haggard *would* submit to the censure of his community under some circumstances and so was in *some* sense disposed to accept blame from others. This does not present a particularly serious problem for my account if it also makes sense to describe a crafty criminal who *would* plead guilty to his crime if caught as, nevertheless, not disposed or indisposed to submit to punishment. We can surely affirm that a hypocrite lacks the disposition to accept blame from others even if he *would* accept blame from others if, and only if, his hypocrisy were publicly revealed.

I will discuss two potential counterexamples to the CAH. First, Hans is a high-ranking customs official in Nazi Germany and because of his privileged position he is able, in a clandestine manner, to grant visas to a large number of Jews. However, in the company of other Nazis he communicates only pure commitment to Nazi ideals, and, at least under non-tortuous conditions, he would never admit to his clandestine operation if accused. The Nazis might be disposed to call Hans a hypocrite since he appears to satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for hypocrisy according to the CAH. However, as I noted above, the CAH requires that the hypocrite lack a disposition to accept blame *for no good reason*, or that this lack of a disposition is *unjustified*. Hans is, indeed, not disposed to accept blame for his good offices to the Jews in the sense of “accept” meaning “submit to or tolerate.” (Indeed, Hans is not disposed to accept blame in the sense of “accept” meaning “affirm the truth or correctness of,” but I have argued above that this is not the sense operative in the CAH.) But Hans has a number of good reasons for not being disposed to accept blame for violating Nazi norms. The first is that Nazi norms are immoral, and as I noted, if the failure to respond appropriately to some norm, good, or ideal is not morally blameworthy, then the putative “hypocrite” has good reason not to be disposed to accept blame for this failure.²⁹ The second is that, by keeping his violations secret, he can help the Jews. If the failure to accept blame is a means to promoting a genuine good, this constitutes another good reason for the putative “hypocrite” to lack the disposition to accept blame. In addition, it’s at least not clear that Hans satisfies the communication condition of the CAH, since by helping the Jews Hans seems to communicate commitment to a norm diametrically opposed to the Nazi norm.

Finally, Jimmy morally condemns others for sucking up to professors, but does so himself with gusto. When he’s confronted with the accusation of hypocrisy, Jimmy avers that he’s not being hypocritical because he endorses the following norm: it is morally impermissible for everyone except Jimmy to suck up to professors. Some have the

²⁹ Here it is important not to interpret “appropriate response” as the response that is objectively warranted, since the Nazi norms do not objectively warrant adherence. See note 25 for further discussion.

intuition that, despite this clarification, Jimmy is a hypocrite. Yet Jimmy does not satisfy the CAH conditions, since he is not disposed to communicate commitment to the norm that he violated. To wit, although Jimmy may have violated a *universal* no suck-up moral norm, he only *communicates commitment* to an “Everyone-But-Jimmy” no suck-up norm. So, he is not a hypocrite according to the CAH.³⁰

I am not convinced that, once this clarification of Jimmy’s commitments is made, we could justifiably call him a hypocrite. To be sure, prior to this clarification, we would be justified in falsely believing that Jimmy is a hypocrite. His moral condemnation of sucking up at least conversationally implies commitment to a universal no suck-up norm, a norm that he appears to violate without accepting blame from others. And even his averred commitment to the unusual Everyone-But-Jimmy norm could be reasonably disbelieved as a bad-faith attempt to deflect blame. This might be what’s behind the intuition that it would be *appropriate* to call Jimmy a hypocrite even after he has made his clarification. But if it’s true that Jimmy really doesn’t endorse the universal no suck-up norm, then he is not a hypocrite. Of course, this does not mean we cannot morally criticize him; it simply means that we cannot morally criticize him on the grounds of hypocrisy.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated the deficiencies of a recent account of hypocrisy and shown how these deficiencies undermine subsequent argument concerning the effects of hypocrisy on standing to blame. I have developed an alternative theory, the Commitment Account of Hypocrisy, that I argue can account for the rich variety of hypocrisy. Finally, I have defended this account against some objections.

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³⁰ Thanks to Mike Zhao for bringing this objection to my attention.

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