

Hypocrisy as Either Deception or Akrasia

Abstract: The intuitive, folk concept of hypocrisy is not a unified moral category. While many theorists hold that all cases of hypocrisy involve some form of deception, I argue that this is not the case. Instead, I argue for a disjunctive account of hypocrisy whereby all cases of “hypocrisy” involve *either* the deceiving of others about the sincerity of an agent’s beliefs *or* the lack of will to carry through with the demands of an agent’s sincere beliefs. Thus, all cases of hypocrisy can be described either as cases of deception or as cases of akrasia. If this analysis correct, then I suggest further that the moral status of all instances of hypocrisy must be reduced either to the moral blameworthiness of deception or to the moral blameworthiness of akrasia. There can be no unified account of the moral wrongness of “hypocrisy” that holds across the disjunction.

Keywords: akrasia, deception, ethics, hypocrisy, moral psychology

The claim that I wish to defend is this: hypocrisy is not a distinct moral category whose wrongness can be explained by a unitary theory. Hypocrisy often functions as an intuitive, everyday moral concept that is roughly meant to insinuate a certain insincerity on the part of the accused. Someone who is charged with “hypocrisy” is typically accused of professing certain moral beliefs, often with the intention to get others to adhere to those beliefs, but who appears unwilling to adhere to those beliefs themselves. My claim is that when we look at the nature of hypocrisy in more detail we find that each case of what we call “hypocrisy” can be reduced to either instances of deception or instances of akrasia (or, weakness of the will); and so, the wrongness of hypocrisy can always be reduced to either the wrongness of deception or the wrongness of akrasia. Beyond deception or akrasia, there is nothing distinctive remaining that typifies the wrongness of “hypocrisy”.

In this essay, I will first offer a brief account of the folk conception of “hypocrisy”. I will then draw a distinction between two kinds of cases—*hypocrisy through deception* (or “deceptive hypocrisy”) and *hypocrisy through akrasia* (or “akratic hypocrisy”). I will argue that instances of deceptive hypocrisy are morally wrong, not because they are *acts of hypocrisy*, but because they are *acts of deception*. As such, there is nothing morally wrong in these cases by virtue of their being “hypocrisy” as any moral reprehension we feel towards deceptive hypocrisy can be reduced to our moral reprehension of deception. Finally, I argue that the correct view of the blameworthiness of akratic hypocrisy must approach such cases primarily as epistemic problems and only secondarily as moral problems. While some moral theories will count instances of akrasia as a moral vice—like virtue ethics—other moral theories do not.

If this view is correct—that all cases that one would describe as “hypocrisy” can be reduced to either cases of deception or cases of akrasia—then the concept of *hypocrisy* does no additional work as a distinct moral concept and is in fact redundant in philosophical moral discourse. As such, we should reject the standard assumption, which is implied by the folk conception, that there is a single structure that all instances of hypocrisy must share. Instances of “hypocrisy” are not morally wrong by virtue of their being cases of *hypocrisy*, but rather by virtue of their being either cases of *deception* or cases of *akrasia*.

1. Folk Hypocrisy

What does *hypocrisy* consist of? The familiar folk conception holds that hypocrisy is the act of saying one thing while doing another. More specifically, hypocrisy is typically thought of as a perceived inconsistency between the moral beliefs that an agent professes and the way in which that agent behaves. Typically, such inconsistencies earn the charge of “hypocrisy” when the

agent appears to make demands on others that they are unwilling to make of themselves—think of the parent who scolds their child for smoking, but who themselves smokes. The folk conception of hypocrisy is best summed up by the aphorism, “Do as I say, not as I do”. We should notice, however, that hypocrisy is not merely the exhibition of some inconsistency between belief and behavior. Rather, the folk conception of hypocrisy implies that there is some perceived attempt on the part of the hypocrite to saddle others with moral obligations that they are unwilling to adhere to themselves—that is, hypocrisy involves some element of an agent’s *exhorting* or *advocating* a moral belief that the agent does not, or would not, adhere to. This view of hypocrisy has a certain rough-and-ready applicability for everyday moral discourses; but it fails to offer a coherent picture of the psychology of the hypocrite and so also fails to identify what is truly wrong in these cases.

What is wrong with the folk concept? Three problems stand out. First, such a view would be restricted to the *actual* behaviors of an agent. “Do as I say, not as I do” is expressed in terms of *doings*. Certainly, we would accuse an agent of hypocrisy when they act in a way that is inconsistent with the moral virtues that they admonish others to follow; but restricting our concern to the agent’s actual behaviors offers a too narrow view of the phenomenon. We may feel that someone is being hypocritical even when their actual behaviors do not conflict with their professed beliefs. For instance, imagine a person who strongly professes a selfless duty to give money to every homeless person that they meet, but who also happens to live in an affluent town where they are never asked to give money to the homeless. This person professes a certain moral outlook that they are never actually required to practice by virtue of their environmental circumstances. However, imagine further that this person really feels no such moral duty and, if asked, would refuse to give money to someone in need. In this case, the agent professes to have

higher moral standards than they actually do while taking comfort in the relative safety of their situation. The agent takes advantage of the fact that it is very unlikely that their actual moral standards will be discovered. Surely, this person would be a “hypocrite” even though they never find themselves in a situation that would reveal their hypocrisy. The concern here is that a definition of hypocrisy that is restricted to an agent’s actual behaviors might allow a hypocrite to sneak past through moral luck. A way to reconcile this problem would be to require that a more accurate account of hypocrisy must consider an agent’s dispositions to act as well as their actual actions; but at that point, we are moving beyond what the folk conception is designed to do.

Second, the folk view does not capture what is morally problematic about such inconsistencies. It is not morally problematic to simply “say one thing and do another” as this would seem to imply that there is something morally wrong with cases like suffering from confusion. Imagine a person who professes that *it is morally wrong to drink alcohol*, but then has a glass of wine with dinner. Perhaps they were confused about the menu. Perhaps the menu was written in a language that they did not understand which lead them to order wine inadvertently. Perhaps they were tricked. Or perhaps, through ignorance, the agent never learned that wine is alcoholic. One might say one thing while doing another for entirely innocent reasons. An accurate account needs to identify what is morally problematic with hypocrisy and should be able to distinguish morally irrelevant cases of apparent inconsistencies between belief and behavior from those cases that are morally relevant.

Finally, there are cases that appear to be “hypocrisy” but in fact should not actually count. An agent might advocate for others to believe in p and yet act in a way that is inconsistent with p because that agent also sincerely believes that they are not bound to the demands of p , perhaps by virtue of some special circumstances that would count as defeating conditions for the

demands of p . For example, consider an agent who believes that *smoking marijuana is immoral*, but who also allows for exceptions to alleviate pain associated with certain medical conditions, like one that the agent suffers. In this case, the agent's professing p but acting in a way that is inconsistent with p might have the appearance of hypocrisy, but would not actually suffice by virtue of their special circumstances. So, an agent could believe that *smoking marijuana is immoral (minus any defeating conditions)* and yet use marijuana for the treatment of their own pain without hypocrisy provided that their own usage was covered under the defeating conditions clause. Now, suppose that an agent believes that some special circumstance removes them from the demands of p ; but the agent's belief in their immunity from the demands of p is false. In this case, there is nothing *hypocritical* about holding a false belief. What may count as an instance of hypocrisy would be one where the agent believes *insincerely* in their immunity to the demands of p . In this case, the agent takes advantage of the appearance of immunity. This would count as an instance of hypocrisy on the folk view, but crucially the distinguishing feature here is the insincerity of the belief. So, the "Do as I say, not as I do" conception of hypocrisy is not fine-grained enough to distinguish those cases where the failure to adhere to a belief that one appears to advocate would count as hypocrisy from those cases that would not.

In each of the cases discussed above, the charge of hypocrisy depends importantly on the state of the agent's motivation. When an agent advocates some moral belief that the agent does not adhere to, such cases do not all share the same motivation. In some cases, advocating for a moral belief that one does not adhere to would amount to a kind of insincerity. These would be cases where the agent does not actually hold the moral belief that they advocate to others; and certainly, we would call this person a "hypocrite". But imagine a case where an agent *sincerely* advocates some moral belief, and yet is unable or unwilling to adhere to that belief. I suggest that

such cases should be analyzed as instances of a weakness of the will. We would call this person a “hypocrite”, but for a very different reason from the case of the insincere agent. The characterization of hypocrisy as an act of advocating some moral belief that the agent does not adhere to themselves would (wrongly) lump these two cases together. However, my suggestion is that these cases are quite different—they stem from very different motivations—and that this difference points to something important both about the concept of *hypocrisy* and about the particular form that culpability takes for each agent. In the following section, I will argue that there is a legitimate distinction between these cases and that this distinction underwrites a difference in the moral status of these cases. With this in mind, we should first examine in more detail what this distinction in motivation would amount to.

2. Two Hypocrisies: A Disjunctive Analysis

Taking into account the observations above, the folk concept of *hypocrisy* would seem to suggest two features common to all cases of hypocrisy:

x is a “hypocrite” iff:

- (1) x professes a particular moral belief p , and
- (2) x either acts or is disposed to act in a way that is inconsistent with p .

We should first examine (1). When an agent professes a belief in p , they may be taken as reporting any or all of the following: (a) they may be reporting that they are disposed to behave in a way that is consistent with believing p , (b) they may be making an evaluative claim to the effect that p is good or worthwhile or valuable, or (c) they may be making the claim that others should be obligated to adhere to the demands of p . While much could be said about the relations

between these three, it would suffice for our purposes to say that (a) is a necessary condition for an accusation of hypocrisy, while (b) and (c) are not. Instead, (b) offers a distinguishing factor between different types of hypocritical motivations, while (c) has no role to play in the analysis of hypocrisy. The reasons for this are as follows.

It was suggested previously that there is a difference in motivation between two kinds of hypocrites: those who are insincere in their professed beliefs and those who act against their professed beliefs due to some weakness of will. This difference arises in regard to (b). The insincere hypocrite who professes a false belief in p has no intention to assert anything like (b)—that is, the insincere agent does not in fact believe that p really is good, worthwhile, or valuable. Alternatively, the agent who suffers from weakness of will would satisfy (b) in asserting p —that is, they do believe that p really is good, worthwhile, or valuable despite their inability to adhere to the demands of p . Thus, one of the distinguishing factors between the insincere agent and the akratic agent comes down to whether or not an agent satisfies (b).

Now, what about (c)? An agent who claims to believe p may not feel that anyone other than themselves is bound by p or may not seek to endorse p as a universal norm. For instance, an agent may adopt a strict vegetarian diet for moral reasons, and yet may not feel that others should be obliged to do so. This agent may feel that their vegetarianism was a personal choice rather than a universal duty. In this case, when the agent professes their vegetarian beliefs, they may be stating (a) that they are disposed to avoid meat products and (b) that they deem a vegetarian diet to be worthwhile, even though they avoid making the claim that (c) others ought also to adopt a vegetarian diet. The absence of (c) makes the agent a non-proselytizing vegetarian. Now imagine that this person were to then break their diet and eat a cheeseburger. Assuming that they have not changed their mind, were not confused, and continue to profess an adherence to vegetarianism,

they may continue to hold (b) that a vegetarian diet is worthwhile without inconsistency, but they would appear to exhibit an inconsistency between (a) their actual behaviors and their claimed disposition to avoid eating animals. However, notice that the hypocrisy in this case was due to a conflict between the agent's beliefs and actions—that is, the conflict arises because of (a). The conflict does not arise because of (c). A hypocrite need not be a proselytizer. One could be a hypocrite even though their beliefs do not satisfy (c). Proselytizing hypocrites are particularly infuriating and have a tendency to provoke a deep sense of indignation in others than do non-proselytizing hypocrites; but nonetheless, charges of hypocrisy need only satisfy (a), but not (b) or (c).

Given this conception of moral psychology, we should interpret (1) as only referring to (a): a “hypocrite” is an agent who (1.a) claims to hold a certain moral disposition toward p and yet (2) either actually acts in a way that is inconsistent with p or is disposed to act in a way that is inconsistent with p . With this in mind, we can now turn to (2).

What is the source of the inconsistency indicated in (2)? I have argued in regard to (1.b) that such inconsistencies might arise from least two distinct motivations: between agents who sincerely profess a belief in p and those agents who insincerely profess a belief in p . For now, I will refer to the latter sort as a “deceptive hypocrite”.¹ In effect, this agent misrepresents the true nature of their moral disposition—that is, they profess (a) to be morally disposed toward p but this is insincere because (b) they do not genuinely value p .

Deceptive hypocrites are best explained in terms of an inconsistency between the agent's professed beliefs and their dispositions to act. Here, I take a “disposition to act” to describe a

¹ I will later argue that this terminology is redundant, but for now adopting this terminology will be helpful in making my case.

complex set of standing psychological features of an agent, such as the agent's beliefs, character, desires, motivations, and psychological habits that would normally play some role in determining their actions. The deceptive hypocrite gives a false report of how they are disposed to act.² Essentially, the agent is lying. Typically, these agents do so in the hopes of gaining something like the appearance of moral righteousness, the respect of their peers, or some sort of perceived advantage that comes with the appearance of possessing the disposition. The deceptive hypocrite is merely concerned with appearing to have a certain moral disposition—like the character of Valmont in Laclos' novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* who seeks to seduce the virtuous Madame de Tourvel. Valmont succeeds in convincing the Madame that he is reformed of his former lascivious ways by staging scenes in which the Madame witnesses Valmont performing virtuous deeds. We should notice, however, that in order for the deceptive hypocrite to keep the ruse going, that agent may occasionally need to actually act in a way that does conform to the virtues that they profess. In order for Valmont to seduce Madame de Tourvel, he must stage scenes in which she observes him *actually* acting virtuously. As such, Valmont's actual actions are consistent with the statements of moral virtue that he professes to Madame de Tourvel. However, we would still consider Valmont to be a hypocrite because we know that his true intentions—to deceive and seduce Madame de Tourvel—are inconsistent with his true moral dispositions. Valmont performs good deeds, but he does so insincerely. He is supremely cynical because he does not genuinely value his own actions. In effect, he is a right-acting hypocrite—one who acts against his genuine beliefs, but in doing so, acts morally.

² In Aristotelian terms, we might say that the deceptive hypocrite is one who misrepresents their own moral character. In fact, the notion of hypocrisy that I defend here would be most easily expressed using the language of virtue ethics; however, I believe my account of hypocrisy is not dependent on the truth of virtue ethics. One can adapt the account to both utilitarian and deontological normative ethics.

Additionally, we must keep in mind that it is not true of all cases of deceptive hypocrisy that agents always wish to appear morally virtuous—a deceptive hypocrite might wish to appear immoral. Crisp and Cowton offer an excellent example demonstrating this: a teenager who wishes to be accepted by their neighborhood gang.³ The teenager might profess an enjoyment of violence or criticize other gang members for fleeing from a fight when in actual fact is themselves frightened of violence and would have fled from the fight as well. In both of these cases—Laclos' Valmont and the wannabe gang member—there is a deception of moral disposition, which indicate some insincerity.

Contrast this with the sincere believer: someone who sincerely believes p and yet at times actually acts in a way that is inconsistent with believing p . Imagine an agent who sincerely believes that gambling is morally wrong; however, despite the sincerity of their belief, also occasionally gambles. The remorseful gambler may feel quite guilty—fully knowing that they are acting in a way that is inconsistent with their belief—and yet, they may still be unwilling or unable to give up their occasional habit. This is what I will refer to as “akratic hypocrisy”. Akratic hypocrisy can be defined simply as sincerely believing p and yet at times actually acting in a way that is inconsistent with believing p .⁴ This form of hypocrisy is markedly different from the case of deceptive hypocrisy mentioned above. The deceptive hypocrite not only has different motives to the akratic hypocrite, but each of these cases of hypocrisy are likely to be phenomenologically distinct as well—that is, both deceptive and akratic hypocrites are likely to

³ Roger Crisp and Christopher Cowton, “Hypocrisy and moral seriousness”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1994), pp. 343-349.

⁴ We should keep in mind that a person can of course change their mind, so when I say that an akratic hypocrite is one who sincerely believes p while actually acting in a way that is inconsistent with believing p , we should understand that as an inconsistency between a standing belief and some actual action.

feel some anxiety about their inconsistencies, and yet the source and nature of that anxiety is likely to differ between the two cases.

The characteristic difference between the motivations behind each pertains to the sincerity of the professed belief: while the deceptive hypocrite is insincere about their believing p and is motivated by a desire to appear sincere, the akratic hypocrite is quite sincere about their believing p and is not necessarily motivated by any desire to deceive. Some philosophers argue that all cases of hypocrisy necessarily involve some kind of deception or insincerity, and so would likely reject my notion of akratic hypocrisy. Shklar claims that hypocrisy is an act “designed to deceive others”.⁵ Szabados and Soifer suggest that hypocrisy necessarily involves deception, provided that the notion of deception is broadened to include self-deception.⁶ Benn argues that the deception stems from an agent’s pretended moral sincerity⁷—thus Benn’s account would demand that we must find some deception in the cases that I describe as “akratic hypocrisy”. The link between deception and hypocrisy is evidenced in much of the literature as well as our pre-theoretical thinking about hypocrisy. By perusing the literature, one will find that the charge of hypocrisy often appears to be used interchangeably with the charge of deception.⁸

⁵ Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1984), p. 47.

⁶ Béla Szabados and Eldon Soifer, *Hypocrisy: Ethical Investigations* (New York: Broadview Press Ltd., 2004). See especially Chapter 13.

⁷ Piers Benn, “What is Wrong with Hypocrisy?”, *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies* 8 (1993), pp. 223-235.

⁸ For instance, see Crisp and Cowton, “Hypocrisy and moral seriousness”; and Eva Feder Kittay, “On Hypocrisy”, *Metaphilosophy* 13 (1982), pp. 277-289. Also, both Daniel Statman (“Hypocrisy and Self-Deception”, *Philosophical Psychology* 10 (1997), pp. 57-75) and Dan Turner (“Hypocrisy”, *Metaphilosophy* 21 (1990), pp. 262-269) note the identification, though each argues against it.

However, I do not believe that deception is a necessary feature of all cases of hypocrisy, as I argued in reference to (1.b) above. If this is acknowledged, the most natural way to describe those instances of non-deceptive hypocrisy would be as forms of akrasia.

To explain, consider again the case of the agent who believes that gambling is morally wrong and yet still gambles now and again. Does this case necessarily involve deception? In many ways, the agent may act in a way that is consistent with their belief: they may avoid casinos, admonish others for their gambling habits, or campaign to strengthen laws against gambling. The hypocritical gambler's problem, however, is that they will occasionally wager a bet—perhaps saying, “I just couldn't help myself”.⁹ The gambler may be sincere in their belief, but still behaves in a way that is inconsistent with that belief. The important point to notice, however, is that the gambler may not be deceiving themselves or anyone else—they may be aware of the inconsistency and may acknowledge that their actions do not live up to their moral standards (e.g. they might admit to having “faults of my own”). The gambler might play at some deception publicly—they may be ashamed of their weakness and may go to great lengths to avoid detection—however, the gambler may not be playing at this deception in order to hide their true beliefs about gambling. Their motivation for the deception may be very different: it may simply be to avoid shame. The gambler certainly exhibits some inconsistencies between their beliefs and their behaviors—and so would rightly be regarded as a hypocrite—but the act of deception does not seem to be a necessary component of what makes their actions hypocritical. To see this, simply consider an alternative case in which the gambler does not suffer from shame and makes

⁹ Another familiar example of an akratic hypocrite would be a person who believes that adultery is immoral, but is having an affair—examples of many politicians here spring to mind. Some such individuals may be sincere in their belief that adultery is immoral and might consider their affair to be evidence of a deep character flaw within themselves. Such individuals should be considered akratic hypocrites.

their gambling habits public—perhaps as a warning to others of the dangers of gambling. Despite their sincere belief that gambling is morally wrong, the gambler may publicly admit that they occasionally wager a bet. By this public acknowledgement of inconsistent behavior, the shameless gambler is playing at deception in no way, neither publicly nor privately. The shameless gambler is in the same position as the smoker who admonishes their children for smoking. The akratic smoker may not seek to deceive anyone about their smoking habit and yet their expressed beliefs clearly contradict their actions.

Finally, the reader will notice that I define each sort of hypocrisy differently with regard to the agent's behaviors: a deceptive hypocrite is one who professes to believe *p* and yet is *disposed to act* in a way that is inconsistent with believing *p*, while an akratic hypocrite is one who professes to believe *p* and yet at times *actually acts* in a way that is inconsistent with believing *p*. But, one might here object that actually acting in a way that is inconsistent with some professed belief, however sincerely the belief is professed, must be cashed out as another disposition to act—if the akratic gambler occasionally wagers a bet, then this makes up part of their moral disposition. In which case, we need to describe the akratic hypocrite as well as the deceptive hypocrite as professing some belief that conflicts with their moral dispositions, in which case the distinction that I offer between these cases seems to collapse. Surely part of this objection is correct—moral dispositions are complex mental states that are likely to contain conflicting desires, goals, and values, all of which could be considered “sub-dispositions”—but we should also remember that what makes the akratic hypocrite a *hypocrite* is an inability to resist acting in a way that they profess to reject. Suppose that two agents believe that gambling is morally wrong, and yet both feel some compulsion to gamble—that is, both are disposed to feel conflicted toward gambling. While one occasionally cannot resist wagering a bet, the other is

steadfast in their resistance to the urge. The steadfast agent *is not* a hypocrite because they are able to resist, while akratic agent *is* a hypocrite because they cannot resist. The akratic gambler suffers from a weak will while the steadfast agent does not suffer from a weak will even if they suffer from an urge to gamble. One who sincerely believes *p* is not a hypocrite just because they sometimes feel conflicted about the demands of adhering to *p*. Rather they are simply human. The charge of hypocrisy only arises for the sincere believer when they fail to act on their sincerely held beliefs.

3. The Moral Status of Hypocrisy

Is there anything morally wrong with hypocrisy? This general question cannot be answered as it stands. Any answer we give must surely depend on which sort of hypocrisy we are talking about. So a more accurate question to ask would be, are either deceptive hypocrisy or akratic hypocrisy morally blameworthy?

Beginning with deceptive hypocrisy, it seems clear that such instances would be morally objectionable only insofar as the deception is itself morally objectionable—or put another way, any analysis of the moral status of *deceptive hypocrisy* will simply collapse into an analysis of the moral status of *deception*. If a particular act of deception is morally objectionable, then nothing more is added to our moral disapproval of this act by also labeling it as “hypocrisy”. To accuse someone of deceptive hypocrisy is nothing more than to accuse them of something akin to lying, though this is a specific kind of lie: the agent is lying about their moral disposition. In fact, on my view the phrase “deceptive hypocrisy” is redundant. Indeed, it would be erroneous to treat deceptive hypocrisy as a moral category that is distinct from deception.

Furthermore, the moral status of deception would of course depend on one's view of normative ethics. Rule consequentialists and act consequentialists would disagree over the moral status of deception based on whether deception is a morally objectionable rule or whether instances of deception result in morally objectionable consequences, respectively; deontologists would hold that deception is morally objectionable because the deceiver disrespects the humanity of others; and virtue ethicists would likely hold that deception is morally objectionable because the development of a deceptive character is in conflict with living well. Within the discussion of hypocrisy, there is some disagreement as to whether hypocrisy is always morally condemnable.¹⁰ There may be cases of deception that are morally harmless, others that are morally praiseworthy, and still others where the apparent hypocrisy is not blameworthy. For instance, imagine a case where an individual is *forced* to behave in a way that is contrary to their actual beliefs—say, a housewife who holds a pro-choice view of abortion rights but who outwardly claims to hold pro-life views and who professes support for pro-life political candidates because of the overpowering influence of her oppressive pro-life husband. Strictly speaking, this case would superficially fulfill my characterization of deceptive hypocrisy—the agent actually acts in a way that is inconsistent with her beliefs—yet this also intuitively would be a case where the deception does not seem morally reprehensible. In sum, whether a deceptive hypocrite is blameworthy or not is ultimately decided by whether their act of deception is or is not morally blameworthy.

What about akratic hypocrisy? Is there anything morally objectionable to sincerely believing *p* and yet acting in a way that is inconsistent with believing *p*? On my account, we must treat akratic hypocrisy as primarily an epistemic problem, and only then can we address whether this epistemic fault constitutes a moral problem. Insofar as an agent fails to act in a way that is

¹⁰ For instance, see Benn, "What is Wrong with Hypocrisy?"; and Turner, "Hypocrisy".

consistent with their actual beliefs, this simply means that the agent is acting irrationally.¹¹ The smoker who scolds their children for smoking might be acting irrationally; but surely, they are also giving good advice. Indeed, the children would be better off to listen to their akratic parent and ignore the inconsistency in the agent's behavior.¹² In many case, the akratic hypocrite is at least half-right.

There surely is *something* wrong with akratic hypocrisy—such a person suffers from an inconsistency of reasons—but my point is that an agent who acts in a way that is inconsistent with their actual beliefs need not be taken as thereby suffering from a moral vice. The akratic hypocrite may not seek to deceive others about what they sincerely believe and may not fail to possess sound moral beliefs. If x is morally wrong and S sincerely believes that x is morally

¹¹ Cf. Turner, "Hypocrisy", p. 266. My account is very similar to that of Turner's in this respect. Where we differ is that Turner aims to give a singular account of hypocrisy—all cases of hypocrisy are instances of a "disparity" between either words and deeds, pretended beliefs and genuine beliefs, or beliefs and desires (p. 265).

Ultimately, Turner argues that this structure of a disparity between some pair of values remains the same in each instance of hypocrisy. The difference between his account and mine, then, is that I reject the singular structure of all instances of hypocrisy and instead offer a disjunctive account: some cases of what we might call hypocrisy are instances of akrasia and while other cases are nothing more than instances of deception.

¹² Szabados and Soifer (*Hypocrisy*, pp. 244-246) argue against cases like this claiming that, insofar as the smoker is an addict and is therefore unable to resist their desire for nicotine, then they are not morally responsible for their actions, and therefore cannot be hypocrites. I disagree with this description of the case—the smoker may sincerely believe that no one should either start smoking or continue to smoke. Sincerely believing this, the smoker will act in some ways that are consistent with this belief, however, also being driven by the desire for nicotine, the smoker will continue to smoke. This is one idiosyncrasy of the smoker's dispositions to act. On my proposed view, the smoker would be an akratic hypocrite, which captures the inconsistency of their behavior as well as their lack of deception, which is part of what drives Szabados and Soifer to reject this case.

wrong, then in fact *S* has to that extent a sound moral belief. In acting against their sincerely held beliefs, the akratic hypocrite does something irrational, but it may not be the case that they are also doing something immoral, at least, not insofar as they are acting against their beliefs.

Consider what happens when we dispense with the word “hypocrisy” altogether: then we simply refer to the akratic hypocrite’s actions as “acts of akasia”. Is akasia itself a moral vice? As with deception, this too depends on one’s favored account of normative ethics. While for a virtue ethicist, akasia is morally problematic because it detracts from one’s ability to lead a fulfilling life, neither consequentialism nor deontology would seem to be committed necessarily to the moral wrongness of akasia—that is, an agent does not act wrongly just because they are conflicted. Other accounts of moral psychology may avoid the issue entirely. Consider Hume’s account of moral psychology. If reason is a slave to the passions, and passions are not rational mental states, then one cannot suffer any irrationality between their beliefs (i.e. reason) and their actions (i.e. passion).¹³ On my understanding of Hume’s ethics, akasia is impossible. One can of course feel conflicted between one’s passions and one’s reasons, and yet passion always wins out according to Hume.

In some cases, an akratic may commit an immoral act; however, the immorality of their actions need not be due to their irrationality. Suppose an agent sincerely believes that “doing *x* is morally wrong”, and for the sake of argument, suppose that doing *x* really is morally wrong. If the agent were to act against their sincerely held beliefs and go on to do *x*, then they are an irrational agent; and if doing *x* is in fact morally wrong, then they have also committed an immoral act. The important point to notice, however, is that the immorality of the act is entirely dependent upon the fact that *x* really is morally wrong—it is not dependent on their acting

¹³ Hume, *Treatise* III.1.i-ii.

inconsistently with their beliefs. So, in doing x , the agent has done something immoral *and*, by acting against their sincerely held belief, they have also done something irrational. Alternatively, to see that the fault rests on the moral status of the action, consider how the case would go if x were not morally wrong. In doing x , the agent does something morally harmless or perhaps even morally praiseworthy; however, in acting against their sincerely held belief, the agent has done something irrational. In this latter case, I think we would correctly describe the agent's action as irrational-but-not-immoral. Thus, there need not be any moral fault inherent to akratic behavior.

However, the akratic does not get off the hook entirely. The exhibition of their epistemic inconsistency will be a source of much trouble for them. In addition to whatever internal trouble is attended by epistemic inconsistency, such a person would likely suffer a weak position socially. First, the akratic would likely be suspected of deception: when one is discovered to have said p but done $\sim p$, it is difficult for others to know whether this person is a deceiver or suffers from akrasia. Perhaps we chastise and distrust the akratic because there is an expectation or suspicion that they are deceiving us. Second, someone who is known to be an akratic finds themselves in a weak position regarding their ability to give testimony. Knowing that some person suffers from epistemic inconsistency, others will have reason to doubt the sincerity or truth of any assertion that the akratic makes. Finally, the akratic would not gain much respect from those genuinely immoral deceivers who seek to appear virtuous. In Book I of Plato's *Republic*, Thrasymachus defends the very mercenary view that the appearance of justice is nothing more than a tool that the strong use to their advantage.¹⁴ It would then seem that the appearance of sincerity, characteristic of how I described "deceptive hypocrisy", would suit

¹⁴ Plato, *Republic* 336b-354c.

Thrasymachus' ideal of justice nicely. By contrast, the akratic—someone too weak willed to follow their own sincere beliefs—would likely gain no respect even from Thrasymachus.

In summary, all instances where one might employ the folk concept of *hypocrisy* can always be described either as a case of deception or as a case of akasia. So, the concept of *hypocrisy* is not itself a genuinely distinct moral concept. Alternatively, treating *hypocrisy* as its own morally damnable category seems like over-determination: in the case of deceptive hypocrisy, the agent is both a *liar* and a *hypocrite*, which I have argued would be redundant; while in the case of akratic hypocrisy, the agent is both *irrational* and a *hypocrite*. Within the realm of moral accountability, nothing appears to be gained by describing an agent as a “hypocrite” over and above describing them either as a liar or as weak willed.¹⁵

¹⁵ This essay has benefitted from comments offered by numerous colleagues, many of whom I fear I may be forgetting. At least, I wish to offer a note of thanks to Larissa Cambel, Brandon Conley, Anna Cremaldi, Kim Hall, Jack Kwong, Monique Lanoix, Patrick Rardin, and one anonymous referee for this journal.