

On Losing One's Moral Voice
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Note to the reader: this is a paper I wrote in the summer of 2015. I shopped it around to a few journals, but without success. I then realized that Ori Herstein had published a paper that comes to a very similar conclusion (<https://philpapers.org/rec/HERUSP>), and so I put this project on indefinite hold. But I'm still a fan of some of the arguments in the paper, so I thought I'd put it up on PhilPapers for safekeeping.

Abstract

Although it is widely accepted that hypocritical blamers lack the standing to blame others who have committed similar wrongs, an account of what it is that's lost when someone loses their standing to blame remains elusive. When moral address is inappropriate because it is or would be hypocritical, what is the precise nature of the complaint that the blamed party is entitled to raise, and that so often gets voiced as "I don't have to take that from you"? In this paper I argue that extant answers to this question fall short, and I offer a novel account that takes seriously the thought that hypocrisy somehow silences the blame of the hypocrite. To make sense of this silencing effect, I argue that we need to look closely at the role that second-personal reasons play in moral address.

1.

At the dinner table not long ago, my daughter was going to great lengths, as only a 4-year-old can do, to avoid eating her asparagus. My partner and I, on the other hand, were going to great lengths to try to convince her otherwise, saying that it was both delicious and also a very small piece. (Though on second thought those points seem to be in tension with one another.) Finally, when it became clear that rational persuasion was hopeless (as it usually is when the issue is vegetables), we played a variant of the "because I said so" card. As my daughter was getting set to leave the table, asparagus still on her plate, my partner said, "Oh, we can't be finished with dinner until we eat our asparagus. Everyone has to eat their asparagus." To which my daughter responded in all earnestness: "Even the neighbors?"

It was a funny moment for at least two reasons. One was simply the fact that my daughter's innocence had made her overlook the implicitly restricted use of the word 'everyone'. But there's another aspect of my daughter's innocence here, too, which is this: although my partner and I can sometimes legitimately play the "because I said so" card with our daughter, we certainly can't play that card with our neighbors. Through her innocent ignorance of the normative structure of ordinary interpersonal relationships, my daughter is constantly reminding me of how complex that structure is, and making me laugh in the process.

But the joke here is connected to a broader moral phenomenon that is worth exploring in detail. The phenomenon I have in mind is this: sometimes it is inappropriate for me to blame you for what you've done, even if you are blameworthy for doing it. In what has now become the

standard terminology: even if you are blameworthy for something you've done, I may lack the *standing* to blame you for doing it.¹ In such a situation, if I nevertheless try to blame you, it seems that you are entitled to raise some sort of complaint against me. If, for example, I lack the standing to blame you because I am guilty of a similar transgression, then you might say, "Look who's talking". And that, in some sense, is all you would need to say to shut me up.

In my experience, this sort of retort can be very effective as an explicit response to verbalized blame, but it can also work more abstractly through our recognition that it is a possible move through moral space. Knowing that there's some sort of impropriety involved in hypocritical blame can effectively shut down blame from would-be hypocrites before it gets voiced at all. "Yes, I agree that they are doing something wrong," I might say to a third party, "but I'm in no position to blame them for it."

But what exactly is the nature of the complaint that you are entitled to make, the anticipation of which might keep me from voicing my blame in the first place? By hypothesis, your complaint is not that you have been falsely accused, since the retort in question seems in order even if your guilt is common knowledge. Rather, your complaint is that I am *also* guilty. But how is that relevant? As Macalester Bell points out: "The educational or motivational value of blame is not undermined by the blamer's hypocrisy; we can learn from the morally corrupt just as we can learn from the morally pure" (Bell 2013: 275). Nevertheless, a hypocritical blamer seems, in some sense, to have lost their moral voice. But what exactly does that mean? Although many theorists now acknowledge that we need to grapple with the notion of standing in order to understand the ethics of blame, no one has yet attempted to articulate *what it is that's lost* when someone loses their standing to blame. In what follows I make an attempt, guided by my daughter's refusal to eat her asparagus.

2.

Let's begin by bringing the relevant phenomenon into sharper focus. Suppose that I report to you that your friend Joshua has just published a paper that contains an astoundingly uncharitable reconstruction of one of your arguments. Upon hearing this news, you might blame Joshua (or express your blame, depending on how exactly you like to conceptualize these things) in several different ways: you might simply lower your opinion of his work, or you might get angry with him, or you might send him an annoyed email, or you might call him and give him an earful, or perhaps you could adopt a policy of summarily rejecting every paper that you're asked to referee which seems likely to have been written by him. Depending on the details of the case, there are several ways in which your blame here could be inappropriate, and it will be useful to go through a few of them as a way of isolating the one that will matter to us as we move forward.

Perhaps the most obvious way your blame could misfire is if it turns out that I'm wrong: it wasn't Joshua who published the paper after all, or perhaps it was him but the reconstruction wasn't uncharitable. If either of these facts comes to light, then your blame is inappropriate because *Joshua isn't blameworthy*, after all. But now suppose that it was Joshua, and it was uncharitable. Still, your blame might misfire. If it turns out that since its publication Joshua has had a change of heart and has sent a retraction request to the journal in question, and further has called you to apologize,

¹ See, for example, Cohen 2006, Smith 2007, and Friedman 2013, among others that I'll discuss in more detail below.

then at the very least the *intensity* of your blame ought to be tempered.² If you continue to act on your policy to summarily reject all papers that might be written by him, then arguably this way of blaming is inappropriate because it is *disproportionate* to the facts. But now suppose that it was Joshua, it was uncharitable, and your blame is in proportion to the severity of the wrong. Still, your blame might be inappropriate if you know that I am notorious for giving bogus testimony, and the only reason you have for thinking that Joshua published the paper in question is the fact that I told you so. In this case your blame is arguably inappropriate because it is *epistemically irresponsible*.³

But I don't want to focus on any of those ways that your blame might be inappropriate. Instead, suppose that it was Joshua, it was uncharitable, your blame is in proportion to the severity of the wrong, and you have plenty of good evidence for thinking that Joshua is in fact blameworthy (perhaps you've now read the paper yourself). However, suppose further that you yourself routinely publish astoundingly uncharitable reconstructions of the arguments of other philosophers. As your friend, if I find out that you are going to go give Joshua a piece of your mind, I might gently point out your hypocrisy in doing so. And I might even manage to convince you that you've got no right to get worked up about Joshua's paper. What I would have convinced you of in this case is that your blame is inappropriate because, in this instance, you *lack the standing* to blame. It is this sort of inappropriate blame – standingless blame – that I want to focus on.

Still, there may be various ways to lose one's standing to blame. *Hypocrisy* is perhaps the clearest case (or, more precisely, the fact that one's blame *would be* hypocritical), but *complicity* is also usually mentioned in the same breath.⁴ Suppose, for example, that Joshua and I co-authored the paper in which the uncharitable reconstruction occurs. Assuming we shared responsibility for the reconstruction, it would be inappropriate for *me* to blame Joshua for the lack of charity. I'm too involved in the relevant wrong to have the standing to blame Joshua for it, even if Joshua is equally blameworthy for it – or so it seems. Then perhaps, too, someone can lack the standing to blame if the wrong in question is simply *none of one's business*, or if the wrongdoer is someone to whom one doesn't stand in any relevant relationship.⁵ Joshua's partner can perhaps blame him, and maybe his parents can, and you can, but it would seem at the least very odd if a perfect stranger were to chew him out for his lack of charity.⁶ In each of these cases – the cases of hypocritical, complicit, and meddling blame – it seems like Joshua is entitled to retort, "Who are *you* to blame me for this?" And it's this question that, when appropriate, seems to indicate a lack of standing.

However, for the sake of keeping our focus, I propose to restrict the discussion to cases of hypocritical blame. I'm optimistic that the lessons will be applicable more broadly, but I don't intend to argue for that here. So, our question is this: when blame is inappropriate because it is or would be hypocritical, what is the nature of the complaint that the blamed party is entitled to raise?

² Smith 2007 contains a nice discussion of the role that this sort of consideration (i.e., the agent's own response to their wrongdoing) might play in tempering one's blame.

³ D. Justin Coates articulates and argues for a version of this view in his 2016.

⁴ See, in particular, Cohen 2006 and Watson 2015. But complicity may, perhaps, ultimately reduce to a form of hypocrisy. See also Todd 2012.

⁵ See Radzik 2011 for a nice discussion of the moral importance of minding one's own business.

⁶ There's a Golden Girls episode that nicely illustrates this phenomenon. Faced with a lawsuit from the city of Miami for having too many renters under one roof, Rose suggests kicking Dorothy's mother Sophia out of the house. Offended, Dorothy responds, "Well, thank you very much!", and then invoking her special relationship to her own mother to comedic effect, she adds, "But if anybody is going to put my mother out in the cold, it's going to be me."

An answer to this question will help us to figure out what it is that's lost when someone loses the standing to blame, and hence what the notion of standing is in the first place.

3.

But before we can begin considering candidate answers to this question, there's one more way in which the question needs to be clarified and, as a result, restricted. I've tried to distinguish standingless blame from other ways in which blame can be inappropriate, but we might still wonder, of the wide range of responses that might count as blame, which are thus rendered inappropriate by hypocrisy and whether the nature of the complaint might differ depending on which sort of response we have in mind. Broadly speaking, we can divide *blaming responses* into three categories (we'll call them 'blaming responses' so as not to prejudge the question of the precise nature of blame itself) based on whether they are *judgings*, *feelings*, or *doings*.⁷ The issue of standing might crop up in any of these three categories, and it will prove useful – again, for the sake of focus – briefly to consider how.

Consider the category of *judgings* first. Here I have in mind beliefs formed about a wrongdoer in response to their wrong, beliefs such as “He’s a jerk” or “He deserves to be punished for that” or “He just broke a promise for no good reason”. It’s controversial whether beliefs like this count as blame if they are never expressed in words or actions, but that controversy is irrelevant for our purposes, since forming these beliefs is obviously closely related to, if not a way of, blaming.⁸ And it’s not hard to think of cases where, plausibly, someone lacks the standing even to form (or at least to take an active role in forming) beliefs like this. I think here in particular of the judgmental parent, who is always on the lookout for ways in which her son-in-law is falling short of her ideals with respect to, say, proper lawn maintenance. Plausibly, how well her son-in-law cares for his lawn is none of her business, and so it is inappropriate (meddlesome, perhaps) for her even to be forming judgments about it.⁹ We might even imagine her expressing these judgments to a friend over coffee, and her friend thinking it bizarre and unloving for her to be oriented such that those things are even on her radar in the first place. The worry here might plausibly be spelled out as a worry about standing, but I won’t dwell on it anymore, because in what follows I won’t be concerned primarily with the category of *judgings*.

Consider next the category of *feelings*. Arguably the most widely accepted account of blame is the one championed by R. Jay Wallace (1994), who takes his inspiration from P. F. Strawson’s (1962) emphasis on the role that the moral emotions have in our interpersonal relationships. For Wallace, to blame someone just is to feel resentment (or indignation, or guilt) toward the person as a result of their wrongdoing, or to judge that such an emotion would be appropriate. Again, though, whatever your favored account of blame, it’s uncontroversial that paradigmatic blaming scenarios involve some sort of emotional or affective response that targets the person blamed. Might a worry about standing arise here, even if the relevant emotional response remains completely hidden from the view of the person being targeted (i.e., even in cases of what we might call “unexpressed blame”)? I think the answer is yes, perhaps because the wrong in question is “no

⁷ See Coates & Tognazzini 2014 for a more careful articulation of the structure of blaming responses and the surrounding ethical issues.

⁸ Hieronymi 2004 makes a strong case for the claim that *judgings* can carry the characteristic sting of blame, and hence are a way of blaming. See also Watson 1996.

⁹ Watson 2013 is a compelling exploration of the vice of judgmentalism.

proper concern of yours” (Wertheimer 1998: 499).¹⁰ But unexpressed resentment might be inappropriate for reasons of hypocrisy, as well. Again, it helps to imagine a conversation with a third party, who, upon noticing that you are beginning to seethe with resentment, gently points out that you are chronic offender of exactly the same type as the person you are targeting with that resentment. Even if you never express it to the person you are blaming, your blame nevertheless seems inappropriate because you lack the standing, in this case, even to *feel* resentment. Again, though, I want to set the case of unexpressed resentment to one side, for the sake of focusing on what strikes me as the central sort of case in which issues of standing arise: blame that is explicitly addressed to the person blamed, or what we might call “expressed blame”.

The sorts of cases that will be the focus of my analysis are cases where the blamer is engaged in some sort of rebuke or verbal expression of blame or some clear modification of the relationship with the person blamed (e.g., a noticeably decreased willingness to hang out on a regular basis, or an unmistakably cold shoulder). It is when these sorts of interaction are hypocritical that the retort about standing seems to have the most force, when the person blamed can most clearly say, “You have no right to say that to me”, or “That’s rich coming from you”.¹¹ Again, although I’m optimistic that the account of lost standing developed below can bear fruit for the unexpressed cases (a question I hope to take up in future work), I think it is worth narrowing our focus here, both because it makes for a cleaner discussion and also because I want to leave open the possibility that the challenge to standing just means something completely different depending on the precise blaming response in question. So, again, we’ll focus here on cases of overt hypocritical blame, or what Wallace (2010) has called “hypocritical moral address”.¹²

4.

Our question, now adequately refined, is: when moral address is inappropriate because it is or would be hypocritical, what is the nature of the complaint that the blamed party is entitled to raise? I’ve found four answers to this question in the literature, but in my view none is completely satisfactory. To see why, let’s go through them one by one.

T. M. Scanlon (2008, 2013) has recently offered a compelling account of the nature of blame, where blaming someone is a matter of recognizing that the wrongdoer’s action has impaired one’s relationship with the wrongdoer, and then altering one’s relationship with the wrongdoer in light of the recognition of that impairment. For Scanlon, no particular emotional response is necessary, though of course moral emotions like resentment and indignation will be concomitants of blame. There is much to recommend this account as an understanding of moral blame, but what

¹⁰ The full quotation is worth your time: “If the harm isn’t gross or the injustice egregious (no crime against humanity), if our concern, though earnest, is idle, then high-minded indignation has odors of moral self-indulgence if it’s unprompted by institutional or communal affiliations, or personal attachments or identifications with the victims, or some stake in the issues. Some matters -- like other folks’ intimate intrafamilial relations -- may be none of your business, not your affair, no (proper) concern of yours, so, whatever your evidence and emotions, it is not your place to bear ill will. Persons with ties to the principals may have better claim to a concern that could justify ill will than persons connected purely by principles” (Wertheimer 1998: 499).

¹¹ Thus Gerald Dworkin says that the issue of standing is about “who can say what to whom” (Dworkin 2000: 182).

¹² Strictly speaking, Wallace distinguishes between two modes of hypocritical moral address: advice and criticism. What he is most interested in, and what I am focusing on here, is hypocritical moral address in the mode of moral criticism. The connection between criticism and advice will come up later, however, as it provides a nice way to test the hypothesis about standing that I’m about to present.

we're interested in is the answer this account allows him to give to our main question. For Scanlon, what exactly is the problem with hypocritical moral address?

Since moral blame, for Scanlon, is a matter of altering one's relationship with the wrongdoer in light of the recognition that the wrongdoer has impaired the relationship through their wrongdoing, blame communicates to the wrongdoer that the relevant impairment in the relationship is the direct result of the wrongdoer's actions. But in cases of hypocritical blame, says Scanlon, this is a false message. As he puts it, "There is something false in my suggesting that it is *your* willingness to act in ways that indicate untrustworthiness that impairs our moral relationship" (Scanlon 2008: 177, original emphasis). Since "normal moral relations" are constituted by mutually held intentions and expectations, our relationship was in fact already impaired in the relevant sense by my own wrongdoing, and thus "there is something false" in the suggestion carried by my blame that you are the one who impaired it.

One way of describing the issue here is to say that for Scanlon, the problem with hypocritical moral address is that it is *unfitting*: it represents the world in a way that doesn't "fit" how the world actually is. (False beliefs are unfitting in this sense, but the notion of fittingness is broader, potentially applying to other states like emotions and, as it does here, to actions, or the meanings carried by actions, as well.¹³)

It may be true that hypocritical moral address is unfitting, but I don't think the idea of fittingness gives us the answer to our primary question. What we're interested in is the nature of the complaint that the person who is hypocritically blamed is entitled to raise. And on Scanlon's account it looks like the complaint is merely, "What you've said (or implied) is false." But this is the same sort of complaint that is raised when the person who is blamed offers an excuse or a justification for what they've done. Since blame also implies that the person blamed is blameworthy, I can attempt to escape blame by pointing out that my action didn't actually violate the relevant norm, or perhaps that although it did violate the norm, the circumstances of my wrongdoing made it unreasonable to expect me to do anything else. These moves in the blaming conversation also amount to the claim that the blamer has said or implied something false, but what we're interested in is what's *distinctive* about the retort that challenges a blamer's standing to blame. Scanlon has articulated another way that blame can fail to fit the facts (besides targeting someone who is not in fact blameworthy), but the relevant retort about standing seems to be something more forceful and distinctive than the mere claim that blame is unfitting.¹⁴

R. Jay Wallace has also treated the problem of hypocritical moral address in detail, and in his view what's crucial is that the objection to the hypocritical blamer is a *moral* objection. Hypocrisy in general is morally problematic, and in Wallace's view, the fundamental form of hypocrisy – the one that provides the foundation for an understanding of other morally problematic forms of hypocrisy – is the one found in hypocritical moral address. This connection that Wallace

¹³ On the notion of fittingness, and how it differs from other ways in which moral responses might be appropriate, see D'Arms & Jacobson 2000.

¹⁴ On second thought, perhaps the problem with hypocritical moral address, for Scanlon, is identical to the problem with blaming someone who is not blameworthy. If judging that someone is blameworthy is a matter of judging that they have done something to impair their relationship with you, as Scanlon contends, then the problem with hypocritical moral address is that it implies that the person who is blamed is blameworthy, when in fact they are not (since the relationship was already impaired by the blamer's previous attitudes and behavior). But again, the issue of standing seems like something distinct from the issue of blaming someone who isn't blameworthy, so this is more reason to look elsewhere for an adequate account of standing.

finds between hypocritical moral address and hypocrisy more generally is what leads him to think that the objection to hypocritical moral address must be a moral objection, as well. But what precise objection is it?

Recall that for Wallace, blame is intimately tied with the moral emotions of resentment, indignation, and guilt. This is because a disposition to feel these emotions – emotions which express disapproval and opprobrium – is constitutive of “[caring] about the values at the heart of morality” (Wallace 2010: 324), and a blameworthy person has flouted those values. But the moral emotions are more than just vehicles for expressing one’s disappointment at a moral violation; they can also be “vehicles for moral insight and improvement” (Wallace 2010: 326) since experiencing them can make one aware of what a particular moral wrong looks like, and thus can make one aware of ways in which one has violated moral values oneself. And what this shows us, according to Wallace, is that hypocritical blame is problematic only to the extent that the blamer fails to “[subject their] own attitudes and behavior to critical assessment, and [bring] them into harmony with [the blamer’s] current reactions to the attitudes and behavior of others” (Wallace 2010: 326). When hypocritical blame is morally objectionable, then, it’s because I try to make an exception for myself. As Wallace (2010: 328) puts it:

Suppose I blame you for your dishonesty when I have regularly been dishonest in my interactions with you, and suppose I also fail to reflect on and come to terms with my dishonest behavior in the past...[In this case], I treat your dishonesty as a license to disregard your interest in avoiding social disapprobation. But I also act as if I continue to deserve protection from the same effect myself, despite the fact that I have been dishonest toward you in just the same way. As long as it goes uncorrected, this complex stance attaches to my interests greater importance than it ascribes to yours, affording my interests a higher standard of protection and consideration than it affords to yours. This offends against a presumption in favor of the equal standing of persons that I take to be fundamental to moral thought.

In cases of morally objectionable hypocritical blame, the blamer wants to shield himself from blame but does not extend the same opportunity to the person he blames, which is a violation of a fundamental moral principle. The objection that the person who is hypocritically blamed can raise, then, is that the hypocritical blamer has done something morally wrong.¹⁵

Again, though, while it may be true that this sort of unreflective hypocritical moral address is morally wrong, I don’t think this fact gives us the answer to our primary question. For one thing, the relevant objection to the standing of the hypocritical blamer may be in order *even if* the hypocritical blamer also blames himself. Take, for example, the case of Barack Obama’s views on same-sex marriage. In 2008 Obama was against legalizing same-sex marriage, but over the next several years his views evolved until he announced in 2012 that he had changed his mind. (And when the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015, the White House lit up in rainbow colors.) Let’s assume that Obama’s change of mind was the result of sincere soul-searching, and let’s not try to specify the precise statute of limitations on a sincere belief that would render the assertion of its negation evidence of a changed mind rather than evidence of hypocrisy.

¹⁵ Similar accounts of the objection to standingless blame can be found in Duff 2010, Tadros 2009, and Lippert-Rasmussen 2013.

Instead, let's imagine that shortly after changing his mind, Obama is in conversation with a Republican colleague who voices opposition to same-sex marriage. And suppose that in response, Obama experiences the sort of emotional response characteristic of blame (and the disposition to which constitutes caring about the relevant moral values), and voices his blame to the colleague. Isn't the colleague entitled to some sort of complaint about Obama's standing? Can't he say to Obama, "You've got no right to be upset with me or think poorly of me, since not too long ago you yourself espoused exactly the same views that I do"?

Or, to approach the same situation from a different perspective: upon hearing his Republican colleague voice opposition to same-sex marriage, what should Obama's response be? Would it be appropriate for Obama to feel and express resentment? By hypothesis, Obama regrets his previous position on these issues and blames himself for his previous views, so if he were to experience and express resentment, he wouldn't be trying to make an exception for himself. His blame wouldn't be morally objectionable, at least not for the reasons that Wallace thinks hypocritical moral address is morally objectionable. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it would still be inappropriate for Obama to be emotionally exercised in the way characteristic of blame, and certainly inappropriate for him to rebuke his colleague. Given Obama's recent history, a much more measured response seems called for, perhaps something along the lines of: "I used to feel that way, too, but you know what? After much deliberation, I changed my mind. Can I tell you why I disagree?" Even supposing that opposition to legalizing same-sex marriage is objectionable and that the Republican colleague is in the wrong, it nevertheless seems like *Obama* in particular is not in a position to blame his colleague, at least not in the same way in which, say, a lifelong supporter of same-sex marriage could do so. Why not? Well, what else could it be other than that Obama lacks the standing to blame, given how recently he changed his mind? But if Obama lacks the standing to blame in this case, even though blaming would not be morally objectionable, then complaints about standing are not best understood as accusations of morally objectionable blaming.¹⁶

But even if I'm wrong that a hypocritical blamer who blames himself can nevertheless lack the standing to blame, I still think that the complaint about standing to which the blamed person is entitled is not merely the complaint that the blamer is also doing something morally wrong. The complaint, when it is raised by someone who is being hypocritically blamed, is supposed to tell us something about how the blamed individual should (or can) respond to the blame she is receiving. As G. A. Cohen (2013) puts it, the complaint about standing is meant to be a way of "silencing" one's critics. And while pointing out that the hypocritical blamer is doing something morally wrong may convince him to stop blaming you, it may also simply convince him that he should be blaming himself as well, in which case it's hard to see exactly what the "silencing" effect would amount to. The relevant force of saying, "I don't have to take that from *you*", isn't merely that the hypocritical blamer ought to stop blaming or else blame himself; it's that *even if* the hypocritical blamer continues with blame, the blame is somehow *irrelevant* or *impertinent* or *something that can be ignored*. Again, as Cohen puts it, the relevant complaint is supposed to "disable moral condemnation" (Cohen 2013: 134). Pointing out that the hypocritical blamer is doing something morally wrong might, as a matter of fact, convince him to stop blaming you, but the complaint

¹⁶ Or, more precisely: the complaint can't be that in blaming, Obama is seeking to make an exception for himself. Perhaps Obama's blame could be morally objectionable for other reasons, but I'm inclined to think we'd be able to alter the example accordingly so that it would do the same work.

about standing is supposed to have more force than that. It's doesn't serve merely to *stop* the blame from happening, but to *disable* the blame in some way. An account of this disabling or silencing effect is what we set out to find, and it still eludes us.

Gerald Dworkin (2000) gets us a bit closer. His account begins with the observation that blame, especially expressed blame, has a *point*, namely "to have the person make some change in behavior, or dispositions, or character traits" (Dworkin 2000: 186). (This is *one* of its points, at least.) But typically, in order for a wrongdoer to be moved toward reform by someone's blame, the blamer must be someone whose opinions the wrongdoer cares about. And it is this insight that, according to Dworkin, allows us to see what lies behind the complaint about standingless blame. As he puts it (2000: 187):

The idea here is that the sanctions of morality—censure, ostracism, blame, disapproval, disgust—operate effectively only when they resonate with the person being sanctioned. The target of criticism feels that she is being distanced from a person, or a moral community, that she sees as legitimate and worthy. It is not sufficient that the criticism be correct or accurate. It must come from a source whose criticism I care about. It is because the criticism causes me to lose status in the eyes of the person who makes the criticism that it moves me.

Now we have an explanation for the requirement. When the person who calls attention to my character fault suffers from the very same fault, this puts him on a par with me—with respect to this fault at least. If I lose respect in his eyes because of the presence of this fault, he must lose respect in my eyes as well. But this means that I do not care as much whether he disapproves of my conduct. And this means that the criticism cannot be as effective as it normally would have been.

Since "we value being valued by those we value", blame is often effective at getting wrongdoers to shape up. But standingless blame fails to offer the wrongdoer the proper motivation, and this is the sense in which it is inappropriate. When a wrongdoer offers the complaint about standing – "Who are you to blame me?" – she is pointing out that the hypocritical blamer's blame will not in fact motivate her to shape up.

Like I said, I think this gets us closer because it takes seriously the "silencing" effect that the relevant complaint is supposed to have. Standingless blame doesn't just mean something for the blamer – that he is doing something unfitting or morally objectionable, for example – but it also means something for the person being blamed, that he "doesn't have to take it" when it comes from a hypocrite. But the account that Dworkin gives of this further element is too incidental. He is surely right that, as a matter of fact, the person who is being hypocritically blamed is much less likely to be motivated by the blame to shape up, and in that sense hypocritical blame will fail to achieve one of the primary aims of blame. But the relevant complaint is stronger than this. It's not merely, "Your blame doesn't motivate me." Rather, it's, "I'm *right* not to be motivated by your blame", or "I *shouldn't* be motivated by your blame." It's not merely, "I won't take it from you"; rather, it's "I don't *have to* take it from you". So although Dworkin is in the ballpark, we need something that captures the normativity.¹⁷

¹⁷ Moreover, even if the person being hypocritically blamed *is* thereby motivated to change their ways, this would be *in spite of* the fact that the hypocritical blamer lacks standing. Thanks to Philip Swenson for this point.

Macalester Bell (2013) gets us even closer. Although she is skeptical of the notion of standing in general, she nevertheless does a nice job of articulating the account that she is skeptical of, and it will prove instructive for us to consider it here. As she sees it, the challenge to standing is an attempt to dismiss the blame, where this is spelled out in terms of whether the hypocritical blamer's blame *provides the person blamed with a reason to shape up*. This gives us the normativity that was lacking in Dworkin's account – it's not just that the blamed person *won't* respect or be motivated by the hypocritical blamer's blame; it's also that the hypocritical blame provides the person blamed with *no reason* to shape up. So if you lack standing, Bell says, then “[your] reproach necessarily lacks moral propriety and may be dismissed without consideration of its content” (Bell 2013: 264).

As I said, Bell herself is skeptical that challenges to standing are ever legitimate, and this is because they smack of the *ad hominem* fallacy. We have to distinguish between the *person* who is blaming, on the one hand, and the *content* of the blame, on the other. Once we do that, Bell says, we can see that the challenge to standing moves illegitimately from a critique of the person issuing the blame – namely, “You’re a hypocrite” – to a dismissal of the content of their blame – namely, “Your blame doesn’t give me a reason to shape up”. But this move is clearly illegitimate. Regardless of the moral record of the blamer, the content of the blame may still have very important lessons to teach us. Bell says, “The educational or motivational value of blame is not undermined by the blamer’s hypocrisy; we can learn from the morally corrupt just as we can learn from the morally pure” (Bell 2013: 275). A bit later on she echoes this sentiment: “Targets of blame should resist the temptation to try to undermine criticism by bringing up the moral record of the criticizer. While it can be hard to hear, we often have reason to give uptake to criticism voiced by the morally flawed” (Bell 2013: 280). Bell rightly points out that blame has a number of aims, including the education of the wrongdoer and the avoidance of condonation on the part of the blamer. As long as the blame is fitting and achieves one of its aims, then, Bell says, the blame is morally appropriate (Bell 2013: 272). Since hypocritical blame can still manage to achieve some of the aims of blame, there is nothing morally untoward about it, and thus it is misguided to raise any worries about the blamer’s standing.

Although I agree with much of what Bell says, I disagree with the lesson that she draws. She is surely right that the content of hypocritical blame can nevertheless be instructive, and we would do well to pay attention to it and take it seriously. She’s also surely right that blame has multiple aims, and that even hypocritical blame can manage to achieve at least some of its many aims. Nevertheless, it seems to me that she misconstrues the nature of the complaint about standing. She construes it as an attempt to dismiss the content of the blame, and this leads her to think that it smacks of an *ad hominem*. But in its most familiar manifestations, the complaint about standing isn’t an attempt to dismiss the *content*; rather, it’s an attempt to dismiss (or silence) the *blamer*. The complaint, after all, isn’t that the blame is off-target, and we don’t even need to suppose that the person who is being blamed is uninterested in shaping up. The relevant complaint can be raised even if the person raising it isn’t trying to get off the hook, broadly speaking. What the complainant is saying, instead, is that even if they are on the hook, they aren’t on *the blamer’s* hook. Alternatively: that even if they agree that they need to answer for their wrongdoing, they don’t need to answer *to the blamer*. Because Bell focuses on the content of the blame rather than on the blamer’s relationship to the person being blamed, she is led to skepticism about the challenge to standing. So what we need to avoid such skepticism is a way of understanding how

the person being blamed can dismiss the blamer without thereby dismissing what the blamer has to say. And now, I think, we're at the heart of the matter.

5.

My favored account of what's going on when someone challenges the standing of a hypocritical blamer is captured by putting this sentence into the complainant's mouth: "What you're saying may give me a reason to shape up, but your saying it doesn't." In order to make this sentence intelligible and show how it can account for standard cases of standingless blame, though, we'll need take a page from Stephen Darwall (2006) and invoke the notion of a *second-personal reason*.

Suppose you are trying to get me to exercise. One way you could accomplish this goal is simply to force it upon me, say by convincing me to go out on your boat with you, throwing me overboard in the middle of the lake, and then heading back to shore without me. But we're better friends than that (or, perhaps, depending on your perspective, not quite as good friends as that would require), so you'd prefer to accomplish your goal by *giving me a reason* to (choose on my own to) exercise. Still, there are two ways you could do this. On the one hand, you could try to *convince* me by reminding me of my most recent visit to my doctor and the recommendations my doctor gave me, by observing out loud how cheap membership rates are at the local gym, by sending me links to articles demonstrating the positive effects of exercise on mental health and happiness, etc. If this is the path you take, then you are giving me a reason to exercise by directing my attention to the reasons that *there are* to exercise. The reasons are there independent of your attempts to get me to see them, though of course whether your attempt to convince me is successful will depend on how competent I think you are on the topic of exercise, and thus whether your report of the reasons really does justify my believing that there are those reasons. Whatever authority your advice has for me in this case, it is *third-personal* authority (Darwall 2006: 12).

Contrast this first way of giving me a reason to exercise with a second way. Imagine now that you are not only my friend, but also my superior officer, and we are in an appropriate military context. Now there is another way for you to give me a reason to exercise besides convincing me that it's good for me: you can simply *order* me to take a few laps around the track. Independent of whatever reasons I already had for getting some exercise, I now have a new and different sort of reason, namely that you demanded that I do so. Crucial to my having this reason, of course, are facts about you and your authority over me, but when these facts are in place, you are able to give me what Darwall calls a *second-personal reason*. Unlike the appeal to my doctor and reputable journal articles about the benefits of exercise, the reason you give me when you issue an order is a reason that "would not exist but for [your] authority to address it through [your] command" (Darwall 2006: 13). Your order is a "second-personal address", which has a "directive element" lacking in the mere persuasion case. As Darwall puts it (2006: 49):

As I understand it, second-personal address makes a claim on the addressee's will (and not, like advice, only on her beliefs about what there is reason for her to do). It presumes to tell another person, not just what to do in the way advice does, but also, in some way or to some extent, to do it.

Crucially, it isn't only in military contexts that second-personal reasons can be given. The phenomenon is, in fact, ubiquitous in interpersonal relationships in general.

Darwall's example is of someone who is stepping on your foot, and he asks us to consider two ways you might give that person a reason to get off your foot. On the one hand, you could point out that it is painful and that the person generally has reasons not to cause pain to other people without compensating goods, etc. On the other hand, you could simply demand that the person get off your foot. In the first case, you would be directing the person's attention to reasons that already exist; in the second case, you would be creating a new, second-personal, reason for the person to move their foot.

Or, take the example with which we began, of my daughter and her asparagus. There are certainly third-personal reasons for her to eat her vegetables, and if she were older, perhaps I would try to persuade her by directing her attention to those reasons. But parenting a young child by rational persuasion is often a doomed enterprise. So, instead of trying to get one's child to see the third-personal reasons, a parent might instead create a second-personal reason. This is, I submit, the sense in which "Because I said so" can be a perfectly legitimate answer to the child's exasperated question of why should eat her vegetables.¹⁸ And the distinction between second-personal and third-personal reasons can also explain the child's exasperation with the invocation of parental authority, since although that does answer one 'why' question in the vicinity, that's not the question the child was asking.

In both the parental case and the case of fellow members of the moral community, it's worth asking exactly what gives us the authority to make demands of each other in this way. (Darwall himself eventually uses the notion of second-personal reasons to ground a general moral framework.) But for our purposes we need only acknowledge that we do have such authority and generally presume that others in our moral community have it too (perhaps that's partly what constitutes the moral community in the first place).

Having added second-personal reasons to our conceptual repertoire, the next point to make is that blame, at least expressed blame, is a form of second-personal address, and as such, it typically attempts to address second-personal reasons to the person being blamed. Actually, the point I need to make is even more modest than that, since we've explicitly restricted our focus here to cases of hypocritical moral address and the associated complaint that arises in that context. My suggestion (which we have yet to flesh out) is that the relevant complaint should be understood in terms of the notion of a second-personal reason, so all I need here is the claim that when the complaint about standing is in order, the hypocritical blamer was engaged in an attempt to address second-personal reasons to the person being blamed (perhaps not consciously under that description, of course). But what does that look like, and what sorts of reasons does expressed blame attempt to address?

Whatever your favored account of the nature of blame, it is widely accepted that expressions of blame (e.g., verbal rebukes or accusatory questions) are *communicative*; they are moves in a moral conversation. But what sorts of moves are they? Plausibly, they are something like demands: specifically, demands to explain or justify one's behavior or, if it can't be justified, to acknowledge wrongdoing and apologize. In his influential discussion of the reactive attitudes, P. F. Strawson explicitly connects sentiments like resentment and indignation with "an expectation of, and demand for, the manifestation of a certain degree of goodwill" (Strawson 1962: 84). (In fact, Strawson makes the claim that our disposition to feel the reactive attitudes "*is* the making of the

¹⁸ Invoking one's parental authority in this way can, of course, be abused. Exactly when and why an invocation would count as an abuse of authority is an interesting question.

demand” (Strawson 1962: 90.) When someone apparently manifests ill-will toward you, your natural response is resentment that your normative expectations have been flouted.¹⁹ What I’m saying here is that the next move in the conversation often embodies a demand in much the same way. When I express my resentment to you by saying something like, “How could you?”, what I’m doing is addressing what we might call an *answerability demand*. In addressing you in this way, I make certain assumptions about you – minimally, that you have the capacities to engage in a moral conversation (see Watson 1987; Darwall 2006; McKenna 2012) – and I attribute your action to you in a way that makes it appropriate for me to ask you to explain yourself to me, or if you can’t, to apologize or otherwise make amends. I need not consciously think of myself as doing this, of course, but the point is that the *illocutionary force* of my expressed blame is to address an answerability demand to you (see Austin 1975; Darwall 2006: 52-55).²⁰

In this way, expressed blame is often an attempt to address a second-personal reason. As Darwall puts it (2006: 76):

If you express resentment to someone for not moving his foot from on top of yours, you implicitly demand that he do so. And any second-personal reason you implicitly address presupposes, first, that he can recognize the validity of your demand and, second, that he can move his foot simply by recognizing a conclusive reason for acting deriving from your authoritative demand (whether or not, it is worth noting, you have his sympathy).

The remark in parentheses at the end is meant to emphasize the distinction between addressing second-personal reasons and addressing third-personal reasons. You might get the person who is stepping on your foot to move their foot by pointing out that he is violating certain moral norms, and that he cares about not being someone who violates moral norms, but this would be a purely third-personal form of persuasion. On the other hand, when you express your resentment, you are attempting to give him an *additional* reason to move their foot, namely that you’ve demanded that he do so. If he refuses, then he is not only continuing to violate a moral obligation, but he is also adding insult to injury by treating your demand as though it is not authoritative.

It is the presence of this *additional* reason in contexts of second-personal address that, I claim, allows us to make sense of the complaint about standing. Essentially, the complaint can be formulated as a sort of protest against the demand that the hypocritical blamer is making, via their expressed blame, of the person he’s blaming. The person being blamed might even say something like, “I don’t have to answer to you”. Unlike Bell, I don’t think this is an attempt to dismiss the content of the hypocritical blame. Rather, it seems like an attempt to dismiss the *blamer himself*. And the notion of a second-personal reason helps us to make sense of how a blamer can be dismissed without (the content of) their blame being dismissed. Whereas the content of the blame might, if the person who is being blamed takes it to be accurate, point to a third-personal reason to explain or apologize, etc., the expression of blame is also attempting to address a *second-personal reason* to explain or apologize, and the relevant complaint is that the hypocritical blamer is failing to address that reason successfully. So, whereas it would ordinarily add insult to injury to refuse to

¹⁹ On the notion of *normative expectation*, see Wallace 1994. The contrast is with *predictive expectations*. Whereas the latter are beliefs about what will come to pass; the former are standards that we *hold* others to.

²⁰ The notion of answerability looms large in the literature on moral responsibility, and is sometimes thought to be the central notion. See, for example, Smith 2015. For the view that answerability cannot capture everything we want from a theory of responsibility, see Shoemaker 2015. Nothing I say in this paper hinges on this dispute.

explain yourself to someone who is blaming you; in the case of hypocritical blame, refusing the answerability demand embodied in the expressed blame is not inappropriate.

Gary Watson gives a nice description of the sort of normative infelicity at issue, in a discussion of whether it makes sense to blame psychopaths, individuals who by hypothesis are not able to grasp moral reasons. Watson points out that there are two ways that an attempt to address a second-personal reason might misfire: on the one hand, the addressee may not have the competence to recognize the second-personal authority of the person addressing the demand. This, Watson thinks, is what makes blaming psychopaths inappropriate. But for the sake of contrast, Watson also describes the other type of misfire, which is when the person attempting to address the second-personal reason lacks the authority to do so. Watson says (2011: 314-315):

I can legitimately require others to do things only if they have good reasons to act in this way because I have required it. In other words, it is normatively infelicitous to make demands of people who have no good reasons to regard the demanding as legitimate. To illustrate, consider the infelicity of my ordering you not to park on the public street in front of my house, when I have no authority to control this space. Whether or not you have any reasons to refrain from parking in that spot, my telling you not to is not among them. I have presumed a power I do not have.

This, essentially, is what I'm suggesting happens when the person who is hypocritically blamed lodges a complaint about standing. To paraphrase Watson: whether or not the person being blamed has any reasons to apologize or explain himself, the fact that the hypocritical blamer is (implicitly) demanding that he do so is not among their reasons for doing so. It is precisely in this sense that the hypocrite has lost their moral voice.²¹

6.

To strengthen my argument that what constitutes the hypocrite's lack of standing is their inability to address second-personal reasons, let me briefly consider another puzzle about hypocrisy that's in the same neighborhood. It's this: hypocrisy can seem to both *undermine* and also *enhance* one's standing in a moral conversation. Although the question we have been focusing on is, "Who are *you* to say that to me?", often there seems to be a perfectly good answer to that question, namely, "Someone who has made the same mistakes." And doesn't that perfectly good answer (if true, and sincere, etc.) serve to cure the hypocrite of their moral laryngitis? I suspect that this thought is what is driving the intuitions of so many theorists (including Wallace from above) who say that as

²¹ Though I don't have space to explore it here, I suspect there will be similar standing norms that apply to praise, and those will work in a similar way. Think, for example, of the political candidate who has carefully considered whether to support a particular policy on immigration, and who has arrived at the conclusion that they should indeed support it, despite how controversial it is. Then they receive a letter from a constituent who also favors the policy, but who favors it for what are clearly racist reasons. In this letter, the constituent urges the candidate to vote in favor of the policy, and in fact the candidate does later vote in favor of the policy. But the candidate might reasonably want to distance themselves from this particular constituent, despite the fact that they favor the same policy. The candidate might do this by saying (if only to themselves): yes, I voted for the policy, but not because this constituent asked me to.

long as the hypocrite also blames himself, no complaint about standing can arise.²² So, somehow a hypocrite seems simultaneously to be last person who should address the moral faults of others (since they are no better), but also the person who is most well-placed to address the moral faults of others (since they can empathize and perhaps encourage reform). How is the hypocrite's voice both silenced and also amplified, seemingly at the same time?

The obvious resolution here is to distinguish between blame and advice. A hypocrite is the last person who should be blaming (because of issues of standing), but also perhaps the person who is the most well-placed to offer advice (because they've been through the same thing before). What's perhaps less obvious is how exactly blame and advice differ such that a hypocrite can be barred from one and well-suited for the other. Taking a cue from the above discussion, it seems like we can articulate the difference by distinguishing the type of reason that each activity intends to convey. Put simply, whereas advice-giving is an activity that merely involves pointing to third-personal reasons for action, blaming is an activity that involves attempting to address second-personal reasons, as well. So, we might draw the distinction between blame and advice by distinguishing between practical standing and epistemic standing. To address a second-personal reason successfully, you need practical standing, which is undermined by hypocrisy (or, more precisely, its potential manifestation in blame). But to address a third-personal reason successfully, you just need epistemic standing, which is enhanced by experience.²³

Of course, in practice the distinction between (expressed) blame and (voiced) advice is blurry. Take, for example, my partner's reaction upon hearing me recite the classic Peter Singer argument for the conclusion that we ought to give a lot of our money away. Her immediate response was, "Well how much does he give away?" At first I was inclined to think that this question was essentially an inappropriate *ad hominem* against Singer's argument, and I (quite arrogantly) tried to explain to my (non-philosopher) partner that there's a difference between what an argument says, on the one hand, and who is saying it, on the other. Forget that the argument was concocted by Peter Singer, I said, and just imagine that you found it in a book written anonymously. But she wasn't convinced, and thought that such a proposed separation of author and argument was artificial. And, upon further reflection, I think my partner and I are both right. (Which means, yes, that she was right.) How can that be?

Having been trained in the world of professional philosophy, I have learned to "hear" the conclusions of arguments, even moral arguments, as mere assertions about how the impersonal facts stand. So, when I read Peter Singer telling us what we ought to do, I take him to be offering something like moral advice, merely pointing to third-personal reasons that we all have for giving more of our money away. My partner, on the other hand, hears the conclusion of his argument as *blame* (or, as an attempt to pass judgment on his audience). And it's this way of construing the argument (as blame) that makes her inquiry into his hypocrisy completely in order. Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance put this point nicely (2009: 109):

²² In fact, these theorists may want to say that if the hypocrite also blames himself, then they aren't a hypocrite after all. Though it would take us too far afield to explore the details, I'm inclined to think that performing actions with conflicting meaning can be enough for one to count as a hypocrite even if neither action conflicts with the mental states of the agent at the time each action is performed. This would be a purely behavioral hypocrisy, perhaps, but hypocrisy nonetheless. Thanks to Philip Swenson here.

²³ As Philip Swenson has pointed out to me in personal correspondence, giving advice while lacking relevant experience seems most problematic in cases where the advice is *against* some course of action, rather than *in favor* of some course of action. It's an interesting question why there should be this asymmetry.

In practice, it is often hard not to smuggle a subtle holding into a second-personal prescriptive; when I point out an ‘ought’ to someone I am almost inevitably heard as requesting that she obey it, rather than as merely exhibiting its salience so that it can do its own normative work.

Statements that begin with the words ‘you ought’ may simply be intended as moral advice, but when they are said out loud – tone of voice, facial expression, and body language are often crucial here, too – they can easily *seem like* attempts to address answerability demands (hence, second-personal reasons) to the hearer. Though the distinction is difficult to maintain in practice, it’s nevertheless an important one for helping us to understand the way in which hypocrisy can affect the character of a moral conversation. Again, my proposal is that the trouble with hypocrisy is best understood in terms of the activity of addressing second-personal reasons.

7.

Even if the proposal is right – that is, even if what’s lost when a hypocrite loses the standing to blame is the ability to successfully address second-personal reasons via their expressed blame – an important question still remains unanswered, namely: *how does it work?* The question we’ve been focusing on is about the *content* of the complaint about standing, but another good question is about the *mechanism* by which the standing is lost, when it’s lost. Granted that having done similar things disables you from being able successfully to address second-personal reasons via expressed blame, how does it do this?

I confess not to have an answer to this question, but in closing let me consider two (admittedly obscure) possibilities. The first comes from Darwall, who takes the second-personal nature of blame to show that when we blame others, we must presuppose that the objects of our blame themselves have second-personal competence and are able to “hold themselves responsible by self-addressed demands from a perspective that we and they share” (Darwall 2006: 112). Darwall intends this to be a point about what we must assume about each other when we attempt to address second-personal reasons to each other. In particular, we must assume that others have certain *capacities*. Darwall thus attempts to derive, in Strawsonian fashion, the conditions of morally responsible agency from the presuppositions of second-personal address. But there’s something else that we might squeeze out of Darwall’s remarks here.

Even supposing that an addressee has the capacity for appreciating the notions of second-personal authority and second-personal reasons, something might still be missing, namely a coherent “perspective that we and they share”. Perhaps in the case of hypocritical moral address, there is no such perspective. As the person being blamed, your blame only conveys a second-personal reason if I can take up your perspective and address the reason to myself.²⁴ But when you are blaming me hypocritically, it’s not clear that there is even a coherent perspective for me to “take up” (insofar as hypocrisy is a form of inconsistency and hence is rationally criticizable), so one of the presuppositions of successful second-personal address may be missing. To make good on this suggestion, we’d have to look more closely at the nature of hypocrisy, and the precise sense in which rationality is built into the second-personal perspective.

²⁴ Guilt is also a form of second-personal address, albeit to oneself. See Darwall 2006: 72.

The other relatively obscure suggestion for understanding the mechanism by which hypocrisy might undermine standing is inspired by a remark made by Kukla and Lance, who point out that “...only beings who are recognized as members of a discursive community count as normative subjects capable of having agent-relative commitments and entitlements” (2009: 193). Here the emphasis is on the social dimension of language and reason-giving, and perhaps there will also be an irreducibly social element to determining who has the authority to address second-personal reasons for action, as well. Perhaps, in fact, our refusal to allow hypocrites a moral voice is the very thing that silences them.²⁵

8.

Although invoking second-personal reasons helps us to make progress on understanding the standing to blame, much remains up in the air. Recall, for example, that I have explicitly restricted my focus to cases of *expressed blame*, and even then, to cases of *hypocritical moral address*. There are many other responses to wrongdoing that plausibly count as blaming responses, generally speaking, and there are many other ways one can lose one’s standing to blame than by being a hypocrite. A full analysis of the standing to blame will therefore be broader in scope than what I have undertaken here. But I think the account offered here of what constitutes lack of standing in the case of hypocritical moral address is a step in the right direction. Hypocritical moral address may be unfitting, morally wrong, and pointless, but none of those things best explains the force of the complaint about standing. Rather, that complaint is about who has to answer to whom (and hence about who can legitimately demand answers from whom). And that means that discussions about standing are going to have to take seriously the nature and presuppositions of second-personal address.

²⁵ It might be instructive here also to consider other contexts in which we can legitimately refuse an answerability demand. For example, in a court of law, a witness need not answer certain questions posed to them if the lawyer who poses the question has violated certain courtroom procedures. Of course, analogizing moral blame with institutional blame has limitations. See, for example, Shoemaker 2013.

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