

## Does Lack of Commitment Undermine the Hypocrite's Standing to Blame?

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**ABSTRACT** *According to an influential account of standing, hypocritical blamers lack standing to blame in virtue of their lack of commitment to the norm etc. which they invoke. Nevertheless, the commitment account has the wrong shape for it to explain why hypocrites lack standing to blame. Building on the lessons of that critique I propose a novel account of what undermines standing to blame – the comparative fairness account. This differs from the commitment account and the other prominent account of why hypocrites lack standing to blame offered in the literature: the moral equality account. Finally, I observe that, intuitively, lack of commitment undermines standing to blame and that many hypocrites might lack standing for that reason also. Moreover, typically the hypocrite's failure to address their own faults is a feature in virtue of which, other things being equal, the hypocrite is less committed to the norm in question. These two observations provide the basis for an error theory of the commitment account's appeal, despite its inability to explain why, qua hypocritical blamer, one lacks standing to blame.*

### 1. Introduction

We are dining together, and you order steak. So do I. Halfway through mine, I start blaming you for your choice of dish, pausing occasionally to chew another morsel of my own tasty beef. By eating meat, one contributes to climate change, the suffering of animals, and hunger in the poorest parts of the world, and that makes it wrong – or so I argue, concluding that your choice of dish is morally appalling. Whether or not these are in fact effects of meat-eating, my blaming of you is hypocritical. I know I am doing exactly what I am blaming you for doing. Yet in no way do I address what, by my own standards, is the same wrongdoing on my part.<sup>1</sup> Hence, I have ‘no standing’, as it is commonly put, to blame you. You can appropriately respond by saying something like ‘Look who’s talking’.<sup>2</sup> You can do so even if you agree that your choice of dish is, for the reasons I have stated, morally appalling. Your point, in denying that I have standing to blame you, is that I, as a *hypocritical blamer*, am effectively holding myself and you, my *blamee*, asymmetrically accountable. That is something I am not entitled to do. Were the vegan couple sitting at the table next to us eating asparagus risotto to start castigating us both for eating meat, we could not dismiss their blaming of us as hypocritical and thus standingless.

Call the common view that a hypocritical blamer who blames someone for violating a norm that they violate to the same, or a greater, degree without appropriately addressing their own norm violation lacks standing to blame *the Standard View*.<sup>3</sup> I will take this view for granted and concentrate on the following question: what fact about the hypocritical blamer explains their lack of standing to blame?

In the ethics of blame literature, essentially there are two answers to this question. One is:

*The moral equality account:* What makes the hypocrite lack standing to blame is that his blame, or some other fact about him, clashes with the basic moral equality of persons.

Moral equality accounts differ on what the relevant standing-undermining fact about the hypocrite is and how it clashes with the basic moral equality of persons. For Fritz and Miller, the relevant fact is that the hypocritical blamer has an unfair differential blaming disposition, which involves an implicit denial of basic moral equality, which in turn means the hypocrite has forfeited the right to blame.<sup>4</sup> For Wallace, the relevant fact is that the hypocritical blamer gives greater weight to their own interest in avoiding blame than the similar interests of their blamees.<sup>5</sup> Wallace holds that ascribing unequal weight to the equal interests of different persons is incompatible with basic moral equality.

The main alternative to the moral equality account is:

*The commitment account:* What makes the hypocrite lack standing to blame is his lack of commitment to the norm he invokes.

On this view, the reason we can dismiss blame from hypocrites is that they are not appropriately committed to the norms they blame others for violating.<sup>6</sup> The commitment account has several attractive features. First, in many instances of hypocritical blame: blamers are indeed uncommitted to the norm to which they appeal; this lack of commitment is tied to their hypocrisy, for example, because the latter manifests, or is even constituted in part by, the former; and the fact that they are not committed to the norm they are invoking is a ground for indirectly rejecting their blame (see Section 5). Second, the commitment account explains why one regains one's standing to blame through moral improvement when one has violated the relevant blame-warranting norm in the past. After all, the improvement, if it is of the appropriate kind, involves a significant increase in one's commitment to the norm.<sup>7</sup> Third, the commitment account suggests a natural explanation of why a critic can be in a position to blame violators of a norm which, out of weakness of will, they themselves have violated despite their commitment to it.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the commitment account can be applied to norms other than moral norms. Hypocrisy theorists have persuasively argued that there is such a thing as hypocritical epistemic blame.<sup>9</sup> Suppose that, appealing to epistemic norms, I criticize you for embracing conspiracy theories about the 2020 US presidential election on shaky grounds, but I also believe the Cold War was a cover-up concealing collaboration between the US and the USSR on the ground that otherwise the KGB would have revealed that the Apollo moon landings were fake. Plausibly, the same features that are at play in similar cases involving moral norms undermine my standing to engage in this epistemic blaming.<sup>10</sup>

I will argue that, despite these attractions, the commitment account of lack of standing to blame must be rejected. I will also sketch an alternative to both the commitment and moral equality accounts which I call *the comparative unfairness account*. This account is immune to standard challenges to the two dominant accounts and has additional attractions of its own.<sup>11</sup>

Section 2 briefly examines two variants of the commitment account. Section 3 argues that appeals to lack of commitment have the wrong shape for explaining why hypocrites lack standing. In the light of this negative argument, Section 4 sketches the comparative

unfairness account of hypocrites' lack of standing to blame. Section 5 then explores what I regard as the kernel of truth in the commitment account – which is that, independently of hypocrisy, blame can be deflected by pointing out that, in a non-comparative sense, the blamer is uncommitted to the norm to which they are appealing. Section 6 concludes.

Two preliminary clarifications are necessary. First, blame is a multifaceted phenomenon. I will focus on blame understood not as a reactive emotion, but as an illocutionary act. In the simplest case, the blamer communicates to the blamee that they (the blamee) acted in a blameworthy way and directs that some kind of uptake, such as an apology, is required.<sup>12</sup> Second, even when we narrow the focus to blaming in speech acts, it is tricky to define hypocritical blame. For instance, is it crucial to hypocritical blame that, by the lights of the blamer, the blamer's faults are greater than that of the blamee, or is what counts whether, according to some objective moral standard, the blamer's faults are greater? Is a blamer, who is disposed to repress memories of their own greater faults, hypocritical, when, in motivated obliviousness to their own greater faults, they blame someone for this person's much lesser fault? However, in the interest of focusing on commitment I shall set such (for present purposes largely irrelevant) complications aside.

## 2. Variants of the Commitment Account

To assess the merits of the commitment account we need a better understanding of what commitment is.<sup>13</sup> I shall extract two accounts of commitment from the writings of Patrick Todd and Stefan Riedener.<sup>14</sup> Using these, I will distinguish between a two-component and a more complex account of motivation, briefly indicating some crucial differences between them as well as problems for them.

According to Patrick Todd, 'if you lack the requisite commitment to the given values, you lack the standing to blame those who would violate them'.<sup>15</sup> Requisite commitment 'consists, minimally, in endorsement of the value as a genuine value, together with at least some degree of motivation to act in accordance with the value'.<sup>16</sup> Since endorsement and motivation are minima of standing-preserving commitment, they are probably necessary but not sufficient for such standing, on Todd's view. Hence:

*The two-component view:* X has standing-enabling commitment to norm N only if X: (1) suitably endorses N (*endorsement component*), and (2) is suitably motivated to act in accordance with N (*motivation component*).

Stefan Riedener provides a slightly more detailed account of commitment.<sup>17</sup> He holds that 'to have the standing to blame, one must blame another person in light of some norm N only if one oneself takes N seriously'. When Riedener talks about taking a norm seriously, he is pressing into service:

a rich notion, concerning a range of intentions, actions, attitudes and dispositions. To take seriously the norm against aggressiveness, say, means to try to avoid aggressiveness and (presumably) standardly succeed in doing so, to feel remorse or make amends if one has been aggressive, to try to prevent others from being aggressive and blame them if they've responsibly been so, and so on.<sup>18</sup> It arguably means that one does all of this responsibly, and for roughly the right reasons, and for some nontrivial period of time. And it arguably also means

something about what one's intentions, actions and attitudes would be in counterfactual worlds ... Arguably, you needn't perform perfectly in all of these respects in order to take a norm sufficiently seriously. For instance ... you might sometimes fail to blame aggressors to quite the appropriate extent. And yet if you're thoroughly peaceful and disposed to blame yourself after the slightest undue aggression, you may still take our norm sufficiently seriously.<sup>19</sup>

Riedener's account is close to Todd's. It includes both an endorsement and a motivation component. However, it differs from Todd's in that the motivation component also addresses both the reasons why the agent is motivated to act in accordance with the norm, as well as how the agent responds to violations of N. Arguably, this amounts to an improvement relative to Todd's account in that, plausibly, our commitment to a norm is manifested not just in our motivation to conform with it, but also in our response to violations of it. Also, Riedener's account points to three additional components of commitment:

*The complex view:* X has standing-enabling commitment to norm N only if X does all of the following to a sufficient degree: (1) suitably endorses N, (2) is suitably motivated to act in accordance with N for roughly the right reasons and to respond properly to violations of N, (3) has suitably acted or been disposed to act in accordance with N (*behavioral component*), and (4) satisfies (1–3) for some non-trivial period of time (*temporal component*); and (5) all of this is true in some relevant counterfactual worlds (*modal component*).

One final apparent feature of Riedener's account, which merits commenting on, is that on his view there can be trade-offs between the different components of commitment, for example, you can have a sufficient level of commitment and, thus, standing to blame even if you do not do very well in terms of your response to others' violations of N as long as you do very well with regard to N when it comes to the behavioral component. This feature is significant because all components of commitment on Todd's and Riedener's accounts are scalar items. Hence, it appears that, provided trade-offs between the different components are possible, the same level of commitment can be realized in quite different ways. This seems like another plausible feature of Riedener's account. After all, two persons who differ in opposite directions when it comes to their motivation to act in accordance with N as well as in their responses to violations of N might, overall, be equally committed to the norm, even if they realize this level of commitment in different ways.

However, perhaps not all the aspects of commitment Riedener identifies bear on standing to blame. Consider Riedener's case of Adam, who is completely insensitive to people's pain except insofar as he conscientiously abides by a norm of not inflicting pain on others on Tuesdays. Plausibly, he does not have the required 'intentions, actions, attitudes and dispositions' not to inflict pain on people on Tuesdays for anything remotely like the 'right reasons'. Thus, on Riedener's view Adam might have no standing to blame people who hurt others on Tuesdays for violating the no-hurting-on-Tuesdays norm, because he accepts and complies with this norm for the wrong reasons. Contrast Adam with Adam\*. Adam\* accepts a derivative no-hurting-on-Tuesdays norm for the right reasons, having a worked-out, well-justified moral theory. However, Adam\* occasionally hurts people on Tuesdays, which Adam, who accepts the norm for irrelevant fetishistic reasons, never does. Suppose also that both blame others for violating the norm. Intuitively, I would

say, it is the reflexive endorser Adam\* who is the standing-deficient, hypocritical blamer, not Adam. Assuming it allows trade-offs between the degree to which the different components of commitment are satisfied, Riedener's account is compatible with the opposite judgment.<sup>20</sup>

My key points from this brief comparison of Todd's and Riedener's remarks on the nature of commitment are as follows. First, different theorists understand standing-relevant commitment quite differently and in potentially conflicting ways. Second, on any plausible account of it, commitment is a multifactorial thing and a simple additive model of what overall commitment is looks inadequate. Third, the aspects of commitment that we can extract from the work of standing theorists (endorsement, motivation, behavior, time, and modality) need clarification, and in some cases (e.g. motivation for the right reasons as in the comparison of Adam and Adam\*) their variation seems to be irrelevant to standing to blame. These points make it reasonable to ask whether alternative accounts are available. I take on this question in the next three sections.

### 3. The Non-Comparativity of Commitment

I will now argue that any theory merely citing the hypocritical blamer's *deficient* commitment has the wrong shape, as it were, for explaining lack of standing. Hypocrisy is a comparative matter. Whether one's blaming of another is hypocritical depends crucially on how one's own faults, action-wise, compare with the blamee's: specifically, are the blamer's faults at least as great as the blamee's?<sup>21</sup> Presumably, however, if the degree of an individual's commitment to a norm depends on non-comparative factors, such as the degree to which she is motivated by, or disposed to act in accordance with, that norm, it will be possible for someone to be at greater fault vis-à-vis norm N than another person whom she blames for violating N even though she, the blamer, is more committed to N. On the commitment account interpreted as focusing on whether the blamer's commitment is stronger or weaker than the blamee's, this blamer would have standing to blame. This, I suggest, is counterintuitive.

In reply, it might be said that, on the commitment account, what matters is that the blamer is sufficiently committed to the norm relative to some absolute scale of commitment, not how the blamer and the blamee's levels of commitment compare.<sup>22</sup> However, consider Jack, who occasionally flies; Al, who flies an awful lot; and Greta, who worries about the climate and very rarely flies. Suppose we say Jack has no standing to blame Greta for flying because his occasional flying shows, or makes it the case, that he is insufficiently committed to the norm 'Don't fly'.<sup>23</sup> If so, and if standing to blame depends on one's absolute level of commitment as measured by non-comparative features, it follows that Jack has no standing to blame Al, either. However, intuitively Jack does have standing to do just that. Al cannot reasonably complain, 'Who are you to judge me? You fly occasionally', because Jack can retort, 'True, we both violate the norm, but I do so to a much lesser degree than you do'.<sup>24</sup> Admittedly, we could focus on how the commitment of the hypocritical blamer compares with that of the blamee, but, as already indicated, there is no conceptual guarantee that the commitment of the hypocritical blamer to the norm in question will be lower than that of the blamee. One reason why is that a blamee can dismiss hypocritical blame as *ipso facto* standingless even if he is not committed to (or even committed against) this norm. For example, Jack can dismiss Al's blame for flying too much

as hypocritical even if he thinks that climate change does not give rise to any personal duty not to fly and, thus, is even less committed to the norm in question than Al is. This consideration offers the basis of a serious challenge to the commitment account – one that can be represented informally as follows (henceforth: *the Blamer–Blamee Relativity Objection*):

- (1) Jack can lack standing to blame Greta for violating N and have standing to blame Al for violating N.
- (2) (1) can only be explained by how Jack, Greta, and Al compare pairwise in some dimension.
- (3) It is not the case that how people compare pairwise in their commitment to N determines whether one of them has standing to blame the other.
- (4) Hence, how Jack, Greta, and Al compare pairwise in their commitment to N does not explain (1).
- (5) Any account of standing that cannot explain (1) should be rejected.
- (6) The commitment account explains (1) only if how Jack, Greta, and Al compare pairwise in their commitment to N explains (1).
- (7) Hence, the commitment account of standing should be rejected.

In defense of (1), I appeal to what I suspect will be the reader's intuition about the Jack, Greta, and Al case, and to the general view that hypocrisy is standingless (and particularly objectionable) when the blamer's faults are greater than the blamee's.<sup>25</sup>

In defense of (2), I note what the only alternative commitment-based explanation would look like. This explanation would have to consist in assessing how each of the three persons involved score on some absolute dimension and then, independently, asking how they compare with each other, in order to determine whether they have standing to blame. However, as I have indicated, such a procedure could not result in the set of judgments that Jack has standing to blame (Al) (because, as an absolute matter, he scores sufficiently highly on commitment) and that Jack has no standing to blame (Greta) (because he scores insufficiently highly on commitment).

Premise (3) is strongly supported by the fact that it is not generally the case that to assess whether someone engages in standingless blame, we seek, or should seek, to determine their comparative levels of commitment. And even if we did, or simply happened to know what these levels are, we would not infer from the mere fact that the blamer is less committed to the value in question than his blamee that he has no standing to blame. If I have never violated N, but have some doubts about whether N really is a valid norm and am at best moderately motivated to act in accordance with N, whereas you are strongly convinced that N is valid and strongly motivated to act in accordance with it, although on a couple of occasions (perhaps following considerable temptation) you have violated it yourself, you cannot dismiss my blame as standingless on the ground that I am less committed to N than you are. But if being less committed to N in such a case does not undermine standing to blame, then less commitment to N cannot be what undermines standing in the case of hypocritical blame either.

(1)–(3) entail (4). (5) is true, because a strong desideratum for any account of what undermines lack of standing to blame is that it explains blamer–blamee relativity of standing: that one and the same person – Jack in our case – can have standing to blame a second

person with greater faults for violating N and nevertheless have no standing to blame a third person with lesser faults for violating N.

It might be protested that while the stated desideratum is important, (5) is nevertheless false, because, ultimately, whether one should accept an account of standing to blame depends on how its strengths and weaknesses compare with those of competing accounts. This point is well taken, but if it is accepted (5) can be weakened accordingly. Also, failing to satisfy the stated desideratum is such a serious deficiency of the commitment account that it makes it reasonable to expect that there are other, better accounts. In the next section I will propose one – one that differs from both the commitment and moral equality accounts.

(6) is true because if the commitment account is to explain (1) it must do so by appeal to the involved parties' levels of commitment compared pairwise, but according to (4) there is no such explanation. And (4)–(6) entail (7). This concludes my presentation of the Blamer–Blamee Relativity Objection to any commitment account of the hypocrite's lack of standing to blame.

#### 4. The Comparative Unfairness Account

Assuming the Blamer–Blamee Relativity Objection is sound, we need a different account of why the hypocrite lacks standing to blame – one with the right shape. I propose:

*The comparative unfairness account:* What makes the hypocrite lack standing to blame is the fact that hypocritical blaming involves comparative unfairness to the blamee in the form of an inappropriate focus on the blamee's similar or less serious faults.<sup>26</sup>

The 'comparative unfairness' here can be explained as follows. Hypocritical blamers ignore their own greater or similar faults while holding blamees accountable for smaller or similar faults even though, given how the two parties' faults compare, the focus should be reversed. This account makes no reference to the strength of the commitments of the blamer and the blamee to the relevant norm. It refers only to the comparative faults of the blamer and the blamee.<sup>27</sup>

It is highly intuitive that hypocritical blame involves unfairness. Still, some might think that we need a deeper understanding of what the precise unfairness amounts to, even though, on most accounts of it, hypocritical blame probably does involve unfairness. On John Broome's influential account of it, unfairness occurs when people's equally weighty claims are satisfied to unequal degrees.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps we can tweak this and say that unfairness also arises when people's liabilities (in the case at hand: to be subjected to blame) are actualized to an unequal degree. By 'actualization of a liability' I mean that the treatment, at the hands of a particular blamer, which the liable person is liable to is a treatment that the liable person is subjected to.

To apply the comparative unfairness account, one needs to say something about what determines someone's degree of fault. Proponents of the account may disagree, for example, over whether, or in what way, a wrongdoer's motives bear on her degree of fault. They could also differ over which factors, other than the comparative faults identified, determine whether a blamer's focus on the blamee's similar or less serious faults is 'inappropriate'. For instance, blaming can be costly, and presumably blamers could be in a situation

where it is their agent-prerogative not to blame everyone in a group of relevantly similar blamees. Proponents of the comparative unfairness account might present different answers to the question of whether a selective pattern of blame falling within the blamer's agent-relative prerogative is 'inappropriate'. It is plausible to assume, therefore, that applications of the comparative unfairness account will be governed by contextual factors, and that, like the commitment account, it is a family of different views.<sup>29</sup>

The comparative unfairness account clearly differs from the commitment account, however commitment is understood. It makes no reference to the degree to which the blamers endorse the norm to which they appeal in their blame. Comparative unfairness is merely a matter of the relative magnitude of the faults exhibited by the hypocritical blamer and the blamee. A crucial assumption here is that one's level of commitment is not determined solely by one's past faults.<sup>30</sup> However, that assumption seems eminently reasonable. First, of the two accounts surveyed in Section 2, one (Todd's) makes no reference to past faults, in the form of non-compliance (either as constitutive, or indicative, of commitment); and both include determinants of the level of commitment other than past faults, thereby seemingly ensuring that levels of fault and commitment can diverge. Second, if (implausibly) one's level of commitment were simply constituted by one's level of past faults, an appeal to level of commitment could no longer explain why the person with greater faults is in no position to blame the person with lesser faults. Such an appeal would simply be another way of stating their differing levels of fault.

The unfairness account is also different from the moral equality account (see Section 1). It makes no reference to basic moral equality. Some might suggest that appearances are deceptive here since we cannot make sense of unfairness without appealing to basic moral equality. However, this is not the case. Suppose for the sake of argument that the hypocritical blamer has higher moral status than the blamee.<sup>31</sup> That would not imply that the hypocritical, high-moral-status blamer is entitled, in fairness, to ignore his own greater faults and hold the low-moral-status blamee accountable for her lesser faults. The possession of higher moral status does not license one to do whatever one likes to those with lower moral status. When it comes to blame for faults, one might say that if the higher moral status derives from a more elevated level of moral powers, the high-status person's interest in avoiding blame has no greater weight just because the interest-holder has a higher moral status. While the interests of individuals with a higher moral status might generally count for more, morally speaking, than those with lower status, this does not imply that any interest of an individual with higher moral status counts for more than the comparable interest of a lower moral status individual. 'Noblesse oblige', as they reminded one another in feudal societies with social hierarchies. Why should we not say, similarly, 'Greater moral powers and higher moral status oblige' in a world involving a hierarchy of moral status?<sup>32</sup>

Should we accept the comparative unfairness account? Let me start by noting that it is well placed to capture the following intuition. Suppose I have granted you permission to subject me to what would, in the absence of my permission, have been a comparative unfairness to me. Moreover, suppose that having accepted my permission you start blaming me for being late for our meetings even though you tend to arrive much later. Intuitively, I cannot now dismiss your blame as standingless.<sup>33</sup> However, presumably I could have done so if unfairness did not undermine standing to blame on the plausible assumption that, given my permission, it is not unfair of you to blame me despite your greater, similar faults.



Next, the comparative unfairness account is immune to the Blamer–Blamee Relativity Objection. One crucial premise in that argument is:

- (3) It is not the case that how people compare pairwise in their commitment to N determines whether one has standing to blame the other.

The relevantly similar premise pertaining to the hypocrite's faults, that is:

- (3\*) It is not the case that how people compare pairwise in their faults relative to N determines whether one has standing to blame the other.

is false. It is precisely because the hypocritical blamer's faults are no less bad than the blamee's that it is hypocritical of him to blame the blamee. Accordingly, an appeal to comparative unfairness has the right shape to explain standing to blame.

The unfairness account also has the advantage that it explains the following phenomenon well. Suppose Adam and Belinda are both at fault relative to some norm, but Adam more so than Belinda. Belinda has often blamed Adam for this, and Adam has responded appropriately – for example, by apologizing and inviting Belinda to deliberate on how he could improve, etc. But then, one day, Adam starts criticizing Belinda for her lesser faults. Intuitively, Belinda cannot then dismiss Adam's blame as standingless and, thus, something to which she does not need to respond – not even if Adam is less committed to the norm in question. On the comparative unfairness account this makes sense, since given that Adam has been appropriately blamed by Belinda for his greater faults, there is no unfairness in Belinda's lesser fault now (and for a while) being the subject of conversational attention.<sup>34</sup>

What if you have been subjected to a lot of blame for your faults (which are greater than mine) by strangers and, in response to your blaming me for a minor fault, I dismiss your blame as hypocritical? You cannot then justifiably say: 'Look, I've already been blamed a lot by others, so let's set aside my greater faults and focus on my condemnation of you for your minor fault'. In one respect, the fact that I have been blamed a lot by strangers does give you an impersonal reason – even a fairness-based reason, since it is unpleasant to be blamed and I have already experienced a lot of that unpleasantness – not to blame me now. In another, though, blame and fairness are interpersonal, and because of this you can appropriately respond: 'What strangers did to you without my knowledge has nothing to do with us – at least, it isn't all, or even primarily, about you and me and what should go on between us. So, sure, I can appropriately blame you for your greater faults if you're going to blame me for my minor faults and appropriately demand a response from you'.<sup>35</sup>

The comparative unfairness account can also explain why one can regain standing to blame through one's moral improvement given the intuitively plausible view that it is sometimes unfair to hold someone's past against them in the light of what they have done since. Hence, even if your past faults are greater than my present faults, in the light of your past acceptance of blame for those faults and your remarkable moral improvement it is not unfair for you to blame me now for my present faults without addressing your own greater, past faults.<sup>36</sup> This speaks against the commitment account, since in dismissing your blame I need not deny that you are indeed very committed to the relevant norm – we have both improved morally since our past faults. Given this it is hard to see why, on standard

versions of the commitment account, I would be in a position to dismiss your blame as standingless.

The comparative unfairness account also appears to be consistent with the idea that an akratic wrongdoer can be in a position to blame. At least, to the extent that they cannot be blamed for their weakness of will, it is arguably not unfair for an akratic individual who has tried to comply with a norm to blame others for failing to conform to it despite not addressing their own failures to comply. In saying this, I am not denying that the comparative unfairness account is also consistent with an akratic wrongdoer *not* being in a position to blame. The issue depends on how fairness relates to holding people responsible for actions they have tried unsuccessfully to avoid.

Finally, the comparative unfairness account is consistent with there being such a thing as standingless, non-moral blame. Suppose you blame me for jumping to inadequately supported conclusions, and you are much worse than I am in this regard. Though the norm here is not a moral norm, you are arguably treating me unfairly in a way that undermines your position as a critic. In this respect, the comparative unfairness account has the same appealing features as the commitment account. It also avoids the Blamer–Blamee Relativity Objection. Hence, the comparative unfairness account of why hypocritical blame is standingless is superior to its commitment-based competitor. As will become evident in the next section, this is not to say that the commitment account has no merits.

## 5. Lack of Commitment as a Non-Hypocrisy-Related Source of Lack of Standing

Assuming my arguments in the previous sections are sound, why does the commitment account nevertheless appear to be such an appealing explanation of why hypocrites lack standing to blame? Two suggestions provide some vindication of the bearing of commitment on standing, even if commitment as such does not provide the correct account of why *hypocrites* lack standing to blame.

First, normally lack of commitment to a norm in the form of not accepting it *does* undermine one's standing to blame others by appeal to that norm. As Rawls puts it: a 'person's right to complain is limited to violations of principles he acknowledges himself'.<sup>37</sup> No doubt some hypocritical blamers do not accept the norms they are invoking.<sup>38</sup> If Tartuffe in Molière's play is the Thrasymachean character that Crisp and Cowton take him to be, blame from him relative to the norms he has violated himself can be dismissed as hypocritical and standingless;<sup>39</sup> 'hypocritical' because he deceptively pretends to be committed to moral norms, and because he neglects to address his own failings in relation to morality, and 'standingless' because standing requires both that one accepts the norm to which one is appealing and that one does not have the same faults as one's addressee. However, the former fact about deceptive pretense has nothing specifically to do with what deprives the hypocrite of standing to blame. One can blame appealing to a norm one does not accept without in any way pretending to accept it, as the following cases show. Bill is higher in the pecking order than Emma. He blames Emma, appealing to norm N. Actually, he does not accept N, and he knows Emma knows this, but for some reason he has never failed to act in accordance with N himself. In blaming Emma, he demonstrates his superiority and humiliates her. Bill's blaming is standingless because he does not accept N, the norm to which he is appealing. However, what undermines his standing

is simply that he does not accept N. Had he not only not accepted N, but also violated it on many previous occasions, Bill's blaming of Emma could have been dismissed by her as standingless for an additional reason: namely, that it is hypocritical because Bill's faults, relative to N, are greater than Emma's and yet he has remained silent about those greater faults. So, it cannot be lack of commitment (here in the form of endorsement) that explains why the *hypocritical* blamer lacks standing to blame even if many hypocritical blamers lack standing for this reason also.

Second, by definition hypocritical blame involves not (or insufficiently) blaming oneself, or not (or insufficiently) blaming those to whom one is favorably inclined, for failures to comply with a norm one blames others for not abiding by. Arguably, in itself that is a fact in virtue of which one is less committed to the norm one is appealing to in one's blaming than one would be if one were as inclined to blame oneself, or those with whom one sympathizes, as much as those with whom one does not sympathize. Given this, it is tempting to infer that one is not committed to the norm one is appealing to when one blames. However, that does not follow. One can score highly on the many other factors that together determine the degree of one's commitment to the norm in question (see, especially, Riedener's account in Section 2). Hence, even if one has a lower degree of commitment to the norm in virtue of one's hypocritical blaming, one can still have a high level of commitment overall. Indeed, the hypocritical blamer can be much more committed to the norm than the blamee. However, it is perhaps true that few hypocritical blamers score highly on counterbalancing commitment-related factors, and, thus, true that few have a low degree of commitment to the norms on which their blame rests. This makes the commitment account seem attractive. But it does not make it correct.

## 6. Conclusion

Assuming the arguments in this article are sound, all variants of the commitment account are vulnerable to the Blamer–Blamee Relativity Objection. The claim that a hypocritical blamer lacks standing to blame on account of their lack of commitment to the norm they invoke fails to account for the fact that a hypocritical blamer can lack standing to blame one person but have standing to blame another. Hence, we must reject the commitment account. In its stead I propose a novel fairness-based account which appeals to the comparative unfairness of not addressing one's own similar or greater faults while demanding some form of uptake from one's blamee. In closing the article, I have conceded that lack of commitment undermines standing to blame, and that many hypocritical blamers might have a low, standing-undermining degree of commitment to the norms they apply. However, that low degree of commitment is not something they have simply in virtue of their hypocrisy or the facts that make them hypocritical blamers. Consequently, it is not a definitional property of hypocritical blame in virtue of which it is standingless. An illuminating comparison is this. Imagine a world in which, almost always, hypocritical blamers standinglessly blame people for things that are none of their business, and only for such things.<sup>40</sup> In that world, assuming meddling blaming is standingless, most of the hypocritical blamers would lack standing to blame because they are blaming people for matters that are none of their business. However, it would not be *qua* their being hypocritical blamers that their blame is meddling. Thus it would not, in the relevant sense, be meddlingness that had undermined their standing to blame.

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## NOTES

- 1 Blame can be hypocritical even if the blamer is not knowingly doing the exact same thing at the exact same time as the blamee in the absence of any justification or excuse that does not apply in the blamee's case. Since my topic here is not the conditions under which faults of the blamer are related to the faults of the blamee in such a way that the blamer is blaming hypocritically, I shall focus on cases where most uncontroversially these faults render the blamer's blame hypocritical (Cohen, *Finding Oneself*, 134–42).
- 2 *Ibid.*, 123.
- 3 *Ibid.*; Friedman, "How to Blame"; Fritz and Miller, "Hypocrisy and the Standing"; Herstein, "Understanding"; Lippert-Rasmussen, "Lesser Transgressions"; Lippert-Rasmussen, "Beam"; Piovarchy, "Hypocrisy, Standing"; Riedener, "Standing"; Roadevin, "Hypocritical Blame"; Rossi, "Commitment"; Rossi, "Hypocrisy Is Vicious"; Statman, "Disregarding"; Todd, "Unified Account"; Wallace, "Hypocrisy". Dissenters include Bell, "Standing," esp. 275–7; Dover, "Walk"; King, "Skepticism"; O'Brien, "Easy."
- 4 Fritz and Miller, "Hypocrisy and the Standing," 125.
- 5 Wallace, "Hypocrisy," 323–30.
- 6 Friedman, "How to Blame"; Rossi, "Commitment," 554; Piovarchy, "Epistemic Hypocrisy"; Piovarchy, "Situationism"; Riedener, "Standing"; Todd, "Unified Account."
- 7 Cf. Cohen, *Finding Oneself*, 125 n. 20; Fritz and Miller, "Hypocrisy and the Standing," 121–2; Todd, "Unified Account," 357–9.
- 8 Fritz and Miller, "When Hypocrisy Undermines," 382.
- 9 Boulton, "There Is a Distinctively"; Boulton, "Standing"; Boulton, "Epistemic Blame"; Boulton, "Significance"; Brown, "Epistemic Blame"; Piovarchy, "Epistemic Hypocrisy."
- 10 Rossi, "Commitment," 560–1.
- 11 For critiques of the moral equality account, see Riedener, "Standing," 189–91; Lippert-Rasmussen, "Moral Equality Account."
- 12 For accounts of blame and criticism with this focus, see McKenna, *Conversation*; Bell, "Standing," 265; Cohen, *Finding Oneself*, 120–2; Darwall, *Second-Person Standpoint*, 120; Dover, "Walk," 397; Dworkin, "Morally Speaking"; Fricker, "Point," 177–80; Smith, "Moral Blame," 39.
- 13 Fritz and Miller, "Unique Badness," 566–7.

- 14 A third account in the literature is offered by Rossi, "Commitment." Because my later arguments do not hinge on the exact difference between the various commitment accounts on offer, I restrict myself to briefly presenting Todd's and Riedener's accounts.
- 15 Todd, "Unified Account," 372.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 355; see Piovarchy, "Situationism." The phrase 'together with at least some degree of motivation' suggests Todd, "Unified Account," does not take motivation to be internal to value judgments (Riedener, "Standing," 195; Rosati, "Moral Motivation," sect. 3.2; Smith, *Moral Problem*).
- 17 Riedener, "Standing," 184, 196.
- 18 Cf. Piovarchy's ("Situationism," 527) suggestion that commitment to a norm is partly determined by one's disposition to display 'certain affective responses' to (non-)conformity with it.
- 19 Riedener, "Standing," 197.
- 20 Arguably, there are no right reasons for accepting a non-existent norm and, thus, no right reasons for acting in accordance with it. Compare two blamers, one of whom blames by appeal to a non-existent norm that he accepts on reasonable (but incorrect) grounds and the other of whom blames by appeal to an existent norm that *he* accepts on reasonable (but in this case correct) grounds. Standing and hypocrisy-wise, the two blamers seem to be on a par. But if this is so, 'roughly for the right reasons' is not a factor that bears on their status. For present purposes, I bracket this challenge.
- 21 Lippert-Rasmussen, "Beam."
- 22 The argument of this section assumes that if commitment explains standing it does so with reference either to the blamer's absolute level of commitment or to the blamer and blamee's relative levels of commitment. I think this assumption is sound. It certainly informs most of the published work on the commitment account – including Todd's, Riedener's, and – full disclosure – my own (Lippert-Rasmussen, "Beam").
- 23 In my example, all three people violate the norm "Don't fly". However, they are not equally at fault for doing so. Against other norms such as "Don't fly excessively" the situation would be different, and the example would not work, since Greta would not violate the relevant norm at all.
- 24 Nevertheless, the fact that Al's challenge points to ought to temper Jack's blame.
- 25 Cohen, *Finding Oneself*, 135; Crisp and Cowton, "Hypocrisy," 344; cf. Lippert-Rasmussen, "Lesser Transgressions."
- 26 Cf. Telech and Tierney, "Comparative." In some cases, we dismiss blame from a blamer whose faults are somewhat lesser than the blamee's as hypocritical; for example, I blame you for stealing other people's bikes, when you have done that 50 times and I have done it 40 times. The comparative fairness account is easily tweaked to accommodate this intuition, because even though the blamee has more to answer for than the blamer, the latter has almost as much to answer for and, plausibly, it is unfair that the blamer's almost equally great faults are ignored.
- 27 This is not to deny that the two facts are connected. Other things being equal, one would expect a person who is more committed to a particular norm (and has been so for a while) to be less at fault, relative to it, than a person who is less committed to it (see also the second argument in [sect. 5](#)).
- 28 Broome, "Fairness," 95–96.
- 29 The aims of this article – to introduce an alternative to the moral equality and the commitment accounts, and to argue that, unlike the commitment account, it is immune to the Blamer–Blamee Relativity Objection – do not require me to commit to a specific comparative unfairness account.
- 30 I set aside the complication of future faults. Typically, we do not know what these will be, but if we did they too would negatively affect present standing to blame.
- 31 Of course, philosophers who defend the claim that all human beings – perhaps setting aside marginal cases, for example, fetuses and anencephalics – are moral equals deny the truth of the assumption they are being asked to make here. However, since most of them also believe that human beings have a higher moral status than that of most non-human animals, they cannot object to the present assumption based on a denial of the very possibility of different individuals having unequal moral status. In any case, I believe moral counterfactuals like the one I entertain here make sense. Finally, I am neither contending here that some human beings have higher moral status than others, nor need I do so for the purpose of the present argument. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need for these clarifications.
- 32 Lippert-Rasmussen, "What Is It." I am not suggesting that one *should* take this view. I am simply saying that it is one possible response to basic moral equality and that we need a story for why this is not the right response.
- 33 This is so, I believe, if your blame is hypocritical.
- 34 For a similar reason, the moral equality account can accommodate the present intuition.
- 35 Admittedly, some might have a more impersonal perspective on unfairness.

- 36 If you blame me for smaller past faults that I have accepted the blame for and put behind me through successful efforts to improve morally, I can dismiss your blame as unfair and, therefore, standingless.
- 37 Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 190. Blame is a form of complaint, and standing to blame presupposes the right to blame.
- 38 Typically, hypocritical blamers accept the norms to which they appeal to some degree – the purely manipulative hypocrite like Tartuffe is an anomaly in the ordinary psychology of hypocrisy (Statman, “Hypocrisy”). However, they interpret and apply norms in a biased way favoring themselves and others with whom they sympathize.
- 39 Crisp and Cowton, “Hypocrisy,” 346; see also Bell, “Standing,” 275–6.
- 40 Duff, “Blame,” 125–6; McKiernan, “Standing,” 145–51; Radzik, “On Minding”; Radzik, “On the Virtue”; Smith, “On Being Responsible,” 478–80.

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