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## Epistemically Hypocritical Blame

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**Abstract:** It is uncontroversial that something goes wrong with the blaming practices of hypocrites. However, it is more difficult to pinpoint exactly what is objectionable about their blaming practices. I contend that, just as epistemologists have recently done with blame, we can constructively treat hypocrisy as admitting of an epistemic species. This paper has two objectives: first, to identify the epistemic fault in epistemically hypocritical blame, and second, to explain why epistemically hypocritical blamers lose their standing to epistemically blame. I tackle the first problem by appealing to an epistemic norm of consistency. I address the second by arguing that the epistemically hypocritical blamer commits to an opting-out of the set of shared epistemic standards that importantly underlies our standing to epistemically blame. I argue further that being epistemically hypocritical undermines a blamer's standing even to judge epistemically blameworthy.

### 1. Introduction

The claim that there may be a distinctively epistemic kind of blame has recently experienced a flurry of attention within epistemology.<sup>1</sup> Epistemic blame is the kind of blame that is directed toward culpable epistemic failings. Recipients of moral blame may rightfully ask their blamer, “who are *you* to blame me?” This objection is centered on the blamer's standing to blame, which has been recognized as a critical feature of the ethics of blame. Standing is the status that generates our entitlement to blame others for a particular wrongdoing. Entitlements are importantly not

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Boulton (2020; 2021a; 2021b; 2023; forthcoming), Brown (2019; 2020), Meehan (2019), Nottelmann (2007), Piovarchy (2021), Rettler (2018), and Schmidt (2021).

categorical: they are conditional in that certain conditions must be met in order for them to obtain. This is a happy result, since we do not want it to be the case that just anyone may blame anyone else. Thus, insofar as we take seriously the issue of epistemic blame, we should devote attention to the conditions under which we may possess or lack the *standing* to epistemically blame.

We receive from ethics the idea that being a hypocrite with respect to some moral failing  $f$  is one way in which we can lose the standing to blame with respect to  $f$ .<sup>2</sup> In this way, hypocrisy presents a negative condition on the standing to blame, and indeed one way to approach the notion of standing is by way of suggesting what might undermine it.<sup>3</sup> Yet suggesting that standing is whatever hypocrites lack has two problems: 1) it tells us little about what standing is, or how it contributes to the propriety of blame, and 2) it makes it merely trivial that hypocrites lack standing, rather than explaining why they lack it.

It is uncontroversial that something goes wrong with the blaming practices of hypocrites. However, it is more difficult to pinpoint exactly what is objectionable about their blaming practices. I contend that, just as we have with blame, we can find important insights by treating hypocrisy as admitting of an epistemic species. This paper has two primary objectives: first, to give an account of what, if anything, is *epistemically* objectionable about epistemically hypocritical blame, and second, to explain why epistemically hypocritical blamers lose their standing to epistemically blame. I tackle the first problem by providing an account of the doxastic makeup of an epistemically hypocritical blamer. I argue that the epistemically hypocritical blamer rationally commits themselves to an inconsistent set of beliefs, thereby violating the epistemic

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<sup>2</sup> See Bell (2012) or King (2019) for articulations of the non-hypocrisy condition on the standing to morally blame.

<sup>3</sup> One might be concerned about the explanatory power of negative conditions on the standing to blame. As Matt King (2019: 1) notes, “One might lack the standing to blame another because the fault is private and one is a stranger or because one is guilty of the very same offense and so one’s blame would be hypocritical. But despite its prevalence as an explanation of what goes wrong in such cases, the standing to blame itself has been given relatively little attention.” More attention must be paid to what the standing to blame is, rather than to the conditions under which it may be denied.

norm of consistency. I suggest that their inconsistent blaming dispositions, which demonstrate their inconsistent beliefs, reflect a failure in the epistemically hypocritical blamer's commitment to the epistemic norms they attempt to deploy. This, I claim, causes such epistemic blamers to lose their standing to epistemically blame. Moreover, I will argue for the idea that epistemic hypocrisy undermines one's standing even to *judge* epistemically blameworthy—i.e., in the epistemic case, in being hypocritical a blamer loses their entitlement to form internal judgments of epistemic blameworthiness.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this paper is to examine the epistemically hypocritical blamer's loss of standing in such a way that is explanatory—that is, I am pursuing a treatment of the issue that helps us both to demystify and apply the concepts of hypocrisy and standing in the emerging literature on epistemic blame.

## 2. Initial Clarifications

A few initial remarks are necessary to set the stage for discussion. First, while this paper is in large part concerned with losses of standing, some critics have been skeptical that standing is a genuine normative phenomenon at all. Macalester Bell (2012), for instance, surveys each of the supposed standing conditions on blame—the conditions one must satisfy in order to be entitled to blame—and finds arguments for them to be lacking. Rather, she emphasizes the positionality of blame and argues that this positionality depends on the relationships that exist between ourselves and others (Bell 2012: 277–9). Similarly, Matt King (2019) claims that the inappropriateness of putatively standingless blame is better explained by failures in attention. If skepticism about the standing to

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<sup>4</sup> I take it for granted that the formation of *judgments* or *beliefs* of epistemic blameworthiness figures centrally and necessarily into what it means to epistemically blame. Such an assumption should be viewed as uncontroversial, as all extant views of epistemic blame view it as being partially constituted by a judgment of epistemic blameworthiness. See Brown (2020) for a treatment of the belief-desire model of epistemic blame; Boulton (2020) for the relationship-based view; Nottelmann (2007) for an emotion-based view; and Piovarchy (2021) for the agency-cultivation model. In this paper, I am explicitly making the claim that it is possible to lose the standing to form judgments of epistemic blameworthiness—i.e., that we can distinguish between the standing to issue epistemic blame and the standing to judge epistemically blameworthy. The argument for this claim comes in Section 5.

blame in the moral domain is found to be warranted, this would undermine the motivation to investigate this phenomenon in the epistemic realm.

While the idea that standing in part contributes to the inappropriateness of blame has received some important criticism, it is worth noting that such views are in the minority. For this reason, I am comfortable operating on the assumption that the appropriateness of blame, in both the moral and the epistemic domains, supervenes in part on standing. Explicitly defending the standing to blame against skeptical worries is outside the scope of this project. Given the prevalence of talk of standing in discussions of blame, I believe this phenomenon warrants attention. Assuming there is such a thing as standing, we may ask what constitutes such an entitlement and can plausibly explain our possessing or lacking of it. As such, if this paper is successful in offering a compelling explanation of how failures in standing contribute to the appropriateness of epistemic blame, this serves itself as an implicit defense of standing as a genuine normative phenomenon.

In a similar vein, accounts of standing, particularly in discussions of hypocrisy, tend to be either consistency or commitment based. Consistency-based views suggest that differential blaming dispositions undermine one's standing.<sup>5</sup> Patrick Todd (2019) rejects consistency-based accounts in favor of a view of standing grounded in commitment: one fails to have standing insofar as one is insufficiently committed to morality. It is worth clarifying at the outset how this distinction bears on my argument. There is an important sense in which I see my view as falling squarely into neither camp. In Sections 2 and 3 of the paper, I argue that epistemically hypocritical blamers demonstrate a culpable epistemic inconsistency. Later, I argue that that inconsistency is revealing of their normative commitments. Commitment, in my view, requires consistency. As

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Fritz and Miller (2018), who argue that such differential blaming dispositions reflect our repudiation of the equality of persons.

such, my account in what follows dovetails nicely with both consistency and commitment explanations (and, hopefully, can inherit and contribute to the merits of both).

Lastly, I limit the scope of this paper to discussing *epistemic* blame, and epistemically *hypocritical* blame, in particular. There are several motivations for doing so. First, the literature on epistemic blame is nascent. There is space to ask whether epistemic blame shares common features with moral blame: can we be similarly hypocritical in epistemically blaming others, and does the phenomenon of standing have a place in our epistemic blaming practices? Pursuing such questions allows us to further clarify the nature and ethics of this emerging species of blame. Moreover, providing plausible answers to such questions is a way of responding to skepticism about epistemic blame. As Cameron Boulton (2020: 519) notes, “some of the most compelling reasons for skepticism about epistemic blame focus on disanalogies, or asymmetries, between the moral and epistemic domains.” If my argument is successful, it is evidence against such asymmetries. Lastly, as will become clear, I emphasize the centrality of judgment to standingless epistemic blame. It strikes me as highly plausible that epistemic blame may be more judgment-centric than moral blame.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, more work would have to be done beyond the bounds of this paper to show that my argument applies in the moral case.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Characterizing Epistemic Hypocrisy<sup>8</sup>

Hypocrites lack the standing to blame others for relevant infractions. Hypocritical blamers criticize

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<sup>6</sup> Importantly, I do not view the emphasis on judgment to epistemic blame as implying that characteristic blaming responses or attitudes do not also have a place, if not a constitutive role, in our epistemic blaming practices. See also Boulton (2020: 520–2) for a description of and answer to “the problem of cool judgment” for epistemic blame.

<sup>7</sup> While drawing out insights and implications for moral blame remains outside the scope of this paper, I would take it to count in favor of my view were additional investigation to discover that the argument defended in this paper could apply in the case of moral blame.

<sup>8</sup> To my knowledge, there exists no extended treatment of epistemic hypocrisy in the context of discussions of epistemic blame. In his book-length treatment of epistemic blame, Boulton (forthcoming) deploys this term within a larger discussion of standing. Carter (2017) uses this term in a paper concerning the knowledge norm of assertion; ‘epistemic hypocrisy,’ here, should be taken as a distinct phenomenon.

others for violating a norm that they themselves have violated, and fail to hold themselves to the same standards that they impose upon others. Different species of hypocrisy can be analyzed in terms of the nature of the norm in question. *Epistemically* hypocritical blamers demonstrate hypocrisy as it concerns their epistemic practices: they criticize others for violating an epistemic norm that they do not respect themselves. Respect, here, is a loaded word. This is because merely violating a norm oneself isn't sufficient to signify a lack of respect for the norm or to render one a hypocrite.<sup>9</sup> Rather, a lack of respect for the norm is entailed only once one fails to associate one's norm violation with one's own blameworthiness. By contrast, "a blamer who has rectified, or at least acknowledged, her own wrongdoing has reaffirmed her commitment to the norm in question. Rectification and acknowledgement express renewed commitment to the relevant norms" (Friedman 2013: 282). Thus, the class of individuals who are eligible to be called epistemically hypocritical blamers are those who have failed to respect the norm in question without having made such reparations. I hope for the following account to be applicable to a broad range of species of epistemic hypocrisy<sup>10</sup>, including what might be called weak-willed or akratic hypocrites<sup>11</sup>, exception-seeking hypocrites<sup>12</sup>, and willfully ignorant hypocrites.<sup>13</sup>

We can now proceed with a motivating case:

*Jumping to Conclusions: S and P are engaged in an argument about what conclusion some piece of evidence e supports. P, a proponent of conclusion c<sup>1</sup>, takes e to support c<sup>1</sup>. S judges P epistemically blameworthy for jumping to conclusions. However, S infers c<sup>2</sup> from*

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<sup>9</sup> While we might think of someone who criticizes us for a norm violation that they have committed themselves as, e.g., annoying, if such an individual has held themselves to account, we should not take them to be hypocritical with respect to that norm.

<sup>10</sup> Such species of hypocrisy follow straightforwardly from accounts in moral philosophy. See Bell (2012) for a helpful, though potentially non-exhaustive, taxonomy of hypocrisy in the moral domain.

<sup>11</sup> These are the kind of epistemic hypocrites who purport to be committed to certain epistemic norms and values, but who, given weakness of will, fail to manifest respect for those norms and values in their actions. They care about their own epistemic norm violations and continue to judge others epistemically blameworthy for those same infractions.

<sup>12</sup> Exception-seeking epistemic hypocrites are those who form differential judgments of epistemic blameworthiness that manifest a self-regarding preference on the basis of a false or pretended belief in their own exceptionality.

<sup>13</sup> Willfully ignorant epistemic hypocrites are those hypocrites who either choose to ignore or reject, without reason, their own epistemic blameworthiness. This category is also meant to capture those who are culpably or willfully ignorant of their own transgression.

*e when in fact e supports c<sup>3</sup> (moreover, proper consideration of e would reveal that it supports c<sup>3</sup>). S demonstrates little regard for their own mistake.*

Here, we see a violation of an epistemic norm, and *S* judges *P* epistemically blameworthy for violating exactly the same norm that they themselves have failed to respect. This is a case of epistemic hypocrisy. We can use this case to reach a definition of epistemically hypocritical blame:

**Epistemically hypocritical blame:** *S*'s epistemic blame is epistemically hypocritical iff (1) *S* culpably fails to follow an epistemic norm *n*, (2) *S* (inappropriately) does not judge themselves epistemically blameworthy for violating *n* and is disposed to refuse epistemic blame from others, and (3) *S* judges another person *P* epistemically blameworthy for failing to follow epistemic norm *n* under like circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

These three conditions on epistemically hypocritical blame will help us to clarify what makes *S*'s blaming of *P* objectionable.

Looking at this set of actions and attitudes, we can see that (1) and (2) are bad by themselves. (1) needs little explanation: it is inherently objectionable (epistemically, at least) to culpably violate an epistemic norm. (2) can manifest itself in different ways: *S* may explicitly deny their own epistemic blameworthiness, or they may fail to raise the question of their own epistemic blameworthiness.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, though, *S*'s failure to regard themselves as epistemically blameworthy must entail a disposition to refuse to accept epistemic blame from themselves or others in order to count as genuinely hypocritical. The importance of this condition will become clear in the next section. (3) demonstrates that *S* does indeed form the (appropriate) judgment that *P* is epistemically blameworthy for the same epistemic norm violation under like circumstances in light of their evidence. Thus, in doing (2), if the epistemically hypocritical blamer actively *denies*

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<sup>14</sup> By "like circumstances," I mean sufficiently similar circumstances. This is to rule out the violation of *n* under potentially exception-granting circumstances, or circumstances that are incomparable to one's own violation of *n*.

<sup>15</sup> We might think that (2) rules out the applicability of this definition to cases of weak-willed hypocrisy. I do not think this is the case. *Akrasia* is manifested in a repeated violation of a norm; being weak-willed expresses a general character trait or disposition. Yet if *S* has a consistent disposition to violate a norm, this would imply that *S* does not actually self-blame for those infractions. Instead, *S* merely feigns self-blame or falsely believes that they self-blame. Blame is effectual and moves one to act in accordance with the norms one is resolved to uphold.

their own epistemic blameworthiness, they believe against their evidence; or similarly, if they fail to take up the matter, they fail to believe despite having strong evidence.<sup>16</sup> Taken together, (1) and (3) tell us that they should believe in their own epistemic blameworthiness, and they fail to do so. They do not recognize like for like, despite being in an ideal epistemic position to do so. In this way, *S* is not appropriately responsive to their evidence in failing to judge themselves epistemically blameworthy. This is an additional culpable epistemic norm violation and thus an additional badness. Doing (3) is not in itself bad, since *S*'s evidence would suggest that *P* is epistemically blameworthy. In doing (3), there is a sense in which *S* gets something right.

However, I contend that the epistemic badness of epistemically hypocritical blame is not exhausted by (1) and (2). There is an additional badness that is more significant to explaining why epistemically hypocritical blame is epistemically objectionable. In doing (1), (2), and (3), the epistemically hypocritical blamer upholds a problematic conjunction of attitudes, where the wrongness of the conjunction is not simply due to the individual badness of some of the conjuncts.

Hypocrisy is often portrayed as demonstrating an inconsistency between what one does and what one professes: hypocrites may be taken, as exemplified in my description of *epistemically hypocritical blame*, to be inconsistently committed to norms.<sup>17</sup> Marilyn Friedman (2013: 280) refers to the “hypocritical blamer’s inconsistency in subjecting other persons to moral evaluation according to standards she does not apply to herself.” Friedman recognizes this as a “moral problem”; elsewhere, Bell (2012: 275) echoes the idea that “hypocrisy is a moral fault.” The aim of this paper is not to erase, comment on, or defend the moral fault that may be inherent in instances

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Matt McGrath for making clear the potential different ways of satisfying (2).

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Wallace (2010).



of epistemically hypocritical blame, but rather to argue for the presence of a characteristic epistemic fault.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. The Epistemic Norm of Consistency

##### 4.1. *Inconsistent Beliefs*

I suggest that the epistemically hypocritical blamer—the individual who meets conditions (1)–(3) above—commits themselves to an inconsistent set of beliefs that reveals itself in and gives rise to hypocritical blaming practices. That is, each instance of epistemically hypocritical blame rationally commits the blamer to an epistemic inconsistency. If this is the case, and there is an epistemic norm of consistency, the epistemic wrongness of the epistemic hypocrite’s blame goes beyond the badness of (1) and (2).

Let’s first attend to (3), *S*’s judgment that *P* is epistemically blameworthy for violating *n* (in our case, jumping to conclusions on insufficient or irrelevant evidence). I suggest that this act of judging entails a rational commitment to the norm in question. Judging that *P* is epistemically blameworthy for violating *n* must commit one to the belief that *n* is a legitimate epistemic norm worth respecting. We can spell out this entailment further.<sup>19</sup> Blaming is a response to wrongdoing; thus, judging someone blameworthy means that you are committed to that person’s having committed a wrong. Yet wrongs are constituted by the violation of legitimate norms.<sup>20</sup> So it follows from judging blameworthy that one is committed to the norm in question. Further, being committed to a norm means that one deems it worthy of respect, or recognizes that it is the kind of rule that has value and ought to be followed. While I am silent on the issue of whether judgments

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<sup>18</sup> I take it that any species of hypocrisy, including epistemic hypocrisy, is subject to a number of moral faults, including the inconsistency mentioned here, but also potentially deceptive practices and free riding.

<sup>19</sup> Thank you to Allan Hazlett for making clear the explicit reasoning behind maintaining this entailment.

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this move itself requires further elaboration: wrongs attach to the violation of a right. As will become clear later, I am committed in this paper to the view that others have a right to your respect of certain epistemic norms in virtue of the implicit or explicit agreements at work in our epistemic communities.

of this kind go beyond mere belief—though I expect that they do—I contend that judgments are the kind of thing that require the judge to take a stance on a proposition. In judging epistemically blameworthy, you are implicitly affirming the truth of the proposition that, in violating epistemic norm  $n$ , an agent is the appropriate target of epistemic blame. It would be difficult to explain this affirmation if one did not also take the epistemic norm in question as worthy of respect. This affirmation, I think, entails the further thought that the epistemic norm is one that, barring exceptional circumstances, commands respect.

Now, let's turn to the epistemically hypocritical blamer's own violation of the epistemic norm  $n$  and their subsequent failure to judge themselves epistemically blameworthy ((1) and (2), respectively). We said above that  $S$ 's failure to judge themselves epistemically blameworthy can take the form either of an explicit judgment in their own lack of epistemic-blameworthiness or a failure to take up the matter in their own case—that is, such an individual either judges that they are not epistemically blameworthy, or deems their own epistemic norm violation properly ignored. Under either interpretation, I take it that  $S$ 's failure to judge themselves epistemically blameworthy for violating  $n$  under like circumstances reflects a belief that  $n$  is not an epistemic norm worth respecting.

The reason for this half of the explanation may initially be less clear. However, it becomes plainer once we clarify something about the epistemically hypocritical blamer's failure to judge themselves epistemically blameworthy: this failure to judge is distinctive insofar as I am attending to cases where this negligence is not due to mere oversight. Without qualification, failing to judge oneself epistemically blameworthy does not, on its own, express one's further belief that the epistemic norm one has violated is not worthy of respect. This is because we might imagine that one simply failed to consider or observe one's own epistemic infraction, but that one would, under

the right conditions, affirm one's own epistemic blameworthiness. Rather, I am interested in the subset of cases where one's failure to judge oneself epistemically blameworthy communicates one's disposition to *refuse epistemic blame from others*. This is why the second clause in condition (2) is important. The genuinely epistemically hypocritical blamer fails to self-blame in a way that signifies their disposition to deny (or their active denial of) their status as a worthy target of epistemic blame. After all, if one were disposed to self-blame when prompted, we would not view this individual as genuinely epistemically hypocritical—only as culpably un-self-aware. This clarification fits nicely with the natural idea that to *judge* epistemically blameworthy is to recognize that one is the fitting target of epistemic blame.

This attitude of the genuinely epistemically hypocritical blamer is revealing of their belief that the epistemic norm in question is not worthy of respect. As Friedman (2013: 281) notes insightfully of the moral case, “Any intentional failure to apply a moral norm where it should be applied is a lapse of commitment.”<sup>21</sup> I suggest that our normative commitments have both behavioral and rational elements. Let us call one's commitment to *acting* upon and *upholding* a norm one's *behavioral* commitment to an epistemic norm *n*. By contrast, we may refer to one's *belief* in the force or authority of that norm one's *rational* commitment to *n*. I am interested in the latter sense of ‘commitment.’ To be disposed to refuse epistemic blame from others requires some further belief about the epistemic norm that has been violated. It is the presence of such *rational* commitments that support my claim that there is a distinctive epistemic badness that accompanies epistemically hypocritical blame.

Yet one might worry that we need not go beyond our attention to behavioral commitments in explaining what is objectionable about the epistemically hypocritical blamer's failure to self-

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<sup>21</sup> Though it is worth noting that inappropriate failures are not restricted to intentional failures. Thanks to Matt McGrath for discussion on this point.

blame: why posit a further belief, or rational commitment, about the epistemic norm in question?<sup>22</sup>

However, without specifying the nature of this commitment as rational, one runs into problematic cases: suppose one thinks that an office policy is downright foolish, but one chooses to obey it so that their employment is not threatened. There is an important sense in which one is behaviorally committed to the policy in question, but given their further belief about the rule's foolishness, one would not regard anyone's violations of the policy as genuinely blameworthy or as worthy of punishment—that is, they lack the rational commitment to the norm's force. Merely behavioral commitment and judging blameworthy can come apart. This is because one can have purely practical reasons for upholding a norm which are disconnected from one's blaming practices and rational commitments. I take it that a failure in behavioral commitment is not, on its own, sufficient to explain why one would fail to self-blame in the relevant way. However, if we further stipulate that there is an additional sort of commitment which is rational in nature—that is, that one is rationally committed to the epistemic norm in question demanding respect—we are better positioned to explain failures of self-blame. This rational commitment, or lack thereof, seems to be required in order to rationalize the attitude non-self-blaming agents hold toward their own epistemic practices.<sup>23</sup> One's failure to judge oneself epistemically blameworthy is indicative of one's beliefs about the value of the epistemic norm in question. Moreover, I am limiting my attention to cases where one's failure to self-blame is, in effect, a disposition to judge non-epistemically blameworthy. As above, then, we might add that this sort of judgment involves the denial, rather than the affirmation, of the value of the epistemic norm in question.

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<sup>22</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this point.

<sup>23</sup> One might object here that such a commitment is only entailed if *S* has a general disposition or habit to violate *n*. There is intuitive appeal to this idea, but recall that our interest is in defining and diagnosing an *instance* of epistemically hypocritical blame. Within the context of their epistemically hypocritical blame—which need not take the form of a general disposition to be epistemically hypocritical even with respect to *n*—*S* is rationally committed the proposition that *n* is not an epistemic norm worth respecting. Thanks to Allan Hazlett for proposing this sort of objection.

Thus, I take condition (3) above to be indicative of the epistemically hypocritical blamer's belief that an epistemic norm  $n$  demands respect, and (1) and (2) as revealing of their belief that  $n$  is not worthy of respect. At this point, we see a tension manifested in the epistemically hypocritical blamer's actions: they have committed themselves to an inconsistent set of beliefs. The epistemically hypocritical blamer, in violating  $n$  themselves, not self-blaming, and judging others blameworthy for violating  $n$ , demonstrates both belief that  $n$  is not an epistemic norm worth respecting and belief that  $n$  is an epistemic norm worth respecting. I will not here take a firm stance on whether these are outright beliefs or merely implicit commitments, but either should be governed by the norm of consistency. One potential theoretical reason for thinking that the epistemically hypocritical blamer really does hold these beliefs comes to us from the traditional dispositional view of belief. On this view, what it is for a person  $S$  to believe a proposition  $p$  is for  $S$  to exhibit certain behaviors regarding  $p$ ; in other words,  $S$  acts as though  $p$  is true (Schwitzgebel 2013). Regardless of our theoretical underpinnings, the ideas that we act in accordance with what we believe, and that belief is important to explaining action, have quite an intuitive pull.

In holding each of the constitutive attitudes of epistemically hypocritical blame,  $S$  implicitly violates the epistemic norm of consistency, which dictates that we should strive to hold beliefs consistent with each other. The epistemically hypocritical blamer is wide-scope irrational; it is the combination of conditions (1)–(3) that is at issue, over and above the wrongness of  $S$ 's own epistemic norm violation and failure to self-blame. The epistemically hypocritical blamer cannot, therefore, legitimately form a judgment of epistemic blameworthiness because it would be epistemically wrong for them to do so insofar as it would be inconsistent with their set of beliefs.

#### ***4.2. Defending the Epistemic Norm of Consistency***

At this point, we should say more to support my claim that the epistemically hypocritical

blamer's violation of the norm of consistency, and thus the conjunction of constitutive attitudes, is really the point of contention in the case of epistemically hypocritical blame, rather than simply the blamer's failure to self-blame for their own epistemic norm violation ((1) and (2)). What gives us reason to believe there is an epistemic norm of consistency? Beyond the intuitive pull of such a norm, we can provide an independent argument. Epistemic norms are the rules that govern inquiry and support the achievement of our epistemic goals; they dictate what one ought and ought not do with respect to one's epistemic life. The epistemic norm of consistency suggests that if one believes  $p$  at  $t$ , then one should not also believe  $\neg p$  at  $t$ .<sup>24</sup> In general, this is a rule that is conducive to success in inquiry.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, I suggest that if the badness of the epistemically hypocritical blamer's attitudes was only due to the badness of their (1) violating an epistemic norm and (2) failing to self-blame, then we would get unintuitive results when we compare the epistemically hypocritical blamer,  $S$ , to the non-self-blaming epistemic norm violator,  $S^1$ , who does not judge  $P$  epistemically blameworthy (i.e., the individual who meets conditions (1) and (2), but not (3)). This is because, in either of these cases,  $S$  would be doing (1) and (2), and thus committing the same set of infractions. But  $S$ 's badness appears to vary depending upon the presence of (3) a judgment of  $P$ 's epistemic blameworthiness. That is,  $S^1$ , who does not judge  $P$  epistemically blameworthy, does not seem to be bad in the same way as  $S$ , who is an epistemically hypocritical blamer. This is not to say that  $S^1$  is *less* bad than  $S$ , but that  $S^1$  is wrong in a different way.<sup>26</sup> But if the epistemic

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<sup>24</sup> I am indebted to Artūrs Logins for clarifying some ways to articulate this norm.

<sup>25</sup> Though importantly, I do not take this norm to be indefeasible. Lottery cases and preface paradoxes may show us that holding a set of inconsistent beliefs at the same time can be acceptable. This defeasibility might inspire us to treat the epistemic norm of consistency as an epistemically evaluable standard that characterizes an ideal doxastic state of affairs rather than as a norm. I am silent on this amendment, but note that this weaker view of consistency still does the work we need it to do in the argument: it allows us to express what is epistemically objectionable about epistemic hypocrisy. Thanks to Jeremy Fantl and Matt McGrath for pressing this point.

<sup>26</sup> Though I, for one, do intuit that  $S^1$  is comparatively less bad than  $S$ . This is interesting, since  $S$ , as we've noted, does seem to do something right in judging  $P$  epistemically blameworthy (namely, believing in accordance with their evidence).

badness was completely explained by the presence of (1) and (2), we should have the same intuitions about the badness of  $S$  and  $S^1$ . Thus, the badness of the conjuncts (1) and (2) individually do not seem sufficient to explain what is objectionable about the epistemically hypocritical blamer.

One might object here that there is an important difference between  $S$ 's and  $S^1$ 's cases as I have described them. Namely, there *is* an additional badness at work in  $S^1$ 's case already: they have once again failed to respond to their evidence in not judging  $P$  epistemically blameworthy, given that  $S$  and  $S^1$  are each in a position to know that  $P$ 's violation of  $n$  warrants epistemic blame. So, we can suggest that  $S$  and  $S^1$  are bad in different ways without positing any other source of badness in the epistemically hypocritical blamer's case outside of conjuncts (1) and (2). In response, I suggest the following: highlighting this additional badness in  $S^1$ 's case implies that  $S^1$  is *worse* than  $S$  because  $S^1$  has violated a *greater number* of epistemic norms. This means that the epistemically hypocritical blamer—the non-self-blaming epistemic norm violator who *does* hypocritically assent to  $P$ 's epistemic blameworthiness—is at the very least less bad than the non-self-blaming epistemic norm violator who does not assent to  $P$ 's epistemic blameworthiness. I think this runs counter to our intuitions;  $S$  seems to be *at least* as bad as  $S^1$ , though in different ways. In order for this to be the case, there must be some additional badness present in the case of the epistemically hypocritical blame apart from (1) and (2). I suggest that this additional badness is best explained by the blamer's violation of the epistemic norm of consistency, since this appears to be the only other possible epistemic wrong in this case. This explanation of what is epistemically objectionable about epistemic hypocrisy fits nicely with the basic picture of a hypocrite as someone who lacks a match between what they profess and what they do.

### ***4.3. Concerns about Consistency***

There are two other closely related worries that may naturally arise from the preceding. First,

inconsistency in one's judgments of epistemic blameworthiness does not seem an apt criterion for marking out epistemically hypocritical blame; and second, the charge of epistemic inconsistency does not seem to identify a badness *distinctive* of epistemic hypocrisy.

Let's turn to the first of these problems. This concern is suggestive of the idea that inconsistency on its own cannot characterize the badness of epistemically hypocritical blame. However, this line of response relies on a misunderstanding of the claim at issue; on my view, inconsistency in one's judgments of epistemic blameworthiness is not a sufficient condition for epistemic hypocrisy. Rather, as conditions (1)–(3) suggest, it is implicitly a necessary condition. We do not want it to be that inconsistency among judgments of epistemic blameworthiness *tout court* suffices for one's blame to count as epistemically hypocritical since, as Mark Alicke et. al. (2013: 674) note, "people are inconsistent for many reasons," and perhaps they merely "forget what they have endorsed." Importantly, what is at issue in cases of epistemically hypocritical blame is that the blamer *at one and the same time* both denies their own epistemic blameworthiness and maintains the epistemic blameworthiness of another agent for the same epistemic norm violation under like circumstances. The blamer may forget that they once committed the same epistemic norm violation and did not treat themselves as the appropriate target of epistemic blame; however, in such cases, only individuals who never renounced such a judgment and, if the question of their own blameworthiness was once again presented for their consideration, would continue to deny their blameworthiness will turn out to be epistemically hypocritical on my view.<sup>27</sup> Thus, I think we can set aside worries that stem from the *sufficiency* of inconsistency for epistemic hypocrisy.

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<sup>27</sup> Relatedly, if the blamer merely forgot their past norm violation and failure to self-blame, their epistemic blame would fail to be epistemically hypocritical if they *were* disposed to judge themselves epistemically blameworthy in retrospect (say, considering another agent's epistemic blameworthiness caused them to reflect upon their past actions).



Still, we may wonder whether epistemic inconsistency of a different form suffices for epistemically hypocritical blame. Consider two relevant kinds of cases: one where one judges *themselves* but not others epistemically blameworthy for the same infraction under like circumstances, and one where one discriminates evaluatively such that, say, they do not epistemically blame their friends for what they, at the same time, judge a stranger epistemically blameworthy for doing.

Suppose that *S* views themselves as epistemically blameworthy, but does not view *P* as such. Galen Strawson (2008: 357) writes, “I do not regard bad things that I do as mere bad luck, but have true responsibility-presupposing attitudes to them (which may admittedly fade with time)...I do naturally regard bad things that other people do as explicable in ways that make true-responsibility-presupposing blame inappropriate. I suspect that this pattern may not be particularly uncommon.” Strawson’s experience demonstrates that we might hold ourselves to higher standards than we do others. We might also frame this type of case as an inconsistency in one’s distribution of excuses, in a way that favors others. But is this a case of epistemically hypocritical blame? Insofar as an individual of this kind does not meet the conditions (1)–(3), we must answer No. This is not a concession, because neither hypocrisy, nor a failure of standing, are the only ways in which one’s blame—or failure to blame—can be inappropriate. Strawson (2008: 357) calls his own experience “dramatically inconsistent.” Indeed, *S* ought to hold others to account, on epistemic grounds, and may otherwise be open to the charge of epistemic inconsistency and going against the evidence. Moreover, there may be moral or prudential reasons that *S* should hold others to the standards operative in their epistemic community.<sup>28</sup> We can maintain that this individual’s epistemic blaming practices are inappropriate or unfitting, while also upholding that what is

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<sup>28</sup> For instance, the threat of being the recipient of unpleasant blame might constitute a part of others’ motivation to internalize norms in the first place.

distinctive of epistemically hypocritical blamers is a failure to self-blame in a way that disposes them to deny epistemic blame from others.

Similarly, though one might object to a case where one forms differential judgments of epistemic blameworthiness towards others, first and foremost, on the grounds of fairness and of epistemic inconsistency (say, when one's epistemic blaming practices favor one's fellows), this does not suffice for epistemic hypocrisy. Moreover, we should keep in mind that one can choose to *refrain* from epistemically blaming in a way that does not signify a lack of commitment to the epistemic norm in question, and this is the case in order to maintain the variability characteristic of our blaming dispositions.<sup>29</sup>

We can now turn to the second of the objections above. I've said that the distinctive *epistemic* badness in epistemically hypocritical blame is an epistemic inconsistency in one's judgments. However, one might point out, there are other scenarios that do not constitute instances of hypocrisy, but which manifest this exact epistemic badness. Our case above, in which one judges a stranger epistemically blameworthy but fails to judge one's friend epistemically blameworthy for violating the same epistemic norm under like circumstances, is an example of this kind of case. But, the blamer here does not seem to be as bad, or going as wrong, as the epistemically hypocritical blamer. If this is right, then perhaps the badness of epistemically hypocritical blame cannot be totally explained by the epistemic inconsistency I've identified.

In response, I first note that maintaining, as I do, that the epistemic inconsistency which accompanies one's normative commitments distinctively characterizes epistemically hypocritical

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<sup>29</sup> We might also note, following Fritz and Miller (2018: 133), that it makes a difference whether or not one's failure to blame in some circumstances but not others is rooted in what they call a *differential blaming disposition*, where the inconsistency in one's blaming judgments is rooted in a rejection of the impartiality of morality (though we might take it to apply more broadly to domain-specific normativity). We might find other explanations for a failure to blame others in some cases but not in others (e.g., from commitments to partiality in the case of our friends, or simply because we do not feel like blaming).

blame does not entail that the badness of such blame is exhausted by this explanation. There are indeed other transgressions at work in the case of epistemic hypocrisy that do not concern us in evaluating the merely differential blamer: one culpably violates an epistemic norm *oneself*, and there are important potential moral failures for the epistemically hypocritical blamer, like their free riding on others' maintenance of the norms from which they benefit, or their outward deception. Moreover, as we will see in the next section, only the inconsistency inherent in epistemically hypocritical blame is one can which lead to a failure of standing.

## **5. Losing the Standing to Epistemically Blame**

### ***5.1. The Standing to Epistemically Blame***

So far, we have shown, by appeal to the epistemic norm of consistency, what is epistemically objectionable about epistemic hypocrisy. Our next task is to elaborate upon how (1)–(3) cause the epistemically hypocritical blamer to lose the standing to epistemically blame. One reason for this is that merely showing that one's epistemic blame is objectionable is not sufficient to demonstrate that one lacks the *standing* to issue such blame. That is, what we've done so far is show that the epistemically hypocritical blamer's blaming practices are inappropriate, but there are important reasons to think a person's standing to epistemically blame is inequivalent to the appropriateness of their blame.

Standing is determined by appeal to features of the blamer, but the appropriateness of one's blame is contingent upon certain facts about the blamer *and* the blame-recipient obtaining (such as whether the recipient of blame is excused). That is, evaluations of appropriateness are *broader* than evaluations of standing. Moreover, there are some facts about the blamer themselves that render blame appropriate or inappropriate, but are unrelated to their standing. For instance, it could be contextually imprudent to blame: since blaming often involves a speech act, blaming in a certain

context could inhibit one's goals. Whether one possesses standing does not depend on what one's goals happen to be. Or, as Kyle Fritz and Daniel Miller (2018: 124–5) point out, we can be mean, petty, or arrogant blamers and yet not lose our entitlement to blame. Furthermore, blaming a certain transgression could be morally required of an agent, which indicates one's blame can be inappropriate along the dimension of *standing*, but appropriate in other respects. And, as we mentioned before, merely having violated the epistemic norm in question is itself insufficient to explain a loss of standing.<sup>30</sup> The key idea here is that standing does not track appropriateness, since there are factors relevant to establishing appropriateness that do not figure in ascertaining one's standing (though it does seem that all cases of blaming without standing contribute to the inappropriateness of one's blame). One can have standing while their blame is nonetheless inappropriate. So, we must tell a further story about how the epistemically hypocritical blamer loses their standing that goes beyond an explanation of why their blame is epistemically objectionable.<sup>31</sup>

As we have seen, standing refers to our entitlement to blame or to judge blameworthy. Those entitled to blame can successfully respond to the question 'who are *you* to judge me?' A very plausible way to view standing is that what permits us to epistemically blame is our acknowledgement and participation in a set of shared epistemic standards. This is the line of thinking adopted by Boulton (2021b) in his defense of the standing to epistemically blame. Boulton defends a Scanlonian, relationship-based view of epistemic blame, where epistemic blame is warranted when one has violated the normative ideal constitutive of our epistemic relationships

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<sup>30</sup> This is, in part, because we violate epistemic norms very often! If the violation of an epistemic norm was all that was required to lose the standing to blame, the institution of blame would suffer damaging consequences, since we do not want to license blame without standing. Thus, lacking standing must amount to something over and above believing inconsistently.

<sup>31</sup> Though, naturally, the epistemically hypocritical blamer's lack of standing will figure into *why* their epistemic blame is objectionable.

with others. In enjoying membership in an epistemic community, we “stand in a relationship of mutual epistemic expectation—one that is bound up with a complex network of intentions and expectations that are oriented around our epistemic agency in very basic ways” (Boult 2021b: 11364). While Boult is specifically concerned with how others’ epistemic errors might be one’s own business, his view is that one has the standing to epistemically blame, in this respect, if one’s epistemic relationship is impaired—say, one’s normative expectations have been unjustifiably violated (2021b: 11365–70).

In the following, I will adopt a similar emphasis on epistemic expectations and community. As such, I view what I say in the following as largely compatible with the view Boult has put forward on the standing to epistemically blame, without relying on an endorsement of any specific framework for epistemic blame. I take it as a point in favor of my view that it is consistent with the current thinking in this small literature. It may indeed be read as extending at least some of Boult’s reasoning by showing that this sort of treatment of standing is compatible with explaining the epistemically hypocritical, rather than the merely meddlesome, blamer’s loss of the standing to epistemically blame.

Our epistemic communities are committed to sets of epistemic norms that govern inquiry, such as the epistemic norm to believe in accordance with one’s evidence. Our relations with other epistemic agents are unified by the common aims of (at least) acquiring knowledge about the world and avoiding falsehoods. It is our general adherence to the set of shared epistemic standards and norms conducive to such aims that ensures our epistemic communities achieve their goals. There are certain expectations that must be at work in order for our epistemic communities to operate effectively. We expect that others will follow epistemic norms. We must be able to trust and rely on other epistemic agents, and they must be able to trust and rely on us. When those expectations

are not met, epistemic blame is in order. The suggestion here, for which I lack the space to launch a complete defense, is that epistemic normativity is a system of mutual accountability. In virtue of one's membership in an epistemic community, one is a part of the group whose success is contingent on its members following the agreed-upon system of epistemic normativity. This explains why violating an epistemic norm constitutes a wrong and thus renders one the appropriate target of epistemic blame. It is our commitment to the epistemic norms that underly our communities of inquiry that grounds our complaints about others' epistemic norm violations: such norm violations constitute the violation of an agreement or system of expectations.

The system of epistemic normativity that grounds our right to epistemically blame only functions successfully if we do not discriminate when it comes to epistemic evaluation. The standing to deploy an epistemic norm toward others necessitates a commitment to that norm applying to oneself.<sup>32</sup> Thus, in doing (1), (2), and (3), the epistemically hypocritical blamer demonstrates their lack of participation in this set of shared standards that importantly underlies our ability to form judgments of epistemic blameworthiness. This individual makes an exception of themselves knowing that they are not entitled to a claim of specialness. We have seen that, minimally, the epistemically hypocritical blamer is committed to the idea that the epistemic norm in question does not apply to them. However, viewing oneself as exceptional to receiving epistemic blame is contrary to being a member of an epistemic community with a set of shared standards.<sup>33</sup> But since being committed to a shared set of epistemic standards is what gives us the standing to

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<sup>32</sup> Perhaps this also lends support to the idea that in judging epistemically blameworthy one is not merely judging an individual to be the appropriate target of *others'* epistemic blame. Judging epistemically blameworthy is more robust, on my view, than simply expressing your approval for others' going in for epistemic blame. It seems plausible that part of the function of such judgments is to internalize the epistemic norms one deploys in oneself. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this potential weaker conception of judging epistemically blameworthy.

<sup>33</sup> Though this argument makes explicit reference to exceptionality, it should not be interpreted as applying only to cases of exception-seeking epistemic hypocrisy. It is sufficient to make an exception of oneself that one fails to self-blame in a situation that they know full well demands it.

epistemically blame, the epistemically hypocritical blamer therefore loses this standing. The epistemically hypocritical blamer, in doing (1), (2), and (3) *opts themselves out* of the set of shared epistemic standards and thus has no grounds to epistemically blame others for epistemic infractions that would typically be taken to violate that set of shared epistemic standards.<sup>34</sup> Treating oneself as exceptional, on no good basis, is in effect such an opting out. Epistemically hypocritical blamers reveal themselves to be insufficiently committed to the epistemic norms in question by failing to regard such norms as applying first-personally. Such blamers are not entitled to launch an epistemic complaint on the ground of a set of standards to which they do not hold themselves—that is, that are not shared. Such individuals are not participating in their epistemic communities in the way required to epistemically blame.<sup>35</sup>

Let's take stock. So far, we have shown that (a) epistemically hypocritical blame is objectionable on epistemic grounds because it commits the blamer to an inconsistent set of beliefs. We have also seen that (b) the constitutive attitudes involved in epistemically hypocritical blame cause the blamer to lose the standing to epistemically blame. In what follows, I will elaborate upon (b): I contend that the epistemically hypocritical blamer's loss of the standing to epistemically blame occurs at the level of *judgement*—i.e., these blamers lack the entitlement to form judgements of epistemic blameworthiness. In addition, I will clarify how much work (a) does in explaining (b).

## ***5.2. The Standing to Judge Epistemically Blameworthy***

I claim that epistemically hypocritical blamers lose the standing to *judge* epistemically

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<sup>34</sup> It is worth pointing out that though the epistemically hypocritical blamer loses the *standing* to epistemically blame, there could be other reasons under which their blame could be appropriate (such as cases in which it is imprudent to refrain from blaming).

<sup>35</sup> It's important to remember here that the epistemically hypocritical blamer merely opts themselves out with respect to the epistemic norm *n* in question. They do not experience a total loss of standing, in that they would not be entitled to blame *P* for a violation of a different epistemic norm *n'*.

blameworthy. As I mentioned earlier, I start from the uncontroversial point that epistemic blame involves a judgment component. Yet it is also often theorized that full-fledged moral blame involves the taking up of certain blaming *attitudes*, such as anger, disappointment, or sadness. We may think that such attitudes figure in our practices of epistemic blame, too: I may feel contempt upon judging that you have not believed in accordance with your evidence.<sup>36</sup> Alternatively, we might contrast *feeling* epistemic blame with *expressing* epistemic blame, and suggest that only the latter, which may manifest in, e.g., public criticism or disavowal, requires standing.<sup>37</sup> Thus, my suggestion that epistemically hypocritical blamers lose their standing to *judge* epistemically blameworthy should be contrasted with both the view that losses of standing occur at the level of our entitlement to manifest blaming attitudes in response to epistemic wrongdoing and the view that failures of standing tell us only about our entitlement to express blame.<sup>38</sup> In effect, I deny epistemically hypocritical blamers the standing to epistemically blame—that is, to manifest blaming attitudes or to express their epistemic blame—by way of denying the standing to *judge* epistemically blameworthy.

There is reason to prefer this view. I offer three arguments for why. The first two are theoretical: building off the preceding view, I argue that the fault that should undermine one's standing is found in one's judgments rather than in one's attitudes or expression. The last is an appeal to intuition.

First, judgments can embody culpable inconsistency. Of course, attitudes can also be inconsistently manifested, yet there are no plausible rules that would dictate which blaming attitudes one should manifest at any given time. Must I always feel contempt when someone fails

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<sup>36</sup> Though some are skeptical of the fittingness of strong negative emotions in response to epistemic wrongdoing; see, for instance, Piovarech (2020).

<sup>37</sup> Todd (2019: 350) draws a distinction between feeling and expressing blame.

<sup>38</sup> Notably, these two alternative views are closely related.



to believe in accordance with their evidence? Similarly, I am skeptical that there are standing-related standards of consistency as to when blame ought to be expressed or be kept private. Whether one ought to express their epistemic blame is often conditional upon one's circumstances. The appropriateness of expressing blame seems subject to context rather than consistency. As Todd (2019: 359) notes, "in certain social contexts, it can be wrong to insist on exercising a right one actually has." Importantly, it is widely recognized as a *virtue* of an account of epistemic blame if it permits variability in our blaming reactions, both felt and expressed.<sup>39</sup> Requiring consistency in attitude and expression threatens this desirable variability. If we are concerned to explain the inconsistency of epistemically hypocritical blame, we should turn our focus to the judgments themselves.

Second, variability in judgments, as opposed to variability in attitude or expression, tells us something important about our commitments to the epistemic norms in question in the first place. I have already expressed skepticism above about the sufficiency of a merely behavioral story about one's normative commitments. This is not to say that public reactions are not informative as to one's normative commitments. If one responds with anger to the violation of an epistemic norm, this provides evidence of their opinion on the sanctity of that norm. However, one important difference between how information-giving judgments and expression or emotion are is that the latter may be feigned or insincere. One may feign epistemic blame in order to better fit into their broader epistemic community. It is easy to express condemnation without feeling it, and expressing blame may reinforce our relations with others. This concern also extends to the manifestation of characteristic blaming emotions. One may object here that it is less plausible to say that *felt* blaming attitudes may be insincere. I concede this point, but note that one would not

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<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Brown (2020) and Boulton (2021a).

internally feel certain blaming attitudes, regardless of whether they are expressed or manifested outwardly, unless one had already formed a judgment of epistemic blameworthiness.<sup>40</sup> Doing this explanatory work is more evidence that it is one's judgments that are most reliably indicative of one's normative commitments. Thus, if consistency with respect to one's commitment to the epistemic norms in question is our concern, it seems that inconsistency at the level of attitude or expression do not serve as reliable guides for revealing one's normative commitments. Judgments of epistemic blameworthiness perform better along this dimension. There is little motive to be insincere in one's private judgments.<sup>41</sup> My account also nicely captures why a hypocrite's both publicly *and* privately judging epistemically blameworthy feels wrong.

That judgments of epistemic blameworthiness, in contrast to the blaming attitudes one may outwardly manifest, may be subject to the charge of culpable inconsistency and are what are most revealing of our normative commitments gives us reason to think that a loss of standing to epistemically blame occurs at the level of judgment. It is one's failure in judgment that is constitutive of the opting out that undermines standing. Furthermore, my account is friendly to those who are skeptical that characteristic blaming attitudes have any place at all in the epistemic domain, where infractions might be taken to be less serious or impactful on the lives of others when compared to the moral domain. Someone with these leanings may favor a more judgment-centric account of epistemic blame to begin with, and would thus naturally be more amenable to my view.

A final reason is intuitive: Suppose that *S* is epistemically hypocritical with respect to *n* in

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<sup>40</sup> It is outside the scope of this paper to consider some issues that may be inherited from metaethics, such as the practicality of our normative judgments or the debate between cognitivism and non-cognitivism.

<sup>41</sup> This is not to say that such judgments cannot ever be insincere (e.g., it may be possible that one believes they judge epistemically blameworthy when closer examination of their commitments reveals they do not—say, one fails to act in accordance with that judgment), but they do seem more information-giving.

a way that satisfies conditions (1)–(3). Suppose further that *S* demonstrates no internal or external blaming emotions, but nonetheless judges *P* epistemically blameworthy for violating *n*. I suspect that we find something objectionable in the mere judgment of epistemic blameworthiness—specifically, something that would suggest a lack of entitlement to form such a judgment at all. In his discussion of moral blame, Todd (2019: 350) advocates for the intuitive appeal of denying the standing to *feel* blame: he calls

the standing to *feel* blame the “basic” moral standing to blame...it doesn’t follow from one’s having the *basic* standing to blame that one has the standing *with* someone to express it, and it doesn’t follow from one’s lacking the standing to *express* blame that one lacks the (basic) standing to feel it...[W]e’re interested in...when and why one might lack the *basic* moral standing to blame.

I agree with Todd that the standing to *feel* blame is more foundational, yet I depart from his view in a significant respect. For Todd (2019: 350), it is not the case that feeling blame is “simply a judgment that the given agent is blameworthy, but also a negative reactive attitude.” I have argued, by contrast, that in the *epistemic* case, loss of the standing to blame occurs, at its most basic level, in such a judgment.

One may worry about a potentially problematic consequence of adopting my reasoning here. That is, in arguing that the epistemically hypocritical blamer lacks the standing to *judge* epistemically blameworthy, we have effectively denied them their ability to do one thing right (that is, to correctly identify an agent as epistemically blameworthy).<sup>42</sup> Are we committed to viewing this small success as objectionable? If so, doesn’t this count in favor of the view that what is objectionable in epistemically hypocritical blame is that one engages in full-fledged epistemic blame—that is, in feeling or expressing characteristic blaming attitudes?

We have already considered some responses in the vicinity in looking at the differences

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<sup>42</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this concern.

between someone committed to (1)–(3) and a blamer who holds attitudes (1) and (2) but not (3). This discussion called into question the idea that the belief in someone else’s epistemic blameworthiness, is a success. In addition, the foregoing should suggest that this kind of epistemic success would be unavailable to the epistemically hypocritical blamer insofar as their inconsistent beliefs regarding the epistemic blameworthiness for violating a particular epistemic norm *defeat* their justification for identifying another epistemic agent as epistemically blameworthy for violating *n*. Lastly, we can take a cue from Todd (2019), who responds to a similar worry. Todd (2019: 374) identifies this sort of response as a brand of standing skepticism, writing, “[a]ccording to the standing skeptic, in purported cases of ‘standingless blame’, all that is objectionable is simply the absence of the agent’s self-blame, and not the presence of the agent’s blame.” Todd asks us to imagine someone who repeatedly violates some norm and fails to self-blame. This lack of self-criticism may be mildly bothersome to you, but if this same person were to suddenly criticize you for a violation of that same norm, you would be liable to object further (Todd 2019: 374). From this we may conclude that, “what is additionally objectionable...is not simply an absence” of one’s self-blame, “but a presence (perhaps, indeed, the presence together with the absence)” of marking another out another as epistemically blameworthy (Todd 2019: 374).

In the preceding, I have provided three arguments for the idea that loss of the standing to epistemically blame can occur at the level of judgement. Note that my explanation of the loss of the standing to epistemically blame is stronger than the alternative views. This is because it makes the home of the relevant entitlements one’s internal mental states rather than one’s behavior. My view places restrictions on what one is allowed to judge or believe.

On a brief closing note, we may ask how much work the epistemic fault I have identified in epistemically hypocritical blame does in explaining the blamer’s loss of standing. I suggest that

the epistemic fault plays an important explanatory role, but is not itself sufficient to account for the epistemically hypocritical blamer's loss of standing. The argument in this section has meant to show that one's right to judge others epistemically blameworthy for violating an epistemic norm is forfeited if one is committed to that norm applying differentially—specifically, in cases of epistemic hypocrisy, in a manner which benefits the hypocritical blamer. I contend, however, that genuine commitment to a norm begins in, or minimally requires, belief that the norm is worth respecting. Our normative commitments have their origin in our rational commitments. Although we have seen that it is the epistemically hypocritical blamer's treating themselves as exceptional to receiving epistemic blame that ultimately compromises their standing, the rational commitments of this blamer are nonetheless an integral part of the explanation for why the blamer loses their standing. It is therefore not the case, on my account, that lacking the standing to epistemically blame is only a matter of failing to have a justified belief in another's epistemic blameworthiness.<sup>43</sup>

## **6. Conclusion**

The aim of this paper has been to launch an epistemic analysis of hypocrisy, and in particular, of what I have termed epistemically hypocritical blame. This has had the dual purpose of demystifying both hypocrisy and standing in the context of epistemic blame. I have argued that the blaming practices of epistemically hypocritical blamers are objectionable on epistemic grounds because they violate the epistemic norm of consistency. I have suggested that the epistemically hypocritical blamer, in meeting the constitutive conditions on epistemic hypocrisy, commits to an opting-out of the shared set of epistemic standards that importantly underlies our standing to form judgments of epistemic blameworthiness. Considering hypocrisy and standing from an

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<sup>43</sup> Todd (2019) briefly discusses the possibility of an epistemic norm for our blaming practices.

epistemological lens has revealed important results about the faults of epistemically hypocritical blame and about standing that have so far gone unnoticed.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> I am grateful to Alexander Wentzell, Jeremy Fantl, Allan Hazlett, Matt McGrath, Artūrs Logins, Todd Cunningham, and an anonymous reviewer from this journal for invaluable feedback and discussion on earlier drafts of this project. In addition, I benefited from opportunities to present different versions of this paper to audiences at the 2023 APA Eastern Division Meeting, the Atlantic Region Philosophers Association 2022 meeting, and the University of Calgary. This paper draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

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