# **Feeling Badly is Not Good Enough: A Reply to Fritz and Miller**

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Abstract: Kyle Fritz and Daniel Miller’s (2019) reply to my (2018) helpfully clarifies their position and our main points of disagreement. Their view is that those who blame hypocritically lack the right to blame for a violation of some moral norm *N* in virtue of having an unfair disposition to blame others, but not themselves, for violations of *N*. This view raises two key questions. First, are there instances of hypocritical blame that do not involve an unfair differential blaming disposition? Second, if the answer to the first question is Yes, do hypocritical blamers of this kind lack the right to blame? In this paper, I argue that the answer to the first question is Yes. Given this, Fritz and Miller’s account faces serious problems regardless of whether the answer to the second question is Yes or No.

Kyle Fritz and Daniel Miller’s (2019a) reply to my article helpfully clarifies their position and our main points of disagreement. Their ultimate aim is to justify the Nonhypocrisy Condition:

Nonhypocrisy Condition (NH): *S* has the right to blame some other agent *R* for a violation of norm *N* only if *S* is not hypocritical with respect to blame for violations of *N* (2019a: 381).

Their (2018) argument for the NH included an account of hypocrisy that they labelled “H3” (2018: 123). H3 claimed that having an unfair differential blaming disposition (UDBD) is necessary for hypocrisy. A UDBD is an unfair disposition to blame others, but not oneself, for violations of *N*. Thus, H3 claimed that:

H3: *S* is hypocritical with respect to violations of *N* iff *S* is blameworthy for a violation of *N* and *S* has a UDBD with respect to violations of *N.*

Fritz and Miller appear to concede that there are cases of hypocrisy that do not involve a UDBD. They now claim that their argument for NH does not rely upon H3, but rather an account of hypocritical *blame* they call “H3\*” (2019a: 380):

H3\*: *S* is hypocritical with respect to *blame* forviolations of *N* iff *R* is blameworthy for a violation of *N* and *R* has a UDBD with respect to violations of *N.*

Fritz and Miller also argue (2019a: 381) that in all cases of hypocrisy that does not involve a UDBD, the hypocrite is not hypocritical with respect to their *blame*, so H3\* does not apply to them. Moreover, asking whether such hypocrites lack the standing to blame is “inapt” (2019a: 381), since insofar as they are hypocrites without UDBDs, they do not blame others. These claims raise two key questions:

1. Are there instances of hypocritical blamethat do not involve a UDBD?
2. If the answer to (1) is Yes, do hypocritical blamers of this kind lack the right to blame? [[1]](#footnote-1)

I believe that the answer to (1) is Yes, and much of this paper will argue for this in detail. I am less confident about the answer to (2). However, it is apparent that given an affirmative answer to (1), either an affirmative or a negative answer to (2) posess serious problem for Fritz and Miller. Suppose that hypocritical blamers who lack a UDBD have the right to blame. Then it follows that the Nonhypocrisy Condition is false. Since Fritz and Miller’s ultimate aim is to vindicate the NH, this means that their argument is doomed to fail. Suppose instead that hypocritical blamers who lack a UDBD lack the right to blame. Since Fritz and Miller’s argument for why hypocritical blamers lack the right to blame crucially depends on their possession of a UDBD, their argument cannot explain why hypocritical blamers who *lack* a UDBD lack the right to blame. So, on this horn of the dilemma, Fritz and Miller fail to fully justify the NH.

Because conceding the existence of hypocritical blamers who lack UDBDs would lead to the dilemma just described, it is of crucial importance for Fritz and Miller to show that hypocritical blame always involves a UDBD, or to show that the answer to question (1) is No. It is to this question that I now turn.

I will discuss two cases of what appears to be hypocritical blame that does not involve a UDBD. The first is a case in which the manifestation of a person’s consistent disposition to blame both self and others is blocked in a particular case.

*Jokey Jake*: Jake is committed to the norm that one morally ought not tell racist jokes. One manifestation of his commitment to this norm are his feelings of self-reproach and shame that he experiences when he recollects past jokes he told during his teenage years, before he became sensitive to the moral reasons not to tell such jokes. If Jake were to be informed that a joke he told today was racist, in almost all cases he would experience the same feelings of self-reproach and shame. However, there is a Polish joke that his deceased father used to tell him, and which he has forgotten until something reminds him of it one day. He tells the joke to his friend Sara, who tells Jake that she thinks the joke is racist. Although Jake usually takes Sara to be a reliable moral judge, he dismisses her claim out of hand because of his sentimental attachment to the joke and implicit and unjustified belief that his father was not the sort of person to tell a racist joke. Later, Jake expresses his indignation about a co-worker who made a racist joke. Exasperated, Sara remarks, “You hypocrite! You’re so indignant, but you told that racist Polish joke and didn’t own up to it!”

Arguably, Jake has a consistent blaming disposition with respect to racist jokes. By stipulation, Jake is disposed to genuinely blame both himself and others for telling racist jokes with near-perfect consistency. However, Jake’s motivated belief that the Polish joke is innocuous—a belief he holds in the face of contrary testimonial evidence—prevents his disposition from manifesting with respect to one racist joke. It must be allowed that one can count as having a consistent blaming disposition even if the disposition fails to manifest at least once, or even on occasion.[[2]](#footnote-2) Thus, that his disposition is blocked on *this* occasion is compatible with the claim that he has a consistent blaming disposition. This is true even if a consistent blaming disposition is a “high fidelity” disposition (see Alfano 2013), meaning that the disposition must manifest near-perfectly in the relevant conditions (i.e., when blame is called for) in order to count as consistent. We have stipulated that this is true in Jake’s case.

Jake’s blame of his co-worker is also hypocritical. Since Jake has easy access to evidence that the Polish joke is racist, and since we can reasonably demand that Jake engage in the kind of moral self-scrutiny that may overturn cherished beliefs if he is to claim a serious commitment to the norm, we can say that Jake is blameworthy for failing to see that the joke is racist. In addition, although it does not reflect a settled *disposition* to blame inconsistently for violations of the norm prohibiting racist jokes, Jake’s blame of his co-worker *is* inconsistent with telling the joke. Since this inconsistency also reflects a culpable lack of moral reflection rather than some innocuous cause, Sara’s accusation of hypocrisy seems to be apt. Thus, Jake is a hypocritical blamer, but not because he has a UDBD.

Fritz and Miller might object that the case is under-described, because we do not know whether Jake is disposed to blame others for this particular Polish joke. If he is, then he has a UDBD. This last claim could be supported in at least two ways. One idea is that a consistent blaming disposition is very high-fidelity, so that any *instance* of differential blame with respect to some norm automatically makes one count as having a differential blaming disposition with respect to that norm. This argument simply denies that a consistent blaming disposition with respect to some norm is compatible with *any* inconsistency in one’s blame for violations of that norm. The burden here is on Fritz and Miller to explain why a consistent blaming disposition requires *perfect* consistency with respect to blaming for some norm.

Alternatively, Fritz and Miller could claim that the norm with respect to which Jake is hypocritical is the norm that one morally ought not tell the particular Polish joke. If Jake is disposed to blame others for this particular joke, then while Jake may not have an unfair differential disposition to blame others for making racist jokes, he has the more fine-grained unfair differential blaming disposition with respect to that more fine-grained norm. Because he has *this* UDBD, he is a hypocritical blamer. If this were the correct account of Jake’s hypocrisy, however, then Sara’s attribution of hypocrisy on the grounds of inconsistency in his blaming for some *other* racist joke would be inapt: she would be justified in calling Jake’s blame hypocritical only if the blame were directed at someone making the particular racist Polish joke. Moreover, those who believe that Jake is a hypocritical blamer without a UDBD need not deny that Jake is hypocritical because of his UDBD with respect to the fine-grained norm. They simply need to claim that Jake is *also* hypocritical because of his blame of others for racist jokes and his telling the Polish joke, and that his disposition to blame for racist jokes *in general* is consistent—i.e., is not a UDBD.

Both of these arguments assumed that Jake is disposed to blame others for the Polish joke. Actually, the accusation of hypocrisy “sticks” even if Jake would not blame others for the Polish joke. Sara need not assume that Jake is disposed to blame others for the Polish joke in order to think herself justified in accusing Jake of hypocrisy with respect to blaming for racist jokes. But that means that his hypocrisy cannot be explained by invoking some UDBD with respect to the Polish joke.

Jake’s case is an example of a hypocritical blamer who does not have a UDBD because his failureto blame himself for racist jokes is restricted to a single racist joke on a single occasion. The point is that one can hypocritically blame even if one lacks a *disposition*, or a reliable tendency,to blame differentially for violations of a particular norm, so long as one’s blame is inconsistent with one’s past actions or attitudes and that inconsistency is blameworthy.[[3]](#footnote-3) Here is a different kind of example.

*Vick the Vegetarian:* Vick is a moral vegetarian activist, but he sometimes can’t resist the temptation to eat burgers. When he does so, he experiences intense guilt and self-reproach. However, after these episodes of self-blame, he does not dwell on these transgressions further, since to fully attend to them would be too costly to his sense of himself as a morally principled person. Moreover, he continues to blame others. Indeed, channeling is own self-reproach onto an external target, he has little patience with vegetarians manqué who claim to have indulged in meat eating due to moral weakness.

Being a moral vegetarian, Vick views his consumption of burgers as a violation of a moral norm. Thus, Vick knowingly behaves in a manner inconsistent with how he believes he morally ought to behave: he is weak-willed. In addition, his genuine commitment to the relevant norm supports the disposition to sincerely blame *both* himself *and* others for violations of the norm. Nevertheless, his blame of others still looks hypocritical. This is not *solely* because his self- and other-directed blame is inconsistent with his own behavior; weakness of will *per se* is not sufficient for hypocrisy. Rather it is because, while Vick does blame himself, his desire to uphold a valued self-image leads to a failure to *translate* that self-blame into any revision of this self-image, or deliberate effort to overcome his akrasia or any other behavioral change. In other words, his self-blame does not lead to *taking* responsibility for what he does.[[4]](#footnote-4) In blaming others, however, he implicitly demands that *they* take responsibility for their ‘wrongdoing’, and is not satisfied until he perceives that they have done just that. He is, therefore, a hypocritical blamer without a UDBD.

One way of describing the case is that although Vick is disposed to blame both self and others, he is not disposed to blame self and others *to an equal degree*. Accordingly, one response open to Fritz and Miller is to change the definition of a UDBD. On the revised account, a UDBD is a disposition to blame oneself and others *unequally*, where this can mean either blaming others and *not* oneself, *or* blaming others and oneself to an *unequal degree*.

However, to evaluate the claim that Vick blames himself and others to an unequal degree, we need an account of *degrees* of blame. One interpretation of blaming to an *equal* degree is the following: two instances of blame are of equal degree just in case both the phenomenal strength of the reactive emotions and the levels of credence in the blameworthiness of the target of blame are equal. On this account, *degrees* of blame refer to the phenomenal strength and credence levels of blame’s constitutive attitudes. Suppose we stipulate that the strength of Vick’s *self-directed* reactive emotions and his levels of credence in his own blameworthiness match those of his *other-directed* emotions and corresponding credences. Despite this, it may still be the case that Vick’s motivated belief in his own goodness prevents him from taking responsibility for his wrongdoing. If so, and if he continues to demand by blaming that others take responsibility for theirs’, I would argue that Vick blames hypocritically. Another interpretation of blaming to an equal degree is that two instances of blame are of equal degree just in case they attribute *equal blameworthiness* to the target of blame. On this view, degrees of blame refer to the *degrees of blameworthiness* the blamer attributes to her blame’s target. Again, even stipulating that Vick believes himself and others to be equally blameworthy, he may fail to take responsibility for his wrongdoing, and this may make his blame of others—wherein the demand to take responsibility is implicit—hypocritical. So, it does not seem that the hypocrisy of Vick’s blame rests on the idea that he blames himself and others to an unequal degree. I conclude, then, that Vick is hypocritical with respect to his blame, but not because he has a UDBD as understood along the lines of Fritz and Miller’s original conception or the revised conception adumbrated above.

## **References**

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1. Throughout this essay, the terms “hypocritical blamer” and “hypocrite with respect to blame” are used interchangeably. We should, however, note the important distinction between a hypocrite who blames, but whose blame is not itself hypocritical—we might call such a person a “hypocritical blamer”—and a hypocrite whose *blame* is hypocritical—a “hypocrite with respect to blame.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Indeed, this possibility partially undergirds Fritz and Miller’s distinction between “Type A” and “Type B” inconsistent blamers (see 2019b: 560-561, esp. n. 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is only a rough characterization. I develop this account of hypocrisy in work currently under review. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Here is one gloss on *taking responsibility*: an agent, *S*, takes responsibility for an outcome whenever they are: (a) willing to do the work required to achieving or prevent that outcome; (b) willing to be accountable for the success or failure of that outcome; and (c) self-identify with that outcome (see Danaher 2011). Vick the Vegetarian fails to meet conditions (a) and (c) on my reading of the case. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)