## **Hypocrisy is Vicious, Value-Expressing Inconsistency**

Abstract: Hypocrisy is a ubiquitous feature of moral and political life, and accusations of hypocrisy a ubiquitous feature of moral and political discourse. Yet it has been curiously under-theorized in analytic philosophy. Fortunately, the last decade has seen a boomlet of articles that address hypocrisy in order to explain and justify conditions on the so-called “standing” to blame (Wallace 2010; Friedman 2013; Bell 2013; Todd 2017; Herstein 2017; Roadevin 2018; Fritz and Miller 2018). Nevertheless, much of this more recent literature does not adequately address the question, “what is hypocrisy?” In this paper, I develop and defend an account of hypocrisy as vicious, value-expressing inconsistency. I show how this account solves some traditional and some novel philosophical puzzles concerning hypocrisy and affords a deeper understanding of the features of hypocrisy emphasized by other prominent accounts.

Hypocrisy is a ubiquitous feature of moral and political life, and accusations of hypocrisy a ubiquitous feature of moral and political discourse. Yet hypocrisy has been curiously under-theorized in analytic philosophy. Fortunately, the last decade has seen a boomlet of articles that address the nature and moral status of hypocrisy, apparently touched off by G.A. Cohen’s (2006) paper, “Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can’t, Condemn the Terrorists?” Cohen claimed that there are facts about those who condemn others that can undermine their *standing* as “good faith condemner[s]” (Cohen 2006: 119). One supposed “standing-undermining” fact is that the critic would be hypocritical in condemning others. The series of articles that followed (Wallace 2010; Friedman 2013; Bell 2013; Todd 2017; Herstein 2017; Roadevin 2018; Fritz and Miller 2018, 2019b) thus examine hypocrisy in order to explain and justify the conditions of the standing to blame. In this way, recent work on hypocrisy constitutes one distributary of the surging interest in the nature and ethics of blame.

Nevertheless, much of this literature does not adequately address the question, “what is hypocrisy?” Although I will not argue for this claim here, this failure has serious implications for some prominent accounts of hypocrisy’s relation to standing (see Rossi 2018; Fritz and Miller 2019a; Rossi 2020). In this paper, I develop an account of hypocrisy as vicious, value-expressing inconsistency. I argue that this account solves some traditional philosophical puzzles concerning hypocrisy and affords a deeper understanding of the features of hypocrisy emphasized by other prominent accounts.

The plan of the paper is as follows. In the first section, I discuss the nature of the inconsistency that hypocrisy involves. In the second section, I explain the ways in which that inconsistency is value-expressing. In the third section, I offer an account of the features of hypocrisy that distinguish it from three phenomena that generate value-expressing inconsistency: weakness of will, changes of mind, and inconsistency due to culpable ignorance. At the end of that section, I precisely state my account and compare it to other prominent theories. Finally, in section four, I consider the possibility of non-vicious hypocrisy.

To anticipate, the account I ultimately arrive at has the following basic commitments. First, hypocritical behavior is constituted by a pair of actions or attitudes that are inconsistent with one another. Second, this pair expresses what the hypocrite either *genuinely* values or her *purported* values—the values to which she outwardly expresses commitment*.* Finally, hypocrisy manifests at least one of four moral vices *or* attitudes characteristic of those vices. While the account is thus irreducibly disjunctive, I propose that there is a way of describing the vices of hypocrisy that unify them: all involve representing oneself as broadly speaking ‘better’ than one is with respect to some value, norm, or ideal.

## **Hypocrisy as Inconsistency**

A key commitment of my account is that hypocrisy requires inconsistency. In this section, I develop this idea and defend it against some objections. I use a classic case of hypocrisy to propose that hypocrisy involves inconsistency between combinations of attitudes or actions, and that hypocrisy can involve three distinct types of inconsistency. One objection to this view is derived from cases involving seemingly hypocritical agents who are merely *disposed* to behave inconsistently; I address this issue by distinguishing between *hypocritical behavior* and the *disposition to be hypocritical.* Another potential problem for the inconsistency account is that hypocritical blame or criticism of other individuals or groups that does not explicitly include the hypocrite herself does not on its face involve inconsistency. I show how, in fact, *any* normative claim commits the hypocrite to a corresponding universal normative claim with which her behavior is inconsistent. Finally, I argue that, contrary to certain accounts, hypocritical inconsistency is neither always self-regarding, nor always driven by narrowly self-interested motivation.

Let’s begin with a classic case of hypocrisy.

*Haggard the Horrible.* Ted Haggard, an evangelical preacher, frequently condemns homosexual sex from the pulpit while secretly engaging in trysts with his male masseur— until the latter publicly reveals the relationship.

This sort of case exemplifies one lay-definition of hypocrisy as not practicing what one preaches. As an exemplar of the phenomenon, the case suggests that all hypocrites manifest an “inconsistent pair” consisting of actions—broadly understood to cover speech acts, omissions, and mental decisions—or attitudes.[[1]](#footnote-1) The pair can be inconsistent in at least three ways. A pair is *propositionally* inconsistent if each member represents contradictorypropositions as true (or false). This can happen if the pair consists of beliefs or *assertions,* speech-acts by which speakers commit to a content’s truth*.* For example, in one version of Haggard’s case, his hypocrisy may partly consist in his assertion that homosexuality is wrong coupled with his belief that it is not wrong for him to have sex with his masseuse.In addition, a pair can be *normatively* inconsistent if it consists of a doxastic attitude or assertion that represents a *normative* proposition as true, and an action or attitude that does not ‘satisfy’ the proposition. A normativeproposition is a proposition that enjoins or endorses (or forbids or disapproves of) an action or attitude by way of concepts such as *ought,* *should*, *good*, and so on. A n example of a normatively inconsistent pair is a pair consisting of Haggard’s belief that he morally ought to not engage in homosexual sex and his engaging in homosexual sex.[[2]](#footnote-2) Finally, a pair can be *alethically* inconsistent if one member represents a false proposition *about* the other member as true. For example, hypocrisy can sometimes arise from self-deception when a person holds false beliefs about her own motivations.[[3]](#footnote-3)

One might think that the inconsistent pair requirement runs afoul of cases like the following.

*Would-be Wanda.* Wanda is talking to her cousin Jane, whom she secretly loathes. Jane is a hospital administrator and confesses that she violated HIPAA regulations in order to access the medical files of a man she wanted to date. Wanda knows she would have done the same thing; nevertheless, she tells Jane she is a terrible person just to make Jane feel ashamed.

Wanda may never have done or attempted to do anything like what Jane did, but her behavior certainly seems hypocritical.[[4]](#footnote-4) In support of this claim, imagine a variation on the case in which Wanda, instead of condemning Jane, tells her that “I can’t blame you, since I would have done the same thing.” The most plausible interpretation of this common kind of talk is as follows: *I can’t blame you, because if I were to blame you when I would have done the same thing, that would be hypocritical*. Partly based on such cases, some philosophers claim that people need only be *disposed* to manifest inconsistent behavior or attitudes in order to count as hypocrites; I call such views “dispositionalist.” This sort of view is rejected by *actualists,* who argue that hypocritical conduct consists in inconsistency between *actual* attitudes or actions.[[5]](#footnote-5) Wanda’s case constitutes *prima facie* evidence against actualism.[[6]](#footnote-6) On the other hand, the actualist appears to have the intuitive upper hand if we imagine that Wanda *has* violated others’ privacy and is merely *disposed* to blame others for doing so, or that she is disposed to violate privacy and also only disposed to condemn others for doing so. In both cases, it seems more natural to say that she *would* behavehypocritically if she blamed others.

We can resolve this debate by distinguishing between *behaving hypocritically*, *being hypocritical,* and being a *hypocritical person*.[[7]](#footnote-7) To anticipate some of what I develop in more detail below, hypocrisy reflects badly on the hypocrite in virtue of manifesting certain moral vices *or* attitudes characteristic of such vices. A hypocritical *person* is not only disposed to behave hypocritically, but these dispositions and behaviors are manifestations of their vicious character traits. By contrast, a person who *is* hypocritical, while being disposed to behave hypocritically, is not as such a hypocritical *person* precisely because her disposition manifests only blameworthy attitudes and not vicious character traits. Hypocritical behavior may or may not manifest vicious character traits. We might say that some instances of behaving hypocritically do not involve behaving *from hypocrisy*, or as a result of the possession of hypocritical vices.[[8]](#footnote-8)

With these distinctions in hand, I propose that actualism is correct as an analysis of behaving hypocritically, while dispositionalism is correct as an analysis of both being hypocritical and being a hypocritical person. We sometimes use the term ‘hypocrite’ to signify only that a person is guilty of behaving hypocritically, while at other times using it to denote a person who is being hypocritical or a hypocritical person.[[9]](#footnote-9) This linguistic ambiguity accounts for our seemingly inconsistent intuitions in the Wanda case variations. In these cases, we ought to say that she is hypocritical with respect to the privacy norm because she is disposed to behave hypocritically, but she does not thereby *behave* hypocritically, and she also may not be a hypocritical *person*.

It is clear how hypocrites behave inconsistently with respect to their own actual or purported values when they say things like, “People should not do X,” and then do X; after all, the hypocrite is a person. Other cases are less obvious, however. For example, Ted Haggard blamed others for engaging in homosexual sex and did so himself, and he is correctly considered a hypocrite for this, but there does not initially appear to be anything *normatively* inconsistent in Haggard’s claim that *others* ought not engage in homosexual sex together with *his* engaging in homosexual sex. In general, it is not always clear how hypocrisy consisting in targeted blame or condemnation involves inconsistency.

A similar problem arises with respect to special pleading hypocrites, who extend justifications or excuses for their own normative failures or those of people they favor while failing to extend them to similarly situated others. Consider the case of Philadelphia Phil.

*Philadelphia Phil*: Phil, an Eagles fan, reads an article about riots in an African-American neighborhood and tells his friend that he hopes those responsible for destroying property are caught and severely punished. Later, upon hearing about how Philadelphia Eagles fans burned cars and smashed windows, he says that they were “just blowing off some steam” and law enforcement shouldn’t bother to punish them.

In this example, Phil hypocritically asserts that “blowing off steam” is an excuse or justification for property destruction when Eagles fans engage in it, but not when African-Americans do the same. But there does not seem to be anything propositionally inconsistent in the claim that *S* is excused for φ-ing, but *R* is not. So if, as I claim, hypocrisy must involve inconsistency, how are we to explain what is inconsistent about Haggard’s condemnation or Phil’s special pleading?

A promising suggestion is that hypocrites somehow commit themselves to the relevant norm not just *as applying* to the object of blame*,* but as applying to themselves or those they favor. This would make their hypocrisy an instance of normative inconsistency. To make good on this claim, I need to introduce a little new vocabulary. I will define a “normative truth” as a truth that enjoins or endorses (prohibits or opposes) by means of a normative term like “ought,” “right,” “reason,” or “good” (or “ought not,” “wrong,” or “bad”) *S*’s φ-ing. Now, my central claim is that by virtue of the normative concepts that figure in them, normative truths are universal in just the following sense:

*Normative Universality*: For some agent *S,* if there is a normative truth that enjoins or endorses (prohibits or opposes) *S*’s φ-ing, then for all agents *R*, there is a normative truth that enjoins or endorses (prohibits or opposes) *R*’s φ-ing under relevantly similar circumstances.

*Normative Universality* is souncontroversial that it seems to capture a basic logical feature of normative propositions, such that insofar as any person, *S*, judges that some agent *R* has a reason to φ, ought to φ, and so forth, *S* thereby *implicitly judges* that any other agent *T* has a reason to φ, ought to φ and so forth in relevantly similar circumstances.[[10]](#footnote-10) That is to say, any competent user of a normative proposition believes, at least dispositionally, that the proposition either itself universally quantifies over agents, or entails a universally quantified proposition in the sense proposed by *Normative Universality.*[[11]](#footnote-11)

If this is the case, then *Normative Universality* can explain what is inconsistent about hypocritical condemnation or blame of particular individuals. When *R* blames *S* for φ-ing, *R* believes, *inter alia,* that *S*’s φ-ing was wrong or bad by the lights of some value, norm, or ideal. If *Normative Universality* is true, then *R* believes, at least dispositionally, that *anyone’s* φ-ing is wrong or bad under relevantly similar circumstances. Thus, when a *hypocrite* blames others for φ-ing, we can say that her behavior is normatively inconsistent with her dispositional belief that φ-ing is wrong or bad for anyone under relevantly similar circumstances. Of course, not all hypocrites blame sincerely; some *feign* blame by performing a condemnatory *speech act.* But such speech acts commit their speakers to the relevant universality claim in virtue of their content, in the same way as someone who says that “*S* has a right to *Q*” and that “*P* is a necessary means to *Q,*” but then says that “*S* has no right to *P*” *speaks* inconsistently, whether or not they believe these utterances.

What about special-pleading hypocrites like Philadelphia Phil? To see what is inconsistent about Phil’s judgments, note that principles governing justification and excuse are themselves normative truths. So, if someone believes or utters a justification or excuse for *some* agent’s φ-ing, then by *Normative Universality*, they either believe or implicitly state that *any* agent is justified or excused for φ-ing in relevantly similar circumstances. If they go on to blame others for φ-ing in relevantly similar circumstances, this is propositionally inconsistent with their beliefs or utterances.

Some philosophers assert that hypocrisy involves only *self-regarding* inconsistencies­: inconsistencies between her beliefs or claims *about herself* and other actions, attitudes, or claims (see Kittay 1982). This view is naturally paired with the idea that hypocrisy is always driven by self-interested motivation (Grant 1997). But none of these claims is true, as the following case illustrates.

*Sally the Sex Offender Defender.* Sally is the parent of an indicted sex offender. She has previously treated the credible testimony of a victim of an alleged sex crime as sufficient to warrant belief in the accused person’s guilt. For example, she criticized others for denying that Christine Ford’s testimony against Brett Kavanaugh was sufficient to establish his culpability. Yet when her own adult child is arrested on sex crime charges, her desire to believe her son is innocent leads her to believe, and to publicly insist, that substantial corroborating evidence, which conveniently does not exist, ought to be a condition of believing him guilty. She is still disposed to believe accusations in other cases on the basis of testimony alone.

Here, Sally’s hypocrisy does not lie in an inconsistency amongst her *self-regarding* attitudes or actions, e.g. claims about her own virtue and behavior inconsistent with such claims. Instead, it consists in the inconsistency between the evidential standard she uses in her son’s case and the one she uses in others’ cases. And although she clearly *favors* her son in her use of double standards, her motives are not self-interested in the narrow sense of aiming at some object she conceives as good for herself (even if, in fact, her son’s innocence *would* be good for her). Thus, it seems that hypocrisy need neither involve self-interested motivation nor self-regarding inconsistency.

## **Hypocrisy Expresses Cares and Commitments**

In this section, I explain how hypocrisy expresses what the hypocrite values or purportedly values. I distinguish between *cares* and *commitments* as different modes of valuing, and I explain how hypocritical inconsistent pairs *express* what the hypocrite values or purports to value. I then offer a case that neatly illustrates various modes of expression of both commitments and cares.

A “commitment” is a complex attitude consisting of an *evaluative judgment* and a *motivational attitude.* The evaluative judgment predicates some evaluative property to an object, such as a person, norm or standard, or state of affairs. For example, a person could judge something to be *exemplary* relative to some standard or *desirable* relative to some standard; or she could judge that some action, feeling, or thought is required, permitted, or obligated by a standard*.* A person counts as *committed* when, in addition to having such a judgment, she is at least to some extent motivated to act in whatever way is appropriate for a given norm, value, or ideal, *for the reason that* she takes it to have this status (e.g., exemplarity, desirability, or some deontic property). A “care”, by contrast, is a complex attitude consisting in a disposition to respond emotionally to the perceived fortunes of the cared-for object (Shoemaker 2015: 51). The key difference between cares and commitments is that the former do not involve evaluative judgment; indeed, the person’s care and its object may be negatively evaluated by the agent (Watson 2004: 167-9; Shoemaker 2015, esp. 51-56).[[12]](#footnote-12) For example, when a person is moved by a vengeful attitude to harm another, she may well believe her desire and the hatred (which is a care) that engenders it are unjustified, at least all-things-considered (Shoemaker 2015: 53).

­We said that hypocrisy *expresses* genuine or purportedcommitments and cares. It can do so in at least three ways. When the hypocrite performs a speech act in which she states that she has one of these attitudes, this act expresses her attitude by way of her *locution*; thus, it is a case of *locutionary expression*. A politician insincerely claiming that he “feels your pain” might be an example of hypocrisy involving locutionary expression of a purported care—the sympathetic pain in this case being constitutive of the care. There are also cases in which at least one member of an inconsistent pair is a speech act by which, as in the case of locutionary expression, the speaker means to express a commitment or care, but this is not what she says. For example, someone who pointedly declares that she “stands for the national anthem” is expressing a commitment, even though she is not explicitly stating that she has the attitude in which that commitment consists. These are cases of *implicative* expression.Finally, there are cases in which at least one member of an inconsistent pair is an attitude or action that either genuinely or purportedly *manifests* a commitment or care. Desires, intentions, and intentional actions can manifest a person’s commitment to their objects by being, while not themselves constitutive of that commitment, causally dependent upon it, as well as the sorts of desires, intentions, and actions a person with that commitment characteristically has or performs. For example, when we say that King David’s anger is hypocritical (see below), we are taking his anger to express an evaluative commitment, and at the same time to be a constituent of his hypocritical inconsistent pair. Hypocrites can also insincerely purport to have a care or commitment by performing actions typical of manifestations of these attitudes. These are all cases of *non-verbal expression.*

As a further illustration of some of these modes of expression of both cares and commitments, consider the case of Uriah Heep, the villain of Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield*.

*Uriah Heep.* An apprentice at Mr. Wickfield’s legal practice, Heep represents himself as a trustworthy helpmeet—“ever so ‘umble,”—who secretly works to destroy Wickfield’s career and force his daughter to marry him.

*Qua* hypocrite, Heep represents himself as possessing two kinds of attitude. First, *via* locutionary expression he represents himself as *committed* to certain standards of conduct, such as the norm of keeping one’s promises, because these are commitments that a loyal, trustworthy, and humble subordinate would have. Second, by performing actions that purportedly manifest a care for his employer, he represents himself as having the *cares* such a subordinate would have. Finally, Heep expresses his *genuine* cares and commitments by adopting the intentions to destroy Wickfield’s career and marry his daughter. Thus, Heep nicely illustrates how hypocrisy expresses the hypocrite’s genuine or purported commitments or cares. His hypocrisy involves the insincere *outward* *expression* of the commitments and cares just described, and his actual attitudes, which express his *genuine* commitments or cares.[[13]](#footnote-13)

## **Hypocrisy, Weakness of Will, and Changes of Mind**

Combined with the idea of hypocrisy as inconsistency, the view so far is that all instances of hypocritical *behavior* are characterized by an inconsistent pair that expresses the hypocrite’s genuine or *purported* commitments or cares. For the sake of brevity, I will call such pairs “value-expressing.” However, philosophers have long recognized that weakness of will and changes of mind bear important similarities to hypocrisy (see Szabados and Soifer 2004, Turner 1990). Complicating matters is that while not identical to hypocrisy, they can be tightly bound up with hypocritical behavior. In addition, it has not been previously recognized that culpable ignorance can lead to value-expressing inconsistency, but apparently without hypocrisy. I will argue that the distinction between hypocrisy and these phenomena is that hypocrisy manifests a particular suite of vices or attitudes characteristic of those vices, and in virtue of this, hypocrisy always reflects badly on the hypocrite.

Consider the following case.

*Haggard the Horrible: Weak Willed Non-Hypocrite.* Ted Haggard frequently and sincerely condemns homosexuality from the pulpit. At some point, he engages in a homosexual act. Afterwards, he experiences tremendous guilt and self-recrimination and never repeats the experience. Accepting that he will lose his pastoral position and the moral adulation of his parishioners if the incident is made public, and feeling that he no longer merits a position of responsibility in his religious community, he publicly discloses his action, steps down from his pastoral position, and ceases his public condemnation.

In this case, Haggard is weak-willed: he acts or intends against his better judgment, with subsequent feelings of regret. In acting against his moral convictions, he also manifests an inconsistent pair consisting of an action normatively inconsistent with one of his commitments. Yet Haggard does not seem hypocritical here. Kyle Fritz and Daniel Miller (2018; 2019a) suggest that this is because Haggard lacks an *unfair differential blaming disposition* (UDBD)*.* A differential blaming disposition is a disposition to blame others, but not oneself, for violations of a norm; such a disposition is *unfair* if there are no differences between one’s own case and others’ cases that justify differential moral treatment of them. Since Haggard is both disposed to blame others and himself, he lacks such a disposition, and Fritz and Miller claim that this explains why we do not judge him to be hypocritical. In general, they suggest, the presence or absence of a UDBD is what distinguishes hypocrisy from weakness of will and changes of mind (Fritz and Miller 2018: 122; 2019a: 381).[[14]](#footnote-14) However, consider a modified version of this case.

*Haggard the Horrible: Weak Willed Hypocritical Blamer.* Ted Haggard has been removed from his pastoral position. However, he is unable to refrain from engaging in homosexual sex. He experiences guilt and self-recrimination whenever he indulges in these acts; however, after these episodes of self-blame, he does not dwell on his “transgressions” further, since to fully attend to them would be too costly to his sense of himself as a pious person. Moreover, he continues to genuinely blame others, although he keeps these feelings to himself. Indeed, channeling is own self-reproach onto an external target, he experiences the most indignation towards those who claim to have engaged in homosexual sex due to moral weakness.

Just as in *Weak Willed Non-Hypocrite,* Haggard in this case does not have a differential blaming disposition, but his conduct still looks vulnerable to the accusation of hypocrisy. This is because while Haggard does blame himself, his desire to uphold a valued self-image leads to a failure to *translate* that self-blame into any sustained critical self-reflection, 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. In blaming others, however, he implicitly demands that *they* take responsibility for their ‘wrongdoing’—even if, in this case, he keeps his blame to himself. In short, he inconsistently makes an implicit normative demand that others take responsibility while omitting to do so himself, failing to “put his own house in order” before criticizing others. Thus, he is a hypocritical blamer without a UDBD.

It might be suggested that Haggard has a UDBD because the fact that he does not attempt to take responsibility for his actions suggests that his blame is insincere or different in kind from the blame he experiences towards others.[[15]](#footnote-15) But I do not see why Haggard’s failure to take responsibility suggests that he does not genuinely demand *of himself* that he take responsibility. What we have in Haggard is a psychic battle between two elements, with both of which Haggard wholeheartedly identifies: his desire to see himself as a moral exemplar and his guilty conscience. That the former reliably wins out over the latter is not evidence that his self-blame is insincere, or that does not make a genuine self-demand.[[16]](#footnote-16)

We also need an explanation for why some cases of changes of mind seem hypocritical while others do not, even though changes of mind need not involve blame at all. Consider this example.

*Petroleum Polly*: Polly, a recent PhD in geology, is talking to a friend at a party about what she will do with her new degree. Her friend asks her whether she would consider working for an oil company as a surveyor. Polly recoils. “Of course not! It would be deeply immoral to help fossil fuel companies warm the planet!” Her friend expresses support for the sentiment—but adds that no one could be blamed for at least being interested in a 500k starting salary. “500k?” Polly replies. “That’s…a lot.” A few weeks later, her friend runs into her and discovers she has taken a surveying job for BP. She explains her decision thusly: “You know, I read more about it, and it turns out that the science is a lot murkier than I thought.”

What is clear in this case is that Polly had one very strong opinion at one time, has a different one shortly thereafter, and the information about the starting salary played an important role in that change. As Szabados and Soifer (2004) point out, there are ways of understanding this kind of case that are non-hypocritical (Szabados and Soifer 2004: 273-275). For example, while the information about the starting salary may have prompted Polly to research climate change in greater depth, it may not be the cause of her change of mind. To condemn that change as hypocritical solely on the basis of its epistemically or ethically impure *origins* would be to commit a version of the genetic fallacy.

There are, however, descriptions of the case that suggest that Polly’s change of mind is hypocritical. One such description involves the claim that Polly is self-deceived, and so requires a little unpacking of this notoriously difficult notion.[[17]](#footnote-17) On Al Mele’s (2001; 2009) conception, *S* is self-deceived concerning *p* if, roughly, *S* falsely believes that *p*, this belief is the result of some motivationally biased treatment of the evidence,the evidence available to *S* provides greater support for ~*p* than *p,* and *S* has some false belief(s) about the reasoning she employed to arrive at *p*.[[18]](#footnote-18) Suppose that initially, Polly genuinely holds an anti-fossil fuel industry view. However, because she wants a lucrative job, her subsequent assessment of the evidence is selective and distorted, resulting in a false belief about the state of climate science. On the basis of this belief, she concludes that it is permissible for her to work for BP. Polly is not aware that her desire for a lucrative job drove her inquiry; instead, she sees herself as having arrived at her conclusions through sound reasoning and appropriate weighing of evidence. This is important to her, as she wants to believe she is an unbiased and critical thinker. Thus, through self-deception, Polly hypocritically pretends (to herself) that her belief that it is permissible to work for the fossil fuel industry is based on sound reasoning. Importantly, in this description, her hypocrisy lies not in her change of mind *per se*, but in the inconsistency between her beliefs about her reasons for belief and her actual reasons for belief.

Based on cases like Polly’s, we might follow Szabados and Soifer’s suggestion that hypocrisy will always involve deception or self-deception, while weakness of will and changes of mind need not (Szabados and Soifer 2004: 271-285; see also Statman 1997). This would be a mistake for a number of reasons. As we have seen, according to at least one important account, self-deception requires false belief. However, consider the biblical story of King David.

*King David:* David commits adultery with Bathsheeba and knowingly causes her husband’s death in order to continue the affair. Later, Nathan tells David a story about a rich man who, when preparing a meal for a hungry traveler, kills a poor man’s only lamb instead of one from his large flock. When David “burns with anger” on behalf of the poor man, Nathan replies, “You are the man.”

There is a reading of the case on which David’s hypocrisy is a manifestation of moral complacency supported by a culpable failure of self-reflection. David impulsively commits an injustice without considering the moral considerations for or against it, and since he occupies a position of extreme power and privilege, no one dares call him out on it. Then, when presented with a story that clearly underscores similar moral considerations, he responds with genuine indignation directed at the fictional wrongdoer. Szabados and Soifer correctly see this as a case of unconscious hypocrisy, but they also claim that David exhibits self-deception:

What we have here is a culpable failure of self-knowledge… One is too lazy or reluctant to look, anxious that one’s own moral identifications are at risk (Szabados and Soifer 2004: 266).

However, they neglect to point out that being *too lazy* to engage in self-examination is very different from being reluctant to do so. The latter suggests self-deception, while the former does not. If David is just *too lazy* to engage in moral self-examination, perhaps due to an underlying complacent disposition, then there need be none of the tension characteristically involved in cases of self-deception: no suspicion that he might really have been in the wrong, no effort at rationalization, no conscious avoidance of evidence of wrongdoing. Moreover, if self-deception involves having a false belief, then David must be mistaken about something. But it’s possible that David has *no* beliefs about the moral status of his action because he’s too complacent to engage in *post hoc* self-reflection, and he may correctly believe that the fictional rich man’s actions were wrong. Thus, this version of the King David story is a case of hypocrisy without self-deception.

We could also fill in the details of Polly’s case that makes it seem more like a case of hypocrisy without self-deception. Because she is complacent—that is to say, disposed to be unjustifiably satisfied with herself with respect to her values—Polly’s commitments are rather shallow: she devotes very little effort to interrogating her standing vis-à-vis her normative commitments. Her desire for a lucrative job causes her to gradually change her mind about the fossil fuel industry’s contribution to climate change not by prompting a new inquiry into the science, but rather by causing her to gradually and largely unconsciously change her beliefs in various scientific propositions. Finally, being basically unreflective, Polly has no views about why she changed her mind, and does not much care. Here, unlike in the previous description, Polly’s hypocrisy appears to consist in the two contrary beliefs in the permissibility and impermissibility of working for the fossil fuel industry, the transition between which also constitutes her change of mind. That change is itself a diachronic, value-expressing inconsistency that manifests complacency.

Another reason to reject Szabados and Soifer’s view is premised upon the idea that self-deception requires false beliefs about one’s belief-forming process. Suppose that Sally the Sex Offender Defenderhas no beliefs about why she believes corroborating evidence is necessary for proof beyond a reasonable doubt in her son’s case. Not being aware of one’s belief-forming process is not the same as having false beliefs about it. Thus, Sally is guilty not of self-deception, but of something like *wishful thinking*.[[19]](#footnote-19) If Sally is still a hypocrite, then hypocrisy without self-deception is possible.

It also seems possible that one knows one’s belief is based on motivationally biased treatment of the evidence, but one does not abandon it because it is too psychically costly to do so: call this *willful ignorance.*[[20]](#footnote-20) Suppose that Sally the Sex Offender Defender’s close friend, frustrated by her inconsistency, emails her a series of articles about why credible accusers’ stories ought to be sufficient to warrant belief in the accused person’s guilt. Sally knows that her friend would only send her the articles that made rationally compelling arguments, but when she sees the subject lines of the emails, she sends them directly to the trash. If we still think she behaves hypocritically, then hypocrisy does not require self-deception.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Although I reject Szabados and Soifer’s general thesis, one might maintain that what distinguishes hypocritical *instances* of weakness of will or changes of mind from non-hypocritical instances is that in the former the person deceives or is self-deceived *about* their weakness of will or change of mind, whereas in non-hypocritical cases the person does not deceive about such things. For example, in one version of the case, Polly’s hypocrisy consists in pretending to herself or others that her change of mind was due, not to desire for lucre, but a dispassionate review of the science.

However, changes of mind or weakness of will combined with deception do not always amount to hypocrisy. Consider Wilhelm Canaris, the head of German military intelligence (*Abwehr)* in Nazi Germany. Like many conservative military men, Canaris welcomed the Nazi takeover in 1933. However, notwithstanding his anti-Semitism and contempt for Communism, as the decade progressed his admiration for the Nazis faded. Here I will somewhat fictionalize Canaris in order to make his case satisfy Szabados and Soifer’s conditions on hypocritical changes of mind (see Orbach 2016). The massacres of Jews he personally witnessed in Poland far exceeded what he could morally tolerate, turning him against the regime. He knew, however, that most German military officers would not be moved by the thought of massacred Jews. Hence, in order to gain their support for a plot to overthrow Hitler, he pretended that what brought about his change of mind was Hitler’s warmongering. Here we have all the conditions of hypocritical changes of mind, according to Szabados and Soifer: Canaris pretends that his change of mind was caused by considerations deemed worthy by the standards of the relevant community, while in fact it was caused by considerations “deemed unworthy or unacceptable by the social group” (Szabados and Soifer 2004: 277).. Yet attributing hypocrisy to Canaris seems inapt.

We can conclude from the foregoing discussion that neither weakness of will nor changes of mind are *in themselves* hypocritical. As the last description of *Petroleum Polly* suggests, to replace one belief with another that is inconsistent with it, or to change one’s mind, *may* count as an instance of hypocrisy, but this will depend to upon the reasons or causes of the change: Polly’s hypocrisy in the last description seems to consist in a change of mind that manifests a morally complacent disposition. Likewise, to act or intend inconsistently with how one believes one ought to act, perhaps with subsequent feelings of regret, seems to be hypocritical only when these actions are causally dependent on attitudes or dispositions that *reflect badly* on the agent in specific ways. For example, Haggard’s hypocrisy seems to lie in his failure to take responsibility, coupled with his demand that others do so—an inconsistency that we might chalk up to unjustified self-regard.

My suggestion, then, is that what is properly called “hypocrisy” is not *mere* value-expressing inconsistency, but inconsistency that reflects badly on the hypocrite in virtue of manifesting certain vicious character traits or attitudes of the agent*.* By “manifest,” I mean that the behavior is both causally dependent upon these character traits or attitudes, and the behavior consists of attitudes and actions to which that character trait or attitude characteristically disposes an agent (see Shoemaker 2015: 48-49). I cannot provide a full account of these vices and attitudes in this paper, so what follows is a sketch of the view I develop more fully elsewhere. I understand moral vice, after Driver (2001) and Cassam (2019), as a character trait that produces actual bad consequences systematically (i.e., generally and on-balance) in a certain context (Driver 2001: 107; Cassam 2019: 23). The vices of hypocrisy are pretentiousness, self-righteousness, complacency, and partiality. Pretentiousnessis a disposition to knowingly falsely represent oneself to others as better than one is with respect to values prized by these others, or at least as committed to these values, with an eye toward gaining some advantage based on that misrepresentation. Self-righteousness is the disposition to falsely represent oneself asexemplary along some dimension of value to oneself, and possibly to others. Complacency is the disposition to be unjustifiably satisfied with one’s goodness or rectitude with respect to some value, norm, or ideal. Partiality is the disposition to unjustifiably regard oneself or favored others as morally deserving of treatment that one is *not* disposedto extend to others. In hypocrisy, these *moral* vices are characteristically supported by at least one of the following *epistemic* (or epistemic *cum* moral)vices: dishonesty, self-deception, willful ignorance, wishful thinking, and unreflectiveness.

As I briefly discussed in section one, I take it that someone can *behave* hypocritically even if it is out of character for them to do so. This means that they do not have the moral vices that hypocritical people have and many people who behave hypocritically exhibit. Instead, their hypocrisy exhibits the vicious *attitudes* that are characteristic of these vices. For example, even if one is not a self-righteous *person*, meaning that one is robustly disposed to have self-righteous attitudes, one can exhibit a self-righteous attitude *on occasion.* Thus, behaving hypocritically and having a disposition to behave hypocritically may reflect badly on one, but may not manifest a vicious character trait. I will return to this point in my consideration of objections to the account.

This account can also help distinguish between hypocrisy and cases in which a person’s ignoranceof empirical facts causes her to behave inconsistently with her actual or purported values in a way that reflects badly on the agent, but apparently without hypocrisy. Consider the following case.

*Foolish Fritz*: Fritz believes, and has frequently stated, that it is immoral for a parent to risk losing large sums of money on ‘gambles,’ by which he means risky financial ventures. For example, he has on this basis blamed other people for playing the stock market or investing in friends’ business ventures. However, Fritz is also extremely gullible and foolish. When he receives an email from “Prince Faisal I of Iraq” asking for a $25,000 loan to fund a coup d’etat to be repaid with interest in oil revenues, he sends it. When confronted by his wife about the inconsistency between his actions and his opposition to gambling, he says, “But this *isn’t* a gamble! If you can’t trust a prince, who can you trust?”

Fritz is ignorant of the fact that the email is a scam, and his ignorance is due to his epistemic vices of foolishness and gullibility (for discussion of these vices, see Cassam 2019: esp. Ch. 2). Sending the check *notwithstanding* his own stance against gambling is thus a manifestation of vice, and reflects badly on him. Yet he does not seem to be *hypocritical* in virtue of this vicious, value-expressing inconsistency.

One response to Fritz’s case is to suggest that hypocrisy occurs only when a person behaves in a way that is inconsistent with her actual or stated values *on her own understanding of her behavior.* But phenomena like self-deceived special pleading hypocrisy militate against this proposal. Consider again the case of *Sally the Sex Offender Defender.* The most natural description of Sally’s hypocrisy is that she is unfairly using one evidential standard for her own child, and another standard for others. But if she is self-deceived, Sally would likely deny this characterization. If she were confronted with this inconsistency, she might evade the point or perhaps try to argue that the testimony of her son’s accuser is not credible.

A better way to distinguish between self-deceived hypocritical special pleaders and people like Foolish Fritz is to note that people like Foolish Fritz do not manifest the vices or attitudes characteristic of those vices distinctive of *hypocritical* behavior. Foolish Fritz is not a hypocrite because while he is foolish and gullible, he is neither characterologically nor attitudinally pretentious, self-righteous, complacent, or partial. By contrast, the conduct of characters like Sally the Sex Offender Defender, Ted Haggard, Uriah Heep, and Petroleum Polly all manifest at least one of these vices or their corresponding attitudes. Sally is partial with respect to her child, and her partiality is supported by some self-obscuring mechanism such as self-deception, wishful thinking, or willful blindness. Haggard and Heep are both pretentious, representing themselves as “better” than they know themselves to be. And Polly is complacent and/or self-deceived. Thus, what distinguishes weakness of will, changes of mind, and inconsistency due to culpable ignorance from hypocrisy is that the latter’s inconsistency manifests a particular suite of vices or attitudes characteristic of them.

Because it invokes the notion of vice, the account on offer is intrinsically normative. This is an advantage over a purely descriptive account, since the same fact(s) may not invariably reflect badly on the agent in different contexts. For this reason, it may be difficult or impossible to try to distinguish weakness of will or changes of mind from hypocrisy *in terms of* such facts. Many philosophers seem to have the intuition that one can act inconsistently without being hypocritical if one publicly *acknowledges* one’s wrongdoing, engages in self-blame, commits oneself to the norm one violated, engages in critical self-scrutiny, seeks to compensate those effected by one’s hypocrisy, or some combination thereof (Duff 2010; Roadevin 2018; Fritz and Miller 2018, 2019b). But these *mitigating factors* are notoriously difficult to describe in general terms; we always seem to be able to come up with a case in which a given factor is present, but the conduct is still hypocritical. My account explains why this is the case: our judgments of hypocrisy track a certain cluster of vices and attitudes characteristic of these vices, and the sorts of gestures listed above are *sometimes* rebutters of hypocrisy attributions because they sometimes, *though not invariably*, indicate that the agent’s inconsistency does not manifest vices or vicious attitudes.

Let us take stock. In this section, I have argued that hypocrisy always reflects badly on the hypocrite because it manifests at least one of a suite of vices or attitudes characteristic of these vices. This is sufficient to distinguish it from weakness of will, changes of mind, and inconsistency due to culpable ignorance. The first two phenomena are not always vicious; and when they are, they do not always manifest the specific vices or attitudes distinctive ofhypocrisy. Inconsistency due to culpable ignorance is vicious by definition, but it is nevertheless not a manifestation of the aforementioned vices or attitudes. Thus, it too is distinct from hypocrisy.

We are now in a position to precisely state the account of hypocrisy as vicious, value-expressing inconsistency.

1. *S behaves hypocritically* if and only if
2. *S* instantiates an inconsistent pair that expresses *S*’s values or purported values; and
3. The inconsistent pair reflects badly on *S* in virtue of its manifesting least one of the following:
   1. Pretentiousness; or
   2. Self-righteousness; or
   3. Complacency; or
   4. Partiality; or
   5. Attitudes or ways of thinking characteristic of (i)-(iv)
4. *S* is *hypocritical* if and only if *S* is disposed to behave hypocritically due to some attitudes or ways of thinking characteristic of the vices listed in 1(b).
5. *S* is a *hypocritical person* if and only if *S* is disposed to behave hypocritically and this behavior reflects at least one of the vices listed in 1(b).

My account has something in common with Roger Crisp and Christopher Cowton’s (1994) account, according to which hypocrisy instantiates the vice of a lack of “moral seriousness.” Both accounts locate the essence of hypocrisy at least in part in the hypocrite’s traits of character or the lack thereof. There are, however, four difficulties with this account. First, lacking moral seriousness is clearly not sufficient for hypocrisy: for example, a person may not care about her relation to morality, and her behavior can be entirely consistent with her moral insouciance. Second, the “moral seriousness” account cannot accommodate cases of hypocrisy with respect to non-moral values, norms, or ideals (cf. Bloomfield 2018: 74). While my account links hypocrisy to moral vice, it does not require that hypocrites act inconsistently with respect to only moral norms. For instance, a person can manifest a partial attitude or trait of character *with respect to* their application of non-moral norms. Third, this account cannot accommodate cases of hypocrisy that do not manifest an absence of the *character trait* “moral seriousness,” e.g., out-of-character hypocrisy.[[22]](#footnote-22) Finally, while there may be a *sense* of “moral seriousness” that aptly describes every instance of hypocritical behavior, I doubt that there is a single sense that applies to all instances. For example, a pretentious hypocrite may not take morality seriously in the sense that she doesn’t *actually* care about some justified moral value, but she may take morality very seriously in the sense that her attitude toward that value might be the result of careful deliberation about the values to which she ought to be committed. By contrast, the self-righteous hypocrite may care deeply about a moral value, and so in that sense be morally serious, but her commitment may not be supported by serious self-reflection concerning which values to adopt. Both characters can be said to “lack moral seriousness,” but that characterization does not mean the same thing in each context. Thus, characterizing hypocrites as “lacking moral seriousness” is not particularly informative.

There is, however, a way to describe the vices of hypocrisy that unifies them: they all involve representing oneself as broadly speaking ‘better’ than one is with respect to some value, norm, or ideal.[[23]](#footnote-23) It is for this reason that hypocrisy has some of the other features we have noted. For example, hypocrisy involves the expression of the hypocrite’s genuine or purported values because hypocrisy is a manifestation of the hypocrite’s representations of herself as “better” with respect to those genuine or purported values. It involves expressions of commitments *and* cares because these are both ways of promoting, living up to, or behaving in accordance with values, ideals, and norms. Finally, hypocrisy can be constituted by three kinds of inconsistency--normative, propositional, and alethic—because these are different ways in which one’s representations of oneself as “better” can be false.

My account also provides a useful corrective to another recent theory put forward by Paul Bloomfield (2018). Bloomfield offers the following account of hypocrisy:

HYP: Hypocrisy is when, with regard to circumstances of type ϕ, an agent attempts to wrongly take an advantage by judging and/or acting in accord with one standard privately, or in one range of situations in which ϕ arises, while judging and/or acting in accord with a different standard publicly, or in a distinct range of ϕ situations (Bloomfield 2018: 70).

There are a few problems with this definition. Bloomfield explicitly states that the benefit hypocrisy aims at must “redound to the hypocritical agent”; he claims that “if I wrongly employ a double standard to enrich the coffers of my loved ones, this is unjust and immoral but not hypocritical” (2018: 72). In other words, Bloomfield appears to subscribe to the view that hypocrisy always involves self-interested motivation. However, the variations on the Sally the Sex Offender Case throw this claim into doubt; Sally wrongly uses a double standard, but in doing so she aims first and foremost to benefit her son.

Another problem is that because Bloomfield’s notion of “double standard” goes unanalyzed in his article, it is difficult to assess whether acting or judging in accord with a “double standard” in Bloomfield’s sense is *equivalent* to acting or judging inconsistently in mysense, or if the former constitutes a proper subset of the latter. This comes out in Bloomfield’s discussion of Tony Lynch and A.R.J. Fisher’s (2012) article on “pure hypocrisy.” As they depict him, the pure hypocrite is sincerely committed to the standards she applies to others and sincerely believes her own behavior meets those standards; yet, she violates those standards, sometimes in the name of promoting morality itself*.* Lynch and Fisher claim that the pure hypocrite does not use two standards—one “reflected in what they say,” the other “under whose authority they act.” Instead, pure hypocrites “take themselves to have one set of standards…and to be living up to those standards” (2012: 36). Bloomfield’s reply to this claim is that “if pure hypocrites are violating their own standards, even in the name of upholding them, then there is still a double standard involved” (2018: 77). Bloomfield’s idea seems to be that simply performing an action that is normatively inconsistent with the standards by which one lives amounts to acting in accord with *two* standards. On this capacious interpretation, acting or judging in accord with double standards is just equivalent to acting or judging inconsistently. The advantage of framing the account in terms of inconsistent pairs instead of this capacious sense of “double standards” is that doing so does not threaten to obscure a narrower sense of “using double standards” in which an agent either consciously or unconsciously appliestwo different principles to like cases. On this more restricted interpretation, not all hypocrites use double standards. The weak-willed hypocrite, for example, does not apply two different standards to his and others’ cases, but simply fails to live up to the standard he sincerely avows.

## **Non-Vicious Hypocrisy?**

My account claims that hypocrisy manifests vice or vicious attitudes. I argued that this claim is the key to distinguishing between hypocrisy and other phenomena that generate value-expressing inconsistent pairs. However, some philosophers seem to argue that non-vicious hypocrisy is possible. Consider the following case.

*Franck the Fake.* Franck is a Jew living under Nazi occupation in World War II who uses forged documents to avoid deportation. He also sometimes reluctantly espouses Nazi beliefs in public, including condemning Communists, Jews, and so on, to avoid drawing suspicion. Of course, he abhors the Nazis and Nazi values.

Eva Feder Kittay holds that Franck is a hypocrite, but his hypocrisy is “quite free of moral opprobrium” since it is employed “defensively and protectively in a threatening and aggressive situation” (Kittay 1982: 289). Kittay and Szabados and Soifer refer to people like Franck as “victim hypocrites.” Turner (1990) also defends the possibility of hypocrisy without moral blemish.

The claim that Franck’s behavior is free of moral opprobrium can be interpreted as the claim that his behavior is not *blameworthy* either because, while it does violate some moral obligation, Franck is excused from blame, or because it does not violate any moral obligation.[[24]](#footnote-24) If this is the correct interpretation, then my account can accommodate this case so long as Franck’s behavior is still a manifestation of one of the vices or vicious attitudes. To see how hypocrisy is *as such* a manifestation of vice or vicious attitudes yet not necessarily blameworthy, we must carefully distinguish between the claim that hypocritical behavior *reflects badly* on agents, and the claim that agents are *blameworthy* for their hypocritical behavior.[[25]](#footnote-25) A number of philosophers have distinguished between three types of responsibility: attributability, answerability, and accountability. Roughly, an agent is attributable-responsible for an action or attitude just in case it manifests an agent’s character; and an agent is answerable-responsible for an action or attitude just in case the agent could in principle cite her reasons[[26]](#footnote-26) for having the attitude or performing the action. In order for one’s behavior to count as hypocritical, it must manifest either vice or vicious attitudes; and from this it follows that agents are always either attributable-responsible for their hypocrisy in cases in which it manifests their vicious character, or answerable-responsible for it in cases in which the behavior is motivated by vicious judgments. And since hypocritical behavior is *vicious*, it follows that an agent is liable to the *critical* responses characteristic of either type of responsibility. For instance, Shoemaker (2015) argues that disdain is the characteristic emotion for which attributable agents are liable when their attitudes manifest vicious character traits.[[27]](#footnote-27) It is in this sense that hypocritical behavior *reflects badly* on agents: it manifests their (vicious) quality of character or judgment, and because of this, it is worthy of certain critical responses. My view, then, is that agents are always either attributable- or answerable-responsible for their hypocritical behavior *because* their behavior manifests vice or vicious attitudes.

Still, there is an important sense in which agents may be said to *not* be blameworthy for their hypocrisy: they may not be *accountable* for it. Roughly, one is accountable for some action or attitude just in case one is *properly held responsible* for it, where this involves the imposition of some form of *sanction*. The imposition of sanctions arguably raises issue of fairness that attributability and answerability responses do not; most notably, the fair imposition of sanction seems to require that the target of sanction had some form(s) of control that would allow them to avoid incurring it. Hypocritical agents may fail to meet these control conditions and so, on my view, may not be fairly held accountable. And it is in this sense that hypocrites may not be blameworthy: they may not be worthy ofthose responses characteristic of accountability-responsibility*.* Returning to Franck’s case, if we supposed that Franck could not reasonably be expected *not* to be hypocritical under the circumstances, then he may not be accountable, even though may still be liable to certain critical responses.

The distinction between reflecting badly and blameworthiness or accountability-blame highlights another possible interpretation of the claim that Franck’s hypocrisy is free of moral opprobrium: that it does not *reflect badly* on him because it is not a manifestation of vice or vicious attitudes. Crucially, on this interpretation, Franck’s behavior *cannot be hypocritical* if my account is correct. It seems to me that this is, indeed, the most natural interpretation of the case; Franck’s behavior is not pretentious, self-righteous, complacent, or partial. Hence, assuming the second interpretation of the claim that it is free of moral opprobrium, there seems to be a genuine clash of intuitions concerning Franck’s case: I do not see it as a case of hypocrisy, while Kittay and others do. It is worth noting that more recent accounts of hypocrisy tend to support the view that hypocrisy is, as such, a manifestation of vicious dispositions or attitudes. Fritz and Miller (2018) defines hypocrisy in terms of having an *unfair* differential disposition to blame, while we have seen that on Bloomfield’s view hypocrisy is always an attempt to take unfair advantage. Indeed, Bloomfield explicitly avers that “there is always something wrong with hypocrisy: there is no reason for having the concept *hypocrisy,* other than to point to behavior we wish to discourage in ourselves and others” (2018: 72). Conversely, Crisp and Cowton acknowledge that we would feel “qualms” about describing Franck’s actions as hypocritical, and that if we do, it is because they are the sorts of actions typically performed by hypocritical people (1994: 78). Thus, philosophers are unsettled as to the intrinsic viciousness of hypocrisy.

Since my project is to examine and evaluate commonplace moral claims about hypocrisy, my conception of hypocrisy, including with respect to its intrinsic viciousness, ought to be broadly consistent with ‘folk’ intuition. Alicke et. al. (2013) report that in cases in which people act inconsistently with their convictions due to rival social values, hypocrisy attributions are “reduced when the actor’s motives are prosocial, as in the case where attitude-inconsistent behaviors involved avoiding conflict with relatives” (Alicke et. al. 2013: 681). Since respondents likely see prosocial inconsistency as morally benign, this suggests that attributions of hypocrisy depend on the attributor’s perception of facts that alter the conduct’s moral valence. Speaking almost directly to cases like Franck’s, Alicke et. al. speculate that “people would refrain from calling a political dissenter who pretended to follow the policy line to avoid severe reprisals a hypocrite…” although such cases were not part of their attribution study (2013: 691). Alicke et. al. also find that parents who admit to their former drug use but exhort their children to refrain from drugs are frequently seen as hypocrites, as is an unmarried woman who believes that premarital sex is wrong but freely acknowledges she is sexually active (Alicke et. al. 2013: 689). Their proposed explanation for the hypocrisy attributions is that these characters evince “an air of superiority” (Alicke et. al. 2013: 289), thus invoking attitudes in the light of which the people in the stories seem morally vicious. Finally, the intrinsic viciousness view explains Barden et. al.’s (2005) finding that people are much more likely to judge someone to be a hypocrite if their statement establishing a personal standard *preceded* behavior violating that standard as opposed to the behavior coming first. Mediation analyses showed that the latter order mitigated hypocrisy attributions because it opened up the possibility of the target undergoing a change of views or moral dispositions. In test subjects’ eyes, one temporal ordering suggests that the behavior manifests a vice or a vicious attitude, while another ordering is evidence for a non-vicious change of mind or moral improvement. ‘Folk’ intuitions, then, seem to better cohere with the intrinsic viciousness view.

Another reason to be skeptical of the possibility of non-vicious hypocrisy is that it would make the so-called No Hypocrisy Conditionon the standing to blame extremely difficult to justify. The No Hypocrisy Condition is the claim that:

No Hypocrisy Condition (NH): *S* has the standing 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*.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Many things about the NH remain unsettled, including the nature of standing itself, but one thing seems fairly clear: any justification of the NH will have to point to some moral fault in virtue of which hypocrites or would-be hypocrites lose their standing, where by “moral fault” I mean some morally objectionable attitudes, actions, or character dispositions.[[29]](#footnote-29) But if cases like Franck’s truly are cases of hypocrisy “without moral opprobrium,” in which neither the hypocrite’s actions nor his attitudes or dispositions are objectionable, then it is hard to see how such cases could be compatible with a justification of the NH that invokes hypocrisy’s essential moral objectionableness. And if the NH can only be justified in this way, then it appears that cases of like Franck’s cast doubt on the truth of the NH itself.[[30]](#footnote-30) Admittedly, that implication would not be difficult to accept for those who, for independent reasons, hold that the NH is indefensible. But for the many philosophers attracted to something like the NH, it is a significant consequence.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I developed an account of moral hypocrisy according to which hypocritical *behavior* is value-expressing inconsistency that reflects badly on its agent in virtue of manifesting certain vices or attitudes characteristic of those vices. I argued that hypocrisy is to be distinguished from similar phenomena like weakness of will, changes of mind, and inconsistent behavior due to culpable ignorance in terms of the kinds of vices or vicious attitudes that hypocritical behavior manifests. Along the way, I argued that my account is both consistent with, and can explain, the extant empirical findings about hypocrisy attribution, and that it can deepen our appreciation of features of hypocrisy emphasized by other accounts, such as the hypocrite’s lack of “moral seriousness.”

On my view, hypocrisy just is a way in which vicious character traits or attitudes manifest themselves in behavior and behavioral dispositions. This approach has two important implications. First, “hypocrisy” does not name a distinctive vice; rather, it is a kind of *behavior* or behavioral disposition that *manifests* at least one member of a cluster of vices or attitudes characteristic of these vices. In this sense, my account of hypocrisy’s objectionableness is both reductive and pluralist. Second, since whether some conduct so much as counts as hypocritical will depend upon whether or not it reflects traits or attitudes, it may often be the case that what *looks* a lot like hypocrisy is not hypocrisy at all. Thus, generally, we ought to be more circumspect about attributing hypocrisy to others.[[31]](#footnote-31)

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1. My account shares much in common with Dan Turner’s (1990) account, according to which someone is hypocritical just in case she manifests a “disparity pair” that expresses values. Turner acknowledges that since “cases of changes of mind do not properly count as cases of hypocrisy,” his account does not give sufficient conditions for hypocrisy (Turner 1990: 266). I will argue for an additional condition: that the inconsistent pair is reflects badly on the agent in virtue of manifesting at least one of a handful of moral vices or attitudes characteristic of these vices. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cases of supposedly inconsistent *actions* typically fall under this type of inconsistency. For example, it seems hypocritical for a person to secretly donate to a corrupt oil company for business reasons, and also publicly donate to a wildlife conservation organization. One way of understanding this case is to see the public act of donation to the conservation organization as an expression of a normative commitment that is inconsistent with donating to a corrupt oil company. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer at *The Journal of Ethics* for this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the case of *Petroleum Polly* below. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tognazzini and Coates (2014) call such cases *subjunctive hypocrisy.* See also Todd (2017: 360). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Actualism” should not be understood as excluding dispositional attitudes, which are attitudes an agent actually has, but rather dispositions to acquire attitudes or to behave in certain ways. For actualist views, see Isserow and Klein (2017), Wallace (2010). For dispositionalist views, see Fritz and Miller (2018; 2019b), Rossi (2018). Complicating this distinction is the fact that many dispositions to behave and acquire attitudes are grounded in actual attitudes. For example, on Fritz and Miller’s view, the hypocritical blamer’s differential blaming disposition is grounded in an attitude of unequal regard. However, this attitude is not essential to hypocrisy as such. Hence, regardless of the categorical ground of the disposition, on Fritz and Miller’s view it is the disposition that remains essential to hypocrisy, and so the view counts as “dispositionalist.” Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for *The Journal of Ethics* for pushing me on this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It may be objected that if Wanda is merely disposed to want to do the same thing as Jane, then Jane would lack justification for attributing hypocrisy to Wanda. In response, the dispositionalist can reply that whether or not Wanda *is* a hypocrite does not obviously depend upon Jane’s *actual* attribution of hypocrisy to Wanda or her possession of sufficient evidence for that attribution. It might also be objected that if Wanda knows she would have done the same thing, she must know it on the basis of some past action or attitude; but in that case, her hypocrisy involves *actual* attitudes or actions, rather than dispositions. However, I believe Wanda would be equally hypocritical (i.e., disposed to behave hypocritically) even if she did not know that she would have done the same thing. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for *The Journal of Ethics* for bringing these objections to my attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bloomfield (2018: esp. 78) makes a similar distinction between acting hypocritically and being hypocritical, although in his taxonomy a person who is hypocritical is what I call a “hypocritical person”. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Thanks to Robert Audi for this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Isserow and Klein (2017) and Bloomfield (2018) correctly point out that hypocrisy does not always amount to a full-fledged character trait. Fritz and Miller (2019b: 556) plausibly argue that because dispositions can be fine-grained, a dispositional account of hypocrisy is not committed to this claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Compare this claim with Henry Sidgwick’s claim that “[i]f…I judge any action to be right for myself, I implicitly judge it to be right for any other person whose nature and circumstances do not differ from my own in some important respects” (Sidgwick 1981: 208). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Normative Universality* is compatible with various forms of agent-relativity, including *internalism about practical reasons,* which *Normative Universality* can accommodate by counting psychological states of the agent among the “relevantly similar circumstances” referenced in its consequent. For example, if some reason for *S* to φ is dependent upon *S*’s having an attitude *A*, any agent *R* will have a reason to φ only if *R* has an attitude of the same type and with the same content (e.g., a desire to φ). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. My conception of “commitment” is different from Shoemaker’s in that his “commitments” are restricted to those judgments the agent would endorse under good conditions for reflection (see Shoemaker 2015: 49). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Hypocrisy can also involve the expression of onlycommitments or only cares. Both members of the inconsistent pair may express a commitment or care, or only one. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In light of Fritz and Miller’s (2019a) discussion, this claim requires some qualification. Fritz and Miller now say that a UDBD is necessary for one’s *blame* to be hypocritical, but not for hypocrisy *per se.* In this section, I argue in effect that even this qualified claim is false. However, if having a UDBD is not necessary for hypocrisy, then it is apparent that the absence of a UDBD cannot be what distinguishes weakness of will from hypocrisy in general. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer at *The Journal of Ethics* and Chad Van Shoelandt for pressing me on these points. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. One way of describing the case is that although Haggard is disposed to blame both self and others, he is not disposed to blame self and others to an equal degree. My reply to this suggestion can be found in [redacted]. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Statman (1997) for a probing discussion of hypocrisy and self-deception. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For alternative accounts, see Audi (1989) and Bermúdez (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Bach (1981), Johnston (1988), and Scott-Kakures (2002) for discussion of wishful thinking and its relation to self-deception. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Holton (2001) for discussion of willful ignorance and its relation to self-deception. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This case in some ways resembles David Runciman’s veiled description of George W. Bush (or perhaps Tony Blair): “If, say, one were a democratic politician sincerely believing that another regime posed a threat to national security because of its weapons program, and also recognizing that maintaining the sincerity of one’s convictions was crucial to persuading the public of the threat, then one might seek to insulate that sincerity from reasonable doubts, by deliberately avoiding any evidence that might raise such doubts. In this way, the politician remains sincere…But the politician is still a hypocrite” (Runciman 2008: 172). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Crisp and Cowton might claim that out-of-character hypocritical acts are so-called because they are the kind of acts typically performed by those who take morality seriously (1994: 347). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. This is not a wholly original view. Kittay (1982), McKinnon (1991), Grant (1997), and Szabados and Soifer (2004) all understand the hypocrite as a person who represents herself as better than she is. Kant (1788) partly equates hypocrisy with false humility. Lynch and Fisher (2012) depict the “pure hypocrite” as someone who either desperately wants to be virtuous, or who believes himself to be a “Force for Good.” In either case, this kind of hypocrite *regards* himself as better that he really is, perhaps as a result of willful ignorance or self-deception. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Some might want to allow the possibility of blameworthy but morally permissible behavior, so that the mere fact that Franck’s behavior does not violate a moral obligation does not entail that he is not blameworthy for it (see, e.g., Coates 2012). If so, we can add to this second alternative that Franck’s behavior does not reflect attitudes or character traits that would make it blameworthy. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Cassam (2019: esp. Ch. 6) for an application of a similar distinction to an account of epistemic responsibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Shoemaker (2015, 75-76) argues that the capacity to cite a distinctive *kind* of reason is required for answerability: namely, *relevant contrastive* reasons for this *as opposed to* that. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Whether we label such critical responses *blame* or mere *criticism* is largely a matter of conceptual regimentation. For example, Cassam (2019: 139) seems to argue that criticism of this kind is not blame; Watson (1996) and Shoemaker (2015) classify them as different types of blame. Importantly, however, the responsibility skepticism articulated by philosophers such as Derk Pereboom (2014) or Galen Strawson (1994) concerns *accountability-responsibility* (see Caruso 2018 for discussion). Thus, my account is not vulnerable to the objection that if no one is morally responsible for their actions because no one possesses the requisite control over their actions or character, then no one can engage in hypocritical behavior. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer at *The Journal of Ethics* for raising this issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Cf. Wallace (2010), Todd (2017), Roadevin (2018), Rossi (2018), Fritz and Miller (2018; 2019b). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For examples of this strategy, see Fritz and Miller (2018; 2019b), Roadevin (2018), Isserow and Klein (2017), Todd (2017), and Wallace (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Thanks to David O’Brien for suggesting this argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. I would like to thank the participants in the Murphy Institute’s faculty seminar in which this paper was discussed for their incisive comments. Particular thanks are due to David O’Brien, Chad Van Schoelandt, and David Shoemaker for their probing questions. I would also like to thank Robert Audi for his helpful feedback on an early draft of this essay, and two anonymous reviewers at *The Journal of Ethics* for their wonderfully constructive criticism. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)