

Standing to Praise

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Abstract: This paper argues that praise is governed by a norm of standing, namely the *evaluative commitment condition*. Even when the target of praise is praiseworthy and known to be so by the praiser, praise can be inappropriate owing to the praiser's lacking the relevant evaluative commitment. I propose that uncommitted praisers lack the standing to praise in that, owing to their lack of commitment to the relevant value, they have not earned the right to host the co-valuing that is the communicative aim of praise.

1. Introduction

Sometimes praise is intuitively inappropriate despite its being the case that the person praised is praiseworthy and known to be so by the person praising. To illustrate, consider the following case:

Andrei cares about the availability of clean drinking water. He lobbies against the mismanagement of water resources, volunteers to pressure domestic and international groups to revise wasteful irrigation practices, etc. Recently, Andrei's proposal for the harvesting of rain and gray water has been accepted by an international water council; plans are underway to deliver infrastructure that will provide clean water for several at-risk communities. Andrei is proud of this achievement. And rightly so: Andrei, I stipulate, is praiseworthy for it. Now, suppose that Andrei's brother, Basil, who is in other respects a decent sibling, has failed time and again to show any real concern or support for the issues animating Andrei, namely those of 'vital environmental aid', as we can call it. Andrei does not expect Basil to *be like him*, i.e., equally (or even half as) passionate about vital environmental aid. But Andrei wishes that Basil would accept at least some of Andrei's many (but gradually infrequent) invitations to get involved with, or show support for, issues of vital environmental aid, e.g., by attending nearby lectures about water crises, joining for protests, signing and forwarding petitions, etc. Although Basil does not *prevent* Andrei from promoting vital environmental aid, his failure to muster any concern for this end has become evident in his various abovementioned omissions. Suppose, finally, that, having learned of Andrei's achievement, Basil praises Andrei for it, saying with enthusiasm something like, "Well done! Your hard work is really going to help people."

What Basil asserts is true (Andrei's work *is* going to help people) and Basil possesses sufficient evidence of Andrei's praiseworthiness. Yet, it is not difficult to imagine Andrei being put off by his brother's praise. There is *something* morally objectionable about Basil's praise given what his past responses reveal of his evaluative commitments. The proposal that this paper seeks to develop is that Basil lacks the *standing to praise* Andrei, and that this is so owing to Basil's lack of commitment to the value underlying Andrei's praiseworthiness. Though I take as my starting point the intuition that Basil's uncommitted praise is morally objectionable, this paper mounts an argument in support of this intuition, one that

builds on assumptions concerning the psychological resources we employ in being committed to some value, along with an account of the communicative character of praise.

A widely held view in the literature on blame is that although some agent may be blameworthy, it might nonetheless be inappropriate for *me* (or some other particular person) to blame that agent. In virtue of one's relation to the blameworthy agent, one might lack the standing to appropriately feel and express attitudes of blame. Various conditions have been identified as necessary for standing to blame, of which the most commonly cited are *non-hypocrisy*, *non-complicity*, and *non-meddling* conditions.¹ The (would-be) hypocritical blamer, for instance, is sometimes taken to lack the standing to blame because in blaming another for a wrongful act that he himself refuses to 'own up to' (i.e. express remorse, or apologize, for), the hypocritical blamer privileges his own interests in a manner expressive of wrongful disregard for the moral equality of persons.² While there is disagreement about what makes it the case that the hypocritical (or complicit, etc.) blamer's blame is morally objectionable, the thesis that such blamers lack the requisite standing to blame has emerged as the "standard account" (Bell 2013) or "orthodox view" (King 2019).

On the face of it— and as one may be inclined to conclude from a survey of the relevant literature— norms of standing have no analogue in the domain of praise. While it is often assumed that persons sometimes fail to be "*blamer-worthy*" (Friedman 2013: 273), similar restrictions seem not to apply to the 'praiser-worthiness' of persons. We might attempt to ground such a difference in other asymmetries between praise and blame, e.g., in blame's tendency to cause pain, or perhaps its characteristic force or sting (Hieronymi 2004; Pickard 2013: 619; Wallace,

¹ Beade (2019); Cohen (2006); Duff (2010); Dworkin (2000); Edlich (2022); Edwards (2019); Friedman (2013); Fritz & Miller (2018, 2019); Herstein (2017, 2020); Isserow (2022); Isserow and Klein (2017); Lippert-Rasmussen (2013); Piovarchy (2021, 2023); Radzik (2011); Riedner (2019); Roadevin (2018); Rossi (2018) Sabini and Silver (1982: 40–42); Seim (2019); Scanlon (2008: 175–179); Smith (2007); Snedegar (2023); Todd (2012, 2019); Wallace (2010); Wertheimer (1998). Darwall (2006: 54), drawing on Austin's talk of "illocutionary abuses" (which are nonetheless felicitous), arguably invokes a norm of standing to blame. For skepticism about standing to blame, see Bell (2013) and King (2019). Dover (2019), too, is a skeptic about standing to blame, though she denies that hypocritical blame is wrong in the first place. Note that not all *non-skeptics*, i.e., those who accept that there are norms of standing to blame, take all of the above conditions (i.e., non-hypocrisy, non-complicity, and non-meddling) to pick out genuine or irreducible norms of "standing". See Todd (2019).

² See Wallace (2010: 329), Friedman (2013: 280–1); Fritz and Miller (2018: 125), and for a recent challenge to the moral equality account of hypocrites' standing to blame, Lippert-Rasmussen (2020). But see Tierney (2021).

1994: 54). Perhaps praise differs from blame in being like good company: ‘the more the merrier’, such that any candidate praiser has the standing to praise any praiseworthy agent. *Perhaps*. But, given the wealth of research on norms governing blame, we should expect greater reflection on the idea that our responsibility practices display sensitivity to norms governing standing to praise.³ This relative neglect is plausibly symptomatic, at least in part, of the fact that our vocabulary of praise is impoverished generally, relative to that of blame (cf. Watson 1996: 283).⁴ But, if we hope to understand the ethics of a full range of our responses to morally responsible agents, it is incumbent upon us to enrich our vocabulary of praise. In this paper, proceeding from cases like that of Basil and Andrei, I take a step toward this goal by making a case for the existence and moral significance of a norm of standing to praise. I argue, in particular, that the praise of candidate praisers is governed by the “evaluative commitment condition”: *for S to appropriately praise T for ϕ -ing, S’s praise must be based in commitment to the value expressed in T’s ϕ -ing*. Praise that flouts this condition is vulnerable to a distinctive kind of criticism. Why does the lack of evaluative commitment undermine standing to praise? Two factors feature centrally in the account I provide: i) the nature of the psychological resources employed in being committed to some value, and ii) the interpersonal good achieved when praise fulfils its communicative aim. Having omitted to invest one’s psychological resources in promotion of some value, the uncommitted praiser has not earned the right to partake in the interpersonal good of communicative praise concerning that value.

I proceed as follows. In section 2, I clarify the relevant sense of praise at issue. Section 3 presents two cases where, despite the praiser’s knowing the person praised to be praiseworthy, it is inappropriate *for them* to praise. Before advancing my view that these praisers lack the standing to praise owing to their lack of

³ But see Lippert-Rasmussen (2013) for discussion of the objectionableness of *failing to praise* others for that which one praises oneself, which Lippert-Rasmussen (2022) understands in terms of the lack of standing for *self-praise*. (I return to this idea in section 5.) See also Fritz and Miller (2018: 123) who, in the course of providing an account of why hypocrisy undermines the standing to blame, provide an analogous case of unfair praise, one where a praiser praises only one of two equally praiseworthy agents (on the basis of a differential disposition to praise). For exploratory comments on the topic, see also Stout (2020: 219), Telech (2022: 11) and Johansson Werkmäster (2023: 184-187). On ‘hypocritical praise’, see Jeppsson and Brandenburg (2022). Additionally, several of Markovits’s (2012) examples invite discussion of standing to praise.

⁴ A further (non-justificatory) explanation may be that talk of “standing” derives at least in part from legal discourse, where “standing” or *locus standi* refers to the right a plaintiff must have in order to bring suit to court (*US Const. Art. III, sec. 2*). For influential discussion of modern standing law, see Fletcher (1988).

evaluative commitment, I illustrate the inadequacy of two, more familiar, explanations of what wrong goes in the cases. Section 4 advances the evaluative commitment condition, and with it, articulates why evaluative commitment is normatively significant such that it could matter to praise. Section 5 advances a view of the wrongness of evaluatively uncommitted praise that relies on a communicative (in particular, *invitational*) conception of praise, and proceeds to argue that we should understand evaluatively uncommitted praise as standingless praise.

2. Fixing Praise

The sense of “praise” of interest me is that associated with ‘giving another credit’ for some action.⁵ More substantively, I take it that to praise someone for some action is, at a minimum, to positively evaluate and take non-instrumental satisfaction in their performance of that action and to be motivated therein to communicate one’s attitude to the target. This requires some unpacking. First, positive evaluation alone is not enough; Satan and the amoralist can presumably positively evaluate the saint’s action—in the sense of representing her to have done ‘the right thing for the right reasons’, say—without thereby praising her. In learning that you placed another’s interests before your own, Satan or the amoralist might think, ‘she did the morally right thing—*what a sucker!*’ This is not a response of credit-giving or praise. Unlike the amoralist’s or Satan’s response, praise is expressive of the praiser’s *being for*, or *in favor of*, the action performed by the agent, and thus involves her taking satisfaction in the action (represented to have been) performed.⁶

The satisfaction taken must be of a *non-instrumental* kind. For, if the ground of Al’s satisfaction in another’s performance of some generous deed, say, were solely that he placed a bet predicting this action, Al’s satisfaction will not be of the right sort to constitute praise. Praise involves non-instrumental satisfaction in the positively evaluated action: in praising another for some action, the praisee is satisfied in the action *in virtue of taking that action to have been done for the right reasons* (e.g. out of concern for another’s normative perspective, or her autonomy, or her well-being, etc.). Owing to its being a retrospective response that takes non-instrumental satisfaction in an agent’s having done the right thing for the right reasons, praise understandably represents its target as meriting the positive response that praise is.⁷ Unlike judgments of praiseworthiness—which too

⁵ This and the following paragraph draw on Telech (2023: 327)

⁶ See Arpaly and Schroeder (2014: 160-161).

⁷ While this formulation might suggest that I take merit (or desert) to be part of the representational *content* of praise, I remain neutral on this issue.

represent their objects as worthy of a positive response— instances of praise essentially evince non-instrumental satisfaction in the action represented as praiseworthy.⁸

Next, the kind of praise of interest to me is a *communicative* phenomenon. That is, on the approach here pursued, praise (like blame)—or at least, one kind of praise— is an inherently interpersonal response that seeks uptake from its targets, and as such presupposes the target’s possession of certain normative competencies. In adopting a communicative view of praise and blame I join those who follow Gary Watson (1987: 235) in thinking that “holding responsible requires the intelligibility of moral address...[where] a condition of such address is that the other be seen as a potential moral interlocutor”.⁹ There may be other types of praise, e.g. praise consisting merely in positive evaluation or ‘grading’ (Smart 1961: 303).¹⁰ But my topic here is praise qua moral address, through which the praiser communicates her positive evaluative attitude to the object of praise. Given that praise not only represents another as praiseworthy in some respect, but involves non-instrumental satisfaction in another’s performance of the action, it is intelligible that the praiser is motivated to communicate their attitude to the praiseworthy agent. Recognizing that another has performed an action we take to be worthy of praise, we are motivated to ‘give credit’, by expressing our recognition of the action’s moral significance, to the agent.

The claim that praise is communicative can be unpacked in a range of ways compatible with this paper’s aim. On one understanding it is essential to praise that it *is in fact* communicated, such that only overt acts (e.g. speech acts) expressive of the right kind of attitude will count as praise. Alternatively, it may be that while individual tokens of praise needn’t be expressed to count as praise, praise-manifesting attitudes are communicative as a type in *aiming* at their own communication, e.g., owing to their etiological function, or their action-tendency. For simplicity’s sake, I focus in what follows on overtly expressed praise—that is, the overt expression of attitudes of taking non-instrumental satisfaction in an agent’s performance of some action— for this praise is both non-controversially

⁸ As described thus far, the present view of praise is consistent with, but less committal than, Strawsonian accounts of praise, according to which praise is instanced in positive emotions—or “reactive attitudes” (Strawson 1962)—like admiration and gratitude. At least, this is so on the assumption that these kinds of reactive attitudes are ways of positively evaluating and taking non-instrumental satisfaction in an agent’s performance of some action.

⁹ See also Darwall (2006); Fricker (2016); Helm (2017); Macnamara (2011, 2013); McKenna (2012); Shoemaker (2011, 2015); Wallace (2019); Telech (2021).

¹⁰ For an overview of different accounts of praise, see Telech (2022).

communicative and poised to bring into relief the interpersonal significance of our praising responses.

Finally, unless otherwise noted, it can be assumed in what follows that the persons praised are in fact praiseworthy and that the praiser is warranted in believing (indeed, *knows*) them to be so.

3. Two Cases (and what's *not* wrong with them)

This section presents two (ostensible) cases out standingless praise, and then clarifies that their intuitive objectionableness cannot be accounted for by supposing the praise to be either insincere or pragmatically infelicitous.

3.1 The Cases

The first example is that canvassed in the introduction, namely that of the brothers, Andrei and Basil. We can be brief here. Recall that Andrei is praiseworthy for his work in promoting vital environmental aid, and that his brother, Basil, who has failed time and again to show any real concern or support for the issues animating Andrei, now praises his brother for his achievement, saying something like, "Well done! Your hard work is really going to help people." Although Basil knows Andrei to be praiseworthy, there is intuitively something morally objectionable about his praise.¹¹ I stipulate the Basil does indeed take Andrei to have done something praiseworthy; his praise is not feigned. Though Andrei knows this, he is disinclined to accept Basil's praise.

Mira and Ron are professional acquaintances and chairs of their respective History Departments. Mira works assiduously to implement measures geared toward improving the representation of women in her department (and thereby in the profession at large), both at the student and faculty levels. For example, given evidence of bias against candidates with the names of women, Mira ensures that search committees review applications anonymously. She has also advocated for greater inclusion of women authors on course syllabi, and takes measures to promote greater inclusion of women speakers at departmental events. Mira, in short, is deeply committed to the *value of improving the representation of women in the*

¹¹ As the praiser in this case is the praiseworthy agent's *brother*, he may have special (e.g. relationship-dependent) reasons (perhaps obligations) to engage with Andrei's evaluative projects. But, whatever norm of partiality Basil violates in failing to take an interest in his brother's deepest evaluative commitments, this norm is violated *prior to and independently of* his now praising Andrei, which is the focus of my attention. Praise is bound to take place in *some* relationship (including that between strangers), and the norms governing the relationship in question will invariably have some bearing on the overall normative significance of the praise.

academic discipline of History. Over the course of their professional relationship—meetings at conferences, workshops, the occasional coffee, etc.—Ron has learned of Mira’s various efforts, and he admires her for it (where his admiration is a praise-manifesting attitude). Ron judges valuable Mira’s work in this regard. But, in his capacity as chair of his department and as a member of the profession at large, Ron fails to engage in the kinds of efforts that Mira ardently pursues. It’s not that Ron ever sets out to undermine the representation of women in his discipline. But his belief that initiatives like Mira’s are valuable has no meaningful import for his day-to-day motivational, attentional, and affective dispositions. Mira knows of Ron’s tendencies (or lack thereof) in this area, and so, when Ron praises her, saying things like ‘good on you!’ or ‘I admire what you’re doing’, this praise rings hollow. Ron’s praise is sincere and based in justified beliefs about Mira’s praiseworthiness. But Ron lacks commitment to the value underlying Mira’s praiseworthy action. This lack of commitment is evinced in Ron’s failure to support (by expending motivational, affective or attentional resources in promotion of) initiatives aimed at improving the representation of women in the discipline. Having little reason to believe that Ron is committed to the value underlying the actions for which she is being praised, Mira is disinclined to accept Ron’s praise.¹²

3.2 What’s *not* wrong with the Cases

I stipulated that the praisers are being sincere. Can this be coherently stipulated? One might think that our praisers *must* be engaged in a kind of pretense, not really meaning the words of praise they utter. Admittedly, it is not difficult to come up with explanations for why one might seek to *appear* to judge praiseworthy what one does not, in fact, take to be praiseworthy. Doing so may be in the insincere praiser’s self-interest. This idea can be unpacked in a variety of ways, corresponding to a variety of ways acts can be self-serving. Perhaps Ron seeks to curry favor with Mira in light of her recent receipt of a large grant. In such a case, Ron’s insincere praise would amount to flattery, and an especially manipulative instance of it.¹³ Or

¹² A further (sketch of an) example for those sympathetic to the Strawsonian view that *gratitude* is a paradigmatic vehicle of praise: war veterans sometimes report feelings of alienation and aversion when targeted with gratitude (e.g., “thank you for your service”) from individuals who otherwise evince no commitment to the values underlying their service. See e.g., former US Army officer Phil Carter’s remarks (2011): “Instead of thanking me, I wanted them to do something tangible for their country, to make some sacrifice greater than the amount of lung effort necessary to utter a few words.” See also Richtel (2015) and Sherman (2015: 41).

¹³ At least, if we suppose that Ron “makes use of excessive commendatory language in describing the qualities or record of another person for the purpose of creating a favorable attitude in that person towards the flatterer” (Eylon and Heyd 2008: 686).

perhaps Ron's laudatory utterance is explained by the desire to make a favorable impression on others within earshot. Regardless of how exactly the self-interested motive is construed, if Ron's 'praise' is in fact insincere and motivated by self-interest, it will be no mystery why his behavior would be objectionable. More generally, the worry goes, why not think that what goes wrong in our cases is that they are instances of *insincere + self-serving* praise?

In reply, I grant that we *can* construe the cases above as non-praise masquerading as praise, i.e., as instances of *insincere + self-serving* praise. *Insincere + self-serving* praise in my view picks out a genuine phenomenon of moral interest. Consider the CEO who publicly lauds his poorly compensated employees, calling them 'heroes' as they work in precarious conditions that are within his power to ameliorate.¹⁴ Should we conclude that because Ron and Basil lack evaluative commitment to the values underlying their targets of praise that their praise must be, like the CEO's, insincere and self-serving? One reason to doubt this is that hypocritical blamers are naturally understood as possessing the blaming attitudes they appear to have in engaging in blaming behavior.¹⁵ Indeed, this is part of what is so frustrating about hypocritical blame. It would be highly surprising if it turned out that persons can sincerely blame despite lacking commitment to the norm underlying the blameworthiness of the action, but cannot sincerely praise without commitment to the value underlying the praiseworthy action. At the very least, the explanatory burden is on those positing this kind of asymmetry.

But, even if the praise is not insincere, it might be otherwise deceptive. Perhaps we can explain what is objectionable in the above cases by appeal to the conversational pragmatics of praise. Expressions of praise often imply something about the speaker, and the implication may be false in our examples. So, even if we grant that the praiser lacks any motive to deceive, if their praise is pragmatically infelicitous, licensing a false inference about the praiser, it may be, in this sense, deceptive.

To illustrate, suppose Basil's praise of Andrei conversationally implies, say, *that Basil has performed certain actions in support Andrei's promotion of vital environmental aid* [S]. If so, even if Basil lacks the desire to mislead anyone into thinking that he in fact did support Andrei in this way, his expression of praise [P],

¹⁴ See Brogan (2020). For related discussion of ways in which positive reactive attitudes can uphold and mask oppressive expectations, see Martin (2021). See also Holroyd (2021). See, too, Johnson King (ms.) on the ways in which praise (whether sincere or insincere) can function to distract (from pressing moral and political questions) and manipulate (especially exploited agents).

¹⁵ This contrasts with the *insincere + self-serving blame* of those like Molière's Tartuffe, a "clear-eyed hypocrite" according to Bell (2013: 275).

might itself be a deceptive utterance; owing to the meaning of its terms or the pragmatics of the assertion, P , we might think, implies S . And S is false. Perhaps it is this kind of linguistic infelicity that we are picking up on in the above cases of praise. Call this the “linguistic explanation”.

The linguistic explanation falls short for at least two reasons. First, on the assumption that Basil’s expression of praise, P , conversationally implies that he has supported Andrei, S , then Basil ought to be able to render his praise linguistically kosher by cancelling what’s implied by P . For, conversational implicature is standardly taken to be *cancelable*, such that implicatures to the effect that p can felicitously be cancelled by the speaker’s tacking onto them, *not p* (Grice 1975: 44). For example, if I ask whether you plan on attending the festival on Friday and you *are* planning on going, but reply [W] ‘I work on Friday’, your utterance will license the conversational implicature that you are *not* planning on going to the festival. But, if you add ‘but I will come after work’ to the end of [W], the implicature will be cancelled, and so, you will have violated no norm governing conversational implicature. The norm violated by the evaluatively uncommitted praiser, however, does not appear to be cancellable. Were Basil to express praise for Andrei’s achievement, and then add something like, ‘I, of course, did little to nothing to support your goal’, the objectionableness of Basil’s praise would remain (if anything, it would be exacerbated).

Second, and more importantly, the linguistic explanation offers the wrong kind of explanation for the phenomenon at issue. What needs explaining is the *morally objectionable* quality of the praise in question. But, when one violates a norm of conversational implicature, one does not thereby, or necessarily, do anything morally objectionable. If Pete says, [R] ‘the Rocky Mountains are absolutely stunning’, he will have licensed the inference that [M] *Pete has seen the Rocky Mountains*. Suppose Pete has not in fact seen the Rockies and that it is on the basis of testimony that he knows R. Suppose also that Pete is ignorant of the norm that licenses the inference that he has seen the Rockies. Pete has no motive to deceive. Now, if we know all this of Pete, and so, understand that he utters R without any aim of deceiving us about what he has seen, his evaluative statement—con conversationally infelicitous though it is— will ordinarily cause no offense. Why should it? Violations of linguistic norms may occasionally be annoying, tending to impede conversation, but they do not by themselves disrespect, or otherwise slight, one’s interlocuter. The linguistic explanation fails because it does not account for the intuitive moral objectionableness of the above cases. Ron and Basil do not manifest shortcomings of linguistic competence, but rather moral psychological failures. To be sure, some instances of evaluatively uncommitted praise may, as a matter of fact, also violate norms of conversational pragmatics. But to understand

the distinctive objectionableness of the praise in the above cases, we must look elsewhere.

The explanation I propose shares with the *insincere + self-interested explanation* the idea that the praise in question is morally objectionable owing to facts about the praiser's underlying psychology. It shares with the *linguistic explanation* the idea that the objectionableness of the praise is to be understood in communicative terms. It is by attending to the nature of evaluative commitment on the one hand, and the form of address proper to praise, on the other, that we can see what is distinctively objectionable about the above cases.

4. Evaluative Commitment

To make sense of the objectionableness of the praisers' praise in our examples, I propose we understand each as featuring the failure to meet the *evaluative commitment condition* governing praise.¹⁶

EVALUATIVE COMMITMENT CONDITION:

For S to appropriately praise T for ϕ -ing, S's praise must be based in commitment to the value expressed in T's ϕ -ing.

To anticipate, reflection on evaluative commitment will provide us with one of two parts of my explanation of the wrongness of uncommitted praise, the other residing in praise's communicative nature (section 5). Before that, however, we need to get clear on what evaluative commitment is (4.1) and why it is normatively significant such that it could matter to the status of one's praise (4.2).

4.1 The Nature of Evaluative Commitment

What is evaluative commitment (i.e. 'commitment to a value')? To start, it is a way of responding to (perceived¹⁷) value. It is, further, a way of responding to value that

¹⁶ Commitment accounts of the standing to *blame* (or, of hypocrisy's undermining standing to blame) have been developed and endorsed in recent years (Rossi 2018; Riedener 2019; Todd 2019; Lippert-Rasmussen 2020). I take this to provide prima facie support for my proposal. Still, because these theorists tend to say relatively little about what commitment consists in, and because I diverge from them in certain non-trivial respects (see e.g. notes 18, 21), I provide my own characterization of commitment.

¹⁷ I forego this qualification hereafter, as I focus on cases where the evaluatively committed agent is indeed committed to something of genuine value (and not merely perceived value). Still, evaluative commitment is non-factive, and so, it does not follow from an agent's being evaluatively committed to X that X is valuable.

is psychologically more robust than the ways in which Basil and Ron respond to the relevant values in the above cases. These agents, we granted, make accurate and warranted judgments about the relevant values. They do so in correctly taking the objects of their praise to be praiseworthy. But while evaluative judgment is *a way* of responding to value, it does not amount to evaluative commitment.¹⁸

A feature of the above examples was that the praisers did not really *care* about what they were praising. This, anyway, is how we might colloquially put what I am calling their lack of evaluative commitment. More substantively, I propose that for an agent S to be evaluatively committed to some value X, S must be attentionally and emotionally vulnerable to X, and sufficiently motivated to promote X.¹⁹

Let me emphasize, however, that my paper's main aim is neutral with regard to the exact components of evaluative commitment. Even if being evaluatively committed to some value X was *solely* a matter of, say, being sufficiently motivated to promote X, Basil and Ron will lack evaluative commitment to the relevant values (and so, may lack the standing to praise for reasons like those outlined below). Nevertheless, and while I return below to the point that my proposal is compatible with different conceptions of evaluative commitment, I outline and provide some motivation for what is, in my view, the correct understanding of commitment,

¹⁸ When an agent is evaluatively committed to X, she will *normally* (and if rationally consistent) also judge X to be valuable (or be disposed to do so). But because I am far less confident about the essentiality of this kind of 'cognitive component' to commitment than I am about the essentiality of the components I proceed to outline, I do not build evaluative judgement (or endorsement) into my account of commitment (as does, e.g. Todd (2019: 355, 371)). To be sure, agents who are evaluatively committed to X but fail to (be disposed to) judge X valuable (or worse, judge X to be nonvaluable or disvaluable) will suffer certain failures of rationality, but I am unsure that they will necessarily lack commitment to X. For an account of valuing without judging valuable, see Kubala (2017).

¹⁹ My discussion of evaluative commitment draws on accounts of *valuing* found in Anderson (1993), Scheffler (1997, 2010), Raz (2001), Kolodny (2003), Svavarsdóttir (2014), Callard (2018b). I employ "evaluative commitment" partly because it helps convey the motivational component of the relevant form of responding to value, and partly because there may be genuine forms of valuing that are too weak to count as evaluative commitment. For example, I leave open the possibility that judging X to be valuable and on that basis being disposed not to destroy, or interfere in *others'* engagement with X—roughly what Raz (2001: 161-65) calls "respecting value"—can qualify as a form of valuing, but it does not amount to evaluative commitment. For other sparse views of valuing that are insufficient for evaluative commitment but might be forms of valuing nonetheless, see Lewis 1989; Smith 1992; Harman 1993. Additionally, what Watson (1975) calls "valuing" presumably gives rise to evaluative commitment in the ideal case (i.e. in the free agent), but an agent may value X in Watson's sense without being evaluatively committed to X.

namely the tripartite view which includes an attentional, emotional, and motivational component.²⁰

To be attentionally vulnerable to X is a matter of X-related considerations being attentionally salient to one, such that one is disposed to attend to how X fares (—I unpack ‘faring’ shortly). For example, Mira is disposed to attend to gender distributions at conferences, opportunities to further diversify her syllabi, and other features of her environment that present information and options concerning gender diversity. To anticipate, the attentional condition is irreducible to the motivational condition, because not all attention is volitional. As talk of salience suggests, attentional vulnerability is understood in the first place as a broadly “perceptual phenomenon...driven, quite independently of the subject’s volition, by the high salience of attention-grabbing items in the perceptual field” (Mole 2021; see also Smith 2005: 242). While I can (at least, try to) ‘direct’ my attention away from the suffering person on the street, say, ordinarily I attend to her suffering not on the basis of some choice to attend, but simply as a matter of being drawn in by its apparent significance. Acts of deliberately ‘turning one’s attention to’ something can be understood as mental actions, and as such, are subsumable under the motivational condition.

Emotional sensitivity is in my view also necessary for evaluative commitment. To be emotionally sensitive to how X fares is a matter of being disposed to feel positive emotions when X is promoted and negative emotions when X is demoted. The particular range of emotions will depend non-trivially on the *kind* value in question; grief and gratitude, for example, may be part of the suite of emotions relevant to being evaluatively committed to one’s relationship with a friend, but presumably not (at least, directly) to evaluative commitment to horological history.

In addition to their attentional and emotional import, our evaluative commitments have motivational import. They have a kind of “deliberative significance”, such that evaluatively committed agents possess, as Scheffler puts it, a “disposition to treat certain kinds of X-related considerations as reasons for action in relevant deliberative contexts” (Scheffler 2010: 29). We are not mere observers of that which we value; being evaluatively committed to some value X entails a motivation to deliberate in light of and form intentions to act for the sake of X. Importantly, one might have a sufficiently strong (for evaluative commitment) motivational disposition to act in promotion of X, yet nevertheless *fail to act* in promotion of X, owing to some barrier that blocks the transition from motivation to action, be the barrier external (e.g., coercion, manipulation) or internal (e.g.

²⁰ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for calling for clarification on this point.

weakness of will, narcolepsy). This need not undermine evaluative commitment. For, it is not essential to evaluative commitment that one act in promotion of some value, only that one have a sufficiently strong motivational disposition to do so.²¹

It may be that in cases (or for agents) where the possibility of acting in promotion of some value is *nonexistent*, the motivational disposition will be manifest only in conative attitudes like desires and hopes—attitudes that (like intentions) have a world-to-mind direction of fit, but whose satisfaction does not depend essentially on its subject's exercises of agency. Ordinarily we can exercise *some* degree of agency in promotion of our values (especially where those values can be promoted via speech acts and mental actions), but it is consistent with the motivational condition's satisfaction that, where acting in promotion of some value X is ruled out, one possesses sufficiently strong conative attitudes that aim at X's promotion (e.g., hoping that environmental aid for others is forthcoming).

I take the affective, attentional, and motivational components of evaluative commitment to be non-substitutable, such that each has a threshold that must be met in order for one to be evaluatively committed. Intuitively, an agent who pays an extraordinarily high degree of attention to, say, the living conditions of refugees in her community, but who is unmoved (both emotionally and motivationally) by those conditions or any changes to them—feeling no frustration when the conditions deteriorate and having no desire to contribute to their improvement—does not count as evaluatively committed to the quality of refugees' living conditions in her community, even if she also judges that those conditions ought to be improved.²² An agent who is saddened when it is pointed out to her that those conditions have deteriorated (and is generally emotionally attuned to such changes), but who fails to attend to any such changes *on her own* similarly intuitively lacks commitment. There are a number of other possible combinations of the above dispositions we might consider. The following test can be used to assess whether an agent possesses commitment to some value X. We can ask, in light of their dispositions relative to X, 'does that agent really *care* about X?' Or, 'does X matter to that agent?' A positive answer commends itself unreservedly to me only when each abovementioned disposition is present and strong. But what matters for my purposes is primarily that this entailment between caring and commitment be secured. Again, my proposal is compatible with different conceptions of evaluative commitment.

²¹ In this respect, my understanding of commitment departs from Rossi's (2018) and Riedener's (2019).

²² Whether such an agent is possible depends on thorny questions like the truth of motivational judgement internalism (according to which motivation is internal to normative judgment).

Before turning to the normative significance of evaluative commitment, five clarificatory points are necessary. The first concerns ‘faring’ in talk of the committed agent’s vulnerability to how *X fares*. Faring is a broad qualitative notion that can be understood by reference to its two poles: promotion and demotion. To illustrate, the value of gender diversity in History is promoted (or ‘fares well’) when it becomes instantiated (e.g., in a hire) or when its instantiation becomes non-trivially more probable (e.g., in the passing of some policy). The value is demoted (or ‘fares badly’) when the change goes in the other direction—when the value becomes uninstantiated (e.g., when that hire leaves the profession) or when its instantiation becomes non-trivially less probable. I hasten to add that I understand promotion (and demotion) capaciously such that (depending on the value), it may include attitudinal and expressive responses to value, e.g., respecting, celebrating, honoring.²³

Second, as mentioned above, it is not my goal to establish that the preceding conception of evaluative commitment is right in all its details. Depending on one’s broader moral psychological views, different versions of the evaluative commitment condition will commend themselves. For example, those drawn to hierarchical views of autonomy might maintain that evaluative commitment to *X* includes having a second-order desire (or some such) that one be motivated to promote *X*. Or one might build a historical condition into evaluative commitment, such that evaluative commitment requires not only the *possession* of certain dispositions, but that these dispositions be “one’s own” in a way that requires (or rules out) their having a certain etiology. The idea of evaluative commitment, in other words, admits of multiple conceptions consistent with my proposal that there is a norm of evaluative commitment governing praise.²⁴

Third, I treat evaluative commitment as a threshold phenomenon that, once achieved, admits of degrees. That is, to first be evaluatively committed to some value *X* one must have reached a certain threshold of attentional, emotional, and motivational responsiveness—or whatever else constitutes evaluative commitment—toward *X*. (Again, I take the attentional, emotional, and motivational components of evaluative commitment to be non-substitutable, such that each has a threshold that must be met in order for one to be evaluatively committed.) Past the threshold sufficient for *being* evaluatively committed to *X*, one might be more or

²³ Importantly, what it will be for a value to be promoted (or demoted) will depend non-trivially on the kind of value in question; see Baron (1997: 22).

²⁴ Some conceptions of evaluative commitment are ruled out on my proposal. For example, evaluative commitment to *X* cannot for my purposes consist simply of judging *X* to be valuable, for otherwise our ostensibly ‘standingless’ praisers *would* possess the standing to praise they intuitively lack.

less evaluatively committed. Of two agents committed to some value, one might be more committed than the other. We can be more or less attentively, emotionally, and motivationally invested in some value. Andrei, for example, is committed to vital environmental aid *to a very high degree*; we can mark this degree of commitment with the label, “evaluative dedication”. Basil’s standing to praise does not require evaluative dedication.

Fourth, an adequate answer to the question, ‘are two agents, A and B, committed to the same value?’ requires characterizing the values at the right level of generality. Though I cannot provide a formula for determining the right level of generality for commitment-relevant value individuation, overly fine-grained ways of individuating values will issue the misleading verdict that two agents are not committed to the same value (and so, lack the standing to praise one another). To illustrate, imagine *Ira*, who like *Mira*, is committed to improving diversity within academia. *Ira*’s discipline, however, is Physics, and his commitment is to improving diversity along the dimension of socioeconomic class. While it is doubtful that the discipline in question (History vs. Physics) makes any relevant difference to value individuation, it is not implausible that a) the value of gender diversity in academia and b) the value of socioeconomic diversity in academia are distinct values. Nevertheless, both values are species of the more general value of *diversity in academia*. And, sharing commitment to *this value*, *Ira* and *Mira* presumably possess the standing to praise one another. (Nothing hangs on agreement about this particular example, of course.) While overly fine-grained individuations of values may issue false-negatives, overly *coarse*-grained individuations may issue false-positives. Suppose *Ron* is committed to the value of animal well-being. Even if there is *some* (presumably, much) more general value of which the value of animal well-being and the value of academic diversity are both species, *Mira* and *Ron*’s shared commitment to *this value* is presumably insufficient for *Ron*’s having the standing to praise *Mira*.

Finally, let me emphasize something implicit above, namely that talk of “commitment” does not imply *choosing* one’s values; evaluative commitment is not like one’s commitment to go to the gym biweekly. The sense of commitment at issue is more like that implied by talk of a parent’s being committed to her child’s well-being. This does not require that the parent chooses, or forms anything like a policy, to be motivated by and attentionally and affectively attuned to changes in the child’s interests. One is committed to the objects of one’s evaluative commitment in that one is, as it were, *invested in* them. (More on this shortly.) I do not deny that there may be in a meaningful sense in which we sometimes choose our values, say,

through successful processes of aspiring to value some value X.²⁵ But even if being evaluatively committed to some value X may result from a process *initiated by* one's deciding to become so committed, being evaluatively committed is not something that happens solely in virtue of making such decisions.

4.2 The Normative Significance of Evaluative Commitment

While some readers will find intuitive the idea that evaluative commitment is of normative significance such that its absence could plausibly affect the standing to praise, I suspect others may not. What can be said in its favor? Unless evaluative commitment is normatively significant in this sense, the claim that some person's praise flouts the evaluatively commitment condition risks triviality or at least, irrelevance for our purposes. Why care about whether an agent is evaluatively committed?

While some of our resources can be expended in a detached or impersonal way (e.g. one's finances), those underlying evaluative commitment—our evaluative resources—are not like this. To be evaluatively committed to X is to be *personally* invested in X. For, in investing our evaluative (i.e. motivational, affective, attentional, etc.) resources in some value, we are, in a non-trivial sense, investing *ourselves*, i.e. the energy and time of which we, our lives, are constituted. There are two facets to this point. The first is that, to put it crudely, evaluative commitment *is work*, psychological work. While we can delegate to others the investment of our external resources, in being evaluatively committed to X I am personally invested, and as such, psychologically vulnerable to how X fares. Given that evaluative commitment is neither an instantaneous nor fickle way of responding to value (it takes time and effort), the laborious quality of evaluative commitment renders it particularly costly.

The second facet of the point that evaluative commitment is a matter of personal investment is this: one's evaluative commitments, especially those most deeply held, are integral to who one is, in a practically significant sense. As we might put it, one's evaluative commitments constitute one's practical identity, where a practical identity is roughly “a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking” (Korsgaard 1996: 101). Andrei's evaluative commitment to vital environmental aid, for instance, is simultaneously a matter of his having special, project-based, reasons concerning the environment and his *being* an environmentalist. Whatever else may constitute who one is in the normatively rich

²⁵ See Callard (2018).

sense that distinguishes one from (but, to anticipate, also binds one to) other particular agents, one's evaluative commitments are an important component.

So far, I have maintained that our evaluative commitments are normatively significant because, being *personal* resources, our evaluative commitments involve psychological work and form who we are, i.e. our practical identities. Further, assuming that the *goodness* of one's life (construed capaciously to include one's well-being, the meaningfulness of one's life, etc.) is partly a function of the particular evaluative commitments one has, it will be no trivial matter for our lives what are our actual evaluative commitments. If anything is capable of contributing to the goodness of one's life, engagement with what is worth valuing is a strong candidate. But, given the significance for our lives of how our evaluative resources are invested, there will be certain 'risks and rewards' attendant in being evaluatively committed to some values rather than others.²⁶ Understandably, and keeping in mind that our evaluative commitments are not direct objects of the will, it will be advisable for us to be judicious in where we invest our personal evaluative resources.

Finally, while I have emphasized the way in which our evaluative commitments are comprised of personal resources, there is an important *interpersonal* dimension to evaluative commitment. One's being evaluatively committed to some value X puts one in a special normative relation to others committed to X. To the extent that our evaluative commitments generate for us normative expectations or reasons (to attend, feel, and act) we will ordinarily be pro tanto licensed to hold similarly committed agents to the same expectations. For example, knowing that B is, like A himself, committed to the value of birdwatching, A will be in a position to address (e.g., with demands, requests) B in light of norms recognized within the community of birdwatchers, a position that may not extend to other members of the moral community. Being evaluatively committed is in this way also a way of being bound to others with similar commitments. In regarding themselves and others committed to the same value as answerable to mutually recognized (though not necessarily codified) expectations and reasons oriented

²⁶This is not to say that our evaluative commitments are chosen on the basis of expected risks and rewards, or that we *should* strive to 'maximize evaluative returns' via moral psychological cost/benefit analysis of our commitments. But while we might not be value *maximizers*, pursuing ends in a way that will generate the most value, I suspect it would nonetheless come as a great disappointment to many of us, were we to learn in our lives' final hours that we had been committed to values that, we now recognize, are not worth pursuing. A thought of this kind finds dramatic expression in Parfit's (2011: 12, 303-4, 367) reflection on his life's work.

toward that value's promotion, evaluatively committed agents are bound in 'evaluative community'.²⁷

Against this background of common commitment-based reasons, it is no accident that we are sometimes moved to coordinate our activities with others to better promote our values. After all, if I am motivated to promote some value X, the thought of what could be achieved by joining forces with others in promotion of X will understandably have motivational significance for me. Similarly, to the extent that my commitment to X gives me reason to promote X, I will have reason to interact and collaborate with others in promotion of X.²⁸ Importantly, however, that I have commitment-based *reason* to collaborate with others similarly committed (members of my 'evaluative community') does not mean that I *ought* to do so. Reasons abound, and the force of my reason to increase (by collaborating with others) the extent to which some value of mine is promoted may be outweighed by other reasons (e.g. those provided by the value of autonomy). Thus, Mira's being committed to the value of improving gender diversity in the discipline of History is compatible with her promoting this value on her own. There is a further reason why evaluative commitment does not—indeed, *cannot*—require collaborating with others to act in promotion of some value. Recall that the motivational condition can be satisfied even if (owing to agential barriers) one's intentions to act in promotion of some value cannot be satisfied. But since evaluative commitment does not require *acting* in promotion of some value, it cannot require collaborating (acting together) in promotion of some value. Furthermore, on the assumption that some values can be promoted attitudinally and expressively (via e.g., appreciating, honoring and celebrating), the interpersonal reasons relevant to evaluative commitment may be reasons concerning others' attitudes and expressions.

Let us take stock. There are at three interrelated reasons why evaluative commitments have normative significance of the sort relevant to the status of one's praise. First, the capacities underlying our evaluative commitments are personal resources; being evaluatively committed is costly in that what is invested is ourselves, psychological resources integral to our practical identities. But, second, the goodness of our lives (e.g. our well-being, the meaningfulness of our lives) is partly a function of our actual evaluative commitments, as these are part of what form our practical identities. Finally, our evaluative commitments connect us to others with similar commitments; in being committed to a set of values, one is part

²⁷ See Devlin (1965); Gilbert (2005: 27–33); Hedahl and Huebner (2018: 243).

²⁸ This is not to say that we ordinarily regard others who share our values as mere instruments to the promotion of the objects of our evaluative commitment; rather, we tend to (and in the ideal cases, do) value our relationships and group-memberships with fellow valuers in themselves.

of a set of evaluative communities whose members are licensed to see one another as potential participants and addressees in the promotion of a common value. Since the health of the objects of our evaluative commitments depends on the agential contributions of other committed agents, the goodness of our lives depends in this way on the agential contributions of agents who share our evaluative commitments.

5. The Objectionableness of Uncommitted Praise

Building upon the previous outline of the normative significance of evaluative commitment, I advance in this section my view of the wrong-making feature of evaluatively uncommitted praise (5.1), after which I make explicit why we should understand evaluative commitment as a condition of *standing* in particular (5.2).

5.1 Praise's Communicative Nature

I propose that when praisers lack commitment to the value underlying the actions they praise, there is a morally significant sense in which they therein address the praisee with an unwarranted invitation. As the invitation is to partake in an interpersonal good, the objection facing the uncommitted praiser is that they have not earned the right of participation in that interpersonal good. To make sense of this proposal, we must attend to the communicative nature of praise.

Praise, recall, is a communicative phenomenon. We can distinguish two senses in which praise is communicative, corresponding to the following two questions: i) '*what* does praise communicate?' and ii) '*how* does praise communicate?' *What* praise communicates when one agent, A, praises another, B, for some action, X, is that A positively evaluates and takes non-instrumental satisfaction in B's having done X. The problem with evaluatively uncommitted praise does not reside here. The praisers under consideration *do* positively evaluate and take non-instrumental satisfaction in the relevant actions. Their praise is sincere. Additionally, as the actions praised are praiseworthy, the praise correctly represents the praisees' actions.²⁹ When Ron praises Mira, saying e.g., "what you've done for women in our discipline is commendable", he is not only being sincere; he is saying something true.

To understand the objectionableness of evaluatively uncommitted praise, attention must be paid to *how* praise communicates. We need attend, in particular, to the idea that praise is communicative *in form*, i.e., that our responses of praise (like those of blame) are "forms of moral address" (Watson 1987: 231). Consider,

²⁹ It is also assumed that the praiser is justified in believing the target of their praise to be praiseworthy for the relevant action.

first, the form of address standardly attributed to blame, namely moral *demand*.³⁰ While one sense of ‘moral demand’ refers to a feature of the content of blame—the norm taken to have been violated by the blameworthy agent—proponents of communicative views of blame also maintain that blame is demanding in form; *it demands something of the blamee*, e.g., “acknowledgement of a failure of regard” (Shoemaker 2015: 155). On this kind of view, blamers do not simply represent the blamee to have violated some moral demand (qua requirement); a detached judgment about a norm-violation could do this. Blame is communicative in form in that it issues a demand, and as such, *directs* the blamee to respond. In particular, blame issues a directive that possesses imperatival force.³¹ It seeks the blamee’s compliance, in the form of apology, redress, etc. Communicative theorists of blame diverge on *what makes* blame communicative (is it the communicative *intention* of the blamer? Or the (etiological) function of blame? Or perhaps the blaming emotions’ motivational tendencies?), but we can put this issue aside. What matters for our purposes is that, when it comes to blame, the question ‘*how* does blame address its target?’ receives the following answer: *demandingly*. That is, blame directs the blamee to respond and it does so with the imperatival force of demand.

Back to praise: how does it communicate? In what way does praise address the praisee? To begin, it does *not* do so demandingly. The praisee is not addressed with a directive possessing imperatival force; the response sought by praise is not compliance with a demand.³² Yet, praise—or at least the central variety that has been our concern—*is communicative*. Like blame, praise seeks uptake from its target and presupposes for its intelligibility that the target is capable of understanding the message.

On a recent proposal, the idea that praise is communicative but not demand-issuing finds development in the view that praise addresses the praisee *invitationally* (Telech 2021; cf. Lippert-Rasmussen 2022). On this invitational conception of praise, in praising another the praiser invites the praisee to take credit for some action and to therein jointly value, with the praiser, the meaning of that action for the praiser. I assume, at least in broad outline, this view in what follows.³³ For our purposes, two features of invitation must be delineated, namely that invitations seek

³⁰ See Strawson (1962: 76, 78, 84, 85, 90); Watson (1987: 229-231, 1996); Darwall (2006: 84-85, 2007: 118); McKenna (2012: 138, 200); Shoemaker (2007: 70, 2015: 155) Helm (2017: 4); Wallace (1994: 18-23, 2010; 2019).

³¹ On this point, see Darwall (2006: 14, 18, 85).

³² Though a version of this point is present in Bennett (1980), it has in recent years received detailed discussion. See Macnamara (2011, 2013, 2013b); King (2014); Mason (2017); Telech (2020).

³³ See also the communicative view of praise in Mason (2019).

acceptance from their addressees, and that, in inviting another to ϕ one proposes to *host* the ϕ -ing.

First, while demands seek compliance, invitations seek acceptance. In contrast to an ordinary invitation, e.g., to a dinner party, praise's invitation has an essential backward-looking component, construing the addressee as *meriting recognition* or credit for some action. (Blame's demand similarly construes the addressee as meriting a negative response for some action.) Accordingly, to accept praise's invitation is to *accept credit for what one did*, from the praiser. While one can *take credit* for an action independently of another's praise, *accepting credit* is an interpersonal activity presupposing an invitation, a giving of credit.

What is it to accept praise's invitation? Arguably, it is to value the meaning of one's action *as framed by the praiser's praise*, with the praiser (Telech 2021: 165–66; Mason 2019: 108). As the inviting and the accepting are both ways of valuing the same thing, communicatively successful praise will consist in *jointly* valuing, or 'co-valuing', the significance of the praiseworthy agent's action. For, when praise is accepted, receiving uptake in the addressee's pride (or some such), the praiser and praisee mutually recognize one another as valuing the same action, from different perspectives. Responses that might superficially appear to deflect expressions of praise—e.g. 'don't mention it', 'no problem', 'it was nothing'—are conventional ways of modestly giving praise uptake (Mason 2019: 108). These normally count as ways of discursively registering praise's invitations no less than do more explicit ways of expressing that one values the significance for another of one's manifestation of good will.

Next, praise is invitational in that the praiser can be understood to *host* the co-valuing that arises when communicative praise is accepted. On the view that praise issues an invitation "to engage in a form of joint valuation that is at once a way of accepting credit [*from the praiser*]" (Telech 2021: 157), the praiser can be understood as the host not only in that the praiser initiates the co-valuing; more importantly, the praiser frames the praiseworthy agent's action in terms that are salient to them. As such, the acceptance of praise will occur on the basis of the evaluative construal of the action provided by the praiser. It is a familiar observation that those moved by the praiseworthy actions of others are moved too to express to the targets of their praise the particular significance, *to them* (the praisers), of the praiseworthy agents' actions. Of course, the praiser's evaluative framing could totally miss the mark, e.g. by construing morally irrelevant features of the action as among its right-making features. In such cases, however, the praise will be unfitting; it will misrepresent. But, even when praise is fitting (and appropriate in being epistemically warranted), there will be a range of possible

elements in the praiseworthy action that could be highlighted, such that distinct praisers can praise in ways that frame the action in distinct ways.

This is because praiseworthy actions are replete with value that can be described in numerous ways reflective of the praiser's particular concerns, their relative weightings of the normative considerations, their histories, etc. One and the same action may, for example, be generous, compassionate, and courageous. Different praisers might fittingly praise the very same action in distinct but non-competing ways, one for its generosity, one for its compassionateness, and so. (There is presumably also more than one aspect of an act's generosity, say, that can serve as the focal point of an agent's praise.) Consider the way in which fan-mail sent to musicians and other artists regularly expresses something of the personal significance of the praised work to the fan: how it resonated with them; how it helped them through a difficult period, etc. Distinct evaluative properties (or clusters of properties) of a single aesthetic object can garner fitting aesthetic appreciation from distinct agents depending on their interests, background, etc. It would be surprising if aesthetic value was unique in being 'multiply-frameable' in this way.

When the praiseworthy agent accepts credit from the praiser by co-valuing her action in the evaluative terms provided by the praiser's praise, the praiser can be understood as hosting the co-valuing that her praise sought. It is here, I propose, that the objectionableness of evaluatively uncommitted praise resides. For, to host another in co-valuing is a kind of privilege. Having failed to invest the requisite motivational, affective, attentive (etc.) resources into the relevant value—that sufficient for evaluative commitment—these praisers have not earned the right to partake in the interpersonal good that arises when praise's invitation is accepted.

To lend support to the proposal that it is a kind of privilege to host a valuable interaction, consider that insufficiently committed institutions and states are sometimes criticized as lacking 'the standing to host' activities celebrating certain values. Their lacking this kind of standing is sometimes explained by their evincing a lack of commitment to the values integral to the activity in question. Consider, for example, the complaint raised by the editorial board of the *Washington Post*, that, owing to its "slowly strangling an entire people" China lacks "the moral standing to host the 2022 Winter Olympic Games".³⁴ Appealing, inter alia, to this editorial, a US Congressional report explicitly refers to the Chinese government as evincing a failure to "meet the values of Olympism", and on that basis "urges the International Olympic Committee to rebid the 2022 Winter Olympics to a country that recognizes

³⁴ Washington Post Editorial Board (2020)

and respects human rights.”³⁵ The idea that hosting a valuable activity is a kind of privilege that requires the host’s being sufficiently committed to the values underlying the activity is similarly present in skepticism that “the U.S. has moral standing to host [“The Summit for Democracy”]”, owing to *its* track-record in upholding the value of democracy.³⁶

Returning to praise, recall the way in which Basil praises Andrei: “Well done! Your hard work is really going to help people”. Given that Basil has consistently neglected Andrei’s various efforts to draw Basil into supporting the value of vital environmental aid, Andrei might reasonably reply by saying something like, “so *now* you care about environmental aid and its impact on the vulnerable... You were indifferent to the cause when support was needed, but now you’re here to celebrate the win?” This kind of response might seem harsh and it is a complicated question whether Andrei *should* respond thus, but the intuitive fittingness of his at least having this kind of put-off *thought* in response to Basil’s praise suggests that we’re on the right track. After all, the thought expressed in this kind of dismissal of praise is mirrored in the kind of response the die-hard sports fan has available with respect to the fair-weather fan. The fair-weather fan cheers for and celebrates the success of whichever team is, at that time, in the lead. The diehard fan, by contrast, has supported the team through various iterations of ‘thick and thin’, feeling pain in their various losses, investing hope in them as they advance, and so on. As such, there is a sense in which she has earned, through her psychological investment in the team, the right to celebrate its win in a manner the fair-weather fan lacks. The thought underlying the diehard fan’s objection to the fair-weather fan’s opportunistic celebration is that, having failed to do his part in tilling the field of the relevant value, he cannot legitimately reap its fruit. Andrei’s objection involves this kind of thought, but it includes still more, owing to the communicative nature of praise. The objection is ‘you have not invested sufficiently to have the privilege to host the joint valuing of my action that your praise calls upon me to engage in.’ Only by doing the work of investing our psychological resources (those constitutive of commitment) in promotion of some value X, does one merit the benefits associated with X, including the interpersonal good of co-valuing in praise.

The present invitation-based explanation shares with the *insincere + self-interested explanation* the idea that the praise in question is morally objectionable owing to the facts about the praiser’s underlying psychology. But the while the *insincere + self-interested explanation* attributes to the praiser a desire to deceive, the invitation-based explanation allows that the praiser is sincere and engages in

³⁵ H.Con.Res.16 - 117th Congress (2021-2022)

³⁶ Widakuswara (2021)

genuine praise. The invitation-based explanation shares with the *linguistic explanation* the idea that the objectionableness of the praise is to be understood in communicative terms. But while the linguistic explanation identified the praiser's error as a linguistic one, on the invitation-based view, the praiser makes a moral error. For, given that the uncommitted praiser lacks the right to invite the praiseworthy agent to co-value the latter's action, his praise is pro tanto morally wrong.³⁷

Even it is granted that praise is invitational, and that uncommitted praise is morally defective, why should we understand any of this in terms of *standing*? Why think the evaluatively uncommitted agent lacks the standing to praise? I turn now to these questions.

5.2 But why *Standing*?

One might wonder whether "standing" can mean the same thing in discussions of 'standing to praise' and 'standing to blame'. If it does not, given that talk of standing in the responsibility literature has its home in discussions concerning the ethics of blame, one might worry that I'm changing the topic. The challenge can be posed as follows. It is often held that for would-be blamers to have the standing to blame is for them to have the entitlement (or authority, or right) to blame another.³⁸ Absent

³⁷ Can the present proposal be extended to explain the wrongness of uncommitted *blame*? If so, we may have available a unified account of what undermines standing to blame and praise, namely that, owing to their uncommitment, the uncommitted blamer/praiser lacks the privilege to engage the blamee/praisee in the valuable communicative activity that is the aim of praise/blame. Whether such an extension is feasible will depend on the viability of the idea that blaming interactions are (non-instrumentally) valuable, which depends on how we individuate blaming interactions. For, while *moral repair* is a plausible candidate for something of non-instrumental value, moral repair sometimes results only after considerable work on the blameworthy agent's part (e.g., their changing their habits, their performance of reparative actions). It is unclear whether moral repair is *part* of the blaming interaction (in which case, the blaming interaction might inherit its non-instrumental value from its 'reparative component'), or simply the desirable *result* of the blaming interaction. Admittedly, there may be other candidates for non-instrumental goodness in the blaming interaction (e.g., alignment of moral understanding (Fricker 2016)), but to the extent that any such goods are distinct from the blamee's acceptance of blame's demand, they will be open to a version of the previous worry. In any case, the applicability of the present proposal to uncommitted blame is worthy of further exploration. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

³⁸ On standing as i) entitlement, see Wallace (2010) and Todd (2019); ii) authority, see Friedman (2013) and Todd (2019); iii) a right, see Cohen (2006), Fritz and Miller (2018) and Todd (2019).

this entitlement, blame is impermissible. One might assume that it is the *sanction-like* nature of blame that explains why blame can be thus impermissible. Blame is often understood to be a response that (characteristically, if not essentially) sets back the interests of—or, harms—the blamee (Wallace 1994; Watson 1996; Bennett 2002: 151–2; Rosen 2004; McKenna 2012: 134–141). While would-be blamers possessing the standing to blame are permitted to harm blameworthy agents by blaming them (as merited by their blameworthiness), this permission is intuitively lacking for those without the standing to blame. Praise, however, does not harm the praisee. If praise is interest-affecting, it presumably promotes the interests of—or, benefits—the praisee. But we do not need special permissions to benefit others. So, praising does not require the kind of permission (or entitlement) required for blaming. Thus, the objection concludes, unless we are equivocating, praise is not governed by a norm of standing.

In reply, it is doubtful that only harmful responses require the relevant kind of entitlement, and so, that it is in virtue of blame's harmfulness (if it is harmful) that it is governed by a norm of standing. Consider requests. My entitlement to make a certain request of you might be undermined by my failure to comply with (or take sufficiently seriously) comparable requests you have previously made of me (Herstein 2020: 1; cf. Laskowski and Silver 2021: 67). These failures reveal me to lack commitment to the norm of beneficence (or some such) that I implicitly appeal to in requesting your assistance. If that's right, blame may be governed by a norm of standing not in virtue of its harmfulness, but rather in virtue of involving a kind of normative imposition, in directing the addressee to do something (e.g. acknowledge wrongdoing, offer redress). Indeed, the view that to blame another without standing is to engage in wrongful moral address—where blame's moral address is understood in terms of demand—is a prominent view in the literature on standing (Wallace 2010; Herstein 2017, 2020; Lippert-Rasmussen 2022; Snedegar 2023; cf. Darwall 2006: 54). This view, furthermore, has the advantage of making sense of why ordinary moral discourse makes reference to standing in domains beyond blame, e.g., request, command. On the view of praise endorsed in this paper, praise involves a kind of normative imposition in directing the praisee (albeit invitationally) to respond in a certain way. It is the entitlement to make this kind of normative imposition that is morally undermined when one lacks evaluative commitment. To praise without this entitlement is to lack the standing to praise. Thus, we are not changing the subject in referring to *standing to praise*.

On the present proposal, praise's norm of standing is a second-order norm permitting one to disregard a directive reason, namely the reason provided by the invitation to accept credit from (by co-valuing one's action in the terms provided

by) the praiser.³⁹ Above we imagined Andrei to deflect Basil's standingless (because evaluatively uncommitted) praise. Andrei rejected Basil's invitation to co-value his praiseworthy action, citing Basil's lack of evaluative commitment in doing so. Importantly, however, there may be weighty reasons to accept praise even when the praiser lacks the standing to praise. The overall balance of reasons might speak in favor of accepting praise's invitation. Perhaps Andrei and Basil's relationship is already on shaky grounds, and in the hope of salvaging the relationship, Andrei overlooks Basil's lack of commitment, and so, accepts the invitation. Fortunately, this is possible, as Basil's praise, unlike insincere praise, *does* provide Andrei with an invitation.

Before concluding, a word is in order about the possibility of a more fundamental explanation of the wrongness of evaluatively uncommitted praise. I proposed that evaluatively uncommitted praise is wrongful *not* in being insincere and deceptive or in involving pragmatic infelicity, but rather in its invitationally directing the praiseworthy agent to partake in a valuable activity that the praiser has not earned the right to host. While I drew support for this proposal from the charge sometimes directed toward institutions that they lack 'the standing to host' activities celebrating values to which they are insufficiently committed, one might reasonably ask whether there is not a more fundamental moral norm by reference to which we can understand the wrongness of evaluatively uncommitted attempts to host others in joint valuable activity. Or, is standingless praise wrong simply in virtue of its issuing an invitation that the praiser, owing to their lack of evaluative commitment, has not earned the privilege to issue?

For the purpose of this paper—that of giving plausibility to the idea that praise is governed by a norm of standing—the explanation provided in this section is sufficient. And, perhaps it is fundamental. One thing to note is that the appeal to praise's communicative aim provides a *more informative* explanation of the wrongness of standingless praise than that afforded simply by attending to its being the lack of evaluative commitment that undermines standing.⁴⁰ Beyond this, one might wonder whether standingless praise involves a denial of the *moral equality of*

³⁹ Here, like Lippert-Rasmussen (2022), I follow Herstein (2017, 2020).

⁴⁰ Todd (2019: 372) expresses sympathy for the idea that "it is simply a *fundamental* fact that, if you lack the requisite commitment to the given values, you lack the standing to blame those who would violate them." Although Todd does not explicitly claim that to blame without standing is *wrong*, he thinks the standingless blamer blames without the right or entitlement to do so. (But see Todd (2023) for the proposal that a comparative norm—a "*be better* norm"—is more fundamental than the norm of commitment.)

persons.⁴¹ Perhaps it does, but this is not obvious. If Basil treats some interest of his as more important than Andrei's, it's not clear what this would be. By contrast, when one is uncommitted to the relevant value but praises *oneself* and not others for similar praiseworthy acts, one plausibly praises in a way that violates the moral equality of persons.⁴² More promising is the idea that the wrongness of uncommitted praise has its basis in considerations of desert. Indeed, the idea that the uncommitted praiser lacks the *privilege* to host that to which praise is an invitation arguably already makes reference to desert.⁴³ The idea would be that the uncommitted praiser seeks, via praise's invitation to co-valuing, a kind of good that, owing to his lack of investment, he does not deserve.⁴⁴

In any case, this paper has provided grounds for the view that praise is governed by a norm of standing. Even when the target of praise is praiseworthy and known to be so by the praiser, praise can be inappropriate owing to the praiser's lacking the relevant evaluative commitment. I proposed that uncommitted praisers lack the standing to praise in that, owing to their lack of commitment to the relevant values, they have not earned the right to host the co-valuing that is the communicative aim of praise. As commitment-based accounts of the standing to *blame* are already in philosophical circulation,⁴⁵ we appear to have available a commitment-based account of the standing to hold responsible, generally.⁴⁶

⁴¹ See Jeppsson and Brandenburg (2022: 668-70) for the idea that hypocritical praise can fail to respect the equality of persons.

⁴² See Lippert-Rasmussen (2022: 242).

⁴³ A further idea worthy of exploration is that the uncommitted praiser violates also a norm of *fairness*. As the uncommitted praiser does not deserve the interpersonal good at which their praise aims, it may be unfair (to committed praisers, i.e., those who *have* invested the personal resources requisite for commitment) for them to enjoy that good.

⁴⁴ See Isserow and Klein (2017) for a related view, though they understand the wrongness of hypocritical blame in terms of the blamer's garnering (or attempting to garner) undeserved esteem

⁴⁵ See n.16.

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