Let's See You Do Better

Let me begin this paper with some puzzling data. In response to criticism, many people often say, in these or similar words, "Let's see *you* do better!" Consider the following cases:

The dragon. Lucy and Dan (both teenagers) are in art class; the assignment is to draw a dragon. Dan enters class slightly late, and is preparing to begin drawing. Before doing so, he catches a sideways glance at Lucy's (admittedly shambolic) dragon; he says to Lucy, snidely, "Nice dragon Lucy!" Lucy responds: "Alright Dan, let's see you do better!"

The baseball players. Taylor and Chase are teammates on the baseball team. Taylor strikes out, and badly so. As he is returning to the dugout, Chase shouts at him, "Come on man, hit the stupid ball!" Taylor says, "Alright Chase, let's see you do better!"

The gardeners. John and Jane are fellow friends and gardeners. John is visiting Jane when he notices that her orchids have wilted and died. Grinning sarcastically, John says "Looking after these orchids well I see!" Jane says, "Hey, I'd like to see you keep orchids alive!"

The graduate students. Andrew and Marcus are friends and history PhD students, and Andrew has recently started submitting some of his work for potential publication, but unfortunately keeps getting rejected. Marcus – who is a year behind Andrew in the program – says, with just a small discernible hint of *schadenfreude*, "Another rejection, eh Andrew?" Andrew replies, "Yeah, well, let me know when you get your first acceptance, wise guy."

The house painter. Rebecca is undertaking some do-it-yourself house renovations, and is struggling to even out a coat of plaster. Her father Ross, an electrical engineer, stands by chirping various corrections and criticisms: "Not so much on the plate just there,

love", "Spread it a bit more evenly now," and so on. Tiring of Ross' complaining, Rebecca says, "Alright Dad, let's see you do it better!"

At this point, you get the idea. As a first approximation, the data here is twofold: (a) we very often say such things, and (b) there is a feeling that if the critic *does* do better – for example, if Dan draws an impeccable dragon – then the criticism *stands*, whereas if the critic doesn't, that criticism must be *retracted*. Prima facie, then, it looks like the response, "Let's see you do better," is a challenge of a certain kind – a challenge to prove that one has what has recently been called *standing*. As a first approximation, the thought here seems to be this: the critic can properly cricitize (with respect to some standard) only if the critic is *better than* the criticized (with respect to that standard). More generally, the data here seems to point a certain kind of norm of criticism: *be better*. Slightly more carefully:

> The *be better* norm of criticism:
>
> > One must: criticize *x* with respect to standard *s* only if one is better than *x* with respect to standard *s*.

In this paper, I defend precisely this norm of criticism.

But let me back up. There has been an explosion of interest in recent moral philosophy in the notion of the *moral standing to blame*. The central phenomena at stake in this literature is the following: just because a given wrongdoer is in fact blameworthy for a given wrong, it doesn't follow that *just anyone* is in moral position to *blame* her for that wrong. More particularly, the thought is that some blamers are not "in position" to blame, *irrespective* of the fact that the *content* of their blame may be true (and thus in that respect "fitting"). Philosophers writing under the guise of the "moral standing to blame" have articulated at least four conditions on having "moral standing," but the central condition that unifies all such treatments is what we might call the *non-hypocrisy* condition. As a first approximation, according to this condition, one has standing to blame a morally responsible wrongdoer only if – again, as a first approximation – one is not guilty of the very offence one seeks to criticize. Precisely how best to motivate and articulate a non-hypocrisy norm on standing to blame is a

complicated affair. But the following is uncontroversial: if there is a standing norm on blame at all, then there is some appropriate non-hypocrisy condition on the standing to blame.[1]

But now the point. I do not have a theory of blame. However, I do claim the following. In none of the cases described above – *the dragon, the baseball players, the students, the gardeners, the house painter* – does the critic morally *blame* the criticized. In other words, it is intuitively obvious that the cases described above do not involve *moral blame*. In the sense of "blame" at issue in the literature on moral standing, it is a minimally necessary condition on "blame" that the blamer thinks that the blamee has acted *immorally* – that is, has violated some moral expectation. But consider. When Dan criticizes Lucy's dragon, is this because Dan thinks that Lucy has acted immorally in producing such a dragon? Does Dan believe – implicitly or otherwise – that Lucy has *done something wrong* in producing such a dragon? Of course not. Dan does not *blame* Lucy for her dragon; that would be absurd (not to mention unjust). And yet Dan has certainly *criticized* Lucy's dragon – and thus, in some sense, Dan has criticized Lucy herself. (Dan criticizes Lucy *by* criticizing her dragon.) So similarly in the other cases: there is no moral wrongdoing (no *moral failings*) even in the vicinity of these examples. And yet, in these examples, *a standing norm is still in place*.

Thus, considerations concerning the *positionality* of critics – of who is in position to criticize – are seemingly more general than considerations concerning the positionality of *blamers*. In short, all blame is criticism, but not all criticism is blame – and concerns about the "standing" of critics apply *more widely* than merely to *blamers*. But now we face a series of difficult questions. What, exactly, is the relevant norm pertaining to criticism more generally? And how does that norm relate to the non-hypocrisy norm on the standing to blame? These are the questions I address in this paper. I defend the *be better* norm of criticism, and I defend the thesis that the non-hypocrisy condition on standing to blame can plausibly be *derived* from this more general norm on criticism *per se*. The *be better* norm, however, faces a series of

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[1] Early reflections (relatively speaking, of course) on standing can be found in Wertheimer 1998 and Dworkin 2000. When the proper explosion began is slightly hard to determine, but Cohen 2006 seems a good place to locate it. For further reflections on the "positionality" of blamers, see, e.g., Tadros 2009, Duff 2010, Wallace 2010, Russell 2010, Radzik 2011, Todd 2012 and 2018 and 2019, Lippert-Rasmussen 2013, Friedman 2013, King 2015 and 2020, McKiernan 2016, Herstein 2017 and 2020, Rivera López 2017, Isserow and Klein 2017, Coates and Tognazzini 2018, McKenna 2018, Fritz and Miller 2018 and 2019, Rossi 2018, Roadevin 2018, Fritz 2019, Riedener 2019, Matheson 2019, Beade 2019, Edwards 2019, Seim 2019, Tierney and Telech 2019, Cornell and Sepinwall 2020, and Piovarchy forthcoming a [https://philpapers.org/rec/PIOHST] and forthcoming b [https://philpapers.org/rec/PIOSSH].

difficult objections. After laying out the conceptual options concerning the issues of this paper, I defend the *be better* norm from these objections, and turn finally to the crucial project of deriving the non-hypocrisy condition on blame from the *be better* norm in question.   The end result is that though the *be better* norm stands, we must concede that it is nevertheless frequently abused.

Four Options

I begin by briefly describing the four different options we must consider concerning the topics of this paper:

(1) There is no standing norm on criticism *per se*, and no standing norm on blame.

(2) There is no standing norm on criticism *per se*, but there is a standing norm on blame.

(3) There is a standing norm on criticism *per se*, and there is a standing norm on blame, but the former does not ground the latter.

(4) There is a standing norm on criticism *per se*, and there is a standing norm on blame, because the former grounds the latter.

In this paper, I defend option (4). But why not (1), (2), or (3)? I take these options in turn.

Option (1) is the view of someone we might call the *resolute standing skeptic*. According to this kind of skeptic, there is not even a genuine standing norm on *blame*. Now, anyone who thinks that there is no standing norm on blame is unlikely to think that nevertheless there *is* a standing norm on non-moral criticism. My goal in this paper, however, is not to argue against the resolute standing skeptic. My goal, instead, is to say that those who take seriously a standing norm on blame should *also* take seriously a standing norm on criticism more generally. Accordingly, in this paper, I simply assume that (1) is false.[2]

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[2] For what I take to be defences of option (1), however, see Bell 2013, and Dover 2019.

Option (2) is, I think, the position that is implicit in much of the recent literature on the standing to blame. Theorists in this vein take seriously a standing norm (or norms) on blame, but discuss this norm solely as a norm on blame *qua* blame – and seemingly never connect the standing to blame with the standing to criticize more generally. Of course, I am not aware of theorists defending a standing norm on blame explicitly *denying* that this norm applies to criticism more generally; the point, however, is simply that this connection is never made; the literature simply proceeds as if there were no such more general norm. However, since I am assuming that there *is* a standing norm on blame, my argument against option (2) is simply that there is in fact a standing norm on criticism more generally. In the sections to come, building on the cases described above, I articulate and defend just such a norm.

The proponent of Option (3), however, agrees with me that there is a standing norm on criticism *per se*, and a standing norm on blame. However, according to Option (3), these norms are conceptually independent, in the sense that the former does not, in any way, ground the latter. Now, the best way to argue against (3) is simply to provide a plausible positive account of how the standing norm on criticism (together, perhaps, with other relevant facts) *does* ground a standing norm on blame – and to this project I eventually turn. However, conceptually, it seems that there is strong antecedent reason to regard (3) with suspicion – especially once we admit that blame is a *type* of criticism. That is, *criticism* stands to *blame* as genus does to species; again, all blame is criticism, although not all criticism is blame – indeed, blaming is a *specific way* of criticizing, just as being a horse is a specific way of being a mammal. (More on criticism shortly.) In this light, consider the following commitment of Option (3):

> The standing norm on blame is *not* grounded in the standing norm on criticism, even though (i) there is a standing norm on criticism, and (ii) blame is a type of criticism.

It is perhaps impossible to rule out this contention on conceptual grounds alone – but it seems implausible. More plausibly, if there *is* a more general norm of criticism, the standing norm on blame is in some way grounded in that more general norm. Thus, philosophers who think that the standing norm on blame *cannot* be grounded in a standing norm on criticism more generally are seemingly better off denying that there even *is* a more general standing norm on criticism: "standing" *only pertains to blame*. And here we are back to Option (2).

And thus we come to Option (4), the view I wish to defend. The challenge for Option (4) is clear. We must (a) explain and defend the standing norm on criticism, and (b) articulate how the standing norm on blame is grounded in the standing norm on criticism. To the first of these projects I now turn.[3]

Be better: initial observations

Let me begin with the following admission. At first blush, it can seem that the fact that one's critics can't do any better themselves is of no independent importance to the appropriateness of their criticisms. (It certainly isn't relevant to the *correctness* of their criticisms; but this point is agreed on by all hands.) That is, it can *seem* that the reply, "Let's see you do better," is something like a schoolyard defense-mechanism: when you've been rightly criticized, simply throw up something about one's critics to deflect the attention on to *them* rather than *you*. And so let me address the following question. Why is it that we might *rightly* care about whether the person criticizing us can do any better? Why is that when we suspect that someone *can't* do better, we somehow *rightly* resent their criticism? Various answers suggest themselves; here is just one. Suppose Lucy and Dan, side by side, have independently just drawn dragons of equally poor quality. Nevertheless, Dan looks at Lucy's dragon and makes fun of it. What is it that is so irritating about *Dan's* criticism (beyond, of course, the intrinsic annoyance of being made fun of)? One suggestion is simple. Dan's criticism – unlike the criticism of someone else – seems to suggest that he is a *fault-finder*, and ungenerously disposed to be concerned with the wrong things. Lucy may think: fine, my dragon is admittedly poor – but why are you concerned with pointing out the faults in *my* dragon when the faults in your

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[3] Note: a norm like *be better* just says who is *not prohibited for standing-based reasons* from criticizing. It doesn't say who is all things considered *enabled to criticize*. In general, however, I will tend to assume that those not prohibited for standing bases reasons from criticizing are not prohibited by any *other* reasons from criticizing, and are therefore enabled to criticize. A further note: it very well may be that, in the cases I describe in this paper, the critics are simply criticizing unnecessarily, or pointlessly, or even meanly – and that the critics shouldn't criticize in the given ways on these grounds alone. And so let me say the following. I am not saying, in this paper, that one can meanly criticize someone else, so long as one can do better than that person. Instead, I am saying that it is one thing (a bad thing) to criticize meanly, and an *additional* bad thing (albeit of a different kind) to criticize without *standing*. To the merely mean critic, one can say, "Hey, don't be mean!" But to the mean critic who *also* lacks standing, one can say, "Hey, don't be mean – and who are you to be criticizing me anyway; you're no better!"

One final note: I am defending *be better* as a moral norm on criticism, but not as a *constitutive* norm of criticism. For more on this distinction, see Reiland 2020.

own dragon are (or ought to be) equally salient? Why is it that the faults of *my* dragon have caught your particular attention in this way?[4] They would be salient to you, given the faults of your own dragon, only if you were *particularly interested in finding them* – and, we think, being particularly interested in finding faults in others is certainly some kind of vice.

Before moving on, it is worth noticing that the scenario as described is certainly psychologically unrealistic. In a context in which Lucy and Dan have both *publicly* drawn dragons of exactly the same quality, it is extraordinarily unrealistic to think of Dan now making fun of Lucy's dragon *in particular* – without any reference to his own. This would, practically, simply be creating a rod for his own back; Lucy would, of course, turn quickly back around on Dan, likely in anger, and point out how Dan's dragon is equally bad. And it is practically senseless (and perhaps pathological) to create a rod for one's own back, just for the sake of creating a rod for someone else's. In other words, it is only the pathologically critical who are so concerned to see someone else criticized that they would willingly see *themselves* criticized simply so that someone else may be criticized as well. For Dan's criticism to make sense, it would have to be that he values *Lucy's being criticized* more than he disvalues *himself being criticized.* Most of us, however, would far prefer a situation in which we aren't criticized at all than a situation in which some other given person *is* criticized, but we are too.

To bring out the psychological implausibility yet further, consider a standard scenario in which a baseball player strikes out, thereby letting the team down. Now, no minimally sensible baseball player who has just struck out will easily find within himself the capacity to yell at the *next* player who strikes out; any player with even a modicum of sense will know that any such behaviour would invite a monumental backlash. A *star player* who never strikes out may eventually find himself without friends if he consistently yells at his teammates who *do* strike out – but the average player who just strikes out will find himself without friends *that very day* if he nevertheless yells at his teammates who *also* strike out. But then: I contend that it is precisely because we *accept* the *be better* norm that these scenarios are so unrealistic. It is not uncommon to find a star player that likes to yell at his less talented teammates when they fail; it is more or less unheard of to find an average player that likes to yell at his teammates for failing in exactly the ways he does.

Note further that a proper theory of the data at issue in this paper should be consistent with the observation that the "let's see you do better" response can be deployed *third-personally* –

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[4] Cf. King's 2020 account of standing in terms of norms of *attention.*

that is, on behalf of someone else. Some interlocutors have registered their worry that they would feel *bad* – or somehow unvirtuous – if they employed this response to a given criticism. There are perhaps various reasons for this feeling, not all of which I can diagonose; I simply wish to note that this feeling is less likely to arise in the event that one deploys this response *on someone else's behalf*. If Dan makes fun of Lucy's dragon, then even agents besides Lucy can challenge Dan in the relevant way; a bystander who wishes to (in some sense) stick up for Lucy, or who otherwise simply thinks (or suspects) that Dan has no right to make the criticism he has made, can say to him, "Well, let's see you do better Dan!"[5]

Finally, one note about the title of this paper. Note that, strictly speaking, the reply "Let's see you do better" will only make sense in contexts in which the relevant acts are publicly *repeatable*. For instance, suppose Chase struck out three times during the last game, which Taylor missed due to a family emergency. Catching up with Chase, Taylor says, "You struck out *three times?* Come on!" Here it makes little sense for Chase to say, "Well, let's see *you* do better." The game is in the past, and the circumstances of the test – that particular pitcher on that particular day – are unrepeatable. But this doesn't imply, of course, that the *be better* norm is not in place. Instead, it shows that if Chase suspects that Taylor *could have done no better*, Chase would have to content himself with the reply, "Yeah, well, trust me – you couldn't have done any better." And at this stage we simply encounter all the vagaries inherent in the judgment that Taylor could have done no better in a situation he never in fact had to face. Needless to say, if Taylor insists that he *could* have done better in that situation, but Chase disagrees, there is no decisive way of resolving this dispute. Once more, however, this doesn't imply that the *be better* norm isn't in place; this simply implies that – as with many moral norms – it is sometimes difficult (or even impossible) to settle when they have been violated, and when they haven't been.

Objection 1: an epistemic error-theory

At this stage, I want to address one potential competing diagnosis of the cases described at the outset of this paper. One might contend that the reply, "Let's see you do better," is not exactly a demand that the critic prove that he or she has *standing* to criticize. Rather, it is a way of indirectly attempting to get the critic to withdraw the criticism by coming to appreciate that the

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criticized is not properly objectively *criticisable* – in particular, it is an attempt to get the critic to see that the task at hand is *harder than the critic appreciates*. And once the critic appreciates that the relevant task is sufficiently difficult, the critic will (or should) come to appreciate that the criticism was unfitting, and thus that he or she must retract it. Fundamentally, then, the "Let's see you do better" reply is not a *standing-based* reply to a critic, but a *criticizability-based* reply. Consider the parallel distinction in the case of blame. Certainly one way – perhaps the standard way – of rejecting someone's blame is by contending that what one has done is not really *blameworthy*, whether because it wasn't wrong, or whether because, even if it was wrong, one had some given excuse for doing it. What is distinctive of a *standing-based* reply to a blamer, however, is that the blamee *does not contest* (which is not to say *concedes*) his or her blameworthiness[6]; instead, the blamee's point is that *even if I am blameworthy*, you in particular are in no position to blame. In short, according to this objection, at a deeper level of analysis, "Let's see you do better" is a really just a way of saying "What I've done here is not objectively criticisable."

First a concession. I concede that "Let's see you do better" is *ambiguous* between this non-standing-based challenge, and a standing-based challenge. Consider once more moral blame. As Todd (2019: 359) observes concerning the "non-hypocrisy" condition, sometimes we may point to our critics' past behaviour, not as a way of showing that they lack *standing*, but as a way of (attempting to) undermine their confidence in their judgment that what we're doing is wrong in the first place. Consider Todd's case of a teenager who protests to her parents, "Well, I know that *you* went to parties where there was alcohol when *you* were young." Such a protest is ambiguous between the following: (a) yes, maybe this is wrong, but *you* are in no position to blame me, having done this yourself, and (b) the fact that you did this when you were young (and are fine now!) shows that this is a normal thing for people of the relevant age to do. The first protest is standing-based; the second isn't. So similarly here. Challenging our critic to perform the relevant task herself may be a way of trying to get that critic to see something *objective* or *person-neutral* about that task – or, I contend, it may be a way of trying to get that critic to see something *person-relative* about that task, viz., that *even if* that task is objectively not that difficult, anyway *the critic* is in no position to criticize, because *the critic too* falls below the objective standard in question.

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[6] Cohen 2006: 119.

Suppose Chase is facing a moderately talented pitcher (relative to the level of play at issue), and has just struck out. Taylor is now up to bat facing the same pitcher, and *also* strikes out. Now consider what would explain the total strangeness, in this context, of Chase's criticizing Taylor for striking out. Plausibly, nothing "epistemic" can (by itself) explain this strangeness – that is, there is nothing that Chase is *not aware of* that might explain this strangeness. Having just struck out (and, perhaps, having a great deal of relevant experience at this level of play), Chase is, indeed, in perfect position to appreciate precisely how difficult it is (or isn't) not to strike out against this pitcher. In this context, Chase may be in privileged position to *judge* or *recognize* that Taylor is bad batter, objectively speaking (supposing he is) – but what he *isn't* in a position to do is to *criticize* Taylor's batting, being no better himself. It is this fact that would explain the strangeness of Chase's nevertheless criticizing Taylor.

Objection 2: Criticizing versus pointing out

This final point – one concerning the distinction between *recognizing* a fault and *criticizing* a fault – brings us to our next objection. Consider the following dialogue from the 1940 film *Edison the Man:*

> Thomas Edison: That spring is too strong. It won't work.

> Workman: I'd like to see you make a better one.

> Thomas Edison: Well, a fellow can tell a bad egg without being able to lay one.[7]

Now, Edison certainly seems to have a point. Thankfully, however, my defense of the *be better* norm of criticism does not commit me to disagreeing with Edison. In particular, I concede that the workman's reply is inappropriate – but this is because it isn't clear that Edison's statement is a *criticism* of him and his spring. If Edison is simply *pointing out* that, as a matter of fact, the workman's spring is not going to work, it is of course beside the point for the workman to reply that he would like to see Edison do better. Edison is right: a fellow can *tell* a bad egg without being able to lay one; but it doesn't follow that a fellow can *criticize* a bad egg without

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[7] As referenced here: https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/LetsSeeYOUDoBetter.

being able to lay one. To bring out the contrast here, consider the following modified dialogue:

> Thomas Edison: Look, I doubt anyone could do any better, least of all me, so I'm not criticizing you; but I should point out, before you go further, that that spring is too strong – it isn't going to work.
>
> #Workman: Oh really? Let's see you do better.

It is patently obvious that if someone tells you "I'm not criticizing you, but I just wanted to note that ...", it is inappropriate to respond, "Well then, let's see you do better." In other words, if someone says to you, "OK, let's see you do better," one way to deflect this response *just is* to say that one is not doing the thing subject to the norm now being invoked; one is not *criticizing*. The very infelicity of the workman's response in the second dialogue is strong evidence that, once more, we *accept* some kind of *be better* norm, and suggests that the diagnosis concerning the first dialogue is the *ambiguity* of Edison's statement. By saying "It won't work," Edison *could* be criticizing the workman, or he could be merely *pointing out* that what he's done won't work.

My defense of the *be better* norm thus crucially relies on some felt distinction between *recognizing* and *advising* that someone or something falls below some relevant standard, and *criticizing* that someone or something for falling below that standard. A similar distinction arises with respect to blame. Observe that, in the case of blame, it is often difficult to tell when one is being *merely advised* that something one is doing (or has done) is wrong, and when one is being *blamed*.[8] Here I borrow a trenchant observation on this score due to Neal Tognazzini, who relates the following anecdote.[9] Tognazzini was relaying to his partner that he was teaching Peter Singer's famous work on our moral obligations towards the global poor, and noted that, according to Singer, we should all be donating at least 10 percent of our salaries to charity. To which his partner replied, "Well, does *he* donate that much money to charity?" (As it happens: yes.) But now: what is the point behind this (seemingly *ad hominem*) question?

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[8] Cf. Wallace 2010: 317, who distinguishes between "moral advice" and "moral criticism" (which is, for Wallace, *blame*).
[9] Tognazzini ms.

Arguably, it is this. By saying that we should all be donating 10 percent of our salaries to charity, Singer can *seem* to be *blaming* those of us who *do not* do so – but if he doesn't do so himself, then he is in no position to blame. In other words, *just by saying*, "We should all be donating 10 percent of our money to charity," this can *seem* to amount to one's *blaming* those who do *not* donate in this way to charity. Now, this strong implication can be cancelled – but the point is that it must be cancelled. That is, one *can* say

> Look, I don't do this myself, so I'm not blaming anyone here, but I do think we should all be donating at least 10 percent of our salaries to charity.

Here one explicitly cancels what would otherwise be pragmatically implied by one's assertion of the claim that, morally speaking, we should all be donating 10 percent of our salaries to charity, viz., that one blames those who fail to do so. And note that it plainly makes no sense to respond to the above with anything like, "Well, you're in no position to say that that's what we should do – you don't do this yourself!" The speaker may be in position to *say* that this is what we should do without being in position to *blame* us if this is *not* what we do. So similarly for criticism more generally. I may be in position to *say* that your spring is inadequate relative to the standard of working for the job at hand, without being in position to *criticize you* on account of your spring that it is inadequate for the job at hand.

Perhaps what is wanted here is some distinction between criticizing a non-agential *thing in the world* and criticizing an *agent* – in other words, some distinction between criticizing the work, and criticizing the workman, or criticizing the painting, and criticizing the painter. As I see it, such a distinction *can* appear in our natural language judgments concerning "criticism" – but, as ever, these judgments are delicate. However, consider first the following, which, presumably, everyone agrees is infelicitous:

> # (5) I'm saying that your paintings are all bad paintings, but I'm not criticizing your paintings.

That, of course, makes no sense. To say my paintings are bad paintings *is* to criticize my paintings. But what about:

? (6) I'm saying that your paintings are bad paintings, but I'm not criticizing you.

Now, (6) is certainly a confusing thing to say. If someone tells me that my paintings are all bad, this seems to simply be another way of saying that I am a bad painter – and to say that I am a bad painter is, in point of fact, to criticize me, viz., as a bad painter. As I noted above, one typically criticizes the painter *by* criticizing the paintings; and it is hard to sense a gap between the two. However, there is a reading of (6) that arguably does make sense – and this is one in which the speaker does not judge that my paintings are a *reflection of my deficient capacity to paint.* Consider:

> (6*) Yeah, his paintings are all bad paintings, but you know why? He was threatened
> that if he ever made a good painting, he'd lose his home. So all this time he's been
> deliberately making bad paintings. So his paintings are all bad, but we have no idea
> whether he's a bad painter.

Now the point. In (6*), one is arguably criticizing the paintings, but not the painter. One can do this insofar as one can judge that a certain deficient outcome may be *someone's doing*, but nevertheless that *someone's doing* which is deficient may not be a reflection of their deficient *capacities to do.* What we have, then, is a distinction between "deficiency" (or "falling below a standard") of two different sorts. Roughly, we have deficiency in paintings (however this is to be understood or otherwise measured), and deficiency is capacities to paint.

It is worth observing here that, on *this* score, there is no relevant parallel with the case of blame. In the case of blame, there is no parallel distinction between, say, blaming an action and blaming an agent – indeed, it is obvious that any such distinction is hopeless. After all, we do not "blame" actions in the first place. Instead, we blame *agents* on account of their actions (or perhaps their characters, or their beliefs, or ...). In other words, there is only one possible fit *object* of the attitude of blame, and that is an *agent.* However, one can indeed criticize pieces of art – and one can also criticize artists. Again, typically, one criticizes artists *by* criticizing some relevant pieces of art. But it makes no sense at all to suggest that one blames some art, and therefore also some artist – or that one blames an artist *by* blaming their art.

This distinction forces a clarification of the *be better* norm. In particular, it forces a restriction on what we are allowed to substitute for *x.* The thought here plainly isn't that one is

in position to criticize a painting only if one is better than ... that very painting, or in position to criticize a spring only if one is better than ... that very spring. The thought, instead, is that one is in position in to criticize a painter with respect to some standard *by* criticizing a painting only if one is better than that painter with respect to that standard. Thus to clarify:

> One must: criticize agent *x* with respect to standard *s* only if one is better than agent *x* with respect to standard *s*.[10]

Return then to Edison and the spring. My suggestion is that Edison can recognize that the spring is deficient relative to some standard of working for the job at hand, but that the spring's being deficient in this respect needn't be *evidence of* some criticisable deficiency *in the workman's capacities*. In other words: Edison can recognize that the workman's capacities do not themselves fall below any relevant standard for workmans's capacities – but that some doing of the workman (even in his capacity as a workman) falls below some *other* kind of standard. Which is other words for saying what is perhaps more simple to say: Edison can recognize that the workman's spring won't work, but not be *criticizing* the workman, because Edison needn't be judging that such a workman is *supposed* to be able to fashion such springs that *do* work. However, if Edison is indeed *criticizing* the workman precisely by criticizing his spring, then – with a certain *proviso* to come – the workman's reply comes into force: *let's see you do better*.

Objection 3: Professionals and Amateurs

And now, finally, we come to what is certainly the most difficult challenge for the *be better* norm of criticism. And this is that the case just considered – even once clarified – can nevertheless seem like a simple counterexample to that norm. After all, suppose Edison clarifies that he *is* criticizing the workman. And the workman replies, "Well, let's see you do

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[10] In practice, no one confuses the nature of the norm in the imagined way; anyway, the result of any such confusion is, shall we say, startling:

> Those apartments are awful – way too tiny and cramped. # Alright, wise guy, but you're not so big yourself.
> That's a lousy spring; it's tensile strength is far weaker than what it needs to be. # Yeah, well, your own tensile strength is not so hot either, tough guy.

better." Might Edison not simply reply that, well, *he is not a workman?* Here we come, then, to a serious difficulty for the *be better* norm. And so let me make, in advance, the following admission. In order to save the *be better* norm from these putative counterexamples, some serious gymnastics are going to be required. In particular, we are going to have to be very careful about what it is we are criticizing the relevant agents *for*. However, my contention is that, overall, these gymnastics are neither *ad hoc* nor unmotivated.

But let's back up. In addition to the case just mentioned, consider further the following:

The gallery. Suilin is in a fancy art gallery in Copenhagen. She says, "Gosh, these paintings are dreadful. The color scheme is all wrong." Improbably overhearing her from behind a hidden screen, the artist emerges to say, "Well you certainly don't like my paintings, that's for sure – but let's see *you* do better!"

> Variant: Improbably, the artist recognizes Suilin as her old acquaintance from high school art class, and retorts, "Yeah, well, I've seen your own paintings, Suilin, and we both know that these are a lot better than anything *you* could do."

The filmmaker. Roland is a filmmaker whose latest film was just trashed by Jane's review in the *Times*. In an outburst, Roland says, "These lazy critics think they're so damn clever – but, you know, they've never produced a single worthwhile piece of art in their lives; all they can do is just sit around sniping at others. Hell, I'd like to see any of them make a film half as good as the one I just made. I'll listen when I see these bastards do better themselves."

The football/soccer fan. Ronaldo, the star player for Juventus, is preparing to take a spot-kick near the side-line. Ronaldo kicks the ball far over the goal post, which prompts Anders – a 70 year-old Juventus fan – to exclaim, "Come on Ronaldo, keep the damn ball down!" Improbably hearing his outburst, Ronaldo calmly walks over to Anders and says, "Alright old man, after the game, let's see *you* do better."

Variant: Ronaldo's adoring fan Juan, sitting a row behind Anders, says to him: "I bet you couldn't do any better, old man."

The kitchen install. Pavel is a professional tradesperson and kitchen installer, recently hired to renovate someone's kitchen while she is away. Pavel's friend Charlie – himself a teacher – happens by, and comes in to have a look at Pavel's progress. Charlie says, "Pavel, I've got to say that this isn't very good. Look, the doors aren't even on straight – and look, the tiles are uneven too." To which he replies: "Yeah, well Charlie, it is a lot better than you could do."

Now the point. Why aren't the above cases simple counterexamples to the *be better* norm of criticism? Intuitively, in every such case, the relevant invocation of that norm is simply absurd. In every such case, it seems, the critic has available a roughly similar – and decisive – reply:

Suilin: "Well, I'm not saying I could do better – but then again, I'm not putting forward my art in a professional art gallery."
Jane: "Well, I'm not saying that I personally could make a better film – but then again, I'm not putting films out there as being of professional level quality."
Anders: "Well, I'm not saying I could do (or ever could have done) better – but then again, I'm not a professional footballer."
Charlie: "Well, I'm not saying that I could do better – but then again, I'm not a professional tradesperson."

The upshot is that we seem to have counterexamples to the *be better* norm, counterexamples that point to a more general lesson. In order to criticize artists, I don't need to be a better artist myself. In order to criticize filmmakers, I don't need to be a better filmmaker myself. In order to criticize athletes, I don't need to be a better athlete myself. In order to criticize tradespeople, I don't have to be able to be a better tradesperson myself. The norm, it seems, has just given us the wrong results.

But this is too fast. My reaction to the above cases is simple. What we have here are not appeals to an illicit norm of criticism. What we have here are illicit appeals to that norm. In other words, what we have here is not a confused norm, but instead confused *appeals* to that

norm. The way I wish to bring out this point appeals to a move familiar from other areas of responsibility-theory. In particular, we must be very careful to specify what it is that – at a deeper level – the above persons are being criticized *for*.[11] That is, we need to specify more clearly the nature of the criticism in question, and what we might call the "logical form" of "criticism sentences". My contention is that once we see what the criticism really is in these cases, we'll see that there is no reason to think that the relevant critics do not in fact satisfy the *be better* norm of criticism – and it is *this* that explains the oddness of the above replies to the given critics.

I begin with the following important observation: no analogue of the replies just considered is available to our critics in our first set of cases. In response to Rebecca's challenge, for instance, Ross can't say, "Well, sure, I can't do any better, but I'm not saying I could – I'm not any kind of professional plasterer." That's of course right. But then again, neither is Rebecca. The simple observation here is that, in the first set of cases, the critic and the criticized are both "amateurs" who are, in some important way, subject to the same expectations. Now, when we move to *amateur-on-professional* cases, something important seems to have changed, and the response ("let's see you do better") seems to misfire. Now, there are two competing diagnoses of this change we might consider. The first is that, when we move to amateur-on-professional cases, the *be better* norm no longer applies. This is equivalent to saying that the *be better* norm is not a norm on criticism *per* se, but is instead a norm on merely on what we might call *peer-criticism*, where two people are "peers" with respect to a standard just in case both such persons are expected, in the relevant way, to live up to that standard. Thus:

Be better than peers:

One must: criticize some peer *x* with respect to standard *s* only if one is better than *x* with respect to *s.*

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[11] Cf. debates about the status of the so-called "Frankfurt-style" counterexamples to the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP). Some defenders of the principle have responded to the cases roughly as follows: once we pay careful attention to what the relevant agent is responsible *for* in these cases (e.g., as in van Inwagen, some "consequence-particular" rather than a "consequence-universal") , we'll see that the relevant agents were in fact free to avoid responsibility for that very thing. Needless to say, I take no position here on PAP and the Frankfurt cases; this is just a comparison.

But whereas I endorse *be better than peers*, this is because, ultimately, I endorse the more general principle, *be better*. And so let us consider a second diagnosis of this change. The second diagnosis maintains that, when we move to amateur-professional cases, it isn't that the *be better* norm no longer applies. Rather, it is that the *criticism* at issue subtly changes as well, and thus subtly does meet that norm (at least when appropriate). In other words, we have two competing explanations of the mistake the professionals are making in the second set of cases: (a) the professionals in the above cases are illicitly appealing to a norm that doesn't apply in the relevant context (they are appealing to a norm like *be better than peers* – but the critic and the criticized aren't peers), or (b) the professionals in the above cases are illicitly misconstruing, by implicitly *levelling-down*, what it is that they are being criticized *for*. Option (b) would preserve the simple norm of criticism: *be better*. I favour option (b).

Let us begin by considering Charlie's criticism of Pavel. And let us distinguish between what we might call the *surface* criticisms in this case, and the *real* criticism. The surface criticisms: *these doors aren't straight; these tiles look bad; this isn't looking very good*. The real criticism: *you are trying to pass off work of non-professional quality as work of professional quality*. But now the point. The problem with Pavel's reply – that Charlie is no better at installing kitchens than he is – is thus that Pavel has responded merely to the *surface criticisms* to which he has been subjected, but is not responding to the *real* criticism. Perhaps Charlie couldn't tile any better. That may be, and had Charlie said, "Pavel, this is bad even for an amateur," that may be relevant. But the real criticism is that he's represented himself as a professional but now isn't delivering work commensurate with being a professional. And it is thus absurd for Pavel to attempt to say that Charlie is no better at installing kitchens than he is. That just misunderstands the criticism. In other words, with respect to the *real* criticism, there is no reason to suppose that Charlie is no better than Pavel; there is no reason to think that Charlie *also* represents himself as a professional and then doesn't deliver professional quality work.

One way to see that what I have called the *surface* criticisms are indeed merely *surface* criticisms is to simply observe that Charlie's reaction *to the very same job* would be very different, if he thought, say, that the job was a first-time "practice run" of Pavel's young upstart apprentice; indeed, in that case, Charlie might have found himself saying, "Hey, wow, these tiles look pretty good!" What this seems to show is that, when Charlie initially uttered, "Pavel, these tiles look bad," what he *meant* was something like, "Pavel, these tiles look bad *for a professional job*," – which, if it is to be a criticism *of Pavel*, is other words for saying, "Pavel,

you're passing off work that isn't up to professional standards as being of professional standards." (If Pavel isn't a professional, or he *is* a professional but, for some strange reason, the job he is doing is not meant to be a professional job, then the fact that the tiles aren't good for a professional job is of course no criticism of Pavel.) Thus again: *that* is the real criticism *of Pavel.*

Now consider the filmmaker. There is something pathetic about the unfortunately common phenomena of a filmmaker who reacts to negative reviews by saying that he'd like to see the film critics themselves do better, *even if* such a filmmaker is right – as such filmmakers tend to emphasize – that it is much easier to criticize films than to make them. But we have, again, two possible explanations of what is pathetic about this reaction. The first is that this amounts to a pathetic appeal to what is *in itself* a pathetic norm – the norm that, in order to criticize, you have to be better yourself. The second explanation, however, is the one I favour. What is pathetic here is precisely the filmmaker's idea that this norm will protect him from criticism if he makes a bad film. We have a pathetic attempt to hide behind a norm that is *in itself* perfectly good – or a pathetic attempt to act as if a norm condemns a piece of criticism which it simply doesn't condemn.

Look at it this way. To make a film and submit it publicly for the world to see is to *take a risk.* But if, when criticized, a filmmaker says, "Alright, you critics – let's see *you* make a better film," the filmmaker is thus revealed to be someone who wants it both ways. If his film is received well, then he expects to receive all of the accolades that accrue to someone who makes great films. But if it is received badly, then he expects to be able to implicate that he is just some sort amateur who never meant to suggest that his work is especially worthy of esteem. In other words, he expects to say: since this was just the product of an idle amateur, it must be *judged as* the work of an amateur – so if you think that what I've done is *bad even for an amateur*, then, since you too are amateur, *let's see you do better.* But this is pathetic. If you put your work forward as being at the level of a professional, you can't then retreat to the safety of the claim that it is good for an amateur. Maybe it is. But we weren't criticizing your film as being bad for an amateur (in point of fact, it may be astoundingly good for an amateur – and if we thought this were a submission for the college film competition, we might be seriously impressed). We're criticizing it as being bad for a professional – and thus, at the deeper level, we are criticizing *you* for seeing fit to *suggest it* as being good for a professional. *That* is our criticism of you. If you say to *that*, "Let's see you do better," then we have a ready reply: we at

least wouldn't put forward material like *this* as of professional-level quality. In other words, once we are clear about the *nature of the criticism*, we can observe that our criticism *does in fact* meet the *be better* norm. And we can see that "Let's see you do better" is a pathetic attempt to reconstrue our criticism as something it wasn't.

Once clarified in this way, the "Let's see you do better" retort is out of place, in the above cases, not because *be better* is a mistaken norm, but because there is no reason to think that the real criticisms at issue fail to meet that norm. A helpful way to bring out this point is to observe how the "Let's see you ..." reply is *pre-emptively blocked* if the critic *specifies his or her implicit criticism* more concretely. Consider:

Suilin: Sheesh, these paintings are really bad – I wouldn't try to pass these off as worth displaying in a fancy gallery!

Artist: Well, let's see you do better.

The artist's retort now makes no sense; is the artist alleging that Suilin indeed *would* pass off such paintings as worth displaying in such a gallery? But that, presumably, is something for which (ordinarily) the artist would have no relevant evidence. Of course, the artist may be reasonably confident that, however "bad" her paintings are, it is unlikely that some apparent tourist can do better. Thus, in principle, she is in position to challenge a tourist on *that* score. But that is not the score on which she has been challenged. Her retort thus verges on the incoherent.

Similarly, consider:

Charlie: Sheesh, Pavel, this kitchen is looking pretty bad – I wouldn't try to pass off this kind of work as professional installation.

Pavel: Well, let's see you install a kitchen that looks better.

Again, Pavel's retort now plainly makes no sense; Pavel has simply *ignored* Charlie's criticism, and responded to some *other* imagined criticism – namely, "Pavel, this isn't even good for an amateur." If Charlie says that his job is so bad that it isn't even good *for an amateur*, then

indeed Pavel's reply makes sense (or at least doesn't so clearly *not* make sense): "OK, if this isn't decent for an amateur – well, you're an amateur, so let's see *you* do better then."

The intuition now is not that the "Let's see you..." reply is absurd, in the above cases, because, really, the critic needn't be *able* to do better (and the *be better* norm is false); the intuition is instead that that reply is absurd because, once the nature of the criticism is clarified in this way, there is clearly now *no reason to think* that the critic *does not* meet this norm. In other words, there is no reason to think that Suilin indeed *would* pass off this kind of art as worth displaying in a gallery, or that Charlie indeed would try to pass off this sort of work as worthy of a professional tradesperson. Once we distinguish between the mere *surface criticism* and the real criticism, the *be better* norm emerges perfectly intact. Admittedly, it is a bit difficult to know how to argue that the "real" form of (say) Charlie's criticism is as I have indicated. The lesson, however, is this. There is a very natural way of construing Charlie's criticism – and all of the relevant criticisms above – as ones which do in fact meet the *be better* norm. I don't have much in the way of argument for my own theory of these criticisms beyond that, well, it saves the *be better* norm – or, less controversially, perhaps ~ it provides us with an elegant way of seeing how *all* agential criticism is subject to one and the same norm of criticism, and how the latter set of cases is, at a deeper level, perfectly continuous with the first set of cases, cases in which the invocation of a *be better* norm seems to be perfectly in order.

But let us finally consider the sports case – the case of Anders (the old fan) criticizing Ronaldo. Here I confess to being pulled in different directions. Let me explain. We must distinguish between *mere outbursts* and *criticisms*. Now, mere outbursts are presumably subject to various norms, but the thesis of this paper is not that outbursts *per se* are subject to the *be better* norm. The thesis is that *criticism* is subject to that norm. To bring out the difference, or at least one in the vicinity, consider:

> *The stairs.* Danny trips on the stairs, prompting spontaneous howls of laughter from his good pal Alice. Danny says, "Oh, shut up Alice – I saw you fall over these steps just last week." Alice retorts, still smirking, "Mate, I'm not criticizing you – I'm having a laugh at you."

The point: there are attitudes nearby criticism that can be mistaken for criticism. If Alice's laughter is implicit criticism, Danny's reply is appropriate. He can rightly say that Alice is no

better with respect to not tripping on stairs, so is in no position to criticize. But Alice can be in position to laugh at Danny, without being in position to *criticize* Danny.

My sense is that, in many "sports" cases, the relevant fan reactions are something more akin to outbursts, or spontaneous expressions of feelings of disappointment or frustration that The Team is losing (or something similar). ("Oh no! She *dropped* it! Come on!") But it can be unclear when the expression of those feelings amounts to criticism. The fact is, someone can be upset to the point of tears – or throwing something at the television – that Jones didn't make that catch, but not be *criticizing* Jones for not making that catch.

Return, then, to Anders. My claim is that what we have here is a mere outburst, then that outburst is not subject to the *be better* norm. But let's suppose that Anders really is *criticizing* Ronaldo. My contention is that, if Anders really is *criticizing* Ronaldo in this case, Anders implicitly does represent himself thusly: *Well, if I were a professional footballer, I at least wouldn't knock the ball that far over the goalpost in this kind of circumstance; I'd have the composure to keep cool, and aim the ball properly, at least giving us a chance at success.* But the status of this conjecture is exactly that: it is sheer conjecture. And this, in part, explains my ambivalence about the status of criticism like that of Anders'. Anders is criticizing Ronaldo's kick, but, really, we have little idea whether Anders (or most anyone else for that matter) would in fact have the composure needed in those circumstances. I can – perhaps – know with some reasonable degree of certainty that I wouldn't try to pass of a certain film as being of great quality; I doubt I can know with any certainty at all that I'd keep my composure under the gaze of hundreds of thousands of overzealous fans.

Look at it this way. If Anders is criticizing at all here, then Anders is really criticizing Ronaldo's mental composure. He's disappointed that, in the heat of the moment, Ronaldo allowed himself to get carried away, trying to be the hero and score some miracle-goal, rather than doing the less "heroic" thing that would in fact give his team its best chance of success. And Anders may in fact be the sort of person who wouldn't do that sort of thing. If so, then his criticism was appropriate; if not, not.[12] But once more, we can explain the feeling that

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[12] With respect to the topics of this paper, there are cases, and then there are cases, and then there are some cases. Needless to say, I can't consider every case that might possibly be relevant here, but I hope I've considered enough (and varied) cases so that we needn't rely on any one single judgment that may be hopelessly idiosyncratic. But I do want to mention one further:

> *The coach.* Serena is a professional tennis player with the stated goal of being best in the world. Her coach, Oracene, now 70, is making her drill her backhand, and is relentlessly barking

there is something amiss with Ronaldo's reply, and we can do so as follows. Insofar as he is being *criticized* at all here, it is on grounds of his mental composure. Thus, to retort "Let's see you do better, old man," is to miss the point. Ronaldo can be sure that the old man could not do any better with respect to a *surface* criticism – *that kick wasn't on target* – but it is at best unclear whether the old man could do better with respect to the *real* criticism – that one must stay composed in the heat of the moment.

Grounding the non-hypocrisy norm on blame

So ends my defense of the *be better* norm of criticism. I turn now to our final issue: what is the relationship between this norm of criticism and the non-hypocrisy norm on the standing to blame? At some level, my story here can be as brief as it is simple. The relationship between these two things is that the latter is simply a more specific instance of the former. There is a *be better* norm on criticism; to blame is to criticize; thus, one must blame a certain agent with respect to some standard only if one is better than that agent with respect to that standard. And that is other words for saying: if you are no better at meeting a certain standard as the person to be blamed, then you are in no position to blame. Thus, the non-hypocrisy condition

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corrections: "Feet planted!", "Good, but now you've overcorrected – one more time!" And on it goes. But Oracene knows what she is doing, and knows exactly how and when to push Serena. Serena ultimately breaks down in frustration, and explains, "Alright Oracene, let's see you do a proper backhand then!"

There is plainly something illicit about the particular form of Serena's frustration in this case – obviously, Oracene, now 70, is not going to be able to demonstrate the precise thing she wishes to see in Serena – but the diagnosis here is delicate. The problem is that, plausibly, by making Oracene her coach, Serena has *authorized* Oracene to criticize her, *irrespective* of Oracene's *standing* to criticize her. (Or: depending on how on conceptualizes "standing", Serena *gives* Oracene standing to criticize her.) What is strange about Serena's retort, in these circumstances, is that she is implicitly reneging on her commitment to Oracene as her *coach*, and has instead lapsed into a posture in which she treats her as a mere fellow player. At any rate, the player-coach relationship at issue in this case raises difficulties, not all of which I have space to address; I thus set this case aside. For more on "authority" and its relationship to "standing", see Herstein 2017 and 2020, Tognazzini (ms), and Piovarchy forthcoming b.

It is worth noting, however, that one could attempt to diagnose *all* of the "amateur/professional" cases at issue in this paper in a similar manner. In particular, one could attempt to say that professionals – just in virtue of becoming professionals – *authorize* us non-professionals to criticize them, irrespective of our *standing* to criticize them. (Thanks to [withheld] for this interesting suggestion.) A full evaluation of this diagnosis, however, must lay beyond the scope of this paper.

on standing to blame follows immediately from the *be better* norm of criticism. We thus have a defense of what I above called Option (4).

The realization that one can derive the non-hypocrisy condition from more *general* norms on criticism puts pressure on certain conceptions of "moral standing" present in the literature. For instance, consider the following. Todd has given what we might call a *moral commitment* account of moral standing: "one has moral standing to blame a given wrongdoer if and only if one is morally committed to the values that condemn the wrongdoer's actions", where "moral commitment", according to Todd, consists, minimally, in "endorsement of the relevant value as a value, and at least some degree of motivation" to comply with it. (2019: 357) But suppose that, in response to Lucy's challenge, Dan tries to draw a dragon and does no better than Lucy. Intuitively, his criticism no longer "stands", and now he must withdraw it. But the problem, then, for Dan's criticism of Lucy's dragon was not anything like that Dan's failure to draw a good dragon reveals Dan to be insufficiently committed to the value – say – of drawing good dragons. Dan's commitment to excellent-dragon-drawing is neither here nor there. What is relevant is simply that *Dan is no better than* Lucy with respect to meeting the standard in question. In general, what seems to matter here is not one's abstract "commitment" to a given norm, but one's concrete ability to comply with it.

The "gap" between the *be better* norm of criticism and Todd's "moral commitment" account of the moral standing to blame is either a problem for the former, or for the latter, or, perhaps, both. In the spirit of reconciliation, however, I want to conclude by suggesting a way of bridging this gap – that is, of explaining why Todd's moral commitment account of the standing to blame is at least *prima facie* plausible, but *can also* plausibly be derived from a *be better* norm of criticism. The suggestion is the following. Note that, in the first set of cases, there is a certain kind of gap between the agent's *motivation* or *desire* to perform the task in question, and the agent's *actually performing* the task in question. When it comes to drawing a "good" dragon, or not striking out, or keeping orchids alive, or getting a paper published, or evening out plaster, there may be a substantial gap between one's *motivation* and *desire* to do these things, and one's actually doing them. Intuitively, one could be *fully committed* to keeping the orchids alive, and yet, due to insufficient gardening know-how, not be able to keep them alive. One could be fully committed to hitting well in baseball, and yet, due to insufficient physical skill, not be able to hit well in baseball.

But is *morality* like this? The question is a difficult question, of course – but there is at the very least a strong case that it isn't. Succeeding in morality – unlike succeeding in gardening – does not demand of an agent more than what is in that very agent's control. More to the point: if meeting a certain standard is beyond the capacity of a certain agent, then that agent's meeting that standard *is not a moral requirement*. Thus, when it comes to morality, the relevant "gap" observed in the first set of cases seems to disappear. Intuitively, the fact that Jane's orchids have died certainly doesn't show, by itself, that Jane isn't committed to keeping her orchids alive. However, the fact that Jane *lies to me* does indeed tend to show that she isn't committed to the value of not lying to me. She could be fully committed to keeping orchids alive, and yet not keep them alive – but she couldn't really be fully committed to not lying to me, and yet lie to me. If she were fully committed to not lying to me, well, she wouldn't. That's because *not lying* is a mere moral requirement, and meeting that requirement is open to any agent that is in fact committed to meeting that requirement. But it is simply false that, if only she were fully committed to keeping the orchids alive, she would.

I can sum up as follows. Todd's "moral commitment" account of the moral standing to blame will be *extensionally equivalent* with a *be better* norm of criticism, so long as we maintain that genuine *commitment* to a moral standard (or value) entails *actually complying* with that standard (or value). Said differently: if we maintain that non-compliance with a norm entails non-commitment to that norm, then the "moral commitment" account of standing ends up converging upon a *be better* norm of criticism. Thus, the plausibility of the moral commitment account of moral standing is in fact no difficulty for the *be better* norm, and vice versa: that there is a deeper, more fundamental *be better* norm is no problem for the *extensional adequacy* of a moral commitment account of the moral standing to blame.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have defended a *be better* norm of criticism – a underexplored norm that is nevertheless ubiquitous in our lives, once we begin looking for it. The *be better* norm is, I hope to have shown, continuously invoked in a wide range of ordinary settings, can undergird and explain the widely endorsed non-hypocrisy condition on the standing to blame, and can be defended – so I say – from all of the most obvious objections it faces. However, if you think

that I have made a mess of the issues discussed above, then I have one simple response. And you can guess what that may be.

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