

The moral function of standing to blame

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To have moral standing to blame is to have a right to blame. But what kind of right is it, and what follows from having or lacking standing? I will argue that the function of standing norms is to protect the freedom and interests of persons who are or could be blamed. Moral standing to blame, I will claim, is a power according to Wesley Hohfeld's classification of rights. It is a normative power to call for an uptake of blame from someone who is liable to blame, i.e., someone who is blameworthy. I make three further claims in distinction to recent scholarship on standing: I argue that the concept of standing does not apply at all to private blame, only to expressed blame; I claim that standing cannot be understood as only a privilege-right; and I argue that there is not a conceptual asymmetry between standing to blame and standing to forgive.

Introduction

To have moral standing to blame is to have a right to blame. But what kind of right is it, and what follows from having or lacking standing? I will argue that the function of standing norms is to protect the freedom and interests of persons who are or could be blamed. Moral standing to blame, I will claim, is a power according to Wesley Hohfeld's classification of rights.¹ It is a normative power to call for an uptake of blame from someone who is liable to blame, i.e., someone who is blameworthy.

I will start by laying out my own view, before engaging with four recent contributions to the scholarship on standing by Matt King, Ori J. Herstein, James Edwards, and Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel J. Miller.² Their views differ in various ways from my proposal. I will argue that the concept of standing does not apply at all to private blame – it serves no valuable moral function in protecting the rights-holder when blame is not expressed. I will claim that standing cannot be understood as only a privilege-right. And I

¹ Wesley Newcomb Hohfeld, 'Some Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning', *The Yale Law Journal* 23, no. 1 (1913).

² Matt King, 'Skepticism about the Standing to Blame', in *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility Volume 6*, ed. David Shoemaker (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2019); Ori J. Herstein, 'Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons', *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 174, no. 12 (2017); James Edwards, 'Standing to Hold Responsible', *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 16 (2019); Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel J. Miller, 'A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness', *Ethics* 132, no. 4 (2022).

will argue that there is not a conceptual asymmetry between standing to blame and standing to forgive.

The right to blame

There is debate in the philosophical literature about the meaning of the concept of standing, as well as about its relevance. The fact that the word is used about two different moral phenomena can create some confusion. Sometimes it is used as a synonym for “esteem” or “status”, as when someone says that “Magnus has high standing among chess players”. When we talk of standing to blame, however, we are talking about the right to blame. This view that standing to blame is a right or an entitlement to blame is the standard view in the literature (although it is rarely specified which type of right standing is).³

Not all who agree that the concept of standing signifies a right to blame think it refers to a real moral phenomenon. They agree about the standard meaning of standing, but they disagree about its relevance. As King says, “I don’t think there is a right to blame. That isn’t to say one is never justified in blaming. Rather, blame just isn’t something to which one has a right”.⁴ King and other skeptics about standing do not see failure to satisfy the typical standing conditions, such as nonhypocrisy and noncomplicity, as precluding justified blame.⁵ Blame can still be appropriate and valuable, they say, for instance by providing the moral community with opportunities for learning and for strengthening adherence to moral norms.

Even if the skeptics are right that hypocritical or otherwise faulty blame can be valuable, it does not follow that it is unnecessary to require standing to blame. The standing requirement for justified blame may still serve an important moral function. This function, I will argue, is the same here as in other cases where rights restrict the pursuit of valuable goals: It is concern for the freedom and the interests of the rightsholders that motivates the restriction of potentially valuable blaming-practices.⁶

³ The standard view that standing is a right, is acknowledged either implicitly or explicitly in the following works (as well as in numerous others): Macalester Bell, ‘The Standing to Blame: A Critique’, in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, ed. D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini (Oxford UP, 2012), p. 269; G. A. Cohen, ‘Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can’t, Condemn the Terrorists?’, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 58 (2006), p. 120; Jessica Isserow and Colin Klein, ‘Hypocrisy and Moral Authority’, *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2017), p. 202; Cristina Roadevin, ‘Hypocritical Blame, Fairness, and Standing’, *Metaphilosophy* 49, no. 1-2 (2018), p. 137; Patrick Todd, ‘A Unified Account of the Moral Standing to Blame’, *Notus* 53, no. 2 (2019), p. 359; R. Jay Wallace, ‘Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 38, no. 4 (2010), p. 317; Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel J. Miller, ‘Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (2018), p. 118. See Fritz and Miller, ‘A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness’, pp. 764-766, for an overview of the literature on standing that does not accept the standard view that standing is a right. This paper takes the standard view as starting point and aims to develop a more nuanced understanding of the right to blame.

⁴ King, ‘Skepticism about the Standing to Blame’, p. 7.

⁵ Bell, ‘The Standing to Blame: A Critique’; Daniela Dover, ‘The Walk and the Talk’, *The Philosophical Review* 128, no. 4 (2019); King, ‘Skepticism about the Standing to Blame’.

⁶ By taking protection of both the freedom and the interests of rightsholder as the function of the right, I intend my theory to be relevant to both of the main theories of rights: the will-theories (freedom) and the interest-theories. On this distinction, see e.g., Leif Wenar, ‘Rights’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition) (2023). It would take us too far off track to spell out these different functions beyond what I do in the following main text, which I hope is sufficient to show that proponents of either type of rights-theory might find it plausible that standing norms serve an important moral function.

To unpack this moral function, we can start by comparing standing to blame with standing in law.⁷ Legal standing signifies a right to initiate a lawsuit. It is a right, in other words, to hold the defendant legally to account. Moral standing to blame, correspondingly, signifies a right to hold the blamed person morally to account. Just like there are conditions on moral standing to blame, so there are conditions on legal standing, such as the condition that the suing party must have been injured by or otherwise have sufficient connection to the law or action in question.⁸

In a legal context, having to defend yourself in court can be both a financial and an emotional burden. It can also restrict your freedom by making you set aside other projects in order to prepare your defense and to stand trial. Likewise in a moral context, blame can constitute a burden and a restriction of freedom. Even if blame can sometimes take a mild and dialogical form⁹, it usually signals “disapproval”¹⁰, “opprobrium”¹¹, a “hostile attitude”¹², etc., which is experienced by the blamed as a form of “harm”¹³, “unpleasant experience”¹⁴ or “negative social effect”¹⁵ which they have an interest in avoiding. Further, when appropriate blame is conveyed to someone, they are expected to react to it. The blamed person is called to answer to the blamer.¹⁶ My blame constitutes a “demand for an uptake from my blamee, for example that he or she responds to my blame by apologizing, laying plans – possibly consulting me – for future self-improvement etc.”¹⁷ “By blaming, one creates an obligation for the blamed”.¹⁸ The blamer “imposes one’s will” on the blamed.¹⁹ The blamed person’s freedom is thus restricted, although not in the sense that they are coerced, as is the case when someone with legal standing can demand your presence in court and have their demand enforced by law. In the case of appropriate moral blaming, one’s freedom is restricted in the weaker sense that one’s choices of morally acceptable actions are constrained. Even though this does not amount to coercion, it still amounts to a demand that you undertake certain actions as opposed to other actions that you might wish to pursue. You can of course ignore the demand without formal sanctions,

⁷ Other scholars who compare standing to blame with legal standing, but who unlike me end up rejecting the analogy, are Adam Piovarchy, ‘Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 101 (2020), p. 605; Bell, ‘The Standing to Blame: A Critique’, p. 269; Fritz and Miller, ‘A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness’, p. 765.

⁸ William A. Fletcher, ‘The Structure of Standing’, *The Yale Law Journal* 98, no. 2 (1988); Eugene Kontorovich, ‘What Standing Is Good For’, *Virginia Law Review* 93, no. 7 (2007).

⁹ Dover, ‘The Walk and the Talk’.

¹⁰ Roadevin, ‘Hypocritical Blame, Fairness, and Standing’, p. 138.

¹¹ Wallace, ‘Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons’, p. 318.

¹² Bell, ‘The Standing to Blame: A Critique’, p. 265.

¹³ Daniel Telech and Hannah Tierney, ‘The Comparative Nonarbitrariness Norm of Blame’, *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2019), p. 30; Todd, ‘A Unified Account of the Moral Standing to Blame’, p. 350.

¹⁴ Isserow and Klein, ‘Hypocrisy and Moral Authority’, p. 217.

¹⁵ Wallace, ‘Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons’, pp. 329-330.

¹⁶ R. A. Duff, ‘Blame, Moral Standing and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Trial’, *Ratio* 23, no. 2 (2010); Coleen Macnamara, ‘Taking Demands Out of Blame’, in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, ed. D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013); Piovarchy, ‘Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority’.

¹⁷ Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, ‘Why the moral equality account of the hypocrite’s lack of standing to blame fails’, *Analysis* 80, no. 4 (2021), p. 667.

¹⁸ Fritz and Miller, ‘A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness’, p. 771.

¹⁹ Ori J. Herstein, ‘Justifying Standing to Give Reasons: Hypocrisy, Minding Your Own Business, and Knowing One’s Place’, *Philosopher’s Imprint* 20, no. 7 (2020), p. 15.

but if the blame is appropriate and expressed by someone with standing, you will thereby flaunt a morally valid demand on your actions.

With this comparison of legal and moral standing, they both serve the function of setting conditions on when the person held to account has a *pro tanto* obligation to respond appropriately to charges against them and to bear the burden of being held to account. In this way, standing norms protect both the freedom and the interests of the person who is or could be held to account. Regarding the freedom dimension, conditions on taking a person to court, such as requirements to have standing, to produce evidence, to show probable cause for indictment, etc., protect that person's freedom by allowing them *not to act* unless the suing party fulfills the requirements. Similarly, conditions on moral standing to blame protect the blamed person's freedom by allowing her not to act. She may justifiably ignore calls for an uptake of blame when the conditions are not fulfilled. The standingless blamer fails to provide the blamed with an obligation to respond on the merits of the blame.²⁰

The freedom of the blamed not to act upon standingless blame is logically entailed by the concept of standing, in the following way: The right to hold someone to account, both legally and morally, makes sense only if, in the absence of the right, the target has a right not to be held to account by that person. The target is normatively free; she is *immune* from blame from someone who does not have a right (standing) to blame. Or put differently: We all have a *right not to be blamed* unless standing conditions (and other conditions) are satisfied.

To flesh out this relationship between the right not to be blamed and the right to blame (standing), we can apply H. L. A. Hart's distinction between general rights of non-interference and special rights to override general rights. Special rights, Hart explains, entail that "the claimant has some special justification for interference with another's freedom which other persons do not have ('I have a right to be paid what you promised for my services')." ²¹ Unless someone has a special right to interfere, the default general right to noninterference applies. Rights and freedom are thus inherently connected. It would not make sense for me to claim a special right to be paid according to our contract unless you were free not to pay me had it not been for the special right. In addition, Hart notes, special rights can be freely created, for instance by signing a contract. Hence, rights presuppose freedom in two ways: a) for creating special rights, and b) as the negative against which positive rights to interfere are conceivable.²²

Applying Hart's terms, we can classify standing to blame as a special right. It is a right to demand an uptake of blame from another who by default is protected by a general right of non-interference and who therefore has a right not to be blamed unless someone else has a special right to do so. For the blamer to have this special right to blame, the blamed person must have done something to grant the special right. The blamed person must have made herself *liable* to blame – or to use a more familiar term, she must have made herself *blameworthy*.

²⁰ Herstein, 'Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons'; Lippert-Rasmussen, 'Why the moral equality account of the hypocrite's lack of standing to blame fails'; Daniel Statman, 'Why disregarding hypocritical blame is appropriate', *Ratio* (2022).

²¹ H. L. A. Hart, 'Are There Any Natural Rights?', *The Philosophical Review* 64, no. 2 (1955), p. 183.

²² Ibid.; David C. Vogt, 'The Natural Meaning of Crime and Punishment: Denying and Affirming Freedom', *Criminal Law and Philosophy* 17 (2023)

Liability and power to blame

This way of understanding standing as a special right leads to the following analysis, which distinguishes between the grounds and the normative significance of both blameworthiness and standing to blame: The *ground* of a person's blameworthiness is her fault; she becomes blameworthy by culpably committing wrong without justification or excuse. The *normative significance* of her blameworthiness, on the other hand, is that she becomes liable to blame. As Mitchell Berman puts it, "Blameworthiness serves a liability function (removing a bar to otherwise impermissible treatments)".²³ The idea that blaming is "otherwise impermissible" makes sense only if a person by default has a general right not to be blamed unless she incurs a liability to blame – or in Hart's terminology, unless she acts autonomously (culpably) so as to grant another a special right to interfere in her sphere of freedom, which is otherwise protected by her general right to non-interference.²⁴ Note that blameworthiness merely removes a bar to justified blame. There are other conditions (at least some of which must be satisfied) for blame to be justified *all-things-considered*, such as it being proportional, deserved, conveyed in a justifiable manner, useful, etc.²⁵

Turning to standing to blame, it can sometimes be *grounded* in a special relationship between the blamer and the blamed. Other times, however, it can be grounded in our relationships *qua* members of the moral community, and hence, can apply to everyone. An example of the first might be when a parent of a child has standing to blame their co-parent for being too lenient on their common child, while others who do not partake in this special relationship do not have standing. An example of the second might be when everyone has standing to blame a drunk driver as long as they fulfill certain negative standing conditions, such as nonhypocrisy. Whenever the grounds for standing are satisfied (whatever these may be), the *normative significance* is that the blamer has the power to blame a blameworthy person. Standing is indeed a right, then, but it is a particular type of right, namely a power(-right) according to Hohfeld's schema.²⁶

Power to blame (standing) and liability to blame (blameworthiness) are thus correlative "rights positions" upon this Hohfeldian view: One cannot have standing to

²³ Mitchell N. Berman, 'Blameworthiness, desert, and luck', *Noûs* (2021), p. 1.

²⁴ There can be different grounds for special rights. Sometimes consent is sufficient. However, in the case of blame, consent is insufficient to create a special right for another to blame her. The ground for her liability is her fault, not consent to blame. Hence, if one is not blameworthy, one cannot waive the right not to be blamed.

²⁵ Whether an instance of blame is all-things-considered justified will depend on whether there is value in that instance of blame. Liability does not add value; it merely removes a bar. Desert, on the other hand, (arguably) adds value, such as when a criminal gets blamed in a way that is deserved and thereby attains the value of retributive justice. Berman, 'Blameworthiness, desert, and luck', p. 1, calls this value-adding function of desert a "favoring function", as opposed to a liability function. Different theorists apply the terminology differently. For instance, Michael McKenna, 'Directed Blame and Conversation', in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, ed. D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), p. 119, says that "blame is *deserved* by one who is blameworthy".

²⁶ Hohfeld, 'Some Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning', showed that "right" can designate four different legal positions: claim, privilege, power, and immunity. Each has a correlative legal position: duty, no-right, liability, and disability. The first two pairs of rights are first-order rights that apply directly to actions, such as the claim-right to fulfillment of a contract or the privilege-right to remain silent during arrest. The second two pairs of rights are second-order rights, meaning that they apply to other rights. They are rights to change someone else's rights and duties, i.e., to alter the normative situation of others (or in the case of immunity, to not have one's normative situation altered).

blame someone who is not liable to blame. And one cannot be liable to blame from someone who does not have standing to blame. This does not mean, of course, that one cannot be culpable if no-one has standing – one may still have acted wrongly and be at fault even if, say, everyone else has acted equally wrongly and would lack standing to blame due to hypocrisy. Put differently: The *grounds* of blameworthiness are not affected by whether others have standing to blame or not.²⁷ Indeed, with this Hohfeldian view of standing and blameworthiness, we can account for the notion that there are two separate conditions on the rightfulness of blame (which of course is a premise for the whole debate on standing as something separate from culpability). The first condition is that the blamed person must be at fault. If this condition is unfulfilled, blaming will not be in accordance with the blamed person's right (i.e., one cannot rightfully blame an innocent person). The second and separate condition is that the blamer must have standing. Standingless blame will not be in accordance with the blamed person's right, even if the blamed person is at fault and could rightfully be blamed by someone else who has standing. If the two conditions are not fulfilled, blaming is *pro tanto* wrongful.²⁸

I will explain the power to blame in more detail during the following discussion of the rival views of King, Herstein, Edwards, and Fritz and Miller.

King's denial of standing as power

King analyses standing as I do by seeing how it fits into Hohfeld's system of rights. He concludes opposite of me that standing cannot be a power:

It's perhaps most implausible that the right to blame would be a power or immunity. These are rights that alter another's normative situation. Because blaming is not something that changes rights, powers and immunities appear to have the wrong scope. The blameworthy's normative situations are not altered by being blamed. If they have duties to apologize or make amends, such duties plausibly arise from being blameworthy (or having acted wrongly), not from someone's specific blame.²⁹

²⁷ Upon the presented view of standing and blameworthiness as correlative rights positions, it is only the normative significance of one that is affected by the normative significance of the other; the grounds of the one are not affected by the grounds of the other. In other words: The grounds of blameworthiness are unaffected by the standing of others (which is why one cannot justify a wrong by appealing to the fact that others have also committed wrong and are hypocrites). Conversely, the grounds of standing to blame are unaffected by the culpability of others (which is why one cannot cancel out one's own hypocrisy or meddling by appealing to the fact that the object of blame is guilty). This means that if someone who is culpable is not currently blameworthy by anyone (the grounds of standing are unfulfilled), they will nevertheless be blameworthy by someone who has standing, or a potential person with standing, should they appear. In that sense, they are liable to blame even if the liability has not yet materialized. Conversely, if the grounds for standing are fulfilled but the person lacks standing vis-à-vis an innocent person, they will nevertheless retain their standing should the innocent become blameworthy or another person similarly placed is blameworthy. In that sense, they have standing (generally), even though they do not yet have someone over whom they can exercise their standing (specifically), just like a police officer has power to issue speeding tickets (generally) even when no-one has yet speeded and there is therefore no-one (specifically) to whom they have the right to issue a ticket.

²⁸ Fritz and Miller, 'Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame'; Herstein, 'Justifying Standing to Give Reasons: Hypocrisy, Minding Your Own Business, and Knowing One's Place'; Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, 'Praising Without Standing', *The Journal of Ethics* 26, no. 2 (2022), p. 230.

²⁹ King, 'Skepticism about the Standing to Blame', p. 14.

It is clearly correct that some of the blameworthy person's duties arise from having acted wrongly in the first place and not from being blamed. If a person has incurred a loss due to my fault, I ought to compensate her regardless of whether she or anyone else blame me. My moral reasons for compensating her are independent of blame. King's claim is stronger than this, however. The blameworthy person's normative situation is not altered at all by being blamed, he claims. Blame supplies no moral obligations in addition to those obligations that a blameworthy person has independently of blame. If King is correct, standing is not a power since power is the capacity to alter another's normative situation.

In response to this, we can start by considering other contexts in which a person can put someone else under a *pro tanto* obligation to do something. Imagine that a sick friend asks you to help clean their apartment. You may have moral obligations to help clean the apartment that are independent of the fact that your friend asks you for help (such as an obligation grounded in the fact that it is good to alleviate the suffering of sick people). In addition to such independent obligations, the fact alone that your friend asks you for help is usually understood to entail a *pro tanto* moral obligation to help your friend. The situation might be different if the request came from someone you didn't know, say, a representative of a corporation. A request from someone at Amazon or Google to help clean their offices would normally not be understood to create a *pro tanto* obligation for you to do so. It is (arguably) part of the concept of friendship that such a relationship grounds the standing to ask each other for help to undertake chores. One's relationship with a representative of a corporation (arguably) does not ground such standing.

Turning to blame, a blameworthy person has independent moral obligations to explain themselves to those who have a stake in the matter, to inform about what they have done and why, to lay out what they will do to remedy their wrong, to apologize, to relay how they will try to avoid doing the same in the future, etc. If standing is a power, however, then blame from someone with standing provides additional *pro tanto* obligations beyond those that arise directly from their wrongdoing. As several scholars emphasize, those additional obligations may be owed directly to the blamer, to answer to the blamer for their wrongs.³⁰ Contrariwise, if a hypocrite or someone else who lacks standing blames the blameworthy person, then their blame does not create such additional obligations.³¹ In that case, the blamed person can justifiably ignore the call for an uptake that is implied by the blame itself. They would still have independent moral obligations to answer for their faults, but not additional obligations that are grounded in the fact that they are blamed. To flesh out how blame itself may create obligations, let us consider Herstein's theory, which similarly emphasizes the additional reasons for acting that blame can create.

Herstein's denial of standing as power

Upon Herstein's theory, blame can involve a valid *directive*: "[I]n directing we purport to trigger, generate or give reasons".³² A valid directive successfully triggers a reason for acting *because of* the directive. Standing norms govern the right to give valid directives,

³⁰ Duff, 'Blame, Moral Standing and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Trial'; Fritz and Miller, 'A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness', p. 772; Lippert-Rasmussen, 'Why the moral equality account of the hypocrite's lack of standing to blame fails', p. 667.

³¹ Herstein, 'Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons'; Lippert-Rasmussen, 'Why the moral equality account of the hypocrite's lack of standing to blame fails'; Statman, 'Why disregarding hypocritical blame is appropriate'.

³² Herstein, 'Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons', p. 3115.

Herstein says. Blame from someone with standing alters the normative situation of the blamed (by giving valid directive-reasons), while lack of standing allows the blamed to disregard these directive-reasons.

Nonetheless, Herstein denies that standing is a power. If standing were a power to offer valid directive-reasons, he says, lack of power would invalidate the directive-reasons of blame. Lack of standing does not automatically invalidate directive-reasons, however. The blamed person may if she wishes take the blame as supplying valid directive-reasons. Herstein gives the example of parents who are smokers and who plead with their daughter not to take up smoking.³³ This is not an example of blaming, and it is not even clear that it is an example of hypocrisy. But for the sake of argument, let's assume that the parents do lack standing to plea with their daughter to stop smoking. In that case, Herstein says, the daughter may nevertheless choose to take their plea as a directive-reason for quitting smoking. The parents will then have succeeded in giving a valid directive even though they lack the standing to do so. If we understand standing as power, then the standingless parents do not have power, and without power, they cannot bring about the altered normative situation of the daughter. Herstein therefore denies that standing is a power, and instead claims it is "an independent and unique – and mostly overlooked – normative category".³⁴ Specifically, he sees standing norms as providing second-order reasons, that is, reasons regulating which reasons you are obligated to take into account and which you can justifiably ignore without considering their validity.

I think this postulation of an independent and unique normative category is premature. I agree with Herstein that if the parents really were able to provide the daughter with a normative reason to quit smoking simply by pleading with her to do so, then that ability to alter the normative landscape of the daughter is incompatible with their supposed lack of standing as normative power. We should rather say, in such a case, that the parents really did have standing. However, even if the parents did lack the standing (power) to create a normative reason for the daughter simply by pleading, the daughter might nevertheless choose to comply with their plea. She might, for instance, choose to heed their plea because she knows it will pain them if she doesn't. In that case, it is not their pleading in and of itself that creates the normative reason for her – it is rather the perceived negative effects of non-conformity with their wishes that motivates her, regardless of whether their wishes are expressed in a plea or not. Similarly, a person who is blamed by a hypocrite may nevertheless choose to apologize or otherwise give uptake. The fact that she chooses to give uptake is compatible with the blamer lacking the normative power (standing) to create a pro tanto moral obligation for her to apologize. The blamed may simply waive her right not to give uptake to standingless blame.

The concept of standing as power requires only that standing is *sufficient* for creating a pro tanto obligation, not that it is also necessary. The parents' pleading may be insufficient to create a pro tanto moral duty for the daughter, but there may be other sufficient grounds for such an obligation. Similarly, a legal power entails only that it is sufficient to alter legal rights and duties, not that it is also necessary. A police officer has the legal power to issue a ticket for speeding. But so does a prosecutor and a judge. Hence, the police officer's legal power is sufficient, but not necessary for imposing a legal duty to pay the fine. Applied to standing to blame: standingless blame will not succeed in putting the blamed person under obligation to answer to the blamer for their fault, for instance by

³³ Ibid., p. 3120.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 3125.

apologizing. Nevertheless, the blamed person might be under obligation to do so on other grounds (e.g., on grounds of having committed a wrong). If I steal the bike of my neighbor, who has previously done the same to another neighbor, my victim may plausibly lack standing to ask me to apologize, but that does not rule out that I have an independent pro tanto moral obligation to apologize grounded in the fact that I have stolen his bike. In sum, I may be under obligation to do something that another person does not have standing to create an obligation for me to do. This does not undermine the notion of standing as power, for if the other person did have standing, that would be sufficient for them to be able to create an obligation for me.³⁵

Standing as privilege?

Finally, I will discuss a few theories that are closer to mine, in that they acknowledge that standing is (also) a power. These are the theories of Edwards and of Fritz and Miller.³⁶ They claim, however, that moral standing to blame cannot be understood only as a power. It is both a power and a privilege, they claim. It is, in other words, both a first-order right (a privilege) and a second-order right that regulates first-order rights (a power).

Notice that the claim is not simply that the exercise of standing as a second-order right is regulated by a first-order right. If that were all, it would be trivially true. The exercise of a second-order right is always regulated by a first-order right. Sometimes it is regulated by a privilege-right, as when a prosecutor has the privilege of pressing charges in a case where there is sufficient evidence to support conviction. And sometimes it is regulated by a duty, as when a prosecutor is compelled to press charges for certain crimes, like domestic violence crimes in many jurisdictions. The same power (to make the defendant liable to answer for the charges) can thus be regulated by both a privilege and a duty. And since also the duty to prosecute entails the privilege to do so (“ought implies can”), it is trivially true that even in such cases the exercise of a power requires a privilege.³⁷ The same can be said of the power to blame: Usually it is regulated by a privilege, but we

³⁵ This same point may also be made using Hart’s distinction between general and special rights, as explained above: If Tom has a special right grounded in a contract to enter your property, it will be sufficient to override your general right of non-interference. However, even if Tom lacks that special right grounded in a contract, Jenny might have a special right grounded in something else, say, a right of emergency, if she must cross your property to get to the hospital. Paul might have no claim against you to let him enter your property, but you may waive your right to non-interference and let him enter anyhow, for instance to let him sleep in your guestroom on a cold winter night. Neither particular special right is necessary for your general right to non-interference to be overridden, but each is sufficient. The example of Paul is most similar to Herstein’s example of the standingless parents: You (in the case of Paul) and the daughter (in the case of the parents) are both immune from the claims of the others, but you can both choose to waive your rights of non-interference and grant them what they plead for.

³⁶ Edwards, ‘Standing to Hold Responsible’; Fritz and Miller, ‘A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness’.

³⁷ Duty entails privilege in the sense that one must be at liberty to do that which one has a duty to do, and not, of course, in the sense that one is at liberty *not* to do that which one has a duty to do. In the latter sense, duty has “a content or tenor precisely opposite to that of the privilege”, Hohfeld, ‘Some Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning’, p. 32. But, Hohfeld notes, duty and privilege can also co-exist, as when a person is under contract (duty) to do something they have a privilege to do (Hohfeld’s example is a contract to take a walk on one’s own land). What matters here is the correlative normative position to privilege: A duty entails privilege in the sense that others have no-right that one does not do that which one has a duty to do (in other words, one will not violate anyone’s right by fulfilling one’s duty; i.e., one has the privilege to do so).

might also think that under certain conditions one has a duty to blame³⁸ – in which case fulfilment of one's duty also presupposes a privilege to blame.

Against the view I have just advocated, Edwards claims that powers are not always regulated by first-order privileges: "There can be privileges without powers, and powers without privileges."³⁹ His example is of a sports referee who has power to impose duties on the players through incorrect decisions, as when the referee mistakenly awards a penalty. The referee does not have the privilege to make incorrect decisions, however. They do not have a privilege to award a team a penalty when a relevant foul has not been made. In fact, I would put it more strongly and say that the referee owes a *duty* to the team who has not made a relevant foul not to award the other team a penalty – which means that the non-fouling team has a claim-right against the referee not to do so. Can the referee have a power, then, if she does not have privilege to exercise it? No. If this were possible, it would mean that someone could have a right to do something that they have no right to do and that others have a right that they do not do. The only way to sustain such a view without contradiction, is to operate with more than one sense of right, e.g., juridical right vs. moral right; in this case, what the referee has juridical competence to do within the rules of the game vs. what they have the moral right to do. If, on the other hand, we stick to talking about one sense of right at a time (in the case of standing to blame: moral right) then Edwards is mistaken about the possibility of a power without privilege. I shall return to the issue of incorrect use of a power.

Edwards and Fritz and Miller do not merely claim that standing to blame is regulated by a first-order right, as all second-order rights are – they do not intend to make this, in my opinion, trivial point (evidently in Edwards' case, since he does not take it to be a trivial point, as we have seen). Rather, they make the stronger claim that standing to blame is in essence both a second- and a first-order right (as opposed to it being in essence a second-order right, the exercise of which is regulated by a first-order right, as I claim).⁴⁰

Edwards reaches this conclusion by defining standing in opposition to authority. The latter, he claims, entails a power independent of privilege, while the former entails both a power and privilege.⁴¹ Since power without privilege is contradictory, as I have argued above, this definition of standing ends up being unsubstantiated. Fritz and Miller's approach is more promising. They claim that sometimes standing is *only* a privilege (and sometimes it is both a power and a privilege). If they are right about that, then standing is indeed in essence both a power and a privilege.

Fritz and Miller give two arguments for why standing is sometimes only a privilege. The first argument is that standing cannot be a power when blame is private, as when a person blames another without expressing blame to her or anyone else.⁴² In such

³⁸ Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, 'A Duty not to Remain Silent: Hypocrisy and the Lack of Standing not to Blame', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2023).

³⁹ Edwards, 'Standing to Hold Responsible', p. 456.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 456; Fritz and Miller, 'A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness', p. 771. A negative definition of the view that Edwards and Fritz and Miller hold is presented in Lippert-Rasmussen, 'A Duty not to Remain Silent: Hypocrisy and the Lack of Standing not to Blame', p. 938: "A promising-looking view is that those without standing to blame lack either the liberty right to blame or the normative power to impose on the blamee a duty to provide an uptake to the blame (and perhaps both)." The negative formulation is helpful to see what at stake here: Edwards and Fritz and Miller's claim entails that it is sufficient for being standingless to either lack the privilege or the power to blame. When I say that standing is "in essence"/"essentially" a power, my claim amounts to a claim that it is sufficient *and necessary* for being standingless to lack the power to blame.

⁴¹ Edwards, 'Standing to Hold Responsible', p. 456.

⁴² Fritz and Miller, 'A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness', p. 771.

cases, blame cannot possibly alter the normative situation of the blamed person who is unaware of the blame. Therefore, it is only a privilege. I agree with the description of the problem, but not with the conclusion. Instead of giving up on the notion of standing as power, I suggest we give up on the notion of standing to privately blame.

The reason I suggest this is because the concept of standing serves no valuable moral function in cases of private blame.⁴³ Private blame does not affect the person who is blamed. As long as the blame remains private, it is only the blamer who even knows about it. While expressed blame confers a burden and an imposition of will on the object of blame, private feelings of blame toward someone do not constitute a burden or an infringement of freedom for them. Therefore, while standing norms serve a valuable normative function in cases of expressed blame (regulating power/disability and liability/immunity), they do not serve any such function when applied only to the blamer's private thoughts and feelings.

Granted, we often say things like, "I don't think you have the right to *feel* blame toward Otto". And this makes sense if we assume that your feelings will result in altered behavior toward Otto, as they often will. But in that case, this is no longer an instance of private blame. If, as stipulated, one's feelings of blame remain entirely private, then they do not affect others.

We might still have a wish that others think well of us (and not blame us), even when they do not act on their thoughts. Similarly, it is not uncommon that people wish that others find them attractive, independently (to an extent) of action.⁴⁴ Many would wish, for instance, that one's partner genuinely finds them attractive even when the partner's actions are otherwise as one would wish. Nevertheless, in such cases, "what we most care about is divorced from what amounts to a moral wrong".⁴⁵ In other words, one does not wrong anyone by not thinking of them as they would wish that one think of them, simply because others do not have the right that one think and feel in a particular way.⁴⁶

What about cases of non-directed expressed blame, where A expresses blame of B to C? If B never finds out about it, does such blame still require standing? I believe so. If A expresses blame of B, they may thereby provide the listener, C, with valid directive-

⁴³ I have elsewhere considered further theoretical benefits of applying standing norms only to expressed blame and not to private blame, David Chelsom Vogt, 'Why the Moral Equality Account of Hypocrisy Does Not Fail After All', *The Journal of Ethics* 28 (2024).

⁴⁴ David Enoch and Levi Spectre, 'There is no such thing as doxastic wrongdoing', *Philosophical Perspectives* (2022).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ This applies whether one adheres to a will-theory or an interest-theory of rights (see e.g., Wenar, 'Rights'). To have a right that others must think well of you (and not blame you) would not qualify as a proper right, because such a right would not protect neither the will nor the sufficiently important interests of the right-holder to warrant a right. If one's wish that others think well of you qualifies as an interest, it is nonetheless an interest that would not suffice upon an interest-theory to justify the existence of a right. First, it is (arguably) not an interest that is important enough to be "a sufficient reason for holding some other person(s) to be under a duty", Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 166. Second, such a right could not ground a duty for anyone else, partly because one cannot sufficiently control one's feelings and thoughts of others ("ought implies can"). On a will-theory such as Kant's, one's rights are grounded in the principle that "the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law", Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 387. It is one's choices (of means and ends of actions) and not one's wishes that are protected by rights. In other words, it is the exercise of one's will, and not one's preferences, that are protected by rights.

reasons, such as a reason to dissociate themselves from B or to convey the blame to B.⁴⁷ A requires standing to alter C's normative landscape in this way. Standing norms also protect B in case C acts on the directive-reasons A provides for them.⁴⁸

Even though private blame cannot wrong anyone, that does not mean it cannot be inappropriate and morally bad, nor that it cannot be appropriate and morally good. Specifically for private blame, I agree with King's statement quoted above: "I don't think there is a right to blame. That isn't to say one is never justified in blaming. Rather, blame just isn't something to which one has a right."⁴⁹ For expressed blame, however, I hold that the right to blame serves an important normative function, as argued above. We need the concept of standing specifically for this function, which comes in addition to considerations of appropriateness of blame that apply both to private and to expressed blame (albeit with differing considerations in the two contexts).

In sum: The fact that standing cannot be a power if standing norms are applied in a context where standing serves no proper normative function does not suggest that standing is not essentially a power. It rather suggests that standing does not apply.

Standing to forgive vs. standing to blame

Fritz and Miller give another argument for why standing to blame is sometimes only a privilege, and not a power. They do so by noting an asymmetry between standing to forgive, which they take to be a power, and standing to blame. "One can successfully blame, even if one lacks standing to do so", but "[o]ne cannot successfully forgive if one lacks the standing to do so".⁵⁰ To explain this asymmetry, Fritz and Miller introduce a distinction between normative and nonnormative functions of blame and forgiveness.

I have already described the normative functions of blame: providing the blamed with a pro tanto obligation to answer for one's fault. The nonnormative functions are, among others, to lay a social burden on the blamed and thereby to create a disincentive for the blamed and others against committing similar acts in the future.

The nonnormative functions of forgiveness are, among others, to heal wounded relationships and to serve therapeutic functions for both victims and wrongdoers, allowing them to move forward with their lives.⁵¹ The normative functions of forgiveness, on the other hand, are to alter in several ways the normative situations of forgiver, forgiven and third-parties:

⁴⁷ Leora Dahan Katz, 'Response Retributivism: Defending the duty to punish', *Law and Philosophy* 40 (2021).

⁴⁸ An anonymous reviewer has prompted me to consider a case where an FMRI machine could reveal that a person feels blame toward someone even though they do not express it. Even if that person was hypocritical or otherwise lacked standing, I would not say that they had wronged the other. The reason is, again, that I don't think that the blamed person has a right against others that they feel a certain way. I would say the same in a less fanciful example where one finds the diary of someone, and it reveals that they blame another hypocritically. I don't think the diary-writer has wronged the person they blame (presupposing that they have taken reasonable care not to share the contents of the diary). One could still claim that the private blamer displayed a vice or that their private blame was bad. But that would not amount to saying that their blame infringes upon the rights of the blamed. I elaborate on the distinction between the badness and the wrongness of hypocritical blame in Vogt, 'Why the Moral Equality Account of Hypocrisy Does Not Fail After All'.

⁴⁹ King, 'Skepticism about the Standing to Blame', p. 7.

⁵⁰ Fritz and Miller, 'A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness', pp. 770-771.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 783.

Through performative acts, forgiveness can function to relinquish certain rights that the victim has with respect to the wrongdoer: the right to blame, to request an apology, or to demand restitution, and perhaps the right to feel resentment. In turn, this may involve releasing the wrongdoer from or waiving corresponding obligations.⁵²

For third-parties, forgiveness may make their continued indignation toward the forgiven person inappropriate.⁵³ Fritz and Miller conclude that “[w]hile blame does not require the fulfillment of its normative functions, forgiveness does”.⁵⁴ Since power is the ability to fulfill the normative functions, standing to forgive is essentially a power, while standing to blame is not.

I am not convinced that this asymmetry runs as deep as Fritz and Miller claim. Let us first consider an example they offer, which seems to corroborate their view. It is a case where a betrayed lover says that she forgives her unfaithful partner, but where she continues to nurse resentment and to demand that the lover apologize on a daily basis. A friend who hears of this situation might respond: “It doesn’t actually sound like she has forgiven him at all”. This is an example of nonfunctional “forgiveness”, Fritz and Miller write, for if it were truly forgiveness, we would expect a transformed normative situation between the two lovers, where it is no longer appropriate to nurse resentment and to demand apologies.⁵⁵ Now imagine a case of hypocritical blame, say, where a lover who herself has unrepentantly been unfaithful blames her partner for *his* infidelity. A friend hearing of the hypocritical blame would probably not say, “It doesn’t actually sound like she has blamed him at all”.

This does indeed suggest that we tend to set a lower bar for calling something blame (normative function is unnecessary) compared to forgiveness (normative function is necessary). But what if we change the example slightly: A betrayed lover, call her Astrid, publicly proclaims that she forgives her unfaithful partner, Rolf, and as a result, friends of the couple, who have also been angry with Rolf, feel obliged to withdraw their anger, which they proceed to do. It then later turns out that Astrid has not truly forgiven Rolf and still feels resentment toward him and demands that he apologize on a daily basis. In this amended example, the forgiveness is flawed in the same way as in Fritz and Miller’s example, but it seems false to say that the declaration of forgiveness is normatively nonfunctional. When the friends heard Astrid declare her forgiveness, they may plausibly have taken it to create a pro tanto obligation for them to withdraw their anger toward Rolf, which they did. (I shall return shortly to the issue of whether this obligation is necessarily rendered void upon learning that it was based on insincere forgiveness.)

One way to analyze what is going on here, is to invoke J. L. Austin’s distinctions between different “felicity conditions” for illocutionary speech acts (such as directives to give uptake to forgiveness and blame, which constitute the normative functions that we are concerned with here). Failure to fulfill some felicity conditions represent a “misfire”, while failure to fulfill others represent an “abuse” of the speech act. When the speech act misfires it is “void or without effect”; when it is abused, however, it is “hollow” but not void or “empty”.⁵⁶ This means that in the former case, the speech act is without illocutionary force. In the latter case, however, the speech act is not without illocutionary force, but it is nevertheless flawed in the sense that it lacks some typical features of the

⁵² Ibid., p. 783.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 778, quoting Priest’s claim that forgiveness makes third-party blame “inapt”.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 785.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 785.

⁵⁶ J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Barakaldo Books, 2020), p. 15.

speech act. Examples of such abuses are speech acts where the speaker is “insincere” by not having those “thoughts or feelings” that the speech act normally requires.⁵⁷ Insincere forgiveness, like that of Astrid, would qualify as such an abuse, since her declaration of forgiveness lacks the feelings or thoughts that normally accompany forgiveness (i.e., the feeling of no longer nurturing resentment). The same goes for blaming when the blamer is insincere (e.g., if they don’t really believe that the blamed is at fault). Upon this analysis, it would not be correct to say, as Fritz and Miller suggest, that the betrayed lover who still feels resentment “has not forgiven at all” – she has forgiven, but her forgiveness is in a sense hollow, just like the expressed blame from someone who does not believe that the blamed has done wrong would constitute blame in words only, i.e., superficially.

Thus, when it comes to abuses, we do not find the asymmetry between forgiveness and blame that Fritz and Miller claim. What about misfires? Upon Austin’s analysis, one type of felicity condition is that “the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked”.⁵⁸ A captain on a ship can declare a couple married, but the purser cannot (Austin’s example). The marriage ceremony would be without illocutionary effect if carried out by the purser. The same seems to apply to forgiveness without standing. Imagine, for instance, that Astrid and Rolf had long since agreed to seize their sexual relationship and that Rolf was at the time in a monogamous relationship with Ingrid. When Rolf had an affair, it was actually Ingrid that he betrayed, and not Astrid. Astrid therefore lacked standing to declare her forgiveness of Rolf, since she was not wronged by him. If the friends of Astrid, Rolf, and Ingrid heard that Astrid had forgiven Rolf, the friends might reasonably conclude that Astrid’s “forgiveness” did not provide them with a valid directive-reason to withdraw their anger toward Rolf. As with the purser “marrying” the couple on the ship, Astrid is the wrong person to fulfill the felicity conditions of the speech act of forgiving.

Now compare this with cases of standingless blame. First, when the blamer lacks standing due to meddling (i.e., when they do not fulfill the business condition on blaming⁵⁹), then the situation is symmetrical to the misfires of “marrying” and “forgiving”: It is an example of the wrong person invoking the speech act of blaming, and the blame will therefore fail to provide the blamed with a valid directive-reason to give uptake. I believe other types of lack of standing to blame can be analyzed in the same way: A hypocrite or a complicit wrongdoer are the wrong persons to convey blame. The content of their blame might be appropriate (the blamed person really is at fault in the way that the blame conveys), but the hypocrite and the complicit wrongdoer lack the power to provide the blamed with a valid directive-reason to give uptake, and hence, their blame is a misfire and therefore infelicitous.

Here again, then, the symmetry between standing to forgive and standing to blame is retained. Further, the symmetry is retained whether we consider the normative or the nonnormative functions of forgiveness and blame: If we consider only whether the normative functions of forgiveness and blame have been felicitous, it would be correct in both cases to say of standingless forgivers/blamers that “they have not forgiven/blamed at all” (the illocutionary speech act misfires). However, because both forgiveness and blame also serve nonnormative functions, it may also be *incorrect* to say of both standingless forgivers and blamers that “they have not forgiven/blamed at all”. Expressed forgiveness/blame may succeed in serving nonnormative functions even when the

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁹ Bell, ‘The Standing to Blame: A Critique’, p. 264.

forgiver/blamer lacks standing (blame may still constitute a burden for the blamed; expressed forgiveness may still serve to heal relationships etc.). Imagine, for instance, that friends of Astrid and Rolf did not know that she was insincere or that she lacked standing. The fact that she declares that she forgives him may cause the friends to withdraw their anger toward Rolf, just like blame from a hypocrite may cause the blamed distress (nonnormative functions). Further, if the friends do not know that Astrid lacks standing (or if a blamed person does not know that the blamer is a hypocrite), the felicity conditions will seem to them to be fulfilled, and they may perceive the speech act as providing them with a valid directive-reason to give uptake (normative functions).

This shows a further analogy with the legal concept of standing, for in law too it can sometimes be the case that lack of standing does not preclude successfully holding someone (legally) to account. Joseph Raz writes of legal standing: "If the issue of standing is not raised early in a process, it may be too late to raise it later. In particular, a court's decision given in an action that the plaintiff had no standing to initiate is unlikely to be void, and often not even avoidable, on that ground."⁶⁰ As in the examples of standing to forgive and to blame that I have given, someone who lacks legal standing can thus sometimes de facto alter the normative situations of others, when the lack of standing is unknown to the relevant parties. Unlike Raz, I do not take this to be an argument against understanding standing as a power. As mentioned in the discussion of Herstein's theory above: Standing (power) is sufficient to create a pro tanto obligation for another person. It is not always necessary for doing so. Hence, even if the court were later to find out that the plaintiff lacked standing to initiate an action, it might nevertheless find sufficient obligations on other grounds to proceed with the action. Similarly, the friends of Astrid and Rolf who withdrew their anger when they did not know that Astrid had lacked standing, might for other reasons find it best to continue to withhold their anger even if they were later to learn the truth. They might perhaps decide that it would be inappropriate to rekindle their anger toward Rolf after having moved on. Similarly with regard to Edwards' example of the incorrect decisions of sports referees: Although referees do not have the moral power to grant penalties when there is no foul, they do have a juridical power within the rules of the game to call penalties when they assess that one has occurred. Even players who are absolutely sure that there was no foul might for other reasons feel morally obliged to accept the referee's decision (e.g., they accept the moral obligation to uphold the juridical rules of the game, including the power of the referee to make bona fide mistakes – only if the players think the referee is corrupt would they rather walk off the field than to accept the decision).

The view I have argued for, that moral standing to blame and to forgive, as well as legal standing, are all to be understood as powers, does not entail that we apply the same threshold for determining when the conditions for the practice to which standing relates are fulfilled. It might well be the case, as Fritz and Miller claim, that we tend to call something blame if it fulfills at least its nonnormative functions, whereas we tend to set a higher bar for calling something forgiveness, requiring the forgiver's sincerity for it to qualify as proper forgiveness. This asymmetry of threshold in typical cases does not show an essential asymmetry of the concepts of standing to blame and to forgive, as I have shown with my examples above.

Indeed, the fact that we tend to set the bar lower for an expression of blame to qualify as blaming than for an expression of forgiveness to qualify as forgiveness, suggests

⁶⁰ Joseph Raz, 'On Respect, Authority, and Neutrality: A Response', *Ethics* 120 (2010), p. 293.

that standing to blame does actually serve the function I have claimed, to protect the freedom and interests of the blamed. Because the nonnormative functions of blame are themselves often harmful to the blamed person's interests and freedom, it is useful to apply the concept of blame in a way that lets us qualify a given instance as an instance of *unjustified blame* due to lack of standing. The nonnormative functions of forgiveness, on the other hand, are rarely harmful to the freedom and interests of the parties. For that reason, we rarely need to apply the concept of forgiveness in a way that lets us qualify a given instance as an instance of unjustified forgiveness due to lack of standing. In short, we rarely need to investigate whether someone who claims to forgive actually does so in the full sense that has normative implications for others, but we often need to investigate whether someone who claims to blame does so in the full sense that has normative implications for others. While the pertinent question regarding forgiveness is usually whether it has taken place or not, the pertinent question regarding blame is usually whether it is justified or not. Hence, we can understand why it may be useful to apply the vocabulary of blame and forgiveness as we do, without thereby concluding that there is an asymmetry at a conceptual level between standing to blame and standing to forgive.

Conclusion

I have argued that the norms that regulate standing to blame function to protect the freedom and the interests of persons who are or could be blamed. Against the views of King and Herstein, I have claimed that standing is a power. Against the views of Edwards and Fritz and Miller, I have claimed that standing is not essentially a first-order privilege-right. Further, I have argued that there is not an asymmetry at a conceptual level between standing to blame and standing to forgive. I have also argued that standing norms do not apply to private blame, because the concept of standing would not serve any important moral function when blame is not expressed.

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