

Dismissing Blame

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1 Dismissing Blame

When someone blames you, there are various ways you might respond. First, you might *accept* blame. You agree that you are blameworthy, which means you agree that you have done something wrong and that you don't have an adequate excuse or exemption.¹ You will typically feel emotions like guilt or remorse, and take reparative steps by apologizing or making amends.² Second, you might *reject* blame by denying that you are blameworthy. If you reject blame, you are unlikely to feel guilty or take reparative steps, since you think no moral repair is necessary. Both of these are direct responses to being blamed: both involve *engaging* with the blame, and in particular, with the blamer, by either agreeing that you are blameworthy and reacting appropriately or else explaining why you are not blameworthy.³ When we engage with blame directly, either by accepting or rejecting it, there can be positive moral upshots, including opportunities for moral repair, taking a stand for our values, and engaging in edifying moral discussion with others.

This paper is about a third way in which you might respond to being blamed, which I call *dismissing* blame; alternatively, we could call it “brushing off” or “disregarding” blame. In contrast to both accepting and rejecting blame, dismissing blame is an *indirect* response, because it does not involve engaging with the blamer about the content of the blame; it is a *refusal to engage* with the blamer about the (supposed) wrongdoing. Many think that this response is appropriate when the person blaming you is doing so hypocritically or when it is none of their business. At least, it is the response that people often give in such circumstances: “Who are *you* of all people to blame me for this?”. This does not mean that you don't believe that you are blameworthy. You might preface the dismissal by admitting that you've acted wrongly: “Sure, I shouldn't have done it. But who

¹ We may accept blame in one sense without thinking that we have acted wrongly. This sense is most familiar when some bad outcome is the result of a group's actions, and someone steps up to take the blame, even if they are not plausibly responsible for the bad outcome; see, for example, Collins, “Filling Collective Duty Gaps.” As Bero, “Holding Responsible and Taking Responsibility,” 291-292 observes, we may also accept blame in some sense in the individual case when someone *mistakenly* believes that we have done something wrong. Accepting blame can be a shortcut to smoothing things over. As Bero also observes, the pressure to do this will be distributed according to unfortunately familiar social hierarchies.

² As we'll see, agreeing that you are blameworthy, feeling guilty, and taking reparative steps may often be necessary but are not sufficient for accepting blame. There may be cases in which there is nothing in particular you should do in response to your wrongdoing, other than acknowledging it and trying to do better going forward. For example, in some cases it will be too late for any meaningful moral repair.

³ See Cohen, “Casting the First Stone,” 119; and Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 96, for the language of direct and indirect responses. Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible,” 448, instead talks about *content-sensitive* vs. *content-insensitive* responses. See Walker, *Moral Repair*, 135; McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility*, 88-89; Bell, “The Standing to Blame: A Critique,” 264; and Friedman, “How to Blame People Responsibly,” 275, for discussion of the menu of responses to blame. Dover, “Criticism as Conversation,” is critical of the call-and-response model of blaming or critical interactions implicit in some of this discussion.

are *you* to blame me for it?”. You might be perfectly willing to accept blame from *other* people and to undertake moral repair. But if you dismiss blame from someone, then you will not engage with *their* blame. This paper defends an account of what it is to dismiss blame.

The phenomenon is quite widespread and can come in many forms, just as blame itself can come in many forms. If someone blames you verbally and face-to-face, the most obvious way in which we can dismiss blame is by responding to the blamer with something like, “Who are *you* of all people to blame me?”. Other kinds of dismissal will be appropriate given other kinds of blame. For example, if you shoot me a nasty look because you think I cut you off in traffic, rather than signaling to you that I accept blame by giving you a sheepish wave, I might instead roll my eyes and wave my hand in a dismissive way, especially if I only cut you off because you had cut me off a moment ago. We can also dismiss blame that is not expressed to us. If a third party informs me that you—a habitual liar—have been blaming me for some recent dishonesty, I might dismiss this blame to that third party, saying “That hypocrite! Who are they to blame me for this?”. I might even find out, for example by reading your diary, that you have been blaming me for something for which you lack standing. Just as you kept your blame to yourself, I can keep my dismissal of that blame to myself.⁴ My focus is on face-to-face, direct blaming interactions, but I return to these non-direct cases at the end of section 4.⁵

Here are two reasons why moral philosophers might be interested in this topic. First, there has been lots of recent work on the ethics of blame—questions about when it is appropriate for some particular person (or group) to blame another particular person (or group), even granting that the latter is blameworthy. Much of this work has focused on when and why the blamer has or lacks the *standing* to blame.⁶ An account of dismissing blame should inform these debates, because the standing to blame is often characterized in terms of dismissing blame: what is distinctive of standingless blame is that you can

⁴ Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to say more about the scope of the phenomenon and for providing some of these nice examples.

⁵ Many authors (though not all, see e.g. Herstein, “Justifying Standing to Give Reasons: Hypocrisy, Minding Your Own Business, and Knowing One’s Place,” fn. 12) think that one can lack standing even for *private* blame—blame kept to oneself—though almost all focus on expressed, direct blame; see, e.g. Wallace, “Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons”; Todd, “A Unified Account of the Standing to Blame”; Fritz & Miller, “Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame.” Other authors who do not take an explicit stand on this question nevertheless focus on expressed blame, e.g. Bell, “The Standing to Blame: A Critique”; Dover, “The Walk and the Talk”; and Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible,” 441.

⁶ For a sampling of recent work on the standing to blame, see Cohen, “Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can’t, Condemn the Terrorists” and “Ways of Silencing Critics”; Smith, “On Being Responsible and Holding Responsible”; Duff, “Blame, Moral Standing, and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Trial”; Wallace, “Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons”; Friedman, “How to Blame People Responsibly”; Bell, “The Standing to Blame: A Critique”; Herstein, “Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons” and “Justifying Standing to Give Reasons”; Isserow & Klein, “Hypocrisy and Moral Authority”; Fritz & Miller, “Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame” and “The Unique Badness of Hypocritical Blame”; Roadevin, “Hypocritical Blame, Fairness, and Standing”; Rossi, “The Commitment Account of Hypocrisy”; Todd, “A Unified Account of the Standing to Blame” and “Let’s See You Do Better”; Dover, “The Walk and the Talk”; Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible”; Piovarchy, “Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority”; Tognazzini, “On Losing One’s Moral Voice”; King, “Skepticism about the Standing to Blame”; Rivera-López, “The Fragility of our Moral Standing to Blame”; and many others.

legitimately dismiss it.⁷ In contrast, as Bell points out, other ways that blame can be inappropriate, like being overly harsh, badly timed, or petty, do not seem to license dismissing blame, but only objecting to the tone or the timing.⁸ My focus is on dismissing blame, but at the end of the paper I briefly explore how the account here may bear on important questions about the standing to blame.

An account of what it is to dismiss blame will also bear on equally important but less well-studied questions about the ethics of *responding* to blame. There are questions about when and why it is legitimate to dismiss blame. Sometimes it seems that we are within our rights to dismiss blame from someone, but often we are not, and many actual cases in which blame is dismissed fall into the latter category.⁹ Consider cases in which someone issues a charge of hypocrisy or tells someone to mind their own business as a diversionary tactic to escape criticism. There are also important questions about the wrongs we commit when we illegitimately dismiss blame, and how these wrongs interact with other sorts of injustice. For example, Sue Campbell discusses the illegitimate dismissal of women’s moral complaints on the basis of “bitterness” or “emotionality”.¹⁰ To address these ethical questions, we need a clear understanding of what it is to dismiss blame. Though I touch on some of these ethical issues at various points, my focus is on the conceptual question of what it is to dismiss blame, rather than on when doing so is appropriate.

In the next section I describe a useful starting point for theorizing about dismissing blame. This is the popular idea that blaming involves making demands on the blamed party. On this view, dismissing blame involves dismissing demands issued by blame. I then consider various accounts of exactly which demands we dismiss when we dismiss blame. Many authors have mentioned potential answers to this question in passing, often in discussions of the standing to blame or of the nature of blame itself. I argue that all of them face problems, or at least leave important questions unanswered. I use lessons from the discussion of these views to develop my own proposal: to dismiss blame is to dismiss a demand for a second-personal expression of remorse to the blamer.

2 Dismissing Blame as Dismissing Demands

⁷ See especially Edlich, “What about the Victim? Neglected Dimensions of the Standing to Blame,” 213, on the *deflection test* for standing. See also Radzik’s, “On the Virtue of Minding Our Own Business,” 178, talk of ‘dismissing’ both the blamer and the content of the blame; Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible,” 447 on ‘dismissing’ accusations; Cohen’s talk of ‘silencing’ critics in “Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can’t, Condemn the Terrorists” and “Ways of Silencing Critics”; Friedman’s, “How to Blame People Responsibly,” 282 talk of ‘ignoring’ blame; and Herstein’s talk of ‘disregarding’ blame in “Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons” and “Justifying Standing to Give Reasons”, for example.

⁸ Bell, “The Standing to Blame: A Critique.”

⁹ Authors who are skeptical that we can lose the standing to blame may likewise be skeptical that dismissing blame, in the sense at issue in this paper, is legitimate. See, for example, Bell, “The Standing to Blame: A Critique”; Dover, “The Walk and the Talk”; and King, “Skepticism about the Standing to Blame”. On the abuse of dismissing blame via a charge of hypocrisy in political contexts, see McDonough, “The Abuse of the Hypocrisy Charge in Politics”. Herstein, “Justifying Standing to Give Reasons,” 18, observes that the practice of invoking standing to dismiss blame (and other interventions) is “precarious” because it is tempting to use it illegitimately.

¹⁰ Campbell, “Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression.” See also Carbonell, “Social Constraints on Moral Address.”

I assume that blaming someone involves, among other things, issuing implicit demands to that person. This is certainly not uncontroversial, but it is a widely accepted way of thinking about blame, and one that philosophers with otherwise importantly different views of blame can accept and have defended.¹¹ This way of thinking about blame is an assumption of this paper, but one relevant attraction is that it gives us a promising way of explaining the sense in which blame goes beyond simply grading an agent's actions, or pointing out wrongdoing to them.¹² In the context of this paper, it helps us see why agents might be eager to dismiss blame. The ability to dismiss mere grading or pointing out of wrongdoing does not seem to capture the appeal of dismissing blame.

There are different ways of developing this picture, but the general idea gives us a natural way to think about the standing to blame, since issuing demands is something that we can have or lack the standing to do.¹³ A higher-ranking military officer has the standing to issue demands to a lower-ranking officer, but not vice versa. A parent has the standing to issue certain demands to her child, but not vice versa. These examples illustrate the standing to issue a demand but are arguably not so helpful for thinking about the standing to blame since they centrally involve hierarchical relationships. These kinds of relationships do not hold between mature moral agents, outside of special relationships like parent-child or commanding officer-subordinate, and clearly we can blame one another outside of these kinds of relationships. But as Darwall and others emphasize, it is plausible to think about morality—at least a large part of it—as involving second-personal demands between peers.¹⁴ If so, then we can think of blame as involving demands that we make on one another even when there are no hierarchical relationships involved.

The view that blaming involves issuing demands also gives us a corresponding way to think about dismissing blame: what we dismiss, when we dismiss blame, are demands that the blamer has issued. Typically, a legitimate demand on us puts us under obligations or at least gives us reasons. When someone with the standing to do so issues a demand,

¹¹ For philosophers who accept some version of this idea, see Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"; Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme"; Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* and "Emotions, Expectations, and Responsibility"; Hieronymi, "The Force and Fairness of Blame"; Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing*; Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*; Smith, "Control, Responsibility, and Moral Assessment"; Duff, "Blame, Moral Standing, and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Trial"; Fricker, "What is the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation"; Edwards, "Standing to Hold Responsible"; Piovarchy, "Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority"; and many others. For critical discussion, see Macnamara, "Taking Demands Out of Blame" and "'Screw You!' and 'Thank You!'" However, Macnamara can, I believe, be on board with the parts of this picture that are crucial for my purposes, since she does accept that blame calls for certain kinds of responses. Her objections are largely directed at the weightiness of demands, on the usual understanding of the term. Prominent views of blame that cannot easily accept what I say here include the views defended by Sher, *In Praise of Blame* and Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Meaning, Permissibility, and Blame*. For the purposes of this paper I have to set such views aside.

¹² See, for example, Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason*, 40; and Hieronymi, "The Force and Fairness of Blame."

¹³ Standing is often thought of as a *right* to blame (e.g., Fritz & Miller, "Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame"). King, "Skepticism about the Standing to Blame," argues that there is no good understanding of standing in terms of rights. Interestingly, King does not (explicitly) object to the idea that we may have a *claim right* against others that they *respond* to our blame in certain ways, and that this claim right can be defeated in some cases, which would presumably license dismissing blame. His complaint is just that this does not explain why blaming without standing would be inappropriate, since the absence of claim rights does not entail impermissibility.

¹⁴ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*.

it is something that we should pay attention to and take into account in our deliberations.¹⁵ On this view, we can brush off these obligations or reasons when the person blaming us lacks standing. This explains why being able to dismiss blame is a *benefit* for the blamed party. Engaging with someone about your (supposed) wrongdoing is usually unpleasant, so it matters to the blamed party that they are able to dismiss blame, and so dismiss a demand that they engage in the relevant way. This explains why people tend to overuse charges of hypocrisy or meddling in an effort to dismiss blame and so escape these burdens.

It is worth pausing over the distinction between dismissing blame and *rejecting* blame. On the view I'm developing, dismissing blame is dismissing a certain demand involved in blaming. Rejecting blame, on the other hand, is denying that you are blameworthy. But whether you reject blame or dismiss it, typically you will not comply with demands issued by that blame. I will argue that the demand we dismiss, when we dismiss blame, is a demand for an expression of remorse to the blamer. If you dismiss this demand, then you will not comply with it. But dismissing blame cannot simply consist in not complying with this demand, since you will also not comply with it if you *reject* blame, rather than dismissing it.¹⁶

We can understand the difference between dismissing and rejecting blame in terms of denying different preconditions or presuppositions of blame. When you reject blame, you deny that you are blameworthy. Being blameworthy is a precondition of the appropriateness for many of the demands plausibly issued by blame, e.g. demands to apologize, to feel remorse, or, on my view, to express remorse to the blamer. If you explain to the blamer that you are not blameworthy, then (if they are reasonable) they will withdraw their blame as mistaken. On the other hand, if you *dismiss* blame, you do not necessarily deny that you are blameworthy, and so do not necessarily reject *this* precondition for blame. Rather, you deny the precondition or presupposition that the person blaming you has the authority or standing to issue the relevant demand(s).

For an analogy, imagine that you are a cleaner at a grocery store. Suppose the store manager mistakenly thinks that you are a shelf-stocker, and so demands that you stock the shelves. You can reject this demand, because one precondition of its appropriateness is that stocking the shelves is your job.¹⁷ You will explain to the manager that you are a cleaner, and (if they are reasonable) they will withdraw the demand as mistaken. On the other hand, if a cashier demands that you clean the floors, you can dismiss this demand, not because cleaning the floors isn't your job, and not because the floors don't need

¹⁵ Macnamara, "Taking Demands out of Blame" and "'Screw You!' and 'Thank You!'" argues that blame does not involve demands because blame can be appropriate even in cases in which issuing a demand would not be appropriate, e.g. cases of "suberogation" from Driver, "The Suberogatory," in which the agent acts badly but not wrongly. I do not need to assume a heavy-handed notion of demands, according to which failing to do what someone (legitimately) demands of you is necessarily impermissible. What is important is the structure: when someone legitimately demands something of you, it puts *normative pressure* on you to comply, plausibly in the form of *pro tanto* reasons. Sometimes the right thing to do, all things considered, may be to resist this pressure and *not* do what is demanded of you, for example if these reasons are outweighed.

¹⁶ Thanks to anonymous referees for pressing me to say more about the difference between rejecting and dismissing blame.

¹⁷ In some workplaces, it might be that if the manager demands that you do some task, even if it is technically someone else's job, you still must do it. But we can assume this isn't the case at this grocery store: people have clearly defined roles, and it is in their contract that they do not have to do things outside of those roles.

cleaned, but instead because the cashier is not your boss and so does not have the authority to issue this demand. In both the blame case and the cleaner case, you can of course both reject and dismiss the demands: you can think both that the preconditions for the relevant demands are not met, and that the person issuing the demand lacks standing to do so.

Assuming that we can defend the approach of thinking about dismissing blame in terms of dismissing certain demands that blame makes on us, we still must say what those demands are. This question has received surprisingly little attention in the standing literature, with Herstein and Edwards being the main exceptions.¹⁸ In the next section I examine different answers to this question, arguing that none are satisfactory. But the discussion brings out important lessons that inform a better account.

3 What is Dismissed?

The question at issue is what we dismiss when we dismiss blame. In this section I explore the idea that dismissing blame is dismissing at least one of the demands issued by blame.¹⁹ I consider different views about what this demand is and argue that these fail in instructive ways. The discussion will bring out three lessons which pave the way for a better account. First is the familiar point that we need to distinguish demands issued by the blamer from ordinary duties, reasons, and norms, violation of which may be the basis for blame, or which the blame may point out to us, but which hold independently of the blame. Second, what we dismiss must be a demand to do something that we have a duty or reason to do only once and because we have been blamed. Third, what we dismiss must be a demand for a second-personal response *to* the blamer; the blamer's role as *recipient* of the response is crucial. In the next section I use these lessons to develop a promising account of dismissing blame.

3.1 *Demands and independent moral norms*

Philosophers working within the blaming-as-demanding framework have offered a range of answers to the question of what blaming someone demands of them. Some authors think that blame expresses a demand that the blamed party comply with moral norms. For example, Darwall says "if you express resentment to someone for not moving his foot from on top of yours, you implicitly demand that he do so." Others think that blame involves demands for reparations, like apology or compensation to those you have wronged. Walker holds that when we blame someone, "we demand some rectifying response" from the wrongdoer. Others, like Shoemaker and Fricker think that blame demands that the wrongdoer experience negative emotions constitutive of self-blame, like remorse or guilt. Blame may demand combinations of these, as well.²⁰

¹⁸ Herstein, "Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons" and "Justifying Standing to Give Reasons"; Edwards, "Standing to Hold Responsible."

¹⁹ Some of the philosophers I draw on in this section have taken as their task giving an account of the demands issued by blame, rather than an account specifically of which demands we dismiss when we dismiss blame. It is possible, of course, that dismissing blame, in the relevant sense, only involves dismissing *some* of the demands issued by blame. So an argument that some demand is not what we dismiss does not necessarily constitute an argument that it is not issued by blame.

²⁰ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 76; Walker, *Moral Repair*, 26; Shoemaker, "Moral Address, Moral Responsibility, and the Boundaries of the Moral Community," 91; Fricker, "What is the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation," 173.

A striking thing about these proposals is that the things demanded are things that moral norms direct us to do independently of being blamed. Ordinary moral norms, e.g. not to steal, as well as the norms directing us to apologize and to have the appropriate attitudes when we act wrongly, apply to us independently of anyone blaming us. It is widely recognized that we can't dismiss these independent moral norms, even if the blamer lacks standing. Some real-life cases that involve dismissing blame, for example criticizing climate activists who fly to speaking engagements on the basis of hypocrisy, are objectionable at least in part because they seem to be illegitimate attempts to dismiss or evade these independent moral norms.²¹ So if this is the right place to look for what we can dismiss when we can dismiss blame, it is important to keep in mind that it is only the *blamer's demand* that we do these things that can be dismissed.

3.2 *Blame-specific responses*

Herstein offers an account that brings this out explicitly.²² On Herstein's view, blaming and demanding are speech acts called *directives* and involve issuing what he calls *directive reasons*. These are reasons to do or feel certain things *because of the directive*; for the directive reason to be satisfied, the motivating reason, or the agent's basis for doing or feeling the relevant thing, must be the directive itself. When a commanding officer commands that a subordinate drop and give her twenty, this gives the subordinate a reason to drop and give her twenty, and to do so because she has been commanded to do so.

Blame, on Herstein's view, gives directive reasons for the blamed party to comply with the moral norms, make reparations, or feel remorse *because of the blame*. For example, he says, "when Caligula blames Nero for being a bad emperor he ... aims to actively give Nero reason to change his ways ... as well as a reason to feel remorse, shame, responsibility and purpose (to improve), which are fitting emotional reactions to blaming." Accepting blame amounts to taking these directive reasons on board in one's deliberations about how to think, feel, and act. When the blamer lacks standing, the blamed party is permitted to dismiss the directive reasons, but not the ordinary reasons to do these things.²³ If I hypocritically blame you for stealing, you only get to dismiss the directive reasons to do these things *because of the blame*. You do not get to dismiss your duty or reasons not to steal, nor duties or reasons to apologize, make amends, feel remorse, and so on. Consider one natural response to being hypocritically blamed for harming some third party: "I'm going to apologize, but certainly not because *you* of all people have blamed me." The 'because' here is clearly intended to be more than merely explanatory. The response means that I'm not taking your blame to be a reason to apologize.

²¹ See Herstein, "Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons," 3116, and McDonough, "The Abuse of the Hypocrisy Charge in Politics."

²² Herstein, "Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons" and "Justifying Standing to Give Reasons." See Tognazzini, "On Losing One's Moral Voice" and Piovarchy, "Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority" for accounts of standing that emphasize the importance of second-personal reasons, and so are similar in important ways to Herstein's account.

²³ It is less important for my purposes *why* hypocrisy or meddling gives the blamed party permission to dismiss blame. But briefly: Herstein's, "Justifying Standing to Give Reasons," sec. 4.5, view is that there are norms against blaming hypocritically or meddlesomely, and allowing the blamed party to dismiss the blame is a kind of compensation once these norms have been violated.

On this view, failing to be moved to apologize, make amends, feel remorse, and so on for the directive reasons issued by blame amounts to dismissing that blame. I will argue that this is not the right way to understand what it is to dismiss blame. I rely in part on an intuitive understanding of when someone has or has not dismissed blame. I take it that we can pretty reliably detect *when* blame has been dismissed, and I make use of this in evaluating accounts of *what* such dismissal involves. One important guide for our judgments here is that dismissing *legitimate* blame—that is, blame that is fitting and for which the blamer has standing—is wrong, or at least wrongs the blamer, since we all have an interest in being able to hold one another to account.²⁴ So in a case in which the blamer does have standing, we can determine whether the blamed party has dismissed the blame by asking whether they have done something wrong, or at least wronged the blamer, in responding to the blame.²⁵

Consider a case in which the blamer does have the standing to blame, so that dismissing blame is not legitimate. If blame issues directive reasons that cannot be legitimately dismissed, then the blamed party should take them into account in their deliberations, and they should serve as the (or at least a) basis of the agent's actions or emotions. But it is not wrong and does not wrong the blamer for someone who has acted wrongly to feel remorse, apologize, make amends, and refrain from future wrongdoing not because they have been blamed, but because of the ordinary moral reasons to do so. In fact this will often be a *better* response, since the agent is being guided by the moral considerations rather than by the person blaming them. We expect good agents to apologize and feel guilty because they've done something wrong, not because they have been blamed. Intuitively, they can do so without thereby dismissing that blame.

One response is that where the blamer has standing, the agent's apologizing, feeling guilty, etc. should be *overdetermined*: they should do these things both for the ordinary reasons *and* for the directive reasons issued by the blame. This picture is plausible for other kinds of directives, like requests. Suppose that you have independent reasons to take me to the airport: it would be a nice thing to do and would give us a chance to spend time together. My request for a ride to the airport adds to these reasons. You could sensibly cite my request as among your reasons for taking me, and there will be cases in which the (directive reason issued by the) request is what "tips the scales" in favor of taking me. But notably, none of this seems to happen with blame. Suppose I wrong you, and some third party blames me for it. It would be objectionable for me to cite as my reason for apologizing or feeling guilty that this third party blamed me, and it is hard to

²⁴ I am not assuming that anytime we set back some of a person's interests, we necessarily wrong them. But I think it is clear that dismissing someone's blame, when it is fitting and when they have standing, is at least very often a way of wronging them. See Campbell, "Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression" and Carbonell, "Social Constraints on Moral Address" for discussion of the ways that people can be wronged by having their moral complaints dismissed or ignored. For relevant discussion in the context of the standing to blame, and of hypocrisy in particular, see Friedman, "How to Blame People Responsibly," 281; Wallace, "Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons"; Fritz & Miller, "Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame"; and Roadevin, "Hypocritical Blame, Fairness, and Standing."

²⁵ Blame that is fitting and for which the blamer has standing might be objectionable in other ways, depending on how widely we understand "fitting." For example, the blame may be disproportionate, delivered in an overly aggressive tone, or at the wrong time. These kinds of considerations fall under what Coates and Tognazzini, "The Nature and Ethics of Blame," call *procedural* norms on blame. When these kinds of norms are violated, the blamed party will often be justified in *objecting* to the tone, timing, degree, etc. of the blame, but not justified in *dismissing* the blame.

imagine a case where the blame is what tips the scales in favor of feeling guilty or apologizing. What seems appropriate in this case is apologizing and feeling guilty for the ordinary reasons to do so, and I can do this compatibly with accepting blame from the third party.²⁶

Whatever accepting blame amounts to, contrary to what Herstein's view predicts, the blamed party can do it even while apologizing, feeling guilty, and so on for the ordinary moral reasons to do so, rather than for new directive reasons issued by the blame. Responding appropriately to your own wrongdoing is one thing, while responding appropriately to being blamed is another. This is not to say that accepting blame is compatible with not responding to it in any way, of course. The point is that one can accept blame without being moved to apologize, change one's ways, or feel guilty *because* one has been blamed.

To illustrate, imagine that the blamed party is already in the process of making amends, feeling remorse, changing their ways, etc. Blame can still be appropriate, and the blamed party does not necessarily dismiss the blame, even if they do not suddenly change or add to their motivating reasons for doing these things, so that they are now based (in part) on new directive reasons arising from the blame. They may say something like, "I know, I just feel terrible. I'm on my way to apologize now." This does not seem to constitute dismissing blame, but there is no indication here that the blame is playing a motivating role either in how the person feels or in their decision to apologize.

For another case, suppose that someone acts wrongly out of negligence caused by distraction, rather than genuine ill will or lack of concern. Blaming them can make them aware of what they've done. Since they are sensitive to the relevant moral considerations, they might feel guilty, get to work making amends, trying to make sure it never happens again, and so on, for those moral considerations to which they are sensitive, rather than for any new directive reasons arising from the blame itself. Even if the blame plays a causal role in their actions and emotions, it does not play a motivating role. This need not amount to wrongfully dismissing blame.

If we assume that accepting blame requires being moved by directive reasons to apologize, feel guilty, and change our ways, then it would be objectionable to not take them into account in a case in which the blamer has standing. The fact that it does *not* seem objectionable tells against thinking that accepting blame requires taking such reasons into account, whether we think blame in fact issues such reasons or not. Again, it does not follow that there is *nothing* that one should do in response to legitimate blame. It also does not follow that any account of dismissing blame based on the dismissing of directive reasons, or demands more generally, should be rejected. The objection to this account turned on the fact that we already have many good reasons to do and feel the things that the posited directive reasons are reasons to do or feel, and that someone can

²⁶ In cases in which the person blaming you is the victim of your wrongdoing, and where they have standing, it is at least arguably better to be motivated to apologize both by the ordinary reasons to do so *and* because you have been blamed. This plausibly constitutes the appropriate recognition of their moral complaint. To preview, I hold that the relevant demand here—the one we dismiss when we dismiss blame—is for a second-personal expression of remorse to the blamer. A sincere apology to the person you've wronged constitutes a second-personal expression of remorse to them, and so where they are the person who has blamed you, you have both ordinary reasons to apologize and blame-specific reasons to apologize. My argument in the main text is just that apologizing to the victim because of a *third party's* blame is objectionable.

do these things for these reasons without thereby dismissing blame. The lesson is that we need to find something that is demanded of us once and because we have been blamed. This must be something we can do because of the blame, even if we go on to change our ways, apologize, and feel remorse for the independent moral reasons.

3.3 *Second-personal responses*

What do I do, then, if I accept the blame but then go on to do and feel the appropriate things for ordinary moral reasons? Many philosophers argue that blame demands some kind of *acknowledgement* or *recognition* from the blamed party.²⁷ This is a *second-personal* response to the person who is blaming you, and in particular to their blaming you—they are the *recipient* of the response. It is thus something that we can only do, and so only be under a demand to do, once we have been blamed. Unlike being moved to apologize, feel remorse, or change one’s ways by ordinary moral reasons rather than by the blame, failing to acknowledge the blame does plausibly amount to dismissing that blame. So it takes on board the lesson from the discussion of Herstein’s account. The important question is what this acknowledgment amounts to.

Edwards offers a view of dismissing blame that emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and engaging with the blame. He holds that blaming someone involves an accusation of wrongdoing, which itself involves a demand for some fitting *content-sensitive* response to that accusation, which “engages with the accusations *on their merits*”, by accepting or denying the content.²⁸ One way of doing this is to deny the content, i.e. to deny wrongdoing. There are also various ways of accepting the accusation, where different kinds of accusations (e.g., condemnation vs. mild criticism) demand different kinds of accepting responses. These include “expressions of remorse, or acts of repentance.” Dismissing blame, on Edwards’s view, “is to refuse to accede to this demand”, and to instead offer a *content-insensitive* response, like a charge of hypocrisy, or perhaps no response at all. This is to “implicitly deny that a content-sensitive response is owed” to the blamer (449).

Edwards contrasts acceptance of the *content of an accusation* with dismissing the blame which makes that accusation. But we can and frequently do accept the content of the accusation involved in blame, and may even tell the blamer that we do, even when we dismiss blame: “Sure, I shouldn’t have done it, but who are *you* to blame me for it?”. Edwards can accept this, since denying that a content-sensitive response is owed to the blamer is compatible with accepting the content of the accusation. But we should emphasize that the crucial question for determining whether we have dismissed blame is not whether we engage with the *accusation* by accepting or denying its content (447), but whether we engage with the *accuser* in the right way.

I agree with Edwards’s focus on expressing remorse. But we should more explicitly highlight that the demand is for a *second-personal* response to the blamer. An expression of remorse to the person we have wronged through a sincere apology, when they are not the

²⁷ See Smith, “Control Responsibility, and Moral Assessment”; Martin, “Owning Up and Lowering Down: The Power of Apology”; Friedman, “How to Blame People Responsibly”; Macnamara, “‘Screw You!’ and ‘Thank You!’”; Fricker, “What is the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation”; and Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible.”

²⁸ Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible,” 447, emphasis in the original. Citations to Edwards’s paper in the next few paragraphs will be parenthetical.

person blaming us, is fully compatible with dismissing blame. So just expressing remorse cannot be sufficient for accepting blame. Rather, the expression of remorse must be *to* the blamer; they must be the recipient of the expression of remorse.

Macnamara offers an account of acknowledging blame that highlights its status as a second-personal response to being blamed. She argues that expressed blame seeks (i) recognition that the blamer has correctly recognized you as having done something wrong and thus (ii) recognizing yourself as a wrongdoer, and (iii) the *expression* of this recognition. To recognize that the blamer has correctly recognized you, and thus to recognize yourself, as a wrongdoer involves feeling emotions like guilt and remorse. To express this recognition is to give voice to these emotions by, according to Macnamara, “apologizing and making amends if necessary.”²⁹

Insofar as recognition is a distinctively second-personal response, this is on the right track. But even when we legitimately dismiss blame, we can and should do all of the things Macnamara mentions. Suppose that you have acted wrongly, and someone blames you, but that their blame is hypocritical and so you legitimately dismiss it. Still, you can and should (i) recognize that the blamer has correctly identified you as a wrongdoer, since you do not *deny* wrongdoing, (ii) experience remorse, since this is called for when you know that you act wrongly, and (iii) apologize or make amends, especially (though not only, I believe) if the person hypocritically blaming you is not the person you wronged. You can respond to the hypocritical blame by saying, “Look, I know I shouldn’t have done it and I feel bad about this. In fact, I’m on my way to apologize right now. But who are *you*, of all people, to blame me for this?”

The view I prefer, and will develop in the next section, follows Macnamara in holding that the demand we dismiss is one for a *second-personal* response to the blamer, as a response to their blame. But it moves beyond responses we should have anyway, like apologizing, feeling guilty, or making amends. In my view, Edwards is correct to identify *expressing remorse* as the response that blame demands, and Macnamara is correct to emphasize that the response demanded is a distinctively second-personal one. I develop this thought and argue that this gives us an attractive account of what we dismiss when we dismiss blame.

4 Expressing Remorse

Macnamara notes the importance of *giving voice* to our guilt or remorse when we are blamed. It is not enough to accept blame just to admit that you have these emotions nor to apologize to the person you’ve wronged and make amends—you can do these things consistently with dismissing blame, especially if the person blaming you is not the person to whom you owe an apology. But there are other ways of giving voice to these emotions. Since what we are after is a direct, second-personal response to being blamed, it is natural to turn to apology, as Macnamara does. It is the paradigmatic second-personal response to our own wrongdoing. But since the person blaming you may not be the person to whom you owe an apology, this isn’t quite right, or at least it won’t cover all cases.

²⁹ Macnamara, “‘Screw You!’ and ‘Thank You!’,” 909. She is here drawing on Kukla and Lance, ‘Yo!’ and ‘Lo!’: *The Pragmatic Topography of the Space of Reasons*, on *recognitives*. Martin, “Owning Up and Lowering Down: The Power of Apology,” 545, similarly claims that resentment, or blame, asks that the wrongdoer (i) take ownership of the wrongful deed, (ii) to regret it, and (iii) to make moral repair.

Still, we can make progress by thinking about what is involved in apologizing, and especially about the difference between sincere and insincere apologies. Sincere apologies express remorse that the apologizer feels, while insincere apologies often ring hollow because the apologizer doesn't actually feel remorse. But as Tierney observes, even if you truly claim that you are remorseful in the process of apologizing, the apology may nevertheless seem insincere or cold.³⁰ The recipient may tell you to "say it like you mean it." A sincere apology should allow the recipient to see or witness your remorse, rather than merely telling them that you feel it. Martin stresses the "performative element of apology" which displays "regretful ownership" of the wrongdoing.³¹ Owning up isn't enough, even if you truly *say* that you are remorseful or regretful. The apologizer needs to performatively express or display their remorse to the recipient.³² Several philosophers defend views of apology that develop this thought, emphasizing the importance of communicating to the recipient of an apology that you are giving them the power to decide whether to forgive you and move on from the wrongdoing, and of, as Bovens puts it, "restoring [your] moral stature."³³ Communicating this at least typically involves a humble apology that clearly expresses remorse to the recipient.

Even if the blamer does not demand an apology, since your wrongdoing may not have affected her, in blaming you she can still demand a performative expression of the kind of remorse characteristic of sincere apology. Perhaps she also demands that you sincerely apologize, and so express remorse, to the victim(s) of your wrongdoing. In general, it might be that in many cases blame also involves other demands. Relatedly, as Macnamara emphasizes, we should distinguish between what would satisfy the demands involved in blaming and what would satisfy an individual blamer.³⁴ Many blamers will rightly care more about the wrongdoer apologizing to the victim, or improving their behavior going forward, than about whether the blamer expresses remorse to them. But as we have seen, complying with demands to do these things is not necessary for accepting blame. The central claim here is that in blaming you, the blamer (also) demands that you express remorse *to her*, i.e. to the blamer, even if she does not demand that you apologize to her.³⁵

Complying with this demand seems to me to be a good candidate for what is necessary for accepting hostile blame, involving indignation or resentment. Expressing remorse to the blamer is a way of acknowledging that they are right that you've acted

³⁰ Tierney, "Don't Suffer in Silence: A Self-Help Guide to Self-Blame," sec. 4.b.

³¹ Martin, "Owning Up and Lowering Down: The Power of Apology," 547.

³² Tierney, "Don't Suffer in Silence: A Self-Help Guide to Self-Blame," argues on various ethical grounds for the importance of expressing your self-blame, via an expression of guilt, to those you have wronged. I am suggesting that at least some instances of blame may involve a demand or expectation for this kind of expression of guilt or remorse to the blamer, even if the blamer is not the one you have wronged. Compare Tierney's discussion of publicly expressing guilt when the wrongdoer is unreachable in sec. 4.c.

³³ Bovens, "Apologies," 231. See Helmreich, "The Apologetic Stance," 79-80, on the inadequacy of an "interview apology", where you inform the victim that you feel badly, won't do it again, etc. by coolly answering a series of questions like "Do you regret it?", "Will you do it again?", etc. See also Martin, "Owning Up and Lowering Down: The Power of Apology."

³⁴ Macnamara, "'Screw You!' and 'Thank You!'," 896 and 899.

³⁵ I'll continue to use 'remorse' here, since it is commonly used in the literature, not focusing on distinctions between remorse and other emotions of negative self-assessment (cf. Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment*). But perhaps 'contrition' would be better; Bero, "Holding Responsible and Taking Responsibility," emphasizes the importance of expressions of contrition for moral repair.

wrongly, and showing that you are pained by your behavior. Many authors have taken angry blaming attitudes like resentment and indignation to involve a (usually indeterminate) desire for some kind of suffering (broadly construed) on the part of the wrongdoer, caused by recognition of their wrongdoing. An expression of remorse to the blamer satisfies this desire.³⁶ Consider Rosen's remark that "The wrongdoer who responds to outward blame with a sincere and cheerful promise to do better next time but without a hint of guilt or remorse palpably frustrates the desire implicit in resentment," and, we could add, indignation.³⁷

If Rosen is correct, then accepting hostile blame plausibly requires an expression of remorse. For all he's said here, this remorse might be expressed only to the victim, and not to the blamer. But, as I have argued, expressing remorse only to the *victim* is consistent with dismissing blame. So to count as accepting blame, this expression of remorse needs to be directed to the blamer. You can be remorseful, and even tell the blamer that you are remorseful, without *letting her in on* that remorse: "Yes of course I feel bad, but I'm not going to sit here and take this from you of all people." In calling this a second-personal expression of remorse to the blamer, I mean to distinguish a case in which the blamer is the *recipient* of the expression of remorse from the case in which the blamer is merely (part of) the *audience* of an expression of remorse. If the blamer happens to see you sincerely and remorsefully apologize to the person you have wronged, this need not constitute accepting blame from the blamer. Accepting hostile blame involves a second-personal expression of remorse *to* the blamer as recipient, in the way characteristic of a sincere apology, even if you are not apologizing to her.

My proposal is that this is what we can dismiss when we can dismiss blame: a demand that we express our remorse to the blamer. This account of dismissing blame has several good features. First, it is appropriately localized to the *blamer*: just because you don't have to express your remorse to the hypocrite blaming you doesn't mean you don't have to express it to someone else who blames you non-hypocritically. It is also localized to the *blame*: the demand to express remorse to the blamer is issued by the blame itself. Doing so is a response to being blamed, and so a way of acknowledging the blame. Third, refraining from expressing remorse to the blamer is consistent with doing all the things that you should be doing independently of being blamed: admitting that you have acted wrongly, feeling remorse, and expressing that remorse *to the person you've wronged* through a sufficiently sincere apology.³⁸ As we have seen, dismissing blame is consistent with doing

³⁶ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, for example, objects to anger on the basis of this kind of desire for suffering.

³⁷ Rosen, "The Alethic Conception of Moral Responsibility," 82-83.

³⁸ What if you wrong someone who regularly wrongs you or others in the same way, but they blame you anyway? Here my intuitions are not clear; I have encountered similar ambivalence from others (see also Smilansky, "The Paradox of Moral Complaint"). Since their blame is hypocritical, it seems that you can dismiss it. But you have wronged them, and so seem to owe them an apology simply on that basis. If you still owe them an apology, as seems plausible in at least some cases, in what sense can you dismiss their blame? I am inclined to think that you still owe them a sincere apology, and since this involves an expression of remorse, you do owe them this, as well. But perhaps it is inappropriate for them to *demand* this expression of remorse, given the hypocrisy involved in doing so. So in a case in which the person to whom you owe an apology blames you and is not hypocritical in doing so, your owing them a sincere expression of remorse is overdetermined: you owe them a sincere apology, which expresses remorse, in virtue of wronging them, and an expression of remorse in response to their blame. Of course, since a sincere apology to someone is a paradigmatic way to express remorse to them, the expressions of remorse need not be distinct.

these things, as well. What you dismiss is the demand for the second-personal response of expressing your remorse *to* the blamer.

Can we say more about what is involved in expressing remorse to the blamer? I suspect it is highly dependent on features of the context, including the personalities, social identities, and relationship between the blamer and blamed party, general cultural norms, and the nature of the wrongdoing in question. This makes it difficult to say anything very general, beyond the suggestive remarks I have made so far. But some familiar ways of doing so include downcast eyes, averted gaze, and in the extreme case, groveling or (usually figuratively) throwing oneself at the feet of the blamer.³⁹ Of course, sincere claims that you are remorseful, apologies, paying compensation, etc. also show remorse. But it is the expression of remorse *to* the blamer that can be dismissed, when you can dismiss blame.

In arguing for this account of dismissing blame, I argued that accepting hostile blame requires complying with the demand for a second-personal expression of remorse to the blamer. It is compatible with my claim about dismissing blame, though, that some kinds or instances of blame do not, in fact, involve this demand. I think this is especially plausible for gentler, non-hostile kinds of blame or criticism. But importantly, these kinds of criticism are not typically apt for dismissal on the basis of lack of standing. If I point out to you that you've mistreated some third party in a constructive or understanding way, perhaps even admitting my own recent mistreatment of someone, it would be inappropriate for you to respond by dismissing this criticism as hypocritical, for example.⁴⁰

This brings out one way in which dismissing blame, or criticism, can go wrong, besides the more obvious case in which the blamer really does have standing. Targets of criticism often inappropriately dismiss that criticism on the basis of lack of standing when in fact the critic was not engaged in hostile blame. Consider constructive criticism that certain choices we make—eating meat or taking short-haul flights, for example—are morally questionable, given the climate crisis. It is easy to imagine such criticism being met with angry dismissal: “Who are you to scold me about this? Didn't you fly to Italy just last summer?”. And it is equally easy to imagine a case in which the critic could appropriately respond by saying something like, “Woah, look, I'm not trying to get in your face about this—we all have a lot of work to do.” The dismissive response is not apt in this case, and, in my view, that is because the criticism is non-hostile and does not involve the demand for an expression of remorse to the critic.

A final complication involves blame that is not expressed to the blamed party. As I noted at the beginning of the paper, blame that is expressed to a third party can be dismissed by that third party and blame that is kept private can, if it is discovered, be dismissed. But if my account is right, then this blame must therefore involve a demand that the blamed party express remorse to the blamer. It is hard to see how it could do this, if the blame is not even expressed to the blamed party. Though I think it is sensible to treat direct, expressed blame—and its dismissal—as the paradigm case, I do need to say something about how to extend what I've said here to these kinds of cases.

³⁹ All of this can of course be faked, but that does not cast doubt on the claim that they are familiar ways of genuinely expressing remorse.

⁴⁰ For discussion of this point, see, e.g. Dworkin, “Morally Speaking,” 184; Cohen, “Ways of Silencing Critics,” 139; Rivera-López, “The Fragility of Our Moral Standing to Blame,” 345; Isserow & Klein, “Hypocrisy and Moral Authority,” 199; and King, “Skepticism about the Standing to Blame,” 1437-1438.

This problem will face anyone who takes blame to involve demands, as I have done, and fully addressing this issue on behalf of this understanding of blame would take more space than I have here. But briefly, I think it is plausible that blame can involve demands to the blamed party even if it is not expressed to them. We can privately make demands of people, or make demands of them to others. Think of saying to yourself or to another colleague, “Bob had better not reheat fish in the department microwave again today.” This is plausibly making a demand of Bob, even though you are not expressing it to Bob. Likewise, then, blaming Bob for doing this can be understood as involving a demand that he expresses remorse to you for his uncivil behavior, even if you do not express that demand to Bob. If you lack standing to blame Bob for this—for example, if you regularly reheat fish—then your colleagues or Bob himself, if he finds out about your blame, can dismiss the demand. Of course, if Bob doesn’t know about your demand, he is unlikely to comply with it. But this is true of demands we keep to ourselves generally. This is part of why keeping demands, and especially blame, to ourselves can lead to increased resentment and frustration.

5 Dismissing Blame and the Standing to Blame

Before closing I will briefly connect this account of what it is to dismiss blame to the standing to blame. Since part of what it is to lack standing to blame is for the target of the blame to be justified in dismissing that person’s blame, we can approach issues about standing from a new direction. In addition to asking whether some condition undermines standing directly, we can ask whether the condition justifies dismissing blame. If so, that is evidence that the condition does undermine standing.⁴¹ On my account, we can ask whether, and if so why, this condition justifies dismissing a demand for a second-personal expression of remorse to the blamer. I’ll suggest that this approach to theorizing about standing allows us to see why two apparently unrelated conditions have the same effect of undermining standing to blame. Fully investigating this would take more space than I have here, but this should show the fruitfulness of thinking about dismissing blame.

Two important ways in which someone can lack standing to blame are (i) the would-be blamer is themselves guilty of violating the norm, and (ii) the norm-violation is none of their business. The former is most widely discussed in the recent literature, often under the heading of *hypocritical* blame. Accounts of why past wrongdoing undermines standing to blame typically do not, and are not intended to, generalize to the second kind of standingless blame, which is sometimes called *meddlesome* blame. Though your being guilty of the same kind of wrongdoing and the wrongdoing in question being none of your business are very different considerations, it is striking that both have the same effect of undermining standing, and that both license the same kind of dismissive response.

On my account, dismissing blame is dismissing a demand for a second-personal expression of remorse to the blamer, of the sort that is characteristic of a sincere apology. As we’ve seen, a popular thought is that sincere, remorseful apologies communicate that the apologizer is putting the power of, as Bovens says, “restoring [their] moral stature” in the hands of the recipient.⁴² Assuming that (most) wrongdoing doesn’t result in any reduction in fundamental worth, the most plausible way to understand this is in terms of

⁴¹ See Edlich, “What about the Victim? Neglected Dimensions of the Standing to Blame,” 213, on the *deflection test* for standing.

⁴² Bovens, “Apologies,” 231.

forgiveness. Apologies put the power in the recipient's hands to forgive and so, as Walker says, make the, "*morally reparative* decision to release himself or herself from the position of grievance and reproach, and to release the wrongdoer from open-ended (but not necessarily all other) demands for satisfaction."⁴³ On this view, though the forgiver may still demand various kinds of compensation and may be unwilling to act as if the wrongdoing never happened, she commits to refrain from treating the original wrongdoing as a reason for further resentment, mistrust, and punishment.

Focusing on apology and forgiveness is too narrow for thinking about blame and proper responses to blame, since we can blame those who wrong third parties. In these cases, the blamed party does not owe *us* an apology and it is not *our* place to forgive them.⁴⁴ Still, on my view a second-personal expression of remorse in response to being blamed has important features in common with a sincere, remorseful apology. Letting the blamer in on our remorse in this way plausibly makes us subordinate to them in a similar way, putting the power to decide whether to refrain from treating our wrongdoing as a reason for further indignation, reproach, and punishment. I'll now suggest that it makes sense to dismiss a demand to give the blamer this power in both kinds of cases in which they intuitively lack standing.

First, if the blamer is themselves guilty of the same kind of wrongdoing, then we can reasonably dismiss a demand to take up a subordinate position relative to them, putting the power to restore our moral stature in their hands. This is because, due to their own similar wrongdoing, they have not earned this kind of elevated position. They themselves need to be welcomed back into the moral fold, and so are not in a place to welcome us back. This approach fits particularly well with one candidate view of standing, according to which having standing to blame requires being *better*, in the relevant respect, than the person you are blaming.⁴⁵ If dismissing blame involves dismissing a demand to take up a subordinate position, treating the blamer as better in an important sense, then we can see why we would be justified in doing so when they are not better. This account of standing is of course controversial, but it is notable that this independently motivated account of what it is to dismiss blame provides at least *prima facie* support for it.⁴⁶

This explanation can also plausibly be made to fit with the other main candidate account—and probably the most popular one—of how past wrongdoing undermines standing, according to which such blamers lack standing because they treat themselves as above the law, morally speaking.⁴⁷ At least many such blamers will make demands that the blamed party give the blamer the power to restore their moral stature, while not being

⁴³ Walker, *Moral Repair*, 153. See also p. 157, where Walker discusses the views of Narayan, "Forgiveness, Moral Reassessment, and Reconciliation" and Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*.

⁴⁴ See Fritz & Miller, "A Standing Asymmetry between Blame and Forgiveness" for recent discussion of a related asymmetry between having standing to blame and having standing to forgive.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Dworkin, "Morally Speaking"; Rivera-López, "The Fragility of Our Moral Standing to Blame"; and Todd, "Let's See You Do Better". Isserow & Klein, "Hypocrisy and Moral Authority," do not explicitly endorse this view, but some of what they say can be taken as support for it.

⁴⁶ I defend this view of standing, drawing on the account of dismissing blame developed here, in Snedegar, "Explaining Loss of Standing to Blame."

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Wallace, "Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons"; Fritz & Miller, "Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame" and "The Unique Badness of Hypocritical Blame"; Roadevin, "Hypocritical Blame, Fairness, and Standing"; and Piovarchy, "Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority".

willing to accede to such demands from others, stubbornly maintaining that they have nothing to be remorseful for and do not need their moral stature to be restored. Plausibly this kind of self-preferential attitude undermines their standing to issue the relevant demands.

Second, consider meddlesome blame, which we often dismiss saying something like “Who are *you* to blame me for this? Mind your own business!”. This kind of dismissal of blame makes sense in cases in which the wrongdoing in question is in the context of some private relationship, e.g. within a family. Obviously there are wrongs that take place within the context of a family which genuinely are everyone’s business, but plausibly there are spheres of privacy such that wrongdoing within that sphere is not the business of other people.⁴⁸ If blame involves a demand for a second-personal expression of remorse, and complying with this demand involves taking up a subordinate position relative to the blamer such that the blamer is given the power to decide whether to welcome the wrongdoer back into the moral fold, we can see why dismissing meddlesome blame is warranted. In short, it is because the blamer is not part of the relevant fold. It is not that they have alienated themselves from it by acting immorally, but rather that they were never part of it to begin with. Just as in the case of hypocritical blame, the target of such blame can be justified in dismissing a demand for a second-personal expression of remorse to the blamer. The private wrongdoing at issue in these cases is not properly treated as a reason for indignation, mistrust, or punishment for people outside of the relevant sphere, and so it is inappropriate for these people to demand a display of remorse that gives them power to decide to refrain from treating it as a reason for these reactions.

There is of course much more to say about both hypocritical blame and meddlesome blame, and I have only been able to sketch the explanations that my account of dismissing blame suggest for why such blame can be dismissed. Still, I think this illustrates the fruitfulness of approaching the standing to blame from the perspective of the blamed party, asking what kinds of responses are appropriate and why.⁴⁹

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⁴⁸ See, e.g., Smith, “On Being Responsible and Holding Responsible”; Radzik, “On the Virtue of Minding Our Own Business”; and Seim, “The Standing to Blame and Meddling.”

⁴⁹ For very helpful discussion of material included in this paper, thanks to Zoë Johnson King, Julia Driver, Joe Bowen, Jessica Brown, Emmy Feamster, Adam Etinson, Julia Staffel, Erik Encarnacion, Ben Lennertz, Nathan Howard, Coleen Macnamara, Patrick Todd, Maggie O’Brien, Hannah Tierney, Dana Nelkin, Shyam Nair, Per-Erik Milam, David Shoemaker, Andrew Ma, anonymous referees, and to audiences at Stirling, St Andrews, Glasgow, the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club, and the UT-Austin/St Andrews Workshop on Blame and Responsibility.

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