

## Chapter 8

# “You’re Just Jealous!”

## *On Envious Blame*

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Criticism often stings. Sometimes the pain derives from our knowledge that the criticism is unfair, that we didn’t make the mistake we are being criticized for. But the sting is there, too, in cases where we know full well that we are criticizable. Those cases can be even more painful, in fact, since criticism compounds the sting of self-blame we’re probably already feeling.

Not that criticism is always a bad thing: its sting can motivate self-improvement. Perhaps that’s the most admirable way to respond to criticism, at least when the criticism is apt. But sometimes we try to *deflect* or *dismiss* the criticism instead, by calling into question the motivations or character of the person who voices it.

There are lighthearted examples of this, which involve unabashed *ad hominems*, like when my daughter tells me I smell bad after I’ve just finished exercising, and I respond with something like, “Oh yeah? Well, *you* stink too.” (Some kids in my high school formed a band called “So’s Your Face,” an excellent all-purpose comeback. Great band, too.) But there are more serious examples, where the attempted deflection is sincere, like when we perceive that the criticizer is equally guilty of the thing they are complaining about, and we respond, “You’re one to talk.” The thought here isn’t that the criticism they are offering is *false* but instead that their hypocrisy makes them ill-suited to be offering it.

It’s puzzling exactly what it could mean for someone to be “ill-suited” to offer an apt criticism, and there is a burgeoning philosophical literature on this topic under the rubric of *the ethics of blame*.<sup>1</sup> There is widespread agreement that hypocrisy—or, rather, the fact that someone would be a hypocrite if they were to issue a rebuke of a particular wrong—undermines one’s standing

to blame, even if the would-be target is blameworthy.<sup>2</sup> The slogan that a wrongdoer seems entitled to invoke in these cases is something like, “Look who’s talking!” or, “That’s rich coming from you.” At least sometimes, the accusation of hypocrisy seems to have bite.

In this chapter, I want to explore a different sort of deflection strategy, one that takes aim at *jealous* or *envious* criticism. This strategy also has a catchphrase, namely: “You’re just jealous!” The person who makes this accusation may simply be grasping at straws in an attempt to avoid responsibility, but suppose that the person offering the criticism really *is* motivated by jealousy. Would that fact have any normative significance? Does an accusation of jealousy or envy, like the accusation of hypocrisy, ever have genuine force as a response to criticism? These are the questions I’m interested in exploring in what follows. My hope is that we’ll learn something about the ethics of blame and about the dynamics of interpersonal relationships more generally.<sup>3</sup>

## JEALOUSY OR ENVY?

Before trying to figure out what normative force, if any, is carried by the accusation, “You’re just jealous!” let’s start by asking whether it’s really *jealousy* that’s at issue, or whether this is one of those common cases where the word “jealous” is used to pick out envy instead. Here I rely on the work of Sara Protasi (2017, 2021), who defends a “lack vs. loss” model of the distinction between envy and jealousy.<sup>4</sup> Roughly speaking, according to this model, despite their similarities as rivalrous and aversive emotions, the jealous person is most worried about *losing* something valuable that they perceive as already “belonging” to them, whereas the envious person is most bothered by the fact they *lack* something valuable that they perceive as “belonging” to someone else. (Note that the belonging at issue need not be a matter of literal ownership, so much as a loose sense in which the thing is seen as a part of your life or not.)

As Protasi and others point out, the “lack vs. loss” model of the distinction between envy and jealousy fits well with psychological and linguistic data, and has a good deal of explanatory power. I won’t reproduce the arguments in favor of the model, but I do want to draw attention to one relevant data point, which is an asymmetry between how the two words get used. As Protasi (2017, 318) puts it, “‘jealousy’ encompasses a range of meanings that include those of ‘envy,’ but not vice versa.” The “lack vs. loss” model can make sense of this linguistic asymmetry in the following way. Since it is less shameful to defend what you already own from threat than it is to pine after something that belongs to someone else, the concept of jealousy carries less

moral and social baggage, which is why we tend to use the word “jealous” even for situations where what we are really feeling is envy.

So, the question for us is whether the accusation “You’re just jealous!” is really about jealousy, or if instead it is about envy. If we adopt the lack vs. loss model, we can answer this question by figuring out whether the person in question is being accused of *guarding* something they already have or of *coveting* something that belongs to someone else.<sup>5</sup>

Here it will be useful to consider a few examples of the phenomenon in question. Not only will this help us to determine whether jealousy or envy is the central emotion at issue, but it will also help us to fix ideas for the discussion to follow.

Let me start with the title comic for cartoonist Tom Gauld’s book *You’re All Just Jealous of My Jetpack*. This is a single-panel comic with a person in a jetpack labeled “science fiction” and three people dressed in black labeled “proper literature.” The three people—snooty professors, no doubt—are saying “tut tut,” and the person in the jetpack responds, “You’re all just jealous of my jetpack.” My apologies to Tom Gauld for ruining the joke by explaining it, but the subtext here is that when literary critics look down on or otherwise criticize science fiction, those criticisms are inapt or somehow not worth listening to, since they are motivated by jealousy. Sci-fi is more “fun” than so-called proper literature—it has more jetpacks, for one thing—and deep down, literary critics wish they could have more fun too.

In this example, the accusation being lobbed at the snooty professors is not properly an accusation of *jealousy*, at least if we are operating with a lack vs. loss model of the difference between envy and jealousy. Proponents of so-called proper literature are being accused of having an aversive emotional response due to their perception that they *lack* the fun literary devices and plot points that show up in sci-fi stories. They wish they had something they don’t; hence this cartoon depicts an accusation of envy.

For another example, consider an exchange from the popular TV sitcom *Friends*. Here’s the background: after much romantic build-up in the first two seasons, Ross and Rachel finally get together in season 2, but then they break up again toward the end of season 3. Then in season 3, episode 22—“The One with the Screamer”—Rachel is dating a new man named “Tommy,” and Ross is the only one of the friends who manages to see Tommy’s dark side (he screams at people for no reason). Ross then tries to convince Rachel to stop seeing him but is aware he’ll just get accused of jealousy. Here’s the exchange (you’ll have to provide the sarcasm to Rachel’s and Chandler’s responses yourself):

Ross: Look, I wasn’t gonna say anything to you, but . . . all right, I don’t think you should be seeing Tommy anymore.

Rachel: You don't?

Ross: No, the guy is mean. I mean, really mean. I think you should stay away from him.

Rachel: Hmm. Or maybe I should stay away from all men.

Ross: No. It's not just because I'm jealous. I mean, I'm not. I'm not jealous. Look, the guy screamed . . . he actually screamed at this couple sitting in our seats.

Chandler: Yeah, and at the end of the play, he got up, and he just started, like, banging his hands together.

In this example, no one explicitly accuses Ross of being motivated by jealousy, but they don't have to. He reads their facial expressions instead and offers a preemptive defense of himself. But is it jealousy or envy that he's being implicitly accused of?

I think it's possible to read this example either way, but the most plausible interpretation is that this is a case of jealousy proper, given the history between Ross and Rachel. Although they are broken up at the moment, Ross still hasn't fully "let go" of Rachel, and the worry is that his criticisms of her new boyfriend are motivated by his sense that he's finally *losing* her to a real-life rival, even though they are already officially broken up.

Let me outline one last example, because it will prove useful in the discussion below. This one is from the 2004 movie *Napoleon Dynamite*. In one scene, Napoleon has been asked to do a chore he doesn't feel like doing, and he gets frustrated with his brother Kip, who is just sitting around on the computer. When Napoleon expresses his frustration—"Stay home and eat all the freakin' chips, Kip!"—Kip responds: "Napoleon, don't be jealous that I've been chatting online with babes all day."

Like the sci-fi example from above, Kip's use of the term "jealous" here seems best interpreted as an accusation that Napoleon is *envious*. After all, what seems to be at issue here is a good thing that Kip has but Napoleon lacks, namely the opportunity to spend time on the computer talking to girls. Kip's response to Napoleon's rebuke is to highlight the "real" source of Napoleon's frustration, namely his envy.

What these examples make clear is that even though the accusation almost always features the word "jealousy," some cases are best interpreted as being about *envy* instead. But I'm interested in both types of situations. Suppose, then, that someone's criticism is motivated by envy or jealousy. So what? Why exactly would that be a problem, especially if the criticism is *apt*?

### CRITICISM AS COMMUNICATION: THE TESTIMONIAL MODEL

One approach begins with the observation that criticism can be a form of communication. Regardless of whether the criticism is intended to sting, it is often intended to convey information, and so it can be thought of as a form of testimony. One way that envious criticism might go awry, then, is if the envy undermines the credibility of the testifier. Consider again the example from *Friends*. In that example, Ross is genuinely worried about Rachel’s well-being, given the anger management problems of her new boyfriend, and when he says that Tommy is mean, he’s simply trying to convey the information that Tommy is mean.

Right after he tells Rachel that Tommy is mean, though, Ross realizes that he has a credibility problem. As Rachel’s very recent ex-boyfriend, any criticism that he lobbs at her new boyfriend may very well be seen as an attempt to keep her from moving on, so that he can eventually win her back. Or, alternatively, his criticisms of the new boyfriend might be interpreted as a way for him to protect his own self-esteem, which is threatened by the ease with which Rachel seems ready to start dating other people. Ross’s friends immediately adopt an interpretation along these lines, and as a result they think he is lying, or at least exaggerating, about Tommy’s mean streak.

The jetpack cartoon can be fit into this framework as well, if we interpret the snooty professors’ “tut tut” remark as an attempt to convey some information. Perhaps, for example, the professors are trying to convince the reading public that sci-fi literature is not worth purchasing or engaging with, that it is frivolous. When the jetpack person responds with the accusation of jealousy, then, the claim is that you, the reading public, shouldn’t lend any weight to the professors’ evaluation of the worth of sci-fi. Perhaps they genuinely think poorly of sci-fi, but that isn’t because they have privileged access to truths about what makes for a good work of literature; instead, they are simply trying to knock sci-fi authors down a peg, so that so-called proper literature doesn’t become an endangered species. As with the *Friends* example, the key point here is that we shouldn’t take a jealous person’s word at face value.

There is a large literature on the epistemology of testimony (e.g., Lackey 2008 and Goldberg 2010), but I think we can avoid the details here and instead focus on a more zoomed-out account of when someone’s credibility as a testifier might legitimately be questioned. In general, what you want to know is whether the person is *telling the truth*. But there are two components to this: first, you want to be reasonably confident that the person is saying something that *they take to be true*—that is, that the person is being sincere, is testifying in good faith. In other words, you need to be reasonably confident

that you aren't being lied to. But that's not quite enough by itself, because even sincere testifiers might lead you astray if they have no idea what they are talking about, or if their sincere judgment is compromised in some way. So, you also want to be reasonably confident that the person's take on the truth has been formed by their being in touch with the actual truth—that is, that the person is *competent*, that their sincere belief is somehow grounded in their experience with things of the sort they are talking about.

One nice way to summarize this is with the notion of explanation. When you are wondering whether to believe what someone has said, you should ask, first, whether the best explanation for why they said it is that they believe it (call this *the sincerity test*), and second, whether the best explanation for why they believe it is that their expertise or experience has put them in a good position to form true beliefs (this is *the competence test*).<sup>6</sup>

In this way of thinking about things, accusing a critic of jealousy or envy might be an attempt to impugn either the critic's sincerity or their competence. And in fact, it's not hard to think of both sorts of case. On the interpretation I suggested above, the *Friends* example falls on the sincerity side of things, whereas the jetpack example falls on the competence side of things. Ross's criticisms are not taken seriously because his friends think he's *lying*, whereas the criticisms of the snooty professors shouldn't be taken seriously because they are letting their professional self-interest cloud their judgments about quality.<sup>7</sup> Neither the negative evaluation of Tommy nor the negative evaluation of sci-fi ought to be taken seriously, since the criticisms fail one of the two tests for successful testimony.

But you can also imagine flip-flopping the examples, so that the *Friends* example falls on the competence side and the jetpack example falls on the sincerity side. Perhaps Ross isn't *lying* about Tommy's having a mean streak—that is, perhaps Ross genuinely believes that Tommy is mean—but his jealousy may nevertheless be pushing him to give an uncharitable interpretation to Tommy's behavior. He so badly wants Tommy to be an unsuitable partner for Rachel that he's convinced himself of Tommy's unsuitability. And in the jetpack example, you could imagine that the snooty professors don't *really* look down upon sci-fi literature, in their heart of hearts, but they feel they must present a negative judgment to the world around them in order to fit in, or something like that, so their "tutting" is just so much play-acting. Again, on either interpretation, the criticism's ability to transmit information has been compromised.

Here, then, is a straightforward way that the accusation of jealousy might have some genuine force. Call it "the testimonial model." In this model, criticism seeks uptake of the information it contains, and *felicitous* criticism offers its hearer a reason to believe the information it seeks to convey. But criticism manages to convey this reason only if it's coming from the mouth

of someone we reasonably take to be both *sincere* and *competent*, and envy or jealousy might interfere with either or both. This is not to say that an insincere or incompetent speaker can’t be speaking the truth, of course. It’s only to say that even if the criticism is apt, *that this speaker is the one voicing it* is not a good reason to believe that it is.

### CRITICISM AS REBUKE: THE EXPANDED TESTIMONIAL MODEL

So far, we’ve been working with a pretty thin notion of “criticism.” We’ve said that Ross criticizes Tommy by *saying that he is mean*, and the snooty professors have criticized sci-fi literature by *implying that it is frivolous*. When criticism is taken to be a way of saying something negative about somebody, it’s straightforward to apply the framework of the epistemology of testimony to the accusation that someone is criticizing out of jealousy or envy. If criticism is a type of assertion, then calling into question the motivations of the criticizer is just another way of questioning whether the assertion is one we have good reason to believe or accept.

But often criticism is more than a mere assertion. Consider now the example from *Napoleon Dynamite*, where Napoleon expresses anger at Kip for just sitting at home on the computer and eating all the chips, and where Kip responds by accusing Napoleon of being jealous that Kip has been “chatting online with babes all day.” In this example, Napoleon’s criticism isn’t really meant to convey any information or make any sort of assertion that Kip might then come to believe on the basis of Napoleon’s say-so. Instead, Napoleon’s angry outburst seems more like a rebuke, something that’s aimed at making Kip feel guilty for an apparent transgression. But the accusation of jealousy seems to work here too, so how should we understand it, if not as related to the conditions of reliable testimony?

Even here, though, I think we can press the testimonial model—or at least an expanded version of it—into service. When I’m wondering whether to believe something on the basis of your say-so, what I’m trying to figure out is whether *your saying it gives me a reason to believe it*. If you’re only saying it because you’re jealous and not because you believe it, then your saying it doesn’t give me a reason to believe it. Likewise, if you only believe it because your jealousy is clouding your judgment, then even though you may be in earnest, your saying it still doesn’t give me a reason to believe it. In the previous section we saw how this model applies to criticism understood as an attempt to convey reasons for belief. But we might also understand criticism as an attempt to convey reasons for *action*.

When criticism takes the form of a rebuke, I may be trying to get you to believe something—like, for example, that you’ve hurt my feelings, or that you had no good excuse for doing so. But often I’m also trying to get you to *do* something as well—like, for example, apologize or in some way acknowledge the way your behavior has damaged our relationship. Just as assertions can be used to give other people reasons to *believe* something, rebukes can be used to give other people reasons to *do* something. And what that means is that there may be a fruitful analogy between the epistemology of testimony and the ethics of blame.

To see what I have in mind, let’s take a brief detour through the ethics of *hypocritical blame*, which, as I mentioned above, is widely taken to undermine one’s standing to blame. What’s not so widely agreed upon, however, is exactly *what it is* for a hypocrite to lose their standing to blame, beyond the vague thought that hypocritical blame is somehow inappropriate. But here’s a thought I quite like: blame, at least overt blame, aims to convey reasons to the person being blamed: for example, reasons to apologize and make things right. And when someone loses their standing to blame, what they lose is their ability to convey those reasons. It may still be—in fact, it usually *will* be—that the person being blamed has *other* reasons to apologize and make things right, but the fact that they are being blamed (by a hypocrite) will not be among them.<sup>8</sup>

If that thought is on the right track, then there is a structural similarity between the aim of assertion and the aim of blame: whereas the first attempts to transmit a reason for belief, the second attempts to transmit a reason for action. And if an assertion is unable to fulfill its aim when it fails the sincerity or competence test, then we might expect that in cases where blame is unable to fulfill *its* aim, this is because it, too, has failed some version of the sincerity or competence tests.

When we examine the varieties of hypocritical blame, I think this is in fact what we find. Consider the following five hypocritical blamers:

1. *The clear-eyed hypocrite* is a hypocrite in the original sense of the term: they are merely play-acting, putting on a mask, wearing the trappings of blame in order to achieve a desired effect.
2. *The weak-willed hypocrite* is genuinely committed to the values they espouse but fails to act in accordance with those values due to weakness of will.
3. *The exception-seeking hypocrite* is also genuinely committed to the values they espouse but fails to act in accordance with those values because they mistakenly think those standards do not apply to them.
4. *The couldn’t-care-less hypocrite* genuinely cares about the values that form the basis of their criticism, but they just aren’t bothered by the fact



that they are enforcing those values in an unfair way, by blaming others who transgress while not blaming themselves when *they* transgress.

5. *The recently-converted hypocrite* is someone whose house is completely in order—there is complete alignment between how they act, the values they profess, and the way they dole out blame—but whose integrity is only very recently won due to a change of heart. Even if their change of heart is sincere (and so they aren’t strictly speaking a hypocrite), there seems to be some sort of residue of their former commitments that make their current blame problematic in a way akin to hypocrisy.<sup>9</sup>

Suppose that each of these varieties of hypocrisy undermines the standing to blame. Is there a way to fit these varieties into our general testimonial model, such that each type of hypocrisy amounts to either a failure of sincerity or a failure of competence? I think so.

The clear-eyed hypocrite is perhaps the clearest case, since they are being insincere in a straightforward sense: they are not even committed to the values that they are purporting to enforce through their blame. But the couldn’t-care-less hypocrite also seems to count as insincere in some sense, since they recognize that they are blaming in an unfair way but are doing it anyway. Perhaps we could cover both cases by saying that the clear-eyed and couldn’t-care-less hypocrites are blaming *in bad faith*.

This distinguishes them from the weak-willed and exception-seeking hypocrites, who are both blaming in earnest. But whereas these two types of hypocrites seem to pass the sincerity test, they seem to fail the competence test. They are both, for different reasons, failing to uphold principles that they are genuinely committed to, one due to a volitional hiccup and the other due to misapplication of the relevant standards. Even the recently-converted hypocrite seems, in some sense, to run afoul of the competence test, since it seems like their past track record should encourage a bit of humility about how hard it is to get things right in this domain.

If the analogy I’m pushing works, it gives us a new model for trying to figure out why the hypocritical blamer lacks the standing to blame. *The case of testimony*: someone’s say-so counts as a reason to believe what they say only if you can be reasonably confident that they aren’t lying and, moreover, are well acquainted enough with the facts to be getting them right in this case. Insincerity and incompetence both render testimony incapable of transmitting a reason to believe the content of the testimony. *The case of blame*: the fact that someone is blaming you counts as a reason to acknowledge wrongdoing, apologize, and so on, only if you can be reasonably confident that they are blaming in good faith and, moreover, that they are well acquainted enough with the normative facts to be getting them right in this case. Bad faith and

normative errors both render blame incapable of transmitting a reason to do the things that blame aims to inspire you to do.

Return now to the accusation of jealousy that comes up in the *Napoleon Dynamite* example. As I said above, Napoleon is not trying to get Kip to believe the content of his criticism; in fact, it's not clear that his criticism has any content at all. Instead, it's simply meant as a rebuke. On the expanded testimonial model, then, we should be able to explain what Kip is up to when he accuses Napoleon of jealousy in terms of either sincerity or competence. In this case, it seems like Kip is calling into question the reason-giving force of Napoleon's rebuke by invoking the competence test.

Perhaps Napoleon is right that Kip has been on the computer eating chips all day, but Napoleon's rebuke represents those facts as though they are bad things, worthy of criticism. Kip's response is intended to enlighten Napoleon, to let him know that his jealousy (envy, really) is compromising his ability to make an accurate evaluative judgment. Another way to put this is to say that when Kip accuses Napoleon of being jealous, he's pointing out that Napoleon's emotional reaction is *unfitting*: it represents the world inaccurately. And what's led him to have an unfitting emotion, on Kip's telling of it, is Napoleon's jealousy.<sup>10</sup>

So, this sort of rebuke—assuming Kip is right about Napoleon's motivations—seems to fail the competence test. But there will also be rebukes that fail sincerity test. A simple example might just be a reinterpretation of the jet-pack cartoon, where the snooty professors' "tut tut" is understood as a rebuke rather than an attempt to convey information. If the professors don't really think that sci-fi literature is frivolous, but they are tutting merely in an envious attempt to hurt the sales of widely adored sci-fi authors, then their tutting need not generate any reason for the sci-fi authors to change their ways.

There's another type of example, though, that would also illustrate the idea of a bad faith or insincere rebuke. This would be one where the blamer is genuinely committed to the values that their rebuke presupposes, and where the rebuke itself is fitting (the person being blamed has in fact behaved badly), but where the blamer's commitment to the values is *not* what explains why they have issued the rebuke.

Think, for example, of a case where a president of the United States has committed an impeachable offense, and where the members of the opposition party vociferously pursue impeachment and conviction, but where their pursuit of that goal is motivated primarily by the fact that they are envious of the power held by their colleagues across the aisle.<sup>11</sup> (We might describe the case in a way that highlights either envy or jealousy: envy if the opposition party lacks a majority in the Senate, and jealousy if the opposition party is trying to protect their majority in the Senate.) We can suppose for the sake of argument that the blistering rebukes of the president given in speeches on

the Senate floor are fitting, but the accusation of jealousy or envy might nevertheless make sense if the opposition part is wielding those rebukes, and the impeachment proceedings more generally, with the primary aim of regaining (or retaining) power, instead of with the aim of upholding the Constitution.<sup>12</sup>

So, it looks like the testimonial model can be expanded to accommodate not only jealous assertions, but jealous rebukes as well. In some cases, the accusation of jealousy is meant to be a way of pointing out that the person is criticizing in bad faith, either because they don’t endorse the criticism or because their endorsement of the criticism isn’t explaining why they are giving voice to it. In other cases, the accusation is meant to point out that the critic’s view of the moral landscape is distorted by their jealousy. But in none of the cases is a genuine reason successfully conveyed to the person being criticized—not a reason to believe the content of the criticism, and not a reason for the person being criticized to shape up or apologize.<sup>13</sup>

Again, I haven’t explained *how* the reason-giving force of hypocritical or jealous blame would get silenced in this way, and I’m not sure I have anything enlightening to say on that score. I’m only suggesting that the testimonial model can help us to make sense of what exactly is going on when someone says, “You’re one to talk!” or, “You’re just jealous!” These retorts, I’m suggesting, are ways of saying that whatever reasons you’re offering, I’m not buying.

### AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL: ABUSE OF NORMATIVE POWER

If we think of blame as a move in a moral conversation, then the testimonial model of hypocritical or envious blame seems promising.<sup>14</sup> But there’s another model that is also worth exploring, so let me sketch its contours here. In brief, the idea is that to blame someone is to exercise a normative power, much like making a promise or issuing a command. In this model, the problem with hypocritical or envious blame would be that those ways of blaming amount to an *abuse of power*, and the accusation of hypocrisy or jealousy is way of calling out such abuse.

A normative power, according to David Owens, is “a power to change what people are obliged to do by communicating the intention of so doing” (2012, 128). For those who opt for a normative power account of phenomena such as promising, there are tricky questions about what it is in virtue of which we have such a power, but again, here I just want to sketch the contours of the idea so that we can apply it to the case of envious blame. The general idea is that promising—like the giving of consent or the issuing of commands—is a power we have to change the normative situation “at will,” and the reason

we acquire for performing as we have promised is “content-independent,” in the sense that the reason-giving force of our promise does not derive from whether it would be a good idea to do the thing we have promised to do, but instead merely from the fact that we *have* so promised.

Like the offering of a promise, an expression of blame might be interpreted as an attempt to change the normative situation between blamer and blamee. Adopting the normative power framework then gives us another way to understand how blaming interactions can go awry due to hypocrisy or jealousy, because where there is power, there is *abuse* of power.

Consider first the broader notion of abuse of power. There are several courses of action that might legitimately count as abuses of power: (1) using your position of power to do immoral things; (2) using your position of power to do things that you weren’t empowered to do; and (3) using your position of power to do something that is at odds with the legitimate source of your power. As an example of the first kind of abuse, think of the professor who exploits their graduate students; as an example of the second kind of abuse, think of the president who mobilizes the Department of Justice in an attempt to punish corporations for political reasons rather than for legitimate worries about monopolies (Krugman 2019); as an example of the third kind of abuse, think of the president who attempts to undermine the very democratic processes that put him in power in the first place.

Perhaps these three types of abuse are not exhaustive, and perhaps in the final analysis they aren’t all distinct. But I want to focus on the second sort of abuse. In this sort of case, we might say that the powerful person is “weaponizing” certain tools that they would otherwise be perfectly within their rights to use. This person is deploying their power for purposes other than those it is intended to serve. And it is *this* sort of abuse of power that I suspect can teach us something about envious and hypocritical blame. Start with the case of hypocrisy.

Not all hypocritical blamers are cut from the same cloth, but one prominent variety—as discussed above—is the hypocrite who is merely play-acting, merely going through the blaming motions for some sort of personal benefit. If we take blame to be the exercise of a normative power, we might explain what goes wrong with this sort of hypocrisy as follows: instead of deploying blame for the purposes of moral conversation, the clear-eyed hypocrite is weaponizing the practice of blame for the sake of scoring points with onlookers or perhaps for the sake of wounding someone they take to be an enemy. This sort of hypocritical blame is an abuse of an otherwise legitimate power that we have to hold one another accountable for wrongdoing.

Perhaps, then, we can view *envious blame* as yet another way to abuse one’s normative power. Again, assuming that one of the legitimate aims of blame is to transmit to the blamee a reason to apologize and make things

right, accusing someone of being “just jealous” might be interpreted as the accusation that the person is acting in the role of a blamer not for the purpose of enforcing moral norms but instead to score points against a rival. In fact, envy is by definition a *rivalrous* emotion, and an envier sees their rival as superior in a certain respect. This can motivate the envier to knock their rival down a peg, to spoil their superior status. Blame, especially if it is voiced publicly, is a natural way that this action-tendency might manifest. When that happens, the blame is being weaponized, used as a status-leveler, rather than as a move in a genuine moral conversation.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Often when someone is accused of being “just jealous,” the accusation is false, and the accuser is simply trying to avoid coming to grips with the legitimate criticism being made. But in other cases, the accusation seems apt, and what I’ve tried to explore here are two models for explaining what exactly would be problematic about criticism that is motivated by envy or jealousy.

According to the testimonial model, the fact that a criticism is motivated by envy might impugn the critic’s sincerity, or else it might cast doubt on the soundness of the evaluative judgment that the criticism presupposes. According to the abuse of normative power model, envy can co-opt the legitimate mechanisms that we use to hold each other accountable and weaponize them for personal gain. But on either model, to accuse a critic of jealousy or envy is to paint the critic as ill-suited to moral conversation. They may continue to talk *at* us, but their motivations undermine their ability to talk *with* us.<sup>16</sup>

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Cohen (2006); Wallace (2010); Radzik (2011); Fritz and Miller (2018); and Todd (2019).

2. For important dissenting voices, see Bell (2013) and Dover (2019).

3. This question—in particular, about how being envied influences the dynamics of interpersonal relationships—is also helpfully explored by Jens Lange and Jan Crusius in their contribution to this volume, “How Envy and Being Envied Shape Social Hierarchies” (chapter 2)

4. Other philosophers also defend versions of this model. See, for example, Purschouse (2004) and Konyndyk DeYoung (2009).

5. Protasi does not *identify* coveting with being envious, and in fact she contends that “covetousness” is a “species of desire” rather than an emotion. However, she

does express the lack vs. loss model by using the motto: “envy covets what jealousy guards” (2021, 13).

6. This zoomed-out discussion of the epistemology of testimony is inspired by the account given in chapter 6 of Wright (2013).

7. Iago is right about this, at least: “oft my jealousy / Shapes faults that are not.”

8. For development of this sort of account, see Herstein (2017) and Tognazzini (n.d.).

9. I borrow the first three varieties from Macalester Bell’s taxonomy in Bell (2013). The fourth and fifth varieties are my own proposed additions to Bell’s list.

10. There’s a puzzle here about how it makes sense for Napoleon to feel envy, which involves a perception of Kip’s superiority, while at the same time issuing a criticism, which implies a negative evaluative judgment. One way to resolve the puzzle is to say that Kip is wrong about Napoleon feeling envy, and another is to say that Napoleon’s criticism is just so much play-acting. But a third resolution might simply appeal to a sort of ambivalence that Napoleon is feeling in the moment: perhaps he admires something he also perceives as laziness. For an excellent discussion of a similar sort of puzzle, see Vanessa Carbonell’s contribution to this volume, “Malicious Moral Envy” (chapter 7).

11. This case is inspired by some remarks in Dover (2019). Perhaps, as Dover speculates, it accurately describes some Senate Republicans during the impeachment trial of Bill Clinton.

12. As Vanessa Carbonell has pointed out to me, politics is an arena both of rivalrous emotions and of coldly rational calculations, and the very same course of action might be recommended by each of those mental pathways. In practice, therefore, it will be difficult to determine whether a political agenda is being pursued in good faith.

13. It’s worth noting that an accurate criticism may still manage to open the eyes of the person being criticized, even if it fails to convey this special sort of reason. (Thanks to Sara Protasi for pushing me to clarify this point.) So, it’s not as though envious criticism will never be instrumentally valuable. For more on this line of thought, see La Caze (2001) and Frye (2016).

14. Various authors have defended the view that blaming interactions are like conversations. See, for example, Macnamara (2015), McKenna (2013), and Watson (1987).

15. It’s worth noting that the *accusation* of envy or jealousy might be weaponized in a similar way, since envy or jealousy is taken to be a defect of character.

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