

SUBJUNCTIVE HYPOCRISY

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It is commonly thought that agents lack the standing to blame in cases where their blame would be hypocritical. Jack for instance, would seem to lack the standing to blame Gerald for being rude to their local barista if he has himself been rude to baristas in the past. Recently, it has been suggested that Jack need not even have displayed any such rudeness in order for his blame to qualify as hypocritical; it would suffice if he too *would have* been rude to the barista, were he in Gerald's situation. The latter is an instance of *subjunctive hypocritical blame*; Jack's blame is hypocritical not because he has committed the wrong in question, but because he would do so under particular circumstances. Many philosophers endorse a kind of symmetry between ordinary and subjunctive hypocritical blame; they maintain that Jack lacks the standing to blame Gerald if his blame would be hypocritical in either the ordinary *or* the subjunctive sense. However, I believe that they are mistaken to do so. I argue for an asymmetry between ordinary and subjunctive hypocritical blame: only the former should be taken to compromise an agent's standing.

1. Introduction

What might be called ordinary cases of hypocritical blame involve blaming others for moral faults of which we ourselves are guilty. It would, for instance, seem painfully hypocritical for Owen, a serial litterer, to blame Olivia for tossing her cigarette butt out of a car window. 'Who are you to blame me for littering?' Olivia could understandably protest, 'You litter all the time!' Viewed from a certain angle, Olivia's response here may seem out of place. She did, after all, do something wrong—is Owen not within his rights to become morally exercised about that? Yet the purpose of Olivia's response, charitably construed, is not to deny that she is blameworthy. It is to emphasise that it is not *Owen's* place to blame her. Owen's track record seems to render his blame in particular morally objectionable.

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Many feel that there is something morally untoward about Owen's blaming Olivia, even if she is blameworthy for acting as she does. More strongly, it has been suggested that Owen lacks the right to blame others for littering, on account of the fact that any blame on his part would be hypocritical. This suggestion reflects the well-known non-hypocrisy condition on the standing to blame: insofar as one's blame would be hypocritical, one lacks the standing to blame others for particular moral failings (Wallace 2010; Friedman 2013; Rivera-López 2017; Fritz & Miller 2018; Rossi 2018; Todd 2019).¹

Importantly, it is often thought that an agent need not even have committed the relevant wrong in order for her blame to qualify as hypocritical. It suffices that she too *would have* acted wrongly, had she found herself in the accused's circumstances. To illustrate, suppose that Sam—who has no track record of littering—blames Sally for tossing her cigarette butt out the car window, but is disposed to do so himself if placed in a similar situation. Many contend that these facts about Sam (what might be called his *counterfactual* moral track record) would likewise render any blame on his part hypocritical—and that Sam thereby lacks the standing to blame Sally for littering (Rivera-López 2017; Fritz & Miller 2018; Todd 2019). The latter phenomenon—blaming others for moral errors that we too are disposed to make—goes by the name of “subjunctive hypocrisy” (Todd 2019: 360). Subjunctive hypocritical blame differs ordinary hypocritical blame; in the latter case, an agent blames others for moral errors that she herself has actually made—not merely errors that she is disposed to make. Nonetheless, it is typically thought that being such that one's blame would be hypocritical in *either* the subjunctive *or* the ordinary sense ought to compromise one's standing.

According to what I shall call *The Symmetry View*, then, an agent's either (i) having committed a parallel wrong to the blamee or (ii) being disposed to commit a parallel wrong renders any blame issuing from her direction hypocritical.² Sam lacks the standing to blame Sally for her littering, just as Owen lacks the standing to blame Olivia for hers. Although *The Symmetry View* is not unmotivated, I believe further investigation reveals it to be deeply mistaken (§3). My ambition in this paper will be to defend an *Asymmetry View*, which carves out an important distinction between (i) being such that one's blame would be hypocritical in the ordinary sense, and (ii) being such that one's blame would be subjunctively hypocritical (§4). According to *The Asymmetry View*, only (i) undermines the standing to blame.

1. I say ‘particular moral failings’ because scarcely anyone thinks that an agent's track record undermines her standing to blame others for any moral failing whatsoever. An agent's track record merely restricts the jurisdiction within which she can exercise her entitlement to blame—it does not eliminate that entitlement completely. This having been noted, I will for ease of expression often speak simply of an agent's ‘standing’ or ‘standing to blame’ in what follows.

2. This is simply a first approximation; I will do more to fill in the details as the discussion progresses.

Before getting down to business, some stage-setting will be helpful. Let me, then, begin by saying a little more about the appropriateness of blaming attitudes more generally, and situating talk of hypocrisy within this broader philosophical framework.

2. Hypocrisy and Standing

About once a month, Betty treats herself to some strawberry cheesecake from Fancy Bakery. That these indulgences only take place on a monthly basis is not owing to any impressive feat of willpower on Betty's behalf. Fancy Bakery is a long drive across town—not to mention prohibitively expensive. Given Betty's busy schedule, she seldom finds time to make the journey. One Friday evening, Betty finally manages to make her way to Fancy Bakery, where she purchases two slices of strawberry cheesecake—one for herself, and another for her partner, Bernie. The next day, she makes a beeline for the fridge, poised to indulge. To her horror, neither slice of strawberry cheesecake is anywhere to be found. Not much detective work is needed to reveal that Bernie has gobbled them down. Betty is enraged, and she gives him a piece of her mind.

Philosophical inquests into such interactions have traditionally focused upon those in Bernie's position. The organising question has been what must be true of Bernie—the *blamee*—if he is to be blameworthy for his wrongdoing. We may, for instance, be less inclined to think Bernie blameworthy had such behaviour been beyond his control (had he eaten the cake while sleep-walking, say). In more recent years, however, the moral spotlight has shifted to *blamers* such as Betty. Just as recipients of blame must meet certain conditions if they are to be blameworthy, it is thought that blamers must likewise meet certain conditions if they are to be "blamer-worthy" (Friedman 2013: 272).

Underlying recent work on the 'ethics of blame', then, is the conviction that certain criteria must be met if blame is to be appropriate. One such criterion is epistemic; there would seem to be something morally amiss in Betty's blaming Bernie if she had fairly weak evidence that he was the culprit (see Friedman 2013). It has also been suggested that blame may be inappropriate when the blamer is unresponsive to the blamee's uptake of blame (Smith 2007: 482; Friedman 2013: 275), or fails to proportion her blame to the severity of the moral fault at issue (Smith 2007: 480).

I am inclined to view each of these considerations as bearing upon the *procedural appropriateness* of blame. However, I understand talk of an agent's *standing* to blame to denote a narrower normative category. Following Todd (2019: 351), Betty would still seem to have the standing to blame Bernie even if she had

reached a guilty verdict on the basis of shoddy evidence. What is at issue here is a procedural defect in how Betty goes about *exercising* her entitlement to blame Bernie—not her entitlement to do so. Yet matters seem different where someone else—Betty’s neighbour, for instance—is concerned. While *Betty* may be in a position to blame Bernie for his misbehaviour, it would seem somewhat out of place for their nosy neighbour to pop his head through their kitchen window and join the domestic fray.³ Betty and Bernie’s dispute is simply none of the neighbour’s business. Unlike Betty, the nosy neighbour does not seem positioned to Bernie or to his wrongdoing in the right sort of way to be entitled to resent him. It would of course be understandable for the neighbour to think less of Bernie in light of his misconduct. Yet paradigmatic blaming reactions (resentment, indignation) are something that he plausibly lacks the standing to adopt.⁴

With this background in place, we can now say something more informative as to how hypocritical blame fits into the general philosophical picture. Suppose now that after having been on the receiving end of Betty’s blame, Bernie becomes rather angry. ‘Who are you to blame me for pinching food from the fridge? You steal *my* food all the time!’ If the facts reported here are true, then Betty’s blame seems intolerably hypocritical. She is surely not within her rights to blame Bernie for his misbehaviour if she has subjected him to similar mistreatment! As is the case with meddling blame, then, hypocritical blame—or, to put matters more carefully, being such that one’s blame would be hypocritical—very much seems to undermine an agent’s *standing* to blame others for particular moral failings. Betty is not entitled to blame Bernie for falling short of standards that she fails to live up to herself.

In what follows, I will largely take it for granted that being such that one’s blame would be hypocritical undermines one’s standing to blame.⁵ Our question, recall, concerns whether Betty’s blame would qualify as hypocritical (and whether she would thereby lack the entitlement to blame Bernie) even if her actual moral track record were *clean*. If Betty had never pinched a morsel of food from Bernie’s stores, but was disposed to do so if the opportunity ever arose,

3. This phenomenon often goes by the name of ‘meddlesome blame’. For discussion, see Smith (2007: 478), Bell (2013: 264), and Todd (2019: 348–49).

4. I follow Todd (2019) in thinking that there is an important distinction between *lacking an entitlement* to blame and *exercising an entitlement to blame badly*. That said, Todd himself (2019: 349) takes meddling blame to fall on a different side of this divide than I do; he suggests that onlookers may lack the standing to *express* blame, but not the standing to *feel* it. Since my arguments do not stand or fall with the claim that meddling blame concerns standing, I won’t defend this particular taxonomical choice in further detail here.

5. See Fritz and Miller (2018) for a suggested explanation of the mechanism by which an agent’s standing is undermined in such cases. See also Todd (2019), who suggests that no such explanation may be forthcoming.

would this suffice to render her blame hypocritical, and compromise her standing to blame in turn? In what follows, I side against the orthodoxy, arguing that it would not.

Before proceeding, two final preliminary remarks are in order. First, one might distinguish between the standing to *feel* blame and the standing to *express* it. On most understandings, blame is chiefly an internal phenomenon—one that involves particular evaluative attitudes. But there is an external dimension to blame as well; for such evaluations often find expression in behaviour. When we blame someone, we are apt to shoot them dirty looks, to criticise them, or to lend reproach. Many philosophers understand questions of standing to apply to both the standing to feel blame and the standing to express it (Rossi 2018: 555; Smith 2007: 47).⁶ I will follow their lead here.

Second, I am throughout this paper going to operate with a particular conception of blaming attitudes—one that sometimes goes by the name of the ‘hostile attitudes account’. On this view (widely if not unanimously adopted in recent discussions of hypocritical blame) blame not only involves the belief that another has acted wrongly and is blameworthy for doing so. Blame additionally (and indeed, centrally) involves experiencing a particular range of negative reactive attitudes in response to others’ wrongdoing; resentment, anger, and indignation, among them.

3. The Symmetry View

According to The Symmetry View, ordinary and subjunctive hypocritical blame are symmetrical as far as one’s standing is concerned. An agent falls afoul of the non-hypocrisy condition—that is, she lacks the standing to blame—if she either *has* committed the wrong in question or if she *would* do so under similar circumstances.

Although almost all variations of The Symmetry View centre upon the notion of moral character in some way or other, I will do my best to organise the discussion in a way that is sensitive to their differences. In what follows, I argue against three promising defences of The Symmetry View: one that draws upon anti-luckist considerations (§3.2), another that appeals to statistical evidence (§3.3), and a final avenue of defence that centres upon the posture adopted in acts of blaming (§3.4). Though these distinct defences encounter distinct problems, a common thread running through the discussion will be that The Symmetry View is worryingly under-inclusive, denying standing to far too many moral agents.

6. Some exceptions are Friedman (2013: 271) and Bell (2013: 266), who focus primarily on expressed blame, and Todd (2019: 348), who takes standing to concern only felt blame.

Before applying a critical eye to The Symmetry View, it will be instructive to begin by reflecting upon the relationship between hypocritical blame and moral commitment. This will be helpful for the purposes of situating the discussion, and edifying for later purposes as well.

3.1. Hypocrisy and Commitment

Suppose that Jones has cheated on his partner, and that Smith blames Jones for his adultery. Jones retorts that Smith would have acted just as he did, had he been given the opportunity. On first appearances, this may strike us as a textbook case of subjunctive hypocritical blame on Smith's part; for Jones is appealing to what Smith *would have done* to call his standing into question. However, and following Todd (2019: 360), such cases often turn out to be instances of ordinary hypocritical blame upon closer inspection. Presumably, when Jones retorts that Smith would have acted just as he did, he does not merely pluck this claim out of thin air. There is usually some evidential basis upon which accusations like these tend to rest. In order to make sense of Jones's response, then, it is natural to assume that Smith has *actually done something* to suggest that he is not committed to the values that he has now taken it upon himself to defend.⁷ Perhaps he has seriously considered adultery before, come close to committing it, or treated the matter lightly whenever the topic has been broached. Yet if Smith really has done such things, then his blame is simply hypocritical in the *ordinary sense*; he blames Jones for adultery despite being guilty of a parallel offence.

We can achieve a fuller appreciation of this reasoning by filling in our working account of ordinary hypocritical blame. According to my rudimentary characterisation, ordinary hypocritical blame consists in blaming others for moral faults that parallel our own. On one common way of filling this out—one that I intend to adopt for the purposes of this paper—hypocritical blame fundamentally consists in blaming others for failing to live up to *commitments* that we fail to live up to ourselves (Todd 2019: 362; cf. Rossi 2018). This commitment-based approach helps us to appreciate why Jones's complaint need not be that Smith *has actually committed adultery*. It is better understood as the complaint that Smith is no more committed to the values that tell against infidelity than Jones is. Smith's lack of commitment to these values is what makes his blame hypocritical, and what compromises his standing to blame in turn. The commitment-based approach also explains why we can expect many accusations of subjunctive hypocritical

7. Some may object that Jones's accusation may equally well rest upon *statistical* evidence; for instance, the likelihood of *anyone* acting wrongly in those circumstances. I will consider this possibility shortly.

blame to reduce to accusations of ordinary hypocritical blame. Often enough, our pointing towards *counterfactual* facts about someone (to what they would have done) is simply an indirect way of pointing towards (certain) *actual* facts about them (to what they have actually done); facts which suggest that they are deficiently committed to the values that they blame others for failing to respect.

An additional virtue of the commitment-based framework is that it helps us to clearly distinguish between ordinary and subjunctive hypocritical blame. The distinction between the two, on the model being suggested here, does not lie in the fact that only ordinary hypocritical blame is grounded in actual facts about the agent. Subjunctive hypocritical blame is presumably grounded in actual facts about the agent as well. What grounds the truth of certain counterfactuals about Smith—that he would commit adultery if given the opportunity—are plausibly certain facts about his actual dispositions or his character. The distinction between ordinary and subjunctive hypocritical blame concerns whether or not these dispositions *have manifested themselves*. As we shall see, proponents of The Symmetry View do not require that Smith’s actual lack of commitment to particular values has ever manifested itself in order for his standing to blame to be compromised. It suffices that he actually does lack such a commitment. Advocates of The Asymmetry View, by contrast, only take *a certain class of actual facts* about Smith to make him such that his blame would be hypocritical, and thus, to undermine his standing. His lack of commitment must have somehow manifested itself—in his committing adultery, or planning to do so, for example.

I will have more to say about the commitment-based account of hypocrisy in §4, by which time I will have sown the theoretical seeds needed to harvest it. Let me, however, say a little more now to appease what I expect will be an immediate concern. While both Smith and Jones may be deficiently committed to the values that speak against adultery, only Jones has manifested this deficient commitment in an especially objectionable sort of way—viz. by actually committing adultery. Smith has (let’s suppose) merely come close. These are surely different orders of wrongdoing; are *both* really capable of compromising one’s standing to blame?

I myself am inclined to offer an affirmative answer. As Colin Klein and I have suggested elsewhere (Isserow & Klein 2017: 208), hypocritical blame often does seem to have a kind of “leaky quality” to it. Compare two colleagues, both of whom routinely make sexist remarks but only one of whom (owing to his senior position) has and takes the opportunity to pass over a woman for a promotion, despite her clearly deserving one. Even if the first colleague never had the opportunity to pass over a woman for promotion, he would still seem to lack the entitlement to blame the second for his sexism. As far as hypocritical blame

goes, then, it very much seems to be a lack of commitment that does the moral work, rather than a very narrow range of behavioural expressions of it.⁸

3.2. *The Anti-Luckist Argument*

I will now proceed to examine a range of promising defences of The Symmetry View, beginning with one which draws upon anti-luckist considerations. To this end, it will be helpful to consider the following well-known case, owing to Nagel:

The Nazi Case

Someone who was an officer in a concentration camp might have led a quiet and harmless life if the Nazis had never come to power in Germany. And someone who led a quiet and harmless life in Argentina might have become an officer in a concentration camp if he had not left Germany for business reasons in 1930. (2013: 323)

Nagel's case features two Germans. The first remains in Germany and commits a range of atrocities during the Nazi reign. The second moves abroad and leads a relatively unremarkable life, but (we are invited to imagine) would have been guilty of similar wrongdoing had he stayed. Only the first seems blameworthy. Yet this is surely a matter of luck—luck in the circumstances in which he finds himself. The Nazi Case thus serves as an illustration of *circumstantial moral luck*, whereby situational factors beyond an agent's control affect her blameworthiness.

A quick clarification will be helpful at this stage: there can be different interpretations of the species of luck at work here, depending on our theoretical focus. On the one hand, we might emphasise that while both Germans are equally susceptible to the influence of corrupt and intimidating authority figures, only one finds himself in circumstances where this disposition manifests itself. Given this description, a *synchronic* kind of circumstantial moral luck is at play; the two Germans have the same moral character flaw when we evaluate them, but, owing to circumstance, one never manifests it. On the other hand, we might observe that the German who remains behind likely becomes a morally worse person as a result of manifesting this susceptibility to authority. This suggests a *diachronic* kind of circumstantial moral luck; in the long term, one man has a less depraved character as a result of circumstance. My focus in what follows

8. It is helpful to remind the reader that this is not my final word on hypocritical blame and commitment, but a down payment on a responsible treatment of the issue. The latter is something I aim to provide in §4.

lies squarely with the element of *synchronic circumstantial moral luck* at play.⁹ My interest does not, then, lie with the fact that the German in Argentina would have become a worse person—a person with different values than he actually has—had he remained behind (though this does seem true). Rather, my interest lies with the observation that both Germans are deficiently committed to the values that speak against the Nazis' actions; for both are (regrettably) equally susceptible to the influence of corrupt authorities. Presumably, someone who *was* sufficiently committed to these values would not be so easily sucked in by Nazi propaganda, so willing to defer to the German authorities, or so swiftly intimidated into committing horrendous wrongs—and, *ex hypothesi*, both Germans are susceptible in this very way.

Of course, not everyone agrees that there *is* such a thing as circumstantial moral luck, that situational factors beyond an agent's control *do* affect her blameworthiness. Some favour a competing, anti-luckist assessment of The Nazi Case and others like it. If the difference between the two Germans is merely owing to luck in their circumstances—if both really are equally susceptible to the influence of corrupt authorities, but only one finds himself in circumstances where this disposition manifests itself—then (so this line goes) they are both properly regarded as blameworthy. Importantly for our purposes, these anti-luckist observations lay the foundations for a promising argument for The Symmetry View. Just as an agent's *blameworthiness* ought to be immune to the vagaries of circumstantial luck, so too (it is thought) should her standing to blame others (see, for example, Todd 2019: 363). This move may seem puzzling at first; for what is fundamental to hypocritical blame (we have suggested) is a lack of commitment to particular values—values that one blames another for failing to respect. And it's far from clear why the German who moved to Argentina should be thought to lack a commitment to the values that he defends when he blames those who remained behind. What the proponent of the anti-luckist argument wishes to emphasise, however is that commitment isn't merely a matter of what we *actually* think, feel, or do, but what we *have it in us* to think, feel, or do. Consider, for instance, the role that *character* plays in Todd's appraisal of the adultery case:

[Smith's] actual values and dispositions make it such that, in Jones' situation, he would have done the same thing – or so we claim . . . it is not the mere truth of the relevant conditional that removes Smith's standing, but what (at least allegedly) grounds it, viz., his actual bad character (constituted by his actual non-commitment to the given values). (2019: 360–61)

9. For more on the distinction between synchronic and diachronic moral luck, see Hartman (2017: 135).

This understanding of commitment sits comfortably with Todd's contention that circumstantial luck affects neither blameworthiness nor the standing to blame—and indeed, with The Symmetry View more generally. Whether or not an individual actually does anything to offend against particular values, she may still lack a commitment to those values in virtue of facts about her character that never manifest themselves. These facts about her character, in turn, compromise her standing to blame others for a parallel lack of commitment on their part. Piovarchy has recently drawn a similar lesson from Todd's anti-luckists remarks, taking him to be committed to the following package of claims:

Agents who ϕ but blame others for ϕ -ing only lack the standing to blame when that agent lacks a sufficient commitment to [value] V. This entails that agents who would have ϕ -ed due to a lack of sufficient commitment V, but who haven't ϕ -ed simply due to not being in the relevant setting, will also lack the standing to blame. (2020: 10)

The following, then, is one possible diagnosis that we might expect our anti-luckist to offer of The Nazi Case.¹⁰ Both Germans are deficiently committed to the values that speak against the Nazis' actions; if they *were* sufficiently committed to such values, then they wouldn't be so susceptible to the influence of corrupt authorities. It is true that, owing to luck in their circumstances, only one of them ever *exhibits* this character flaw. Nonetheless, insofar as the German laying low in Argentina actually does lack sufficient commitment to the values in question, he lacks the standing to blame the German who remained behind, on account of the fact that any blame on his part would be subjunctively hypocritical. The German who moved to Argentina may of course *over-estimate* himself in this regard; he may sincerely believe that were he now deported back home, he would swiftly join the resistance and remain steadfastly immune to the corrupting influence of the German authorities. But insofar as he is *wrong* about this—insofar as he *would be* easily sucked in by German propaganda and simply defer to the authorities were he to return—his actual character comprises a deep moral flaw, and this compromises his standing to blame in turn.

Even if the anti-luckist's stance here reflects a neat theoretical package, however, I believe it is one that we have good reason to reject. I myself favour the contrary diagnosis of The Nazi Case: only the man who actually became a Nazi is blameworthy. The other may be equally susceptible to the manipulation of authority figures, but that does not seem to me to render him blameworthy

10. Although both Piovarchy and I interpret Todd along these lines, it is possible that he would offer a different diagnosis of the Nazi case. In what follows, then, I simply speak of 'the anti-luckist', and resist attributing these arguments to Todd himself.

as the first man is.¹¹ I am also inclined to think that the latter man retains the *standing* to blame the first for his wrongdoing. Suppose that, from the comfort of his Argentinian home, he becomes infuriated upon hearing of the horrors being committed by his former compatriots. It seems a stretch to maintain that this man—who, we may imagine, has never believed in Aryan superiority, nor betrayed any hint of ill-will towards Jewish people (but easily would have, had he stayed)—lacks the entitlement to blame his former compatriots for their moral crimes. It should not strike us as morally questionable for such an individual to become morally exercised by the horrors of Nazi Germany—indeed, it should strike us as questionable if they *didn't*.

So far, I have merely offered an exchange of perspectives. Let me, then, move on to discuss what I take to be an important consideration when choosing between them. Denying that Nagel's second German retains the standing to blame the first (as the anti-luckist does) comes at an unacceptable price; for it is not only the immigrant to Argentina who would have acted as the Nazis did in those circumstances, but a great deal many of *us*. This is a lesson often drawn from a range of results in social psychology—most notably, Milgram's (1963) studies of obedience. Milgram's experiments suggest that—given appropriate circumstances and circumstantial pressures—perfectly ordinary people can be brought to do perfectly dreadful things.

A similar conclusion was drawn by Hannah Arendt during her coverage of Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem:

the trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. (1963: 276)

Arendt is well-known for calling attention to the “banality of evil”: unimaginable wrongs are not merely the province of the sadistic or the cartoonishly wicked—they are often carried out by individuals who strike us as perfectly morally ordinary. This is not an idle theoretical observation. It is a deeply significant moral insight—one that ought to alert us to the potential that each of us carries for wrongdoing (cf. Sher 2005: 25–26).

It is also a deeply instructive insight for our purposes; for these considerations alert us to the *corrosiveness* of subjunctive hypocritical blame. If we take

11. My remarks here do presuppose a particular theoretical stance in debates concerning moral luck, and it may be thought, accordingly, that it is really here that the true battleground lies. However, one could equally well view the present discussion as providing an argument in favour of that particular theoretical stance (and against the anti-luckist's corresponding position). As I will now argue, the anti-luckist position has implausible implications for our understanding of hypocrisy and the standing to blame.

Milgram and Arendt at their word, then many of us (a great deal many more than we are likely to feel comfortable admitting) are such that we would have acted as the Nazis did—or (to put matters more carefully), are such that we too would exhibit a deficient commitment to the values in question, were we to face similarly challenging circumstances. If we follow proponents of The Symmetry View, then, we arrive at the unpalatable conclusion that *we* lack the standing to blame the Nazis for their wrongdoing. It is in this sense that subjunctive hypocritical blame is worryingly corrosive; it dissolves our entitlements to blame even the most serious of moral offenders.

It may be tempting to dismiss this argument by pointing out that we've learned enough from history to avoid egregious moral errors of the kind that the Nazis made. It takes no great stretch of the imagination to suppose that the German in Argentina would have been susceptible to the propaganda campaign laid out by the Nazi authorities. It seems unreasonable, however, to suppose that the same is true of *us now*; for we have access to moral and empirical insights that were unavailable to those in the 1930s. Yet this response simply misses the general philosophical lesson. Consider Milgram's experiments once again; were any of us ever placed in a similar experimental setting, we would likely resist subjecting the learner to painful electric shocks when instructed to do so. Knowing what we know now, our moral antennae are well-attuned to this particular kind of situation. But that's not to say that we would prevail against a parallel moral test for which we are relatively *unprepared*. The real question, then, is not whether we would perform *the exact same wrongs* as the Nazis were there to be some sort of revival of Nazi ideology in our present day society (here, one can reasonably hope we would prevail). The real question is whether we would perform *comparable* wrongs—wrongs that exhibit a deficiency of commitment to the same values—to those in Nazi Germany, were we placed in *comparable* circumstances. That our epistemic situation is now improved simply suggests that a comparable circumstance would have to be one that is similarly testing, raising moral challenges for which we are similarly unprepared. And experiments such as Milgram's do seem to me to support a tempered pessimism on that front. It is far from clear that we *should* be so confident in our capacity to withstand similar sorts of moral challenges—and so, it is far from clear that we should be so confident that we really do have the standing to blame the Nazis or similar wrongdoers on the anti-luckist's account.

As should now be clear, then, my arguments here do not rest upon attributing to the anti-luckist the claim that if any of us here and now were suddenly inserted into Nazi Germany, we would immediately begin to act just as the Nazis did. (My conjectures may be pessimistic-sounding, but they are not *that* pessimistic.) I am instead drawing attention to an important possibility—a

gloomy one, to be sure, but not all that unlikely either given the available evidence. That possibility is that we too may very well harbour a deficient commitment to the values under consideration; a commitment that has not manifested itself, but would in relevant sorts of circumstances. Of course, given the nature of the circumstances that I am imagining—those which present a moral challenge for which we are epistemically unprepared—I cannot provide a description of it (for I too am, *ex hypothesi*, unprepared for this challenge). And so, the anti-luckist may want to respond that whatever these circumstances may be, they are unlikely to reveal a deficient commitment to *sufficiently similar* values on our part as those that are at issue in the Nazi case. That would be an understandable retort. However, and importantly, worries concerning corrosiveness do not end with the Nazi case; as I will explain shortly, such worries extend to more familiar species of wrongdoing as well.

Some may want to resist the more general focus upon our potential for serious wrongdoing here. Suppose my conjecture is correct; that we too would, were we now placed in similarly challenging circumstances, fail a parallel moral test and exhibit deficient commitment to the values under consideration. Are our actual moral characters really impugned by this fact? My own view is that they are so impugned (though I disagree with the anti-luckist that this ought to compromise our standing). And I do not appear to be alone in thinking so.¹² Our potential for serious wrongdoing is not, moreover, something that I think the anti-luckist can hope to get away from insofar as she really is concerned about the quality of our actual characters and our actual degree of moral commitment; for what an agent *would do* in various sorts of circumstances seems to me to be of the utmost relevance to evaluating their actual moral character and actual commitment to moral values. As Vranas points out, “Wars and plagues may be extraordinary, but behavior in them can be revealing in ways in which habitual behavior in everyday life is not” (2005: 28).

Some philosophers will no doubt be inclined to regard the corrosive implications of subjunctive hypocritical blame as an interesting philosophical result rather than an unacceptable moral conclusion. Indeed, Piovarchy (2020) appeals to these considerations in the course of arguing that we do lack the standing to blame the wrongdoers in Milgram’s experiments. It is his contention that we lack the standing to blame others for a lack of commitment to moral values when our subjunctive wrongdoing suggests a parallel lack of commitment on

12. 81% of subjects who were asked whether their view of a friend’s moral character would be affected upon learning that this friend would behave badly towards them (refuse help, for example) in unusual circumstances (a flood or a war, say) answered in the affirmative (Vranas 2005: 28–29).

our part—and, to his mind, the evidence does give us reason to think that we are subjunctive wrongdoers in this regard.¹³

The choice that we face here—interesting philosophical result or unacceptable moral conclusion—may ultimately come down to a matter of philosophical taste. For my part, however, I think that we have good reason to side with the latter verdict, especially once we appreciate just how corrosive subjunctive hypocritical blame can be. The corrosiveness problem does not merely concern spectacular circumstances that lend themselves to corruption (like The Nazi Case); it also concerns opportunities for more familiar forms of wrongdoing. There are many moral failings to which we are all prone from time to time; ignoring a beggar on the sidewalk, betraying a friend in the face of temptation, lying to a loved one to avoid a conflict. It is, to a marked degree, a matter of luck whether or not we find ourselves in these situations that tend to bring out the lesser angels of our nature. It is the anti-luckist's contention that we ought not allow lady luck to determine our standing in such cases; if we are in fact deficiently committed to the values of generosity or honesty, then we lack the standing to blame others for a parallel lack of commitment on their part—even if we ourselves are never actually put to the test and never actually fail. Yet it is far from obvious that our standing to blame others—be they Nazis or lesser wrongdoers—really *is* compromised if we *do* manage to avoid situations in which we are amenable to moral failure. It is a sad fact of life that opportunities for moral heroism and moral cowardice are unevenly distributed among us. But we shouldn't infer from the fact that individuals were simply (un)lucky to have particular opportunities that their standing should be compromised independently of what life happens to throw their way. The fault may lie both in our stars and in ourselves.

It may be objected that The Symmetry View does not throw our standing into jeopardy to quite the degree that I have suggested. In particular, it may be wondered precisely what justifies the generalisation from cases of spectacular circumstantial pressures to opportunities for lesser forms of wrongdoing. The answer is that the empirical evidence itself suggests that the lesson can be generalised in this fashion. It is not only high-stakes obedience contexts in which most people tend to respond to situational factors in a similar way. They also tend to do so in contexts that present opportunities for more pedestrian forms of wrongdoing: from ignoring the needs of a stranger when pressed for time (Darley & Batson 1973) to neglecting to help people when others are around to

13. Some may prefer to say (as I would) not that we would likely act in the exact same way if placed in the exact same situation as Milgram's subjects (this seems unlikely, given what we now know), but that we would likely act in ways that demonstrate a deficient commitment to the relevant values, were we placed in a similarly testing situation. (Though see Vranas 2005: 9, who argues that ". . . most people would behave deplorably if they participated in Milgram's experiment".)

do the moral work (Latané & Darley 1968). While this evidence is defeasible, it does provide grounds for supposing that most of us are vulnerable to similar sorts of moral obstacles.

3.3. *The Appeal to Statistical Evidence*

Although the concerns that I have raised do not stand or fall with the particulars of Nagel's example, there is a noteworthy feature of this case. It is not merely the German sitting things out in Argentina who would have acted as other Germans did under the circumstances, but *almost anyone* (or, perhaps we should say, almost anyone *at the time*). Claims such as these do not strike us as lacking moral consequence. When placed on the receiving end of blame, it is not uncommon to respond by pointing out that almost anyone (including the blamer, presumably) would have acted the same.¹⁴ And this often *does* appear to mitigate blame. Yet this observation would seem to support The Symmetry View; for it suggests that a blamer's standing to blame *can* be compromised by what they ultimately have it in them to do.

One defence against this line of reasoning would be to maintain that the purpose of the 'almost anyone would have done that' response (hereafter, the 'almost-anyone-response') is to cast doubt upon *the blamee's blameworthiness* rather than *the blamer's standing*. This diagnosis seems fitting in some cases. Sometimes, the blamee may be enlisting the almost-anyone-response to emphasise the over-demandingness of the requirement at issue (see Rivera-López 2017: 346). Perhaps the reason why almost anyone *would have* done that is because few if any people *could have* done otherwise; doing otherwise may require a feat of moral heroism of which few are capable. Under such circumstances—and, given further supplementing premises (perhaps of the 'ought-implies-can' variety)—the almost-anyone-response may lead us to conclude that the blamee was not after all at fault.

Yet this can't be the whole story. Sometimes people strike us as blameworthy *even if* almost anyone would have acted as they did. Following Mason and Wilson, blameworthiness need not be "distributed on a curve" (2017: 91; see also Vranas 2005: 7–8). Just about anyone (suppose) would have acted as Milgram's subjects

14. Some may think that the right formulation of this response is '*anyone* would have done that'—not '*almost* anyone would have done that'. However, my impression is that the latter is what is typically intended by the former. It is, after all, often taken to be an unfitting response to 'anyone would have done that' to cite examples of a few moral heroes. To this, it is often replied, 'yes, but they're *moral saints!*' This suggests to me that there is some element of implicit quantifier restriction in the claim that 'anyone would have done that'; the domain is implicitly restricted to ordinary persons, excluding the morally extraordinary among us.

did under the relevant conditions. But it doesn't necessarily follow that *those* individuals aren't blameworthy for subjecting people to painful electric shocks. Unfortunately, wrongdoers do sometimes find themselves in the majority.¹⁵

Just why *does* the almost-anyone-response often strike us as an appropriate response to blame, then? This is not the sort of question that easily lends itself to single answer. But let me offer what I expect are two important pieces of a larger picture. First, moral requirements can be demanding without being over-demanding. When she invokes the almost-anyone-response, the blamee may be reminding her accuser that it was *incredibly difficult* to do what was right under the circumstances. While this need not lead the accuser to retract their blame, it may lead them to temper it, or to be more forgiving in their assessment.

Second, it is helpful to distinguish between blameworthiness and blame-worthiness (see Woods 2016: 88–89; Woods 2021). Taking a pen home from the office or keeping small change when a restaurant undercharges seem like minor moral infractions. Agents may be genuinely blameworthy for these peccadillos, in the sense that they have committed a moral wrong and satisfied the criteria for moral responsibility (insert your favourite ones here). But it doesn't follow that they would be especially *worthy* of blame. Following Woods (2016), we can and should exercise discretion in our blaming practices. We often refrain from blaming others because doing so would be pedantic or unkind. When it is a minor moral infraction that is at issue, then, the almost-anyone-response may simply give expression to the thought, 'Sure, what I did was wrong, but is it really worth blaming me for such a trifling misdemeanour?' Importantly (and to enlist a distinction drawn earlier) this response draws attention to a *procedural* defect in how an agent exercises her entitlement to blame. It does not challenge her entitlement to do so.

For these reasons, I do not believe that the almost-anyone-response can be called upon to rescue The Symmetry View. The almost-anyone-response is, I think, often best understood as an invitation for a blamer to reconsider a judgment of blameworthiness (or *blameworthiness*)—not as a challenge to their standing to blame.

3.4. *The Moral Superiority Argument*

Eduardo Rivera-López's defence of The Symmetry View, like the anti-luckist's, takes an agent's standing to blame to be unaffected by circumstantial luck (2017:

15. Of course, we may often be tempted to treat the fact that some behaviour is common as exculpatory. But caution needs to be exercised here; for we sometimes *treat* behaviour as excused on account of its commonness when we really shouldn't—when it isn't truly excusing. See Woods (2021) for discussion.

334). Yet he offers a distinct justification for this outlook—one premised upon the idea that blame communicates moral superiority:

Having moral standing to blame implies being morally superior (in some specific respect) to the objected person. Being morally superior or inferior is a trait of character. It means being the kind of person who, under certain circumstances, acts in certain ways and not in other ways. . . . If the objector would have acted in the same way as the criticized person, the objector is not morally superior to the criticized person and, therefore, is disabled to blame the latter. (2017: 350–51)

In Rivera-López's view, then, blame communicates that the blamer is morally superior to the blamee (2017: 345). It is for this reason that an agent can lack the standing to blame in virtue of the dispositions that constitute her character; for it follows from her *having* such dispositions that she is *not* morally superior to the individual whom she blames, and her blame falsely communicates that she is. This restores a kind of symmetry between ordinary and subjunctive hypocritical blame: both constitute false portrayals of moral superiority.

I believe that Rivera-López goes wrong both in the emphasis that he places upon moral character, and in his contention that blame communicates moral superiority. Let me take the first concern first. Rivera-López places a great deal of importance upon an agent's character in determining her standing to blame. In his estimation, an agent's moral standing ". . . depends only on whether [she] is the kind of person who would perform (or not perform) the same kind of action under similar circumstances" (2017: 348).

One may wonder about the implications of this picture for the morally corrupt, who are disposed to perform many moral wrongs. Since any blame on behalf of such persons would (likely) falsely communicate moral superiority, they would often seem morally disabled from blaming others on Rivera-López's account. Interestingly, Rivera-López accepts this implication of his view:

The more serious kind of fault we are ready to perform, and therefore, the more depraved our character, the more general is our moral incapacity to blame others. A serial killer is not in a position to blame others for almost anything they can do. (2017: 356)

These remarks suggest to me that Rivera-López actually takes blame to communicate that one is a morally superior person *tout court*—not merely that one is morally superior with respect to the specific fault at issue. (Even if Rivera-López does have the latter, more qualified claim in mind, his proposal still fails to persuade. As I will argue, shortly, blame need not communicate even this more

limited form of moral superiority.) On this stronger version of the proposal, it is not necessary that an agent (has or) is disposed to commit similar wrongs to the blamee for her standing to be compromised; it suffices that she is disposed to perform wrongs *of a similar magnitude or worse*.

Yet there are good reasons to resist this outlook, according to which the morally flawed lack the standing to blame. Consider Omar Little from the TV series *The Wire*, who robs drug dealers for a living, and kills many people in the process. Having become fed up with Omar's escapades, Stringer Bell—one of the Barksdale gang's higher-ranking officials—orders a(n ultimately unsuccessful) hit on Omar while he is taking his grandmother to church. Omar is enraged at Bell for violating the "Sunday truce" between rival gangs. But while he is far from being a moral saint, Omar's blame seems neither standingless nor objectionable. Indeed, it is precisely *Omar's* resenting Bell that communicates to us that ordering a Sunday hit really was taking things too far.

Omar's case is reminiscent of a more general phenomenon: we often emphasise the grievous nature of a wrong by observing that *even someone deeply morally flawed* took offense to it. In the context of the present discussion, it is instructive to observe that we do *not* under such circumstances tend to say, 'Even A was inclined to blame B for what he did—though, we can of course safely discount As blame, since she's a bad egg. It's not as though *she* has the right to get upset.' Quite the contrary: we take A's blame under such circumstances to be edifying. When even those who are deeply morally corrupt are offended by our behaviour, that's usually a decent sign that *we* have gone seriously wrong somewhere. Once again, then, The Symmetry View seems guilty of a problematic sort of under-inclusivity, denying the standing to blame to agents who very much seem to have it.

Rivera-López may protest that such conclusions neglect (what he takes to be) a crucial feature of blame: the communication of moral superiority. Omar Little is such that any blame on his part would amount to a false portrayal of moral superiority, and thus, be standingless. This brings me to my second concern with Rivera-López's position: I am not inclined to agree that blame need communicate any moral superiority.

Consider a variation of the example with which we began. Suppose that Carl and Cara are two committed environmentalists, neither of whom usually smokes. On one occasion, Carl blames Cara for carelessly tossing a cigarette butt out of the car window. Cara's smoking and littering on this occasion was a rare lapse. She is generally more committed to saving the environment than Carl; she invests more of her time and resources into that project, and is more willing to forgo certain luxuries in service of it. In this respect, Cara is morally superior to Carl. On Rivera-López's way of seeing things, then, Carl's blame would amount to a false communication of moral superiority—for it would falsely convey that

he is more committed to saving the environment than Cara—and would thus be standingless. Yet this seems like the wrong lesson to draw. Carl’s blame need not communicate any moral superiority on his part. Indeed, it seems that Carl could pair his blame with an acknowledgment of his acute moral *inferiority* in these matters. Carl might acknowledge that the occasional moral lapse is to be expected of lesser mortals such as himself, but that Cara of all people should know better. *Pace* Rivera-López, this acknowledgement of moral inferiority does not seem to undermine Carl’s standing to blame at all; if anything, Carl’s humility helps him to come out of this moral interaction looking better—not worse.

4. The Asymmetry View

Taken together, the considerations raised in §3 should, at the very least, provide us with reasons to reduce our confidence in The Symmetry View. If there were an alternative proposal on offer that retained many of its virtues while avoiding its attendant problems, then we would have reason to regard that proposal favourably. My remaining task will be to develop such a proposal. I begin by drawing some lessons from the preceding discussion concerning how we ought to understand the notion of moral commitment at play in hypocritical blame (§4.1). To anticipate (and to a first approximation), I argue that for the purposes of the non-hypocrisy condition on the standing to blame, we should understand the hypocrite’s deficiency of commitment as a *manifest* deficiency of commitment. In order for an agent to be such that her blame would qualify as hypocritical—and thus, in order for her to be such that she lacks the standing to blame—we must be able to identify a parallel failing in her *actual* track record.

I am sensitive to the worry that this proposal is unacceptably arbitrary, or merely symptomatic of an epistemic hurdle. However, I also believe that there are sensible replies to these concerns, and that The Asymmetry View has enough going for it elsewhere to compensate for any apparent shortcomings in this regard. In §4.2, I add some further precisifications to the proposal in the course of addressing remaining reservations concerning moral luck, together with the worry that my position makes the standing to blame too easy to come by.

4.1. Commitment and Standing

In §3.1, I suggested that what lies at the heart of hypocritical blame (and, in turn, undermines standing) is a lack of commitment to certain values. However, I also cautioned against being overly restrictive in this regard. In particular, we should not require that the accuser has evinced a lack of moral commitment *in the exact*

same way as the accused in order for her blame to qualify as hypocritical. Someone with a track record of sexist behaviour is not entitled to blame their boss for passing over a woman for a promotion—even if they have never passed over a woman for promotion themselves.

However, the arguments developed in §3 suggest to me that we should not be too *permissive* in what we count as a deficiency of commitment either. An agent who has never actually offended against particular values should not lose her entitlement to blame others for failing to respect them simply because her dispositional profile is found wanting. Yet this ushers in the all-important question: precisely what *does* count as deficient commitment in this context? The time has surely come to attempt an answer.

Here, then, is how I believe that the notion of commitment operates as far as the non-hypocrisy condition on standing is concerned. In order for an agent to qualify as deficiently committed to the values that she blames others for failing to respect (in order for her to be such that her blame would be hypocritical), she must have somehow *manifested* this lack of commitment. These manifestations are likely to differ on a case-by-case basis, and I shall revisit this issue in §4.2. For now, let me just emphasise that my proposal doesn't rest upon any sort of moral behaviourism. Manifestations of deficient commitment need not be restricted to instances of *observable behaviour*; they can include such things as planning to commit a wrong, dismissing others' efforts to protect against a wrong, and indifference to the need to address a wrong. Where there is no manifest lack of commitment, the agent retains her defeasible entitlement to blame others.

This account of deficient commitment is at present incomplete. For an agent may have—in between manifesting her lack of commitment at T_1 and blaming others for a similar deficiency at T_3 —somehow *reinstated* this commitment among her moral priorities. Our sexist office worker, for example, may have spent the last year earnestly attending sexual harassment seminars. Under such circumstances, we may want to say that his standing to blame has been restored. When setting out our criteria for deficient commitment, then, we ought to specify that the agent who has manifested a deficiency of commitment *remains* deficiently committed to the values at stake. Thus, we have:

Commitment_{HYP}: An agent qualifies as deficiently committed to the values that she blames others for failing to respect (i.e., she is such that her blaming others for failing to respect these values would be hypocritical) just in case she has manifested this lack of commitment and remains deficiently committed to these values.

It is precisely because I endorse Commitment_{HYP} that I favour The Asymmetry View, and contend that it is only if an agent's blame would be hypocritical in

the *ordinary* sense that she should be said to lack the standing to blame; for the deficient commitment at issue in subjunctive hypocritical blame is *non-manifest* deficient commitment, and that, in my view, should not be taken to undermine standing.

I'll have more details to add to this sketch shortly. Before doing so, it's worth pausing to note its serviceability: Commitment_{HYP} smoothly handles the case studies that caused trouble for The Symmetry View. Earlier, I suggested that Carl is entitled to blame Cara, a committed environmentalist, for littering. Carl may not be as committed as Cara is to protecting the environment. But it need not follow from this information about his character that Carl has ever manifested a deficient committed to the values at stake. Thus, Commitment_{HYP} delivers the right result: his blame need not be hypocritical. The case of Omar Little is also easily handled. An agent can be strongly committed to some values but deficiently committed to others, whatever her moral character happens to be like. Though Omar is hardly an upstanding moral citizen, he has never manifested a lack of commitment to the values that speak against violating the Sunday truce. Thus, Commitment_{HYP} delivers the correct verdict here as well: Omar is entitled to blame Stringer Bell.

So far, I have effectively been using 'commitment' as a place-holder, relying to some degree upon our intuitive sense of what it ordinarily involves. Let me now do a little more to flesh it out. I conceive of value commitments as species of pro-attitudes; when we are committed to values, we are typically motivated to pursue or to promote them. However, and as Tiberius (2000) observes, value commitments are not just any species of pro-attitudes—they are pro-attitudes that we take ourselves to have *reasons* for having. Unlike "whims, fleeting fancies, and stubborn desires . . . we take there to be something at stake in these commitments which is not present in other of our affective attitudes" (2000: 432). Value commitments are viewed as normatively meaningful, and it is precisely because of this that we do not simply abandon them whenever they conflict with other things that we want. Our value commitments rather *constrain* our pursuit of other ends; there is usually a "presumption in their favour" when we deliberate about what to do (2000: 431). It is for this reason that, following Tiberius (2000: 432), agents are typically willing to sacrifice other things that they want for the sake of their commitments.

In keeping with this outlook, I understand being appropriately committed to moral values to require affording those values a suitable place in one's priorities.¹⁶ Someone who is truly committed to a value will be willing to take on a

16. Precisely what makes for a *suitable* place is difficult to determine independently of any particular moral theory. More demanding moral theories may require that we afford moral values a very high place in our priorities. Those that make room for prerogatives or options may allow for more discretion.

range of costs to uphold it, and to forgo a range of gains. A friend who is truly committed to loyalty will, for instance, be disposed to keep our secrets even when doing so means forgoing the social gains of gossiping, or withstanding others' frustration as she remains tight-lipped.

Even if this notion of commitment is found agreeable, it may be objected that it is not the notion that I defend above; Commitment_{HYP} makes no reference to an agent's dispositions—it concerns only their manifestation. On my way of seeing things, then, moral commitment is amenable to (purely) dispositional analysis, but in order to render an agent's blame hypocritical (and thus, to undermine her standing), such commitment (or rather, deficiency thereof) must be manifest. I appreciate that this claim may strike us as pre-theoretically peculiar, but it is not unmotivated. One motivating factor is its serviceability; as I have noted, the proposal accommodates our intuitive reactions to a range of cases. A further rationale concerns the corrosiveness problem (§3.2); The Asymmetry View avoids this by restricting our moral focus to an agent's actual track-record.

An additional line of support for The Asymmetry view can be found in work on traits of character. Alvarez (2017) has recently argued that moral character traits differ from other kinds of dispositions in that they violate an independence condition; their existence is *dependent upon* their manifestation. To her mind, an agent must have actually manifested the character trait of (say) generosity in order to qualify as having it—in order to be a generous person. Now, my arguments do not commit me to a parallel claim concerning moral commitment. I have no qualms with analysing commitment (or deficiency thereof) in purely dispositional terms, and qualifying that such (deficient) commitment does not deprive an agent of the standing to blame in the complete absence of its manifestation. Still, it is worth noting that arguments of the kind that Alvarez puts forward will tend to favour my conclusions; for they suggest that actually manifesting a particular quality of character—whether a moral virtue or a commitment to particular values—carries a distinct sort of significance.

Some may find it difficult to shake the worry that I am merely chasing the scent of an epistemic problem. Whether or not an agent ever manifests her deficiency of moral commitment, it remains true that she *is* deficient in this regard. Perhaps we cannot ever *know* this. But allowing our epistemically impoverished situation to dictate our moral verdicts here seems unacceptably arbitrary.

Though I feel the force of this worry, I do not regard it as devastating. Consider the following case:

Adam discovers that his wife Amy has been cheating on him. Adam has never fantasised about committing adultery, and has even forgone the opportunity to cheat on Amy in the past. In the midst of a heated

conversation between the two, a strange figure appears. He introduces himself as the Possible Worlds Surveyor, and informs them that he has the power to see how they behave across possible worlds. The Possible Worlds Surveyor reveals that in the nearest world where Adam faces similarly tempting circumstances, he cheats on Amy.

Would this verdict on behalf of the Possible Worlds Surveyor really render Adam's blame hypocritical—in such a way as to rob him of the standing to blame Amy for her infidelity? Perhaps it would lead Adam to be slightly more forgiving. His own dispositions may provide him with evidence that restraint was difficult under the circumstances, and difficulty may sometimes shape our assessments of blameworthiness. Nonetheless, Adam's entitlement to blame Amy doesn't seem to me to have simply disappeared. Indeed, this is all the more true if we imagine that the very reason *why* Adam has never actually faced tempting circumstances is that he generally takes greater care than Amy to avoid them. Is it then still of relevance that in those worlds where Adam either fails to exercise such care or is unsuccessful in avoiding such temptations, he would act the same? It doesn't seem so to me.

A final matter that awaits resolution concerns which *kinds* of behaviour qualify as manifestations of deficient commitment. I have suggested that making sexist remarks and passing over a woman for promotion can both evince a lack of commitment to the values that tell against sexism, and that both can, in turn, compromise one's standing to blame others for sexism. Yet other cases are not so clear. Would having made a resolution to do something sexist suffice? Would having intrusive sexist thoughts, or even sexist fantasies? I expect that some of these cases will fall in a moral grey area—enough to cast doubt upon standing, but not enough to undermine it categorically. Others, however, are more amenable to principled treatment. In what follows, I argue that a manifest deficiency of commitment requires a *willing* on the agent's behalf. This qualification rules out intrusive thoughts, and rules in resolutions.

4.2. *Remaining Reservations*

Let me now add some further precisifications to The Asymmetry View. The first of these concerns a theoretical loose end from §3.2. There, I suggested that we may be willing to stomach some degree of circumstantial luck in who enjoys the standing to blame. Indeed, I think this is something that we *had better* be willing to stomach, lest we rob ourselves of the entitlement to hold grave wrongdoers to moral account. Yet this professed tolerance for moral luck may be thought to raise problems of its own. Consider:

Prom Date

Molly and Naomi hear that a nerd is going to ask one of them out to Prom. Each decides that they will cruelly refuse his request and make a spectacle of the rejection. The nerd sees Molly first, so he asks her. She refuses. Naomi blames Molly for her cruelty.

It is highly intuitive that Naomi lacks the standing to blame Molly. Yet it also seems difficult to accommodate that intuition if we deny that being such that one's blame would be *subjunctively* hypocritical compromises one's standing. To what else can we appeal to support the intuition that Naomi's blame would be hypocritical, if not to what she *would have* done?

On closer inspection, however, there is no need to retreat to facts about Naomi's dispositions to accommodate the intuition that she lacks the standing to blame Molly. We can simply maintain that Naomi's blame would be hypocritical in the *ordinary* sense. Notice that both Molly *and* Naomi have offended against the values that speak against publicly humiliating someone; for *both* have formed intentions to humiliate the nerd. These intentions should, I submit, strike us as manifestations of a deficient commitment to the values that speak against cruelty.

Indeed, Prom Date does not really seem to be a case of *circumstantial* moral luck on reflection. If we were to allow facts about whom the nerd runs into first to dictate these girls' blameworthiness or their standing, then we would be allowing for *resultant* moral luck. We would, that is, be allowing luck in the outcomes of their identical choices to shape our moral assessments of them. But my proposal does not allow for this. Insofar as Molly's and Naomi's choices have already been made—or, in my language, their deficiency of commitment has already been manifest—their blameworthiness has already been decided, and their standing to blame one another already compromised. There is no role left for factors beyond their control to play. Even if my proposal allows circumstantial luck to affect one's standing to blame, then, there is less scope for resultant luck to do so.

(I do not want to pretend that this qualification will be to everyone's liking. Some philosophers are *systematically* anti-luckist: they deny the existence of moral luck altogether. Others, however, are *tempered* anti-luckists; they are willing to countenance some forms of moral luck but not others. Importantly for my purposes, it is customary for the latter to reject only resultant moral luck [see Khoury 2018]. At the very least, then, my proposal should appease tempered anti-luckists, even if it fails to satisfy the systematically anti-luckist among us.)

My handling of *Prom Date* is in keeping with internalist views of moral responsibility, according to which the objects of blameworthiness are an agent's *willings*, as opposed to her physical movements, or the effects thereof. (These may alternatively be thought of as "tryings" or "volitions".) As Khoury (2018) observes, internalist views allow for a principled distinction between resultant moral luck and other varieties. Insofar as it is the quality of an agent's willings that is at issue in assessments of responsibility, it is these to which we must direct our attention in our moral assessments of her. The circumstances in which we find ourselves can indeed affect our willings, and so, circumstantial luck can affect our responsibility. However, the causal impacts of our willings upon the world are external to them, and so, do not affect our responsibility—ergo, there is no resultant moral luck.

Readers of a certain philosophical persuasion may want to identify willings with actions. Others may prefer to think of willings as the mental component of actions that invests them with voluntary character. It is not my business to adjudicate that philosophical dispute here. (See Khoury 2018 for an extended treatment.) For present purposes, the main take-away is that it is willings that serve as manifestations of deficient commitment. It is for this reason that everything from an agent's forming an intention to do wrong to her wishing others ill or turning a blind eye to moral wrongdoing can properly be taken to constitute a manifest lack of commitment to particular values.

I take this clarification to add a further measure of plausibility to the proposal on offer. A notable concern for The Asymmetry View is that it over-counts non-hypocritical blamers. Controversially, the proposal invests deficiently committed moral agents with the standing to blame so long as that deficiency fails to manifest itself—and it may be worried that there are plenty such persons to be found. In requiring that hypocritical blamers have manifested a deficient commitment to certain values, however, I am not requiring that they have actually engaged in specific forms of observable physical behaviour. It is in the *internal* components of action where our focus should lie. Since this internalising strategy broadens the range of phenomena through which deficient commitment can find expression, it should make us more confident that the proposal will tend to deny agents standing in cases where they do seem to lack it.

Admittedly, some may have their confidence on this score shaken by the following variation of *Prom Date*:

Prom Date II

Molly and Naomi hear that a nerd is going to ask one of them out to Prom. Each refrains from giving the matter any further thought. The nerd

sees Molly first, so he asks her—she refuses, and makes a spectacle of the rejection. Naomi blames Molly for her cruelty. Had Naomi been asked to Prom, however, she too would have refused, and humiliated the nerd.

Many will feel that Naomi lacks the standing to blame Molly in this case as well; that she is disposed to cruelly refuse the invitation seems enough to render her blame hypocritical. But here, it seems that The Asymmetry View really is in trouble; for there is nothing that Naomi has *actually done* that could indict her—all that we have to go upon are her (non-manifested) dispositions.

I myself am inclined to question our first-pass intuitions here; for it is not at all clear to me that Naomi *does* lack the standing to blame Molly in this case. Why, then, it is intuitive to think that she does? I suspect it is because these divulged facts about Naomi's counterfactual track record make it difficult for us to avoid building in certain assumptions about her *actual* track record. Insofar as Naomi is disposed to cruelly refuse the nerd's request, it is tempting to suppose that she is generally rather full of herself, a high school bully, or a social snob. If that were so, however, then Naomi's blame would simply be hypocritical in the *ordinary* sense; for she likely would have treated (or intended to treat) others in a similarly cruel manner as Molly treats the nerd. Under *these* circumstances, a proponent the Asymmetry View would agree that she lacks the standing to blame Molly. However, once we take active steps to imagine that Naomi has *never* manifested any deficiency of commitment to the values that speak against high school snobbery—and that, it should be emphasised, is something we must do if the objection here is to gain a foothold—it becomes far less intuitive that she really does lack the standing to blame Molly. If Naomi has never felt any disdain for high school misfits nor been guilty of any social snobbery, then it is far less clear that she really is unentitled to blame Molly in this case.

It is in cases such as these that The Asymmetry View comes apart from The Symmetry View in important ways. The proponent of the anti-luckist argument, for instance, likely *would* take Naomi to lack the standing to blame Molly in Prom Date II. Naomi's actual character is such that, were she asked to Prom, she too would cruelly refuse the nerd's request and make a spectacle of the rejection. She is, in other words, deficiently committed to the values that tell against publicly humiliating someone just as Molly is. Given this, any blame on Naomi's part would be subjunctively hypocritical—and so, she lacks the standing to blame Molly for what she does. Perhaps some will find themselves in agreement with the anti-luckist on this front. But for those who are inclined (as I am) to focus their moral attention less upon Naomi's counterfactual wrongdoing and more upon her actual track record (she has, *ex hypothesi*, never felt disdain for high school misfits nor been guilty of any social snobbery), the anti-luckist's arguments are likely to seem inconclusive at best.

5. Conclusion

My foremost aim in this paper has been to caution against taking ordinary and subjunctive hypocritical blame to be symmetrical. The Symmetry View, though well-domesticated in the philosophical literature, is a view that we have good reason to resist.

The Asymmetry View that I favour does not suffer from its competitor's shortcomings. But that's not to say that it is without its own problems. The Asymmetry View requires that we tolerate some degree of luck in who enjoys the standing to blame. It also leaves open the possibility that the sphere of entitled blamers may be larger than some of us pre-theoretically believed it to be—though that will of course depend upon the likelihood of the deficiently committed among us manifesting their moral shortcomings.

I have argued that neither worry ought to be regarded as devastating. Steadfast anti-luckists will predictably remain unpersuaded on the former count. How devastating the latter concern proves to be is difficult to discern in the absence of further empirical evidence—viz., information concerning the likelihood of an agent manifesting her deficient commitment to particular values in some way or other. On this score, I can merely offer my own philosophical hunch: deficient value commitments seldom fail to find expression in our actions.

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