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Hypocrisy in Politics

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The charge of hypocrisy is a peculiar kind of accusation: it is damning and ubiquitous; it is used to deny the hypocrite standing to speak; and it is levelled against a great variety of conduct. Much of the philosophical literature on hypocrisy is aimed at explaining why hypocrisy is wrongful and worthy of censure. We focus instead on the use of the accusation of hypocrisy and argue for a revisionary claim. People think that hypocrisy in politics is bad and that calling it out is good. Our novel claim is that even if hypocrisy in politics is bad (and that is a big if), calling it out is worse. We give a feminist case as to why accusations of hypocrisy are problematic. We also go further and claim that hypocrisy is a ubiquitous and perhaps even a necessary and beneficial part of political debate in liberal democracies. We also consider and reject candour as a possible alternative solution to hypocrisy in public debate. We argue that requiring people to be candid is not necessarily a good solution because it will often require one to divulge what is private when there are good reasons not to do so.

1. Introduction

A politician backs tough drug laws and criticizes middle class drug takers but admits to having taken cocaine.[1] A married politician runs a campaign against same-sex marriage on the grounds of family values while having an affair with a staff member.[2] An Education Minister preaches the importance of State edu-

1. See Mark Townsen and Michael Savage (2019), Kojo Koram (2019), BBC (2019).
2. See John Birmingham (2018).

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cation while sending her children to a private school.[3] The government's Chief Medical Officer implores us to stay home during a global pandemic one day and travels to their second home the next.[4] The Archbishop of Canterbury attacks the 'gig' economy and criticizes Amazon for 'leeching' off the taxpayer while the Church of England holds shares in Amazon and employs workers on zero-hours contracts.[5] An Oxford graduate student advocates for the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes as part of the Rhodes Must Fall movement while receiving funding to attend Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar.[6] Republican Senators rush through a Republican US Supreme Court nomination just before an election despite previously refusing to confirm a Democratic nomination because of proximity to an upcoming election.[7] 'Hypocrisy, hypocrisy', people cry out.

The frequent accusations of hypocrisy made in the public sphere take for granted that hypocrisy is wrongful and warrants criticism, and moreover, that wielding these criticisms in political debate is a worthwhile and productive activity. Faced with the kinds of examples above, much of the philosophical literature on hypocrisy is aimed at helping us understand why the conduct in question is wrongful and worthy of censure.[8] We do not deny that hypocrisy can be, and often is, revealing of an underlying wrong such as a lie, a lack of sincerity, self-deception, the application of double-standards, a lack of integrity or more controversially a weakness of will.[9] Our focus is not, however, on whether or why hypocrisy is wrongful. Our project is different. We focus on the accusation of hypocrisy and argue for a revisionary claim. People think that hypocrisy in politics is bad and that calling it out is good. Thus, Jessica Isserow and Colin Klein, in a recent article, suggest that the looming threat of being accused of hypocrisy is good for moral discourse (Isserow & Klein 2017). We take a different view of the role of both hypocrisy and accusations of hypocrisy in political discourse. In the spirit of work by Judith Shklar and David Runciman, we cast doubt on the claim that hypocrisy in politics is bad.[10] Then, shifting away from the focus of the

3. See Liz Lightfood (2003).

4. See BBC (2020), Oliver Norton and Ryan McDonald (2020).

5. See John Humphreys (2018).

6. See, e.g., Javier Espinoza (2015), Eleanor Harding (2015), Nadia Khomami (2016).

7. See, e.g., Aaron Blake (2020), William Saletan (2020).

8. For examples, see Cohen (2000), Edwards (2019), Fritz and Miller (2018), Herstein (2017), Isserow and Klein (2017), McKinnon (1991), Ryle (1994), Shklar (1984), Smilansky (1994), Todd (2019), Wallace (2010).

9. We are sceptical as to whether it is possible to identify one morally problematic feature of all the conduct that attracts the charge of hypocrisy. For others who express similar scepticism see, e.g., Isserow and Klein (2017).

10. Shklar (1984) and Runciman (2008) both argue that at least some hypocrisy in politics is inevitable in liberal democracies and that we shouldn't be too worried about it. While we agree with these claims, we provide further and different reasons for them reflecting our different

existing literature, we turn to consider the use of the accusation of hypocrisy in political debate.[11] Our novel claim is that that even if hypocrisy in politics is bad (and that is a big if), calling it out is worse.

In defending this claim, we rely only on a minimal definition of hypocrisy and we do not endeavour to adjudicate the hard cases.[12] We proceed on the basis that at a minimum a hypocrite is someone who exhibits an incoherence or 'mismatch'[13] between what they say (in particular, what they say that others should do) and what they do themselves. By this we mean that there is, *prima facie*, a failure for the person's beliefs, acts, and claims to form a unified whole or to hang together in a way that makes sense.[14] For many philosophers, this kind of minimal definition is insufficient to accurately track *actual* cases of hypocrisy. They posit an additional wrongful feature such as a false, or undeserved, claim of moral superiority[15] or some kind of deception.[16] Consider the paradigmatic examples of hypocrisy, all of which involve the kind of mismatch we outlined above: the champagne socialist dining out on Karl Marx and caviar or the socially conservative politician employing sex workers. They are labelled hypocrites because they advocate for one thing (equal distribution of wealth; harsh prosecution of sex workers and their clients) and do another (indulge their extravagant tastes; avail themselves of such services in private). Depending on one's account of hypocrisy (whether an additional feature is required and if so which one) sometimes in what follows it will turn out that we are talking about the *appearance* of hypocrisy rather than *actual* hypocrisy.[17] This is a strength of our project. Part of our aim in

approach. Both Shklar and Runciman take a literary and historical approach. In contrast, we take a philosophical approach that engages with, develops, and presents challenges to, the philosophical work on hypocrisy and why hypocrisy is wrongful, standing and attacks on standing, and the nature of liberal democracies and the public/private divide (including as it has been considered by feminist literature).

11. Neither Shklar (1984) nor Runciman (2008) focus on the nature and role of *the accusation* of hypocrisy in political debate. In this way, our work builds upon and goes beyond their conclusions about hypocrisy in politics.

12. For example, that of whether weakness of will counts as hypocrisy.

13. The term 'mismatch' comes from Isserow and Klein (2017).

14. The type of inconsistency at play is thus best understood as a kind of incoherence: see Wallace (2010).

15. See, for example, Isserow and Klein (2017), Wallace (2010). For Wallace, hypocrisy is wrongful because (or insofar as) it entails a denial of the equal standing of persons. See also Shklar (1984: 50) who argues that the wrong of hypocrisy lies in the unfairness of being forced to regard the hypocrite in better light than they deserve. In a similar vein, Isserow and Klein (2017) argue that the hypocrite is a person who by reason of the mismatch between their judgements and actions undermines their claim to moral authority (although they do not maintain that all hypocrisy is wrongful).

16. See, for example, Ryle (1994) and Todd (2019).

17. For an example, consider honest hypocrisy: the person who says one thing but does another but is honest about the mismatch between what they say and do. If one's account of hypocrisy

this project is to motivate the counter-intuitive idea that we needn't be so worried about hypocrisy in politics, and the equally counter-intuitive claim that we shouldn't be so trigger happy with the accusation of hypocrisy. If it turns out that politics is full of what only *appears* to be hypocrisy and therefore it is full of *false* accusations of hypocrisy, that only strengthens our case.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We begin by exploring why accusations of hypocrisy in political debate are problematic and therefore why we should refrain from making them. In the next section we go on to argue that we are unlikely to succeed in eliminating the kind of behaviour that invites the accusation. We explain why this is so, arguing that hypocrisy is likely to be prevalent in liberal democracies and indeed that it is a product of features of liberal democracies that we value. We conclude that we should both expect, and accept, some hypocrisy in political debate. Next, we review the remaining worries about hypocrisy and consider how these worries can be balanced with our concerns about the use of the accusation. We end by considering the role of candour as a possible alternative solution to hypocrisy in public debate. We argue that requiring people to be candid is not necessarily a good solution because it will often require one to divulge what is private when there are good reasons not to do so. Such revelations will often be costly for women. Thus we give a *feminist* case, in addition to our general reasons, as to why accusations of hypocrisy in politics are problematic.

2. The Problems with the Accusation

To understand why the accusation of hypocrisy is problematic, it is necessary to consider precisely what kind of accusation it is. The accusation of hypocrisy has two possible complaints built into it: an objection about standing, a complaint that the speaker cannot, or should not, make their claim; and an objection about character, an assertion that the speaker's character is defective in a particular sense. To assert 'You're a hypocrite!' is not to assert 'You're *wrong*!'. It is, instead, to assert '*You* cannot say it!' and/or 'You are *deficient* (in the hypocritical

requires deception, then the honesty removes the hypocrisy. In contrast, if deception is not required for hypocrisy, then this conduct qualifies as hypocrisy, but its wrongfulness (if any) does not derive from any deception for there is none. See also Daniela Dover's work on hypocrisy (2019). Like her we are interested in behaviour that appears to be hypocrisy (even if on someone's precise definition it is not). Our focus is motivated by our interest in the charge of hypocrisy and as such what we are interested in behaviour that attracts the charge which is this incoherent behavior. Dover uses the term 'hypo-criticism' to describe what she is interested in. We just use the term 'hypocrisy'.

sense)!'.[18] We want to focus on the objection to standing, as this is generally the point of levelling a charge of hypocrisy, particularly in political debate.[19]

Attacks on standing target the speaker's right or ability to speak on a particular subject and to contribute to debate.[20] Importantly they do this without engaging with the substance or merits of the claims made. There are many philosophical accounts of what it means for someone to lack standing and how we are entitled to engage (or not) with a person who lacks standing. The first point to emphasize is that the stakes are high when we attack standing. If a person's conduct justifies denying them standing, that has significant consequences for their ability to make claims and to participate in debate. Most notably a lack of standing changes the options available to a respondent. Where a person lacks standing to make a particular claim, a respondent may be entitled to undermine or dismiss the speaker without any consideration of the merits of their claim[21] and to deflect or dismiss certain types of reasons provided by the speaker (roughly, the 'because I asked' reasons).[22] Attacks on standing are thus one way to influence a debate by silencing, undermining, and dismissing the speaker without any engagement with the substance of their claim. To be clear, a loss of standing does not, in theory, necessitate dismissal of the speaker.[23] But in practice, the hypocrite's loss of standing tends to result in dismissal, at least in that instance.[24]

Arguments about hypocrisy do not engage with the substance of the claim made. They target standing to speak, not whether the speaker's claim is right or wrong. This may seem obvious (the socialist's indulgence in luxury tastes tells us nothing about the merits of socialism) but it is worth emphasising. The fact

18. Granted, sometimes we might not mean to impugn someone's overall character, but rather to describe their particular behaviour.

19. Also, the attack on character is often a way to undermine standing. The assertion being that because you are deficient in the hypocritical sense, you can't say it or the audience can dismiss it. That said, the two complaints can come apart. See Eduardo Rivera-Lopez (2017).

20. See Maggie O'Brien (2022) who distinguishes between what she calls 'entitlement views' and 'failure views' of standing. Failure views connect standing to speech act theory such that those without standing actually fail to perform their intended speech act. Entitlement views argue that those without standing don't have the right or aren't entitled to criticise.

21. In the context of standing to blame, see Edwards (2019).

22. See Herstein (2017). Ori Herstein calls these reasons (that may be dismissed or deflected) the 'directive-reasons'. Another type of retort that focuses on the standing of our critic is the 'it's none of your business' reply. This is often described as the business condition on standing. See for discussion: Edwards (2019), Herstein (2017), Todd (2019). See also Bell (2013), who is skeptical of the business condition for standing.

23. See O'Brien (2022), who argues for the possibility that someone without standing should, all things considered, still do the criticising.

24. It should go without saying it is harmful for a person to have their standing revoked without justification: see Marilyn Friedman (2013) who also contends that someone who has standing is wronged when their blame is ignored.

that a person is a hypocrite tells us little about the merits of their claim.[25] At most, hypocrisy may reveal that what the person is advocating is difficult and that there are competing pressures. But it cannot tell us whether the person's claim is right or wrong. What's more, a focus on hypocrisy often distracts from the real issues in the debate. There is, of course, a significant difference between attacking hypocrisy and attacking the views expressed by the hypocrite. There is also a difference between attacking hypocrisy and attacking the faults it may betray (Shklar 1984: 55). That is, there is an important difference between calling out the hypocrisy of the Chief Medical Officer who travelled to her second home and criticizing the lockdown policies she advocated. Only a critique engaged with the latter contributes to political debate as to the substance of the issue. Accusations about hypocrisy affect who gets to speak and whose claims are taken seriously, but they do not bear upon the merits of the claims made. If we are concerned about making progress in political debate, and changing views on substantive issues, accusations of hypocrisy are likely to distract us from that work.

A further difficulty arises because accusations of hypocrisy often masquerade as a knockdown argument against the (alleged) hypocrite's claim. The aim of calling out hypocrisy is often to attack the person's standing to speak and thereby encourage people to reject their view. Those wielding the charge, especially in political debate, often intend to cast doubt on the veracity of the claim made and to imply that there must be something wrong with the claim if those making it are hypocrites. Thus, they seek to use the charge to influence the substance of the debate, despite the fact that hypocrisy tells us little, if anything, about the merits of the claim made. This was evident in the debate about the Rhodes Must Fall campaign. At times, certain accusers presented the allegation of hypocrisy as ending the debate in their favour, that is, that the statue should not be removed. Their position seemed to be that those Rhodes Must Fall campaigners are hypocrites because they accept money from the Rhodes Trust and *so* there must be something wrong with their position. This is a mistake—as we have already explained hypocrisy tells us little if anything about the substance of the claim made—but it is a mistake that people seem particularly prone to make in political debate.[26] This use of the charge is worrying: it is an attempt to influ-

25. Hardly any philosopher disputes this claim, although Isserow and Klein (2017) suggest that hypocrisy can bear on the merits of the speaker's claim at least insofar as it gives us reason to call into question the soundness of the speaker's judgement on the matter in question.

26. We have some suggestions as to why people are prone to make this mistake. As a starting pointing this mistake begins with the assumption that inconsistency connotes error or irrationality (Kolodny 2005). And therefore where a person's normative claims and behaviours point to inconsistent views, one of those views must be wrong. Interestingly, this dislike of inconsistency and desire to resolve it by identifying one view as wrong may be a peculiar attribute of WEIRD people (those who are Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) who place a peculiarly high value on consistency, authenticity and conformity to universal principles and are more likely

ence the substance of the debate without any actual engagement with the merits of the claims made.[27]

There are many different explanations for behaviour that looks hypocritical—lying, lack of sincerity, self-deception, double-standards, lack of integrity or weakness of will—and therefore many different ways of explaining such conduct and, depending on one's account of hypocrisy, whether such conduct counts as hypocrisy.[28] These explanations will reveal behaviours of varying moral wrongfulness. To know how bad the conduct really is and whether it counts as hypocrisy we need to know the explanation for it. But the accusation of hypocrisy simply lumps together this variety of conduct. This is another reason why it is a troubling accusation.

We have good reason to be concerned about the use of the accusation of hypocrisy in political debate. This accusation focuses the debate on standing, distracts from the substance of the issue and, often, seeks to resolve the substance without engaging with it.

3. The Incentives to Be a Hypocrite

In this part, we contend that political debate in liberal democracies is likely to be hypocritical or at least to appear hypocritical. And that we should expect and accept some hypocrisy in politics because it comes from features of politics that we value. This gives us reason to think that we needn't be so concerned about

to see inconsistencies and behavioural flexibility as hypocrisy rather than wise and mature personal adjustments to differing relationships: see Henrich (2020: 21 and 32). As to why people are prone to think that hypocrisy means there is something wrong with the normative claim made, here are some suggestions: (1) If only one of two inconsistent views can be correct, it might be thought that a person's true commitments are reflected in what they do rather than what they say and that in this way hypocrisy reveals that there is something wrong with the normative claim made. (2) Hypocrisy might be thought to reveal that it is not possible to do the thing advocated and therefore it is not the thing that ought to be done. (3) Insofar as hypocrisy is taken to be a major character flaw (or, as Henrich suggests, is disliked by WEIRD people) it might suggest that the 'wrong' people are in favour of the view and thus taint the view by association. (4) The mistake might be self-serving in that it allows someone who is criticized by a hypocrite to reject that criticism by taking the position that there must be something wrong with the criticism itself if it is being made by a hypocrite. We are grateful for an anonymous reviewer for pushing us to reflect on this question and we also invite the reader to reflect on this question.

27. This is not to deny that there may be reasons in favour of attacks on standing in political debate. As foreshadowed, sometimes there are good reasons not to engage with the substance of the debate. But it is usually difficult to make moral and political progress without some engagement with the substance.

28. For an exploration of the kinds of wrongs that may underlie hypocrisy or the appearance of hypocrisy, see Dover (2019).

hypocrisy in politics and yet another reason we shouldn't be so quick to wield the accusation.

It is a paradox of liberal democracy that it both encourages hypocrisy and exaggerates the significance and prevalence of hypocrisy because it is a fault that everyone has and an accusation that everyone makes.[29] There are numerous reasons why liberal democracies and modern political debate tend to foster hypocrisy. Liberal democracies, by their very nature, require participants to compromise and, also, to appeal to, and get along with, persons holding diverse views. Invariably, this requires persons to temper their publicly expressed opinions and to sign-up to some positions that they do not really endorse. As such, what people ultimately do in politics may not always track their personal convictions and how people express their convictions publicly may not track their actual beliefs or what they do in private. In short, participants are likely to exhibit some incoherence, which is in turn likely to be labelled hypocrisy.

The prevalence of hypocrisy in liberal democracies may simply reflect the very real tension between public life and private life and relatedly, the vast expansion in the content of public debate (which Thomas Nagel has attributed to decline in respect for the value of privacy).[30] Many topics once thought to be a matter of private morality—such as, sex, sexuality, and family relations—are now considered fair game in the public arena. There is much to be commended in the breakdown of the public-private divide. But this expansion of the public sphere has also led to a demand that persons take a public position on a vast array of divisive issues once thought to be private matters. Politics (and, indeed, social life) requires persons to play a role of sorts and it is usually understood that this is separate from one's private role. But that separation is fertile ground for hypocrisy. When we reflect on the (seeming) prevalence of hypocrisy in public life, and whether this is problematic, we must also consider how much space we should grant for people to take different roles in society and whether those who assume different roles are exhibiting a kind of failing (hypocrisy, inauthenticity, a lack of integrity, deception, or insincerity), making necessary compromises in aid of civility or liberal democracy, or exploring a kind of freedom to be a different person in different contexts. This tension between the public and the private is a particular issue in liberal democracies where people move between different social groups and are required to get along with persons holding a variety of different views. It's valuable for people to take up different roles and even be different people in these roles—politician, swimmer, parent at drop-off, book club member, coffee shop regular and so on. And it is not just the different roles

29. For other arguments of this view see Runciman (2008) and Shklar (1984).

30. For discussion on private life and privacy in politics see Nagel (1998: 22–24) and Shklar (1984: 2).

we may take up contemporaneously, but it is how we might change and evolve as persons. The room for this type of growth and experimentation is a valuable part of a liberal democracy. Further, as society increasingly demands greater authenticity, more information about the private self, and a greater synergy between the public and private self, it becomes increasingly difficult for people to maintain separate roles. Hypocrisy is a feature of liberal democracy, one that (at least sometimes) reflects deep and difficult questions about the separation between the private and the public, and the demands of compromise, civility, and cooperation.

There are also other, more mundane, ways in which political debate encourages hypocrisy. Public figures can be pressured into taking positions they do not really endorse just to show sufficient fidelity to their side: the Republican politician has to publicly endorse the pro-life position on abortion; the Democrat has to publicly endorse the pro-choice position. Moreover, the tone of political debate is marked by whole-hearted condemnation or enthusiastic endorsement and by a pressure for public figures to take strong positions. This makes it hard for public figures to make the kind of nuanced normative claims that denude the charge of hypocrisy of much of its force, including those that are coupled with an acknowledgement of one's own failings. A nuanced position is often criticized as a 'wishy-washy' one and may well be less memorable. This tone is coupled with the speed of modern political debate in which public figures are forced to take stands on issues quickly and pithily and which encourages such figures to endorse crude positions. Avoiding this political fate is particularly difficult in our current political climate: it requires a rejection of the condemnatory tone of debate, candour in respect of a great many issues, and a nuanced explanation of one's view.

Hypocrisy may be a necessary consequence of good political rhetoric. Aspirational claims play an important role in politics and yet the higher the aspiration the harder it is to live up to and so the greater the risk of hypocrisy. As Judith Shklar observes, the better the speaker's rhetoric and the higher the aspirations, the more likely there is to be a disparity between what is said and what is done (Shklar 1984: 69). And yet it is not clear that politics would be well-served by less aspirational rhetoric. Having professed goals and values asserted in constitutions, speeches, party platforms is valuable even if and when we fall short of these ambitions. They inspire and foster hope. They give us standards by which to hold each other accountable and language and vocabulary to describe our rights and demand change.

It is worth pausing here and noting that our cultural obsessing with tarring the hypocrite risks punishing the person who has convictions and who is likely to fall short of them. This will often be persons whose lives are punctuated with double binds. And even more especially those who agitate for change and whose

politics challenge the status quo. For example, challenging the patriarchy is in part so difficult because it has so many mechanisms for incentivizing compliance.[31] So the outspoken feminist will almost inevitably fall short of her feminist ideals and leave herself open to accusations of hypocrisy.[32] Most people can understand why an avowed feminist might think it is hypocritical for her to treat catcalling as a compliment and for her to worry that this undermines her feminism. Hypocrisy rears its head because it appears that her normative claims about feminism and her response to the catcalling fail to hang together in a way that makes sense. It may be that this person is simply not a hypocrite (because, for example, upon analysis there is no incoherence between her claims and her treatment of catcalling) and thus the term is misused. We do not seek to resolve that debate here. Instead, we want to emphasize that the charge of hypocrisy is frequently aimed at this kind of mismatch. This is enough for the charge to be made and for it to be taken seriously. Thus, feminists may easily accept that wearing make-up or high heels is a case of weakness of will or internalized patriarchal norms (and, as such, perhaps not a case of incoherence at all) while those hostile to the feminist cause are likely to call hypocrisy. There is thus a feminist case in favour of accepting at least some hypocrisy in politics. Further, as we will see in Section 5, one way to avoid the difficulties that attend hypocrisy in politics might be to encourage those seeking to make normative claims to be more candid about their own shortcomings and experiences. However, requiring candour gives rise to particular costs for women advocating for political change in a world that is often critical of, and hostile to, their choices.

The incentive to avoid being a hypocrite should not be so strong as to make one commit a wrong (e.g., endorsing the wrong normative claim) so as to avoid the charge. Hypocrisy can be characterized as a vice on top of a vice (what Hobbes called the 'double iniquity') or a virtue on top of a vice (as La Rochefoucauld famously said, the 'tribute vice pays to virtue') (Runciman 2008: 10, 24). The thought captured by the latter is that at least the hypocrite says the right thing even if they do not do it. And surely this is better than doing the wrong thing and saying the wrong thing. Notably, a person with no principles, moral or political commitments, cannot be a hypocrite. As Shklar notes, if hypocrisy is the worst vice, then the excuse of avoiding hypocrisy can be used to justify anything, including cruelty (Shklar 1984: 45). But that cannot be right. It cannot be preferable to live in a world in which people are so driven to avoid accusa-

31. See Manne's (2018) discussion of the distinction between sexism and misogyny.

32. See Gay (2014). Gay self-identifies as a bad feminist because she falls short of her own feminist ideals. See also Deborah Frances-White's podcast, *The Guilty Feminist* at www.guiltyfeminist.com, which describes itself as 'a podcast in which we explore our noble goals as 21st Century feminists and the hypocrisies and insecurities which undermine them'.

tions of hypocrisy, that they will do anything else. Isserow and Klein hope that the desire to avoid accusations of hypocrisy will push us to judge and condemn less. But, instead, it may push us to abandon even lip service to the right views. It is clear that a great many liberal democracies are hypocritical in their stance on human rights. Plainly it would be best if those countries adjusted their conduct to match their rhetoric. But it would seem to be significantly worse than the current, hypocritical, state of affairs if those countries were simply to decide that they would no longer profess adherence to the importance of human rights or call on other countries to reform their human rights practices. Even though, in doing so, such countries would avoid the charges of hypocrisy.

Daniela Dover also expresses concerns about the ways in which we might remove hypocrisy (or what she calls 'hypo-criticism'). She notes that those who exhort others to 'practice what they preach' or 'walk the talk' tend to be focused on stopping the preaching and the talking as opposed to reforming the practice and the walk. Of course, the easiest way to avoid any charge of hypocrisy is not to speak. It takes far more work to reform behaviour and any underlying character flaws.[33] Moreover, reform of behaviour is often not the aim of calling out hypocrisy: people can be just as exercised about hypocrisy when they approve of the behaviour in question as when they do not. Dover gives the example of liberals who were disgusted by the hypocrisy of Idaho Senator Larry Craig, who had solicited sex in a men's bathroom despite having advocated anti-homosexual measures. She notes that liberals were appalled by this conduct precisely because they did not disapprove of his behaviour (Dover 2019: 406–7) and so presumably did not want, by their charge of hypocrisy, to reform it.

The key point is this: the hypocrite only does better by undoing their hypocrisy the right way. It is not *merely* hypocrisy one should give up. One should give up doing the bad thing and thereby make one's claims, acts, and beliefs coherent. A focus on hypocrisy as the key wrong makes it seem like any way we resolve the incoherence is just as good as any other. But that is plainly not the case.

In a related vein, a flawed person may be well placed to speak on a particular issue because of that very flaw (think of the alcoholic who advises against drinking or the unfaithful person who advises against an affair). In her writing on blame and standing, Macalester Bell emphasizes the educational value and role of blame.[34] She contends that blame motivates and educates the wrongdoer

33. See Dover (2019: 413) for discussion.

34. Bell (2013) contends that blame has five aims and modes of value: it marks damage done, it helps the wrongdoer know they've committed a wrong, it motivates its target, it educates and motivates the wider moral community, and it is a way to stand up for one's principles. For Bell, blame is forward and backward looking.

and the rest of the moral community. As she stresses, the hypocrite's blame can still play this role and, indeed, it may be especially well informed (and thus Bell rejects the contention that a hypocrite does not have standing to blame). The hypocrite, for example, knows all too well the ways excessive drinking or affairs can wound those we love and even ourselves. Again, it is not clear that politics would be well-served by attacking such a person's standing to speak. There are good reasons to encourage normative claims from all, including those who exhibit incoherence in their acts, claims, and beliefs.[35]

Hypocrisy attracts much opprobrium. That opprobrium may, in some cases, be deserved. But our first priority should not be to remove all hypocrisy from political debate. It may be preferable to live with some hypocrisy and instead to focus our debate on the substance of the issues. In this part, we have argued that certain features of liberal democracy and modern political debate make some hypocrisy very likely in the public sphere. In so far as we place value on our democracies that allow for inspirational rhetoric, ambitious goals, compromise, a freedom to explore different aspects of ourselves, and the ability to take a day off from our political projects and sometimes fall short of our aspirations, we must acknowledge that these features are fertile ground for hypocrisy. This is not to deny that some hypocrisy arises out of pure self-interest and callousness towards the truth. Such persons should be criticized. But, it is not at all clear that political debate would be best off without any hypocrisy[36] nor that it benefits from frequent accusations of hypocrisy.

4. Remaining Worries about Hypocrisy

Thus far, we have addressed those who are keen on policing and enforcing a non-hypocrisy norm in the public arena. We have explored our concerns about the use of the accusation of hypocrisy in public debate and argued that those seeking to wield it should temper their zeal.

In this part, we consider whether, despite our arguments about the accusation, we should remain concerned about hypocrisy and if so, how those two positions can be reconciled. We consider and reject four arguments in favour of calling out hypocrisy in politics.

35. In a recent article, Dover (2019) explores one such reason, namely that we should encourage a mutual exchange of criticism and dialogue from all, which in turn enables us to reflect upon our own failings and bring moral disagreement into the open and make moral progress.

36. Plainly there is some hypocrisy we would be best off without. There is a great variety of hypocrisy. We may be better off with some hypocrisy than none.

4.1. Targeting a Serious Moral Wrong

It might be said that whatever the drawbacks of the accusation, hypocrisy is a serious moral wrong and accordingly it should be called out and criticized. The thought is that persons making normative claims in the public arena should be committed to their principles,[37] such that they can be counted on by others to act in accordance with those principles. This quality—which might be described as a kind of integrity—is particularly valuable in our public officials. Those who are committed to their principles exhibit coherence between their acts, beliefs, and claims, including when under pressure. As such, they tend to be reliable and predictable. These are particularly valuable attributes in our public officials, whom we do not know and whom we may struggle to hold accountable.[38] There is real value in being able to count on the politician who ran on a green platform to enact green policies even when there is serious pressure on them not to do so.[39] And so, one might argue, we should not tolerate hypocrites in the public arena because such persons cannot be counted on in the right way.

But it is not clear that hypocrisy renders a person unreliable in this way. The presence of hypocrisy does not in and of itself reveal anything definitive about a person's belief in, or commitment to, a professed norm. That is particularly so given the variety of reasons why a person might display incoherence. The hypocrite may be committed to their professed claim and they may exhibit that commitment through a variety of behaviour, despite also acting incoherently in some respects. Nevertheless, a worry may persist about their reliability: even if the hypocrite sincerely believes in their professed principles, one might regard their incoherent conduct as evidence that they cannot be relied upon to stick to those principles. But again, it is not obvious that hypocrisy renders the hypocrite unreliable in this sense. Consider again the conduct of Idaho Senator Larry Craig. His behaviour attracted allegations of hypocrisy, but it is not clear that people were led to doubt his commitment to anti-homosexual measures as a result.[40]

Hypocrisy can be a symptom of moral shortcoming. It might also, depending on the circumstances, signal that the speaker is not reliable. For these reasons, it ought, generally, to be avoided. Consider a politician who advocates for abolish-

37. Irrespective of the merits or demerits of those principles.

38. Reliability and predictability are not the only values conferred by integrity but they are particularly important ones in the context of public life.

39. Notably this is valuable whether or not one endorses the green policies espoused.

40. The Senator's conduct can be explained in different ways. For his supporters, his conduct may be an obvious case of weakness of will: he knows and endorses the right principle but he struggles (and sometimes fails) to comply with it. For his critics, his conduct may be an equally obvious case of lack of integrity, proof that he does not really support the principle he endorses, or the application of double standards etc.

ing private schools despite sending her child to such a school. We should not shirk from criticizing her where she behaves wrongly. But we question whether the accusation of hypocrisy is the best form of criticism, particularly given that this accusation aims to deny her standing without engaging with the merits of her claim. The charge of hypocrisy is a cheap shot. While the appearance of hypocrisy might provide some *pro tanto* reasons to question a person's belief in, or commitment to, a professed norm, further investigation will be necessary in order to reach any conclusion.[41] And of course, it is a further question whether one ought to accuse such a person of hypocrisy. The better approach is to do the work of identifying the underlying wrong and to criticize the politician on that basis. Perhaps the politician is being deceptive, or perhaps she is weak of will, or perhaps there is no incoherence at all between her principle that the state should provide free education and her other principle that in the absence of that a parent can do what is best for their child. It is also worth reiterating what hypocrisy does not show. It does not reveal that the speaker is insincere in making their claim, that they do not believe their claim, or that their claim is impossible to comply with. It does not tell us much, if anything, about the merits of the claim made. On the flip side, the presence of coherence and even integrity do not guarantee goodness of character or action or that one has endorsed the right principles.[42] We should not prize the absence of hypocrisy too highly.[43] And the hypocrite, even when criticizable, should not lose standing to contribute to the debate.[44]

4.2. Transcending Political Division

We have already argued that accusations of hypocrisy are attacks on standing. Perhaps the value of the accusation of hypocrisy lies in the denial of the hypo-

41. This suggests that perhaps an alternative conclusion is that people ought to be more careful about whom they accuse of hypocrisy. That is, the solution to the problems we have identified with accusations of hypocrisy might be greater epistemic caution before making that accusation. While this would be a welcome change in political debate, our worries about the accusation remain. Specifically, it remains the case that the accusation, even when wielded carefully, is likely to distract from debate about the substance of the issue and that a more specific criticism would often be better. It might also be that the two solutions should go hand in hand—both fewer accusations of hypocrisy and better informed ones when they are made. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pushing us on this point.

42. Without getting into the weeds of the debate on integrity, it is at least a plausible view that morally suspect characters with morally suspect principles can act with integrity by acting in accordance with those suspect principles.

43. We do not want to encourage persons to dilute their convictions or give up their principles just to avoid the charge of hypocrisy or to ensure that they are classified as persons of integrity.

44. Much of what we say here is amenable with the view that there is a non-hypocrisy standing norm. Part of what we are endeavoring to show is that we should be reticent in policing and enforcing that norm.

crite's standing. Attacks on standing appear to be a potent tool in political debate. To begin with, it tends to be far easier to attack a political opponent's standing to speak than it is to disprove or discredit their claims.[45] More importantly attacks on standing enable a respondent to influence the debate without engaging with the substance of the claim made. This can be particularly valuable where there is deep and divisive disagreement and where attempts to convince opponents that their position is wrong on the merits are futile. Attacks on standing provide a different kind of critique. One can put aside the substance of the debate, expose the lack of standing, and thereby attack the speaker's right to speak.[46] By way of example, we may never convince some persons that abortion is permissible, but we may be able to dismiss, undermine, and even silence, a conservative politician who condemns abortion—*including in the eyes of their supporters*—by exposing that politician's hypocrisy and thereby attacking their standing to speak. The thought is that while we may never agree about the moral permissibility of abortion, we can all agree that hypocrisy is intolerable and the hypocrite has no standing to tell us what to do.

But does it really work like this? Do accusations of hypocrisy succeed in transcending political disagreement about the substance of the dispute? Are people who disagree fundamentally about the permissibility of abortion likely to agree about who is being hypocritical when they make claims about abortion and therefore who has standing to speak on this issue? Psychological research conducted at Yale University suggests that they do not. The study considered people's attitudes towards hypocrisy and it concluded that people dislike hypocrites not because of the perceived incoherence but because they take the hypocrite to be falsely signalling that they (the hypocrite) are someone who behaves more morally than they actually do (to be good when they are really wicked) (Jordan et al. 2017). The study revealed that even if we agree on what hypocrisy is, we don't agree on who's doing it. We are far more likely to identify hypocrisy in our foes than our friends. As David Runciman puts it when discussing Hobbes's approach to hypocrisy, Hobbes thinks he cannot stand the Presbyterians because they are hypocrites, but it is just as likely that the reason he thinks they are hypocrites is because he cannot stand them (Hobbes 1969; Runciman 2008: 18).

This makes sense when one considers the nature of hypocrisy. We said at the outset that we are not committed to a particular account of hypocrisy beyond certain specified minimum features. But whatever one's preferred account of hypocrisy, identifying it in the real world is difficult. As we have already said there are many different explanations for behaviour that looks like hypocrisy. To return to the conduct of Idaho Senator Larry Craig (who solicited sex in a men's

45. See in the context of hypocrisy Shklar (1984: 48 and 63).
46. See further Isserow and Klein (2017: 219), Runciman (2008) and Shklar (1984:48).

bathroom despite having advocated anti-homosexual measures), the Senator's conduct can be explained in different ways. For his supporters, his conduct may be an obvious case of weakness of will: he knows and endorses the right principle, but he struggles (and sometimes fails) to comply with it. And if it's a case of weakness of will then Craig might not be guilty of hypocrisy at all or his hypocrisy might be entirely excusable.[47] For his critics, his conduct may be an equally obvious case of lack of integrity, proof that he does not really support the principle he endorses, or the application of double standards and therefore a clear case of hypocrisy. His supporters and critics may agree that hypocrisy is bad, but they are far less likely to agree about whether his conduct qualifies as such. While the accusation of hypocrisy may appear to be an accusation that enables us to speak across the political aisle or to avoid harms that might arise from engaging with the substance, in reality, often those wielding this charge are simply giving those who disliked someone already another reason to do so (Hobbes another reason to dislike the Presbyterians).

4.3. Avoiding the Issue

We have cautioned that charges of hypocrisy distract from the substance of the debate and fail to engage properly with the claim made. That presupposes that substantive engagement is something we should always set out to do. But there are cases where we may have good reason not to engage with the substance of the claim made because, for example, to do so would give the claim an undeserved platform or such engagement would be harmful to the respondent.[48] Accusations attacking standing provide a useful way to influence the debate in such circumstances: the respondent can seek to undermine and even silence the claim made without engaging with its substance. The charge of hypocrisy appears useful in precisely this way: it is after all a charge aimed at attacking the hypocrite's standing without engaging with the substance of their claim. However, for the reasons we have explored, we are sceptical that charges of hypocrisy enable us to make much political progress. While these charges may sometimes succeed in undermining the hypocrite, they are likely to do so only in the eyes of those who already dislike the speaker or disagree with the claim made. To be clear, that does not mean we should always address the substance of claims made in

47. Whether or not weakness of will counts as hypocrisy depends on one's definition of hypocrisy. If, for example, hypocrisy requires some form of deception, weakness of will may not qualify.

48. We have in mind the harm that may arise when a person engages with the substance of a view that expresses hate towards them. We are grateful to Lucy Allais for pushing us to reflect on this use of attacks on standing.

the political arena. The questions of whether there are some claims we should not engage with and how we should deal with such claims are important. But they are separate from the question of how we should use the charge of hypocrisy. That said, it is worth flagging that hypocrites are found wearing all sorts of political stripes and professing a wide variety of views. It would be a mistake to think that it is a vice that plagues only those with views of hatred or injustice.

4.4. A Softening Effect on Moral Discourse

Like us, Isserow and Klein take seriously the idea that the accusation of hypocrisy is a damning one. But they take heart from this fact, suggesting that the fear of facing the accusation will have a softening effect on moral discourse and public debate, perhaps compelling people to be less forceful with their condemnations and judgements so that they themselves avoid accusations of hypocrisy (Isserow & Klein 2017). As will already be clear, we take a different view of the role of accusations of hypocrisy in moral discourse. We are sceptical that accusations of hypocrisy have the positive effect claimed by Isserow and Klein both because people disagree about what counts as hypocrisy[49] and because the accusations themselves have negative effects on public debate. Isserow and Klein want participants in political debate to temper their statements and judgements in fear of being accused of hypocrisy. Given their posited role for accusations of hypocrisy, one assumes that they support the use of these accusations in political debate. We have tried to show that accusations of hypocrisy are unlikely to have the moderating role suggested. To the contrary, these accusations are likely to have a negative effect on political debate and hamper political progress.

Whatever the remaining worries about hypocrisy, the accusation of hypocrisy remains problematic. The accusation is divisive (because people rarely agree on what counts as hypocrisy). And its effect on public debate is worrying. The aim tends not to be to reform behaviour or any underlying moral failings, but rather to prevent certain persons from participating in moral and political discourse. That is worrying because it is an attempt to silence, to shut down debate, and to distract from substantive consideration of difficult moral and political issues. For these reasons, we should be cautious about the use of the charge of hypocrisy in political debate, even if, in certain cases, there are reasons to criticize the hypocrite. Similarly, upon hearing that someone has been accused of hypocrisy we should not jump to condemn, dismiss, or disregard their claims.

49. There is disagreement both about the features of hypocrisy (e.g., whether cases of weakness of will or even a change of heart count as hypocrisy) and about what conduct in the real world qualifies as hypocrisy.

5. Candour As an Alternative Solution

We have argued that we should be worried about accusations of hypocrisy and thus we should temper our use of them. There might be another way to avoid the difficulties that attend hypocrisy. That is to encourage candour on the part of those seeking to make normative claims, specifically to encourage speakers to be candid about their own shortcomings or flaws.[50] Notably, the audience has little reason to complain about the candid hypocrite. That is so irrespective of one's view of hypocrisy. Candour may have the effect that there is no hypocrisy at all if, for example, one's definition of hypocrisy requires deception. But it may also have the effect that there is nothing much wrongful about the hypocrisy or not much cause for complaint. It is, for example, difficult to see how an incoherence between a person's normative statements and their own beliefs wrongs someone else when the person is candid about that incoherence.

Recall the example of the politician and the choice of her child's school—if she advocates in favour of solely publicly funded education, but admits that she sends her children to a fee-paying school and explains why (she might add that with better publicly funded schools she would not feel the need to send her child to a private one), then it is difficult to see how her behaviour is problematic. The audience knows that the politician has acted in a way that runs counter to her own stance. Her candour mitigates the potential unfairness lurking in the incoherence between her claim and her behaviour and, as such, there is not much for the audience to complain about. (Some might argue that she is not a hypocrite at all, by virtue of her candour. Whether this is true depends on one's precise definition of hypocrisy. Certainly candour makes it difficult to accuse her of being deceptive or of making a false or undeserved claim to moral superiority.) There remains an incoherence between her normative claim and her act and this enables us to make sense of the accusation of hypocrisy even in an instance of candour. The fact that candour denudes a charge of hypocrisy of much of its force has been borne out by psychological research. The Yale University study found that 'honest' hypocrites (as they defined them) are not perceived negatively even though their actions are inconsistent with their stated views (Jordan et al. 2017).

Although candour can go a long way to mitigate hypocrisy, there are also good reasons not to be candid. Practically, candour is not often appreciated in today's public political life; it is more likely to be seen and exploited as a weakness by one's opponents.[51] Candour about the full range of one's own views, behav-

50. Perhaps this is also a way to, as Isserow and Klein (2017) put it, soften moral discourse. Candour about our failings is different from tempering our judgements altogether, but it is a plausible way to soften moral discourse.

51. Judith Shklar (1984: 48 and 72) has also expressed some scepticism as to whether candour would serve politics well. Some readers may balk at the idea of a candid political hypocrite even

iour, and inconsistencies can also detract from one's ability to get along with and cooperate with persons holding different views on controversial issues.[52] That is particularly so in a liberal democracy which depends on persons living and working alongside persons who hold different views from them. As discussed earlier, it is a valuable feature of liberal democracies that they encourage fruitful relationships between people who hold different views, and sometimes complete candour may make such relationships difficult. As well, there remain cases where there will be good reasons not to be candid: for example, where the subject matter is of a private personal nature, or it involves other people who might be hurt by the exposure. Imagine that our politician, instead of sending her child to a fee-paying arts school, sent her child to a fee-paying school that was particularly well equipped to teach children with severe learning and physical disabilities. More than likely, the politician's choice to send her child to such a school is justified (and maybe not hypocritical) and perhaps even her staunchest opponents would see that. However, should she have to reveal such details about her child and arguably betray her child's privacy in order mollify her critics and prove that she has standing to make claims about education? An accusation of hypocrisy in a world that despises the hypocrite seems to demand that she explain herself and such a demand would require this revelation.

But we do not need to tell the whole truth or reveal our whole selves all the time. We have good reasons for maintaining some boundaries between our public and private selves and for maintaining some reticence and privacy.[53] Given the widespread and deep disagreement over many issues, it is essential for smooth social relations that we be able to conceal at least some of our beliefs and acts from others.[54] It is not clear that one is required to be completely authentic all the time, such that a failure to be authentic necessarily merits complaint. The cost of participating in the public sphere should not be a requirement to reveal everything about oneself in that sphere. One might accept that that is so but respond that the woman who is not prepared to be candid about her own child's education, should not purport to guide others on the subject of education. It may be true that such a person should refrain from condemning others for using private education or condemning the existence of private education. Condemnation is

though they would be more understanding and appreciative if it were their friend.

52. Candour might be more appreciated when it comes from the environmental ethicist or the egalitarian at All Souls College. Indeed, in these cases candour might benefit their cause rather than burden it: in being honest about the difficulties of living up to their principles they allow for meaningful and fruitful discussion and make way for powerful insights into how we can be better environmentalists and egalitarians. See Nagel (1998:13).

53. As explored by Nagel (1998).

54. We take this to be an important consideration. However, it must be recognized that the costs of civility and politeness—of a smooth society—are not borne equally.

a particularly worrying form of criticism (similarly so for blame).[55] But we are not prepared to deny the politician standing to advocate against private schooling or to criticize it.[56] Nor do we consider it a price of her advocacy for state education that she admit that she attended a private school or that she reveal her child's type of school.[57] Where hypocrisy is seen as unfair, candour can do a lot to denude the charge of its force; but in some cases, there will be good reasons not to be candid and in these cases we leave ourselves open to accusations of hypocrisy.

Relying on candour as a solution to the problems that attend accusations of hypocrisy is particularly concerning from a feminist point of view. As we have explored, accusations of hypocrisy are used to silence and exclude people from political debate. But requiring candour as the price of participation in that debate may often mean requiring women give up their privacy, and the protection it affords, in a world that is often critical of, and hostile to, their choices.[58] Is a woman who advocates for the normalization of abortion and the breakdown of secrecy around abortion required to disclose her own reproductive history in order to make this claim?[59] If she refuses to do so, she may well be accused of hypocrisy. But in an environment that can be hostile to women's reproductive freedom, there are clearly good reasons for women to maintain some privacy around their reproductive choices. This again reveals the troubling nature of accusations of hypocrisy. Note that in making a feminist case against accusations of hypocrisy we are not suggesting that all those accused of hypocrisy should

55. See Cohen (2013: 21). No doubt this is why many philosophers have focused on hypocritical blame.

56. In a similar vein, Dover (2019: 387–422, 404) draws an important distinction between (1) criticism as a sanction and (2) criticism as a way of initiating, and participating in, moral dialogue. She argues that criticism in the latter sense involves a process of exchange in which each person develops better awareness of how they perceive others and how others in turn perceive them, and that this process can be an important way of bringing moral disagreements into the open and effecting moral change. She goes on to argue that there is no reason why a person should lack standing to participate in this process simply because they have themselves engaged in the activity that they seek to criticize.

57. This is one reason why requiring higher epistemic standards before the accusation of hypocrisy can be made is not necessarily a solution to our worries about accusations of hypocrisy.

58. The same point applies to other marginalised groups when they seek to participate in political debate.

59. Carol Sanger, a well-known legal academic who writes about abortion largely in the US context, has called on us to normalize abortion and, in doing so, acknowledged that campaigns such as #shoutyourabortion (which call on women to share their stories about abortion) are highly successful ways of doing so (Sanger 2017). And yet, in interviews, when she has been asked whether or not she has ever had an abortion, she has refused to answer the question. Whatever her personal reasons for doing so, her position reflects that there is both value in people coming forward to claim their abortions and that this can be a powerful force for change, but equally there can be a significant cost for the women who do so and, thus, given the way the world is now, it must remain open to women to keep their choices private.

have our feminist sympathies. Rather we are drawing attention to the use of accusations of hypocrisy as a way to silence certain participants in politics and to the fact that avoiding hypocrisy or responding to accusations of hypocrisy may sometimes require one to reveal what one has good reason to keep private. These aspects of the accusation are and should be of particular concern to feminists.

One might also claim that if the hypocrite cannot be candid, then at the very least they should only give advice. The thought being that the hypocrite who advises or criticizes (but does not condemn or blame) will not be subject to the kind of criticism we have considered. We might be more willing to tolerate advice from the hypocrite than condemnation or blame. But it is not quite so simple. We are not always adept at telling the difference between advice, condemnation, and blame. These normative claims often sound alike and can be easily mistaken for one another.[60] We hear blame not just in the words used but also in the tone, expression, and body language. We also bring our own presuppositions to bear on that interpretive process. So while toning down the form of the normative claim—advising as opposed to condemning or blaming—may *in theory* leave the hypocrite less open to attack, *in practice* its effectiveness is much less clear.

6. Conclusion

It may be that hypocrisy is a morally weighty wrong and that hypocrites are deserving of criticism. But in this paper we have tried to draw out the difficulties that attend the accusation of hypocrisy. The accusation is easy to level and damning, and it purports to deny the speaker standing to speak. And yet hypocrisy seems to be a ubiquitous and perhaps even a necessary and beneficial part of political debate in liberal democracies. And so, we should be cautious about wielding the accusation of hypocrisy. We should not rely on candour as a solution to hypocrisy. We should focus on engaging with the substance of the claims made. And we should be conscious of the benefits (or at least the inevitability) of a little hypocrisy and the costs of trying to root it out.

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60. Tognazzini (n.d.) makes a similar point.

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