

The Walk and the Talk

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1.

The call to ‘practice what you preach’ sounds like a harmless exhortation to live up to one’s own ideals. Of course it is usually far easier to comply by cutting back on one’s preaching than by reforming one’s practice. And those who demand that others ‘practice what they preach’ are indeed often more interested in silencing preachers than in challenging them to improve their behavior. Likewise, the admonition that ‘you’d better walk the walk if you are going to talk the talk’ is at least as often used to discourage talking as to encourage walking. Grammatically speaking, these expressions are framed as exhortations to good behavior: it’s the practicing and the walking that are in the imperative mood. In practice, however, they more often function as post-hoc rebukes to speech than as forward-looking calls to action.

The ubiquity of such expressions trains us to think before we speak about moral matters. What these expressions encourage us to think about is not the moral issue at hand but *ourselves*—in particular,

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our personal moral track records. Before avowing an ideal or articulating a principle, we are supposed to pause to ask whether we, ourselves, manage to embody that ideal or principle in our own lives. And before morally criticizing someone else, we are supposed to pause to ask whether we might not, ourselves, justifiably be subject to the very same criticism. If we find that we do not walk the walk in question—if we are not ourselves innocent of whatever fault or transgression we contemplate criticizing in others, or are not ourselves paragons of whatever ideal or principle we wish to defend—then we are supposed to hold our tongues.

To speak up in such a case would be an instance of ‘the pot calling the kettle black’—or in an earlier and superior version of the idiom, ‘the pot calling the pan burnt-arse’.¹ But what is so wrong with the pot’s calling the pan burnt-arse? The pot’s own burnt arse hardly prevents it from seeing the pan’s. It may even help: sometimes it ‘takes one to know one’. Furthermore, the pan may well stand to gain valuable insight from the pot’s criticism. After all, the pot can see the pan’s arse better than the pan can see its own, and vice versa: we are seldom our own best critics. If the pot says to the pan, ‘your arse is burnt!’ and the pan responds ‘so is yours!’, they might both walk away wiser. To embrace the norm that lies behind the idiom—‘[Don’t be like] the pot calling the pan “burnt-arse”!’—is to believe that this edifying exchange should never have taken place: in light of their own flaws, both should have kept their observations to themselves. But why should only spotless vessels be allowed to express the full range of their moral responses? And why are we so unwilling to accept criticism from those to whom we could truly say ‘you’re no better’?

The abovementioned clichés, along with others such as ‘look who’s talking’, ‘take a look in the mirror sometime’, ‘oh, and you’re so perfect’, and ‘people who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones’, embody a number of widely accepted moral ideas. One is that we should try to be as generous, tolerant, and forgiving of others’ imperfections as we hope they will be of ours. Another is that we should try to live up to our own ideals and hold fast to our principles. A third is that we should remember to reflect self-critically on our own behavior rather than expending all our moral energy harping on the flaws of others. A fourth is that we should avoid self-flattering sanctimoniousness. A fifth is that we should not criticize others for wrongs that we have committed ourselves. I am as much on board with the first four claims as the next person.

1. This version is included in John Clarke’s 1639 collection of proverbs, cited in Cresswell 2010: 339.

My aim here is to cast doubt on the fifth. It is true that those who habitually criticize others for faults that they themselves share often exhibit various objectionable attitudes and behaviors, including those invoked by the previous four truisms. But the speech act of criticizing others for wrongs that you have committed yourself is not in itself morally objectionable. Or so I will argue.

All five of the moral ideas I mentioned in the above paragraph are often discussed under the banner of ‘hypocrisy’. That concept, as R. Jay Wallace (2010: 309) notes, tends to get applied to a bewildering range of moral phenomena, “from the cynical and calculating moral ostentation of *Tartuffe* to the thoughtless hypocrisy described in the New Testament, whereby one dwells on the minor peccadilloes of others while remaining oblivious to one’s own enormous moral failings.” For that reason, I doubt the concept’s utility: I suspect it unhelpfully groups together a number of habits and character traits that are morally problematic for very different reasons. Sanctimonious preening, petty harping, and priggish moralism, for example, are distinct problems; the fact that they exhibit a certain degree of comorbidity does not make them all symptoms of a single syndrome.

Furthermore, not all of the phenomena that get called ‘hypocritical’ are correlated or even compatible. Your walk may not measure up to your talk because you are a cynical, self-serving instrumentalizer of moral discourse or because you are an utterly sincere, self-hating akratic, but you cannot easily be both at once; yet both patterns are apt to get you labeled a hypocrite. Thus there is reason to doubt that the concept of *hypocrisy* corresponds to a unified moral kind. But we do not need to settle that question in order to proceed. My discussion will be strictly limited to the question of the moral status of the following pattern of behavior:

- (1) X criticizes Y for φ ’ing; and
- (2) X φ ’s herself.²

With apologies for the ugly neologism, I’ll call that behavioral pattern ‘hypo-criticism’. This terminology will be helpful in allowing us to avoid conflating hypo-criticism with other patterns of behavior that are often characterized as ‘hypocritical’; the hyphen is there as a reminder that, given my skepticism about the utility of the concept of hypocrisy, I do not wish to endorse that characterization in my own voice. Even if

2. For reasons that will soon become clear, I stick to cases in which X criticizes Y second-personally, ‘to her face’, rather than ‘behind her back’ to a third party.

'hypocrisy' does indeed pick out a genuine moral kind, since my view is that hypo-criticism is not wrong, it would follow a fortiori that it is not wrong qua manifestation of hypocrisy.

I'll call the notion that hypo-criticism is morally wrong—the notion that I will be challenging in this article—the 'anti-hypo-criticism norm'.³ My contention is that, despite its broad social acceptance, this norm carries no independent moral weight. This is a revisionist view, since the anti-hypo-criticism norm is endorsed by nearly everyone who has written on the subject.⁴ While defending it on interestingly various grounds, philosophers have almost universally affirmed the received view that it is wrong to criticize others for wrongs we have committed ourselves.⁵ They often go on to analyze the wrong in terms of a quasi-judicial notion of 'standing'; hypo-criticism is wrong, they claim, because the hypo-critic lacks standing to criticize, or even to privately blame. Macalester Bell (2013) has recently offered a partial dissent. Bell carefully distinguishes between claims about the moral status of hypo-criticism and claims about the hypo-critic's 'standing' to engage in moral discourse. While seeming to concede that hypo-criticism is wrong, Bell argues that this wrong does not undermine the hypo-critic's 'standing to blame'.⁶ My view, by contrast, is that hypo-criticism is not wrong in the first place. My position also differs from Bell's in that we have different conceptions of criticism and its importance.⁷ An auxiliary aim of my dis-

3. The anti-hypo-criticism norm is sometimes conflated with the *tu quoque* fallacy, the argumentative move in which the content of a moral claim is rejected on the grounds that the same claim applies to the speaker herself. The claim at issue here is that X's ϕ 'ing makes it morally wrong for X to utter her criticism, not that X's ϕ 'ing gives us reason to reject that criticism's content (which would indeed be fallacious).

4. Recent discussions include Cohen 2013a, 2013b; Duff 2010; Dworkin 2000; Friedman 2013; Fritz and Miller 2018; Herstein 2017; Isserow and Klein 2017; Scanlon 2008; Smith 2007; Tadros 2009; and Wallace 2010.

5. Defenders of the anti-hypo-criticism norm may, however, hold that preemptive acknowledgement of one's own past wrongdoing renders hypo-criticism permissible. For discussion, see footnote 9.

6. As Bell (2013: 275–76) puts it, we should not have to "sort through all of our dirty—and clean—laundry in order for the content of our criticism to be taken seriously." For Bell's apparent endorsement of the claim that hypo-criticism is wrong, see Bell 2013: 275. I say 'apparent' because Bell does not precisely define hypocrisy, saying only that "hypocrisy is a moral fault, and Wallace is right to stress that people often evince hypocrisy in their critical interventions" (275). I read this as referring to hypo-criticism in light of the mention of Wallace, for whom hypo-criticism is the core, distinctive wrong of hypocrisy.

7. Despite these differences, I share Bell's sense that appeals to the juridical notion of 'standing' in moral argument are "usually . . . utterly beside the point" (Bell 2013: 265).

cussion is to enrich our working understanding of the practice of moral criticism, which I regard as a communicative practice that raises distinctive ethical questions to which we cannot do full justice if we try to subsume them under the heading of blame.

I begin in section 2 by addressing an influential recent defense of the anti-hypo-criticism norm, namely R. Jay Wallace's argument that hypo-criticism is an affront to the equality of persons. I show that Wallace's argument relies on certain assumptions about the character and value of moral criticism that I wish to contest. After explaining where I depart both from Wallace's picture of criticism as a kind of social sanction and from Bell's alternative picture of criticism as tool for moral education, I sketch the outlines of an alternative, dialogical conception of the value of criticism. Here I emphasize criticism's role in prompting substantive ethical discussions that are valuable precisely because they are adversarial. With this alternative picture of criticism and its value in mind, I present my challenge to the anti-hypo-criticism norm in sections 3–4. In section 3, I offer a taxonomy of scenarios in which hypo-criticism typically arises. I describe five representative cases, each of which involves a hypo-critic whose attitudes and/or conduct are clearly objectionable in one way or another. In section 4, I go on to argue that in each case our objection to the hypo-critic is most plausibly traced not to the hypo-criticism itself but to some other aspect of their attitudes or behavior. Simply avoiding hypo-criticism would not, in itself, constitute a moral improvement for these agents.

My discussion of these cases may not fully persuade committed defenders of the anti-hypo-criticism norm: broad social acceptance of that norm has left its mark on our intuitions. But I will be satisfied if, by the end of section 4, I have managed to shake the reader's confidence in these intuitions somewhat, and to foster a more critical attitude toward the received wisdom about the ethics of criticism. I conclude in section 5 by underlining the stakes of this debate, stakes which the dominant understanding of criticism encourages us to overlook.

2.

In an insightful study of the notion of hypocrisy, Wallace (2010: 328) argues that hypo-criticism is morally problematic because it "offends

And my defense of hypo-criticism is motivated by some of the same concerns about the suppression of important ethical conversations that animate Bell's discussion.

against a presumption in favor of the equal standing of persons.” Crucial to Wallace’s argument is the idea that criticism is something that we all have an interest in avoiding. When I criticize you for φ ’ing although I φ myself, I treat your interest in avoiding being criticized as less important than my own. The basic structure of his argument is as follows:

- (1) INTEREST: Criticism is something that we all have an interest in avoiding.
- (2) TREATMENT: When I criticize you for φ ’ing although I φ myself, I treat your interest in avoiding being criticized as less important than my own.
- (3) EQUALITY: When I treat your interests as less important than my own, I offend against the equality of persons.

It follows that, when I criticize you for φ ’ing although I φ myself, I offend against the equality of persons.

My disagreement with Wallace begins with INTEREST. Below, I argue that Wallace’s view that we all have an interest in not being criticized depends on a tendentious, and ultimately unattractive, conception of criticism. But Wallace’s argument for TREATMENT reveals a further point of disagreement that I want to highlight before we move on. Wallace’s case for the claim that the hypo-critic treats her own interest in avoiding criticism as more important than her interlocutor’s is complex, and I cannot do full justice to its details here. But one revealing assumption on which it relies is that to second-personally blame or criticize another person is to incur a new obligation vis-à-vis one’s first-personal practices of self-criticism. While Wallace (2010: 327n35) concedes that “there arguably is a standing (if modest) obligation that we are under all the time to scrutinize our attitudes and behavior,” blaming or criticizing others *strengthens* that obligation. It is this enhanced obligation to self-scrutiny that the hypo-critic incurs but refuses to shoulder.

Positing such an enhanced obligation means that agents who ‘mind their own business’, morally speaking, are ipso facto less obliged to self-scrutinize than those who engage in critical dialogue with others. I find this consequence deeply implausible; if anything, I would sooner think that it is those who choose to withdraw from such dialogue who undertake a stronger obligation to critical self-scrutiny.⁸ By declining to enter the fray of moral argument—or engaging only on an abstract level, withdrawing as soon as the argument ‘gets personal’—such people

8. For a different challenge to this aspect of Wallace’s view, see Bell 2013: 274–75.

deprive themselves of many opportunities to receive critical feedback from others. They are thus thrown back on their own resources of self-critical introspection, resources which are likely to have been depleted by this very lack of interpersonal moral engagement. Arguably, the least they can do in the wake of this retreat is to make time for especially thoughtful critical self-scrutiny. Since we are seldom our own best critics, however, even the most stringent self-examination is unlikely to fully compensate for the morally stultifying consequences of withdrawal from critical engagement with others.

This point of disagreement with Wallace may come down to a question of the distribution of moral labor, both cognitive and affective. We all have faults, and we are often oblivious to our own. There is more than one way to respond to this problem. Wallace's goes something like this: When you notice (and are inclined to blame or criticize) someone else's faults, be sure to look all the more closely at yourself before getting all worked up about them, let alone saying anything. Thus he approvingly cites the New Testament parable of the mote and the beam: "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" (Matthew 7:3, King James Version, as quoted in Wallace 2010: 336). The main aim of Wallace's paper is to defend the narrower position that we ought not criticize others when we share the *very same* flaws or are guilty of the very same transgressions. Here, however, Wallace also appears to be sympathetic to the broader view that, as Angela Smith (2007: 480) succinctly puts it, "our first obligation is to correct our own failings and not to concern ourselves with the failings of others."⁹

9. The 'first' is key here. In endorsing the parable of the mote and the beam, Wallace does not mean to suggest that we should *never* concern ourselves with the failings of others. In other words, he does not endorse the much broader anti-criticism views that readers have found elsewhere in the New Testament, such as that suggested by "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1, King James Version). For Wallace, blame, which involves being "actively exercised about moral issues" (Wallace 2010: 308n2) is a "way of valuing or caring about the ends that are promoted by morality" (327) and is thus morally indispensable. Rather, his view seems to be that we earn the right to blame or criticize others by *first* "acknowledg[ing] publicly [our] own moral shortcomings" (336). Wallace does not point out this temporal element of his view, but it is necessary in order to generate the anti-hypo-criticism norm that he defends; otherwise, it should be fine for X, the φ 'er, to criticize Y for φ 'ing, so long as—say, if Y then responds by criticizing X for φ 'ing—X is willing to own up to it. In this scenario, X points out Y's φ 'ing and Y points out X's; like the pot and the pan, each then stands to benefit from the other's insight. On Wallace's view, such a mutually beneficial arrangement is morally ruled out, since neither

This view seems to me to overlook the extent to which we depend on the criticism of others to figure out what our own failings are in the first place. Of course it is true that we cannot be more obligated to *correct* the failings of others than to correct our own—not least because it is generally impossible for us to directly ‘correct’ the failings of others, and even to try would typically involve undue coercion. But this hardly justifies adopting a regime in which we refrain even from *concerning* ourselves with the failings of others—or from articulating our concerns to others—because we have not yet made enough progress in *correcting* our own. Such a regime recommends a degree of moral self-reliance that seems unwarranted, given how frequently others see us more sharply than we see ourselves. The individualism of the introspective ethos recommended in the New Testament makes the most sense in a context in which we each have a private relationship with a god (or at least a confessor) who can help us to sort out our sins. In a secular context, however, we have reason to fear that such individualism will leave us profoundly adrift. (After all, the notional interlocutor with the beam in his eye apparently needed Jesus to point it out to him—a detail seldom acknowledged by those who invoke the parable.) Introspection is all well and good, but we will be better off if we learn to acknowledge our reliance on one another’s moral vision.

Some of the considerations in the above paragraphs are question-begging against Wallace, however, since they depend on differences between his background conception of criticism and my own. Drawing out those differences will allow me to outline my most fundamental disagreement with Wallace, which has to do with the claim that we all have an interest in avoiding criticism. In claiming that we have an interest in avoiding criticism, Wallace is not just pointing out that we do not much *like* being criticized. That criticism is something that we are often motivated to avoid is clear enough, although it is equally clear that some people nonetheless value being criticized for the insight that it can yield, and that the extent to which we tend to bristle at being criticized varies dramatically from person to person. But Wallace’s claim here is not merely psychological but normative: to be regarded critically by others is not just unpleasant, it is *bad* for us. As he puts it: “We all have an *interest* in being protected from the kind of social disapproval and opprobrium

party can permissibly initiate it (by criticizing the other’s φ’ing) without first preempting it (by acknowledging her own).

that are involved in blame. Morality shields us from these effects, providing a justification that can disarm opprobrium when we comply with its requirements, but we lose this protection when we treat people with a lack of consideration and respect” (2010: 328; emphasis added).

The martial imagery is striking. Morality appears here as a ‘shield’ that ‘protects’ us from the slings and arrows of other people’s moral reactions to us, which are ‘disarmed’ by our own good conduct.¹⁰ Criticism is an attempt to pierce this shield; like a projectile, it is ‘launched’ (Wallace 2010: 317, 332) at a ‘target’ (334, 335). The ideal moral agent, according to this view, would have perfect full-body armor—criticism would bounce right off him. To modify the metaphor slightly, to behave well is to build a fortress of moral unimpeachability within which one is safe from justified reproach. When we behave badly, chinks appear in the walls through which the disapproval of others can justifiably penetrate: we are now “open” or “vulnerable” to criticism.¹¹

Wallace’s approach thus treats criticism as, in many respects, a kind of informal punishment: part of a “system of social sanction and constraint” (2010: 333) that looks a lot like an informal analogue of the legal system. To underline the extent to which Wallace’s theory treats criticism as analogous to criminal punishment, consider the following structural parallel. Agents (generally) have an interest in avoiding imprisonment. This interest grounds a presumptive entitlement not to be imprisoned. By acting legally, we ensure that we retain this default entitlement. If we act illegally (enough), however, we forfeit this protection. We are now legally imprisonable. Likewise, according to Wallace, agents (generally) have an interest in avoiding criticism. This interest grounds a presumptive entitlement not to be criticized. By acting morally, we ensure that we retain this default entitlement. If we act immorally (enough),

10. See Bell 2013: 281, in which she also objects to the ‘shield’ metaphor.

11. For illustrations of the language of ‘openness’ and ‘vulnerability’ to criticism, see Wallace 2010, 309n5, 317, 319n20, 320n23, 321, 323, 325, 327, 328, 329, 329n37, 332, and 334. Such metaphors encourage us to imagine ourselves as primarily vulnerable not to the *person* we are speaking with but to the *criticism* that she threatens to ‘launch’ our way. The problem with this way of looking at things is that in protecting ourselves from the criticism we often shut ourselves off from the person—by refusing to listen to what she has to say or by responding in a reflexively defensive manner rather than engaging with the substance of her criticism. Openness and vulnerability are generally good things within the context of ongoing relationships; we make it more difficult to achieve and sustain them when we focus on protecting ourselves from criticism.

however, we forfeit this protection. We are now morally criticizable. We can call this the *Sanction View* of criticism.¹²

Wallace of course recognizes that the Sanction View does not capture the full range of our practices of moral address. He accordingly recommends a distinction within the category of moral address between the “modality of moral exhortation and advice” and the “modality of moral criticism” (2010: 317).¹³ The wrong with which Wallace is concerned—which he calls “hypocritical moral address”—arises within the modality of moral criticism. That modality involves “chastis[ing]” one’s addressee; the critic “stand[s] in judgment over a person or persons, blaming them for something they have done, and responding to their moral lapses with critical opprobrium and disapproval” (318). What interests Wallace about moral address in the modality of moral criticism is not so much the act of literally *addressing* your criticism to another person, but the underlying reactive attitudes—blame, opprobrium, disapproval—that such an address characteristically expresses. Indeed, while Wallace uses the terms ‘criticism’ and ‘blame’ more or less interchangeably throughout the paper, the latter is the true focus of his attention.

This approach to the relationship between criticism and blame is typical of the literature that has recently grown up around the idea of the ‘standing to blame’. Inspired by P. F. Strawson’s influential account of the reactive attitudes (Strawson 1962), discussions of the ‘standing to blame’ typically focus on the psychology of the blamer. They tend either to conflate criticism with blame entirely or to treat criticism merely as an optional expression of blame. Private attitudes of blame then become the primary locus of moral evaluation; whether one ought to (outwardly) criticize depends on whether one has the standing to (inwardly) blame.

12. Another proponent of the Sanction View is Gerald Dworkin (2000: 187), for whom criticism is one of “the sanctions of morality—censure, ostracism, blame, disapproval, disgust”. See also Smith 2007: 477, where reproach, demanding an apology, shunning, and making someone’s transgression known to others are grouped together as “sanctioning activities.” For Friedman (2013: 271), the relationship between criticism and punishment is more indirect: “When blame is expressed to the blame recipient, it may lead to painful consequences for her, perhaps criticism, censure, ostracism, or punishment.”

13. Wallace introduces this distinction because he wants to allow that an inveterate φ ’er might gently exhort someone else to stop φ ’ing without opening herself up to the sort of hypocrisy charge that most interests him; her own φ ’ing need not undermine her eligibility to offer helpful *advice*. It does, however, disqualify her to address her interlocutor in the modality of moral criticism. Cf. Cohen (2013a: 116), who entertains the possibility that we may remonstrate with our fellow sinners, but not with “vehemence and indignation.”

Accordingly, although Wallace's advertised subject matter is moral *address*, outward criticism ultimately turns out to be something of an afterthought; Wallace's ultimate concern is with the private state of being 'exercised' about moral issues.¹⁴

By contrast, although I join Wallace and other theorists of the Strawsonian reactive attitudes in affirming the importance of the reactive attitudes in moral life, I am primarily interested in these attitudes because of their potential as catalysts for further communication. Negative moral emotions can prompt and animate conversations that are at once thoughtful and passionately adversarial, conversations whose intellectual fecundity derives in part from their affective charge. But for such conversations to get off the ground, these emotions first need to be put into words. Thus my concern here is not with the private attitudes that may or may not prompt criticism, but with the literally communicative activity of articulating our moral responses to one another. The question that interests me is not how to feel but what to say. Once we attend more closely to the communicative role of criticism, both the Sanction View and INTEREST lose much of their appeal.

The claim that we have an interest in avoiding criticism derives much of its plausibility from the sheer unpleasantness of the experience of being criticized. It can indeed be painful and frightening to be criticized.¹⁵ Nonetheless, it is (I take it) uncontroversial that being criticized can at least sometimes be good for us. Being criticized can alert us to ways in which we have behaved badly, or—just as important—to ways in which we disagree with those around us about moral issues. Compare Socrates's famous insistence that being refuted in philosophical argumentation is a gift. Whether or not we are decisively 'refuted', the social practice in which we defend our philosophical views against objections, and bring the differences between those views out into the open between us—the practice of philosophical conversation—is edifying and valuable in its

14. Wallace (2010: 324) navigates the tension between the initial terminology of 'address' and this ultimate focus on individual psychology by suggesting that even private blame can be understood as a form of incipient moral address. The idea that blame is a form of incipient communication was proposed in Watson 1987 and reiterated in Watson 2011.

15. As I note below in section 5, however, our tendency to respond defensively to criticism is at least partly an artifact of the popularity of the Sanction View. If we regard criticism as an attack or a punishment, we will naturally want to escape it or ward it off. But (as I am about to argue) we need not regard criticism in that way.

own right, even if it sometimes makes us squirm. Likewise for the practice of offering and responding to criticism.

Silently seething, by contrast, has none of these benefits. Once you privately blame me, it may or may not be better for me if you outwardly criticize me than if you keep quiet—that depends on how you criticize me, and how I respond. But it is hard to see the upside for me to your secretly stewing over my misdeeds. The appeal of INTEREST for Wallace thus partly relies on his conflation of (outward) criticism and (private) blame. The dialectical situation will look different if the communicative role of criticism is brought more clearly into view.

A step in that direction has been taken recently by Macalester Bell (2013), who, in the context of a trenchant critique of the entire notion of the ‘standing’ to blame (or criticize), highlights some of the important roles played by the communication of blame (or criticism). While challenging the idea that critics must meet standing conditions in order to be permitted to speak, Bell retains the identification of criticism and blame characteristic of the ‘standing to blame’ literature, stipulating that she will use ‘blame’, ‘moral criticism’, ‘reproach’, and ‘condemnation’ interchangeably (Bell 2013: 266). ‘Blame’, for Bell, refers exclusively to outwardly expressed blame, which is in turn understood to be synonymous with ‘criticism’. In the next few paragraphs, I’ll use ‘criticism/blame’ when speaking of the views of Bell and Wallace, which (I am about to argue) do not adequately capture the communicative potential of criticism. I’ll use ‘criticism’ when speaking in my own voice.

Although Bell helpfully focuses our attention on the importance of communicating our moral responses to one another, her account falls short of acknowledging criticism’s full communicative potential. To see why, it will help to outline the differences and similarities between Bell’s view of criticism/blame and Wallace’s. According to Bell’s “Hostile Attitude Account,” criticism/blame expresses a judgment of blameworthiness, accompanied by a “hostile emotion” such as resentment, indignation, or contempt (Bell 2013: 265). Bell’s conception of criticism/blame thus closely resembles Wallace’s category of moral address in the modality of criticism; whereas Wallace underscores the pitfalls of this practice, Bell emphasizes its benefits.

Bell identifies five aims of criticism/blame, each of which contributes to the value of the practice. First, following Thomas Scanlon, Bell (2013: 267) notes that criticism/blame “marks” or “signal[s]” the “damage done to our relationships by wrongdoing.” Let’s call this criticism/blame’s *damage-signaling* function. Second, criticism/blame has a *pedagogic*

ical function: it “educates its target about the norms violated through wrongdoing” (267). Third, criticism/blame has motivational value for its target: “Since being criticized is psychologically painful, the possibility of being on the receiving end of moral criticism may motivate some offenders to do what they can to avoid future blame” (267). Let’s call this the *individual deterrence* function.

These pedagogical and deterrence benefits are not confined to the ‘target’. Criticism/blame also “educates and motivates” the community at large, serving what we may call a *public-service-announcement* function: “upon witnessing a stern rebuke, onlookers may be reminded of their reasons not to perform similar acts” (Bell 2013: 268). Finally, criticism/blame is “valuable as a way of standing up for one’s values” (268). By “condemning wrongdoing,” we “express [our] moral commitments” and avoid condoning moral failures (268). Let’s call this the *expressive function* of criticism/blame.

The similarities between the aims Bell envisions for criticism/blame and those standardly cited as justifications for criminal punishment reveal how much Bell’s view and Wallace’s have in common.¹⁶ Bell departs from Wallace’s Sanction View of criticism/blame by emphasizing its educational benefits, so we can call hers a *Didactic View* of criticism/blame. But Bell’s moral pedagogue is, if anything, a sterner disciplinarian than Wallace’s dispenser of social sanctions. Repeatedly referring to addressees of criticism/blame as ‘offenders’, Bell, like many theorists of blame, understands criticism/blame as closely connected to a unilateral ‘demand’ for reform.¹⁷ The language Bell uses to defend criticism/blame vividly, if inadvertently, illustrates why so many people find the practice *prima facie* troubling and are moved to try to constrain it with ‘standing’ conditions. Who, among adults, wants to be

16. Theorists of punishment have argued that it should aim to educate and improve the criminal (rehabilitation) and discourage recidivism (deterrence at the level of the individual, aka ‘special’ or ‘specific’ deterrence). It is also supposed to prevent crime in the population at large via the frightful spectacle of what awaits lawbreakers (‘general deterrence’). And as Joel Feinberg (1965) famously argued, punishment serves an expressive function, symbolizing or demonstrating the state’s commitment to the moral norms (putatively) inscribed in the law.

17. Criticism/blame is useful in “focusing [our] attention on the wrong done and motivating [us] to *demand* that the target change his ways” (Bell 2013: 267; emphasis added). The idea that criticism/blame either expresses or constitutes a ‘demand’ is widespread, and goes back to Strawson’s (1962) “Freedom and Resentment” (reprinted in Strawson 2008). For a critique of this tendency, see Macnamara 2013.

on the receiving end of a practice whose point is at once “to stand against wrongdoing” (Bell 2013: 266) and “to educate its target about the norms violated” (267), one in which “we point to reasons why the target should not have acted as he did, and we attempt to put the target into a position to appreciate these reasons” (267)? One understandably recoils from the thought of one’s own acquaintances adopting such a condescending pose. A challenge to the speaker’s presumption to unilaterally ‘educate’ the addressee—‘Who do you think you are, my youth pastor?’—would be a natural response. Whether the speaker is metaphorically figured as a judge, a corrections officer, a medical professional, a preacher, or a teacher, the posture rankles.¹⁸

What the Sanction View and the Didactic View have in common is that both envision criticism/blame as a fundamentally *asymmetrical* interaction, in which one party invokes uncontroversial moral norms and applies them to the behavior of another. The vignettes discussed by theorists of criticism/blame take place “in the wake of wrongdoing” (Bell 2012: 205); substantive moral questions are assumed to have been settled offstage, in advance. At the outset, we are told by the omniscient third-personal philosophical narrator who is in the right. We meet the aggrieved addressing the aggressor, the righteously indignant addressing the unrepentant, the resentful addressing the guilt-ridden, and so on.

In real life, by contrast, parties to a critical discussion seldom accept such casting decisions outright. Often, the interlocutors *disagree* about who is the ‘wrongdoer’. That is part of what they are arguing about. Furthermore, they often disagree about what it would *take* to be in the wrong. In other words, they disagree about morality itself. That, too, is part of what they are arguing about. Indeed, they often disagree about just the sort of norms that philosophers are discussing in the literature on criticism and blame: norms about how morally fraught conversations among equals should be conducted. These facts are elephants in the room where the ‘standing to blame’ debate takes place.

I suspect that this focus on peremptory, one-off volleys of criticism—‘drive-by criticism’, we might call it—accounts for some of the

18. Adopting such a pose toward a fellow moral agent can usefully be compared with presuming to unilaterally ‘educate’ a fellow philosopher about why her view is incorrect, as though the philosopher were not your peer but a recalcitrant undergraduate in need of remedial schooling. Indeed, as memories of one’s own best and worst philosophy teachers may reveal, such unilateral didacticism is misguided even with recalcitrant undergraduates.

initial appeal of the notion that hypo-criticism is an affront to equality. Wallace suggests that the hypo-critic, so to speak, dishes criticism out without being willing to take it. But the plausibility of this suggestion is at least in part an artifact of the structure of the cases discussed in the literature, in which one character is cast as the sole critic, without any reversal of roles. In real life, nothing about the pot's calling the pan 'burnt-arse' entails that the pot is unwilling to accept similar criticism from the pan. If the pot is indeed unwilling to engage the pan in a mutual exchange of criticism, that may well be an affront to equality. But the affront would arise from the fact that the pot *refuses* to engage, not from the fact that the pot *initiates* such engagement despite being tarnished himself.

To see why I think we cannot ignore the prevalence of mutual exchanges of criticism in our thinking about hypo-criticism, consider the contrast between two incidents that took place in Europe in 1524–25, a watershed period for the Reformation in which many who had hoped to confine theological disputes to the realm of letters were forced to choose sides, as peasant revolts and the rise of more radical reformers brought out Martin Luther's reactionary streak.

Lesson Learned. In a tense confrontation, Zell accused [Capito] of being a self-seeking humanist interested mainly in making a name for himself. After a period of painful introspection, Capito concluded that Zell was right, and by October 1524 he had openly embraced Scripture as the sole authority and faith as the one true path to salvation. (Massing 2018: 623)

According to the Sanction and Didactic Views, this is a paradigmatic critical intervention. The 'target' has been made to see the error of his ways and motivated to avoid future wrongdoing; bystanders have had the chance to be edified both by witnessing his 'sanctioning' and by the example of his subsequent reform.

Next consider a more complicated case, in which, rather than meekly accepting the critic's view of the matter, the addressee talks back. This case has a number of features that I expect many readers will recognize from their own experience of conversations that involve moral criticism. An extended quotation is necessary here:

Critical Dialogue. In a public sermon, Luther inveighed against the spirit of . . . sword-wielding radicals who destroyed sacred images, discarded baptism, and besmirched the Eucharist. Such a spirit could only produce rebellion and murder. Luther mentioned no one by name, but the reference to Karlstadt was unmistakable. Sitting in the back of the church was

Karlstadt himself, trying without success to hide under a broad-brimmed hat. Furious, Karlstadt sent a sharp note to Luther, requesting a meeting. Later that same day, they met at the local inn. Karlstadt objected to Luther's associating him with the spirit of the rebellion. Karlstadt went on to accuse Luther of having written and preached against him while trying to prevent him from responding in kind. From the start, Luther had always reproved him harshly, rather than trying to instruct him in a brotherly fashion. When Luther referred to Karlstadt's destruction of shrines and icons, Karlstadt said he had not engaged in such actions alone, but had been helped by some of Luther's close associates. "I know well," Luther said, growing impatient, "that you always go about in a grandiose fashion and want only yourself to be exalted and noticed." "If I did that," Karlstadt replied, "you should instruct me. But I see clearly who boasts most highly and seeks the greatest honor." The two then began wrangling over the Leipzig disputation, which had taken place years before, in 1519, and at which, Luther complained, Karlstadt had pridefully insisted on speaking before him. *Et cetera*. (Massing 2018: 612–13; lightly edited)

I include all these details to illustrate five salient features of everyday moral discourse that the Sanction and Didactic Views tend to overlook. As mentioned above, (1) Luther and Karlstadt do not agree about who is the wrongdoer; each thinks the other is primarily in the wrong. Nor (2) do Luther and Karlstadt entirely agree about which moral norms apply. Both condemn excessive pride, though they likely differ as to exactly which actions count as excessively prideful. They clearly disagree about baptism and iconography—disputes that may not seem moral to us, but certainly did appear so to them. And they disagree about when a speech delivered from the pulpit counts as a culpable incitement to violence. Among the moral norms about which the two disagree are (3) the norms that govern their conversation itself. Roughly speaking, Luther's ideal of criticism seems to be close to Wallace's; he aims to 'stand in judgment' over Karlstadt. Karlstadt, by contrast, envisions a more didactically oriented critic, but with a gentler tone than Bell's, and an added emphasis on the idea that moral pedagogy takes place in the context of ongoing relations of spiritual brotherhood.

Nor can Luther and Karlstadt's dispute necessarily be reduced to abstract ethical questions about which norms hold and how to apply these norms to particular cases. Their dispute may be (4) essentially hermeneutic; that is, their thinking and emoting about the moral questions at hand may be bound up with their psychological interpretations of themselves and of one another, interpretations which are in turn infused

with moral and emotional significance. For example, it may be that part of how Karlstadt has arrived at his current view of what counts as a good critical intervention is precisely via his frustrating encounters with Luther, and the interpretations of his own and Luther's motives that he arrived at in their wake. In other words, their first-order moral dispute might be ultimately inseparable from their ongoing process of interpreting themselves and one another.

This in turn is possible because of the fact that (5) Luther and Karlstadt have a history. This episode is not the first conflict they have faced, nor is it likely to be their last. As their exchange about the Leipzig dispute three years earlier attests, questions about how to narrate this shared history are also at issue in their dispute. A palimpsest of painful memories, misunderstandings, and grievances underlies each of their respective interpretations of one another's most recent actions. This history cannot be reduced to a series of isolated wrongs and one-off volleys of opprobrium.

As the reader will know from experience, these five features of *Critical Dialogue*—features absent in *Lesson Learned*—are present in many of our everyday critical interactions. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge here that the Sanction and Didactic Views do indeed capture something important about the way that many of us experience criticism. To be criticized really can feel like an attack, a denunciation, a punishment, or an unsolicited lecture. My point is simply that this is not all that criticism is and has to be. Many of us also have experience with criticism conducted in a much more dynamic, egalitarian, back-and-forth mode—a mode that, at least sometimes, gives rise to substantive moral and interpersonal insight of a kind that unilateral punishments and lectures would never have yielded.

To be sure, not all critical encounters are, or ought to be, as dialogical and multilayered as *Critical Dialogue*. Sometimes a peremptory, unilateral judgment is exactly what is called for. At the Nuremberg trials, the point was not to arrive, via an egalitarian, dialogical process, at a nuanced, thick interpretation of German history or of the various protagonists' characters—let alone to dispute the permissibility of genocide. Rather, it was precisely to stand in judgment over the Nazi war criminals, condemning their actions in the name of an (aspirationally) global moral community and deterring would-be mass murderers. It is far from clear that our everyday critical interactions ought to take any such form. For now, my point is simply that *when* to adopt such a peremptory stance,

rather than engaging in critical dialogue, is itself a substantive moral question.

In thinking about this question, we should remember that conversations like *Critical Dialogue* play a number of crucial roles in ethical life, and in social life more generally, roles which cannot be played by monological instances of moral address like *Lesson Learned*. Here I will mention just a few. First, such conversations call on us to *articulate* our negative reactions to the behavior of others, rather than merely evincing or expressing them—and to do the same in response to others' negative reactions to us. They force us to put our inchoate moral emotions into words, training us to convert previously inarticulate resentment, guilt, and rage into intersubjectively available moral ideas that can then be considered and perhaps contested by our interlocutors.

This endeavor in turn helps us understand ourselves in light of how others respond to us, and to understand others in light of how *they* respond to how *we* respond to them. To be criticized, or to criticize others and stick around to hear how they respond, is often to be confronted with vast distances between how we see ourselves and how others see us, and between how we see others and how they see themselves. The resultant socialized awareness of self and other is essential both to mature self-understanding and to flourishing interpersonal and political relationships. The development of such awareness is thwarted just as much by avoiding interpersonal critical dialogue as a thinker's philosophical development would be by avoiding submitting her work to the critical attention of other philosophers.

Finally, such conversations are a crucial source of the affective and cognitive energy that is required for moral change, not just at the individual level but also at the level of groups and of the culture at large. They bring our moral disagreements out into the open, illuminating and enlivening them in a way that abstract philosophical discourse cannot, by situating them within concrete situations and relationships that involve us personally, and about which we may care deeply.

None of these three roles can be played in quite the same way by bloodless abstract debates, by joint deliberation that aims to produce consensus at the end of the day, or by personal exchanges in which anger and frustration are suppressed in an attempt to keep the discussion purely constructive. Nor can they be played very well by interpersonal moral criticism, so long as that is understood as a peremptory form of moral address aimed exclusively at holding presumptive wrongdoers accountable and upholding uncontroversial moral norms.

In order to play these roles best, moral criticism should be ventured in a way that invites a substantive response, rather than merely attempting to trigger a predictable stock ritual of condemnation and apology. And yet even an initially univocal, peremptory intervention can end up resulting in a much more substantive dialogue than the initial speaker bargained for—so long as the initial speaker is willing to hear what her addressee has to say in response, and to respond in kind.¹⁹ What ultimately matters most is not how a conversation starts but where it goes. When we criticize one another in ways that militate against substantive dialogue, we thereby reduce the chance that we will go on to have a valuable critical conversation. But we are certain not to have one if we refrain from criticizing one another in the first place.

As the above observations suggest, I believe that interpersonal moral criticism is a valuable practice whose full importance often goes unrecognized in discussions of hypo-criticism. By complicating our picture of criticism and its value, I have challenged some of the theoretical presuppositions of the anti-hypo-criticism position. But when we confront examples of hypo-criticism, our habitual reactions may be difficult to shake. So I propose that we take a look at five of the most familiar sorts of scenarios in which hypo-criticism arises. My discussion of these cases has two aims. First, I attempt to disaggregate our responses to the cases, showing that they are best understood not in terms of the anti-hypo-criticism norm but in terms of distinct objections to each critic's behavior. Second, I argue that avoiding hypo-criticism would not in itself constitute a moral improvement in these cases: silence is not the answer to these critics' moral problems.

3.

Before we begin, a couple of general observations are in order about the structure of the anti-hypo-criticism norm. Suppose that Y invokes one of the idioms with which we began in order to object to the fact that:

- (1) X has just criticized Y for φ 'ing; and yet
- (2) X φ 's herself.²⁰

19. Note, for instance, that *Critical Dialogue* began much like *Lesson Learned*; it got more interesting because, rather than simply issuing a counter-denunciation from his own pulpit, Karlstadt invited Luther to meet at the inn, and Luther showed up.

20. In practice, of course, φ 'ing and criticizing others for φ 'ing seldom take place at the same time (though see Gerald A. Cohen's [2013a: 126] illuminating discussion of the

By objecting to X's hypo-criticism, Y typically implies that (1) ought not to have happened, in light of the fact that (2). Y's objection to X's behavior targets the *conjunction* of X's (1) criticizing others for φ 'ing and (2) φ 'ing herself. He may well also happen to regard (1) and/or (2) as objectionable in its own right, but he need not. Y's objection to the conjunction is intelligible even if he personally has no moral objection to φ 'ing whatsoever. Similarly, his objection is intelligible even if he has no moral objection to the vocal moral criticism of φ 'ing. What Y finds objectionable is the *juxtaposition* of φ 'ing oneself and morally criticizing others for φ 'ing.

For example, the following is a typical—though, as I will argue, misguided—set of attitudes. Carl does not himself believe that meat eating is wrong; so he would not morally object to Hannah's eating meat. But nor does Carl believe that those who disagree with him are wrong to morally criticize meat eating; so he would not morally object to Hannah's criticizing meat eaters. Carl does, however, object to Hannah's criticizing meat eaters, *given that* she eats meat herself. So Carl need not accept the independent wrongness either of φ 'ing, or of speaking out against φ 'ing, in order for the combination of φ 'ing and speaking out against it to strike him as objectionable.

In fact, I suspect that the following armchair-psychological claim is true. When we do happen to disapprove of φ 'ing (that is, of (1)), this disapproval is largely independent of our disapproval of the hypo-criticism constituted by φ 'ing while also criticizing others for φ 'ing (that is, of (1) & (2)). In other words, disapproving of (1) does not systematically exacerbate our disapproval of (1) & (2), nor does not disapproving of (1) systematically mitigate it. In fact, we often find hypo-criticism most irksome when we do not disapprove of the φ 'ing in question. Consider the aftermath of the 2007 sting operation that caught Idaho Senator Larry Craig soliciting sex in an airport men's room. His public shaming and

"you're involved in it yourself" retort to criticism). Diachronically considered, the anti-hypo-criticism norm entails that (1) a history of having criticized others for φ 'ing gives one further moral reason to refrain from φ 'ing oneself (on top of any reason one might independently have had not to φ), and that (2) a history of having φ 'ed gives one further moral reason to refrain from criticizing others for φ 'ing (again, on top of any independent reason one might have not to criticize). I disagree with both claims, but since my motivating concern in this article is with the role of the anti-hypo-criticism norm in silencing criticism, I will focus mainly on challenging the claim that having φ 'ed yourself makes it wrong for you to criticize others for φ 'ing.

forced resignation might have won him support from non-homophobes sympathetic to the predicament of a closeted Idaho Republican. But because Craig had advocated anti-gay measures in the past, he won the enmity and ridicule of right-thinking liberals and homophobic reactionaries alike. The two groups had independent and non-overlapping objections to his conduct: homophobes objected to his sexual behavior, liberals to his anti-gay legislation, and not vice versa. But they were united, for once, in their contempt for his hypocrisy.²¹

The homophobes, however, could at least in theory have cast Craig as a fallible moral striver, in the grip of a sinful passion and struggling but so far failing to overcome it. That is a more flattering overall picture of Craig than the most sympathetic one available to liberals, who could at best see Craig as tragically self-loathing. So I think it's fair to say that liberals were especially disgusted by Craig's hypo-criticism precisely in virtue of the fact that they did not disapprove of his sexual behavior on its own. The anti-hypo-criticism norm, then, has a fundamentally conjunctive structure. It claims that the *combination* of two phenomena, either one of which might (or might not) be wrong on its own, constitutes a further, distinct wrong.

The burden to be met by a defender of the anti-hypo-criticism norm is thus to show that hypo-criticism constitutes an *additional* moral wrong, over and above anything that might be objectionable about the ϕ 'ing or the criticism on its own. Note that the defender of the anti-hypo-criticism norm need not show that criticizing others for ϕ 'ing when you have ϕ 'ed yourself is always wrong, *all things considered*. It may be that, when sufficiently grave moral issues are at stake, the all-things-considered best thing to do is to "dirty one's hands" with hypo-criticism in order to avoid some graver wrong.²² All that the defender of the anti-hypo-criticism norm needs to show is that hypo-criticism is a pro tanto wrong. That is the claim I wish to deny. I will be arguing that, while hypo-critics may exhibit all sorts of objectionable traits and behaviors, there is nothing wrong with hypo-criticism in itself.

21. Judith Shklar (1984: 47–48) observes that "ideological conflict . . . contributes as much as moral rigor" to the popularity of the concept of hypocrisy, especially in liberal societies: "When political actors disagree about right and wrong, and everything else, they can only undermine each other with the revelation that their opponent is not living up to his own professed ideal."

22. Thanks to an anonymous referee for *Philosophical Review* for raising this point.

In the remainder of this section, I describe a range of scenarios that illustrate what I take to be the five most common sorts of contexts in which hypo-criticism arises. In each of these cases, the person being accused of hypo-criticism has misbehaved in one way or another. I have classified the cases by reference to the signature moral fault that each type of critic evinces: weakness of will, insincerity, the holding of double standards, excessive moral rigorism when it comes to others, moral complacency, and moral resignation about oneself. I do not mean to suggest that the above five case-types exhaust the range of moral problems that hypo-critics might exhibit.²³ My point is rather that, whenever we find ourselves objecting to the attitudes or behavior of hypo-critics, we should think carefully about whether it is their hypo-criticism itself to which we are objecting. My argument (which I defer to sec. 4) will be that it is not: our moral objections to these critics are fully traceable to one or more of these distinct moral flaws. Hypo-criticism does not constitute an additional moral failing in these cases, and refraining from hypo-criticism would not constitute a moral improvement. To establish this in even one of the five cases would already undermine the anti-hypo-criticism norm. The point of discussing a variety of cases is to provide a range of debunking explanations for our intuitive objection to hypo-criticism in different types of contexts. By casting light on a number of legitimate moral objections that (in my view) we are apt to mistake as objections to hypo-criticism, I aim to turn our attention toward the moral phenomena that really matter in these cases.

(i) Weakness of will: Horace and Alice. Like most of us, hypo-critics are often weak-willed. Suppose Horace criticizes Alice for flying into a rage about some petty matter. Alice responds by recalling times at which Horace has done the same. As it happens, Horace is as sincere in his own determination not to allow himself to lose his temper as he is in his criticism of Alice. Occasionally, though, he does not manage to control himself.²⁴

23. In the case of Larry Craig, for instance, the nub of the problem lies not in any of the above issues but in a kind of betrayal of (potential) solidarity. Rather than responding to his experience of the closet with heightened compassion for others in the same bind, Craig instead subjected them to more of the very same oppression. Focus on his hypo-criticism directs our attention away from this more subtle problem. Thanks to Amia Srinivasan for discussion of this case.

24. Bell (2013) similarly distinguishes between “weak-willed hypocrites” and “clear-eyed hypocrites.” The latter merely feign the attitudes their criticism seems to express; they correspond to cases of type (ii) (“insincerity”) below. Bell also discusses a third category that does not neatly line up with those offered here: the “exception-seeking

(ii) **Insincerity:** Harold the Governor. Hypo-critics are often suspected of insincerity. Take Harold, who, as governor of New York, proposes a crack-down on prostitution rings. This advocacy involves not only professions of concern for the welfare of sex workers, but sharp moral criticism of their clients. And yet Harold has no genuine moral objection to paying for sex; privately, he does not blame others for hiring sex workers, and frequently does so without compunction himself. His criticism is motivated not by moral outrage or altruistic concern but by the desire to win votes by putting on a show of righteous indignation. But of course Harold *presents* his criticism as morally motivated; insofar as he expects to be believed (rather than regarded as a transparently cynical opportunist), his behavior is deceitful as well as insincere.²⁵

(iii) **Double standards:** Henry and Catherine. Hypo-criticism can arise when a critic either implicitly or explicitly takes himself to have some principled reason to regard the *φ*'ing of those he criticizes as more objectionable than his own. Take, for example, the traditional double standard of bourgeois sexual morality. Suppose Henry, an Edwardian father, comes to regard his daughter Catherine as beyond the pale due to some minor tryst. Meanwhile, it is an open secret in the family that Henry's ward, supposedly an orphaned cousin, is in fact his 'natural son'. Henry is genuinely bewildered when Catherine points out this irony, and not just because Catherine has broken rank by reproaching her father. Because Catherine is a woman, her conduct is, as far as Henry is concerned, simply more unbecoming than his own. True, under a gender-neutral description, their behavior might appear the same. But in his view, that is precisely

hypocrite." An exception-seeking hypocrite "genuinely blames others while seeing himself as blameless" for the "same kind of behavior" (276). Although, for the reasons discussed in section 2, I have avoided framing these issues in terms of blame, the cases I discuss below under (iii) ("double standards") and (iv) ("being overly critical of others and/or complacent about oneself") might or might not count as cases of exception-seeking hypocrisy in Bell's sense, depending on one's account of blame (but see footnote 26). As will emerge below in the discussion of cases of types (iii)–(v), I suspect that pure exception-seeking is rarer than we tend to think. For an account of hypocrisy that emphasizes exception-seeking, see Fritz and Miller 2018; for one that emphasizes insincerity, see Shklar 1984.

25. In the case of Harold's real-life counterpart, Eliot Spitzer, there was of course no way for the public to know whether Spitzer was insincere or sincere but akratic. Unlike accusations of lying, which require some evidence that the speaker believed his claim to be false, the charge of hypo-criticism is often made to rest on the speaker's outward performance alone. This goes a long way toward explaining the charge's ubiquity in political discourse; accusations that can be made to stick on the basis of publicly observable behavior alone are at an adaptive advantage.

what would make such a description inadequate for the purposes of normative evaluation—it would fail to reveal a crucial, normatively significant difference between the two cases.²⁶ So even if he would be at a loss to provide an explicit, principled moral defense of the contrast in his attitudes toward his own indiscretions and Catherine's, Henry implicitly regards it as non-arbitrary.

(iv) Being overly critical of others and/or complacent about oneself: Harriet and Dave. Let's move on to a more subtle type of case, and one in which the agent's problem is more immediately a matter of her patterns of criticism: the agent is either overly critical of others, overly complacent about herself, or both. Take, for example, Harriet, who resents her friend Dave for failing to make time for her while she is depressed after losing her job. Dave knows that Harriet is suffering and is supportive when he sees her, but he puts off responding to her phone calls, which have become much more frequent since the depression set in. Even though she knows Dave is very busy with his work and family obligations, Harriet feels hurt and betrayed at his failure to come through for her in her time of need.

When she criticizes him for being a fair-weather friend, Dave responds by reminding her that she let him down in just the same way a few years ago, after his father's death. At that time, Harriet was happy and preoccupied with her own concerns, and failed to make enough time for Dave. Dave is now neglecting Harriet for the very same reasons that she then neglected him: he is busy with other things, and spending time with a depressed person is grim. Dave does not excuse his own behavior any more than he does hers. But he resents the fact that *she* dares to criticize his failure, given that she once failed him in the exact same way.

Harriet does not actually believe that Dave has stronger obligations to her than she to him. She simply fails to think as hard or feel as strongly about her own failures with respect to these obligations as she does about Dave's. In fact, like many people, she is in general less attentive and affectively responsive to her own flaws than to those of others; while capable of recognizing her own failings when they are explicitly pointed out, she is sometimes oblivious to them in the absence of such feedback. Thus she is quick to resent Dave's treatment of her, and slow to feel guilty about her treatment of him. She is usually surprised when she finds him angry with her, and yet she is surprised to find him similarly taken aback when she is angry with him. Et cetera. Her habits of outright criticism and avowal

26. For this reason, I doubt that those holding double standards are best understood as "exception-seeking" in the sense of Bell 2013. It is not that Henry objectionably seeks an ad hoc exemption from the norms that he applies to Catherine. Rather, he objectionably believes that he and Catherine are not properly held to the same norms in the first place.

exhibit an analogous pattern—she is quick to reproach others and slow to admit her own faults.

If Harriet wishes to counter Dave's objection to her hypo-criticism, she will not allege that there is some morally relevant difference *between herself and Dave*, in virtue of which, though they have performed the same type of action for the same type of reason, she is less culpable than he is. Rather, she will fumble for some morally relevant difference in their respective *behavior* (as agent-neutrally described), or in their reasons for that behavior. In other words, Harriet recognizes that her only possible line of defense is 'that's different!'—unlike Henry with his double standard, who believes that '*I'm different*' will do. In fact, Harriet's response to Dave implicitly acknowledges that the same standards apply to the two of them. Rather than looking for moral reasons to exempt herself from those standards, she instead looks for reasons why her conduct does not actually violate them.

(v) **Moral resignation about the self:** Hank and Elsa. A fifth type of case, related to but distinct from both simple weakness of will and thoughtless moral complacency, is one in which someone knowingly chooses to do what he sincerely regards as wrong—not just in recurrent but isolated moments of weakness, but routinely and as a matter of course. He does so because he is resigned to his own moral turpitude and, unlike the akratic, has ceased to struggle to improve himself. Nevertheless, he does not think that *we all* should resign ourselves in this way; in fact he thinks *none* of us should, and that anyone who does so is blameworthy (himself included).²⁷

Suppose that Hank is a partner in a corporate law firm. The firm's clients are companies that cause untold harm to their workers and to the environment, and Hank knows this. Indeed, he works day in and day out to help them escape liability for these very harms. Hank often feels guilty and ashamed of his work—his least favorite question at parties is 'What do you do?'—but he is also fond of the lifestyle it has afforded him. He knows that quitting would be the right thing to do, all things considered, and yet he also knows that he is very unlikely to do it. Sometimes he half-heartedly tries to rationalize his choice—pointing out that, were he to quit, dozens of his colleagues would be eager to replace him—

27. Think of the utilitarian philosophy professor who believes that she ought to be out alleviating pain rather than luxuriating in her armchair. Though she knows she will never do what she sincerely believes morality requires of her, she nevertheless hopes to inspire a few of her students to do so. It's a commonplace that we expect better of some people than we do of others. It is equally possible to expect better of certain others than one does of oneself, succumbing to a kind of fatalism about one's own character without becoming equally pessimistic about the character of others.

without ever really convincing himself that any of these rationalizations exculpate him. At other times, he adopts a pose of self-deprecatory cynicism ('it's an ugly job, but somebody's got to do it'). But he can't quite pull this off; since he is not actually so jaded in his private reflection, it sounds strained and affected.

Hank essentially thinks of himself as irredeemable, as someone with whom it is pointless to remonstrate, despite the fact that by his own lights the content of the remonstrance is just as binding on him as on the next person. But he does not think that this is true of others, least of all his daughter Elsa, whom he both adores and admires. So he is horrified when he learns that Elsa has decided to go into pharmaceutical marketing. He had hoped that the family's prosperity would give Elsa the freedom to do something more meaningful with her life; instead, he finds to his dismay that his own example has taught Elsa to care more about wealth and status than about the loftier values Hank had hoped to instill.

Unlike Harold (the cynical governor), Hank is entirely sincere in his criticism—he genuinely believes that Elsa is making the wrong choice. He of course makes the very same choice every day, but unlike Horace (the hot-tempered akratic), he has never come close to arriving at a willful determination to stop. And yet unlike Harriet (the neglectful friend), he is neither blind nor indifferent to his own moral failure. Nor, unlike Henry (the misogynist father), does he think the obligation to do something socially useful with one's life applies any less to him than it does to Elsa.

Hank is not a nihilist; he thinks that there are better and worse ways to live, and that it makes sense to criticize people for choosing the latter. In fact, he wishes that his own father (who was, let's say, a socialist garment worker) had taken him to task decades ago; perhaps that would have convinced him to change his course before his own habits had ossified. So Hank is inclined to criticize Elsa's plan, on moral grounds, and for Elsa's sake. But the taboo against hypo-criticism gives him pause. Even though he hopes very much that someone else will step up to dissuade Elsa, Hank worries that he himself is 'not one to talk'. In spite of these qualms, Hank eventually speaks up. Elsa, predictably enough, parries his criticism by pointing out that it amounts to the notorious parental move of telling a child to 'Do as I say, not as I do'. She thus manages to avoid confronting its substance.

4.

What are we to think of our hypo-critics? Certainly none of them is perfect. Horace (the rage-prone akratic) is weak-willed and ill-tempered.

Harold (the governor) is a cynical opportunist. Henry (the priggish father) is sexist and controlling. Harriet (the needy but neglectful friend) is obtuse and self-indulgent. And Hank (the morally resigned lawyer) is greedy and fatalistic. It's understandable that we might bridle at being morally criticized by such blemished characters, especially if we are used to looking at criticism through the lens of the Sanction View or the Didactic View. Then again, we tend to bridle at being morally criticized in general. Surely at least part of the appeal of challenging our critics' eligibility to criticize us derives from the fact that it offers a convenient way to deflect unwanted criticism—veering away both from our own failures and from those of our interlocutors (*akrasia*, anger problems, cynicism, double standards, priggishness, judgmentalism, complacency, greed, fatalism, or what have you). Confronting these latter issues takes work, whereas hypo-criticism can be avoided just by keeping one's mouth shut. But does such avoidance actually help matters, morally speaking? In what follows, I will argue that it does not.

The discussion proceeds in two steps. First, I argue that the conjunctive standard proposed by the anti-hypo-criticism norm does not illuminate our cases. The morally salient aspects of our hypo-critics' behavior can be understood without reference to any such formal criterion. Second, I explore the case of Harriet and Dave (the neglectful friends) in a bit more depth, arguing that the anti-hypo-criticism norm is not just irrelevant but positively misleading in how it encourages them to respond to one another.

As I have noted, the injunction to 'practice what you preach' can be used either to discourage 'preaching' or to encourage practicing. In other words, it can be used to express the thought: *If you preach it, then you ought to practice it* (call that the 'positive thought'). Or it can be used to express the thought: *If you do not practice it, then you ought not preach it* (the 'negative thought'). Reflection on our cases undermines both thoughts. To see why, let's start with the case of Harold the governor. And for the sake of simplicity, let's elide the difference between questions about the moral status of sex work and questions about whether it should be legalized. So we can simply say, either paying for sex is OK, or it is not. To avoid multiple-negation-induced confusion, we should also note that two behaviors of Harold's are at issue: his hiring of sex workers, and his criticism of those who hire sex workers (I'll call this 'criticism of sex work' for short). But these two behaviors are not quite the referents of the 'its' in the positive and negative thoughts. The referent of the 'it' in 'preach it' is something like *do not hire sex workers*; the referent of the 'it' in 'practice it'

is *abstaining from hiring sex workers*. Harold, then, ‘preaches it’ but does not ‘practice it’. The positive thought—the thought that, since he preaches it, he should also practice it—instructs him to stop hiring sex workers. The negative thought—the thought that, since he does not practice it, he should stop preaching it—tells him to stop criticizing those who do. Is this helpful guidance?

Suppose that hiring sex workers is not OK. Presumably, then, the thing for Harold to do is to *stop hiring sex workers*—not to stop criticizing those who hire sex workers merely in order to render his criticism more consonant with his behavior. If, on the other hand, hiring sex workers is OK, then the thing for Harold to do would be to *stop criticizing those who hire sex workers*—not to stop hiring sex workers merely in order to render his behavior more consonant with his criticism. In either case, then, it is the moral status of the practice of paying for sex that is relevant both to what Harold should practice and to what he should preach; the merely formal constraints expressed by the positive and negative thoughts are red herrings.²⁸ For in neither case would *merely matching* his behavior and his criticism (regardless of their substantive correctness) have done the trick; it is better to be half right than all wrong.

A similar story holds for Henry the Edwardian father. Since the sexual morality to which Henry holds Catherine is illegitimate, Henry ought not to apply it to anyone: he ought to stop criticizing Catherine. It would not help to start criticizing himself instead; this would simply amount to two, rather than one, applications of a bogus set of norms. Likewise, if the norms to which Henry holds Catherine were legitimate, Henry’s overall pattern of conduct would not be rendered more acceptable if he failed to hold Catherine to these norms, even though this would bring his treatment of Catherine into line with his indulgent treatment of himself. This would simply amount to two, rather than one, failures to apply a legitimate set of norms.

28. Note that the positive and negative thoughts are not just irrelevant here, they also give substantively incorrect guidance. This is so whether hiring sex workers is permissible or not. If it is impermissible, then the negative thought—which tells him to stop preaching abstention, since he doesn’t practice—yields the wrong advice altogether: Harold should, rather, keep preaching and start practicing. Whereas the positive thought—which tells him to start practicing abstention, since he preaches it—gives extensionally correct guidance (it tells Harold to stop hiring sex workers, without telling him to stop criticizing sex work), but for the wrong reason. If hiring sex workers is wrong, then Harold should stop *because it is wrong*, not because he criticizes others for doing so. If hiring sex workers is permissible, then the reverse scenario holds.

Part of our objection to Henry no doubt derives from the feeling that he has failed to ‘treat like cases alike’. Henry has indeed failed to recognize Catherine’s moral equality. But we do not need to invoke the anti-hypo-criticism norm in order to explain this intuition. If it is true that Henry’s responses to his own and Catherine’s behavior should match, it is true because moral norms apply to everyone alike, barring morally relevant differences, and gender is not such a difference (at least, not in this case). In applying separate standards to his own and to Catherine’s sexual behavior, Henry has revealed that he takes women to be fundamentally different from men, in ways that justify restricting their sexual freedom. The problem with this is that it is *sexist*; we do not need to appeal to the putative wrongness of hypo-criticism to understand why such a double standard is objectionable.²⁹

Let’s return to the case of Harriet (the neglectful, complacent, and overly critical friend). Suppose we stipulate that Harriet has all of the following four moral failings. (1) In her private thinking about others, she is (in absolute terms) excessively prone to resentment and indignation. (2) In her private introspection, she is (in absolute terms) excessively indulgent of, or simply oblivious to, her own frailties. In conversation, she is (in absolute terms) both (3) too aggressive and (4) too defensive, overly harsh in her criticism of others and loath to acknowledge her own faults. So there is plenty of room for improvement in Harriet’s public and private patterns of self- and of other-criticism, considered in themselves. But when Dave objects to Harriet’s hypo-criticism, he locates her failing not in any of the above, but in the *relationship* between her self- and other-criticism. Can this be right? That is, can simultaneous, legitimate objections to the lassitude of a subject’s self-criticism and to the vehemence of her criticism of others ground a third, independent objection to something like a ratio between the strength of the two? If so, we would expect two consequences.

First, our overall complaint against Harriet should be pro tanto diminished if we found that Harriet’s first-personal reactive attitudes (guilt, shame, self-disgust, etc.) were just as excessive as her second-

29. In other words, Wallace (2010: 331–32) may be right to claim that behavior such as Henry’s constitutes “an implicit ascription of differential significance to one’s own interests, as compared to the interests of others.” *Contra* Wallace, however, I would think that the relevant interests that Henry treats as less important in Catherine’s case than in his own are first-order interests—for instance, in sexual freedom—rather than a (putative) interest in not being criticized. Thanks to an anonymous referee for the *Philosophical Review* for suggesting this framing of the contrast.

personal attitudes toward Dave. Indeed, that someone is ‘just as hard on him- or herself’ is often regarded as a defense against the charge of being too hard on others. But why should we regard Harriet’s excessive harshness with Dave as any less objectionable in light of her excessive harshness with herself? One’s habit of excessive self-flagellation gains no extra legitimacy when one adopts the additional habit of flagellating one’s neighbor. Nor do I see why excessive self-flagellation should mitigate other-flagellation.

Second, our overall objection to Harriet’s behavior should be diminished if we found that her expectations of Dave were just as low as her (inadequate) expectations of herself. But if Harriet is too easy on herself, why should our evaluation of her improve if she also turns out to be excessively lenient with Dave? Wouldn’t it express disrespect for Dave, or a failure to properly value their friendship, if she did not expect loyalty and care from him? Consider for a moment the following view about critical responsibility in the context of ongoing relationships, which is at odds with the notion that one should as a rule avoid hypo-criticism. If X feels that Y’s ϕ ’ing has compromised their relationship, then for her to fail to openly criticize him would manifest a lack of respect for him, as well as a corresponding devaluation of their relationship. If their relationship is to be maintained on grounds of mutual respect, X should criticize Y whenever X feels that her concerns about Y’s behavior are sufficiently significant to have more than a fleeting effect on her ability to ‘go on as before’ with him. To carry on as though nothing had happened would be a morally culpable omission on X’s part.³⁰

According to the view under consideration, Harriet ought to criticize Dave for his neglect; if she fails to, she has objectionably disrespected him and degraded their friendship.³¹ The anti-hypo-criticism norm

30. The toy view floated above is akin to Scanlon’s (2008) discussion of blame in that it focuses on the role criticism plays in the dynamics of human relationships. But for Scanlon, to blame someone is to call attention to a prior degradation of the relationship, caused by the behavior of the person blamed. By contrast, according to the view under consideration, to *fail* to criticize someone would *constitute* a degradation of the relationship. What matters for criticism on this view is not whether Y has (objectively) damaged the relationship by wronging X, but the fact that X has been brought up short by bewilderment and dismay at Y’s behavior.

31. Scanlon (2008: 130) himself contemplates the possibility that one might be obligated to openly criticize one’s friends in such situations, though whereas he assumes that any such obligation would arise as a requirement of *self*-respect, my main concern is rather that silence would express disrespect for one’s friend. But one needn’t adopt any such account of critical responsibility in order to accept my main line of argument here, which

holds that, even if the importance of avoiding such disrespect ultimately outweighs the importance of avoiding hypo-criticism, the latter is at least a pro tanto moral improvement, insofar as Harriet has brought the standards to which she holds others in line with the standards that she upholds herself. But if we regard Harriet's criticism not as a matter of 'standing in judgment' over Dave but as a way to initiate a necessary, if potentially adversarial, conversation about their relationship, it becomes harder to see the motivation for the notion that—holding her failure to criticize herself constant—it constitutes even a pro tanto moral improvement in her conduct if she also fails to criticize Dave. Readers committed to the anti-hypo-criticism norm may not share my intuitions here, but I have trouble seeing why this scenario should be an exception to the childhood maxim that 'two wrongs don't make a right'.

Harriet ought to recognize, take responsibility, and make amends for her previous neglect of Dave. She also ought to take the trouble to articulate her criticisms of Dave's similar behavior, and to present them to him in anticipation of his response. These are two independent moral obligations that Harriet has in the context of her relationship with Dave; a failure to fulfill the former should not transform the latter from an obligation into a prohibition.

Meanwhile, Dave is entitled, and perhaps (as I've just suggested) even obligated, to criticize Harriet for many things, including her past neglect of him, her obliviousness to her own failings, and her overly harsh criticism of his. The present conversation, during which Harriet criticizes Dave for his more recent neglect and disloyalty, may or may not be the right time for him to do so. In many circumstances, dredging up this material about the past would be a mere distraction, since Dave could perfectly well address Harriet's current complaints without reference to his own past ones. In such cases, Harriet would be right to object that Dave has changed the subject. In other circumstances, by contrast, it would be disingenuous for Dave not to bring up the past. His feelings about Harriet's past treatment of him may be relevant to his visceral reaction to what Harriet has just said, or even to his current treatment of Harriet, which may be a half-conscious attempt to 'give her a taste of

seeks only to establish the permissibility of hypo-criticism, and is thus compatible with a wide range of views as to when (if ever) interpersonal criticism is not merely permitted but required. Thanks to an anonymous referee for the *Philosophical Review* for prompting me to clarify this point.

her own medicine'. If Dave does choose to criticize Harriet in the course of a conversation that begins with her criticizing him, however, he should understand this as a contribution to the conversation that Harriet began by criticizing Dave, rather than a bid to end that conversation by claiming that Harriet should never have initiated it in the first place. Either way, the decision should be made in light of the context of the discussion and of their relationship as a whole, rather than by comparing their respective individual moral report cards.

Similarly holistic considerations of conversational and relational dynamics should be salient for the initial critic, replacing simple rules of thumb like the anti-hypo-criticism norm. Rejecting the anti-hypo-criticism norm does not prevent us from acknowledging that a critic's past behavior may be relevant to how she ought to go about criticizing others: it simply encourages us to tell more substantive stories about when and why that is the case. For instance, supporters of the anti-hypo-criticism norm sometimes note that when a would-be hypo-critic openly acknowledges her own wrongdoing at the time of the criticism — "Look, I know I've been guilty of this too, but . . ." — the intuitive objection to hypo-criticism seems to be diminished, or even overridden (Wallace 2010: 329n37).³² It is no doubt true that acknowledging our own past bad behavior often makes it more likely that our criticisms of others will be well received. At present, of course, that is at least partly due to the fact that our addressee likely accepts some version of the very anti-hypo-criticism norm that we are calling into question here, a norm that grants her license to dismiss our criticisms by reminding us of our own inadequacies. By preemptively acknowledging my own misbehavior at the outset, I anticipate that move and, to some extent, obviate it, or at least drain it of some of its rhetorical force. Even in the absence of widespread endorsement of the anti-hypo-criticism norm, however, being confronted with my anger and pain about your recent ϕ 'ing will sometimes, naturally enough, call up your own painful and bitter memories of my past ϕ 'ing. Being criticized for ϕ 'ing by someone whose ϕ 'ing you have witnessed in the past can then elicit a doubly hostile reaction — the defensiveness with which so many of us respond to criticism is topped off with a renewed

32. As discussed above, Wallace believes that critics incur a heightened obligation to self-scrutiny vis-à-vis non-critics. On Wallace's view, then, admitting to one's own failings in the context of a critical interaction immunizes the critic against hypocrisy by satisfying this obligation. Since I do not believe that non-critics are any less obliged to self-scrutinize than critics are, I cannot accept this explanation.

anger about the critic's past φ'ing. Acknowledging one's own faults before criticizing another person can often soften this reaction.

Such acknowledgment also provides an opportunity for critics to explicitly disavow the condescension that advocates of the Didactic and Sanction Views sometimes seem to regard as built into the act of criticism. By acknowledging my own φ'ing off the bat, I ward off an interpretation of my criticism as a matter either of unilaterally 'condemning' you or of presuming to unilaterally 'educate' you about morality. For these reasons, preemptively acknowledging one's own faults may often help critical conversations go better than they otherwise would. But we do not need to invoke the combination of a default anti-hypo-criticism norm and a clause granting an exemption to that norm in order to explain that psychological phenomenon. It suffices for would-be critics to reflect on what sort of initial conversational move is most likely to make the rest of the conversation go well in the circumstances. Since there are many ways for a conversation—even a painful one—to go well, there are many ways to use criticism to start a good conversation.

As I mentioned at the outset, the anti-hypo-criticism norm encourages us to think about *ourselves* before we speak, and to keep mum if our moral track records are not up to snuff. My suggestion here has been that this is a misdirection of our moral attention. A more dialogical approach to criticism would instead point our attention toward our interlocutors, and our relationships with them, as well as toward the moral issues at hand.

5.

I have proceeded thus far in the hope that reconceptualizing criticism as a way of initiating or contributing to a conversation—rather than as a unilaterally imposed sanction or a didactic monologue—might nudge the reader's intuitions about the anti-hypo-criticism norm in a more skeptical direction. The article has achieved its primary aim to the extent that readers leave less certain of the authority of the anti-hypo-criticism norm than they arrived. For readers whose commitment to the anti-hypo-criticism norm remains unshaken, however, I propose the following takeaways.

Our habits of offering and responding to criticism are malleable social practices. It is, at the end of the day, up to us how to criticize, and how to respond to criticism, and our habits in both cases will be shaped by the conceptual and metaphorical paradigms we adopt in thinking

about criticism. If we all think of criticism as a matter of meting out punishments or delivering lectures, then responses to criticism that question the critic's standing to punish us or her authority to lecture us are fairly predictable. This gives those who share my skepticism about the anti-hypo-criticism norm a debunking explanation for the regularity with which criticism elicits defensive and counter-aggressive responses of this kind: We are drawn to the anti-hypo-criticism norm because we are caught in the grip of a picture of criticism that paints the critic as presumptuously claiming some sort of special authority or standing—whether that standing is envisioned as pedagogical, pastoral, judicial, correctional, or all of the above.³³ Even those who do not share my skepticism, however, have reason to reexamine the conceptions of criticism on which defenders of the anti-hypo-criticism norm rely, and to ask whether we might feel differently about hypo-criticism if we thought and felt differently about criticism as such.

My guess is as follows. To the extent that we think of criticism as a punishment, we are more likely to respond defensively. To the extent that we think of it as a ready-made learning module, we are more likely to respond by rebelling against the putative teacher. To the extent that we think of it as a move in a potentially substantive and potentially valuable conversation, we are more likely to respond substantively, rather than with perfunctory rituals either of apology or of dismissal—and the ensuing conversation is more likely to be valuable.

No doubt many instances of criticism will continue to be offered in either a punitive or didactic spirit, regardless of what philosophers say. But adopting a broader repertoire of paradigms for thinking about our critical practices can help us to envision ways of engaging more deeply and substantively about morality and politics than we currently tend to do. Such a deepened conversational engagement might, in turn, make us more concerned than we currently are about the conversation-stopping potential of the anti-hypocrisy norm.

33. Such an explanation might go on: Since (i) such a presumption is obnoxious, and since (ii) being criticized is often discomfiting (especially when we are expected to respond substantively), we are naturally on the lookout for ways to (1) undermine or challenge the presumption and, at the same time, (2) excuse ourselves from having to respond to the substance of the criticism. Among such challenges, the charge of hypo-criticism is especially appealing since—unlike, say, 'it's none of your business'—it does not merely dismiss the critic but turns the tables on her, thus functioning at once as an offensive and defensive move.

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