

**On Hypocrisy: A Conceptual Analysis with Reference to
Public and Private Spheres**

being a dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Philosophy

in the University of Wales, Trinity St David, Lampeter

by

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January 2023

Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Acknowledgements

I wish to record my sincere thanks to Dr Tristan Nash, who has been the perfect interlocutor and supervisor for my philosophical journey at Lampeter. Also, to Dr Rebekah Humphreys for her engaging courses on environmental ethics and epistemology and Prof David Cockburn for the intellectual stimulation of the Welsh Philosophical Society at Gregynog: long may it continue.

I have found this project to be both challenging and rewarding. On reflection, it may have been easier to have chosen a project that tracked a well-trodden path. However, I feel the pain of actually *doing* philosophy ultimately led to a greater level of satisfaction: what Mill might describe as a higher pleasure!

Abstract

Hypocrisy is a fascinating and powerful moral concept. It has a rich history and has developed into a complex and multifaceted term, which has the power to be weaponised against opponents, yet surprisingly little has been published in the field of philosophy on this topic. Those accused of hypocrisy, whether justly or not, can find their reputations and moral standing seriously affected. This is particularly true of those who have taken up the burden of public roles. Hence the central argument of this dissertation is that since accusations of hypocrisy are normative acts in themselves, precision is required in defining what hypocrisy is, and care is necessary when accusing others of hypocrisy. This dissertation briefly examines the history of the use of hypocrisy as a moral concept before discussing a recent paradigm case. A conceptual analysis of the defining features of hypocrisy is then undertaken before a precisising definition of hypocrisy as moral exception-seeking is given. Through various cases, factors which may mitigate or negate claims of hypocrisy are then explored. Finally, the relationship between hypocrisy and the public sphere is examined, further strengthening the claim for actors to be precise, understanding and charitable in accusations.

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Chapter 1 Hypocrisy: an introduction and conceptual analysis

1.1 Introduction

What is the mentality of those who put hypocrisy first? The question is not trivial. Hypocrisy remains the only unforgivable sin, perhaps, especially among those who can overlook and explain away almost every other vice, even cruelty.¹

Hypocrisy is a dangerous concept. Those who accuse others of this moral vice have the potential to strip away their opponents' moral authority, which is particularly damaging to those in public roles and the plausibility of their broader moral claims. Consider the case of a politician lecturing the public on the importance of action to limit the climate crisis and, at the same time, jumping on a private jet for a short holiday in the sun. It seems reasonable for opponents and ordinary citizens to claim this is a case of hypocrisy and question the moral authority of a leader who says one thing and does something else. If the hypocrisy claim *appears* fair, whether it is or not, not only is the politician's reputation damaged, but additionally, the completely reasonable environmental protection claims can also be undermined through association with the hypocrite.

Despite the importance of claims of hypocrisy in public discourse, until recently, relatively little has been published on the concept of hypocrisy in the academic field of philosophy. A glance through popular ethics texts, and even philosophy dictionaries, demonstrates a lack of reference to hypocrisy (see Blackburn, for example²). In academic journals, there has been sporadic interest in hypocrisy over recent years; nevertheless, it is fair to claim that this is an area of moral philosophy which is both important and has room for further investigation, hence the reason for this dissertation. During my initial reading and discussions for this research, several broad questions emerged, which were subsequently focussed on the following aim and objectives.

¹ Judith N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984) 45.

² Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, 2009).

The principal aim of this dissertation is:

- **To provide a philosophical account of hypocrisy with particular reference to public and private spheres.**

The objectives of the dissertation are:

- **To undertake a conceptual analysis of hypocrisy**
- **To articulate a precisising definition³ of hypocrisy**
- **To evaluate factors that may mitigate or negate claims of hypocrisy**
- **To examine elements of the relationship between hypocrisy and public life.**

In terms of method, I will develop an argument throughout the dissertation addressing the above aims and objectives by drawing on both real and imagined examples. Therefore, I will appeal to academic philosophical texts and news media from across the political spectrum to illustrate how claims of hypocrisy manifest themselves in the public sphere. The topic has been necessarily limited by the word constraints of a dissertation. Therefore, although various ethical theories are mentioned (for example, utilitarianism and deontology) to retain the focus of this project, a detailed analysis of how different ethical theories could deal with hypocrisy is not undertaken. Additionally, in places, the development of cases is limited by space, and it should be noted that further elaboration of examples has the potential to push a case across the boundary from hypocrisy to non-hypocrisy and vice versa.

1.2 The historical development of the concept of hypocrisy.

Any attempt to articulate a definition must balance philosophical precision with generally understood meanings which have evolved through use over time. Although a complete genealogy is not essential for my argument, some etymology and history of usage will help us understand how the concept of hypocrisy has developed.

³ Aloysius Martinich, *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) 93.

In everyday use, sometimes called a folk concept⁴, 'hypocrisy' is a term frequently used to accuse others of not living up to their professed standards. A starting point for general use is a dictionary which helpfully provides a lexical definition.

Hypocrisy, (n). The assuming of a false appearance of virtue or goodness, with dissimulation of real character or inclinations, esp. in respect of religious life or beliefs; hence in general sense, dissimulation, pretence, sham. Also, an instance of this. Etymology: < Old French ypocrisie (modern French hypocrisie), < ecclesiastical Latin hypocrisis , < Greek ὑπόκρισις , the acting of a part on the stage, feigning, pretence, < ὑποκρίνεσθαι to answer, to play a part, pretend, < ὑπό hypo- prefix + κρίνειν to decide, determine, judge. The etymological spelling with h became current (as in French) in the 16th cen.⁵

In Ancient Greek theatre, the term 'hupokrites' was used to refer to an actor or player who was distinct from the chorus. However, in contemporary usage, one would not describe an actor as a hypocrite for simply being an actor. Nevertheless, there is still some sense in which a person accused of hypocrisy is acting. For example, when Donald Trump paraded outside St John's Church Washington in June 2020, brandishing the Bible for photographers, I think it is fair to say that it appeared to be a stage-managed affair to convince viewers of his religious credibility. However, there is a crucial difference between the hupokrite of ancient Greece and the alleged hypocrisy of Trump. In the Greek sense of the word, the actor is morally neutral, whereas the current use of hypocrite includes moral condemnation. Szabados and Soifer make the important point that in the theatre, there are clear conventions to separate reality from acting in the positioning of the audience and stage. In this sense, no genuine deception takes place in the theatre, however good the actor, 'in fact the more compelling the acting the more we praise the actor, while the more convincing the hypocrite the more we blame the unmasked hypocrite'⁶. It, therefore, makes sense that the origin of the term hypocrisy in theatre acting has now evolved into terms such as pretence or deception, which more specifically carry moral connotations of condemnation.

The development of the concept of hypocrisy after Ancient Greece is evidenced in the New Testaments of the Bible. Probably the clearest example is the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 23.

⁴ Christopher Bartel, 'Hypocrisy as either Deception Or Akrasia', *Philosophical Forum*, 50 (2019), 269-281.

⁵ OED, *Hypocrisy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90491> [accessed Jul 8, 2022]. OED,

⁶ Béla Szabados and Eldon Soifer, *Hypocrisy: Ethical Investigations* (Ontario: Broadview press, 2004) 20.

Here the writer of the Gospel articulated explicit charges of hypocrisy against the scribes and Pharisees.

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; 3 therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. 4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. 5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long⁷.

Here Jesus is preaching to the crowd and warns them to do as the religious leaders teach rather than follow their lived example. He acknowledges that these religious leaders have moral authority but lack personal commitment. This inconsistency between declared values and actions is still central to contemporary hypocrisy charges. For illustration, consider the case of Rev Brown, an ambitious vicar who grows his parish through skilled preaching. However, rather than make genuine sacrifices in his lifestyle to help with outreach work, he instructs his parishioners to 'get involved' whilst claiming he is too busy and spends his days happily pottering around his Cotswold rectory. Finally, he calls the local press to gain publicity for the outreach and stands centre stage in clerical dress, with parishioners and homeless people for the photo call. I think Jesus's accusation of hypocrisy would likely be accepted by those who knew Rev Brown's behaviour in this modern case.

A further aspect of Jesus's charges of hypocrisy can be found in versus 23-24 of Matthew 23.

23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!⁸

Here, Jesus makes an important point about taking the easy option, which can support a pretence of high moral or religious standing. In the case of Rev Brown, conducting his services and attending the press meeting are undoubtedly essential parts of his responsibilities. Still, Rev Brown finds these much easier to fulfil since he enjoys them much more than working in the more challenging aspects of ministry. It is, therefore, clear that the concept has evolved from the Ancient Greek meaning of acting into something of a thick moral concept, whereby charges

⁷ *Matthew 23. 1-5. (a).*

⁸ *Matthew 23. 23-24. (b).*

of hypocrisy involve a pretence of character where one professes a higher moral standard than one believes in or practices.

During the medieval period, Dante Alighiere demonstrated the moral seriousness of hypocrisy by reserving a specific place for hypocrites in the eighth circle of hell in his *Divine Comedy*.

Below that point we found a painted people, who moved about with lagging steps, in circles, weeping, with features tired and defeated. And they were dressed in cloaks with cowls so low they fell before their eyes, of that same cut that's used to make the clothes for Cluny's monks. Outside, these cloaks were gilded and they dazzled; but inside they were all of lead, so heavy that Frederick's capes were straw compared to them.⁹

Dante reflects the Biblical references to hypocrites as deceptive, painted people; those who wear clerical clothes that impress but beneath are heavy with lead, alluding to the contrast between the appearance of hypocrites and the reality of their true beliefs. The punishment for hypocrites in the lower reaches of hell included further tortures, such as crucifixion to the ground, demonstrating how seriously Dante thought the vice of hypocrisy.

In this dissertation, it is not necessary to further develop the history of the concept of hypocrisy. The historical touchstones of Ancient Greece, the Bible and Dante's *Divine Comedy* have been enough to establish its development to contextualise contemporary everyday use. Even this briefest of surveys demonstrates that hypocrisy is a complex and multifaceted concept associated with acting, pretence, deception, claiming higher moral values than one genuinely believes, moral authority and religiosity. Although this historical development provides a foundation, the meaning of words changes over time; therefore, I will now attempt to identify a contemporary central case of hypocrisy to illustrate how the concept is applied in the world before moving into further conceptual analysis to formulate a precisising definition.

1.3 A contemporary gold standard case of hypocrisy.

One case frequently mentioned in mainstream media and philosophical literature, which I will claim as a paradigm case of hypocrisy, is that of Ted Haggard. Rev Haggard is a born-again Christian and the successful founder and leader of the New Life Church in Colorado. He was a very influential evangelical preacher who built the Association of Life-Giving Churches,

⁹ Dante Alighieri and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Divine Comedy* (New York: Dover Publications, 2017), S.23:58 to 23.64.

amounting to 300 congregations, and held the presidency of the 30-million-member National Association of Evangelicals. He consistently preached the importance of traditional family values and used his considerable national influence to support homophobic initiatives and laws.

His hypocrisy was exposed when a former male prostitute named Mike Jones came forward to accuse Haggard of both procuring regular gay sex and taking the illegal drug meth (methamphetamine). Haggard denied the allegations when the story emerged. However, as evidence started to surface with voicemails being released, which appeared to verify the claims, Haggard shifted his position by claiming that although he bought meth, he disposed of it without using it. Since it is claimed that he purchased meth on a regular basis, the claim that he disposed of it seems rather unlikely. Haggard eventually stepped down from his senior positions in church organisations after gradually admitting his sexual liaisons. Interestingly, Jones said, 'I had to expose the hypocrisy. He is in the position of influence of millions of followers, and he's preaching against gay marriage, but behind everybody's back doing what he's preached against.'¹⁰

I believe there are several reasons why Haggard can be considered a paradigm case of generally understood hypocrisy. First, the importance of pretence to a false virtue is central to the dictionary and history of hypocrisy. In Haggard's case, there is a clear difference between the traditional virtues he is proclaiming and his actions. As an influential religious leader, his declarations were both *continuous* over several years and very *public*. For example, he was behind policies such as 'For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility' and appeared in films such as 'Jesus Camp', which all reinforced his public persona worldwide. Secondly, Haggard gained great personal *benefit* from espousing church values in terms of status, power and political influence. He was personally ambitious and ultimately gained access to the White House in some advisory capacity. Third, his *actions* were unambiguously contrary to his stated values and continued over several years and included a variety of 'sins' including gay sex, adultery, illegal drug taking and deception. Fourth, whilst engaging in these 'sins', his preaching judged and *condemned* others who engaged in similar acts, as is evident from the policy he produced and his interviews in the media. Fifth, he held a very senior position of moral authority over others yet made an *exception* for himself in that he appeared to have one rule for himself and another rule for everyone else.

¹⁰ 'Haggard Admits Buying Meth', ABC News, Nov 12 2008
<https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=2626067&page=1> [accessed Jul 8, 2022].

An important touchstone in conceptual analysis is intuition;¹¹ hence intuitively, it is my belief that the Haggard case is a gold standard in hypocrisy when considering the broad history and usage of the term. As stated earlier, hypocrisy is a slippery and multifaceted concept making it difficult to pin down; nevertheless, since the Haggard case accords with so many aspects of our general understanding of hypocrisy, I believe it is a plausible paradigm case. Am I being too harsh? Could there be a counter-argument to my claim? It would be difficult to argue that Haggard had competing values or responsibilities to fulfil since his sexual and drug activities were most likely driven by personal pleasure seeking. It could be claimed that Haggard was self-delusional and that he did not realise that his actions and proclaimed values were in conflict. Again, I think this defence is unpersuasive since he went to considerable lengths to hide his actions, for example, by using cryptic messages to order drugs and by changing his name when dealing with his sexual partners. Finally, the charitable defender could argue that his actions were owing to a weakness of will, i.e., he could not resist the temptations. I think this argument would carry more weight in cases like the ex-Welsh Secretary Ron Davis MP, who was robbed of his car and wallet at knifepoint on Clapham Common in 1998, a well-known sex cruising area¹². Davis stated that he was in a long-term happy marriage and that the events that evening were 'bizarre', 'a gross error of judgement', and most famously, 'a moment of madness'. It is far more challenging to claim Haggard acted in a moment of madness because the claims to virtue and the contradictory actions occurred over several years. Hence, owing to the weakness of these counter-arguments, I think I'm reasonably secure in claiming Haggard as a paradigm case of hypocrisy as the term is generally understood in the world.

Having now identified standard definitions, history of use and defended what I believe to be a paradigm case of hypocrisy, it is now necessary to deepen the conceptual analysis by philosophically examining the defining components of hypocrisy with reference to cases and academic literature. This will allow me to increase the clarity of the concept of hypocrisy beyond general everyday usage by articulating a more precise definition to increase the distinction between what ought and ought not to be claimed as hypocrisy.

¹¹ Colin McGinn, *Truth by Analysis: Games, Names, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 4.

¹² 'Davies Faces More Questions', *BBC News*, Oct 28 1998
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/203527.stm [accessed Jul 8, 2022].

1.4 Pretence and hypocrisy

In a recent short survey, Isserow¹³ attempts to bring order to the rather limited and fragmented philosophical literature on hypocrisy. She classifies philosophers as fitting into two traditions, first, hypocrisy as some form of pretence and second, hypocrisy as a form of exception seeking. This section will deal with the first of these traditions: pretence.

'According to pretence-centred accounts, hypocrisy centrally involves pretending to be morally better than one is. Hypocrites present themselves as having morally admirable motives, attitudes, or principles that they in fact lack'¹⁴. I agree that pretence and associated concepts such as deception, dissimulation and concealment seem to play an important part in the hypocrisy cases discussed above. Hypocrites such as Haggard are essentially projecting virtues that they do not possess or act in accordance with and benefit from such pretence. The archetypal example often cited in the literature is Moliere's Tartuffe¹⁵. A priest who, through a façade of religiosity, manages to convince Orgon, the wealthy head of a household, to bring him into the home. Tartuffe then manages to increase his influence over the household through his pretence, almost resulting in catastrophe for the family. He is only unmasked at the end of the play, when his self-interest is exposed.

In a frequently cited philosophical paper on the topic of hypocrisy and integrity, McKinnon (1991) attempts to explore the desires, motives and intentions that underpin the behaviour that would generally be described as hypocritical.

We can start with some ordinary intuitions about hypocrisy. We think of the hypocrite as one who dissembles or shams regarding her motives or intentions in regions where we take such things seriously, namely religion and morality, and probably politics.¹⁶

I think the use of the word dissemble is interesting here, meaning to pretend, deceive or fake. McKinnon goes on to argue that the hypocrite must be self-aware and have sufficient

¹³ Jessica Isserow, 'Moral Hypocrisy', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2020) <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/moral-hypocrisy/v-1> [accessed Oct 18 2022].

¹⁴ Jessica Isserow

¹⁵ Molière, *Le Tartuffe, Ou, L'Imposteur : Comédie / Molière; Édition Présentée, Annotée Et Commentée Par Gérard Ferreyrolles Et Delphine De Garidel*, ed. by Gérard Ferreyrolles and Delphine de Garidel (Paris: Larousse, 2004).

¹⁶ Christine McKinnon, 'Hypocrisy, with a Note on Integrity', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 28 (1991), 321-330.

understanding to pull off the sham. She must understand her real motives and then set about doing things to influence her audience into arriving at a false conclusion regarding her genuine motives. Her aim is to move the audience into making a more favourable judgment of her than they would if they had known her true motives. So, at the very least, the hypocrite is guilty of deception. McKinnon also makes the point that because hypocrisy requires knowledge of the audience's morality and a significant ability to manipulate the audience's judgment, children and people with low cognitive skills do not have the faculties to be hypocrites. She argues that hypocrisy is morally abhorrent because rather than challenge the community's moral standards, the hypocrite manipulates the community into believing she is following their shared morality and thus gains moral praise and avoids the censure she is due.

McKinnon convincingly explores the relationship between hypocrisy, intentions, and the role of deception. I think her argument on how an audience's moral standard is undermined is also true; however, I believe this is less of a problem for a successful hypocrite than an unsuccessful one. Consider the case of Rev Laggard (1875-1958), a fictitious distant relative of Rev Haggard. Laggard was just as successful as Haggard in building his church, proclaiming the church values, and at the same time engaging in contradictory behaviour. However, Laggard is never found out; even after his death, his hypocrisy remains undiscovered. I would therefore argue that although Laggard's hypocrisy was wrong since it involved pretence to values and deceptive actions, this did not undermine his moral community since they were unaware of his elicited actions. This clarification distinguishes the importance of the perfectly successful hypocrite, which by definition we cannot identify, and the unmasked hypocrite, such as Haggard, who did undermine his church's morality because members of that community probably started to question the trust they held for other leaders and members.

A parallel situation can be seen in the unmasking of Sir Jimmy Savile after his death. During his life, Savile was perceived by many to be a model citizen. He was someone who, through hard work and dedication, worked his way up from coal miner to the top of the British establishment. His persona was driven by his very public charitable achievements. It was often stated that he had raised £40 million for charity. However, when his abuse crimes were uncovered, in addition to the national outrage over his crimes, I think it is fair to say that people generally felt less trusting of those, particularly celebrities, claiming to work selflessly for charity, which in the long term may contribute to the undermining of general standards of morality. Of course, for some, his crimes may have had the opposite effect in that his immorality may be reinforced the importance of traditional moral standards.

So far in the discussion above, pretence and deception appear as central to claims of hypocrisy and this is affirmed in the literature of Kittay¹⁷, McKinnon¹⁸ and Szabados and Soifer¹⁹. However, others have argued that claims of hypocrisy can be made where there is no suggestion of pretence or deception. A good example of this is the well-meaning parent who admits her failures as a teenager, i.e., she is completely honest and open, but she also asks her children not to follow in her footsteps: is the parent a hypocrite even when not attempting to conceal anything from her children? If so, this casts serious doubt on the status of pretence or deception as a necessary condition for hypocrisy.

This question has been examined by Alicke et (2012) in the *Journal of Philosophical Psychology*²⁰. Their work is particularly interesting because rather than balancing various theoretical approaches against personal intuition, empirical data was collected to examine what 959 respondents believed ought to be described as hypocrisy. The subjects, American students, were exposed to various scenarios and were required to answer if the actor in each example was hypocritical. This also allowed the authors to vary scenarios and see how this affected the percentage of the sample that thought the case was hypocritical. In the first scenario presented in the paper, the question of whether deception was a necessary condition for attributing hypocrisy was tested.

The case involved a parent who engaged in risky behaviour (drinking and drugs) when he was young but is insisting his 17-year-old son does not do the same. Three levels of disclosure were then elaborated by the father.

Scenario 1.1: Dad **admits** taking drugs and alcohol when he was 17:

Scenario 1.2: Dad **does not say** he took drugs and alcohol at 17.

Scenario 1.3: Dad **lies** and explicitly says he did not take drugs or alcohol at 17.

In 1.1, 56.8% of the sample thought the honest dad was hypocritical. In 1.2, when dad failed to say anything about his past, this dropped to 53.6%, and in 1.3 when dad explicitly lied about his past, 69.3% thought this was a case of hypocrisy. Following three further scenarios, Alicke et al

¹⁷ Eva Feder Kittay, 'On Hypocrisy', *Metaphilosophy*, 13 (1982), 277-289.

¹⁸ Christine McKinnon, , 321-330

¹⁹ Béla Szabados and Eldon Soifer,

²⁰ Mark Alicke, Ellen Gordon and David Rose, 'Hypocrisy: What Counts?', *Philosophical Psychology*, (2012), 1-29.

conclude 'that the intent to deceive others about one's attitudes or values is not necessarily required to judge an actor's behaviour as hypocritical.'²¹

The fact that over half of respondents thought that being open and honest does not immunise the dad from a charge of hypocrisy is not surprising. I think it accords with my intuition that there is at least a mild case of hypocrisy here: 'do what I say, not what I did when I was your age'. However, what is surprising is that the proportion who thought that the dad was hypocritical when he *hid* his own teenage behaviour was less, although this result should be ignored since it was statistically insignificant. Therefore, in the sample, there is no evidence to suggest people thought hiding their own behaviour was worse than being open, which is very surprising. Finally, when the scenario changed to blatant lying, a statistically significant increase in the proportion of respondents was achieved, which I would expect. So, it seems blatant deception is significantly worse than either being open or withholding information. I think the empirical work illustrates how people in everyday life attribute hypocrisy. However, traditional analytic philosophy is an 'armchair activity'²². So, I aim to clarify when it would be *fairer* to apply hypocrisy in various cases since just because people use terms in certain situations does not necessarily mean they ought to. The most important conclusion from these scenarios is that in cases of well-meaning parents, where there is no pretence or deception, the charge of hypocrisy may still plausibly hold. So, does this mean that pretence or deception is not a necessary condition for hypocrisy?

1.5 Exception-seeking and hypocrisy

Crisp and Cowton state that 'one can indulge in the most flagrant hypocrisy of inconsistency without pretence'²³. They develop their argument that pretence is just one species of hypocrisy, the others being: inconsistency, complacency, and blame. I will examine their overall conclusion later; at this point, I will focus on the hypocrisy of exception-seeking, which is similar to their category of inconsistency. Isserow²⁴ makes a similar distinction but instead labels two broad traditions within the philosophy of hypocrisy, namely pretence and exception-seeking. The example given above of the well-meaning dad, who openly admitted drinking and taking drugs as a teenager but insisted that his 17-year-old son abstained from such activities,

²¹ Mark Alicke, Ellen Gordon and David Rose, 7

²² Colin McGinn, 100

²³ Roger Crisp and Christopher J. Cowton, 'Hypocrisy and Moral Seriousness', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 31 (1994)354.

²⁴ Jessica Isserow

may be viewed as fitting the category of the exception-seeking hypocrite. Even though the dad is acting in the son's best interest, he seems to be saying that there is one rule for him and a different one for his son in the same situation. Since the intention is to save the son from the mistakes the father made, this might be considered a more benign form of hypocrisy, and some may argue that it is not hypocrisy, particularly if the dad genuinely regrets his error. Alternatively, if the father is saying, 'do not take drugs' but is at the same time thinking, 'I really enjoyed my teenage drug taking', then obviously, this case more clearly becomes exception seeking. As highlighted by Isserow, exception-seeking undermines the universalism of ethics. For example, if I claim that stealing is wrong, it must be wrong for both you and me; without a good reason, I cannot make an exception of myself, which is what the dad appears to be doing (depending on one's interpretation of the scenario) in the above example.

One example where there might be a good reason to treat one group of people differently from another group is if there is a relevant difference between those groups. Szabados and Soifer discuss examples concerning 'double standards'. In the case of children who have yet to reach maturity, it is fair to judge their behaviour to a different standard from adults. In fact, if a parent was to judge a seven-year-old as an adult with respect to behaviour, this may be very damaging to the child's development. Similarly, in policies of affirmative action, where particular groups have been historically disadvantaged in access to certain professions, holding different groups to different assessment criteria may well be morally required on the grounds of equality. However, when children have grown up and disadvantaged groups are no longer socially discriminated against, there is no continuing justification for the double standards. 'It might be thought, then, that it is the unjust use of double standards that constitutes hypocrisy – a failure to treat different cases differently and like cases like.'²⁵

To test this definition against intuition, imagine the case of Peter, a speeding motorist typically exceeding the legal limit by ten mph, which his wife can see on the speedometer. Later in the journey, he slows down to fiddle with the radio settings, and several other cars overtake, causing him to swear and gesticulate to emote his condemnation of their speeding. I think there is a clear double standard in operation, and there is no reason to believe that Peter should be judged against a different standard from other drivers. Peter seems to be making an exception for himself in relation to the traffic laws. However, there is no sense of pretence since he cannot hide his speed from his wife or himself. It could be argued that he is not aware of his speed since he rarely looks at the speedometer, but I will assume that he is neither ignorant of his speed nor self-delusional. So, could it be that unjustifiable exception-seeking, rather than

²⁵ Béla Szabados and Eldon Soifer, 233

pretence is the single necessary condition of hypocrisy? Or is exception seeking a separate species of hypocrisy?

In many cases of hypocrisy, such as Haggard, there are features of both exception-seeking and pretence. However, plausible cases of hypocrisy, such as Peter the speeding motorist and Moliere's Tartuffe, can be constructed where only one of these conditions exists. For example, it can be suggested that whilst Tartuffe pretended to have virtues he did not believe in, he was not making an exception for himself. In other words, it was not that he believed in the Christian moral values for *other* people; he simply did not believe in them at all. I will return to this point later in the discussion. I will now examine the relationship between hypocrisy and the concept of blame, which may also play a role in developing a definition.

1.6 Blame and hypocrisy

In the Haggard case, I identified several features of his hypocrisy, including condemning others for the behaviour he was engaging in himself. Judgment and blame are evident in Haggard's policies and his interviews. Furthermore, the importance of judging others is found to be central in Biblical illustrations of hypocrisy.

7 Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your neighbour, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's] eye.²⁶

In the above chapter, the writer of Matthew is clearly highlighting the moral problem of people blaming others whilst possessing the same or even more significant faults themselves.

In the same manner that Crisp and Cowton separated off the different species of pretence and inconsistency, they also argue that the hypocrisy of blame can also exist as a separate species. 'Hypocrisy of blame, then, consists in moral criticism of others by someone with moral faults of their own.'²⁷ Of course, in many cases, pretence features alongside blaming others, but not necessarily, according to Crisp and Cowton. They give the example of a father who criticises

²⁶ Matthew 7. 1-5, (c).

²⁷ Roger Crisp and Christopher J. Cowton, 354

other parents for being overprotective. This is hypocritical since, at the same time, he is overprotective of his children. Crisp and Cowton state that 'He is pretending to nothing, and yet when certain aspects of his behaviour are pointed out to him, he may well admit to hypocrisy'.²⁸

I am not convinced that the hypocrisy of blame stands as a discrete species. It seems that of the cases discussed so far, blaming others for faults one possesses oneself is a common feature of hypocrisy and helps strengthen a claim of hypocrisy, for example, in the case of Haggard. However, in other cases, such as *Tartuffe*, the feature of blaming does not feature highly in his actions, yet his long-standing pretence appears to make him hypocritical. In the Crisp and Cowton example of the non-aware over-protective father blaming other parents for being overprotective, *if* there is no exception seeking and no pretence, I think it is difficult to argue that the parent is guilty of hypocrisy. However, it is hard to exclude exception-seeking in this scenario, even if the father lacks the self-awareness to recognise it in himself. Of course, his wife may notice the inconsistency between his speech acts and his behaviour and feel that her husband is being hypocritical. Still, if he is unaware of this inconsistency, it is probably fairer to describe his behaviour as simply morally inconsistent rather than the more specific charge of hypocrisy. If later, however, this inconsistency is pointed out to him, I think he may admit that other people may perceive his actions to be hypocritical.

Additionally, since he is now aware of his inconsistency, any further continuation of this behaviour could be considered hypocritical. Moreover, since he is now aware, he will either be pretending to have morals he does not believe in or making an exception for himself. Hence, it is my view that the species of the hypocrisy of blame that Crisp and Cowton forward collapses into the species of pretence or exception-seeking once the agent becomes self-aware.

In a paper on hypocrisy and standing to blame, Fritz and Miller²⁹ argue that non-hypocrisy is a necessary condition for standing to blame. As part of their paper, they offer a definition of hypocrisy. They forward the following case to illustrate standing to blame, labelled 'cheaters'. Jeff and Kate both cheat on an academic test. Both are responsible and blameworthy. After both realise each has cheated, Jeff criticises Kate for cheating. 'In response, Kate sensibly calls into question Jeff's standing to blame her, saying, "Look, you hypocrite, you've done the same thing. Who are *you* to blame me?"'³⁰. I will return to the topic of how hypocrisy affects standing to blame later; at this point, I will focus on Fritz and Miller's definition of hypocrisy.

²⁸ Roger Crisp and Christopher J. Cowton, 343

²⁹ Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel Miller, 'Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 99 (2018), 118-139.

³⁰ Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel Miller, 188

They work through three definitions resulting in the final and most satisfactory formulation as follows:

H3: R is hypocritical with respect to violations of N iff R is blameworthy for a violation of N and R has a DBD with respect to violations of N.³¹

In a less formal presentation, the definition reads that a person is hypocritical with respect to some violation of a moral norm if and only if that person is blameworthy for that violation and also that the person has a differential blaming disposition. Fritz and Miller state that 'We take an agent's dispositions to be the key to understanding hypocrisy'³². To illustrate this point, take the case of the car thief Jack. He has been stealing cars for ten years, which is his way of life. He recognises that society deems this wrong but feels it is an easy way to make money. He meets other car thieves in his activities, and he is disposed not to blame them. Therefore, he is not a hypocrite since he does not hold others to different standards to himself, i.e. he does not hold a 'differential blaming disposition'. Fritz and Miller's definition is attractive since it includes the concept of dispositions rather than individual acts, which recognise human attitudes towards morality through time. However, ultimately it is still an exception-seeking species of hypocrisy, rather than anything distinctly different in the way Crisp and Cowton have categorised hypocrisy.

1.7 Hypocrisy and complacency

At this point, it is worth mentioning that Crisp and Cowton also claim a fourth category of hypocrisy: the hypocrisy of complacency. Drawing on the example of the Pharisees who paid tithes of mint and dill but did not trouble themselves about the more demanding aspects of the moral law, Crisp and Cowton argue that the hypocrisy of complacency is closely related to their other three categories but is nevertheless distinct. They state that this particular vice is associated with the Victorians and other groups who do not take morality seriously. 'What makes their concern hypocrisy is the extremely undemanding nature of their morality and their unwillingness to reflect upon it'³³. I again would counter-argue that there probably is not enough conceptual distinction to justify a separate category. Consider a Victorian gentleman; he works hard as a director in a factory, attends church, and is good to his family, but also

³¹ Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel Miller, , 118-139

³² Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel Miller, 122

³³ Roger Crisp and Christopher J. Cowton, , 343-349

enjoys his own pleasures and is happy to criticise his workers for lacking Godliness and industriousness. It is easy to see how this exemplar can fall within the category of exception-seeking since he is holding his workers to different standards to himself. If he does not exception seek and simply does not take morality seriously, then I would claim that he is guilty of simply not taking morality seriously, rather than the more specific charge of hypocrisy.

1.8 A definition of hypocrisy

Hence, so far, I have confirmed two broad categories of hypocrisy: pretence and exception-seeking. In the simplest form, these could provisionally be defined as follows.

Hypocrisy of pretence involves pretending to some morally superior position, which in fact one does not hold, for one's own benefit.

and

Hypocrisy of exception-seeking involves holding oneself, or another favoured group, to different moral standards to others.

Although two species of hypocrisy may be captured in a conjunctive definition, in the interests of clarity and parsimony, it may be preferable to identify one overriding condition to define hypocrisy. But is a further reduction possible where a condition can be found to encompass different types of hypocrisy? Crisp and Cowton claim that 'the strand that runs through paradigm cases of the various kinds of hypocrisy is a failure to take morality seriously'³⁴. They argue that a concern to take morality seriously is in a sense a 'metavirtue' because it is concerned with being virtuous itself. This is demonstrated by various central cases from the literature, including the Pharisees and Tartuffe. Although I agree that in some cases, the hypocrite could be charged with not taking morality seriously, the condition becomes so wide as to lack the power to distinguish cases of hypocrisy from general non-hypocritical moral failures. For illustration, *both* the case of a straightforward liar contrasted with a case of a hypocritical liar could be argued to be the result of not taking morality seriously. Additionally, it could be argued that many hypocrites *do* take morality seriously. For example, they may believe in

³⁴ Roger Crisp and Christopher J. Cowton, 347

moral standards, but apply different moral standards to different groups, and do this seriously. I discuss various cases in later chapters.

Furthermore, an individual may strive to take morality very seriously; however, owing to very human flaws, they may have occasional actions which meet our definition of hypocrisy. If he or she regrets these events, we have a situation where he or she did engage in hypocrisy and was at (almost) the same time taking morality seriously. I, therefore, conclude that Crisp and Cowton's metavirtue solution lacks distinguishing power.

Contra Crisp and Cowton, rather than attempting to find a meta virtue overarching the two species of hypocrisy, another strategy is to examine whether the hypocrisy of pretence could collapse into the hypocrisy of exception seeking to develop a definition of hypocrisy *simpliciter*. If we return to Tartuffe, I argued earlier that he is typically assumed to be a paradigm case of hypocrisy. The defining element of his hypocrisy is often argued to be pretence because of his attempts to deceive his host into taking him into his household as a virtuous priest. However, since he does not appear to believe in the religious virtues he pretends to, it can be argued that he is not holding others to the moral standards that he is failing to meet himself. Therefore, there is a potential problem since Tartuffe is traditionally assumed to be a paradigm case of hypocrisy, yet he does not qualify if the exception-seeking definition is recognised. There are three routes out of this problem.

First, it could be argued that in cases like Tartuffe, there is private rather than public blame of others, which he does not apply to himself. McKenna (2012)³⁵ discusses how blame can be private or overt, with private blame being reduced to experiencing a negative attitude in contrast to overt blame, which is evident for others to see in terms of verbal reproach or shunning. Hence, although it is often perceived that cases similar to Tartuffe have no exception-seeking or differential blaming disposition, without a detailed understanding of a character's psychology, this cannot be discounted. Second, it could be inferred that judgment is present merely by the role played by the character, in Tartuffe's case, a priest. Simply by presenting himself as a priest, Tartuffe is signalling that his moral character is superior to other members of the household, which can be seen as a form of exception-seeking. He might genuinely believe in religious conformity for others since it's good for social cohesion or control, but simply believe that owing to his own intellectual superiority; he can be exempted. Finally, even if we reject my two preceding points and insist that there are cases that are traditionally considered to be

³⁵ Michael McKenna, 'Directed Blame and Conversation', in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, ed. by D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini (Oxford University Press, 2012), 119-140.

hypocrisy in which there is pretence but no exception seeking, I will contend that these can be reclassified as non-hypocrisy.

Tartuffe is clearly acting immorally in deceiving the household for his own self-interest. However, if we assume there is no exception seeking judgment, is his behaviour more accurately described as that of a conman or confidence trickster rather than a hypocrite? I am not suggesting that pretence is not important in strengthening charges of hypocrisy. Indeed, it seems true that many cases do include pretence, but I am arguing that cases like Tartuffe may not be central enough to determine that pretence ought to be a necessary condition for either hypocrisy itself or to generate a separate species of hypocrisy.

Hence, having analysed the various potential necessary conditions of hypocrisy, for the purposes of this dissertation, I forward the following single precisising definition of hypocrisy³⁶.

An act is hypocritical if, and only if, the person performing the act morally exception-seeks by holding themselves, or another favoured person or group, to lower moral standards than to those being morally judged for similar acts, and that the difference in moral standards is not justified.

Although the English of my definition may lack elegance, I have framed the definition in the adjectival form to increase the clarity of the essence of what it is for something to be hypocritical. In other words, rather than state ‘hypocrisy is...’ I have articulated a definition in the form ‘X is hypocritical if and only if the following necessary conditions are met’. Since my aim here is to provide a definition, I’m proposing that the conditions are individually necessary and collectively sufficient to guarantee a case of hypocrisy.

The centrality of exception-seeking in the definition captures why hypocrisy is morally problematic. As discussed by Szabados and Soifer, the fundamental problem of hypocrisy is that it undermines the universalism of ethics. If the moral law applies to you, it must also apply to me too: nobody is exempt. Universalism in ethics is given a rich theoretical basis in Kantian ethics. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant articulates the universalism of ethics through various formulations of his famous categorical imperative. In the first formulation, he states: ‘I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law’³⁷. With my definition explicitly articulating hypocrisy

³⁶ At this point, the definition of ‘hypocrisy’ could be extended to define a ‘hypocrite’ as a person with a moral disposition to perform hypocritical acts. This area could be developed further in relation to the nature of a hypocritical disposition and character, which, in order to retain focus, is not pursued in this research.

³⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Law : Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals Translated and Analysed by H. J. Paton* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1991) 67.

as a form of exception-seeking within morality, it is clear that such behaviour is wrong from a Kantian perspective.

The final clause in my definition, 'and that the difference in moral standards is not justified,' is added to take account of situations when it may be justified to accept different moral standards between groups or individuals, and this not be considered hypocrisy. For example, a religious leader, it could be argued, ought to live to the standards proclaimed by his church rather than those potentially lower standards of general society. If, for illustration, I am a sensible social drinker of alcohol, but the local church forbids alcohol as part of its doctrine. One day I saw the priest drinking a beer whilst on holiday; I do not think it is hypocritical to criticise his behaviour whilst at the same time drinking myself since by accepting his role, the priest has accepted conformity to a different moral standard. This clause captures justifiable non-hypocritical exceptions.

As I have already discussed above, the fact that the definition does not include a reference to pretence does not mean that pretence or deception, or other moral features do not occur in cases of hypocrisy, but it is my claim that they are not necessary conditions to claims of hypocrisy. Instead, they act as features of exception-seeking or moral judgments on others and so fit under the defining concepts (analysans) of the target concept (analysandum)³⁸. So, for example, let us return to the paradigm case of Rev Haggard. The necessary features that define his actions as hypocrisy are that he is performing acts whilst at the same time condemning others for performing similar acts. He is therefore declaring others should live up to higher moral standards and judging those who do not, whilst at the same time not applying these same standards to himself. And he has no reasonable justification for these different moral standards. Moreover, since he has a pattern of behaviour over time of committing hypocritical acts, it is fair to describe him as a hypocrite. Finally, of course, there is plenty of pretence and deception in Haggard's case, but I'm arguing that it is the moral exception-seeking that is necessary; the lies, pretence, and deception are the activities that facilitate his exception-seeking in his case, and therefore, they are not necessary conditions in and of themselves.

The central argument of this dissertation is that hypocrisy is a normative claim that can be weaponised and lead to significant damage for both individuals and society. The next section considers factors which either negate or mitigate typical claims of hypocrisy, having accepted my precisising definition above.

³⁸ Simon Blackburn, 13

Chapter 2 Mitigation and negation

Having developed a definition of hypocrisy, I will now argue that situations that are habitually claimed to be hypocritical are often not hypocritical or are at least mitigated or justified by various factors. These factors include weakness of will, change of mind, and ranking of different duties. This is important since charges of hypocrisy often come at great cost to those accused because the charge of hypocrisy is a normative act in itself that has the potential to damage an individual's moral authority and reputation. In the penultimate chapter, I will also argue that targeting unjust claims of hypocrisy to those in the public sphere also damages trust in public positions and civic life itself.

2.1 Akrasia or weakness of will

When discussing the central case of Haggard, I mentioned that a defence against his hypocrisy could be that of weakness of will, i.e., Haggard just could not control himself. Nevertheless, I argued that owing to the consistency of the gap between his proclamations and practice over a long period and his level of deception, this counter-argument would be a weak defence against a charge of hypocrisy. Many politicians, on all sides of the political spectrum, often get into trouble when their private lives seem to clash against their proclaimed values, and the charge of hypocrisy is often applied. A typical case is the Welsh Labour MP Ron Davis, who was robbed on Clapham Common, a well-known sex cruising area³⁹. At first sight, he seems to have been caught doing things that many would condemn. Certainly, some sections of the press thought so: 'The trouble with Ron Davies is not that he is a homosexual. It is that he is a hypocrite and a liar. What he was really up to was illegal and sick.'⁴⁰

However, I would argue that this might *not* be a case of hypocrisy for two principal reasons. First, he did not explicitly proclaim the virtues of sexual fidelity or condemn homosexuality (although, as an MP, he stood for election under a general manifesto of decency in public life and the rule of law). Therefore, it is difficult to imagine that he meets my precisising definition

³⁹ 'Davies Faces More Questions',

⁴⁰ Greenslade Roy, 'Ron Davies's Walk', *Irish Times*, Nov 6 1998

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/ron-davies-s-walk-where-there-is-mystery-there-is-curiosity-1.211596> [accessed 15/10/22].

of hypocrisy as exception-seeking since he does not appear to be holding others to perceived higher moral standards than himself.

Second, he appeared to have had a genuine 'moment of madness' where his suppressed sexuality boiled over, and he lost control of what he was doing that evening. In his public interviews, he seemed genuinely remorseful for what had happened and for the hurt caused to his family and political party. So, even if my first point is rejected, at worst, this might have been a hypocritical *act* rather than the character *disposition* of a hypocrite who continued to engage in exception-seeking behaviour over an extended period, for example, as in the case of Haggard.

The problem of losing self-control against one's better judgment is termed incontinence, akrasia or weakness of will, and was a particular interest of the ancient Greek philosophers. As recorded in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle investigated the character traits of continence and incontinence. 'the incontinent man does wrong because he feels like it, although he knows that it is wrong, whereas the continent man, when he knows that his desires are wrong, refuses assent to them because of his principle.'⁴¹

Hence, according to the virtue ethicist, continence is an admirable character quality, whereas incontinence is a vice. So maybe some charges of presumed hypocrisy of character could more reasonably be categorised as mere weakness of will or akrasia.

Let us take the example of Sid, a recovering alcoholic. Sid has not touched a drink for five years since promising his wife to abstain and joining the local Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). However, one night he meets up with his old friends from the colliery where he worked for 30 years. They do not realise Sid is a recovering alcoholic, so they buy him a drink. He tries to resist, but they keep pushing him, and, in the end, he starts drinking. He is seen in the pub by his sister-in-law, who knows about his promise to his wife; she calls him a hypocrite. The next day, he is upset, tells his wife what has happened and reaches out to his fellow AA members. One would have to be very harsh to consider this a genuine case of hypocrisy since Sid was not condemning other drinkers or alcoholics when he was dry, and was, therefore, not exception-seeking his own behaviour. And although he knew drinking was the wrong thing to do since he promised his wife, he felt genuine remorse and lost control of his addiction that evening: in Aristotelian terms, he was akratic.

Now consider the case of Jim, who runs the local temperance revival movement in Swansea. Jim has been publicly preaching about the evils of drinking for 20 years. One evening, he

⁴¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. by J. A. K. Thomson and Hugh Tredennick, Rev. edn (London: Penguin, 2004), 168.

returns to London for a university reunion, where he lived a typical student life in the 1990s. He is served wine, and because he wants to fit in, he has one glass but continues to drink moderately. Jim knows this is inconsistent with his preaching, and he could have resisted the temptation if he had tried (he was never an alcoholic), but he thought that no one would find out back in his hometown. In some sense, this could be argued to be a compound of akrasia and hypocrisy. Jim knew that drinking was not the right thing to do since he spends his time preaching on the immorality of drink, yet he did drink because he got psychologically swept away by the reunion. He was, therefore, akratic in some sense of the word. However, there are other aspects of the case that bring it under the definition of hypocrisy; for example, Jim has been publicly condemning other drinkers for 20 years and was making an exception of himself because it was easily within his power to resist the temptation. This case shows how moral culpability slightly changes depending on several factors, including the balance between weakness of will and exception-seeking. Thus, the stronger the exception-seeking, for example, if Jim's condemnations increase in strength by showing little understanding for others who become weak-willed, the more serious the hypocrisy. Conversely, the stronger the weakness of will claim, for example, Jim may have become clinically depressed in the weeks leading up to the university event, making him vulnerable, the less serious the hypocrisy. This, of course, is assuming that Jim would not condemn others who were drinking when depressed; if he did, he would again be exception-seeking.

I would therefore conclude that some charges of hypocrisy are unjust and could be more fairly described as weakness of will, as in the case of Sid. This is particularly the case when the accused shows little sign of holding others in a similar situation to higher standards than themselves. Additionally, I claim that other charges of hypocrisy, such as those aimed at Jim, may have mitigating factors relating to weakness of will, which ought to lessen the moral condemnation and any associated punishments.

2.2 Change of mind

If an individual judges themselves against different, typically lower, moral standards to others, then I have argued that this is a necessary condition of hypocrisy. However, is this still the case if that differential judgement occurs over an extended period?

Take the case of Jo, a 40-year-old superbike rider. When she was 25, she would regularly race through her village at illegal speeds, causing a significant nuisance. However, by the age of 40, she had become more civic-minded and joined the local parish council. This involves campaigning for speed cameras and publicly condemning motorists who drive at speed through

the village. She still rides her superbike but now only goes at high speed on a race circuit. Many older villagers remember her behaviour and accuse her of double standards and hypocrisy. Is this a fair charge? I would argue that an individual's character and moral dispositions change over time. It is entirely plausible that Jo has matured between the ages of 25 and 40, and her engagement in local politics and safety campaigning indicates this. If she is now holding herself to the same moral standards as she holds others to, then I do not believe she should be charged with hypocrisy. But how much time is required to change genuinely?

It could be argued that a significant amount of years must pass before an individual can convincingly claim to have moved their moral dispositions. The proverbial saying 'a leopard never changes its spots' may be harsh; still, it captures the widespread sense that people are generally suspicious of those who claim to have changed their moral dispositions or behaviour. Nevertheless, I would argue that significant life events do have the power to transform an individual. For example, imagine that at age 35, Jo was witness to her friend being killed on a high-speed ride. In a very short time, the trauma of such an event could have plausibly changed her views on speeding. Alternatively, the event may not even have to be traumatic; for example, a change could occur if Jo was caught speeding and elected to go on an effective speed awareness course.

It is, therefore, possible that many charges of hypocrisy that appear to recognise moral inconsistency between what people say and how they act are, in fact, nullified or at least mitigated by individuals changing their minds on moral issues. These changes may have occurred over an extended period or resulted from a 'road to Damascus moment'. As an external observer, it will be challenging to infer whether these changes are genuine. Therefore, without evidence to the contrary, we ought to be cautious in claiming hypocrisy since its effects can be so damaging. This is particularly the case with genuinely reformed criminals who now have positions of authority in a society where they are aiming to do good in the world.

2.3 Ranking of duties

Take the case of Sarah, a Labour education minister sending her children to a private school. At first sight, there seems to be something wrong. Sarah actively proclaims the importance of a publicly funded comprehensive school system. In her very public ministerial role, she argues that private schools are a significant factor in inequality of opportunity because they provide access to prestigious universities and highly competitive careers. At the same time, despite these moral proclamations, Sarah sees that her local comprehensive school is performing poorly and that her 12-year-old child will not fulfil her potential if she attends it. So, after a long

process of painful reflection and deliberation, she decides to enrol her child in a private day school with fees amounting to £20,000 per year. This appears to be a clear case of hypocrisy in the popular mind (see similar reports about the UK Labour party MPs)⁴². There seems to be an inconsistency between the egalitarian values being declared and those being practised. Various popular newspapers, both on the left and right, provoke a hornet's nest of anger, calling for 'the resignation of a hypocritical class traitor' with the typical epithets of 'champagne socialist' and 'limousine liberal'. The consequences for Sarah are immense. First, press harassment and public condemnation through traditional and social media channels. Second, influential Labour Party members called for her removal from ministerial office. Third, the personal psychological distress caused by both the decision and the publicity. Not quite Dante's inferno, but very traumatising, nevertheless.

In summary, accusations of hypocrisy are often severe for those accused, particularly those in the public sphere. In this case, it may be that those judging Sarah consider that she only believed in comprehensive schools 'for other people's children' and was making an exception for her own family. If so, then this appears to be a clear case of hypocrisy. However, what if the truth of the matter was somewhat different? Imagine that Sarah desperately wanted her child to go to the local state school since she genuinely believes in a fair society where ability and hard work rather than parental wealth determine success.

Nevertheless, despite agonising over the decision for months, it was clear that the failing comprehensive would not give her daughter an education where she could reach her full potential. Does Sarah not owe a duty to do the best she can for her daughter by facilitating the best possible education while fighting for a better education system for all children? A future more egalitarian country where private schools are unnecessary may be what Sarah genuinely wants and is actively working on. But for the moment, this environment does not exist in the UK, so Sarah attempted to arrive at an ethical resolution based on conflicting moral obligations. Understanding Sarah's inner psychology moves the case from one of exception-seeking for her own child to one of resolving a dilemma between two duties: the duty of the politician and the duty of the parent. Maybe the situation is not even a dilemma since the private and public realms are quite separate, so both actions are compatible, and the charge of hypocrisy is quite unjust (I will return to public and private spheres in chapter three). Therefore, it seems that the

⁴² Glen Owen and James Heale, 'Labour Party High Flyers are Accused of 'Blind Hypocrisy' for Backing Efforts to Abolish Private Education Despite Sending their Children to Private Schools', *Daily Mail*, 2019 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7490373/Labour-Party-high-flyers-accused-blind-hypocrisy.html> [accessed 15/10/22].

charge of hypocrisy, especially when one considers the serious negative consequences, should be withheld unless one has clear evidence of motive, which would be difficult in this case.

W D Ross recognises the difficulty of resolving dilemmas when one has conflicting duties in *the Right and the Good*⁴³. In an attempt to overcome some of the failures of traditional moral systems, such as utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, Ross argued for what he termed *prima facie* duties. These are genuine duties which can be overridden in the light of other *prima facie* duties. Ross argued that different people stand in relation to each other, and this relation is morally significant, for example, 'child to parent, of friend to friend, or fellow countryman to fellow countryman and the like; and each of these relations is the foundation of a *prima facie* duty'⁴⁴. Ross later explains that the term *prima facie* (at first sight) is confusing and 'must be apologized for'⁴⁵ but may be thought of as the corollary to a claim others have on us. So, for example, while Sarah has a *prima facie* duty to keep her promise to uphold the values of socialism and the Labour party, she also has *prima facie* duties to support her child's education. In each situation, how these duties rank against each other will depend on context rather than any predetermined ordering based on the category of duty. Therefore, taking account of the complexity of an individual dilemma, it could be argued that in the above case, Sarah is not exception-seeking but instead trying to balance a dilemma involving the pull of competing duties. Therefore, the charge of hypocrisy is unjust, particularly if she has not condemned other politicians in a similar situation.

Whilst in some contexts, ranking competing duties may match our intuitions and feel like an elegant solution, it still seems natural for Sarah to feel a sense of guilt. In other more extreme examples in public life, where politicians claim to believe in moral norms whilst simultaneously breaking them for an existential emergency, the problem of dirty hands has been forwarded as a way to explain why politicians often paradoxically do wrong to do right⁴⁶. Hence, politicians particularly may be guilty of hypocrisy when undertaking their roles diligently in the public sphere. The next chapter considers if claims of hypocrisy are generated owing to the incompatible nature of morality both *across* public and private spheres and *within* public spheres, and if so, how we might respond to such claims.

⁴³ David Ross and William David Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ David Ross and William David Ross, 19

⁴⁵ David Ross and William David Ross, 20

⁴⁶ Michael Walzer, 'Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2 (1973), 160-180.

Chapter 3 Public and private spheres

In this chapter, I argue that those in the public sphere are particularly prone to charges of hypocrisy. Some charges have merit and help keep those with public roles accountable for their words and deeds. However, I will argue that many charges are unfair and ought not to be made since both the cost to the individual and public trust more generally are eroded by claims of hypocrisy, which may amount to no more than political mudslinging. Additionally, I will suggest that public and private morality operates in different but connected spheres, further explaining why typical charges of hypocrisy in the public domain may be mitigated. Finally, I will examine the concept of dirty hands as an explanation of why some cases of exception-seeking hypocrisy are both wrong but necessary to do the right thing in public life.

3.1 Are there distinct moral spheres appropriate to public and private life?

In *The Prince*, Niccolo Machiavelli argues that for a ruler to conquer and maintain power over a state, he must act in ways that are contrary to behaviour typically associated with the virtuous. So, suppose a sixteenth-century prince wants to succeed. In that case, Machiavelli counsels that he should avoid being too compassionate, kind, and trustworthy or he will lose power to those who are not so virtuous.

The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous. Therefore, if a prince wants to maintain his rule he must learn how not to be virtuous, and to make use of this or not according to need.⁴⁷

Machiavelli appears to have a reputation in the popular mind for promoting tyrannical leadership. However, his point is more subtle. He is arguing that the political world is dangerous, and if a leader wants to hold onto power and maintain a certain way of life for his people, he must face the realities of these dangers or risk losing his state. This does not involve acting like an evil tyrant with an utterly inverted morality but does acknowledge that the morality required in political life is very different from that typically associated with everyday private life.

⁴⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli and George Bull, *The Prince* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961) 48.

In *The Prince*, he articulates how important it is to avoid being hated and despised. He also states that a ruler should appear compassionate and religious since 'people are always impressed by appearances'.⁴⁸ However, it is the *appearance* of virtue that is necessary, not virtue in itself⁴⁹. Therefore, sometimes the ruler will be genuinely virtuous, for example, he is counselled against unjustly taking property, but in other contexts, he will merely take the appearance of virtue. There are also occasions when he may have to be brutal, for example, to put down challengers and instil fear into the population. 'He should not deviate from what is good, if that is possible, but he should know how to do evil, if that is necessary.'⁵⁰ It is my view that Machiavelli is arguing for something far more politically conventional than his reputation in the popular mind suggests.

Machiavelli believes rulers must preach one message of morality to the citizens and, at the same time, develop a separate public morality for those in charge of maintaining the state. If a ruler cannot act against what is generally considered virtuous in the private sphere, he risks the state falling to competitors who will not be playing by the rules.

A certain contemporary ruler, whom it is better not to name, never preaches anything except peace and good faith, and he is an enemy of both one and the other, and if he had ever honoured either of them he would have lost either his standing or his state many times over.⁵¹

Current examples of claimed hypocrisy continue to play out in the public sphere. Many countries worldwide have poor human rights records, for example, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Egypt. Western governments such as the US and UK publicly proclaim the virtues of human rights and condemn these violations, which include imprisonment and torture of political activists. However, at the same time, official visits by senior public figures to further trade and security pacts continue to further the interests of Western. Following Machiavelli, our leaders may have no choice but to engage if they aim to secure their nation's best interests. Although such trade visits are often widely condemned as hypocritical it could be argued that trade deals may help leverage influence to improve human rights in such countries⁵². Hence, hypocrisy may be the least-worst option if the electorate expects a leader to secure economic

⁴⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli and George Bull, 56

⁴⁹ Plato discusses a similar point in the Ring of Gyges tale in the *Republic*

⁵⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli and George Bull, 58

⁵¹ Niccolò Machiavelli and George Bull, 56

⁵² James Lynch, 'Britain has a Voice on Human Rights Issues and should use It', *Open Democracy*, July 15 2022 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/uk-authoritarian-regimes-egypt-human-rights/> [accessed Oct 25, 2022].

opportunities. An alternative would be to avoid the charge of hypocrisy by continuing to trade and remaining silent on the human rights abuses: this intuitively feels worse since silence may be taken as condonement. Secondly, it could be counter-argued that these are not even cases of hypocrisy when taking my exception-seeking definition since unless the Western politician condemns other Western leaders for trading with human rights abusers, no exception is being claimed. The politician is merely attempting to improve the country they were elected to lead through trade or security and, at the same time, influence the leadership of another country to enhance the other country's human rights. This example demonstrates how my precisising definition of a more specific notion of hypocrisy, as unjustified exception-seeking, accords more readily with moral intuitions for decisions made in the public sphere. However, the above raises the question of whether those working in public life are freed from normal obligations since they operate in a separate sphere.

An edited book titled *Public and Private Morality* appeared in 1979, which explored and developed many of Machiavelli's themes⁵³. The date of publication is significant since many of the authors were drawing on the experience of the recent war in Vietnam. Hampshire sympathises with Machiavelli's position and accepts that political power comes with different responsibilities resulting in different moral guidelines. For example, the threat of violence against the state and resultant requirements to exercise violence are not unusual in public life but are rare in the private sphere. Additionally, moral considerations in the private arena are most directly related to oneself and family, whereas those in public positions need to consider the needs of the citizens they rule or represent. These citizens are vast in number and unknown to those making the decisions on their behalf. Therefore, moral decision-making in public life becomes more complex and challenging for those who take public office.

For this reason, consequentialist theory and practice are often used in political policy and associated decision-making since they appear to objectify and measure the results of policy and thus provide a rationale that can be communicated to the citizens. Remarkably, Hampshire argues that notions of 'right' and 'wrong' do not provide an adequate defence to public policy because they find their natural home in the private domain, where judgments are typically informed by values such as friendship, fairness and integrity.⁵⁴

Hence, if we accept that public and private moral spheres are quite separate, typical charges of hypocrisy based on the inconsistency between public moral declarations and private actions, such as the private school case previously discussed, potentially evaporate. However, this feels

⁵³ Stuart Hampshire, *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

⁵⁴ Stuart Hampshire, 50

intuitively awkward. Drawing on the Vietnam war, Hampshire argues that things can go wrong when public and private morality are entirely separated. The problems with decision-making by those in power were not the consequentialist approach itself 'but to the fact that their calculations were not tempered by respect for the ordinary moral decencies.'⁵⁵ Hampshire claims that decision makers were effectively operating in a hermetically sealed morality, where arresting the growth of communism out-trumped any other consideration: this resulted in devastating human suffering. As stated by Hampshire:

The necessary blend between rational policy-making on the one side and natural feelings and reflective intuitions of right and wrong on the other had been distorted by a naïve and mechanical Machiavellianism, which finally failed.⁵⁶

So, although public and private morality have elements of difference, they plausibly appear to be overlapping and somehow connected. This intuitively seems to be the case. The socialist MP who sends her child to a private school ought to find her decision difficult. The consequentialist policy in the political party to abolish private schools for the greater good cannot be wholly divorced from the individual moral duty to support her daughter in gaining a high-quality education. Hence, for a morally serious person, being in public life whilst also having family responsibilities is likely to be far more challenging than for those who do not take on the burden of public office. As citizens, we should recognise this burden and not be too quick to condemn public leaders with claims of hypocrisy, especially if public leaders are not exception-seeking by condemning other politicians who have done similar things. The very nature of public life may mean that it is impossible to govern whilst maintaining 'clean hands'.

3.2 'Dirty hands' in public spheres

In Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Dirty Hands*, his protagonist asks if it is possible to govern innocently. Michael Walzer's response in a paper that has become a landmark for this topic is an emphatic no⁵⁷. However, he also believes that although one cannot govern innocently, one can at the same time do the right thing, this being the nature of politics. This immediately appears contradictory.

⁵⁵ Stuart Hampshire, 51

⁵⁶ Stuart Hampshire, 51

⁵⁷ Michael Walzer, 160

Consider the case of a Prime Minister elected on a pacifist manifesto. During her period in office, she kept to her principles, reduced expenditure on the military and avoided being drawn into overseas conflicts. However, a Russian offensive that is moving across Europe now appears to be preparing to attack the UK, which could threaten the country and its citizens' very existence. Is it morally right that the PM engages in a European war involving the loss of innocent lives? Of course, these decisions are complex and depend on many contextual features; however, the principle of dirty hands suggests that in times of existential threat, the politician ought to break moral absolutes, such as the prohibition on killing innocents, if it is the only way to achieve a greater good, such as the continued existence of the state. Yet, according to Walzer, the politician is still guilty of violating moral norms, even though the war was necessary for self-preservation. Hence the PM cannot escape without dirty hands.

One serious problem with the concept of dirty hands is its paradoxical and contradictory nature. How can a political act be both simultaneously right and wrong? Of course, a consequentialist could dismiss the whole discussion as conceptually confused. There is a right course of action in the decision to go to war, the one that maximises a desirable feature, for example, pleasure or at least minimising pain. The fact that the PM in the example above finds the decision challenging is not (from a consequentialist perspective) because the right one will also be simultaneously wrong; it is because finding the right decision may be genuinely difficult, especially when large numbers of people are involved as is the case with war. But, however personally painful and practically complex the decision, there is a right choice from a consequentialist perspective. The same can be said for the deontologist who believes that killing innocent people is absolutely wrong, irrespective of circumstance. In many ways, her decision to do the right thing may be simpler than the consequentialist's since she will simply not authorise actions that involve killing, even if this leads to the end of the state. Of course, the absolutist position seems highly unrealistic for anyone who leads a nation-state, and my moral intuitions accord more properly with the notion of dirty hands.

It is my belief that although appearing contradictory in nature, the phenomena of dirty hands captures what it is like to be charged with political decision-making, which is not the case with consequentialist and deontological absolutist positions. The world of politics is a messy and practical affair with actors, both friend and foe, playing by their own rule books as powerfully articulated by Machiavelli.

As highlighted above, Machiavelli articulates a perennial truth of political leadership: to further the interests of oneself and the state; it is *sometimes* necessary to act against moral norms; to do otherwise would be self-defeating. This may involve actions that involve killing innocents in war at one extreme but equally may include lying, cheating, backstabbing and other typical

behaviours witnessed among the political elite to gain and maintain power. Walzer agrees and notes

the victorious politician uses violence and the threat of violence – not only against foreign nations in our defense but also against us, and again ostensibly for our greater good.⁵⁸

The necessity of political leaders engaging in such activities tracks back to hypocrisy. To gain the trust of a parliamentary party and the broader electorate, it will be necessary to appear virtuous, often by condemning opposition parties. But when in power, various practical decisions will inevitably mean saying one thing and acting in a contrary manner. It may also involve exception-seeking by acting in ways which were condemned when previous leaders did similar actions. Hence, hypocrisy may be defensible if not excusable from a dirty hands perspective. This means that the politician is still guilty of the moral wrong of hypocrisy in addition to other vices; however, when considering the punishment, the citizens (including the media) should consider the political leader's position and the context within which the hypocrisy occurred. For example, in the case of the pacifist PM who is forced into war in a moral emergency, rather than condemnation, if the PM is genuinely suffering guilt from what she perceives to be an almost impossible situation, an appropriate response may be understanding and empathy rather than condemnation since she is attempting to make a difficult decision in the best interests of the citizens. Furthermore, with reference to my previous discussion on changing one's mind, to adjust the example, the PM may have genuinely changed her position on pacifism since being a critical opposition politician, having realised her previous position was naive. If this change of mind is genuine, then it is possible that she is not exception-seeking, and the situation is not a case of hypocrisy.

⁵⁸ Michael Walzer, 163

Chapter 4 Conclusion

The principal aim of this dissertation has been to provide a philosophical account of hypocrisy with particular reference to public and private spheres.

I commenced by demonstrating that hypocrisy is a complex and multidimensional concept with a rich and shifting usage history. Drawing on Ancient Greece, Biblical references and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, I highlighted how hypocrisy is traditionally associated with acting, pretence, deception, claiming higher moral values than one genuinely believes, moral authority and religiosity. To further the conceptual analysis, I drew on what I consider a paradigm case of hypocrisy; that of Rev Ted Haggard. I argued that he manifested many of the features that commonly are associated with hypocrisy. I then evaluated the work of contemporary philosophers who have attempted to define hypocrisy precisely. I argued contra Crisp and Cowton's view that there are several different species of hypocrisy – and instead arrived at the subconclusion that it makes more sense to categorise hypocrisy into two types: the hypocrisy of pretence and the hypocrisy of exception-seeking. I further refined this position by arguing that exception-seeking is the defining feature of hypocrisy, and cases, such as *Tartuffe*, where no exception-seeking is present, maybe more precisely thought of as cases of con-artistry rather than hypocrisy.

I then articulated my single precisising definition as follows. An act is hypocritical if, and only if, the person performing the act morally exception-seeks by holding themselves, or another favoured person or group, to lower moral standards than to those being morally judged for similar acts, and that the difference in moral standards is not justified.

Hence, with this more restrictive and precise stipulation of hypocrisy, many cases that might be casually thought of as hypocrisy no longer qualify. This is important since the accusation of hypocrisy is a normative act in and of itself that has the power to damage those accused; therefore, such accusations must not be applied carelessly.

I then applied this definition to various situations where accusations of hypocrisy may be casually charged and demonstrated how various factors might mitigate or negate these charges. These factors include weakness of will, change of mind, and ranking of different duties. Again, this section demonstrated the importance of care and charity when evaluating claims of hypocrisy.

In chapter three, I more specifically examined the relationship between hypocrisy and the special context of public life. Drawing on Machiavelli and Hampshire, I argued that owing to the nature of public life and the conflicts between politics and conventional morality, two separate but not wholly independent moral spheres seem plausible. Hence, what may appear as

exception-seeking hypocrisy may simply be conflicts between the private and public spheres of morality. I then introduced the concept of dirty hands to explain that whilst in some cases hypocrisy within the public sphere may be necessary, for example, in an existential emergency, the guilt experienced by the actor is completely understandable owing to the conflicts generated by doing wrong to do right.

As stated throughout this dissertation, it is wrong to throw accusations of hypocrisy around when ill-defined and unjustified, owing to the damage this causes to individuals and public life. I will now conclude by drawing the previous discussion together by considering the effect of hypocrisy claims on three public figures who have various views on climate change.

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of hypocrisy is that it tends to damage public figures attempting to improve the world: i.e. people trying to be good. In contrast, those who lack typical virtues are less damaged by charges of hypocrisy. Take, for example, ex-President Donald Trump. A controversial and divisive figure, he lives a luxurious lifestyle travelling the world in his private plane whilst amassing colossal wealth through property investments. He is openly dismissive of climate change science, which he recently described as a hoax⁵⁹, and is hostile towards sustainable technologies and activists. He infamously dismissed Greta Thunberg as a girl with 'anger management issues'.⁶⁰ In short, according to Trump, global warming is merely normal weather variation.

Additionally, Trump is generally consistent and does not appear to be exception-seeking for himself or other favoured groups. In fact, he is quite open that we should all follow his lead and essentially ignore the 'hoax', which he blames on the Chinese government as a misinformation campaign to damage American economic efficiency. Therefore, although he could be accused of accelerating climate change, he probably should not be accused of being a hypocrite concerning *this* issue. This would not be the case if we were to explore other areas of his morality.

Contrast Trump with King Charles III. Throughout Charles's life, he has demonstrated an abiding and passionate interest in the environment. He has campaigned vigorously for sustainable and organic farming practices and has used his considerable influence to promote

⁵⁹ Tom Phillips, 'Climate Change a Chinese Hoax? Beijing Gives Donald Trump a Lesson in History', *The Guardian*, 17 Nov 2016 <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/17/climate-change-a-chinese-plot-beijing-gives-donald-trump-a-history-lesson> [accessed Oct 18, 2022].

⁶⁰ Tom McCarthy, 'Currently Chilling': Greta Thunberg Ridicules Trump's Angry Tweets', *The Guardian*, Dec 12 2019 <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/dec/12/trump-angry-tweets-greta-thunberg-prompt-humorous-response-teen-activist> [accessed Oct 18 2022].

environmental protection measures globally. He genuinely appears to care and has been awarded various patronages and honours for his work. Yet, he also gets heavily criticised by the press. A national newspaper undertook a poll on the question 'is Prince Charles a hypocrite?' concerning his environmental work: 64 per cent agreed he was.⁶¹ Although the survey was unscientific owing to a self-selecting sample, it is fair to conclude that media opinion may reflect a broader feeling that Charles is a hypocrite on environmental issues. This matters because he is a global figure in the environmental movement and has significant power to improve policy and practice. However, as discussed in the 'cheaters case' in chapter two, Charles's moral authority can be eroded by his personal behaviour. Returning to my definition of hypocrisy as moral exception seeking: is Charles holding others, outside himself and other favoured groups, to higher environmental standards without reasonable justification?

This is a problematic question owing to King Charles's unique position. If any private individual consumed the resources of Charles — for example, multiple cars, numerous large houses across the UK, international holidays, and so on — whilst at the same time calling for environmentally sustainable consumption, one would probably see this as a central case of exception-seeking hypocrisy. However valid the environmental messages, the lack of moral authority would probably lead to ridicule. This is also the case when celebrities preach about the environment but live in a completely unsustainable manner themselves. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Charles is in a different position to an ordinary citizen. By birth, he has found himself in a powerful situation. His job requires that he lives and works in palaces, meets as many subjects as possible, and hosts state banquets for the good of the nation. Like the late Queen, he could remain largely silent on political issues such as the environment. However, he has chosen to voice his opinions for the greater good, probably knowing that he has opened himself up to charges of hypocrisy, which may itself be courageous. I think he could do significantly more to moderate his lifestyle and follow his own advice. There is no reason why he cannot reduce the size and number of his personal homes and release his personal fortune, following the model of some other European royal families, who live far simpler lives. Since he has the *option* to be less exception-seeking across his proclamations for change and personal behaviours, the dirty hands defence appears inapplicable.

Although I strongly applaud his public opinions on the environment, I must conclude that he is making an exception for himself and is, therefore, a hypocrite. This is a serious problem since Charles lacks moral standing and invites mockery when he speaks about the environment, thus

⁶¹ Natalie Crookham, 'Royal POLL: Is Prince Charles a Hypocrite on Climate Change?', *Express*, July 23 2022 <https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/1644780/prince-charles-poll-climate-change-helicopters-planes-royal-family-spt> [accessed Oct 18, 2022].

damaging the causes he cares about. Similar charges, which again I believe are valid, have been targeted at his son Harry, who lectured on the environment whilst taking luxury private jets⁶². It has been argued that anti-environmental groups, supported by oil interests, have changed tactics over the last ten years⁶³. Rather than deny climate change, which considering the science is becoming increasingly difficult, they target the rich and famous with charges of hypocrisy. By ridiculing the messengers of environmentalism and illustrating their incongruous lifestyles, audiences may be persuaded to ignore hard scientific facts since their attention is switched to the hypocrisy of high-profile personalities. This is why potential hypocrites may be better at facilitating others who are more morally consistent, to be the spokespersons on environmental issues.

Greta Thunberg is a Swedish environmental campaigner who generated significant interest in the climate emergency by encouraging school students to strike as part of the 'Friday for Future' movement. As a teenager with autism, she became a distinctive figure leading protests and appearing at international political conventions on climate change. Not only was her message powerful and scientific, but she and her family also made severe sacrifices to live according to her principles. For example, her mother is an international opera singer, but following pressure from Greta, she ended her career by agreeing not to take flights. Greta was invited to speak in New York in 2019 at a UN conference on climate action. A flight is generally considered to be the only practical mode of transport from Sweden; nevertheless, she sailed with a crew across the Atlantic in a small carbon-neutral yacht, which included wind turbines and solar panels.

I would argue that Greta takes her principles so seriously that she is prepared to risk her young life crossing the Atlantic in stormy seas rather than be accused of hypocrisy and damage her cause. In addition to heroic feats, she is also a vegan, only purchases second-hand clothes and continues not to fly. The fact that she cannot seriously be charged with hypocrisy significantly strengthens her message of 'actions rather than words' and adds to her success as a global movement leader. However, the powerful corporate backers of anti-environmental groups and oil lobbyists have moved to attacks based on Greta's personality, looks, age and gender. Various political leaders have followed, including Trump and Putin. These childish insults often backfire. What her critics cannot do is remove her powerful moral standing by

⁶² Joshua Miller, 'Prince Harry, Meghan Markle Slammed as Hypocrites for Flying Home in Private Jet', *New York Post*, June 7 2022 <https://nypost.com/2022/06/07/prince-harry-meghan-markle-slammed-as-hypocrites-for-flying-home-in-private-jet/> [accessed Oct 25, 2022].

⁶³ Aylin Woodward, 'As Denying Climate Change Becomes Impossible, Fossil-Fuel Interests Pivot to 'Carbon Shaming'', *Business Insider*, 28 Aug 2021 <https://www.businessinsider.com/fossil-fuel-interests-target-climate-advocates-personally-2021-8> [accessed Oct 18, 2022].

successfully labelling her a hypocrite since she so clearly lives by her values, which makes her quite exceptional in the contemporary world.

From the above discussion, it is evident that accusations and the threat of accusations of hypocrisy have a powerful effect. To those attempting to do the right thing, a weaponised attack can undermine moral standing and leadership. Curiously, those that have no concern for conventional morality, and are open about this, are unlikely to be affected by accusations of hypocrisy. But, for those like Greta Thunberg who make great sacrifices to safeguard their reputation, public life comes at a high cost. This is problematic because although we want our leaders to be morally consistent, if we insist they are moral saints, many potentially talented people may be discouraged from taking public office.

We should therefore be far more aware of the damage caused by charges of hypocrisy, and in cases where exception-seeking is beyond doubt, recognise that this is often an inevitable consequence of taking up office, as in dirty hands cases. Furthermore, in other situations, there may be mitigations to consider, such as in the cases involving the ranking of duties, instances where people have changed their minds, and cases where people are not exception-seeking when the details of the facts are understood. These considerations mean that in many instances where press hounding and public censure are typical, a more appropriate response may be compassion and understanding for fellow human beings put in difficult, if not impossible, situations having taken up the burden of leadership.

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