

Moral Psychology // Spring 2021

Handout 3

Hypocrisy: Wallace

WHY HYPOCRISY. It is interesting. That's reason enough to consider it. But it is also ubiquitous. Or rather: accusations of hypocrisy are ubiquitous. Whether there is real hypocrisy on these occasions, or whether a particular moral fault is involved—that's something we have to examine.

The ubiquity of (accusations of) hypocrisy points perhaps to its centrality to the moral discourse. That's something to be discussed too later on (DeScioli and Kurzban).

WHAT IS HYPOCRISY? Hypocrisy involves an inconsistency between outward behaviour and internal attitudes/feelings/thoughts. This follows from the OED definition and from the common stock of examples (Tartuffe). But this fact alone is not sufficient to establish the moral failing of hypocrisy. Inconsistency in isolation is perhaps nothing more than 'mental hygiene'. There are, in fact, straightforward examples to show the insufficiency of inconsistency: spies, parents, polite guests.

Thus from the start let's note some elements of Wallace's framework:

Epistemic: We have access to paradigmatic examples of hypocrisy.

Conceptual: We have to make sense of the concept of hypocrisy.

Moral: Hypocrisy is a serious moral failure, and a conceptual analysis of hypocrisy must explain its seriousness.

AUTHENTICITY? If hypocrisy is not bare inconsistency, perhaps it is authenticity. This, of course, is to explain *obscurum per obscurius*, but let it pass. There is a real self constituted by your internal attitudes, and then there is the public self manifested outwardly. The failure to match these two is the hypocrite's failure.

Wallace identifies two problems with this. First, some mismatch may be a good thing as in politeness, but hypocrisy is always wrong. Well, other theorists (as Wallace notes) challenge this, and condemn politeness wholesale. Wallace argues that this is misguided. There's a 'flagrant' dissimulation that is peculiar to hypocrisy, but which need not be present in inauthentic behaviour.

Remark 1. These points were elaborated at great length by Mandeville (whom we cover later on).

Wallace's second complaint: inauthenticity is a personal failure. You might (must!) care about your inauthentic behaviour, but why should others care about it? This complaint, I think, is not too compelling[...]

MORAL ADDRESS. Intrinsic to hypocrisy is some kind of 'deliberate', 'active' deception. It is this deception that violates an important moral norm.

Wallace argues that deception *alone* can't be the whole story. Consider politicians who chastise their opponents about the actions they did a moment ago. There is, he says, no intention to deceive. Yet he notes (fn16) that there is perhaps an intention to 'distract' the audience's attention. But in this case it's not clear why this whole business can't be called 'deception'. Perhaps we could say this: there is, on these occasions, no false proposition that the hypocrite communicates, and that's why this is not a deception.

A different problem is that many hypocrites are self-deceived and forgetful hypocrites where the issue of deliberate deception is moot. Here, I think, it's not clear just how far we should press these scenarios[...]

THE GENERAL SCHEMA. In one of the crucial moves of the article, Wallace observes that hypocritical deception need not involve *saying* something false. Instead, the hypocrite conversationally implicates that he is free of the faults imputed to the other person. We may portray it thus:

- (3-1) a. At t : A : Morally speaking, B was wrong to engage in ϕ -ing.
b. At $t' \leq t$: A is ϕ -ing.