

# Double Standards in the Ancient and Medieval World

Edited by Karla Pollmann



— DUEHRKOHF & RADICKE —

Wissenschaftliche Publikationen

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## Introduction

Treatises dedicated to double standards in a broad variety of fields are easily found on the internet, especially from the early Eighties of the twentieth century onwards. They include themes as diverse as: different pay for the same work of men and women; Thatcher's British health care; when bad men get good press; treatment of aging actresses, and so on. The increasing interest in the phenomenon, which was described well before the actual term "double standards" was used,<sup>1</sup> is documented in a wide variety of writings, which focus on contemporary issues like politics,<sup>2</sup> racism,<sup>3</sup> gender,<sup>4</sup> economic injustice,<sup>5</sup> religious differences,<sup>6</sup> and ethnic minorities.<sup>7</sup>

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "double standard" (under *double* A. 6.) as "a rule, principle, judgment, etc., viewed as applying more strictly to one group of people, set of circumstances, etc., than to another; applied specifically to a code of sexual behaviour that is more rigid for women than for men". The term is relatively recent and was coined (or rather: used in written form) only after the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> This is also true for the German near-equivalent *Doppelmoral*.<sup>9</sup> As is clear from the above examples, the application of the term "double standard(s)" has now widened considerably, and belongs to the larger area of moral hypocrisy. It denotes

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., in Guy de Maupassant's short fiction, where he illuminates the fate of women in a male-dominated world, cf. C.J. Stivale, *The Art of Rupture. Narrative Desire and Duplicity in the Tales of Guy de Maupassant* (Ann Arbor 1994).

<sup>2</sup> See P. Dittmar, *Ost gut, West schlecht: Über Doppelmoral und gespaltenes Bewußtsein* (Cologne 1977); J. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York 1982).

<sup>3</sup> See P. Bardis, *South Africa and the Marxist Movement. A Study in Double Standards* (Lewiston 1989).

<sup>4</sup> I.L. Reiss, *Premarital Sexual Standards in America. A Sociological Integration of American Sexual Standards* (Glencoe [Ill.] 1960; German translation Hamburg 1970); M. Eichler, *The Double Standard. A Feminist Critique of Feminist Social Science* (London 1980); C.L. Muehlenhard, "Nice Women" Don't Say Yes and "Real Men" Don't Say No: How Miscommunication and the Double Standard Can Cause Sexual Problems, *Women and Therapy: A Feminist Quarterly* 7 (1988) 95-108.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kerton, *Double Standards: Consumer and Worker Protection in an Unequal World* (Ottawa 1990).

<sup>6</sup> See H. Goddard, *Christians and Muslims: from Double Standards to Mutual Understanding* (Richmond 1995).

<sup>7</sup> R. Whitaker, *Double Standard: the Secret History of Canadian Immigration* (Toronto 1987).

<sup>8</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the first time in 1951.

<sup>9</sup> According to *Grimm Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Neubearbeitung Leipzig 1983), vol. 6, 1258 the term was first used in writing in the magazine *Der Spiegel* 22 (1977) 177.

a phenomenon in a given society where certain rights or privileges are conceded to one group of society, but not to another, and the criterion for distinguishing these groups can be, for example, gender, race, ethnicity, wealth, age or social status. Generally, this kind of behaviour is viewed as unfair and unjust and has negative connotations, with some possible exceptions like the special treatment of children due to their immature state, or the concession of special rights to people with a special task which is normally limited in time.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, "moral duplicity" has attracted the attention of modern political philosophy and social theory.<sup>11</sup> They emphasize that such duplicity is often due to rapid and unassimilated changes in a society; this makes it more difficult for individuals to orient themselves in such a society due to its lack of reliably applicable norms or rules: this has recently been described as a "morality without foundations".<sup>12</sup> The phenomenon of double standards is thus recognized as a persistent danger and temptation for every society, which has to be fought against constantly, as it could otherwise eventually destroy that society.

Applied to Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the term "double standards" is strictly speaking an anachronism, as there is no exact equivalent for it either in Greek or Latin; the nearest would be the Greek term *hypokrisis* ('hypocrisy') and its Latin equivalent *simulatio* ('simulation').<sup>13</sup> However, as a concrete phenomenon double standards existed already. This can be demonstrated by analysing various literary genres, ancient documents, and philosophical treatises. Interestingly, the vice of double standard behaviour or *hypokrisis* does not figure among Theophrastus' *Characters*. But moral duplicity was always condemned as a most inhumane and totally unacceptable quality. This negative characterization reaches its climax in the sermons of Petrus Chrysologus, the Bishop of Ravenna who died around 450. Here

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<sup>10</sup> Cases like this are left aside in this volume, though of course sometimes groups within societies try to argue that they have analogous 'pragmatic' reasons for splitting morality.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. especially the stream-liner M. Nordau, *Die conventionellen Lügen der Kulturmenschheit* (Leipzig <sup>2</sup>1884); see also A. Vierkandt, *Gesellschaftslehre. Hauptprobleme der philosophischen Soziologie* (Stuttgart <sup>2</sup>1928) 405ff., and Th. Geiger, *Vorstudien zu einer Soziologie des Rechts* (Copenhagen 1947) 38-41.

<sup>12</sup> See M. Timmons, *Morality without Foundations. A Defense of Ethical Contextualism* (Oxford 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Eucherius, *instr.* 2 p. 160,10 "the Greek 'hypocrite' is in Latin 'simulator'" (*ex Graeco ... hypocrita simulator*) and Augustine, *enarr. in psalm. 7,9 hypocrisis, id est simulatio*. Of course, these terms do not coincide completely with "double standards": see the contributions by Buddensiek and Pollmann in this volume.

‘hypocrisy’ is described as "a subtle evil, a secret virus, a hidden poison, the deceit of virtues, a worm gnawing at holiness [...]. With cruel cunning, hypocrisy mutilates the virtues with a sword that consists of the virtues themselves. It destroys fasting by fasting, it makes speech meaningless by speech, it throws mercy to the ground by means of commiseration [...]. What dropsy is for the body, hypocrisy is for the soul, that is, dropsy thirsts when drinking, hypocrisy thirsts when already drunk" (*sermo* 7, CCL 24,49f.).

Its concealed danger is also clearly expressed in various depictions of the personification of Hypocrisy, popular from the Middle Ages to the Baroque period. Hypocrisy could be represented by a woman in a nun’s habit with a rosary, who carries her tongue in front of her and trails her heart behind her on the floor.<sup>14</sup> In another tradition the personification of Hypocrisy is a lean and pallid female, her head covered and lowered, dressed in a ragged garment, who reads from a prayer book which she holds. With her other hand she ostentatiously offers alms to a lame and ragged young beggar crouching at her feet. Her feet, however, are not those of a human, but of a wolf (following *Mt* 7,15, where it says that hypocrites are like lambs outside, but ravening wolves inside).<sup>15</sup>

For Antiquity and the Middle Ages, to date virtually no secondary literature exists that deals specifically with these issues.<sup>16</sup> This collection of articles accordingly attempts to present a first major investigation of the phenomenon in its various facets, in which the modern concept of "double standards" has been taken as a frame of reference, but without using too narrow a definition. Though in questions of moral duplicity the boundary between the unconscious and the conscious is sometimes blurred, for the purposes of this volume consciousness is seen as the necessary precondition for talking about double standards: the generally acknowledged validity

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<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., A. Henkel/A. Schöne (edd.), *Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart 1967) 1545, reproduced on the title page of this volume.

<sup>15</sup> See C. Ripa, *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery. The 1758-60 Hertel Edition of Ripa’s ‘Iconologia’ with 200 Engraved Illustrations. Introduction, Translations and 200 Commentaries by E.A. Maser* (New York 1991) no. 90.

<sup>16</sup> I only know of R.A.H. Waterfield, *Double Standards in Euripides’ Troades, Maia* 34 (1982) 139-142. E.g., K. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley/Oxford 1974 and reprints) and D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society. The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 1991 and reprints) do not discuss the phenomenon separately. The moral notion of double standards, however, should not be confused with the identical term in numismatics, where it denotes a coin-type, see C.W.A. Carlson, *Double Standard. The Double Sestertius of Trajan Decius and Its Significance in the Changing Roman Economy, San* 8 (1976) 20f.

of one moral norm or standard is deliberately split.<sup>17</sup> Self-ignorant inconsistency and theoretical confusion or contradiction, or even self-deception, are left aside. Moreover, double standards are only possible within a group where several human beings interact. A partial overlap between double standards and ‘hypocrisy’ has been accepted, but whereas, for instance, hypocrisy is generally thought of as being a hidden vice, double standards can be proclaimed openly, even if they sometimes pass without criticism. Because of the range of disciplines involved (literary sciences; classical, religious, and medieval studies; philosophy; epigraphy; history of law; patristics) experts from all these fields – both new and established scholars – were invited to contribute to this topic from their perspective.

The etymology of *hypokrisis* is difficult and not entirely clear.<sup>18</sup> In connection with the ancient term *hypokrisis*, two different traditions and contexts in particular can be observed: first, the pagan-hellenistic one, in which the term is originally connected with acting or performing a role; secondly, the Jewish-Christian tradition, where the term is linked with error of judgment (*krisis*) and sin.<sup>19</sup> Later, these two traditions amalgamated. Therefore, two modes of splitting morality have to be considered: first the different treatment (‘judgment’) of various groups in equal circumstances (part I in this volume), and secondly the disguise of one’s true standard by pretending to follow another (part II in this volume). These issues have also been subject to theoretical or satirical treatment (part III in this volume). Aspects of each of these three parts can sometimes overlap.

## Part I

Double standards may operate when there is a discrepancy between how a certain rule is applied to one group as opposed to another, when both are in the same situation, mirrored in the quotation from G. Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (used as the heading for part I). This potential danger of moral and/or legal injustice is reflected in various basic principles of democratic declarations in modern states which seek to prevent preeminence by birth, inequality before the law, and so on. The mechanism

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<sup>17</sup> But see the critical remarks in the contributions by Buddensiek and Hennecke in this volume.

<sup>18</sup> See literature in my contribution for this volume (n. 7).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, in Isidore of Seville, *Orig.* 10,118, where we find the etymology for *hypokrisis* ‘false judgment’ (*falsum iudicium*).

of splitting vertically, as it were, is found between different social groups or classes within a society or between societies and it is normally accompanied by differences in power, wealth, prestige, and the like. Here the act of judgment is vital, that is, the conscious decision that one group deserves a different treatment from another group. To illustrate how this may (or may not) work in detail, the first pair of contributors concentrate on myth (chapters 1 and 2), then follows an exemplary investigation of historical legal issues in Greece (chapter 3) and Rome (chapter 4) and of narrative fiction (chapters 5 and 6).

With special emphasis on the Ancient Greeks, Dover outlines how different cultures at various times tried to cope with the fact that gods were more powerful than humans and therefore required a special standard for themselves. Respected narratives and generalized beliefs attributed to deities behaviour which among humans was rejected and punished. Moreover, philosophers found their supposed goodness and justice irreconcilable with human suffering and pain. To solve these dilemmas, humanity came up with various 'solutions', like hatred and fear of the gods, agnosticism, atheism, ridicule of gods in pagan myth, philosophical sublimation, and in Christianity the postulate of unshakable faith even (or specifically) in the face of theodicy. The myth of Kore seems to contain such objectionable behaviour, as here a god is obviously allowed to abduct a young woman without getting punished. Kledt investigates whether this should be defined as a double standard, that is, as a behaviour that, though not acceptable in the case of humans, is suddenly approved of because the protagonist is divine. Kledt denies this by interpreting the myth of Kore as a paradigm of initiation (or *rite de passage*) that is bound to explain and to make bearable the painful emotional consequences of separation of a young woman from her family after her marriage. If the results of chapters 1 and 2 are put together, it follows that the 'differential' conditions of the human and the divine cannot be judged in moral terms.

Turning to the historical Athens of the fifth century BC, Hartmann analyses the uneven treatment of illegitimate offspring of Athenian citizens, as testified by forensic speeches and other sources. She concludes that moral tensions and legal conflicts arise because of the discrepancy between people's duties as citizens and their private affections and desires on the one hand, and on the other hand because of the difficulty the Athenian community had in adjusting itself to social change. Paulus looks into a case of Roman hereditary law, where a testator intended to secure the well-being of his (later freed) slave and the son he had from her. Despite problems



with the literal interpretation of the will, the jurists were willing to follow the intended meaning of its text, which, Paulus suggests, should not be labelled as a double standard.

Awareness of moral duplicity can be observed in the realm of narrative fiction as well. Harder claims that the criterion of double standards is intrinsically attached to the plot of the ancient novel as such, because its protagonists are 'different' from their environment, and their morality is put to a special test. Geographical space is relevant for morality, since the (genre-specific) separation of the protagonists from their original home leads to their moral standards becoming more relative. This is true even in instances of gender-specific morality noticeable in several romances of the Roman Principate. According to Bethlehem, the link between double standards and the dynamics of a text is even stronger in the case of medieval Arthurian literature. The original plot of the story contained moral contradictions that were felt to be so provocative as to generate a whole strain of different versions. In these the story was reinterpreted over and over again, with the intention of reconciling it in a satisfactory way with a clear-cut moral code. The productiveness of Arthurian literature only stops when a society emerges in which the clear-cut moral code has yielded to a more individual-focussed morality in the Renaissance.

## Part II

Another facet of double standards is displayed by the discrepancy between an inner attitude or true standard followed and an outer performance or pretended guiding standard. This comes close to the modern notion of 'hypocrisy'. It can also be linked with the ancient Greek understanding of *hypokrisis* as disguising oneself and performing a part like an actor, that is, deceiving people by assuming a mask in a kind of conscious (not pathological!) splitting of one's personality into external appearance versus internal being. This displays a lack of integrity and such behaviour (mostly motivated by the intention of gaining some considerable advantage by dishonest means that exploit the moral single standard of one's social environment) is often difficult to recognize. This, and the fact that it will eventually mean the destruction of all morality in a society, has led to the charge that hypocrisy is the vice

of vices.<sup>20</sup> In Antiquity, such issues were partly discussed in connection with outstanding individuals in Athens (chapter 7) and Rome (chapter 8), but can also be observed when the self-definition of a whole group is concerned, be it pagan (chapter 9) or Christian (chapters 10 to 12).

Already in antiquity, Socrates was considered to be the 'inventor' of ethics and a perfect representative of a consistent morality. By analysing Plato's *Apology* Bud-densiek shows that Plato portrays Socrates' enemies as agents of double standards. They intentionally abuse the submission of society to certain standards in order to secure their own privileged positions. Such behaviour is particularly reprehensible, as it is surreptitious and exploits the ignorance of the victims. Socrates tries to defend himself in court against the charges made against him by means of "casting the accusation back at his accusers" (*retorsio*), that is, he claims that his enemies themselves commit the offenses he is accused of. Thus he unmasks the double standards of their behaviour which lead them to condemn somebody else for something they do not find culpable in themselves. Socrates' strategy is doomed to fail because by unmasking the secretive strategies of the powerful and by revealing their unjust usurpation of power he makes it impossible for them to let him go.

Cato the Elder was considered an ideal of Roman virtue and was notorious for his moral rigour. But already Antiquity was quick to notice that (in sharp contrast to, for example, Socrates) even he displayed contradictions between his proclaimed ideals and his actual behaviour, which can only be partly excused as political manoeuvre or as part of Rome's dramatic process of acculturation. As Vogt-Spira shows, the moral tensions in Cato's personality were also exploited both in comedy and satire.

Following the principles of a model Roman like Cato, pagan Roman society praised the ideal of the agriculturist as the perfect lifestyle, especially for the senatorial rank. This sharply contradicts the economic reality that clearly shows that the wealth of this social class is based on trade that was officially despised, as Niquet illustrates by looking at the epigraphic evidence. The reason for maintaining this ideal that became even more praiseworthy with its increasing impracticability can

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<sup>20</sup> Cf., e.g., Cic. *off.* 1,13.41. A relatively recent example would be H. Arendt, *On Revolution* ch. 2: "What makes it so plausible to assume that hypocrisy is the vice of vices is that integrity can indeed exist under the cover of all other vices except this one. Only crime and the criminal, it is true, confront us with the perplexity of radical evil; but only the hypocrite is really rotten to the core."

be seen in the need to create uniform values that provide a sense of community, stability and duration for the senatorial class. Society found ways of smoothing this contradiction between claim and reality by accepting trade in connection with agriculture and investments in landed property.

As has already several times become obvious, double standards and hypocrisy are particularly dominant in societies or groups of society that cannot (or do not want to) adjust to social, economic and/or political change. Early and medieval Christianity is no exception to this. In a time of rapid change in socio-historical conditions Gregory of Tours aims at creating an absolute morality as a stabilizing factor. His axiom that the Christian God rewards his followers and visibly punishes his enemies in human history often clashes with the historical evidence (something against which Augustine had already cautioned his fellow-Christians in his *City of God*). Hennecke explains that in order to maintain his moral standard and preserve an (unjust) stability, Gregory is forced to apply double standards in his interpretation of evil deeds depending on whether they were committed by followers or enemies of the Christian God.

A different kind of ‘compromise’ can be observed in the adoption of the originally pagan practice of burying grave-goods with the deceased. Whereas strict Christians despised this as being contrary to a true Christian orientation towards the afterlife, others managed to adopt this custom without compromising their Christian faith. Marzinzik argues that this is to be understood rather as a successful form of amalgamation of two cultures than as religious double standards. In the high Middle Ages, when the Church was an established organization with considerable political power, the conflict between secular and ecclesiastical power lead to instability and insecurity within the clergy. Using the evidence in the correspondence of Hildegard of Bingen, El Kholi illustrates how the influential visionary reminded her (sometimes very powerful) clerical addressees that their behaviour did not always coincide with the Christian values they represent. The set of vices attacked by Hildegard, who is determined to maintain one single Christian standard, is remarkably timeless.

### Part III

Awareness of moral duplicity is old, and soon became the object of more or less satirical or polemical criticism and theoretical reflection. Behaviour with double standards is characteristic of inflexible, static societies where it is otherwise difficult for individuals to move upwards, or it serves to confirm a (potentially out-dated or threatened) status quo, that is, as a defence mechanism in a society or a group which refuses to undergo change. Structures with double standards permit either justification of privileges for certain groups of people or they help individuals to cope with a situation that is perceived as otherwise disadvantageous to them. The crucial condition in which double standards flourish is public emphasis on the one 'good' morality that must not be questioned at all, but is claimed to be perpetual, eternal, given by god or whatever. A society like this or certain individuals in it may prefer to change the rules for themselves in a parasitic way rather than look at the overall interest of a group or society. Both pagan-philosophical (chapters 13 to 16) and Christian (chapters 17 and 18) thinkers have been aware of this.

Halliwell reminds us that descriptive versus normative concepts of nature have a crucial bearing on theories of ethics. Thus, Thrasymachus' definition of justice via nature and law in Plato's *Republic* book 1 has less to do with biology than with ethics. Plato aims to reveal that a solipsistic, 'natural' egoism (as proclaimed by Thrasymachus) is in danger of collapsing into an acute case of double standards. For individuals living in a community have to share their moral convictions on mutual and equal terms, as unity and society are necessarily linked with justice.

In a careful analysis of the argument in Seneca's *De Vita Beata* Fuhrer expounds how Seneca uses the Stoic doctrine of the highest good (that is, *virtus*) in order to justify the possibility that the perfect Stoic sage can possess wealth without being accused of a double standard or hypocrisy. As wealth is a matter of indifference, the true Stoic sage does not crave for it, and is able to endure its loss without being moved, but he or she is also able to make good use of wealth, thus using the opportunity of applying his or her moral perfection. Moreover, Seneca emphasizes that the moral challenge of practical failure in the face of a philosophical ideal is at the core of Stoic ethics, which raises this problem over and over again.

In a critical dissection of some writings of the philosopher Musonius, Nussbaum manages to demonstrate convincingly that, for instance, by demanding marital fidelity for both men and women he only seems to plead for the equality of the sexes.

Whereas he insists that no double standards should be implied when it comes to following the philosophical standard of self-control (which includes marital fidelity), his argument is embedded in and reinforces a social structure that treats men and women differently. For him, the elimination of the sexual double standard does not jeopardize the overall male-over-female-hierarchy, especially, as Musonius claims that male sexual self-control is a further justification for male dominance. This represents a classic (and unfortunately timeless) example of how the removal of one double standard can happily take place while others remain unquestioned. Männlein illustrates in her contribution how Lucian uses the established literary genre of the philosophical symposium in a satirical manner, in order to unmask philosophy as a trendy fashion of his time that has no true foundation in people's values, attitudes, or actual behaviour. Taken together, the contributions of chapters 13 to 16 illustrate how philosophy can be used both to expose double standards and also itself serve as a vehicle for double standards.

Jesus' speech against the Scribes and Pharisees in *Matthew 23* can be called the Magna Charta of double standards in the New Testament. The speech portrays how religiosity can go wrong, by promoting social inequality, abusing authority and applying religious laws against their intended meaning. Jesus' vehement (moral and eschatological) verdict against such religious double standards was not without impact on later commentators. Pollmann documents how from Origen up to the *Opus imperfectum* (fifth century?) commentaries focus predominantly in their interpretation of this passage on human conscience and the irreconcilable contrast between sincere and hypocritical morality. In practice, however, things were not always so easy. In early Christianity there was, for example, the question of whether lying was allowed under certain circumstances. From the second century onwards, a difficulty existed as to whether concealment of the Christian faith was permissible in times of persecution, and whether this could be justified with a somewhat internalized or inward Christianity. In order to establish a line between right and wrong 'orthodoxy' had to define 'heresy' as the other they wished to exclude. Löhr shows that the Christian claim for religious truth as both exclusive and universal means that double standards are by necessity built into Christianity's concept of religious truth.

To sum up: as a whole, the authors argue for a remarkable continuity in this phenomenon of moral perversion, and offer a contribution to the history of mentalities which concentrates on the analysis of conscious or unconscious guidelines that influence people's behaviour. By looking both at practical examples and the theoriz-

ing concerning double standards it is hoped that this volume will to some extent fill a gap in our understanding of morality in Antiquity and (to a far lesser degree) the Middle Ages. It has to be emphasized that the selective nature of this volume precludes a complete or fully systematized picture of the phenomenon. It is rather intended to highlight some of its crucial facets. This could stimulate further research, especially at a comparative level as regards later times and other disciplines. Quotations from the Greek and Latin are normally translated; the bibliographies that follow each contribution only contain literature quoted by each individual author. As well as the academic reader it is hoped that the volume will appeal to a wider readership with a general interest in the history of morality.

St Andrews/Oxford

K.P.

## Indices (Selective)

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