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Article abstract

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Education in Safe and Unsafe Spaces

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Abstract: *Recent student demands within the academy for "safe space" have aroused concern about the constraints they might impose on free speech and academic freedom. There are as many kinds of safety as there are threats to the things that human beings might care about. That is why we need to be very clear about the specific threats of which the intended beneficiaries of safe space are supposed to be relieved. Much of the controversy can be dissolved by distinguishing between "dignity safety," to which everyone has a right, and "intellectual safety" of a kind that is repugnant to the education worth having. Psychological literature on stereotype threat and the interventions that alleviate its adverse effects shed light on how students' equal dignity can be made safe in institutions without compromising liberty. But "intellectual safety" in education can only be conferred at the cost of indulging close-mindedness and allied vices. Tension between securing dignity safety and creating a fittingly unsafe intellectual environment can be eased when teaching and institutional ethos promote the virtue of civility. Race is used throughout the article as the example of a social category that can spur legitimate demands for "dignity safe space."*

I

An increasingly familiar critique of the academy says that its culture is permeated with ascribed privilege of certain kinds (white, male, middle and upper class, heterosexist, etc.). That culture exposes students from outside the circle of privilege to routine insult and humiliation, and so institutions must be remade to include or become "safe space" for those outside if old patterns of exclusion and domination are to be eradicated, or so at least it is now commonly claimed. Many people who are skeptical of the critique have come to see it as an attack on academic freedom and the right to free speech. According to them, the soothing phrase "safe space" has now become a devious euphemism for suppressing dissent whenever norms of political correctness favored by activist students and their faculty allies are flouted. By labeling offending speech as an attack on the safety of the offended, even good faith contributions to public discourse can be re-described—and condemned without any real argument—as acts of sheer aggression.[1]

There are as many kinds of safety as there are threats to the things that human beings might care about. That is why we need to be very clear about the specific threats of which the intended beneficiaries of safe space are supposed to be relieved if we are to understand the case they make. I argue that much of the current controversy about safe space and education can be dissolved by greater clarity about what kind of safety students might legitimately claim as their right. By "dignity safety," I name a social condition we should strive to create for those who occupy any public role in a democratic

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[1] The journalism on the idea of safe space is extensive but rigorous argument is harder to find. Two excellent short essays that reach opposing conclusions are Levy (2016) and McArdle (2016).

society, whether it is as a student at an elite college or as a janitor in an elementary school. To be dignity safe in a given social environment is to be free of any reasonable anxiety that others will treat one as having an inferior social rank to theirs. I show that the literature in social psychology on stereotype threat contains ideas that can serve the purpose of advancing safety of this kind without compromising liberty. As important perhaps is the need for teachers to be judicious in drawing the distinction between the proper scope of the right to free speech and the encouragement of civility in the exercise of that right. Not all speech we have a right to utter is civil. But encouraging civility in the exercise of the right is among the responsibilities of teachers. An ethos of civility militates against the petty abrasions of ordinary social interaction that prompt anxiety about humiliation. For students who have less reason than others to trust that strangers will respect their dignity, the importance of civility is correspondingly amplified.

Standard liberal accounts of free speech are tightly connected with metaphors of conflict and antagonism—for example, the much belabored image of the "marketplace" of ideas, Mill's "armies fighting under hostile banners," and the like (Mill, 1859/1956). Their application in the context of academic freedom misleads as much as it enlightens us, as metaphors almost always tend to do. But the enlightening bit is profoundly important. The education worth having will encourage open-mindedness. To that extent, it must often take on an agonistic spirit as settled beliefs and values are subject to critique that some students will find distressing or exhilarating, or both at the same time. This is just to say that a good education requires teaching that makes students intellectually unsafe. This can and should happen in an environment where students are also dignity safe. In fact, the same civility that protects dignity can also be a vital ally to an education for open-mindedness.

Claims about safe space fall into two broad categories: the desired safety is located in some partial refuge for a vulnerable group within a diverse institution, a refuge that protects them from hostility and contempt within that institution; or the desired safety might be located throughout the institution, as its culture is transformed in ways that eliminate the vulnerability of vulnerable groups. Although both kinds of safety might be coherently sought together, the argument for the second kind is normatively more fundamental because, to the extent that safety across the institution is achieved, any argument for the safety that self-segregated refuge entails will be correspondingly weakened. For that reason, my argument is focused squarely on institution-wide safety.

II

The idea of equal dignity is a platitude of post-Enlightenment democratic politics and human rights discourse, and one that often seems downright empty. In fact, its high-sounding vacuity was just what attracted the drafters of the International Declaration of Human Rights. Any substantive philosophical grounding for the rights they agreed on—the will of God or the like—would have alienated some potential signatories (Waldron, 2012). All could endorse a common foundation of rights in human dignity only because it seemed to paper over their disagreements. Still, the pragmatic appeal of a thin concept in circumstances of deep political disagreement does not make it morally insubstantial. Pursuing an idea briefly canvassed by Gregory Vlastos many years ago, Jeremey Waldron has recently argued that we might interpret human dignity as the universalization (with appropriate revisions) of the elevated status ascribed to members of the nobility in premodern and early modern Western societies

(Vlastos, 1962; Waldron, 2012). I follow the path that Waldron has charted in some detail because I believe it shows how to conceive equal dignity as much more than empty rhetoric; it is rather the fulcrum of a social practice that recognizes the equal high status of human beings while permitting us also to acknowledge differences in merit.

To have noble status was not the same as occupying any particular elite role, though it was commonly a prerequisite of access to those roles. To advise the king, to be a general in war, a bishop in the church, or a member of the judiciary were things for which only males of exalted birth could be considered. Yet the value of high status itself did not depend on the variable merit that individuals could show in the roles they might be chosen to fill. High rank and high merit were different. One noble general could be admirably loyal to his lord, as well as brave and cunning as a leader in battle, and another contemptibly bad in all these respects. But facts about differential merit did not by themselves make a difference in status. The arenas of merit were specialized roles that could be performed well or badly, but high rank was a comprehensive condition of being bestowed at birth.

You could not ordinarily forfeit noble status once you had it, regardless of wrongdoing, and if you were deemed guilty of a capital crime, you could claim a more honorable means of execution than commoners could expect. Honor was tied to dignity as the name for the code of conduct suited to nobility. Thus to comport oneself honorably was to maintain a public demeanor in keeping with one's dignity. Those who shared the same rank were required to treat each other as equals, even—perhaps especially—when differential role assignments created unequal power, wealth, and privilege among them. Due deference was demanded from social inferiors. Acting honorably required that anyone who slighted one's dignity had to be corrected, and, because dignity was more important than anything else, correction might have had to take the form of lethal violence. And of course, cutting through all social strata were the radically unequal ranks of male and female: a peasant was owed the obedience of his wife as surely as a king would claim the same from his consort (Waldron, 2012).

The dignity of noble rank was embedded within social hierarchies that have been undermined since the advent of mass democracy and the growth of capitalism. Historical distance tempts us to infer that whatever dignity we egalitarians care about could have nothing to do with the banal historical facts I have just outlined. But Waldron (2012) argues that the very point of egalitarian dignity is the raising of each of us to something at least closely akin to noble status. To make this plausible we need to strip away the positional prerogatives and duties that a hierarchy of social status makes necessary. We must also update the rights and duties that were once monopolized by the aristocracy but are now the birthright of everyone. Nevertheless, the broad lineaments of ancient high rank are visible as strong family resemblances to a new, and still emerging, egalitarian dispensation.

Merit and status are still not the same thing. Our merits are not what entitle us to claim the rights enumerated in any of the international human rights documents, nor in America's Bill of Rights for that matter. No king seeks our advice. But we vote in elections that determine how we are ruled, and if our votes do not count equally, or if the corruption of the democratic process has stripped the franchise of its rightful meaning, our dignity is affronted. We may never think of challenging anyone to a duel, no matter how badly we are insulted. But standing up for ourselves when we are humiliated sometimes presents itself as the only acceptable option precisely because our dignity is on the line. We may seek to extract monetary damages through litigation when we are slandered, and the criminal law is the means by which the rights most central to our dignity are supposed to be protected. Further, no one is supposed to be servile anymore. Unfortunately, disparities of power and wealth still mean that many get

away with treating others as if they were servile. But for people who exercise that power, those of us who care about human dignity reserve the contempt that nobles once bestowed on arrogant upstarts whose wealth and power enabled them to lord it over men whose birth was as good or better than theirs.

The global diffusion of egalitarian norms has been highly uneven at best; its future may be as vulnerable to reversal as it is to open to progress, and even in areas where we could argue that success has been greatest, it can often be objected that raising the status of some subordinate groups has come at the cost of oppressing others. I have nothing to say about these matters. My concern is rather about how a culture of equal dignity could best be realized across the cleavage of race in venues of a relatively modest scope—racially integrated classrooms and educational institutions more broadly.

III

A social venue is "dignity safe" for a social group if its members can participate without reasonable worries that they are likely to be humiliated by others. This is a normative principle; it uses concepts of humiliation and reasonableness whose correct use entails ethical judgment. As a bald empirical matter, a student who gets something less than A+ in my class might sincerely *feel* that I have thereby "humiliated" them. But that could not license the inference that I denied anyone the dignity safety they rightly expect in my classroom. So even if indignation and distress induced by another's conduct are often passed off as humiliation, that is not necessarily so in any sense that holds moral interest. By the same token, someone who is hardened to the experience of humiliation or obtuse about its subtler manifestations might not register its occurrence emotionally at all, though it does not follow that they were not, as a matter of moral fact, humiliated. Perhaps "humiliation" is ambiguous. Maybe it also signifies an empirically distinct emotion, or an empirically specifiable type of action or practice that evokes some such emotion. I do not deny that. My point is only that whether there is such a concept or not, it is neither necessary nor sufficient for humiliation as a distinct species of (egalitarian) moral wrongdoing.

The relevant moral concept can be clarified by examining the difference between being humbled and being humiliated. To be humbled is to endure some edifying setback to excessive pride or self-regard. Shame is naturally part of the experience. Yet my being humbled need not cast the least shadow of doubt on my being as worthy of respect and consideration as anyone else and as fully competent to participate in society as any other. I have been disabused of illusions of superiority, though my newfound humility does not require that illusions of inferiority must now take their place. Humiliation, on the other hand, is precisely treatment that implies I have no valid claim to being considered as an equal in the first place. No one can take away the dignity we share equally with others. But they can certainly treat us as if we do not have any in the first place. The words we ordinarily reach for in characterizing the experience—"belittled," "degraded," "demeaned"—all attest to the fact that I am somehow misrepresented or used as if I were an intrinsically inferior being, not just someone who performed badly, say, on a given task and deserves appropriate censure. One is like the medieval duke who is treated as if he were a base commoner or the male under patriarchy who is derided as womanly. Shame is liable to figure here as well, but not as emotional recoil to the self-recognition of a puffed up ego; it is instead a kind of horror at the thought of others seeing me as a comprehensively lesser creature than I am.

Lukianoff and Haidt (2015) say that exponents of safe space just want short-term "emotional well-being" because they are too delicate and sensitive or too solicitous of the delicacy and sensitivity of others to tolerate the rough and tumble of free speech in schools and universities. Examples of activists and administrators saying foolish things in this vein are not hard to find these days. But it is a bad mistake to suppose that exposing such folly settles the matter. Note that the rhetoric of safety has only arisen as a largely inchoate political cause with a very brief history and no clear intellectual leadership. The most interesting question to ask about the movement is this: What is the most compelling interpretation of its meaning given the many ambiguities than lurk in the words of its exponents? That is the question I have been pursuing. A fully-realized dignity safe environment would confer a distinctively valuable aspect of human flourishing: the self-respect of someone confident that others will respect them as an equal. But the best way to get there is most unlikely to be one that forgoes all words that wound. I say more about this in section V, but a simple observation suffices to show why the kind of intellectual coddling Lukianoff and Haidt deplore cannot be warranted by dignity safety. A glance at how current social media operate in response to political and cultural controversy is enough to show how any viewpoint, regardless of how moderately or respectfully framed, is liable to trigger a torrent of invective from outraged others. Offending others is the price one pays for disagreeing with them in the world we have made, and it would be a preposterous conception of equal dignity whose realization required that we expunge all offense.

No institution can insulate us from all risk of humiliation: any regime that seriously tried to do so would itself be humiliating because it would require a control of our interactions so strenuous that it would infantilize us. "Dignity safety" is intended instead to designate a condition of warranted trust in the respect of others with whom one shares a given social space, a trust sufficient to put to rest the worries a reasonable person might have about their vulnerability to a particular kind of wrong in a less benign environment. The value at stake here is not something to be maximized; it is rather a threshold condition that will ordinarily be taken for granted when people are secure in the knowledge that others can be relied on to treat them as equals, even when disagreement or conflict arises.

A final point about dignity safety deserves special emphasis: it can be violated not just in experiencing discrete acts of humiliation but by the aggregate impact of many small social cues that make it clear, if it can be made clear at all, only when assessed cumulatively. (I think this is the morally interesting phenomenon at issue in allegations about "microaggressions" that often surface in arguments about safe space.) I cannot say with any warrant that I was humiliated just because my ideas won no one over at a particular meeting with colleagues. But if my ideas are persistently not heeded at all—and no one even bothers to explain to me why I am wrong or off topic—or the body language of others subtly bespeaks exasperation or impatience whenever I speak up, the aggregate evidence is such that humiliation is clearly evident.

Still, it may well occur and still not be clearly evident. Humiliation effected through a pattern of subtle acts of derogation over time is perhaps most likely to happen when the equal dignity of some group has only precariously become part of a given society's proclaimed self-image after a history of prolonged and blatant oppression. To openly announce beliefs flatly at odds with the new egalitarian orthodoxy is now to forfeit respectability in some quarters. But muted and surreptitious attitudes of disdain could still in fact be widely and often unconsciously directed at the group that was openly oppressed until recently.

This is just how we stand these days with regard to race, gender and the like. Flaunting one's racism or sexism puts one beyond the pale of social propriety in many circumstances, and that creates the motivation to dissimulate. Yet if some residual racism persists beneath a facade of egalitarian probity, it is apt to disclose itself with whom one interacts in ways that will be humiliating if they belong to the wrong group. Relationships secured by trust in the other's respect are thus hard to achieve, even with good intentions on both sides. Victims (or possible victims) of humiliation will often be caught between the horns of a dilemma: failing to see their own humiliation when it happens behind their backs because they are too trusting or, alternatively, wrongly ascribing it to another because they are not trusting enough. By the same token, people of goodwill outside the targeted category will be aware that its members face this interpretive dilemma, and that being so, they can hardly avoid a certain self-consciousness about the possible ambiguities of their own behavior in interacting with those inside. A tendency to self-segregation would seem almost inevitable here, given the centrifugal pressures of an impeccably rational distrust. Further, in the particular case of American racism, the huge scale of *de facto* segregation means that many students who find themselves in racially integrated high schools or colleges have had little or no previous experience of sustained contact with peers of another race, especially when they belong to a different social class. Sheer inexperience heightens mutual suspicions.

IV

Humiliation and race are intimately connected concepts. Aristocracy never took root in North America, but the United States developed its own, still more odious human hierarchy through a system of slavery and its legitimating concept of race. Slavery is gone but race is most certainly still with us. Americans disagree about how much progress has been made in overcoming racism. What none could sanely or sincerely deny, however, is that severely negative racial stereotypes about blacks continue to have wide cultural currency, and when they adversely affect the way people of color are treated, they occasion humiliation.

When young African American adults show up in colleges nowadays, many will have experienced being demeaned by people in authority just because of their race. Many will also have close relatives and friends who continue to endure grave hardship because of racial injustice. The presence of these students in institutions from which their recent ancestors would have been formally excluded is certainly progress, and no doubt everyone is subject to negative stereotypes of some kind in some circumstances. But only some groups are objects of a powerful ensemble of derogatory generalizations that together seem to disqualify them for anything other than comprehensive social subordination. That continues to make black racial stereotypes in the U.S.A. particularly potent as pathways of humiliation.

I said that a social venue is "dignity safe" for me if I can participate without reasonable worries that others will humiliate me. Given the heightened threat of humiliation that is still manifestly tied to certain racial minority categories in the U.S.A. and elsewhere, the asymmetry of risk between their members and others is something we are compelled to acknowledge if we really want dignity safety for all students regardless of race. Without measures designed to erase the effects of that asymmetry, a morally fundamental kind of equality will be denied to African American students in racially integrated schools and colleges, even if teachers and administrators are impeccably colorblind in their conduct. How do we achieve that equality?

We are fortunate in having an ample body of good empirical research that suggests how we might diminish the expected asymmetry in dignity safety among our students. I refer to the influential research on stereotype threat and what is misleadingly called "identity safety" (Davies, Spencer & Steele, 2005; Purdie-Vaughan & Walton, 2011; Steele, 2012). Stereotype threat is a psychological phenomenon that affects everyone under the right conditions. What triggers it are social cues that evoke a negative stereotype applicable to one's performance on a task at hand. Such cues will tend to diminish the quality of performance so as to "confirm" the stereotype, and inevitably, performance will worsen according to how widely held and negative the relevant stereotypes happen to be. Comprehensively stigmatized groups will be the worst affected.

The idea of so-called "identity safety" emerged within the research on stereotype threat as a label for a kind of social environment in which individuals can perform without experiencing its adverse effects. The label is unfortunate because what it is supposed to capture is *not* safety against threats to all facets of identity; I am not sure if that is even a coherent goal. Its intended object is something much more specific: safety from the effects of performance-impairing social cues, such as reminders to black professionals of their social oddity in predominantly white firms or reminders to women in advanced mathematics classes about how few women thrive in mathematics. The good news is that this can be accomplished through quite modest and well-tested interventions. These include ongoing mentorship that combines confidence in the mentee's ability to succeed with personal accountability for high standards of performance; regular conversations among people of diverse backgrounds about their academic or professional struggles so that they come to be aware that many of these are shared by others outside their group; an ethos that welcomes racial or gender diversity, for example, rather than treating it as academically and professionally irrelevant; and the presence of a critical mass of individuals in the relevant group who belong to the stereotyped group (Steele, 2012).

The literature on stereotype threat is focused on measurable academic performance whereas dignity safety is about vulnerability to a particular kind of moral wrong that has no necessary connection at all to effects on students' performance. Think of Jesse Owens' multiple gold medals at the Berlin Olympics in an environment pervaded with symbols that underscored his supposed racial inferiority. He was certainly not dignity safe despite his brilliant performance. Yet there is plainly a deep connection between stereotype threat and dignity to the extent that negative racial stereotypes are the very stock in trade of racial humiliation. An environment in which social cues that invoke stereotype threat in academic performance have been substantially muted for African Americans would to that extent directly countervail the very sources of the asymmetry of dignity safety between them and other students.

Does achieving dignity safety for everyone come at some cost to freedom of speech or academic freedom? I do not see why it must. None of the measures I mentioned for promoting dignity safety poses even a prima facie constraint on either freedom. Why then do intelligent people so often suppose otherwise? I shall argue that the distinction between the promotion of civility and the restriction of speech has become unfortunately blurred in the debate about safe spaces, so that calls for civility are apt to be construed as threats to free speech and countered with arguments against censorship. I show how this confusion has arisen in section V. But more needs to be said about civility before the argument can be made.

Civility is the personal virtue we show when we express respect for others' dignity in how we interact directly with them—for example, in their physical presence, in persuasion and other speech acts

that we direct to them, in cooperative projects, or the like (e.g., Calhoun, 2000; Callan, 2012). It parallels the honorable comportment by means of which nobles could show due respect for their peers within an aristocratic society. The virtue shines particularly bright in circumstances of conflict or disagreement, when anger or frustration inclines us to hostility and recrimination. Civility constrains speech, as any virtue does. But it is senseless to imagine that it therefore constitutes a kind of self-censorship. If I lose my temper with a student, irascibility has gotten the better of my civility, but it would be ludicrous to infer that when this happens the irascible me censors the civil me; it would be no less absurd to infer that when I keep my temper, the civil me is the one who does the censoring. If the rhetoric of safety is sometimes used with indiscriminate abandon by activist students and their faculty allies, perhaps the same might be said of talk of censorship and free speech by their opponents.

There is more than a little linguistic awkwardness in describing institutions as "civil" or "uncivil." Yet there is an institutional analogue to personal civility. An institution that realizes an egalitarian ethos parallels egalitarian civility at the individual level in its clear and consistent instantiation of respect for the dignity of all. If you really want such an ethos, residential halls named to honor people who enslaved some of the residents' recent ancestors are not a terribly good idea, even if the President of Yale University thinks otherwise. More generally, when students come to an institution with a reasonable worry that they will not in fact be respected as others are, an emphatic and consistent public commitment to civility can provide necessary reassurance on that count.

To be sure, explicit verbal reassurance is likely to count for next to nothing in those circumstances. But even small things carry a powerful message about who is really welcome as an equal and who is not. Here is a telling example: On the ground floor of the building where I work, several walls are lined with framed photographs of members of the faculty who have worked here since the school of education was established in the late 1930s. I used to think this was just a nice gesture of homage to our scholarly precursors, people who are far too often ungratefully forgotten just as soon as they retire. That is true as far as it goes, but I failed to notice something else that was more important. A couple of months ago an African American colleague noted that when he was interviewed before being hired a few years earlier, the thought the pictures immediately triggered was "I don't belong here." He could hardly be blamed for thinking that because only a handful of African African Americans were included in the dozens of images that lined multiple walls. No doubt many students of color have had the same thought as they have passed through the building over several decades. So I am glad to say the pictures are coming down soon.

V

The contretemps at Yale University about Halloween costumes in the autumn of 2015 shows confusion about civility and free speech as amply as any event possibly could. It began with an e-mail to students from the "Intercultural Affairs Committee" about the importance of not being culturally insensitive (e.g., no blackface) in choosing Halloween costumes. The preachy tone of the letter irked some of its recipients who complained to Erika Cristakis, an Associate Master at one of Yale's residential colleges. She sent out an e-mail questioning the "institutional (which is to say: bureaucratic and administrative) exercise of implied control" over student behavior in the original letter. Her concern was that campuses were increasingly becoming places of "censure and prohibition" that stifled the freedom of young

adults to be transgressive, even offensive at times. The best response to a Halloween costume that offends you, she advised, is to ignore it or to engage the wearer in dialogue (Hudler, 2015; Stack, 2015).

The e-mail enraged many students of color. A now infamous YouTube video captures a heated confrontation between Christakis's husband, Master at the same college, and a group of protesters. The video shows him repeatedly and earnestly making the distinction between tolerating dissent and agreeing with the dissident, and he insists that Yale must tolerate even racist speech. A student finally loses her temper with him. She screams that his role as Master of his college was to provide "a home" for the students who resided there; the e-mail he defended was a betrayal of that role (Hudler, 2015). Although the rudeness of her outburst was unfortunate, I think the angry student was still far closer to the truth that mattered here than Christakis and his spouse.

The original e-mail from the Intercultural Affairs Committee made not the faintest threat against anyone who might opt for even blatantly racist self-expression in their choice of Halloween costume; its message was merely to encourage respect for others in making the choice. Mill famously and rightly noted that when "public opinion" becomes smugly homogeneous it limits free speech as invasively as legal penalties (Mill, 1859/1956). But the very fact that the message provoked fierce disagreement indicates that no monolithic public opinion was mobilized here to crush brave dissidents. Encouraging students to be civil to each other is a good thing to do when there is some serious risk they will be uncivil, and wearing blackface, for example, is about as hatefully uncivil as you can get, regardless of any transgressive thrill that might infuse the experience.

To be blunt, the rage of African American students was entirely understandable because the message that came from the Associate Master seemed to suggest that merely encouraging cross-racial respect was to be deplored as an encroachment on free choice. I cannot know all that the student had in mind when she screamed that Christakis had failed in his duty to maintain a "home" for the students in his college. But a plausible necessary condition of being at home in any social environment is the knowledge that one is dignity safe there in the sense I specified earlier. By re-casting a plea for respect as a threat to free speech, Christakis and his spouse revealed an unfortunate obtuseness about the distinctive circumstances of students of color in their college, given obvious facts about contemporary race relations in the U.S.A. Both failed badly to appreciate the students' heightened vulnerability to humiliation in a racially integrated environment and the concomitant importance of upholding civility norms that help to secure respect for their dignity. They were no doubt entirely well-meaning in what they did. But then again my white colleagues and I were entirely well-meaning in never noticing anything amiss with a gallery of faculty portraits that sent a clearly inhospitable message to students of color. Humiliation does not entail malicious intent. A lack of imagination will often do just as well.

The moral relevance of the fact that "the speech" discouraged in the original e-mail from the Intercultural Affairs Committee could occur in residence halls rather than in some public place on campus should also be underscored. In the latter setting, or in classrooms made available on some even-handed basis to student groups, I see no good reason why free speech should have any narrower scope than it has outside the university's precincts. Making facilities available for student political organization and protest is a natural way to encourage the development of civic responsibility without paternalistic meddling. For obvious and compelling reasons, universities should be neutral regarding political opinion within the student body, and if students elect to organize for one political purpose or another or to invite people with outré ideas to speak with them, educational authorities have no acceptable grounds to limit liberty. The fact that some students might find their peers' political values

utterly despicable or regard the beliefs of some invited speaker as a grievous affront to their dignity carries no more weight as reasons for censorship than it would if what they despised was to be proclaimed off rather than on campus. But notice that it would be utter folly to imagine we could extrapolate the proper scope of speech *inside* student residences or classrooms from such cases. I am as ready as anyone to defend the right of those with repellently reactionary or radical views to announce them to the world. But that does not mean I would welcome them into my home or my classes. Students who agree to share a residence together have agreed to share a quasi-home, and that makes it reasonable to infer that their speech within that common setting will be restrained by a level of consideration for each other that should not be demanded by sheer strangers or fellow students in an open public forum.

VI

The limits of liberty become more interesting when we consider their contours within what I shall call in an artificially expansive sense "classes." I use the word to refer to any formal educational encounter between teachers and students whether these occur in classrooms in the everyday sense, laboratories, tutorials, or the like. What the encounters have in common is that they are occasions on which teachers are institutionally responsible for the instruction of particular groups of students who have been assigned to them.

The academic freedom my students and I share in our classes together is quite unlike the freedom of speech we enjoy more generally as residents of the U.S.A. I cannot justifiably claim the protection of academic freedom if instead of teaching philosophy when I am supposed to do so, I decide to teach astrology or share the fascinating story of my life. Outside my role as a philosophy teacher, I certainly have a right to teach astrology or tell my life story to anyone who cares to listen, but qua teacher of philosophy, I have no such right.

My academic freedom is also radically different from my students' academic freedom, even though we both have just the same right to free speech.[2] My freedom encompasses the authority to organize and direct my students' learning in their classes in pursuit of our common educational purpose (i.e., their learning philosophy well). If one of them claimed the right to speak as much as I do in class just because their freedom of speech is the same as mine, I would tell them that they did not understand the difference between being a teacher and being a student. By the same token, I violate their academic freedom if I use the authority inherent in my role to impose tasks that cannot be justified by the particular educational ends that shape our professional relationship.

The concept of academic freedom in teaching depends on the distinction between properly educational and other ends. And so differences in how those ends are specified or given priority are apt to be registered in disagreements about its scope for both students and teachers. If we are to talk

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[2] The philosophical literature on academic freedom is decidedly slender in comparison with what is available on free speech. But Strike (1982) is excellent and still well worth a close read. More recently, Robert Post (2012) has charted the connections between the cultivation of citizen competence and academic freedom. Shiffrin (2014) has brilliantly defended a new "thinker based" theory of free speech that affords a more central place to academic freedom in particular and educational interests more generally than competing theories. Bilgrami (2014) is also ingenious and provocatively argued.

usefully about the concept we need at least some partial background agreement about at least some of the purposes that rightfully shape the relationship between student and teacher.

I shall assume that among the primary ends of schools and universities is the cultivation of open-mindedness and other intellectual virtues that befit free people. Call this "liberal education" just for convenience. (If you do not like the elitist or classical associations of the label feel free to substitute something more to your liking. Nothing depends on the label.) Open-mindedness—very roughly, a settled disposition to form and, when appropriate, revise our beliefs according to relevant evidence and argument—is certainly not the only intellectual virtue.[3] Still, its importance is amplified in diverse societies such as ours, roiled by accelerating economic and cultural change. Under these conditions, occasions that require rational belief revision in our daily lives will naturally increase; the personal and social costs of failing to adapt to the necessary requirement will also surely escalate.

Like other virtues, open-mindedness does not come easily to human beings. Many of the beliefs to which we adhere are encased in powerful emotions with deep biographical roots. The prospect of taking an argument seriously when it challenges such a belief is frightening, especially if we have been strongly discouraged from questioning it before by people whom we love and trust. No one wants to be a heretic to the groups with which they identify. Groupthink is only easy to resist when the group is not ours. Unfortunately, when fear and distress are aroused by efforts to encourage open-mindedness, a lingering resentment may destroy the trust on which successful teaching depends. My most negative course evaluations almost always come from students who believe I have attacked their very identity. I am alleged to have disrespectfully engaged some moral, political, or religious belief central to their sense of self.

There is no doubt that lapses of tact or sheer incompetence on my part have spurred students' anger toward me from time to time. But occasionally it seems I teach as well as I possibly could and there is still hell to pay. About twenty-five years ago a very clever and morally passionate student accused me of being like Hitler or Stalin, evidently because I had suggested that any gay adolescent who came out of the closet should be treated with acceptance and empathy. But times change. More recently, I inadvertently convinced a substantial fraction of a class that I was a raving homophobe by saying that parents of children in grade one who object to a day trip to their teacher's gay wedding might have some objections worth thinking about.

The threat to intellectual identity necessary to liberal education will naturally cause some distress when it nudges opens minds that have already been substantially closed on topics such as religion, political ideology, or the like, and when the nudging fails, anger is predictable. My own two examples of anger-provoking failure may be instructive for another reason: resistance to open-mindedness is to be expected regardless of the content of the beliefs that are held close-mindedly. Whatever the moral truth about LGBT rights might be, one's opinion on the matter will not come with an automatic guarantee that adherence will be open-minded. The vices opposed to the open mind—intellectual arrogance, cowardice, and self-righteousness in addition to sloth and indifference—are common more or less wherever we look on the spectrum of opinion about any controversy, and common too is a tendency to

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[3] William Hare's pioneering work on the open-mindedness as an educational aim remains a landmark in philosophy of education (especially Hare, 1985). The revival of interest in virtue ethics and recent work in virtue epistemology have brought much philosophical attention to open-mindedness more recently. See, for example, Baehr (2013). I have also benefited greatly from conversation about open-mindedness with Rebecca Taylor. Her dissertation (2014) is highly recommended.

notice them only among those who disagree with us. "Political correctness" is simply the label for the creed of the American academic left when it is armored with vices that insulate it from criticism. Right-wing critics who have their own well-armored rival creed often use the label opportunistically. But nothing can justify the pretense that the politically enlightened among us have transcended our own susceptibility to intellectual vice.

This is where the truth in conflictual metaphors about a liberal culture of free speech comes into better focus. Good teaching will often hinge on the artful juxtaposition of irreconcilable claims and clashing arguments. Sometimes I present these myself, though the process almost always works much better if I can elicit the intellectual conflict through the views that students themselves express in discussion. I want (and I should want) to stir thoughtful doubt where before there was just smug intellectual torpor; to show how one can learn much from people with whom one profoundly disagrees; to disclose how contingencies of self-interest and cultural formation can color what we believe in ways that create a mere mirage of objectivity.

That is by no means all I should try to do in the classroom. Open-mindedness in the sense I specified is not the same as rampant skepticism. Still, liberal education requires *unsafe* spaces for students because it will threaten their established intellectual identities by its necessary incitement to open-mindedness. By "intellectual identity" I mean an orientation to the world that subsumes core beliefs about purpose and value in our lives, including convictions about our duties to others; it may also include controversial beliefs about fairness and oppression in our own society and the world at large and how we can achieve the first and erase the second.[4]

Still, at least one interesting residual worry remains. Suppose we agree that all our students need and deserve a liberal education; that this should be provided in a social setting that is dignity safe but, at least episodically, intellectually unsafe; and that this will naturally occasion anger and distress on the part of some students. When anger and distress at some threat to intellectual identity is felt by those who belong to some marginal group whose sense of academic belonging is already attenuated, the experience is surely likely to exacerbate their estrangement, even when no good case can be made for saying that their dignity was violated.

I see no way to eliminate that possibility. Still, something can be said about the problem that makes it less worrying than it seems at first blush. There is an important area of convergence between cultivating open-mindedness in a context of disagreement and fostering the civility that would secure dignity safety for all. Within that area of convergence, much can be done to manage the turbulent emotions that liberal education is apt to elicit. To see this point, a little must to be said about another virtue that liberal education must engage.

Candor demands more than the more widely touted virtue of sincerity. Sincerity means only that I must not say what I do not believe; it does not require that I say what I *do* believe. Students who fall silent when I try to elicit discussion of socially incendiary topics often do not want to admit to beliefs that would cause their peers distress or incite their anger or ridicule. They fail to be candid, in other words. Yet we can hardly get far in liberal education unless students can be frank with their teachers and each other about what they really think.

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[4] There is a different concept of intellectual identity that is captured by beliefs about the extent of one's intellectual capabilities and their potential to expand through learning. Interventions to alleviate stereotype threat concern intellectual identity safety in this other sense. So too does the more broadly focused research on "mindset" (e.g., Dweck, 2006).

Without forfeiting candor, students can be helped to learn how to express what they believe in a way that reduces the risk that others will be offended, or if offense is sometimes inevitable, they can take care to be no more provocative and hurtful than candor strictly demands. They need to speak their mind in a manner tempered by civility. The tempering relies on a complex skill that encompasses control of diction, tone, and body language. There is no reason to believe it is less teachable than other complex skills. Being able to express what one believes without giving insult gratuitously to the other makes it easier for that other to open the mind to what is said. But something else will be necessary here as well: a willingness on the part of the one who listens to interpret what is said charitably, to reach for its most cogent interpretation rather than the caricature that enables one to score debating points while remaining smug and secure in a settled intellectual identity. The habits of civil candor on the one hand and interpretive charity on the other can work as mutually reinforcing dispositions, lowering the emotional stakes of disagreement for everyone and making the benefits of open-mindedness more accessible to our students. The intellectually unsafe classroom can be a friendly, even a convivial place, without becoming any less intellectually unsafe as a consequence of that.

VII

A good question to ask about the cause of safe space is how it is related to the earlier post-World War II civil rights movement from which many of its adherents claim inspiration. If its point were just to secure short-term psychological well-being, the connection would be tenuous at best. Indeed, claims for safe space would in that event seem to be little more than an infantile parody of the epochal social movement that preceded it. But the interpretation of safe space I have presented here discloses a deep continuity with the civil rights movement. Further, the relevant continuity attests to a richer and more empirically sophisticated account of the wrongs of race than was available in the intellectual aftermath of World War II.

De jure racial segregation, bolstered by the fiction that separate public services for different races could accord with the imperative of equal citizenship, was the salient racial injustice at the inception of the civil rights movement. Unfortunately, its end was less a defeat for racism than a demonstration that *de facto* segregation could thrive very nicely without *de jure* support and that race could operate with many of its toxic effects in new, racially mixed environments. The case for dignity safety is an argument for overcoming precisely these effects and honoring a dignity we all share regardless of race.[5]

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