

The Virtue of Civility

Author(s): Cheshire Calhoun

Source: *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Summer, 2000, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Summer, 2000), pp. 251-275

Published by: Wiley

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2672847>

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/2672847?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Wiley is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Philosophy & Public Affairs*

JSTOR

The decline of civility has increasingly become the subject of lament both in popular media and in daily conversation. Civility forestalls the potential unpleasantness of a life with other people. Without it, daily social exchanges can turn nasty and sometimes hazardous. Civility thus seems to be a basic virtue of social life. Moral philosophers, however, do not typically mention civility in their catalogues or examples of virtue. In what follows, I want to suggest that civility is a particularly interesting virtue for moral philosophers because giving an adequate account of the virtue of civility requires us to rethink the relationship between moral virtue and compliance with social norms.

I. THREE STRIKES AGAINST CIVILITY

At least three quite different reasons might be offered for why philosophers so often do not count civility among the moral virtues at all or do not count it among the philosophically interesting moral virtues.

First, more so than other virtues, civility has intimate associations with etiquette or good manners. If one takes the elaborate Victorian fork rules as a paradigm of a rule of etiquette, the primary function of etiquette rules would seem to be neither maximizing utility nor respecting persons as ends. Instead, proper etiquette distinguishes the civilized from the barbaric, the upper from the lower classes, and members of polite society from the rabble. Insofar as being civil is identified with complying with class-distinguishing etiquette rules, civility appears not to be a moral virtue, but a badge of class distinction.

Earlier drafts, begun in 1996, have been shared with Richard Mohr, Hilde Lindemann Nelson, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Sarah Buss, faculty and graduate students at Georgetown University, Washington University, University of Colorado-Boulder, Tufts, and Queens University. I am grateful to many of these individuals for stimulating and helpful critiques. I also want to thank the Editors of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* for their very thoughtful responses.

© 2000 by Princeton University Press. *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 29, no. 3

However, even though civility has been a prime subject for etiquette experts (one of Miss Manners's latest books is devoted to what she considers lapses of civility), it is not obviously true that good manners are either primarily or exclusively class demarcators. Good manners include the distinctly moral: considering others' feelings, expressing gratitude, engaging in tolerant restraint, and respecting others' personal privacy. Nor is it obviously true that civility is limited to good manners. One prominent early meaning of civility was fitness for a civil, post-feudal society. Defining marks of that fitness included obeying authoritative law, refraining from violence, and having the literacy and education necessary for public service.¹ Contemporary political philosophers similarly take civility to be a mark of the good citizen.

Even so, there is a second reason for thinking that civility is at best a minor virtue, or perhaps not a *moral* virtue at all. More so than other virtues, civility has intimate associations with following socially established rules, whether those be rules of etiquette or civil law. For example, the civil debater complies with the written rules of debate; civil neighbors comply with local norms for neighborly behavior; and civil drivers comply with conventional expectations about courteous driving. If civility is a virtue it appears to be more like law-abidingness than justice. Like being a law-abiding citizen, being civil appears to require conforming to whatever the social rules are. Unlike justice, it does not require adopting a socially critical moral point of view. When one adopts a socially critical moral point of view, one does not try to determine how people ought to be treated by investigating how they are treated, or how social conventions recommend they should be treated, or any other social fact of this kind. Instead, adopting a socially critical moral point of view means adopting a standpoint that enables one to evaluate the moral merit of established social norms and to recommend the moral principles that, ideally, would be embodied in our social norms. Adopting a socially critical moral point of view means being prepared to violate existing social conventions. Kantianism and classical utilitarianism are socially critical

1. Marvin Becker has recently argued that this early concept of civility originated with the demise of feudal social organization and depended on a new concept of the individual as someone not primarily defined by his loyalty to local lordships. It also depended on the emergence of a conception of the public good distinct from that of local societies and on a shift away from the pursuit of glory to more peaceable practices. *Civility and Society in Western Europe, 1300–1600* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1988).

moral points of view. Although many socially established rules might also be recommended from a utilitarian or Kantian point of view, they are not guaranteed to be. Thus if civility is a matter of complying with socially established rules, what it is civil to do and what a critical moral point of view recommends that we do may not be equivalent. Because of this, even if, like Kant, one finds merit in obedience even to unjust laws, neither civil obedience nor civility is likely to appear among the top-ranked moral virtues. Moreover, they may not seem like moral virtues at all, since what one must do in order to be civil or civilly obedient may conflict with what a socially critical moral point of view would prescribe.

Someone might object, however, that absent further argument, it is not obviously true that *genuine* civility—as opposed to the social interpretation of what counts as civility—cannot be detached from social rules. Even if, as a society, we tend to codify civility in etiquette manuals and civil law, perhaps genuine civility is not a matter of mindlessly complying with those codifications. Instead, it might be thought that genuine civility requires adopting a critical moral point of view and attempting to determine what really counts as kindness, respect for privacy, tolerance, reasonable concern for others' feelings, and so on.

Although detaching civility from mere conformity to established social rules moves civility more clearly into the realm of moral virtue, one might still think that there is a third and quite different reason for not ranking civility among the philosophically interesting moral virtues. Because the scope of application of the terms 'civil' and 'uncivil' is so huge, it will be very tempting to reduce civility either to something like Kantian respect or else to a set of virtues in order to explain the broad scope of these terms. To get some sense for just how large the scope of application of 'uncivil' is, consider these lapses of civility mentioned by Miss Manners.² In addition to shoving, shouting, giving the finger, making insulting remarks, not waiting one's turn in line, there are the incivilities of nosiness, bossiness, snobbishness, breaking appointments, overstaying visits, failing to offer thanks or apologies or responses to invitations, not reciprocating hospitality, hogging the road, littering, proselytizing, and offering unsolicited advice. Colonial American manuals on manners remind us of earthier incivilities such as returning half eaten food to communal dishes, scratch-

2. Judith Martin, *Miss Manners Rescues Civilization from Sexual Harassment, Frivolous Lawsuits, Dissing and Other Lapses in Civility* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1996).

ing or revealing private parts, spraying spit while talking, and farting.³ And political philosophers include in their various lists of incivilities coercion, intimidation, harassment, violence, unrestrained pursuit of self-interest, the arbitrary exercise of power, disrespect for others' rights and dignity, stating deep but unshared moral convictions, inattentively listening to another's argument, intolerance, indifference to offense, voting on the basis of private preferences, expressing contempt for others' life plans, engaging in vigilante justice, rioting, and not obeying the law.⁴

In short, 'incivility' differs from other vice labels in tending to be universally applicable to virtually any example of moral or mannerly misbehavior. Thus 'civility' does not seem to name a distinct virtue. Instead, 'civility' seems either to pick out a fundamental attitude that lies at the core of all the more particular virtues (much the way Kant's concept of respect does) or to designate a collection of virtues such as tolerance, considerateness, law abidance, and the like. In either case, the philosophical analysis of civility will be parasitic on the analysis of the more basic virtue(s) to which civility is reducible.

Each of these reasons for discounting civility as a moral virtue or demoting it to a derivative moral virtue depends on a different understanding of what civility is: (1) a set of class-demarkating behaviors; (2) a morally uncritical conformity to socially established rules of respect, tolerance, etc.; (3) an equivalent to one or more items on the familiar philosophical list of moral virtues. Anyone who wants to argue, as I in fact do, that civility is a distinct and important moral virtue will need to do at least two things. The first and primary task is to provide an account of civility that does not reduce civility to some other virtue(s). Why *isn't* civility just another name for being respectful, tolerant, and considerate of one's fellows? Second, given civility's close association with following socially established rules, it will be necessary to explain why civility should be con-

3. *George Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation*, edited by Charles Moore (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1926).

4. Michael Walzer, "Civility and Civic Virtue," *Social Research* 41 (1974): 593–611; Burton Zweibach, *Civility and Disobedience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Clifford Orwin, "Civility," *American Scholar* 60 (1991): 553–64; Mark Kingwell, *A Civil Tongue: Justice, Dialogue and the Politics of Pluralism* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971) and *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Richard C. Sinopoli, "Thick-Skinned Liberalism: Redefining Civility," *American Political Science Review* 89 (1995): 612–20.

sidered a *moral* virtue. It would also be a bonus if the account captured some of the basic intuitions underlying the three understandings of civility just mentioned. Those intuitions are that civility is intimately connected to socially established rules, including rules of etiquette (view 2); that it is also intimately connected to other moral virtues like tolerance and respect (view 3); and that there is special reason to worry about class bias in our judgments about who is and who is not civil (view 1).

In what follows, I will be adopting a variant of view (2)—the view that civility involves conformity to socially established rules of respect, tolerance, and considerateness. I do not, however, take the social conformism built into civility to be a reason for discounting civility's moral importance. On the contrary, I will argue that this conformity is critical to civility's moral function. The function of civility, I will suggest, is to *communicate* basic moral attitudes of respect, tolerance, and considerateness.⁵ We can successfully communicate these basic moral attitudes to others only by following socially conventional rules for the expression of respect, tolerance, and considerateness. Thus I take civility to be tied to social rules in a way that, for example, honesty, justice, kindness, and respect are not. Although civility's tie to social rules sometimes occasions a conflict between what it would be uncivil to do and what, from a critical moral point of view, is morally correct, I will argue that there is, nevertheless, good reason to count civility among the moral virtues.

II. POLITICAL AND POLITE CIVILITIES

By taking a look at what political philosophers and etiquette experts have had to say about civility, we can get a more detailed picture of the terrain of civility. More importantly, we will be able to see how both political philosophers and etiquette experts have tended to favor the third understanding of civility mentioned above—the view that being civil is *nothing but* a matter of being respectful, considerate, and tolerant. Thus 'civility' does not name a distinct virtue.

While early political conceptions of civility linked civility to the formation and stability of any civil society, for contemporary political theorists, civility is a virtue specific to liberal democratic societies. Civility fits citizens for life in a pluralistic society and is closely connected to tolerance.

5. For a similar view of the expressive function of manners see Sarah Buss, "Appearing Respectful: The Moral Significance of Manners," *Ethics* 109 (1999): 795–826.

The civil citizen exercises tolerance in the face of deep disagreement about the good. She respects the rights of others, refrains from violence, intimidation, harassment and coercion, does not show contempt for others' life plans, and has a healthy respect for others' privacy. As Clifford Orwin puts it, civility is "a bond uniting honest men busy minding their own affairs" who are neighborly but who recognize that "good fences do make good neighbors."⁶

Tolerant self-restraint, however, is only part of what fits citizens for life in a liberal democracy. In addition, citizens must seek accommodation and compromise through reasoned dialogue.⁷ As the virtue that fits citizens for life in a participatory democracy, civility thus gets equated with respectful dialogue—keeping a civil tongue.

Political theorists differ on what speech constraints civility requires. For Rawls, because the civil citizen respects others' capacity to be reasonable in setting the terms of fair social cooperation, civility requires that people be "willing to explain the grounds of their actions, especially when the claims of others are overruled."⁸ On matters of basic justice, civility additionally requires that individuals refrain from appealing to comprehensive doctrines and instead appeal only to basic principles of justice that all can be expected to share.

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (whose work on mutual respect influenced Rawls's remarks about civility in *Political Liberalism*) reject such severe speech constraints. Instead, the civil citizen simply seeks for points of moral agreement, offers rationales that minimize the risk of her position being rejected, and refrains from presenting her views as unalterable convictions.⁹ Mark Kingwell takes a similar approach. Civility, in

6. Orwin, "Civility," p. 560.

7. While some authors continue to include law-abidingness within the scope of civility, the rationale for doing so ceases to be clear. Some law-abidingness is of course directly connected to liberal tolerance, such as respecting rights to speech, association, and privacy. But paying taxes, obeying the speed limit, and not evading the draft are not similarly connected to the distinctive requirements of liberal democracies. Instead, the temptation to equate civility with law-abidingness generally seems to reflect the continuing cultural influence of an earlier conception of civility. See for example, Michael Walzer, "Civility and Civic Virtue," and Burton Zweibach, *Civility and Disobedience*.

8. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 179.

9. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, "Moral Conflict and Political Consensus," in *Liberalism and the Good*, edited by R. Bruce Douglass, et al. (New York: Routledge, 1990). Their analysis is of 'mutual respect,' not 'civility.' Following Rawls, I interpret them as in fact describing civility.

his view, requires a “willingness not to say all the true, or morally excellent things one could say,”¹⁰ especially when expressing one’s deeper moral convictions is likely to be offensive, hurtful, or a conversation stopper.

All agree that civility is, importantly, a matter of restraining speech. They also agree that civility has an active side as well. For Rawls, the civil citizen also exhibits an active willingness to listen to others, to try to see things from the point of view of their conception of the good; she is neither contemptuous of nor indifferent to others’ life plans and makes fair-minded accommodations to their views.¹¹ For Gutmann and Thompson, the civil citizen magnanimously acknowledges that his opponent’s view is a genuine moral position about which reasonable people may disagree. For Kingwell, the civil citizen listens attentively, actively “coaxing out the interests of others through sensitivity and tact.”¹²

As a polite (rather than political) virtue, civility has been understood as the mark of the competent participant in the social settings of everyday life—at work and at parties, in restaurants and private dining rooms, in churches and synagogues, on public transportation and on urban streets, in hospital rooms and doctors’ offices, at family gatherings, weddings, and funerals, in courtrooms, board rooms, and on the floor of Congress.

Like political civility, polite civility has varied historically. Young George Washington’s *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation* focuses in roughly equal measure on basic bodily control and hygiene and on considerate and respectful interaction befitting one’s own and others’ social stations.¹³ Like the early political civility that enables the citizen to escape from barbarism to civil society, Washington’s polite civility enables the social participant to avoid barbaric and potentially disgusting bodily displays. The civil person refrains from humming, finger drumming, nail biting, bedewing others with spittle, eye rolling, lolling out the tongue, gaping, killing fleas and lice in others’ sight, wearing foul clothes, and falling asleep while others speak. The civil person also shows both some sign of respect to everyone in his or her company and special respect for persons of “quality” by, for instance, careful attention to the order in which persons speak, walk, and are seated.

10. Kingwell, *A Civil Tongue*, p. 44.

11. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 337–38; *Political Liberalism*, pp. 217–18.

12. Kingwell, *A Civil Tongue*, p. 211.

13. George Washington’s *Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation* were adapted via a 1640 English manual from a 1595 French Jesuit manual.

Such manuals that focused on deferential displays of respect for rank were not ultimately suitable to American egalitarian ideals. The nineteenth century saw a flood of etiquette manuals, one of whose aims was to adapt the more rank-conscious French and British conception of civility to an egalitarian democracy.¹⁴ In the twentieth century, Miss Manners's etiquette manuals provide a particularly clear example of the attempt to work out a conception of polite civility that is tightly connected to the ideals of toleration, egalitarianism, reasoned dialogue, and positive respect for others' life plans.

Like many political theorists, she regards a sizable portion of the norms of civility as supporting toleration of differences by creating social distance—or as Orwin put it, “good fences.” Civility requires respect for others' privacy, particularly by not intrusively probing into how others are conducting their lives and by not expressing one's assessment of those lives or advice on how to improve them. Thus, incivilities include nosiness, attempting to improve others by offering unsolicited advice, proselytizing, self-righteously insisting that others adhere to particular moral standards, and correcting others' manners.

Like political theorists, she too recommends speech constraints for civil dialogue. For her this means that in public fora where discussion of controversial issues is appropriate, civility simply precludes insults, invectives, displays of contempt, or attempts to humiliate, embarrass, demonize, or demean one's opponent; it also means waiting one's turn to speak and refraining from airing personal prejudices. In more social and private fora such as at the dinner table, civility, in her view, places an almost absolute bar on raising controversial and potentially offensive moral, political, and religious issues that would disrupt the social events that others care about.¹⁵

Polite civility also requires considerably respecting others' life plans by, for instance, waiting one's turn in line, keeping appointments, not treating others' time as though it were less important than one's own, not hogging the road, replying to invitations, not overstaying visits, and graciously accepting gifts rather than asking if they might be exchanged. In little ways, all of these actions acknowledge the value of others' lives.

As descriptions of what in fact we expect of civil people, I take both the

14. John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990).

15. Martin, *Miss Manners Rescues Civilization*, pp. 366 ff.

political and polite narratives of civility to be relatively uncontroversial. But the *account* of civility implicit in both is problematic. The lists of political and polite civil behavior do not appear to depend on a prior understanding of civility as a distinct virtue. Instead, they appear to be entirely derived from a prior understanding of tolerance, considerateness, mutual respect, and a sense of justice. The question, “What should a civil person do?” appears to be interchangeable with the questions “How should mutually respectful citizens treat each other?” or “How should considerate social participants treat each other?” or “What does being tolerant of others’ differences involve?” But if civility is just the exercise of tolerance, respect, and considerateness toward fellow social participants or fellow citizens, then civility does not name a distinct virtue and there is no reason for moral philosophers to mention civility in a catalogue of moral virtues.

This may be the right conclusion. But it is sufficiently counterintuitive to make it worthwhile asking whether there is some way of analyzing civility that preserves much of the above description of civil behaviors but also establishes a distinction between civility and other virtues.¹⁶

III. CIVILITY AS A DISTINCT VIRTUE

What might separate civility from other kinds of moral behavior? Let me suggest this: Civility always involves a *display* of respect, tolerance, or considerateness. By ‘displaying’ respect, tolerance, and considerateness, I have in mind acts that the target of civility might reasonably interpret as making it clear that I recognize some morally considerable fact about her that makes her worth treating with respect, considerateness, and tolerance. That morally considerable fact might be the fact that she is a person, or that she has feelings, or that she has views, tastes, or interests of her own, or that she has earned an authority position, or that she is my neighbor. The civil person regards such morally considerable facts as placing restrictions not just on how she treats others, but on the messages about their worth that she conveys to them.¹⁷ Those messages sometimes

16. The account of civility I offer may not distinguish civility from all possible virtues, particularly not from law-abidingness and civil obedience. My aim is to distinguish civility from respect, tolerance, and considerateness in particular.

17. Jean Hampton develops the idea that moralities and immoralities convey messages about worth in “Forgiveness, Resentment and Hatred” (in Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988]).

get sent through positive tokens of respect and considerateness—listening carefully, saying “thank you,” replying to an invitation. On other occasions, conveying one’s willingness to consider others’ feelings or the fact that they have tastes and views of their own depends primarily on acts of concealment. In social life, there are unending opportunities to find other people boring, disagreeable, repulsive, stupid, sleazy, inept, bigoted, lousy at selecting gifts, bad cooks, infuriatingly slow drivers, disappointing dates, bad philosophers, and so on. The civil person typically conceals these unflattering appraisals, since conveying them may easily suggest that one does not take others’ feelings or the fact that they may have different standards to be worth taking into consideration or tolerating.¹⁸

In short, what makes being civil different from being respectful, considerate, or tolerant, is that civility always involves a display of respect, tolerance, or considerateness. Thus civility is an essentially *communicative* form of moral conduct. In addition, because communicating our moral attitudes is central to civility, being genuinely civil—unlike, say, being genuinely considerate or genuinely tolerant—requires that we follow whatever the socially established norms are for showing people considerateness, tolerance, or respect. Only because there are such generally agreed upon, often codified, social rules for what counts as respectful, considerate, and tolerant behavior can we successfully communicate our moral attitudes toward others. Those rules create a common language for conveying the attitudes of respect, willingness to tolerate differences, and consideration. Similarly, incivilities draw on a common verbal and behavioral language for displaying disrespect, intolerance, or inconsiderateness.

Because civil and uncivil acts are essentially *communicative* acts, while simply *treating* people with respect or tolerance does not always involve communicating our moral attitudes, civil behavior is not coextensive with respectful, tolerant, and considerate behavior. To see this, first consider that being civil and treating people with respect, considerateness,

18. Responding to them as though they weren’t deficient in various ways (and then, perhaps, poking fun at them behind their backs) is hypocritical. But as Thomas Nagel has recently observed, it is a form of hypocrisy that we make sure we teach children, that we’re thankful that others engage in, and that isn’t deceptive since everyone engages in socially conventional practices of polite concealment and everyone knows what might be going on behind their backs. Thomas Nagel, “Concealment and Exposure,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 3–30.

or tolerance are sometimes two distinguishable constituents of what we might call fully, or maximally, respectful, considerate, or tolerant behavior. A fully tolerant person not only permits those with different views or life plans the same freedoms that she enjoys (for example, the freedom to pursue their interests in public spaces); she also displays a tolerant attitude when given the opportunity to do so (by, for example, not audibly complaining about having to share public space with different others). She both tolerantly *treats* others and civilly *displays* her willingness to tolerate others. Because constraining one's actions in ways that are required by a principle of toleration (or considerateness or respect) and displaying attitudes of tolerance (or considerateness or respect) are not the same thing, it is possible to be uncivil while nevertheless treating others with some degree of tolerance, respect, or considerateness.¹⁹ Think, for example, of the person who carefully skirts his neighbor's lawn while sarcastically declaring, "Don't worry, I won't step on your precious grass"; or the employer who carefully follows affirmative action guidelines but who tells the new employee, "You know you only got this job because you're black"; or the partygoer who rues his own self-restraint by announcing, "I guess I won't tell that (sexist) joke since I know you gals don't have a sense of humor." These individuals are being respectful, considerate, and tolerant—although not fully so—because their actions are constrained so that they do not damage others' property, or deprive them of equal opportunity, or insult them with demeaning jokes. Thus complaints of trespass, racist hiring, or sexist joke-telling have no toehold in these examples. One might, however, think that something is missing for fully respectful, considerate, and tolerant treatment—namely the civil display of the corresponding moral attitudes.

Second, that civility does name a virtue different from simply *treating* people with respect or tolerance is also evident if one keeps in mind that not all cases of treating people respectfully or considerately or tolerantly involve any sort of communicative interaction. For example, contributing to charities is a way of treating unknown others considerately and respectfully; but that considerateness is not displayed to the recipients of charity. Charitable donors behave well, but they are not being civil (or uncivil). Consider also the fact that treating people disrespectfully is often accomplished by deliberately avoiding communicative interaction with

19. Sarah Buss makes a parallel point in "Appearing Respectful," p. 797.

the targets of disrespect. For example, when people engage in covert trespassing, theft, forgery, tax evasion, bribing public officials, and drug trafficking, particular persons, or citizens generally, are treated with disrespect. But there is no communicative interaction with the targets of disrespect, and thus there is no opportunity to display any attitudes at all to the targets of disrespect. Thieves and drug traffickers behave badly, but they aren't guilty of incivility. (Of course, they aren't being civil either.)

Third, even when one is in ongoing communicative interaction with other people, treating people disrespectfully is not always accompanied by a display of disrespect. Instead, those who violate principles of respect, considerateness, or tolerance often try to conceal their wrongdoing. Consider conducting a discrete adulterous affair; making racist, sexist, or other demeaning comments about one's coworker behind her back; or engaging in discriminatory hiring practices that are carefully hidden from job candidates. Because the targets of disrespect, inconsiderateness, and intolerance are kept ignorant of how they are being treated, there is no uncivil display to the target.²⁰ Adulterers and discriminatory employers behave badly, but they are not guilty of incivility unless they flaunt their wrongdoing before the target of disrespect. Of course, covert adulterers and discriminatory employers, even if they aren't guilty of incivility, are not to be praised for their civility either, since presumably they conceal their misbehavior for self-interested reasons rather than to avoid sending a disrespectful message.

Finally and most importantly, in morally imperfect social worlds, we may have to choose between being civil—i.e., successfully communicating our attitude of respect or tolerance—and behaving in ways that are genuinely respectful or tolerant. In such cases, it becomes quite clear that civility cannot be equated with respect, tolerance, or considerateness. To take a familiar example, consider how opening doors for women has been, and continues to be, a socially conventional way of displaying respect for women. In many social environments, any man who plunges ahead first through a doorway will be interpreted as rudely displaying a disrespectful attitude. Yet such ladies-first policies, one might think (as most feminists now do), are not *really* respectful. They are rooted in de-

20. In a broader sense of display than I am using, demeaning one's coworker behind her back is a display of disrespect—one has made one's attitude public. On my view, for incivility, it matters to whom one makes this display.

meaning assumptions about women's weakness and need for male protection. In a morally more perfect world where women's equality was built into our social conventions, there would be no ladies-first policies. That is not our world. As a result, men often have to choose between a comprehensible, civil *display* of a respectful attitude and *treating* women in the way that they ought always to be treated were our society a gender egalitarian one.

To take a second example, consider the fact that asking people to closet a nonheterosexual identity (at work, church, family gatherings, the military, and the like) generally does not violate our social norms for tolerance. Thus the military could seriously present its Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy as a tolerant one. In short, pressuring people to stay closeted is generally not uncivil. Yet such don't-tell policies, one might think, are not *really* tolerant. They are rooted in demeaning assumptions about gay men's and lesbians' moral depravity and sexual licentiousness. In a morally more perfect world where prejudices were not built into our social conventions, there would not be don't-tell policies. That is not our world. As a result, nonheterosexuals often have to choose between accepting without ire a civil *display* of tolerance and protesting *treatment* that would not be acceptable were our society a sexually unprejudiced one.

Examples like this show that the decision procedure for answering "How can I treat P with genuine respect, considerateness, or tolerance?" differs from the decision procedure for answering "How can I display respect, considerateness, or tolerance to P?" If I am concerned with treating others with the respect owed them as moral persons, my interest is in determining how they ought to be treated, regardless of what treatments are acceptable under existing social norms. Existing social norms may sanction as natural, normal, and legitimate, treatment that is in fact demeaning, unjust, cruel, or intolerant of alternative conceptions of the good. They may also sanction giving what are in fact unfair privileges to some and denying to others their rightful due. To decide what *genuinely* respectful or considerate or tolerant treatment would amount to, I must set aside socially established moral understandings and adopt a socially critical moral point of view such as a utilitarian or Kantian framework. From that critical point of view, treating others with moral respect may sometimes require violating existing social norms. Similarly, if I am interested in determining what I owe others in the way of tolerating their

differences, I cannot appeal to social norms, since as a result of defects in socially shared moral understandings about the status of different groups, social norms may sanction tolerating what is in fact bigotry. Instead, I must adopt a socially critical moral point of view in order to sort out genuinely tolerant from intolerant beliefs and behaviors. (I will return to this point in Section IV.)

By contrast, if I am interested in displaying respect, my task is not to figure out how people *ought* to be treated, but how I can successfully *communicate* moral attitudes. Displaying respect is essentially a communicative action. That communication requires a common language. Social norms provide that common language, because they embody shared moral understandings. Social norms for what is due others make it possible to successfully deliver an insult, a snub, a demeaning gesture. They also make it possible to offer tokens of respect or considerateness or tolerance. Because some gap between critical moral conceptions and social conceptions of what counts as respectful treatment is likely, a socially critical moral point of view that enables us to determine how persons *ought* to be treated cannot reliably tell us how to *display* the moral attitude of respect. In at least some cases, others may perceive one's effort to treat them with respect as either, depending on the case, insufficiently respectful or exceedingly kind. For example, from a socially critical moral point of view, one might conclude that treating a hostess considerately requires that male (and not just female) guests help clean up. Social norms, however, exempt men from this form of considerateness; thus hostesses are likely to view male help as exceedingly kind. Only within a hypothetical world where critical moral understandings are also socially normative are our acts of treating others with genuine respect, tolerance, or considerateness guaranteed to be correctly interpretable by others. In morally imperfect worlds, correctly treating others and communicating respectful moral attitudes are often two different activities. Consequently, our final judgments about what to do in such imperfect worlds will often involve weighing two *competing* moral considerations: (1) the value of successfully communicating basic moral attitudes (civility), and (2) the importance of treating people with genuine respect, tolerance, and considerateness.

I want to underscore that these are *competing* considerations in morally imperfect social worlds. Any moral framework used to determine what counts as genuine respect, tolerance, and considerateness—and

thus what our social norms ought to be—will surely attach some importance to communicating moral attitudes. Utilitarianism obviously does; but so does any deontological theory containing a duty of beneficence or a duty to promote others' self-esteem.²¹ However, if what we want out of a moral framework are guidelines that will enable us to engage in social criticism, that moral framework cannot afford to weight misguided feelings too heavily. Bernard Williams has made this point quite forcefully about utilitarianism.²² Utilitarians will not be able to criticize existing social arrangements if they factor in too heavily the pleasures taken in existing arrangements, and the pains at disrupting them. So, for example, utilitarianism won't yield a socially critical moral framework if it gives significant weight to offense taken at not being given what social norms mistakenly specify is one's due. Similarly, Kantians cannot afford to attach significant weight to communicating respect, since the acts that successfully communicate respect may be highly inegalitarian (think for example of what blacks have historically had to do in order to communicate respect to whites in the U.S.). In short, any moral framework that is designed to enable us to criticize, revise, and sometimes reject existing social norms cannot afford to be one that places a lot of value on successfully communicating attitudes of respect, tolerance, and considerateness. Thus, in a morally imperfect world, what a socially critical moral framework recommends may well be at odds with what we feel called upon to do in order to communicate our moral attitudes toward those we live with.

IV. THE BOUNDS OF CIVILITY

So far, I have suggested that civility is the virtue and incivility the vice with respect to communicating moral attitudes in contexts governed by social norms. Civility names a distinctive feature of some actions: displaying that one takes another to be worth respecting, tolerating, or considering. Both civilities and incivilities rely on a common social language. Thus civilities and incivilities are directly specified by social norms. Codified or tacitly shared rules of fair debate, clean campaigning, neighborliness, hosting, turn taking, considerate driving, personal inquiries, proper dress,

21. An anonymous reviewer for another journal proposed a variant of this point.

22. Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in his and J.J.C. Smart's *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 104–6.

voicing criticisms, raising controversial subjects, and so on set the terms for displaying respect, tolerance, and considerateness.²³

These displays of respect are not morally negligible. First, civility signals others' willingness to have us as co-participants in practices ranging from political dialogues, to campus communities, to funerals, to sharing public highways. Second, for those who are not already coerced into sharing social practices with us, civility may be a precondition of their willingness to enter and continue in cooperative ventures with us. Third, civility supports self-esteem by offering token reminders that we are regarded as worth respecting, tolerating, and considering. Finally, civility, particularly toward members of socially disesteemed groups, protects individuals against the emotional exhaustion of having to cope with others' displays of hatred, aversion, and disapproval.

Granted that civil displays have moral benefits, one might still object that the *virtue* of civility cannot consist solely in following established social norms for displaying respect, tolerance, and considerateness. Moral virtues should produce conduct that is correct by socially critical moral standards. Compliance with established social norms can hardly be said to produce such conduct—at least not reliably. After all, in markedly inequalitarian societies, established social norms are likely to require that we pay out to dominant groups larger measures of respect, tolerance and considerateness. They are also likely to require subordinate groups to put up with more meager allotments. Thus social norms of civility may fail to condemn the contemptuous treatment of socially disesteemed groups, because they interpret such contempt as civilly displaying the appropriate measure of respect. Until just recently, for example, much of what we now call sexual harassment was socially interpreted as innocent flirting, or as a response invited by some women's impropriety, and thus not a lapse of civility. Far from condemning such moral misbehavior, social norms may instead condemn the disesteemed's protests as uncivil.

If civility doesn't look much like a *moral* virtue on my account, wouldn't it be better to go back to the idea, mentioned at the very beginning, that

23. One consequence of this view that there is a social language for conveying respect and disrespect is that incivility is not a function of persons' *intentions*. Because actions have social meanings, what a person does may display disrespect even if he does not intend to do so. Making baldly sexist comments to a woman displays disrespect and is uncivil regardless of what the speaker means to be doing. The speaker may evade being held responsible for this incivility if he can come up with a passable excuse for being ignorant of the social meaning of his speech (generally a hard thing to do).

genuine civility is not about displays? It is about treating people with real respect, considerateness, and tolerance, and thus we can't be genuinely civil without adopting a socially critical moral point of view. (A socially critical moral point of view, recall, is just a moral framework, like utilitarianism or Kantianism, that we can use to evaluate and revise social norms so that they reflect more correct understandings of what we morally owe to others.) On this latter approach, being genuinely civil could never mean complying with what is in fact unjust. So, for example, genuine civility could never, under any social circumstance, require racial deference or the closeting of one's sexual orientation or putting up with sexual harassment. Instead, a concern for genuine civility might lead us to critically reassess social norms of civility. Although civility would then turn out not to be a virtue distinct from respect, tolerance, and considerateness, we would at least have more reason to lament its decline.

However attractive this alternative, socially critical moral analysis might be, I think it will not ultimately yield a plausible account of civility. In this last section, I will suggest that equating genuine civility with what we (philosophers who appeal to some socially critical moral framework) conclude really does embody respect, considerateness, and tolerance—as opposed to what a social group, perhaps mistakenly, takes to embody these attitudes—will result in setting the bounds of civility in a way that undermines a principal point of the virtue. By 'bounds of civility' I mean the point where speech and action are sufficiently disrespectful, inconsiderate, and intolerant *not* to warrant a civil response. Since civility is not the virtue of being nice no matter what, civility norms need to tell us which intentional misbehaviors on others' part we are required to respond to civilly and which we aren't. To extend Orwin's analogy: civility norms need to tell us when bad neighbors are bad enough to deserve eviction, not a bigger fence. Those who write about civility generally understand their task to include a specification of when the bounds of civility have been reached. A sizable portion of the letters written to Miss Manners, for example, request clarification on where the bounds of civility are set. Those letters narrate atrocious misbehavior and ask, in effect, "Can't I be uncivil to *that*?"

In her replies, Miss Manners takes a socially critical moral approach to setting the bounds of civility. Gutmann and Thompson do, too, in their discussion of mutual respect (which I take to be, in effect, a discussion of civility). Indeed, Gutmann and Thompson give us a particularly clear ex-

ample of what someone who thinks that genuine civility expresses a socially critical moral point of view would say about the bounds of civility.

Gutmann and Thompson argue that in political dialogues mutual respect (civility) is owed only to those expressing genuine moral positions. Whenever a view can be shown not to be a genuine moral position, a respectful (civil) acknowledgment that reasonable people may disagree is not in order. Similarly, Miss Manners sanctions such apparent lapses of civility as subjecting to social scorn, cutting dead, exclaiming "How dare you . . . ?," walking out on an offensive lecture, and the withering look in response to unacceptable conduct. Included on her list of the intolerable are expressions of bigotry, sexual harassment, child-molestation, subjecting others to cigarette and cigar smoke, and in general, patent illegality and immorality.

Both appear to set the bounds of civility by appealing to a moral framework that could also be used to reject some commonly shared social beliefs about what is tolerable behavior or a genuine moral position and thus deserving of a civil response. Consider first Gutmann and Thompson's appeal to the notion of a genuine moral position. To determine which beliefs count as genuine moral positions and which do not, we will have to appeal to some critical moral framework. Doing so will in turn allow us to set the bounds of civility by specifying which beliefs are *really* (or really not) owed a respectful (civil) response, regardless of what the existing social understandings may suggest is owed a civil response. For example, Gutmann and Thompson claim that a defense of racial discrimination is not owed a civil response, because it is not a genuine moral position. Since this is a critical normative claim, it would appear to hold good in any historical period. Thus participants in nineteenth-century debates over slavery were presumably no more required to respond respectfully (civilly) to defenders of slavery than anyone today would be should she encounter an advocate of slavery.

Miss Manners appears also to appeal to an unstated moral viewpoint in setting the bounds of civility. She claims, for example, that sexual harassment has always been intolerably uncivil and thus was never owed a civil response.²⁴ Setting the bounds of civility in this way has the merit of

24. Martin, *Miss Manners Rescues Civilization*, p. 164. It is, however, not always clear whether she intends to appeal to a critical moral view or to social understandings to set the bounds of civility. Her view that reacting against bigotry is not rude so long as what counts as bigotry has already been announced and socially accepted (*Miss Manners Rescues Civi-*

assuring us that being civil never requires dignifying bigotry, racism, sexism, and homophobia, and that protesting wrongful treatment will not be uncivil.

How could this morally attractive view undermine a principal point of the virtue of civility? It will be helpful here to recall the political conception of civility. On that conception, civility is what fits us for life in a pluralistic society, wherein nonlike-minded people will have to enter into political dialogue in order to reach compromise agreements. Controversial issues will be the primary subject of dialogue; and the controversy itself is likely to originate in the fact that the parties to dialogue operate from different moral frameworks (or apply the same framework to different interpretations of the facts). A principal point of having norms of civility is to *regulate* discussion of controversial subjects so that dialogue among those who disagree will continue rather than break down. Civility norms regulate discussion, first, by imposing speech constraints that prohibit the parties from expressing themselves in ways that might give a reasonable interlocutor cause to back out of the conversation altogether. More importantly, civility norms regulate discussion by requiring all parties equally to respond with respect toward the *same* set of positions that are on the table for discussion regardless of what they may privately think about those positions. In other words, civility norms bar dialogue participants from exercising their own individual judgment about what views are utterly contemptible, intolerable, and not worth a respectful hearing. There may, of course, be positions that are off the table; but here again they will get off the table not because you or I happen to think they aren't owed a civil response. If they get off the table, it will be in a way that equally exempts everyone from civilly responding to the *same* set of positions.

To imagine that civility requires that we display tolerance only to what we, as individual reasoners, have concluded are tolerable opinions or genuine moral positions is to imagine a norm of civility that cannot regulate disputes. Because civility has its point and place precisely with respect to views that are under dispute in a society, civility norms must require civil responses to some views regardless of what individual reasoners think about them. Thus, individual judgment cannot determine

lization, p. 358) suggests that the bounds of civility are set by appeal to social understandings.

the views whose expression or enactment are not owed, a civil response. This is true no matter how careful, objective, and well informed individual moral reasoners attempt to be. It is simply a fact about our collective rational life together that we often differ in our judgments. Our disagreements concern not only better and worse behavior, but also the morally intolerable that deserves no civil response. In the midst of disagreement over what is morally intolerable (and thus does not deserve a civil response), it is a display of *intolerance* to insist on using one's own judgment to decide what deserves a civil response.

For the same reason, which views are and are not owed a civil response cannot be a matter for moral philosophers to decide by appeal to some socially critical moral framework. A socially critical moral view is, after all, a *particular* normative view and thus likely to be held by some people and not by others. It is Miss Manners's critical moral view that sexual harassment and subjecting others to cigarette smoke are intolerable and not owed a civil response. It is Gutmann and Thompson's critical moral view that a defense of racial inequality does not count as a genuine moral position. The objective intolerability of sexual harassment and racial supremacy seem obvious to us now. Neither was obvious in earlier historical periods; and there is presently substantial disagreement about what in fact counts as intolerably subjecting others to smoke. To suggest that enlightened individuals in earlier historical periods who realized the wrongness of what we now call sexual harassment and racial bigotry were also correct to ignore the fact of deep social disagreement over these behaviors (or the fact of widespread agreement on their moral innocuousness) and judge for themselves what is owed a civil response, is to leave civility norms up to individual judgment in one of two ways. Either everyone is entitled to use their preferred moral framework and decide for themselves where the bounds of civility are set—producing “civility anarchy” since we will likely not all agree on what is and is not owed a civil response.²⁵ Or one particular moral framework is simply declared the correct one and is used to set the bounds of civility. Miss Manners avoids civility anarchy by setting herself up as the supreme legislator of civility. For example, she assumes the prerogative of deciding what the smoke

25. A good example of this civility anarchy is the variety of nonsmokers' judgments about which behaviors on the part of smokers are intolerable. Smoking near fellow passengers, in offices, in restaurants, in bars, on public streets, and in areas designated for smokers might, depending on the person, be regarded as exceeding the bounds of the tolerable.

rules are, and thus what kinds of smoking do not deserve a civil response. Philosophers who want to set the bounds of civility from a socially critical moral point of view can similarly avoid civility anarchy only by setting themselves up as the supreme legislator of what counts as a legitimate critical morality. Left to individual judgment in either one of these ways, standards of civility cease to *regulate* dispute. They are instead tied to the very moral frameworks that are *under* dispute. In short, if we appeal to any particular moral framework to determine the bounds of civility, we must treat as settled the very questions that civil dialogue was supposed to resolve.

If a list of intolerable views and behaviors that are not owed a civil response cannot be derived from any critical moral view, since that view may itself be under dispute, is there any way of specifying what is not owed a civil response? For that matter, is there any way of specifying what *is* owed a civil response? Yes. It is no accident that Miss Manners and Gutmann and Thompson choose sexual harassment and racial discrimination as examples of the intolerable. These are moral matters on which there is presently extensive social consensus (which is not to say unanimity). Standards of civility reflect that social consensus. We need not respond civilly to a view or behavior once there is social closure on its intolerance. At that point, civility would not further the work of enabling the nonlike-minded to continue political dialogue or social interaction. However, when there *is* social dispute over the tolerability of a view or behavior, being civil has a point. That the dispute is occasioned by others' moral misguidedness is irrelevant to the question of whether we owe others a civil response. All that is relevant is the fact of social dispute.

In sum, analyses of civility that equate being civil with treating people in genuinely respectful, considerate, and tolerant ways and that set the bounds of civility by appealing to some socially critical moral framework to determine what is genuinely intolerable misconstrue what civility is about and why there are bounds to civility. They assume that civility is a virtue we are required to exercise toward others only if those others pursue genuinely morally acceptable views and behavior. (Of course, moral acceptability will have to be judged from the point of view of some particular socially critical moral framework; and others may disagree that ours is the best one.) Thus civility is owed only to people who have (in one's own best judgment) gotten it more or less right. People one judges to have gotten hold of a morally pernicious view are not owed a civil

response. This makes civility a close kin to integrity, since refusing to respond civilly to a view one judges morally pernicious is one way of standing up for one's moral views. Indeed, using a socially critical moral framework to set the bounds of civility assumes that those bounds are there to safeguard our integrity by exempting us from dignifying what we, as individual moral reasoners, take to be morally pernicious views.

By contrast, I think civility is a virtue that we are required to exercise toward others only if they pursue *socially* acceptable views and behavior. At no point do norms of civility presuppose socially critical moral judgments about either what views are worth respecting or what counts as respectful, considerate, and tolerant behavior. Instead, they presuppose social understandings about what views are still debatable, as well as social understandings about what actions are sufficiently respectful, tolerant, and considerate to be worth a civil response. Only by appealing to social understandings can civility norms successfully regulate disputes and interaction with others under social conditions where our different critical moralities lead us to differ over what positions deserve respect and what actions treat others with respect, tolerance, and considerateness. In addition, as I argued in Section III, only by appealing to social understandings can civility norms provide us with a common language for displaying respect, tolerance, and considerateness to each other under social conditions where our different critical moralities create dispute over what genuine respect, tolerance, and considerateness amount to. Civility is thus a kin, not to integrity, but to civil obedience.²⁶ Both civility and civil obedience may require compliance with social norms or laws that are objectionable from a socially critical moral point of view. Neither aims to safeguard our integrity. Both aim to safeguard the possibility of a common social life together.

Because standards of civility are tied to social understandings, there is no guarantee that those standards will exempt us from civilly responding to what we as individual moral reasoners judge to be intolerable. That we now collectively regard racism and sexual harassment to be beyond the bounds of what is owed a civil response reflects a social achievement. Standards of civility can also reflect social *failures* to acknowledge the real moral intolerability of some views and conduct. Civility may require respectful dialogue about morally contemptible views, and tolerant re-

26. Rawls takes using the imperfections of the law as an excuse for civil disobedience to be an instance of incivility (*A Theory of Justice*, p. 355).

sponses to morally intolerable conduct. Given extensive social disagreement over the moral status of homosexuality, for example, civility may require what, from one's own socially critical moral viewpoint, seems excessive accommodation to prejudice. This suggests that standards of civility may directly conflict with morally admirable refusals to dignify what, in one's own best judgment, is morally intolerable. They may thus require foregoing speaking and acting with moral integrity.

It is precisely this sort of result that may incline one to think that civility cannot be a moral virtue on my account. There is nothing morally virtuous, one might naturally think, about obediently complying with merely social norms. A trait that is not directly regulated by a socially critical moral perspective cannot be a moral virtue. And any trait that cannot be brought into unity with such an important moral virtue as integrity must not itself be a moral virtue.

These reasons for not counting civility among the moral virtues are, I think, plausible only so long as one ignores how deeply social the enterprise of morality is. It is deeply social in two respects: Morality is fundamentally about the social relations among people, and morality is always practiced within a social world that already shares some moral understandings and disputes others. Morality calls on us not just to do right by others, for example, to refrain from what in our best judgment amounts to cruelty or coercion or stinginess. It also calls on us to communicate fundamental moral attitudes of respect, toleration, and considerateness. This, I have argued, can only be done by relying on socially shared moral understandings of what counts as displaying these attitudes. Civility requires obedience to social norms not for their own sake but for the sake of one important moral aim: the communication of moral attitudes to fellow inhabitants of our moral world. It is this that makes civility a moral virtue.

In addition, morality calls on us not just to be critically reflective, to search for moral justifications, and to enact what we take to be the most defensible moral views. It also calls on us to aim for mutual agreement on moral norms. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a commitment to morality that isn't also a commitment to seeing that that morality gets instantiated in our social world. Reaching real mutual agreement (as opposed to hypothetical agreement in, say, an original position) requires regulating moral dialogue so that conversations do not break down. This, I have argued, can only be done by relying on socially shared moral understandings of

what positions are reasonably disputable and thus worth a respectful hearing. Civility norms work to regulate disputes precisely because they do not appeal to socially critical moralities that may themselves be under dispute. Thus *not* being regulated by a critical morality is central to civility's being a moral virtue.

And what of the conflict with integrity? Given the complexity of moral life it may be unwise to expect or desire a unity of the virtues. As moral participants we must function in two very different roles. On the one hand, we must be socially critical moral reasoners, exercising our best judgment as individuals who aim to get it right. On the other hand, we must engage in the communal practice of morality, relying on a common language for displaying respect and striving for communal progress toward better moral practices. Whether one can have integrity *and* be civil will largely depend on whether shared moral understandings are reasonably decent. In inegalitarian societies, the biases embedded in standards of civility mean that the socially disesteemed's pointed demands for more respect are sometimes construed as uncivil; those biases also mean that expressions of contempt for the socially disesteemed are often construed either as not incivilities at all or at worst as tolerable incivilities that are owed a civil response. In such morally imperfect social worlds, the choice may have to be made between being civil and acting with integrity. One may have to choose, for example, between a moderate, conciliatory response to one's same-sex partner being excluded from family events and a response that makes clear how intolerably disrespectful such an exclusion is.

In morally imperfect social worlds where civility norms fail to protect the disesteemed from treatment that is genuinely disrespectful, inconsiderate, and intolerant (even though not socially understood to be so), it is tempting to reject the value of civility altogether. This, I think, is a mistake. Members of disesteemed social groups are more likely to experience displays of contempt, intrusions on their privacy, intolerance of their conceptions of the good, and the discounting of their feelings and aims as less important. The last thing they need is for the privileged to be acting out, without restraint, their personal views about homosexuals, or independent women, or Jews, or blacks. What they need is precisely for the privileged to feel constrained to control their hostile, contemptuous, disapproving, and dismissive attitudes. Those constraints will be supplied, if they are supplied at all, by norms of civility, since civility just is the display of respect, tolerance, and consideration toward others no matter

what we might privately think of them. What the disesteemed also need is for there to be shared social understandings about the intolerability of prejudiced and oppressive behavior. Those shared social understandings, if they exist, will define the bounds of civility. While it is true that in morally imperfect social worlds civility norms fail to protect the disesteemed, the problem is not that civility is overvalued; and the solution is not to care less about being civil. The problem is in the shared understandings embedded in our norms of civility. These need to be contested, not the value of civility in general. When women first expressed outrage at men's sexualized behavior at work and in the classroom—behavior that at the time was socially construed as innocent flirting, not harassment—they were not rejecting the value of civility because existing norms required them to respond civilly to sexual advances. They were pressing for an evolution in our shared social understandings, and with it, a new *way* of being civil.²⁷

Finally, what is there to say in response to the objection that civility is at best a minor virtue, because when push comes to shove treating people with genuine respect (and demanding it for ourselves) matters more than communicating respectful attitudes or keeping dialogue and social interaction going? Shouldn't the virtue of civility weigh only lightly in the moral scales? My own view is, no. This is in part because I do not share what seems to be moral theorists' conviction that morality is first and foremost about "getting it right" as individuals—getting the right critical morality and acting on it. In the ways I have just suggested, morality is also something we do together. The more seriously one takes the social practice of morality—communicating attitudes, collectively revising moral norms, sustaining the activities we care morally about (parties, funerals, friendships, being neighbors)—the heavier civility weighs in the scales. In part, too, I am inclined to weigh civility heavily in the scales because I find something odd, and oddly troubling, about the great confidence one must have in one's own judgment (and lack of confidence in others') to be willing to be uncivil to others in the name of a higher moral calling. When one is very very sure that one has gotten it right, and when avoiding a major wrong is at stake, civility does indeed seem a minor consideration. But to adopt a principle of eschewing civility in favor of one's own best judgment seems a kind of hubris.

27. Lawrence Cahoon makes a similar point in his "Response to Alan Wolfe" in *Civility*, edited by Leroy S. Rouser (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), p. 148.