Risks and Temptations: On the Appeal of (In)Civility

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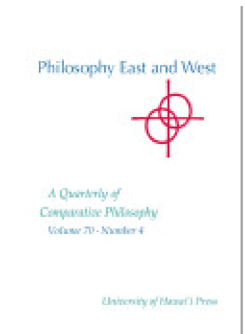

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Risks and Temptations: On the Appeal of (In)Civility

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> I am often rude. I often *want* to be rude. I often *enjoy* being rude. I even frequently enjoy witnessing the rudeness of others. Indeed, I could write a book devoted entirely to rudeness I have relished.
>
> Amy Olberding[1]

This is, perhaps, the most charming opening to a philosophical study of civility that has been, and maybe ever will be, penned. The rest of us working on the topic should probably abandon our aspirations now. And these lines are not only charming; they are illuminating, revealing something of both the style and substance of *The Wrongs of Rudeness*. Stylistically, we learn that the work that follows will be both personal and personable, its author a warm and witty companion. Substantively, we learn that this exhortation to politeness has been penned by someone who takes seriously the appeal of its opposite, and who gets why it might be a hard sell. Amy Olberding seeks to lead the reader from the above-mentioned pleasures of rudeness to the "hopeful optimism" of a life attuned to our deep sociality and fundamental dependence on others, shaped by dispositions to attend to others' dignity and emotions. And, crucially, she seeks to convince the reader that this life and these dispositions are manifested by attending to what might easily be dismissed as the little stuff, namely the careful and habitual practice of good manners over time.

Following the Confucian tradition she draws upon, Olberding understands "good manners" to mean both everyday interpersonal politeness and political civility in the public sphere. Olberding defines these as "behaviors that symbolically demonstrate prosocial values," expressed or communicated according to the rules and codes that constitute local etiquette.[2] In order to best understand the prosocial values in question, Olberding turns away from contemporary accounts that frame manners in terms of respect and toleration—"a tax we pay in order to coexist"—to a deeply relational understanding of life with others, one that emphasizes our social nature and our dependency.[3] We need good manners not to reinforce and assert our separateness as distinct individuals but rather to acknowledge that we are profoundly and unavoidably connected. Furthermore, we are connected because we have to be: we each need the others around us. That might still seem like a somewhat reluctant endorsement, but Olberding and her Confucian sources assure us that if we must cooperate in order to survive, doing so with the symbolic and expressive power of manners "transform[s]

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cooperation into something both more substantive and more meaningful than transactional need fulfillment."[4]

I should probably state, at this point, that I find myself situated fairly close to Olberding in philosophical discussions about the nature and value of manners. I also place myself somewhere in the admittedly unfashionable "pro" civility and politeness camp. Moreover, I think she is right to insist that they are not two distinct phenomena, but identifiable instances of a mode of being with others that can regulate our reactions and self-presentation at home, in our daily lives, and in the wider political community. And third, I agree that the value of civility is best articulated in a virtue-ethical framework. Such an approach allows us to connect externally enforced codes of etiquette ("just following the rules") to what Olberding beautifully describes as a project of self-cultivation: practices and habits of prosocial self-regulation over time. Virtue frameworks highlight how being trained to respond and restrain ourselves in certain ways—even cultivating bodily gestures and "managing the face"—isn't just surface work, but helps to inculcate and develop habits of thinking, feeling, and reacting, dispositions that in turn shape our perception and judgments. While any one polite gesture may be nothing but a deceptive façade, it is very hard to consistently maintain multiple habitual expressions of respect and consideration over time without, perhaps inadvertently, starting to adopt the corresponding attitudes and judgments.

Of course, unlike Olberding, I have thus far been limited to the Aristotelian virtue-ethical tradition. One of the very real gifts of this book, for me, was learning more about *li* in Confucianism, which has—to my mind—at least two significant comparative advantages: its emphasis on our relationality and dependency, and the idea of *rituals* as nodes of meaningful value. The first goes a long way to defusing complaints that virtue ethics is too individualistic in attending to how we shape and are shaped by the relationships that constitute us. The second offers a greater potential vocabulary for explaining why the gestures and routines of etiquette are not empty, but important expressive touchstones for communicating, affirming, reinforcing, and reinstating crucial values—as Olberding puts it, "collective wisdom" about how best to navigate familiar patterns and forms of experience, from the everyday to the momentous.[5] The idea of *li* as ritual is only discussed in passing, but I wonder if a more extended discussion might have helped connect the externality of rules and codes to the internality of attitudes and dispositions.

But the most striking affinity between Olberding's project and my own thinking is—if I read her correctly—a certain wariness in making the case for civility. And it is maybe because we are engaged in similar projects that I find myself eager to push back on exactly those places I need to fortify in my own work—pursuing what I would describe as the anxieties of a cautious, even skeptical, civility advocate. So, while what follows may well

sound like a vigorous defense of rudeness, I lay it out in the hopes that Olberding can defuse and settle my worries.

Like Olberding, I want ultimately to insist that civility has a rightful and beneficial place both in everyday ethics and in our shared political life. But I want to do so even as I remain attentive and sympathetic to the objections and the worldview of its harshest critics (maybe more so than I am to some of its defenders). I read Olberding as sharing at least a little of my ambivalence. It manifests, for example, both in her introductory reflections that her "book is uneasy in what it offers"[6] and her initial chapter, which acknowledges that "the command to 'be civil' can operate as a way to insist that we accept the world just as it is, without protest or complaint."[7] The socially disruptive power of incivility, on the other hand, can be a needed moral beacon or distress signal, arresting our attention and redirecting it to injustice.[8]

Suffice it to say, this is a not-insignificant worry. Prosocial conventions and attitudes may, in an unjust society, express questionable values—if the patterns of cooperation and dependence that sustain shared lives are themselves exploitative, exclusionary, or harmful to some. Even egalitarian commitments and expressions may come wrapped in an inherited language and symbols of historic injustice and exclusion, carrying very real hurts and harms along in their expressive wake. I see how calls for civility, even simple requests that others "be reasonable" or "adjust their tone" before engaging, are often very effective ways of shutting down debate and silencing dissenting voices—especially as they so often come from those with the kind of institutional power to ensure that, whatever the established rules of order turn out to be, *their* voices will still be heard.[9] And insofar as social conventions are developed and shaped by the in-crowd, they are likely to reflect the habits and lifestyles (e.g., linguistic patterns, table manners, even modes of dress and self-presentation) of cultural insiders and those with social power, placing additional burdens and barriers on outsiders and minorities.

Finally, what counts as a sufficient or insufficient display of respect (i.e., what appears polite or rude) may very much depend on the kind of treatment the recipient is used to. Often, the test for rudeness is little more than a gut feeling that I have been snubbed—that something in the other person's demeanor, or tone, or words offered me less consideration than I believe I am due. And here, of course, is the rub: in an unequal society, some of us are far more likely to receive social messages that reinforce our normality, our virtue, and our value in the social order than others—and so challenges to that order and our place in it are far more likely to sound threatening, disruptive, and even anti-social, that is, rude. Those who consistently receive the opposite set of messages, on the other hand, are far more likely to hold disruptive, challenging, and "anti-social" attitudes, and their expressions of such attitudes are far more likely to be read by others as

inappropriate, hostile, or excessive (e.g., angry, bitter, out of control). Practices of civility will tend to prevent some people from saying what might need to be said in just the way it needs to be said, just as they tend to protect others of us from hearing what we might need to hear, doubly protecting the status quo.

But if Olberding and I share these worries, how we frame them is somewhat different. To me, these are the very real moral risks of civility, the pitfalls any advocate must confront and unpack before making her case for its positive value—and the strongest case for civility is the one that says "yes, true, these are real . . . but *still* . . . ." For Olberding, on the other hand, they represent the *temptations* toward incivility (her first and second chapters are titled "Temptations to Incivility" and "Temptations to Bad Manners," respectively). Such temptations are powerful, appearing as they do to express righteous integrity and a call to justice—and we may well "succumb." Eventually, she argues, they lose their appeal and doubts arise, once we come to recognize they may be mixed with "low motives, hypocrisy, and self-deception."[10]

"Temptation" is an interesting choice of word. The allure of a temptation is deceptive or dangerous or ephemeral—something that seems to be good but is actually unwise or bad for us. Framing incivility and bad manners as temptations thus makes two claims: first, that they are, really, what we *want* to do, and second, that they are, really, what we *shouldn't* do. And I'm not entirely persuaded by either—or at least, I'm not persuaded that rudeness is any more tempting than the alternative.

Let's return, for a moment, to the opening quotation, in which Olberding announces not only that she *is*, on occasion, rude—but that she delights and revels in her rudeness (I have not met Olberding, but I suspect she is being hard on herself here). In any case, I am sure she is not ruder than I am. Like most people, I can be abrupt, dismissive, easily distracted, and self-absorbed. Like most philosophers, I can be too excited about what I have to contribute to hear what others are saying, and too quick to interrupt. I have been guilty of a question that is really a comment, and a comment that is really a speech. But have I reveled in my rudeness? Relished rudeness I've witnessed in others? In fact, the latter typically makes me profoundly uncomfortable (even when it is both warranted and well-executed) and the former can still make me cringe, days or decades later. I know I *am* rude, regularly, but I experience my disposition to incivility as a recurrent and discouraging failing (like awkward writing or clumsy dancing), not as a dangling temptation. I may not always write well or dance elegantly, but this is not because I am tempted by the worse, but because I have not found a route to the better.

What I do personally find *tempting*, however, is the comfort and security of a cowardly and excessive politeness, the happy complacency of demurely not rocking the boat. It is too easy to recollect times when I should have

spoken up and called something out, but I didn't because it felt horrifyingly rude; when I should have caused a scene but couldn't bring myself to do it; when I should have challenged the stereotype, interrupted the racist joke, slapped away the sexist hug/grope, refused the handshake, or even turned my back on the speaker and . . . I just *didn't*. Moreover, the parallels to Olberding's tempting rudeness continue. In the moment and immediately after, I could maybe persuade myself that I made the right call, that I drew on the "big values" of sociality and commonality that Olberding so persuasively argues for in chapters 4 and 5. Surely, I console myself, I held off the obvious act of disruptive protest because I had reached beyond myself to recognize the "concerns, feelings, and interests" of someone with actions and attitudes I find despicable, rather than—in Olberding's words—writing them off as "one of *those people*" and refusing our shared humanity.[11] In keeping the peace, I tell myself, I was actually being the bigger, more charitable, person. In other words, my cowardly politeness also comes with the allure of righteous temptations. But later, of course, doubts creep in. I "cannot quite convince myself that these temptations are typically well grounded, uncluttered by low motives, hypocrisy, and self-deception"[12]—for example the obvious rewards of being socially adept and reliable (not to mention a good sport, a team player, one of the boys, and not one of *those* social justice warriors, a feminist who can take a joke, etc.).

This reveals little more than the idiosyncrasies of my own psyche and should not be read as a *reductio* of Olberding's own self-accounting; even the most uncharitable of readers could hardly take her to be saying that civility is always good, and incivility always bad. And I agree with her that some of us get a little too high-falutin about courageous iconoclasts who wield incivility as an exacting and satisfying tool of justice—we could stand to inject some epistemic humility into our assessments of when and where it meets its mark, and to pay more attention to the social costs of its use. But in framing the value of incivility and bad manners as temptations to be exposed and deflated, I can't help feeling that Olberding dodges what is, for me, the hardest obstacle to our shared goal: endorsing the value of civility without downplaying or defusing the moral risks I outlined above, arguing that promoting and adhering to practices of politeness has value *despite* the dangers it brings along in its wake, or (ideally) that it can be detached from them—that we can make practices of civility *better*.

If the value of civility is in question, then we have not answered that question until we have not only considered the failures of incivility and the successes of politeness, but also the reverse. And here I worry about the amount of work done by particular cases. Two examples stand out in Olberding's text: comedian Sarah Silverman's kind response to a vicious tweet that led to her troll apologizing, and Olberding's own student

reporting on his response to a distressing sermon at his grandparents' church, on a trip home. Both these examples moved me very much. The first reminded me of a similar case I have discussed in my own research: feminist writer Lindy West's generous engagement with a particularly vicious troll (who created a fake account mimicking her dead father in order to mock and insult her), detailed in a piece for the *Guardian* and for an episode of *This American Life*.[13] West's story is also one of compassion, apology, and reconciliation—only it doesn't begin with civility, but with anger and the demand for accountability. In fact, what prompted the eventual reconciliation was West's expression of exactly the kind of "purifying" fury that Olberding warns us of, in the final chapter of her book—the kind of "expressed outrage [that] can separate me from any whose views I abhor, letting me *be done with them* and indeed done with all this effortful nicety about 'reasoning together'."[14]

The story begins with an essay for *Jezebel* titled "Don't Ignore the Trolls; Feed Them until they Explode," which West started by explaining:

> [T]his week someone created a parody account of my dead father to harass me because of my stance on rape jokes (still going on, because COOOME-DYYYYY). And you better fucking believe I wanted a "report abuse" button for that. I can see both sides—though mostly what I see right now is how hard the entire system is rigged to fuck women over.[15]

West (who clearly doesn't share my inclination toward cowardly politeness) went on to conclude:

> I feed trolls. Not always, not every troll, but when I feel like it—when I think it will make me feel better—I talk back. I talk back because the expectation is that when you tell a woman to shut up, she should shut up. I reject that. I talk back because it's fun, sometimes, to rip an abusive dummy to shreds with my friends. I talk back because *my* mental health is my priority—not some troll's personal satisfaction. I talk back because it emboldens other women to talk back online and in real life, and I talk back because women have told me that my responses give them a script for dealing with monsters in their own lives . . . .
>
> . . . There's no good solution, but we have to do what we can to stop these people—unmask them, shame them, mock them, cement their status as social pariahs—for our own sanity and for those whose armor isn't so thick (upgrade yo greaves, son).

Even the broadest definition of civil engagement would struggle to include this rather powerful rant within its bounds. It is crude; it is angry; it is insulting; it is decidedly *not* Confucian. And yet, it had exactly the same effect as Silverman's response. As West details in her *Guardian* article, the next day she woke up to an email from her troll that concluded:

I can't say sorry enough.

It was the lowest thing I had ever done. When you included it in your latest Jezebel article it finally hit me. There is a living, breathing human being who is reading this shit. I am attacking someone who never harmed me in any way. And for no reason whatsoever.

I'm done being a troll.

Again I apologize.

I made donation in memory to your dad.

I wish you the best.[16]

Now, full disclosure requires that I explain that, from this point on, things got a lot more civil between West and her attacker (remember, ultimately, I'm a fan of politeness)—with exactly the results Olberding predicts. Two years later, West asked *This American Life* to reach out to him for a story, she talked to him for two hours, he apologized again, and, as West says, "I didn't mean to forgive him, but I did."[17] But, crucially, the initial catalyst was not an olive branch but a returning sword of fire. West's tormentor rethought his actions not because she expressed civil compassion and thus became a real person with feelings to him, but because she showed him her anger and *contempt* and in doing so made herself just as real. As Macalester Bell writes, in her response to Cheshire Calhoun's defense of civility, an appropriate display of contempt "helps put the target in a position to appreciate the reasons he has to change his ways. Being on the receiving end of contempt is often disorientating and highly disruptive, but disruption, in itself, is not always disrespectful."[18] West's troll seems to have undergone exactly this morally transformative disorientation.[19]

In other words, if we're aiming for either reconciliation or moral progress, I think the success rates of civil and uncivil interactions, respectively, are less predictable than Olberding and I might like. Bell notes (citing the history of slavery and abolition in the United States) that the assertion that only civil conversation and dialogue lead to progressive moral consensus is not born out by history as a descriptive claim, and—if a normative one—presumes that all angry and uncivil engagement is disrespectful and dehumanizing, a writing off of the other as "one of *those people*." But this assumption is also contentious. According to Bell, apt expressions of contempt are respectful, insofar as they offer their target *reasons* to change. For West, too, an angry response (rather than silence) is *humanizing* rather than dehumanizing: "I talk back because internet trolls are not, in fact, monsters. They are human beings—and I don't believe that their attempts to dehumanize me can be counteracted by dehumanizing them." Not every angry outburst is a dismissive refusal—some are pleas for engagement, a demand that someone be better *because* you believe they are capable of it or, as Myisha Cherry argues, an expression of political love.[20]

And while it is easy to decry the current costs of uncivil conversation online and in politics, I am not convinced that the costs were lesser, during

whatever prior era of civil discourse is typically appealed to in these laments, just differently distributed. West hints at exactly this when she discusses the costs of ignoring or "starving" online trolls by staying silent—as she was advised to do—especially for women who, she claims, are more likely to receive such abuse and be punished for responding to it.[21] The cost of avoiding incivility for some (and not others) may be to avoid speaking altogether.

This reveals what is, for me, a weakness in the Confucian case for civility, focusing as it does on sociality and dependency. Not all social contexts are healthy for those within them; some are unjust, marginalizing, and unevenly harmful. Similarly, while some dependencies are reciprocal, or beautifully nested in ways that are nurturing and healthy for all involved, others are exploitative and coercive.[22] "Prosocial" values and conventions can include conformity, stable hierarchy, excessive personal sacrifice, and even submission, insofar as these place the overall community structure and functioning ahead of conflicting individual desires and projects. Emphasis on meaningful connection and interdependence rather than "mere" respect and toleration may provide a deeper incentive to commit to civility, but it also decenters two very useful tools for assessing the relationship between the particular practices that are encouraged in a given context and the power relationships structuring that context.[23]

One of Olberding's most powerful discussions, to my mind, is her analysis of social power and rudeness, and her argument that "abandoning good manners . . . [,] failing to try to be polite, will magnify many social ills and inequalities" because it is too easy to treat those with little power very badly, while self-interestedly choosing to remaining obsequiously polite to those with a lot, whatever the convention.[24] We are already more likely to interrupt housekeepers than to interrupt CEOs; abandoning the aims of civility risks exacerbating this.[25] But I wish Olberding had been as willing to recognize the differential distribution of the costs of *civility* as she is the costs of incivility. Instead, I felt her analysis retreated at times into a mild version of both-sidesism, insisting—because people of all political stripes are likely to indulge in excessive incivility and dismissive "*those* people" thinking—that everyone has an equal obligation to be a little more civil. But political orientations are not the only things that separate us. I worry that examples like Sarah Silverman or other "heroes" of unexpected civility inadvertently cover over civility's costs, suggesting that it is always possible to choose to "go high when they go low," to turn the other cheek, and extend the olive branch, without attending to the ongoing, often entirely exhausting emotional labor of doing so, day in and day out, in a society that has found perfectly civil ways to nevertheless communicate messages of disrespect and disvalue. This labor is not done by everyone; for the most part, it is not done by me. But in those rare moments when I have

experienced a little of what it is like, a disruptive outburst doesn't feel like a temptation so much as bare survival.[26]

At this point, I sound less like a cautious advocate for civility than a detractor. So, here is where I introduce the "but still . . . " that I promised earlier, the reason I remain committed to Olberding's project and my own. Throughout this discussion I have repeatedly tried to flip the script on Olberding's narrative: she is tempted by rudeness, I by its opposite. She is moved by Sarah Silverman's civil and successful engagement with a troll, I by Lindy West's equally successful outrage. Olberding has beautifully illustrated the very real costs of incivility on those with the least power to protest, while I share the same concerns about the impact of civility. But this is not because I think there is no difference between the two, or that civility and incivility are equally problematic. In fact, I have not discussed many of the reasons Olberding offers in *favor* of civility precisely because I agree with them so entirely. I do think practices of civility tend to shape our attitudes to others in ways that emphasize respect, appreciation, and commonality, and show what is good and lovely in our shared humanity; I think politeness lubricates our dealings in ways that increase trust and goodwill, and aid in post-conflict repair. There is a reason I ask my children to apologize, even when I'm not yet sure they mean it: I do so with the hope that this practice will help them *become* people who mean it.

But, to my mind, any defense of civility must start from the recognition that both politeness and rude disruption are communicative and cooperative strategies for navigating co-existence. Each has their costs and benefits, risks and temptations, and occasions where they are exactly the right or wrong strategy to adopt. Moreover, our individual proclivities mean that some of us will err toward the excess of one, and others toward the deficiency. In other words, we need both an ethics of civility *and* an ethics of incivility. But, as things stand, our governing practices of in/civility are unevenly and problematically distributed, so that the burdens of each fall too heavily on some, and not at all on others. Advocates must wholly confront the fact that systems of supposedly "good" manners are genuinely bad, that there are unequal burdens placed on outsiders, that civil gatekeepers wield the power to decide what does or does not count as an acceptable interjection, and we must acknowledge the tendency to wield civility as a master value that rules out even legitimate reasons to be angry and rude. These are not deceptive temptations, but very real risks we incur, even when we engage in practices of civility with the best of intentions and the most noble of values.

Many of us need to curb our rudeness for exactly the reasons Olberding so beautifully lays out. Others may well have all the more reason to let it fly. The hardest work facing an ethics of civility is not to turn us from the temptations of one choice to the deeper fulfillment of the other, but to assist each of us in locating our individual places in an uneven and unjust terrain of social communication. Responsible practitioners of civility will face the

uphill journey of learning to make better choices about when to employ which strategy (gracious and social civility or its righteously disruptive counterpart)—which is what I take Olberding's ultimate message to be—but we cannot do this well without first recognizing that we are asking people to continue playing the rules of the game, even though the board is tilted and the game is rigged.

Notes

1 – Amy Olberding, *The Wrong of Rudeness: Learning Modern Civility from Ancient Chinese Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 1.

2 – Ibid., p. 9.

3 – Ibid., p. 50.

4 – Ibid., p. 54.

5 – Ibid., pp. 4–5.

6 – Ibid., p. ix.

7 – Ibid., p. 16.

8 – Ibid., 17–18.

9 – For a deeper discussion, see Tempest Henning, "'I said what I said'—Black Women and Argumentative Politeness Norms" (unpublished), accessed February 20, 2020, available at https://vanderbilt.academia.edu/TempestHenning.

10 – Olberding, *The Wrong of Rudeness*, p. 48.

11 – Ibid., p. 148.

12 – Ibid., p. 48.

13 – Lindy West, "What Happened When I Confronted My Cruellest Troll," *The Guardian*, February 2, 2015, accessed February 20, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/feb/02/what-happened-confronted-cruellest-troll-lindy-west; and "Ask Not for Whom the Bell Trolls; It Trolls for Thee," in "If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say, Say It in ALL CAPS," *This American Life*, January 23, 2015, accessed February 20, 2020, https://www.thisamericanlife.org/545/if-you-dont-have-anything-nice-to-say-say-it-in-all-caps/act-one.

14 – Olberding, *The Wrong of Rudeness*, p. 158.

15 – West, "Don't Starve the Trolls; Feed Them until they Explode," *Jezebel: A Supposedly Feminist Website*, July 31, 2013, accessed February 20, 2020, https://jezebel.com/dont-ignore-the-trolls-feed-them-until-they-explode-977453815.

16 – West, " What Happened When I Confronted My Cruellest Troll."

17 – Though she does insist: "this story isn't prescriptive. It doesn't mean that anyone is obliged to forgive people who abuse them, or even that I plan on being cordial and compassionate to every teenage boy who tells me I'm too fat to get raped (sorry in advance, boys: I still bite)."

18 – Macalester Bell, *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 225.

19 – For a rich discussion of the moral possibilities of disruptive disorientation, see Ami Harbin, *Disorientation and Moral Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

20 – Myisha Cherry, "Love, Anger, and Racial Injustice," in Adrienne M. Martin, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy* (Abingdon: Routledge Press, 2018), pp. 157–168.

21 – Moreover, West and Silverman both engage online as white women; black women and other women of color experience even more disproportionate abuse, such as the unbelievable torrent of racist, sexist hate led by Milo Yiannopoulos against Leslie Jones, a black woman comedian, to the point that she temporarily left Twitter and the social media site eventually banned Yiannapoulos.

22 – I am not assuming that dependencies must be reciprocal or relationships equal for either to be healthy—here I draw on Eva Feder Kittay's work on *doulia* as an alternative to reciprocity in *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

23 – One possible response, of course, is to insist that insofar as any given set of conventions is unjust, or conformist, or subtly authoritarian, it is not *really* prosocial, does not really express prosocial values, and thus does not really count as the kind of manners that Olberding and the Confucians have in mind. I expect neither of us wishes to defend excessively classist table manners, for instance. But this is too quick; practices of civility are social and not what Cheshire Calhoun calls critical-moral conventions, and in anything but the perfectly just society they will be communicated using the tools we have available: imperfect social arrangements, an evolving language, and symbols that carry our often decidedly imperfect history with them.

24 – Olberding, *The Wrong of Rudeness*, p. 46.

25 – Her discussion in *The Wrong of Rudeness* echoes an earlier, more extensive, analysis of this phenomenon in "Manners, Subclinical Bias, and Moral Harm," *Hypatia* 29, no. 2 (2014): 287–302, which I highly recommend.

26 – Consider, for example, the student attending his grandparents' church with the offensive sermon. It is not hard to extrapolate what the subject of that sermon might well have been—imagine how different the student's sense that he couldn't just walk out, that he had to sit and argue the case civilly, would have made him feel had he himself been gay and struggling with the decision to keep himself closeted from his family. It is one thing to insist I be polite to people who disagree with me; it is another to ask politeness for people who reject and dehumanize me.

Civility, Subordination, and Praxis

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I am grateful to the reviewers who have so carefully and insightfully engaged with my work. Promoting civility at our present political moment is often nauseating. Even as I write this (in February 2020), I am acutely aware that by the time it reaches print, the world may well be worse in ways that would alter whatever arguments or reflections I can offer here. The struggle is one caught most directly in Olufemi Taiwo's response: the world we inhabit is not just riven by social and political conflicts, it is also engaged in a heated struggle over just what "civility" will come to mean socially. Like Taiwo, I think we sacrifice too much and to quite uncertain effect if we abandon civility to those who employ it mostly as a cudgel to compel compliance with unjust structures and social arrangements. Even so, I am tempted to say that embracing civility begins in lamentation. So let me just begin by acknowledging all of the ways that civility is terrible by agreeing with the critiques outlined by Taiwo, McRae, and MacLachlan in particular.

Taiwo's focus is on the structural, and here the problems are several. The most basic is that the inequities of a society will often be built into its systems of civility. The codes of Southern Rhodesia are an aggressive case in point. Because to be civil is to perform social conventions that are symbolically coded to represent respect, the colonial powers of Southern Rhodesia effectively scripted the performed self-abnegation of its black population into the code. To show respect was to make a visible public sacrifice of one's own dignity. In the case of Southern Rhodesia, the demand for such sacrifices was enforced by explicit punitive measures against those who refused, but even where overt sanctions are not encoded into law,

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