



Everyday Argument in A Polarized World

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Opening Remarks



- Final Course. Prior conversations:
 - 1. Productive Argument
 - 2. Getting to good faith argument while getting out of our own way
 - 3. Managing emotion in argument, ours and our partners
- Tonight:
 - 4. Considering structures of power alongside argument.

Recall: Last Time



- Practice grounding techniques and bodily regulation. Our bodies freak out, but we can reel them in.
- Acknowledge that you are not infallible, and that means you are able to (even encouraged to) have personal stakes in conversations.
- Recognize that your emotional expression, even if valid, may activate stress responses in others.
- Remember there is no shame in encouraging folks to take a break.

Animating Question:



- In what contexts do predictable, entrenched forces outside of our control make an argument encounter much harder than it should be?
- "Predictable, entrenched forces" refers to:
 - Dominant (cultural, political, social) expectations concerning behavior in argument encounters.
 - Material structures which distribute resources and govern access to spaces.



Civility

What is this?

Why haven't we talked about it up until now?

Why does this disconnect matter for argument?

What is this?



- Civility is a social norm and a standard “of behavior... based on widely shared beliefs [about] how individual group members ought to behave in a given situation” (Fehr and Fischbacher, 2004, 185).
- Civility “specif[ies] what people approve and disapprove within the culture and motivate[s] action by promising social sanctions for normative or counternormative conduct” (Reno et al., 1993, 104).

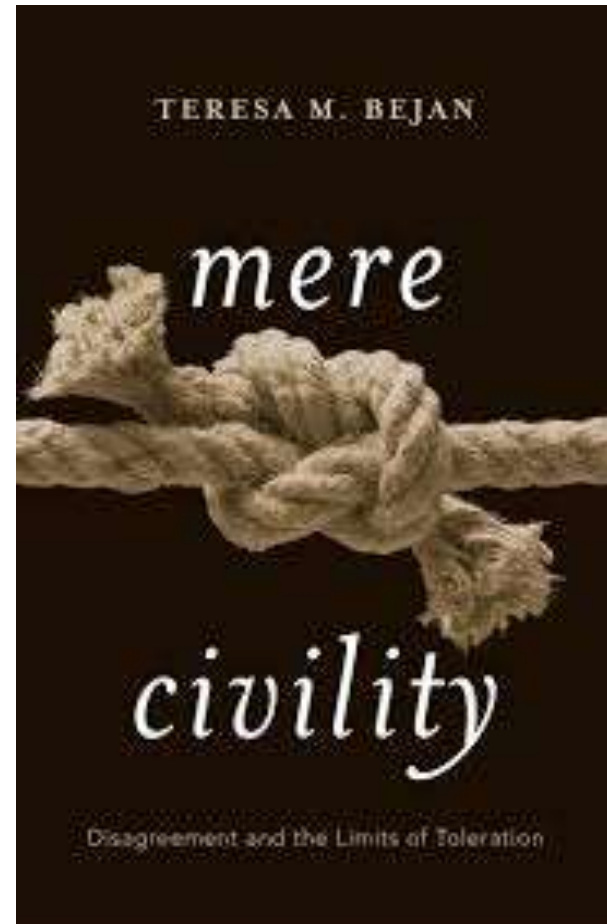
Good faith versus Civility



- According to the Cato Institute, "Good Faith Argument" features both parties:
 - Agreeing on the terms on which they engage
 - Are honest and respectful of the other person's dignity
 - Follow generally-accepted norms of social interaction
 - Genuinely want to hear what the other person thinks and has to say.

Why haven't we talked about "civility" more?

- Civility versus "politeness."
- "Respect" is not universally agreed upon.
- Popper "Paradox of Tolerance"
- Civility works part and parcel with the exclusion of emotion.



Recall: Emotion and Civility

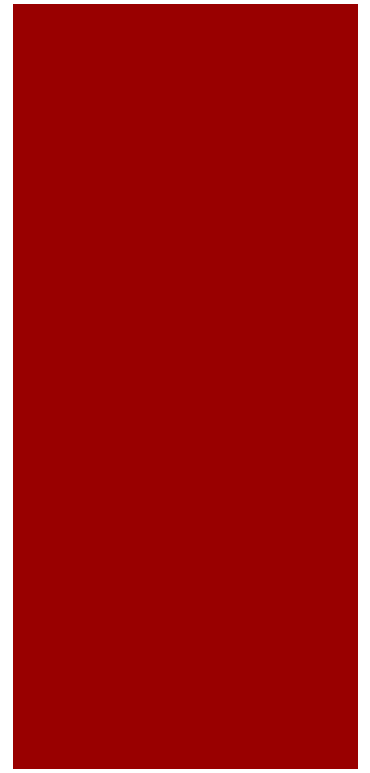
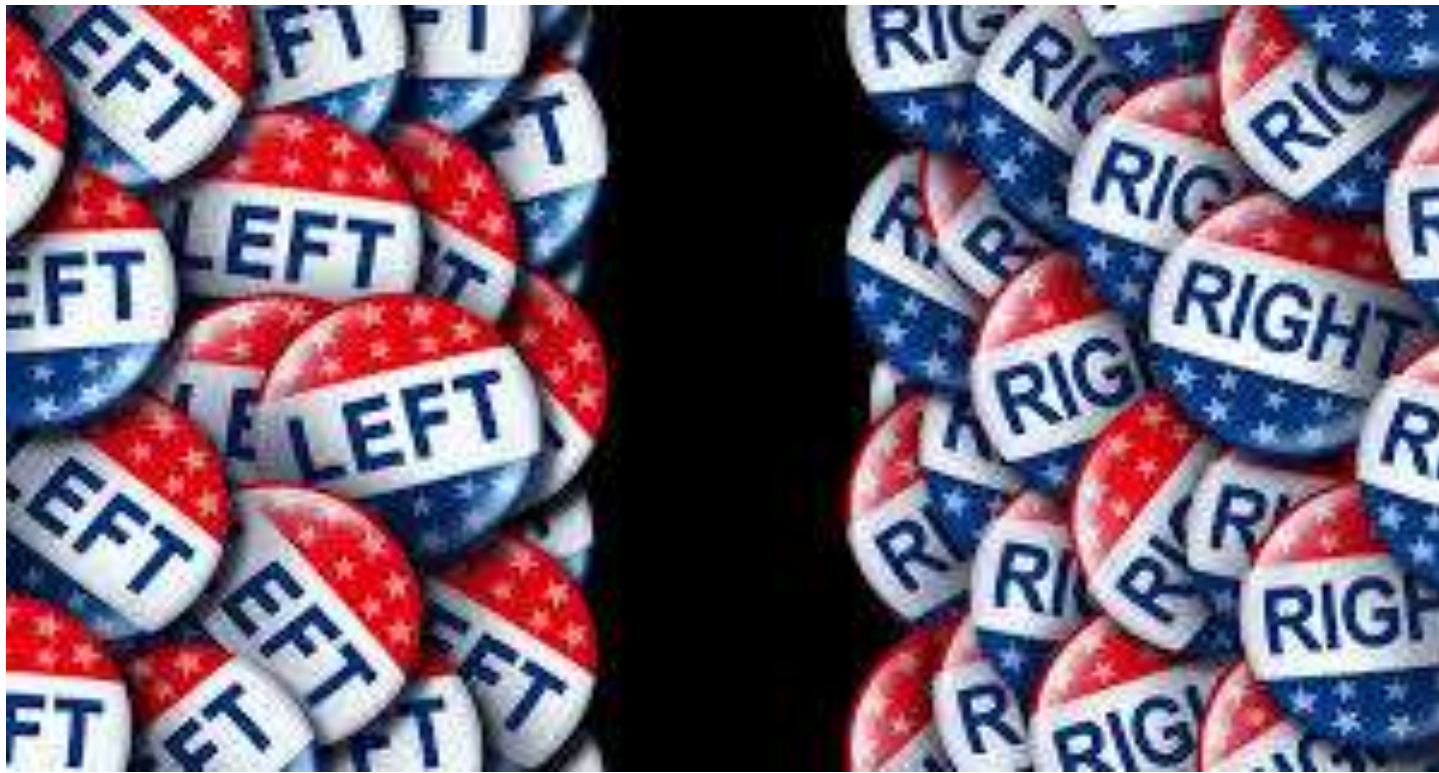


- Emoting in argument is sometimes viewed as a violation of decorum and is therefore uncivil.
- Productive questions:
 - What about this presentation of emotion is disrespectful or disruptive?
 - What are the parameters of "civil" discourse, and are they predictably applied?
 - What parties are calling for civility, and how might their position be impacted if we weren't civil?

How would this shape argument?



- Jamieson et al (2014): Civility “connotes a discourse that does not silence or derogate alternative views but instead evinces respect. Often the object of respect is one’s interlocutor or fellows.”
- Civility is an argument about forum; to talk about this *now* would be indecorous.
- Civility is asymmetrical in its application and enforcement.



Prejudice and Argument

What do we mean?

How can emotion work in argument?

What are going to do about it?

Racial and Gender imbalances in argument



- Persistent double binds pertaining to behavior and acceptable engagement with emotion, evidence, and presentation without corresponding expectations for dominant groups.
- Wide circulations of (negative) stereotypes which create traps within arguments.
- Accountability is often one sided and reflects broader social structures.

Race:



- Persistence of widespread stereotypes governing behavior, which also offer us racially coded language (“Thug”).
- Persistence of structural disadvantages pertaining to (generally) resources and training, and specifically argument training.
- Racial microaggressions create asymmetrical minefields.

Gender:



- Persistence of widespread stereotypes governing behavior, which also have misogynistic enforcement.
- Persistence of structural disadvantages pertaining to (generally) resources and training, and specifically argument training.
- Aggressive policing of “acceptable” behavior and outward presentation.

How do these shape arguments?



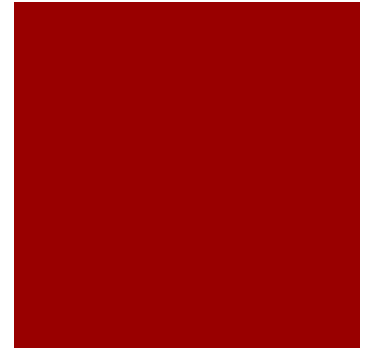
- Uncritical (re)circulation of the tropes and expectations create barriers to entry.
- Disparities in argument training may be taken not as solvable skills deficits, but instead as indices of intelligence or drive.
- Microaggressions and unspoken expectations burden some folks, but not others, which has a corresponding mental and physical toll.

Where is our responsibility?



- Consider, Privilege: “unearned” benefit inherent in being perceived as part of a particular social group.
- Members of dominant groups are often:
 - Less likely to be targeted by bureaucratic apparatuses
 - Afforded additional credibility and legitimacy
 - More likely to benefit from existing structures that are nominally neutral, such as advantaged tax structures.

As members of dominant groups, what should we do?



- Acknowledge that some things you feel are “professional” or “civil” very likely have gendered, racial, or classed dimensions, and are not objective.
- Give others the space and grace to speak, and resist the urge to regulate behavior that doesn’t directly impact you.
- Do not tolerate the uncritical (re)circulation of these damaging thoughts from others.
- Keep the ladder down for those behind us, rather than pulling it up.

As members of marginalized groups, what should we do?



- Find your allies. Many folks want you to succeed, and you are not the first to navigate these spaces.
- Acknowledge the standards and determine how you “fit” within or against them.
- Share knowledge and resistance, rather than uncritically recirculating standards (even in the name of safety or comfort).
- Know that some fights are worth having, some accountability worth insisting upon, but you can’t do it all.

Full Class Recap



- Argument is harder than it should be, and that likely isn't your fault.
- It is up to us to navigate towards a better way; that starts with modeling and holding ourselves to high standards.
- Emotion has place in argument, to the extent that it doesn't keep the argument from occurring.
- Argument takes place in a social context where oppression is persistent and disproportionate.

Wrapping up

- All slides and videos will be posted to the Library's website for your perusal
- I will continue to be accessible through my university email, calvin.coker@louisville.edu.
- Send all laudatory and positive remarks to me at the above email.
- Send all criticism and negative remarks to Tony Dingman, tony.dingman@lfpl.org.