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The Breakdown of Civic Virtues and the Problem of Hate Speech: Is There Wisdom in Freedom of Speech?

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Violence and Vitriolic Language

On Saturday October 27, 2018, a gunman entered the Tree of Life synagogue and shot 17 people killing 11. As he opened fire, the shooter shouted, “All Jews must die.” Before the attack, on Gab, a social media site that asserts it supports freedom of expression, the shooter posted his motivation for the shooting, blaming a Jewish organization for the influx of immigrants to the United States, particularly in the context of a caravan of migrants approaching the United States. Prior to this, President Trump called this caravan an invasion that he blames on the Democrats. President Trump and Republicans have alluded to an involvement of George Soros, a Jewish philanthropist, in funding this caravan. It is no surprise then that a connection is made in some radical minds between Jews and the false threat posed by immigration. The dog-whistle anti-Semitic rhetoric used by President Trump is closely

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mirrored by other elected Republicans and picked up by others on the right on social media. Referring to himself as a “nationalist,” disparaging “globalists,” and referring to opponents as “enemies of the people,” he is using the same language as did the Nazis in referring to Jews.

The mass murder at the Tree of Life synagogue followed closely on the heels of a series of explosive packages sent to President Obama, Hilary Clinton, prominent Democrats, former intelligence officers, and CNN, all of whom have criticized President Trump very publicly. All of whom also have been derogated by President Trump and indeed called crooks, liars, criminals, enemies of the people. The individual charged with sending these explosives is a supporter of President Trump, whose van sported stickers showing a cross-hairs targeting critics of President Trump. In fact, at political rallies, President Trump has encouraged violence against his protesters and when attacks have occurred, he has offered to bail the attackers out of jail.

But President Trump’s vitriol is not reserved for Jews and Democrats. He has disparaged Muslims, Mexicans, immigrants, and African countries in negative and often threatening terms such as “rapists” and “murderers” and “bad dudes.” Furthermore, following a white supremacist Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville on August 11, 2017, he referred to white nationalists and neo-Nazis chanting slogans against Jews and “a rising tide of color” as including some “good people.” All of this has taken place in the context of a rise of anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, anti-Hispanic, anti-immigrant, and anti-Democrat aggression and violence under the current administration.

At the same time, prominent Republicans like Nikki Haley and the White House point to mass shootings in a Charleston church killing African-Americans and other such attacks and argue it is wrong to attribute responsibility to President Trump when President Obama or other administrations were not blamed for such horrific events. Furthermore, the shooting of Congressman Steven Scalise by a supporter of Bernie Sanders indicates that political violence is not solely attributable to Republican supporters. However, this overlooks an important distinction between the present administration and rhetoric of some Republican supporters and the rhetoric of previous administrations both Republican and Democrat in recent decades. Other

administrations have sought to heal divisions in the country or at least paid lip service to the importance of reducing such divisions and did not explicitly derogate other groups or opponents and did not call for aggression against them. President Trump and a number of elected Republicans are unique in the invocation of aggression against protesters and opponents and derogating those with whom they disagree. Consider that Congressman Gianforte physically attacked a reporter and was then lauded by President Trump for doing so, which is consistent with President Trump's constant attacks on reputable news media such as the New York Times and CNN as "fake news" and "enemies of the people," a phrase used by authoritarian regimes in the past.

Language Has Impact

Around the world in 2018, there is a growing concern about the future of democracy (see Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Runciman, 2018; see also Ambrose, this volume). With an increasing number of authoritarian political leaders and populist movements, liberal democratic values seem threatened. Although authoritarian and fascist political regimes have risen in the past, over time, political change comes and goes and such governments have also given way to more democratic politics. For example, Italy, Germany, Greece, and Argentina have seen such nationalistic regimes in the past, only to move back toward democratic values. In some respects, the current rise of authoritarian governments in Turkey, Venezuela, and the Philippines could be seen as part of a cycle rather than a particular global direction. The question of what causes such change becomes more acute, it seems, when the concern focuses on the United States. After President Trump's election in 2016, with a recognition of the importance of accurate reporting, the Washington Post changed its masthead to read, "Democracy dies in darkness." An assault on the meaning of truth undermines the rule of law and degrades civil society.

Words matter. The way language is used has demonstrable impact on individuals and societal attitudes. Orwell (2013/1946) outlined the ways that language can be used in politics to make acceptable that

which people would not accept, to deceive and to convince. His novels illustrated these principles in which lies become accepted truths and unacceptable acts become justifiable, even necessary. This is the current way of political discourse in 2018. And politicians who previously criticized the President and his use of this kind of discourse have come to embrace him and it, much as Orwell's novels demonstrate.

Clearly there are two important issues surrounding language use that can affect society greatly. The first is the problem of hate speech and speech that calls for aggression and violence. The second problem is the use of language to deceive and mislead in order to garner support and obeisance and action. These issues are closely linked, given that the first is a special case of the second. Hate speech fabricates representations of groups, playing on fears, in order to instigate action against those groups.

President Trump has used this tactic repeatedly, but one example is extremely clear. On October 31, 2018, the President shared a video of comments made by an immigrant in the country illegally who was convicted of murdering two law enforcement officials. This was intercut with images of a caravan of immigrants heading toward the United States. The script attributed the killer's presence in the United States to Democrats, in spite of his having entered illegally when there was a Republican President and, at one point, his having been released by the Republican sheriff of Maricopa County, Joe Arpaio. In this case, the President (1) associates a killer with a caravan of migrants suggesting, without evidence, the presence of criminals in the caravan, and (2) falsely asserts the killer's presence in the United States was due to Democrats. While this is consistent with past false statements intended to derogate groups (e.g., falsely claiming to have seen Muslims celebrating the 9/11 terrorist attacks) in order to promote policies blocking immigration, in this case, the argument about immigration is used to increase fear in a population just prior to midterm elections. In this case, hate speech is predicated on falsehoods, with the goal of manipulating voters to affect the outcome of an election.

The combination of lies, eroding the notion of truth when expressed by the President of the United States, and the derogation of a group of Latin American migrants, is a powerful combination directed at

influencing voters by invoking fear. But fear is not just a feeling. Negative emotions can serve to motivate real action that goes beyond talk (e.g., Gerber, Green, & Latimer, 2008; Gronenedyk & Banks, 2014; Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007). This can do more than simply manipulate an election outcome by increasing political action and voting. Hate speech may lead to increased acts of aggression and violence against the vilified groups and promote lawlessness. It can erode the basis of civil society more broadly.

Waldron (2012) has argued that hate speech works against a well-ordered society. Citing Rawls' (1993) concept of a well-ordered society as one that is regulated by principles of justice in which people manifest the civic virtue of justice, he argues that hate speech disorders society. Manifestations of hate speech essentially disfigure the nature of a society. This is akin to the "broken windows" theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982; Zimbardo, 1969), which suggested that visible signs of disorder in a neighborhood promote others to act to increase disorder. It suggests a kind of "licensing" to act badly (Effron, Miller, & Monin, 2012). On the one hand, hate speech from the President might be viewed as making hate speech acceptable more generally. On the other hand, hate speech and group derogation may psychologically license more extreme behavior such as aggression (cf. Miller & Effron, 2010). Moreover, if society indicates that one could have done something worse in respect of some past action, future behavior becomes more immoral (Effron et al., 2012). For example, if someone has thought something negative about a group without speaking those thoughts but subsequently sees (e.g., from news reports of other examples) that they could have *done* something worse, they may feel licensed to act out in the future. In this way, hate speech and more generally, derogating and bullying speech, especially from elected officials, and particularly from the President of the United States, can have a dramatic effect on the people who respect them and voted for them. Derogating jokes (Hodson & MacInnis, 2016) dehumanize groups and dehumanizing descriptions (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008) lead to endorsement of violence against those groups and even an increased bias to shoot group members (Mekawi, Bresin, & Hunter, 2016). It is a short step from using or being exposed to dehumanizing language to violence against the targets of that language.

In essence, unfettered hate speech can erode civic virtues and values. Civility, compassion, and fairness can be diminished in a society where respect, empathy, and perspective-taking have been reduced by the way people and groups are derogated. Dehumanization through language reduces respect, leading to incivility, and it reduces empathy and compassion, leading to harsher judgments, and it reduces the ability to take the perspective of the dehumanized, thereby decreasing fairness. Targets of derogation and dehumanization will get little justice in this context, thus increasing inequities in society. The social damage that this kind of language can produce is clear.

Furthermore, exposure to such derogating language may have personally damaging outcomes. For example, bullying, including verbal bullying online, has had adverse consequences such as leading to suicide (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_suicides_that_have_been_attributed_to_bullying). It is not really possible to identify the antecedents of these cases as verbal bullying, but there is a strong impression that such adverse negative interactions have contributed. Gottman (1994) has suggested that negative interactions need to be offset by more positive interactions. The ratio of positive to negative comments needs to be relatively high (5:1) in order to overcome the negative impact (see Losada & Heaphy, 2004). Words associated with pain can increase the feeling of pain (Swannell, Brown, Jones, & Brown, 2016). Moreover, this is not a subjective illusion. Pain-related words activate a neural network called the pain matrix that is specifically responsive to the experience of pain (Richter, Eck, Straube, Miltner, & Weiss, 2010). While these studies of pain-related words are not specific to social derogation and rejection, other research shows that social rejection activates the neural network that responds to physical pain (Kross, Berman, Mischel, Smith, & Wager, 2011). Words can hurt figuratively but also quite literally. On this consideration—that language can “assault” the audience—one might conjecture that there should be laws to limit this kind of “verbal assault,” just as there are laws to punish physical assault.

Indeed, a number of countries have passed laws that prohibit or restrict this kind of speech. Of course, directly advocating violence and aggression against particular groups or individuals is outlawed in many countries. But some countries have more specific and restrictive laws

that go beyond this. For example, in France, individuals and groups are protected from defamation due to group membership forbidding communication that increases discrimination or hatred. In Germany, inciting hatred or violating dignity through speech is outlawed. In Iceland, simply expressing derogation, even without inciting others to hate, is against the law. But in the United States, hate speech is protected under the First Amendment to the Constitution—it is protected speech under laws that support the freedom of expression.

Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech under the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States has not always been taken as an unfettered license to express oneself freely. Lewis (2007) describes the changes in the interpretation of the First Amendment from its origins in 1791 to the challenges from the Sedition Act in 1798. This was passed in order to stop Thomas Jefferson from attacking President John Adams in Jefferson's newspapers and restrained the ability of the press to criticize the administration. However, the Pentagon Papers trial led to the increased and now well-established freedom of the press. And the freedom to express hate speech was affirmed in the right of neo-Nazis to march in Skokie, Illinois, among a population including Holocaust survivors. As Lewis explains, these changes over time have come through challenges of various kinds but make clear that the meaning of the First Amendment is not the inviolate and immutable freedom of speech and press that most Americans take for granted. Even today, there is substantial confusion about the meaning of the First Amendment. For example, there is no First Amendment right for a speaker espousing white supremacy to speak on a college campus or for a news outlet to keep a commentator who espouses positions at odds with the editorial views of the outlet. The First Amendment does not require that every venue must permit every kind of expression, nor does it prohibit speech calling for a boycott or boycotting a commercial enterprise based on the conduct of that business.

The First Amendment serves to keep Congress from passing laws that restrict freedom of speech or freedom of the press. In this respect, then,

on the face of it, Congress could not pass a law prohibiting hate speech or even speech that criticizes or derogates the President. However, the Sedition Act, passed by Congress in 1798, did just that, threatening fine and imprisonment for derogating the President in the press. The Sedition Act was putatively advanced by President Adams (see Lewis, 2007) in order to win the upcoming election in 1800 by nullifying Jefferson's editorial advantage. But Adams lost the election to Jefferson in part due to the public reaction to the draconian nature of the law. In essence, an attempt to abrogate the right of the free press to criticize a sitting President was addressed by the electorate in the court of public opinion.

This point is important and illustrates why the First Amendment has been treated as particularly important in US history. The checks and balances of the US government by which the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive branches hold each other to task are bolstered by one other important factor: The US electorate can criticize and debate actions of any of the three branches of government and can, through collective response, address such actions. The First Amendment guarantees the right of the people to discuss and hold the government accountable for its acts. However, the First Amendment also guarantees the freedom of hate speech, as in the 1977 case of neo-Nazis seeking to march, displaying Nazi insignia and symbols, in a predominantly Jewish suburb of Chicago. The Illinois Supreme Court ruled that an injunction against the march would violate the First Amendment (Stone, 1994). In essence, the First Amendment is taken to hold unconstitutional any laws restricting expression on the basis of its content, including hate speech (Stone, 1994).

There are basically two broad principles that appear to underlie this. The first of these is grounded in the intent to hold the government accountable to the people in ways that may not be anticipated. Stone (1994) argued that the rationale for hate speech to be protected speech is based on the concern of letting the government determine which ideas can be deliberated publicly and which should not be discussed in this manner. Is the derogation of communists hate speech or is it part of a political debate? What counts as derogation that leads to violence vs. valid political criticism? Would politicians calling President Obama a socialist be guilty of hate speech?

It is not objectively easy to always determine what constitutes hate or hatred expression. All language and communication is inherently ambiguous. The statement, “You are brilliant,” seems unambiguous unless it is spoken right after doing something that is catastrophically stupid. Even then it could be sarcasm or a simple reminder that even the smartest people can do dumb things. The quenelle gesture used by a French comedian has no objective sign of anti-Semitism but the gesture has been taken as such by the context in which it is used. The comic *Jesus and Mo* (<http://www.jesusandmo.net>) is certainly irreverent, but does it constitute hate speech if it is perceived as derogating certain religions? While some extremes of hate speech may seem clear when there are explicit negative statements about a group, there are many less clear examples that may be taken by some as hate speech and by others as the basis for discussion and deliberation of ideas. Is burning a flag or kneeling during a national anthem a sign of protest or derogation? Such acts may be offensive to some who identify as patriots but can represent legitimate acts of protest to others who consider themselves patriots too.

On November 6, 2018, the Associated Press reported that London police arrested six men for a video showing a model of Grenfell Tower being burned, along with images of people in the windows. The video reflected the tragedy that killed 72 people in London in 2017 and the Prime Minister called the video unacceptable. While this video is offensive to survivors of the fire and the Prime Minister, and sufficient to permit an arrest as a criminal act, in the United States this video would be protected speech. The risk of letting the judgment of a government determine what speech should be restricted is the threat to public dissent and deliberation of governmental action, even in the case of hate speech.

The second principle is derived from John Stuart Mill’s 1859 notion of the importance of freedom of expression, especially in the context of the tension between liberty and authority and the need to allow minority opinions to be voiced (e.g., Gordon, 1997). Lewis (2007) attributed to Mill the idea that even a false belief may be important if it gives rise to discussion in consideration of opposing views. In 1919, Justice Holmes expressed the importance of this “free trade in ideas” and debate as if free speech allows for competition within a marketplace of ideas (Lewis, 2007, p. 185). If hate speech stimulates debate that reveals

the lies and distortion, this benefits society. If hate speech is legally suppressed, hateful ideas may exist but there is no explicit counterargument and deliberation. In some sense, this can be conceived of in terms of an inoculation metaphor. Prejudice and stereotyping are an aspect of human psychology and will occur. Exposure to the existence of these may be inoculated against by knowing there are clear responses that negate the claims made in hate speech. But without that inoculation, encountering hate and prejudice may have personally damaging effects.

The Need for Wisdom and Civic Virtues

There are two strong but opposing positions regarding the government regulation of hate speech. From one perspective, hate speech damages society broadly, can lead to aggression and violence, and can be personally hurtful and damaging to its targets. This perspective argues that society has a vested interest in regulating hate speech, restricting it for the good of society and the people. This is the basis for hate speech laws in many countries. However, from the second perspective, the regulation of hate speech requires a government to judge what is hate speech and what is not. This judgment could, in principle, infringe on the people's right to criticize and debate government action and ultimately cede to the government power that should be in the hands of the people. While in recent practice such laws might be prudently enforced, changes in courts and governments could take laws and apply them in ways not previously seen which could act adversely to stifle speech not anticipated in the authoring of these laws. Furthermore, to elide from public discourse hate speech is to eliminate exposure to one set of false and derogatory claims about some people and therefore reduce exposure to the counterclaims and arguments, reducing inoculation against stereotyping, biases, and dehumanization.

Both of these positions have strong arguments in their favor. And both support the need for the civic virtues that underpin a civil society. If virtues are tendencies for action (see Battaly, 2015; van Zyl, 2015), civic virtues are those tendencies that work to maintain a civil society. Civic virtues such as civility, compassion, and fairness are undermined

by hate speech clearly. On the one hand, virtues are generally thought of as characteristics of individuals. One could imagine characteristics such as these might be considered traits or tendencies to be civil, to have compassion, and to be fair that are manifest over situations. However, it is also possible to imagine that such civic virtues are characteristics of a society. As such, government may express such civic virtues as guidance for policy, or perhaps the policies may themselves encourage civic virtues in the population. In this respect, there are two ways in which civic virtues may be held by government. On the one hand, civility, compassion, and fairness might be treated by different parts of government as the principles that govern the creation of laws and policies. On the other hand, the laws and policies of government may directly encourage or enforce civility, compassion, and fairness. In this respect then, if a government holds to these virtues, it might seem that these virtues call for the direct regulation of hate speech by the government. Of course imagining a government in which the virtues underlie choice and policy directives may be difficult in the best of times, much less under the current political climate.

However, this is not the only way to understand the role of civic virtues and government action. Hate speech is a manifestation of beliefs expressed as language by the people holding those beliefs. Regulation of hate speech can stop the manifestation, but there is no evidence to suggest that the inability to express publicly a belief eliminates the belief. Thus, while laws regulating hate speech might reduce the expressions that could work against civic virtues in a society, the beliefs and motivations would not necessarily be diminished. Microaggression and other behaviors that express stereotyping and bias could not be regulated. By driving explicit hate speech and expression out of sight, societal counterarguments and reactions would not be expressed. Such arguments and expressions which, in a marketplace of ideas could serve to counter biases and prejudices, would be lacking. The opportunities for change of those derogatory and negative beliefs would be lost. The reduced manifestation of hate speech could both allow hate to fester unchecked and, as with a failure to inoculate, reduce the awareness of such negativity in the targets of those beliefs. The lack of understanding of hateful attitudes would leave people unprepared for microaggression and other

forms of negative action against them. Civic virtues then could depend on society conveying an understanding that prejudice can be manifest as part of human nature but not all people may manifest prejudicial biases. Society would need the civic virtues that allow people to be willing to support those who are targets of prejudicial and derogatory beliefs. In other words, civic virtues could depend on the manifest contest between hate speech and the willingness of others to respond in countering it.

The contrast between these positions is therefore drawn on the basis of competing theories of what is best for civil society, grounded in different assumptions regarding the nature of people, in some sense. Given that both have beneficial intentions for the public good, but differ in underlying assumptions and theories of government, society, and human nature, this is a situation that calls for wise reasoning at a number of levels. Indeed, the potential clash in means of achieving civic virtues may be thought of as the basis for needing wise reasoning rather than a smart or clever solution.

Practical Wisdom

What is wise reasoning and how can it play a role in addressing the problem of hate speech and government regulation of free speech? Why would this issue not simply require intelligence? In vernacular use, intelligence is generally thought about as the ability that aids in understanding and adaptively solving difficult problems. This view of intelligence derives from a particular aspect of psychological science in history (Spearman, 1904; Thurstone, 1938), and societies value intelligence highly as a way of solving daily problems, financial problems, and societal problems requiring policy, and as important for education (cf. Sternberg, 2000). However, the kinds of things that are measured on typical intelligence tests (e.g., Stanford-Binet test, Roid, 2003) are closer to basic, simple cognitive abilities such as memory, rather than the complex psychological processes. In describing intelligence, Binet and Simon (1916) wrote: “It seems to us that in intelligence there is a fundamental faculty, the alteration or the lack of which, is of the utmost importance for practical life. This faculty is judgment, otherwise called good sense, practical sense,

initiative, the faculty of adapting one's self to circumstances." Practical judgment seems a lot like common sense (Rosenfeld, 2011), and practical judgment and common sense are definitely lacking in foolish people—one can clearly be smart but not have good judgment and common sense. This idea of judgment and good sense, then, is something that would be better for society and for people in society than intelligence alone, as conceived of as a cold cognitive process. Presumably, judgment and good sense are not simply cognitive calculations but take into account social implications and emotion and would involve empathy.

In many respects, this is similar to Aristotle's description of *phronesis* or practical wisdom in the *Nicomachean Ethics Book VI*—practical judgment in decision-making. But Aristotle's depiction of practical wisdom is specifically described as practical decision-making that leads to *human flourishing*. The notion of human flourishing then is a key aspect that distinguishes wisdom from intelligent decision-making or just good common sense. Human flourishing is critical to practical wisdom as opposed to being smart or having good practical judgment. Although in the vernacular, to flourish might be taken as "doing well" in health and personal wealth, and happiness and well-being generally, in Aristotelian terms, it may be better thought of as grounding in the moral virtues (see Roberts, 2015). In thinking about human flourishing, and thus for practical wisdom, it is important to consider moral virtues including the civic virtues such as civility, compassion, and fairness. And these and other moral virtues link practical wisdom to judgment and decision-making that goes well beyond one's own direct personal considerations and well-being to strengthen well-being in society overall. Although from Aristotle, the moral virtues such as the civic virtues are critical to human flourishing and thus serve as the driver of practical wisdom, it is important to note that they need not figure into common sense or good judgment to the same degree.

From Tiberius's (2008) view of practical wisdom, moral virtues are the value commitments that frame our affective responses to prospective choices both personally and in taking the perspective of others. We evaluate prospective choices against our and others' (through perspective-taking) value commitments, and the feeling states that are consequent of this evaluative process for us and others then are critical

to guiding a wise decision (Tiberius, 2013). In this respect, the moral virtues serve as guideposts in the prospective evaluation of a decision. To the extent that a decision is made based on the moral virtues, perhaps as guideposts to making a decision, this seems consistent with the Aristotelian view of practical wisdom as decision-making in service of human flourishing. Of course, there are other ways in which moral virtues play a role in practical wisdom—as general goals or principles, as patterns to shape choice or action. In this respect, practical wisdom is important specifically because we distinguish practical wisdom from other forms of judgment, whether the moral virtues function as goals, values, or action patterns, in the process of decision-making.

Regardless of the way in which the moral virtues actually function in respect of human flourishing for practical wisdom, we can consider moral virtues such as civic virtues to be a form of social intelligence (Snow, 2010)—a way of improving one's social interactions and relationships and benefiting society. The civic virtues provide the social intelligence that is critical for improving society and societal functioning. If human flourishing refers to someone doing well because of the overall well-being of society, then civic virtues such as civility, empathy and compassion, and fairness, are a critical aspect of practical wisdom. In this respect, from the perspective of psychology and philosophy, we can think about practical wisdom as going beyond the self in important ways that are linked to the moral virtues and in this way, have an important link to addressing issues such as considering the impact of hate speech and its regulation by the government.

We can think about “social intelligence” as a way of improving the performance of individual cognizers such as humans or computers. On the one hand, social intelligence can be viewed as abilities that improve social interactions and connections. On the other hand, social intelligence can, through such connections, yield emergent group social intelligence—better social connection and functioning can have the benefit of yielding better group deliberation, thought, and action. For example, Hutchins (1995) introduced the notion of “distributed cognition,” in which perception, thinking, understanding, and memory actually reside in (distributed among) a group of people rather than any particular individual. In this case, the memory or the understanding emerges from

the interaction of individuals such that no particular individual has the memory itself. For example, different group members can express associations of a particular memory (as one does in trying to think of a name and failing) and then bit by bit the group hones in on the actual memory. Of course, once reconstructed, then the entire group has access to the memory itself, although in the future, no one person may again actually hold the memory. Hutchins observed this in the interaction of people working in teams and described how such interactions yield distributed cognition and intelligence. This suggests there is substantial benefit in going beyond the self and connecting to others in effective teams. Individuals are limited in capacity, perspective, and scope of processing, but social networks can connect individuals into groups that broaden these. Indeed, computers originally were designed to be self-contained in terms of processing power, memory, and inputs and outputs such that each computer stood alone and everything to be processed was stored locally on that computer alone. And for the longest time, in the era of modern cognitive psychology (see Gardner, 1985), this was the operative metaphor for understanding the human mind, especially in respect of cognition.

However, the metaphor of the mind as a stand-alone computer was changed in two important ways. First, the development of a new computing metaphor based on analog neurons rather than the digital propositional computing provided a better model of some cognitive mechanisms and more closely fit how the brain might operate (e.g., see Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986). Second, engineering high-speed computing interconnections over networks changed the state of computing, and with wireless networks and omnipresent connectivity, along with constant human data flow the power of distributed digital computing has become clear. Information can reside across the network, distributed among different storage locations. Processing can be distributed as well, and as with people working in teams, different computers can address pieces of a computation. Networked computers that share information and distribute processing throughout the network transcend the limitations of the individual computer to harness the power of a network. In this way, we have a new model of human social cognition in which decision-making depends on social connections formed in a variety of

ways that transcend the cognition of a single person but are leveraged on the foundation of more fundamental human social group cognition as manifest in teamwork.

Given that practical wisdom is decision-making in service of human flourishing, the moral civic virtues serving as social intelligence may provide the interpersonal social connection that allows distributed cognition to function effectively over our more widely dispersed groups, connected by email, text, or voice. Practical wisdom, per Aristotle, depends on self-transcendence in the way that the moral virtues couple individual smart decision makers socially and through the social intelligence of the moral virtues, but there is more to wisdom than just this form of social intelligence. Practical wisdom, through its connection to human flourishing, provides an important function for society in reinforcing social relationships and societal flourishing. Moreover, the focus of practical wisdom on human social challenges and problems engages emotion, creativity, and intellectual struggle in ways that other kinds of decision-making may not.

There are multiple psychological theories, definitions, and descriptions of wisdom (e.g., Ardel, Achenbaum, & Oh, 2013; Grossmann, Na, Varnum, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2012; Meeks & Jeste, 2009; Staudinger, Smith, & Baltes, 1992; Sternberg, 2013; Tiberius, 2008; see Ferrari & Weststrate, 2013; Staudinger & Glück, 2011; Sternberg, 1998; Sternberg & Glück, 2019). In spite of the variation in theories and approaches, there are important commonalities among definitions, such as the need for pragmatic knowledge about people and one's self, gained from life experiences, along with the skills of reflectiveness, engagement of intellectual struggle, and prosocial attitudes and behaviors. However, one aspect of all these theories is that they focus on wisdom as a property of a person or as an approach to decision-making in the individual. In other words, just knowing that we need to use wise reasoning, and having theories of wise reasoning does not address the problem of hate speech and the civic virtues. By identifying wisdom as inherent in the individual, and constituted by individual psychological processes specifically, this could possibly limit the means of addressing issues in hate speech and civic virtues to approaches that affect the individual. But given the scope of the problem in that it affects society, it may be important to conceive of approaches that go beyond the

individual. It is possible, however, to conceive of a broader view of wisdom than that which is inherent in a person. From the Defining Wisdom Project (Wisdom Research, 2011) a group of scholars and researchers proposed the following as part of a definition of wisdom:

Wisdom requires moral grounding, but is not identical to it (i.e., wisdom must be moral but morality need not be wise). Wisdom can be observed in individual or collective wise action or counsel. Wisdom flexibly integrates cognitive, affective, and social considerations....

This definition specifically includes “collective wise action or counsel” going beyond the individual wisdom of most theories and definitions of wisdom. This was intended to encompass two views of collective or “institutional wisdom.” In the first, one can imagine an institution (e.g., government agency) producing wise policies even if no individual in the institution is wise. The interaction among the governing members of the administration of the institution produces an emergent wisdom that can lead to wise policies, where a wise policy is a practical policy that increases societal flourishing. The second view of institutional wisdom is that an institution may have a policy that leads to wiser action on the part of the constituents affected by the policy. One example comes from the policy regarding organ donation (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). In the United States, people must explicitly declare their willingness to donate their organs after death whereas in France, they must explicitly declare the desire to not donate their organs. Organ donation rates are higher in France than in the United States. Nudge-based policies provide an example of wise policies using knowledge of human psychology and behavior to achieve better societal outcomes that lead to human flourishing when the goals of such policies are to benefit society without causing harm.

Wise Reasoning and Hate Speech

It is important to consider two broad approaches to the problem of hate speech. In general, when governments outlaw hate speech and group derogation, they focus on one kind of solution, legislation. Laws that restrict

hate speech can certainly reduce explicit statements fomenting aggression and violence against groups and reduce explicit derogation of groups. But such laws can also stifle protest, be used to arrest people deemed unpatriotic, and diminish more broadly the freedom of citizens. Further, such laws may not change attitudes, so that the same derogatory and negative stereotypes and attitudes exist without explicit voice, but still promulgate microaggression and other forms of more subtle discrimination and derogation. Consider that in countries with strong laws against anti-Semitic speech, such as in France and Germany, there is strong evidence of anti-Semitic attitudes (in 2014, 27% of the population in Germany and 37% of the population in France) whereas in the United States, without such laws, only 9% of the population has such attitudes (see <http://global100.adl.org>). This association simply establishes that the laws are not by their existence diminishing attitudes. Clearly there are complexities here not accounted for by the simple relationship. However, if such attitudes are not regularly given a public voice, there will be no public response and no debate and deliberation about such attitudes. This could act to reduce the target groups' explicit awareness of such beliefs and attitudes and reduces the general population from countering such beliefs openly and responding to show support.

Legal suppression of hate speech does not work to eliminate negative attitudes. Furthermore, legal suppression of hate speech can have negative consequences for the targets of hate speech, given that there is no public evidence of countering those negative attitudes. However, unfettered expression of hatred can lead to overt aggression and violence, promotion of negative attitudes, and the dissolution of civility, compassion, and fairness. What is a wise approach to this problem? Clearly there is no one solution because there is not one simple problem. Hate speech can be modeled by politicians and public figures and thus socially licensed in the public. Negative attitudes can be manifest in a variety of social behavior beyond speech and supported by local authorities and the government in different ways. The response to such complexity requires deeper and broader consideration than simply adding new laws.

Wise reasoning would suggest practical approaches based on deep knowledge about people as social beings and about society as a social

system. Given the origins of hate speech in negative attitudes and given the impact of hate speech as hurtful against targeted populations, it is important to consider how to foster civic virtues of civility, compassion, and fairness in a population. To be clear, it is possible that other moral virtues could benefit society and reduce hate speech. But on the face of it, gratitude, generosity, honesty, trust, courage, humor, spirituality, and other moral virtues do not seem as directly relevant to reducing hate speech. Thus, while hate speech diminishes civil society by eroding the civic virtues of civility, compassion, and fairness, bolstering these may work against both hate speech and hateful attitudes.

Civility as a virtue would motivate respectful communication so that increased civility would decrease hate speech. Compassion as a virtue would increase empathic concern and perspective-taking for others. Increasing compassion for others, being able to take their perspective, understand their values, culture, and situation, should also work to reduce hate speech and increase kindness. And fairness, as a virtue, should motivate people to use an egalitarian approach in treating all people equally, increasing tolerance. Given that hate speech is uniquely targeted at particular individuals or groups, this represents a very unfair treatment of some people and would be reduced by increased fairness in society, which may also increase respect.

Of course, this raises the question of how to increase these civic virtues. One approach is to reduce the biases and prejudices that serve to degrade the civic virtues. In general terms, we know that there are extant methods from social psychology that can be successful in reducing implicit bias (e.g., Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012). The approach generally is based on the notion that implicit bias is essentially a kind of habit and can be reduced or eliminated as can be any habit (see Forscher, Mitamura, Dix, Cox, & Devine, 2017). The basic approach is educational, informing people about the nature of bias as well as providing basic cognitive strategies that, with practice, can overcome biases. And reducing implicit bias and reducing negative affect should, as pointed out previously, reduce explicit negative acts. This suggests that one important means of addressing hate speech is to address its roots by increasing education about others and prejudice,

experience with others, and practice at self-regulation. But as described by Aristotle (cf. Russell, 2015), it is necessary to have the moral virtues as underlying motivations for behavior so that self-regulation and understanding alone are not sufficient.

While viewing implicit bias through the concept of “habit” can lead to ways of reducing bias that increases civic virtues, there is another perspective as well. The habit notion is a negative characterization that works via education and practice to reduce the “bad habit.” However, it is also possible to take a more positive view of the combination of education and practice, which is used in the method above of reducing the habit of implicit bias. It is possible to view the virtues not just as good “habits” but also as skills (Russell, 2015). In this case, skills are also developed through education and practice. Learning about others’ lives and situations through education and practicing interaction with others should increase epistemic humility and perspective-taking as skills thus increasing the skill of wise reasoning. If we take the perspective that strengthening the civic virtues is a form of skill development, this lays out one kind of plan for reducing hate speech. The means by which civic virtues such as civility, compassion, and fairness are strengthened may be diverse from interaction with targets of hate speech to modeling these virtues by political leaders.

If wiser reasoning is related to the civic virtues, then improving the skill of wiser reasoning should reduce hate speech in society. Learning about others’ lives, interacting with others, learning about the limitations of one’s own knowledge and the existence of others’ knowledge (epistemic humility), practicing perspective-taking, reflection, deliberation, and self-regulation should all lead to wiser reasoning. It is therefore in society’s interest to regulate hate speech not by legislating against it but by developing programs that develop wiser reasoning and the civic virtues. Moreover, to increase wise reasoning overall in a society can reduce hate speech but also increase the ability of people who are targets of prejudice to cope with manifestations of bias and stereotyping in speech and behavior. Increased perspective-taking and self-regulation can aid in the way targets of prejudice cope with discrimination and aggression.

Language Use as a Skill for Wisdom

While it seems difficult to conceive of wise reasoning as a skill, this seems to be a good framework for understanding wisdom. For example, if it is the case the moral virtues are a critical part of wisdom, then the moral virtues such as generosity, trust, gratitude can also be viewed as an important part of the skill. In some theologies, there is a notion that acting as if one has the virtues is sufficient—that means to practice acting as though one has the virtues. For example, Emmons and McCullough (2003) demonstrated that keeping a gratitude diary increased well-being and Kaplan (2016) argues from her own experience practicing gratitude that it increases human flourishing affecting those around one as well. Snow (2010) argues that the moral virtues are a form of social intelligence and that if practiced, they can become habits that serve as motivation. Indeed, if we think of moral and intellectual virtues as skills then wisdom is a skill as well. If wise reasoning is a skill, then extended practice should lead to increased performance and there is a significant relationship between some practices such as mediation and measured wisdom (Williams, Mangelsdorf, Kontra, Nusbaum, & Hoekner, 2016). In this way, each of the intellectual and moral virtues that is important in wiser reasoning can be conceived of as a skill on its own, meaning that one can learn about them and practice them to benefit improvement. One aspect of psychological processing that is important for practical wisdom is emotional self-regulation (e.g., Baltes & Smith, 1990; Glück & Bluck, 2013; Meeks & Jeste, 2009; Webster, 2007). Being overly swayed by one's emotional responses makes it difficult to achieve balance (Sternberg, 2013) in decision-making, which is critical, and overrides attempts to take the perspective of others (Tiberius, 2008). However, it turns out that language can be an important tool in this kind of emotional self-regulation.

Self-regulation can be improved if one learns specific linguistic methods that can be employed and practiced. For example, changing the framing of a problem allows one to be psychologically distanced from the problem, increasing self-regulation, and more objective in addressing the problem. The difference between a problem in terms of one's self

or someone else (first- vs. third-person framing or as political issue from a different country) has been shown to increase psychological distance (ego-decentering) and thereby improve wise reasoning (see Grossmann, 2017; Grossmann & Kross, 2014). Moreover, this distancing reduces physiological reactivity measured by heart-rate variability (Grossmann, Sahdra, & Ciarrochi, 2016). When thinking about a problem in terms of someone else, rather than one's self, people are able to make wiser judgments and this appears to be related to reduced physiological reactivity, suggesting that the shift in perspective through language increases emotional self-regulation. Similarly even imagining talking to a friend about a problem before responding (Staudinger & Baltes, 1996) puts a problem into a communicative context that may be less egocentric. This means that, through language, problems can be framed to distance oneself from the potential emotional impact of a problem. Similarly, a cognitive reappraisal of a problem in which a person explicitly reframes a situation to be less dire has substantial benefits for self-regulation and solving problems (Gross, 1998; Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012). Clearly one needs to know what to do, using language to reframe a problem in the third person or as less dire, and one needs to practice this as a skill.

Speakers of a second language can reframe a problem effectively for self-regulation as well. Research comparing decision-making in one's native language compared to a foreign language demonstrates clearly that problems framed in a foreign language affect the choices people make (Hayakawa, Costa, Foucart, & Keysar, 2016). Moral decisions made in a foreign language appear to be more utilitarian (Costa et al., 2014). People are more willing to sacrifice one person to save many in moral decision-making. Of course, whether this is wise will depend on the situation but the ability to evaluate a difficult problem to see solutions that are more utilitarian as opposed to taking a knee-jerk response offers the possibility of wiser reasoning. Moreover, it appears that this change in moral reasoning happens not because people become more deontological but because the negative emotional impact of an imagined action is reduced using a foreign language (Hayakawa, Tannenbaum, Costa, Corey, & Keysar, 2017). Using a foreign language during reasoning allows people to take more strategic risks (Hayakawa, Lau, Holtzmann, Costa, & Keysar, 2017), which makes sense if the

negative affective impact of risks is reduced using a foreign language. Just as ego-decentering (Grossmann, 2017) allows a more reasoned and less affectively impulsive response, being able to assess risks strategically means less impulsive responding and more distanced and reasoned responding. This is important because it suggests that people can better balance risks and benefits (cf. Sternberg, 2013) when thinking about a problem in a foreign language, suggesting switching to a foreign language is a skill that can aid wiser reasoning. While this particular approach depends on the level of skill one has in the foreign language to understand the complexities of a problem, it also demonstrates the more general principle that ego-decentering can be achieved by a variety of means and thus aid in wiser reasoning.

However, the use of language as part of the skill of wiser reasoning is not confined to self-regulation. Compassion is an important civic virtue that is relevant for hate speech. Increasing compassion for others should reduce the propensity toward negative affect for those others and thereby reduce the use of hate speech. As with self-regulation, compassion also appears to have an aspect that is like a skill. Previous research has shown that training in loving-kindness meditation has previously been shown to increase compassion (Condon, Desbordes, Miller, & DeSteno, 2013; Leiberg, Klimecki, & Singer, 2011). In loving-kindness meditation, there is a specific script of language that is being used. We asked if simply listening to this language would increase compassion for others (Williams, Poljacik, Decety, & Nusbaum, 2017). In the language used in this kind of meditation, attention is focused on thoughts of compassion and love for self and others, but in our study no mention was made of meditation at all. The language of loving-kindness meditation was spoken to one group and for comparison, a second group listened to safety and health language that was not focused on compassion and love for self and others. To assess the effects of language, we used a task of rating the pain (as depicted in images) for oneself and for others (e.g., Decety, Skelly, & Kiehl, 2013). Typically, people rate the pain for oneself higher than for others, and this is the behavior shown by the control group. However, exposure to loving-kindness language without any meditation produced greater compassion for others than for oneself. While we did not test the duration of this effect, it is also possible that

a practice of listening to the language every day might yield enduring effects on compassion.

Self-regulation and compassion for others, as demonstrated with loving-kindness mediation language, are just two examples of virtues that are important for wise reasoning and also important for reducing hate speech. Providing the appropriate language experiences for people, either in an educational setting or in public messages could be very helpful as they have been in public health campaigns such as reducing smoking. It is apparent that language can change the way we experience a problem, the way we think about other people, the way we understand a situation. The way we use language can connect us to or distance us from the potential impact of choices, perhaps give us other perspectives, illuminate insights through metaphor, and move others to act. Thus, even beyond the information we can learn from a narrative or a speech, we can be moved or motivated, excited or calmed, and see the world differently. Moreover, the regular use of language patterns—a practice that is used in some wisdom traditions changes brain structures consistent with increased memory capacity (Hartzell et al., 2016). Language use is therefore an experience that can shape other experiences as well as confer new perspectives and even possibly new abilities for wiser decision-making.

John F. Kennedy’s “Ask not what your country can do for you....” and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I have a dream....” affected listeners deeply but not only on the strengths of a good argument. And while all these speeches were delivered beautifully and from the heart, it is not the performance of these speeches alone that can move listeners to act on behalf of others. Performance alone cannot give substance to an empty message. These speeches do demonstrate the power of language as experience. Language is at the heart of the power of sermons and can reach across time and space to change minds, feelings, and behavior and so it follows that understanding language may affect components of wisdom such as increasing epistemic humility, reflection, perseverance, the willingness to engage intellectual struggle, or engage the moral virtues.

On the one hand, this suggests the use of language as a potential “tool” for practical wisdom. If the strategy of reframing a problem is understood well, any problem could be thought of through this lens

and then decision-making could become a little wiser. However, it is possible that with enough experience with this reframing process this may become internalized, making it more of a fluent skill. In this way, the local experience of self-distancing can improve practical wisdom for a particular problem and, over time, this practice may develop into a personal approach for making wiser decisions.

Wiser Government Policy and Law

Although legislation that makes hate speech a crime could have adverse consequences for society, there may still be different kinds of approaches in terms of public policy that could work to reduce hate speech. Just as the leaders of a country can use the bully pulpit to encourage hate speech, the President and other elected officials can set an entirely different tone that models compassion, civility, and fairness. Rather than holding rallies that encourage aggression and anger, politicians could hold rallies that work to increase tolerance and acceptance of others who are different, model perspective-taking and epistemic humility, and engage in reflection rather than impulsive behavior. Rhetoric can motivate, support, and encourage and increase compassion and concern for others and speeches can build purpose whether it is the often quoted “I have a dream” speech from Rev. Martin Luther King 1963, (<https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>) or the “Ask not what your country can do for you” speech from John F. Kennedy’s (1961, <http://www.ushistory.org/documents/ask-not.htm>) Inaugural Address. Such speech can move hearts and minds to act on behalf of society. And government agencies could adopt policies that are grounded in the civic virtues, placing these above other kinds of operating principles, thereby assuring the public of the importance of these virtues as guidance for government action.

Town-hall meetings have been used by politicians to learn about their constituents’ thoughts and concerns. However, town-hall meetings could be held by local governments as a way of holding open deliberative forums about problems that otherwise would fester and cause resentment. There is a concern generally that such public

meetings do not lead to belief change. But research has shown that if such meetings are held in a specific orchestrated way, there can be positive benefits in changing beliefs, finding compromise, and promoting effective deliberation (Jacobs, Cook, & Carpini, 2009). When there is an expert moderator who controls the flow of conversation, when speakers are admonished to support their statements with empirical evidence, and when speakers are expected to maintain civility in their discourse, there are positive outcomes from such deliberation. Although there is a presumption that town halls are venues for dissent and disagreement, local governments could sponsor such deliberative town halls that could lead to be better understanding of different groups and increased fairness.

Furthermore, we know that incentives work better to motivate behavior than does punishment. Thus, there can be a disconnect between laws that are intended to regulate hate speech and the manifestation of aggression against the same groups in those societies. An alternative would be for government policies to be put in place that serve to “nudge” more compassionate, civil, and fair interactions between groups. Rather than impose draconian threats and punishments, incentives for positive behavior could have a beneficial effect on civic virtues manifest in society.

Conclusion

The tension that exists in societies between the worst impulses of people and the manifestations of cooperation and civil interactions depends in large part on the strength of civic virtues of civility, compassion, and fairness. When the civic virtues are strong, the worst impulses may be checked but when the virtues are weakened, the worst impulses may be acted upon. Those worst aspects of people as manifest in hate speech work against the civic virtues and erode respect and justice and lead to increased aggression and violence. Rational-legal approaches such as the regulation of hate speech do not solve the problem and may simply increase resentment and hide from view the ugly truth of certain attitudes.

The wise approach is to find ways of addressing the underlying causes of hate speech and to establish policies that encourage open dialog and deliberation. Although encouraging debate and dialog seems risky and inviting of hate speech, when carried out in the appropriate venue it can lead to increased understanding and compromise. It is important to consider what kinds of policies can work to reduce the festering of resentment, to increase understanding of other groups, and to increase contact and interaction between groups.

The wise approach also entails trying to increase the civic virtues of civility, compassion, and fairness that are undermined by hate speech. If we consider wisdom and the virtues as skills (Russell, 2015) rather than immutable traits, it is possible to find ways of providing the training needed to increase these. The way language is used has a substantial effect on thinking, feeling, and how we understand and interact with others. This can serve as the basis for providing some of the experiences that may start to increase the strength of the civic virtues and in doing so, may also increase wise reasoning more generally.

Tiberius (2008) has suggested it is possible that one may cultivate wisdom by practicing self- and other-reflection. By understanding the underpinnings of wisdom, it may be possible to develop interventions or classroom practices that cultivate wise reasoning. Increased wise reasoning should also increase the civic virtues and therefore diminish hate speech. In this way, practical wisdom can help build a more civil society through prosocial reflection about civility, perspective-taking for fairness, and compassion in social interaction and engagement.

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