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Political etiquette

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Abstract
Social norms forbidding rape jokes, blackface, and flag-burning exemplify a peculiar form of etiquette, which I call political etiquette. Just as compliance with ordinary etiquette expresses respect for the other individuals involved in a social encounter, compliance with political etiquette expresses respect for social groups. In this paper, I propose that we understand political etiquette as a system of conventions whereby we indicate our commitment to treating vulnerable social groups in accordance with their rightful status. Because we have a standing obligation to assure all members of our community that their rightful social status will be respected, we have a powerful moral reason to conform with all existing political etiquette norms whose target social groups lack such assurance, even when compliance with these norms is not antecedently morally valuable. Alongside our moral reasons to comply with some existing political etiquette norms, we also have moral reasons to fortify good political etiquette norms and to reform or erode bad ones.

Keywords Social norms · Social justice · Social status · Political correctness · Assurance · Manners · Etiquette

In 2019, the president of a city council in New Jersey used a regrettable phrase in a closed-door meeting: "They were able to wait her out and jew her down," she said, describing city lawyers' conduct in a settlement negotiation. A recording of her remark leaked to the press and outrage flared in local news outlets (Avilucea, 2019). Before long, two other members of the city council elevated the case to national attention by defending their colleague's use of "jew down": one said that the expression had been used "millions of times" and was "just a statement of speech"; another wrote on social media that while the phrase is "[i]nappropriate in today's PC culture,"

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it is nevertheless "not anti-anything or indicative of hating Jewish people" (Gold, 2019). Soon the entire New Jersey delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives was calling for the resignations of the city officials who had defended the phrase.

As a matter of fact, "jew down" *is* a figure of speech; the Oxford English Dictionary documents its use since the 1820s (n.d.). But as the city officials observed, the expression is deemed offensive by "today's PC culture"—an evolving set of social norms that regulates segments of American society. As the calls for resignation made clear, political correctness does not only regulate the use of phrases like "jew down"; it also regulates the way we talk about those phrases. And its reach extends beyond the public sphere: if you happen to discuss the "jew down" incident with a friend, political correctness norms are likely to regulate the way you talk about it, and if you violate the norms, your friend is liable to enforce them. Where political correctness rules are operative, we are not only subject to them but are also deputized to interpret, enforce, revise, and evaluate them. My aim in this paper is to clarify the normative criteria for assessing and responding to these kinds of rules.

Part of my task is to place some boundaries around "these kinds of rules." Rather than focus narrowly on the rules of political correctness, I analyze a broader category of norms that I call *political etiquette*.[1] Political etiquette includes a wide variety of social norms, from the racist etiquette of Jim Crow to the nationalistic etiquette that governs patriotic rituals and the rules of chivalry that require gentlemen to assist ladies in opening doors and carrying bags. As these examples illustrate, political etiquette systems are numerous, overlapping, and contested. All of us are subject to competing systems of political etiquette norms across a variety of social settings, and these systems of norms sometimes issue conflicting demands.

In this paper, I argue that we should understand political etiquette norms as conventionalized vehicles for negotiating the status[2] claims of social groups.[3] The norms of political etiquette prescribe and proscribe certain *gestures*, which might be words, images, or complex behaviors, and which are taken (at least within the milieu governed by the corresponding norm) to express affirmation or denial of social status claims for certain social groups.[4] By conforming (or declining to conform) to political etiquette norms, and by enforcing them (or declining to enforce them) when they are violated, we communicate about the social status of the relevant groups. This understanding of political etiquette's function can provide an evaluative rubric for particular norms. Political etiquette norms merit our support, I argue, when they

[1] *Political etiquette* is a neologism, not an established term. In what follows, I aim to show that the social norms I have gathered under this heading constitute a cohesive category that merits philosophical attention.

[2] I offer a detailed account of social status in Sect. 3.1.

[3] In this paper, the term *social group* is restricted to groups whose members' social status may be affected by their membership in that group. Thus, for our purposes, children constitute a social group, but people whose names begin with "S" do not. Each of us belongs to many nested and intersecting social groups, which bear on our social status in complex ways (Crenshaw, 1989).

[4] For ease of presentation, I write as if a particular political etiquette norm determines the meanings of the gestures it governs. In fact, the relationship between social norms and social meanings is more complex (see, e.g., Balkin 2003; Bicchieri 2017; Lessig 1995), but these complexities do not make a difference for the present argument.

function effectively and without excessive cost to assure members of vulnerable social groups that they will be treated in accordance with their *rightful* social status.

My account of political etiquette contrasts with a common view of these norms that I call the *summary conception*. According to the summary conception, the political etiquette norms of a given community encapsulate that community's views about our antecedent moral obligations—that is, obligations that we have independently of the norms themselves. If the summary conception is correct, we are obligated to comply with a given political etiquette norm only to the extent that it accurately summarizes our antecedent moral obligations. I will argue that we should instead think of political etiquette norms under what I call the *practice conception*. According to the practice conception, political etiquette norms often alter our moral reasons by shaping the meaning of our conduct. These norms may merit approval even when they prescribe or proscribe conduct that would be morally neutral in the absence of these norms, and they may merit disapproval even when their injunctions line up with our antecedent moral obligations. Moreover, on the practice conception, we can separate the question of whether a particular political etiquette norm should be in effect from the question of whether we should conform to it when it is in effect.

My argument proceeds as follows. In Sect. 1, I introduce the phenomenon of political etiquette, explain why it is philosophically puzzling, and sketch my proposed interpretation of its normative foundation. In Sect. 2, I spell out three versions of the summary conception of political etiquette and explain their appeal. In Sect. 3, I articulate the practice conception of political etiquette and defend it against the summary conception. I conclude by showing how the practice conception of political etiquette might help us tease apart the various moral reasons that bear on our responses to the political etiquette norms that we find in the wild.

1 The puzzle of political etiquette

The "jew down" incident in New Jersey attracted the kind of righteous outrage that infuriates opponents of political correctness. These critics complain that political correctness makes mountains out of molehills: can't we acknowledge that the city council president's use of "jew down" was merely a thoughtless turn of phrase, rather than a sinister expression of anti-Semitism? And on the other side of the political spectrum, why should a gesture as benign as kneeling during the national anthem be regarded as a serious moral affront? What's all the fuss about?

Some will respond to this challenge by agreeing that all moralizing appeals to political etiquette are overblown—perhaps a form of moral grandstanding (cf. Tosi and Warmke, 2020). But many of us, myself included, are committed to embracing some political etiquette norms and rejecting others. To hold that line, we need to explain what gives *some* of these arbitrary, shifting, and culturally contingent norms moral force, and why that same force does not undergird the norms we reject. While

philosophers have attempted to answer these questions for some particular norms,[5] few have devoted systematic attention to these questions.[6]

My answer to the puzzle begins by highlighting the continuity between political etiquette norms and ordinary etiquette norms—which are likewise arbitrary, shifting, and culturally contingent, and which resemble political etiquette in constituting a conventional idiom for expressing respect. In this section, I explain the relationship between ordinary etiquette and political etiquette, and I explain how thinking of the latter norms *as* etiquette illuminates their normative structure.

1.1 Ordinary etiquette

Numerous philosophers have made the case that the norms of ordinary etiquette—the norms that instruct us to say *please* and *thank you* and to bring a bottle of wine to our dinner hosts—are best understood as conventions for communicating respect (Buss, 1999; Calhoun, 2000; Ullmann-Margalit, 2011; Stohr, 2012; Olberding, 2019). Normally, when we behave in accordance with etiquette norms, we thereby express respect for the individuals involved in the encounter.

Etiquette norms ascribe social meaning to *conspicuous norm-responsive conduct.* Let us take this idea piece by piece. *Norm-responsive conduct* is behavior that conforms with or violates an etiquette norm, or that reacts to another person's conformity with or violation of that norm.[7] Such conduct may be *inconspicuous* for any number of reasons: it may be difficult to observe (as with toileting norms, which we observe or violate in private), it may be omissive rather than commissive (as in conformity with a norm that proscribes wiping one's nose with a tablecloth), or it may simply go unnoticed (as in conformity with queuing norms, which is normally taken for granted).[8] But where etiquette-responsive conduct is conspicuous, conformity typically conveys respect and transgression conveys disrespect.

This is not to deny that conformity with etiquette may have more fine-grained or context-dependent meaning. Conformity with etiquette can function as a signal of socio-economic status (Buss, 1999). Skillful communicators can contort etiquette's idioms to shift their meanings—a disdainful "thank you," for example, can exude ingratitude. And even in ordinary cases, the attitudes conventionally conveyed by etiquette-conforming or etiquette-transgressing behavior are often more fine-grained than "respect": giving one's host a bottle of wine expresses gratitude; cursing

[5] Examples include Anderson (2017), Tønder (2011), and Young (1994).

[6] Balkin (2003) and Lessig (1995) come close, with illuminating descriptive analyses of the ways that social and legal norms interact with social meanings, including meanings that concern the status of social groups. However, neither Balkin nor Lessig attempts to address the normative question that concerns us here: when and why do political etiquette norms have moral force?

[7] The term *norm-responsive* is used expansively here. It is meant to include cases of unwitting compliance or violation.

[8] The example of queuing norms highlights an ironic feature of etiquette: the more effectively a norm produces compliant conduct, the more that conduct comes to be taken for granted. When this happens, conduct in conformity with the norm becomes inconspicuous and loses its power to convey respect, while conduct in *violation* of the norm becomes more conspicuous and thus more effective in conveying *dis*respect.

expresses hostility; opening a door for a lady expresses gentlemanly courtesy (Stohr, 2012).

These complications should not distract us from the core normative structure of etiquette: the moral obligation to be respectful underwrites etiquette rules. Respect gives us reason to show gratitude and to refrain from showing hostility (Stohr, 2012). Even chivalry is mediated by respect: proponents of gendered chivalry norms see chivalry as a way of showing respect, while opponents of these norms see chivalry as disrespectful (Calhoun, 2000). And the obligations of respect are often discharged in etiquette's idiom. Conspicuously conforming with a local etiquette convention is a way of saying "I respect you"; conspicuously violating etiquette says "I disrespect you" (Buss, 1999; Calhoun, 2000). In short, our reasons to conform with ordinary etiquette are reasons of respect.

1.2 Political etiquette

Political etiquette functions the same way as ordinary etiquette: in a context where a particular political etiquette norm is operative, when we conspicuously comport the norm, we thereby affirm the social status of the group designated as the target of that norm, and when we conspicuously violate it, we thereby derogate the target group's status.[9] Just as our reasons to comport with ordinary etiquette are rooted in our standing moral reason to express respect for other individuals, our reasons to comport with political etiquette are rooted in our standing moral reason to affirm the rightful status claims of social groups.[10] And just as the conventions of ordinary etiquette imbue our conduct with symbolic meaning, political etiquette is likewise mediated by convention. If my view is right, our moral reasons to comport with political etiquette are partly rooted in the conventions themselves.

Consider the following paradigmatic political etiquette norms:

- *Stand for the Anthem*: Stand up, remove your hat, and place your right hand over your heart when the national anthem is played in a public setting.
- *Avoid Semantic Dilution*: Use powerful terms of opprobrium (e.g., "rape," "racist," or "concentration camp") only where they are truly licensed. Avoid diluting their force by extending them to marginal cases.
- *Conceal Cultural Ignorance*: Avoid disclosing ignorance about minority cultures. (Don't say, "Huh, I thought Brazilians spoke Spanish!")
- *Do Not Wear Blackface*: Do not artificially darken your skin, either in true minstrel fashion with burnt cork or shoe polish, or more subtly with brown makeup.

[9] The "status of a social group" may be understood roughly as the consequence of group membership for the social status of the group's members. Membership in social groups may augment or diminish the status of their members: for example, in the university, belonging to professoriate augments one's social status, while belonging to the custodial staff diminishes one's status.

[10] As I explain in Sect. 3.1 below, this reason is particularly forceful when members of those groups have good reason to fear that their social status will be wrongfully demoted because of their membership in that group.

When one of these norms is violated, the violation is understood as an expression of disrespect for the entire social group that the norm purports to protect. When Colin Kaepernick knelt in protest during the national anthem, his gesture was taken as an insult to veterans (Branch, 2017). When Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez described border facilities for migrants as concentration camps, her comments were criticized as an affront to Jews and Holocaust survivors (Steinbuch, 2019). When photos surfaced showing Justin Trudeau in blackface and brownface, his behavior was condemned as demeaning to black and brown people (Austen and Bilefsky, 2019). In each of these cases, norm-responsive conduct was understood by some people to denigrate the status of an entire social group, including many individuals who were not directly involved in the encounter.

Others disputed the meaning of these norm-responsive acts. Some people (including some Jews) defended Ocasio-Cortez's use of "concentration camp" (Lind-Guzik, 2019); some people (including some veterans) defended Kaepernick's protest (Baker et al., 2016); some people (including some South Asians) defended Trudeau's costumes (Govani, 2019). When we take a step back from the particular norms, we may wonder what these disputes are really about. What underlying facts are supposed to justify moral claims in the domain of political etiquette?

Let us consider two possibilities. Following Rawls (1955), we may distinguish between the *summary conception* and the *practice conception* of political etiquette.[11] On the summary conception, the rules of political etiquette encapsulate the community's judgment about the balance of antecedent moral considerations—that is, moral considerations that are logically prior to the rule. Drawing on Rawls's characterization of the summary conception of a rule, we might say that the rules of political etiquette "are regarded as reports that cases of a certain sort have been found on *other* grounds to be properly decided in a certain way" (1955, 19). According to the summary conception, political etiquette morally obligates us precisely to the extent that it *accurately* summarizes our independently-existing moral obligations. One clear advantage of this view is that it easily explains why morally repugnant political etiquette norms, such as the norms of Jim Crow etiquette,[12] do not morally obligate us.

In contrast, on the *practice conception* of political etiquette, the moral justification for regulating one's behavior in accordance with political etiquette norms is derived at least in part from the meanings inscribed on our action by those very norms. The idiom of political etiquette assigns symbolic meanings to conspicuous norm-responsive conduct, such that conspicuous conduct in conformity with a political etiquette norm affirms the social status that the norm symbolically ascribes to the group, and conspicuous conduct in violation of the norm derogates that social status. When a political etiquette norm encodes a group status claim that we *ought* to affirm, the

[11] My use of the *summary/practice* contrast differs from Rawls's. In my usage, the practice conception does not exclude the possibility that moral considerations antecedent to the rule may contribute to the balance of reasons for or against some action. The practice conception differs from the summary conception in that it accommodates the possibility that the up-and-running political etiquette norms may contribute to the moral reasons that govern our action. See Rawls (1955) 28–29, suggesting that his use of the term "practice conception" is narrower. For further discussion, see Rouse (2006).

[12] For a detailed exposition of Jim Crow etiquette, see, e.g., Dollard (1988), Doyle (1968), McMillen (1989), and Powdermaker (1968).

meaning of conspicuous norm-responsive conduct gives us moral reason to comport with the norm. So, on the practice conception (but not on the summary conception), an up-and-running system of political etiquette supplies us with moral reasons for action over and above the reasons we would have in its absence.

2 The summary conception of political etiquette

Ian Hancock, a prominent Romani scholar and political advocate, once described the way he confronts people who use the verb *to gyp*, which many Romanies find offensive.[13]

> I encounter a lot of people who tell me that they never knew the word *gypped* had anything to do with gypsies, or that it's offensive—especially when the word is heard not read. My response to them is, "That's okay. You didn't know but now you do. So stop using it. It may mean nothing to you, but when we hear it, it still hurts." (Challa, 2013)

In these conversations, Hancock introduces his conversational counterparts to a political etiquette rule hitherto unfamiliar to them: a prohibition on using the word *gyp*. Hancock explains that this word is offensive and that it hurts Romanies who hear it because of its presumed connection with the word *gypsy*.[14] He accepts at face value the excuse of ignorance that his counterparts offer him—he believes that they "never knew" about the connection between *gyp* and *gypsies* and assures them that "[t]hat's okay" (where "that" might refer to their ignorance or to their use of *gyp* prior to this conversation, and "okay" might mean either permissible or excusable). But now that they have the relevant knowledge in hand, Hancock says, they ought to conform to the political etiquette norm that I will call Don't Use *Gyp*.

What should we make of Hancock's claims? If we interpret him according to the summary conception of political etiquette, his reasoning is something like the following. Each of us should adopt Don't Use *Gyp* as a rule of conduct, because this rule best reflects the balance of moral considerations that bear on our conduct independent of this norm: the term *gyp* inflicts pain (understood as indignity) on Romanies and confers no significant benefit, since non-offensive synonyms like "swindle" are readily available.[15] Crucially, according to the summary conception, the word *gyp* inflicts moral costs whether or not we adopt a norm barring its use, and the justification for conforming with the norm is grounded entirely in moral considerations that are independent of the norm's existence.

[13] Hancock speaks here as an informal representative of the Romani community, though he knows as well as anyone that Romanies are heterogeneous in their political views (Hancock, 2002). For a helpful discussion of the complexities of informal political representation, see Salkin (2021).

[14] Etymologists have not established an etymological connection between *gyp* and *gypsy* (Hoad 2003). However, for reasons that will become clear in Sect. 3, I believe that this etymological fact has little bearing on the validity of the political etiquette rule that Hancock recommends adopting.

[15] Cold comfort for headline writers and Scrabble players.

2.1 Three versions of the summary conception

The summary conception of political etiquette may be spelled out in a variety of ways. One significant dimension of variation is the degree to which the political etiquette norm is taken to govern the community's conduct, rather than merely reflecting a pattern whose grounds are antecedent to the norm. We can imagine plotting views along this dimension of variation, beginning with the purest instances of the summary conception and ending with views that decidedly belong to the practice conception, according to which the justification for conformity is partly grounded in the community's acceptance of the norm. To clarify the points on this spectrum, let us examine three versions of the summary conception, which move progressively closer to the practice conception. In the next subsection, I argue that none of these three accounts is adequate.

The purest version of the summary conception, which I will call the *simple summary conception*, attributes no special significance to the fact that the recommended practice is expressed as a general rule. On this view, the reason to refrain from using *gyp* in general is that on each occasion when one might do so, the balance of reasons militates against using it. This view does not explain the moral force of political etiquette because it presents political etiquette as having no such force. Rather than being an operative rule that shapes our conduct, political etiquette is, on this view, a mere pattern that emerges when we extrapolate from the verdicts of our moral reasoning in particular cases. Because the simple summary conception treats political etiquette as an emergent regularity rather than a social norm, it is not a plausible account of the phenomenon.

A second version, the *rule consequentialist summary conception*, does attribute significance to the fact that the norms of political etiquette are behavior-guiding norms rather than emergent patterns of conduct. To determine whether a political etiquette norm should be adopted, an adherent of this conception would make a comparison: on one hand, consider the conduct of a person who evaluates on each relevant occasion whether using *gyp* is morally justified or not, and acts accordingly; on the other hand, consider the conduct of a person who adopts a blanket policy never to use *gyp*, or to use *gyp* only when speaking to people whom one knows well, or to apply any other rule of conduct with respect to this word. Adopting the rule Don't Use *Gyp* is justified, on this view, if a person who does so would better comport with her moral obligations than she would if she adopted any other rule of conduct regarding the term, or no rule at all.[16]

A third version of the summary conception, which I call the *summary-coordination conception*, attributes greater significance to the policy expressed by the proposed political etiquette rule: on this view, the community ought to adopt Don't Use *Gyp* as a *social norm*, because doing so facilitates moral accountability. Let us say that a rule of conduct is a social norm in a given community if and only if members of that

[16] A proponent of the rule consequentialist summary view need not understand the underlying moral considerations in consequentialist terms. The moral reason marshaled on behalf of the Romanies might be understood in terms of nonconsequentialist conceptions of respect, for instance. For this reason and others, one could contest whether this view is properly considered an instance of rule consequentialism. Because that debate is orthogonal to the present discussion, I will not defend my view here.

community (1) generally believe that the rule is followed by others in the community, (2) generally believe that other community members morally endorse the rule (that is, that others believe it morally *ought* to be followed), and (3) take conditions 1 and 2 to give them sufficient reason to conform with the social norm.[17] Note that members of the community need not take the sufficient reason registered in (3) to be a moral reason. They may simply want to avoid informal sanctions or align their behavior with that of others.

The central insight of the summary-coordination view is that social norms provide a foundation for practices of accountability (cf. Van Schoelandt, 2018). When a moral rule acquires the status of a social norm in a community, it becomes more likely that any given community member will be *aware* of the rule and will *endorse* it as justified. Awareness and endorsement are morally significant because they constitute preconditions for moral accountability (Strawson, 2008; Van Schoelandt, 2018). If we are aware of a morally binding rule and believe it to be morally binding and we nevertheless transgress, then we are normally morally accountable for the transgression.

Hancock's *gyp* example is illustrative here. According to Hancock, the use of this word is hurtful and offensive to Romanies whether or not we have a social norm proscribing its use. Hancock recognizes that most people are ignorant of Romanies' legitimate moral interest in eliminating this word, and he holds his conversation partners to the behavioral standard Don't Use *Gyp* only *after* informing them of the moral reasons for it (Challa, 2013). Undertaking this process of moral education involves costs for Hancock and other Romanies (including having to reassure each offender, "That's okay. You didn't know…"). So Hancock and other Romanies would be better off if the moral considerations against using *gyp* were widely known and taken to be justified. If the community were coordinated in accepting Don't Use *Gyp*, then those with good will toward the Romani wouldn't use the word in the first place, and those who insisted on using it in spite of the norm could be held accountable.[18] So we should seek to bring such a political etiquette norm into existence where it does not yet exist, fortify it where it does exist, and comply with it in any case.

The summary-coordination view holds that the importance of holding one another accountable on matters of social concern furnishes us with reason to adopt political etiquette rules as social norms. Accountability is important in the domain of political

[17] This definition is inspired by Bicchieri (2006). My definition differs in one important respect from Bicchieri's. Bicchieri deploys the notion of a norm in order to understand and change motivations to act. On her view, a norm is "social" for a particular agent if that agent's motivation to comply with it is conditional on her beliefs about co-community members' conduct and normative beliefs. Because an individual's moral commitments are unconditional, moral norms are excluded from being social norms (Bicchieri, 2006). But the present focus on accountability makes it appropriate to consider moral norms and conditional social norms together (Van Schoelandt, 2018). So for our purposes, defining social norms as ones in which the expectation of general conformity is sufficient but not necessary for compliance captures the appropriate scope of norms.

[18] Real life is a bit more complex than this story suggests. For one thing, norms may differ between micro-communities, so outsiders might not always know the local norms. Moreover, political etiquette norms are subject to rapid change, so those who briefly tune out could miss a norm shift. Consequently, the adoption of a norm does not guarantee that it will be known to every member of the community, much less to outsiders. Nonetheless, more settled social norms come closer to ensuring a shared behavioral expectation against which deviation can be judged willful.

etiquette because the moral interests of target groups may not be well understood by the broader community. In the absence of shared political etiquette norms, many of us would not meet our obligations to these groups because we would remain ignorant of their interests or would fail to recognize the changes in our conduct that their interests call for. Instituting a political etiquette norm that encodes our moral obligations might thus enable us to coordinate our normative expectations across our community, thereby licensing us in holding all members of society accountable to vulnerable groups.

The coordination version of the summary conception is attractive because it allows for the possibility that political etiquette alters our normative landscape, rather than merely reflecting it. Although it still derives the substance and force of political etiquette norms from norm-independent moral facts, the summary-coordination view suggests that the range of permissible responses to norm violations may vary based on the existence of political etiquette norms.

At the same time, the summary-coordination view offers an attractive solution to the puzzle of political etiquette: it provides an intuitive justification for the difference between political etiquette norms that morally command our allegiance (e.g., "do not display Nazi iconography") and those that do not (e.g., "do not display queer iconography"). According to all three versions of the summary conception, political etiquette norms regulating particular gestures inherit their normative force from our antecedent reasons to perform (or avoid performing) those gestures. Because political etiquette norms are cultural artifacts, they may or may not accurately reflect normative reality. Norms against publicly displaying queer iconography belie the norm-independent moral facts, so there is no requirement to conform with them. Norms against publicly displaying Nazi iconography reflect true moral obligations and therefore ought to command our allegiance.

2.2 Trouble for the summary conception

The summary conception tells us that political etiquette norms inherit their moral force from antecedent moral considerations, so political etiquette norms are morally binding precisely to the extent that they reflect our antecedent moral obligations. This would be a satisfactory response to the puzzle if our endorsement of political etiquette norms matched our norm-independent moral judgments about the conduct they regulate. But in some cases, the considerations marshaled on behalf of widely accepted norms seem strained.

A number of critics have pointed out that political etiquette's prescriptions and proscriptions seem to reach beyond what is morally required. For example, responding to complaints that his use of *gyp* is offensive, William Safire writes,

> Does the verb *to gyp* come from *gypsy*—and if so, is its use proscribed because it derogates a race, nation or group? ... [N]o proof has yet been found [for the etymological connection to *gypsy*]. The word has a separate root as a male college attendant in the old English schools, and a third root as a name for a female dog, and another as a clip of *gypsum*.... I will continue to use *gyp* as a verb,

> secure in the fact that I harbor no bias toward the entire clan, which suffered persecution in Hitler's Germany. (1986, 88)

In a similar spirit, Stephen Pinker writes,

> Many people are puzzled by the replacement of formerly unexceptionable terms by new ones: *Negro* by *black* by *African American*, *Spanish-American* by *Hispanic* by *Latino*, *crippled* by *handicapped* by *disabled* by *challenged*.... [S]ometimes a term can be tainted or unfashionable while a minor variant is fine: consider *colored people* versus *people of color*, *Afro-American* versus *African American*, *Negro*—Spanish for "black"—versus *black*. If anything, a respect for literal meaning should send us off looking for a new word for the descendants of Europeans, who are neither white nor Caucasian. (2002, 212)

The justifications offered for these political etiquette rules, rooted in antecedent moral reasons, seem unpersuasive to Safire and Pinker. If these critics are right, and if the summary conception is right, then we should give up the belief that these political etiquette norms are morally binding. Yet many of us are unwilling to give up that belief.

I expect many readers to find Safire and Pinker's objections to these political etiquette norms unconvincing. Some may insist that the critics have failed to excavate the true moral justification for the norms under discussion: Safire puts too much stock in etymology and good intentions; Pinker's comparison between *colored people* and *people of color* implausibly presupposes that the meanings of these phrases are compositional (see Camp, 2013). Although these responses are plausible, I suspect that the *impulse* to resist arguments like these is partly motivated by a covert commitment to the summary conception, combined with the intuition that these norms are morally binding. For those in the grip of the summary conception, it will seem wrong to concede that conduct proscribed by a proper political etiquette norm would be permissible if not for the norm.[19] Such readers will be disposed to resist any purported example of a morally binding political etiquette norm that goes beyond what antecedent morality requires.

Here, then, is another strategy for establishing the existence of a normative gap: we might say that political etiquette norms are underinclusive. If political etiquette norms are justified in the way that the summary conception presumes, we should be surprised that similar conduct is not prohibited by political etiquette. Here are a few examples. Wearing blackface is prohibited by American political etiquette because of its connection with minstrelsy, but singing "Oh, Susanna" (a minstrel song whose original lyrics included a racial slur) is permissible (Foster, 1863; Kalambakal, 2006). The N-word may not even be mentioned, due to the risk that a mention could be misheard as a use, but mentioning other slurs (*bitch*, *faggot*, *retard*) is permitted in spite of the same risk. Praising a black person for being *articulate* is prohibited because it exceptionalizes its target and discloses low expectations of black people (Perry,

[19] I focus on proscribed conduct for the sake of simplicity, but the same could be said of prescriptions.

2011), but praising a black person for being *responsible* or *well-dressed* is permissible, or at least less objectionable (see, e.g., Alim and Smitherman, 2012).

Again, readers may feel that there are important differences between the prohibited and non-prohibited conduct in each of these cases. Some might question whether the purported justifications offered are correctly capturing the reason that the prohibited conduct is thought objectionable. Some might argue for epistemic humility, insistently deferring to the authority of members of these groups to pronounce on their interests. Some might become convinced that we ought to adopt a political etiquette norm prohibiting the hitherto-permitted conduct described in some of these examples. And some might be inclined to follow Safire and Pinker, concluding that political etiquette is normatively unjustified and should be abandoned wholesale. But if we are inclined to respond in these ways, we should ask ourselves whether these responses are driven by an implicit allegiance to the summary conception. If so, we should consider whether giving up the summary conception might be a better way to go. In the next section, I argue that the practice conception fares better.

3 The practice conception of political etiquette

In this section, I spell out and defend the practice conception of political etiquette. Recall that the practice conception of political etiquette differs from the summary conception in the relationship that it posits between our standing moral obligations and the conduct regulated by the norm. According to the summary conception, the moral status of the conduct is logically prior to the norm, and the norm merely summarizes those antecedent facts about the conduct; at most, the norm serves to coordinate a community's understanding of those antecedent facts. In contrast, according to the practice conception, the norm itself contributes to the moral quality of the conduct by imbuing the conduct with social meaning.

Note that an adherent of the practice conception need not deny that various moral considerations may count in favor of or against the conduct in a way that does not depend on the social meaning that the political etiquette norms give to that conduct. For example, whether or not our cultural milieu includes a political etiquette norm against *manspreading* or *mansplaining*, we have moral reason to make space for others on public accommodations and to recognize women's expertise, and the practice conception can recognize this fact. The practice conception departs from the summary conception in claiming that the norm itself can alter the balance of moral considerations by transforming the meaning of the conduct it regulates.

According to the practice conception, political etiquette constitutes an idiomatic system that assigns symbolic meanings to conspicuous norm-responsive conduct.[20] Conspicuous conduct in conformity with the norm signifies respect for the norm's target group's social status (or more precisely, for the status claim encoded in the

[20] My understanding of political etiquette as a kind of idiom echoes Amy Olberding's account of manners in *The Wrong of Rudeness* (2019) and Chenyang Li's account of *li* in "Li as Cultural Grammar: On the Relation between Li and Ren in Confucius' 'Analects'" (2007). See also Táíwò (2020), noting similarities between my account and Li's and Olberding's.

norm), while conspicuous conduct in violation of the norm signifies disrespect for the target group's claimed status. Likewise, in response to a violation, conspicuous enforcement of a norm signifies respect for the target group's social status claim, while conspicuous non-enforcement signifies disrespect for that group's status claim. When the target group's status claim is rightful, we have a moral reason to communicate respect for that claim, in which case the idiomatic meanings of conspicuous norm-responsive conduct give us moral reasons to comport with political etiquette and to enforce it. These reasons are rendered weighty when the group in question is subject to pervasive social marginalization, both because this background makes each instance of disrespectful treatment more harmful to individual members of the group and because each performance of disrespect for such a group exacerbates the group's marginalization.

To defend this view, I begin by explaining the relationship between our standing moral reasons of respect and patterns of marginalization. I argue that these are connected through our entitlement to *assurance*, which I understand as an entitlement to evidence supporting the confident judgment that our rightful claims to social status will be respected. Next, I explain how political etiquette norms, once they are up and running, offer a means of providing assurance, which establishes a moral reason to comply with political etiquette, and in some cases to enforce it. These are *synchronic* reasons of political etiquette. Next, I describe the way that norm-independent features of the regulated conduct may figure in our moral reasoning on the practice conception, arguing that these features not only count for or against engaging in that conduct on particular occasions, but also give us reason to influence the system of political etiquette norms itself, either sustaining, eroding, or altering the norms of political etiquette that we find in our communities. These are *diachronic* reasons of political etiquette. Finally, I explain the how the practice conception accommodates the core insights that the summary conception captured. I argue that the practice conception, like the summary conception, can generate the verdict that morally abhorrent political etiquette rules (like the rules of Jim Crow etiquette) do not generate synchronic moral reasons to comply and enforce. On the practice conception, we get the highly plausible verdict that abhorrent rules generate diachronic moral reasons to change the political etiquette system.

3.1 The entitlement to assurance

Our reasons of etiquette are rooted in our standing moral obligation to treat others respectfully, but the standing reasons generated by this obligation are not uniform in strength. One contextual factor that contributes to the strength of these reasons is the assurance of the individual or the social group in question. To have *assurance* is to have evidentiary grounds for a high degree of confidence that one will be accorded one's rightful social status—meaning the status to which one is *in fact* entitled, as a matter of justice. An individual may be said to have assurance in a particular setting if the available social evidence suggests that others in that setting will treat her in accordance with her rightful status. A social group has assurance in the context of a larger community if the available social evidence suggests that within that community, members of the group will not be wrongfully demoted in status because of

their group membership. A group is *vulnerable* to the extent that it lacks assurance.[21] Because the evidence that informs our expectations of individual treatment often depends on the evidence about the treatment of groups we belong to, an individual's assurance in any given setting is often tightly linked to the assurance of the groups to which she belongs.[22] In this section, I argue that the moral force of a given political etiquette norm's prescriptions and proscriptions depends upon its target group's assurance or vulnerability.

To establish this claim, I first need to dissect the normative notion of *assurance* and its component notion, *rightful social status*. I begin with assurance. Although the word "assurance" may connote a mental state (say, confidence), I use the term here to mean *evidentiary grounds for* confidence that one will be regarded in accordance with one's rightful status. This distinction is important because it reflects the fact that no one else can give another person confidence in any proposition, and that people are not always responsive to the weight of available evidence. Consequently, although we cannot be obligated to produce *beliefs* in others, we may be obligated to provide others with *evidence* for beliefs, such as the belief that they will be treated justly. On the view developed here, assurance is something we are entitled to, and that entitlement generates obligations in others. So assurance is best spelled out as a state of evidence rather than a state of mind.

Why should we think that people are entitled to assurance, either as individuals or as groups? The reason is derived from our rightful claims to social status; let us turn to that concept next. An individual's social status may be understood roughly to mean her ability to elicit expressions of respect from others, which often take the form of deference. The verb "elicit" in this definition weaves together normative and descriptive components, which we need to tease apart. In a purely descriptive mode, we might say that an individual's social status consists in a pattern of deferential treatment by others. This descriptive strand reflects the fact that our actual social status may come apart from our rightful claims to social status. For example, feudal serfs and nobles were in fact moral equals (and so had equal *claim* to social status), but they differed in their actual social status because the status of nobility enabled its bearer to elicit deferential treatment from others, while the status of serfdom did not. In a community structured by such treatment, the difference in status would persist even if all members of the community privately believed that serfs and nobles were equals. But while the power to elicit respectful treatment from others is necessary for high social status, it is not sufficient; one must also be widely seen as possessing that power rightfully—or at least, it must be widely believed that one is widely seen as possessing that power rightfully.[23] This is the normative strand of status. In the

[21] It follows from this definition that "vulnerability" is a characteristic that comes in degrees, not a categorical property. On the view I defend, the more vulnerable a norm's target is, the more powerful a moral reason we have to comply with the norm, to enforce it, to tolerate its attendant costs, and so on.

[22] Exceptions to this generalization occur in contexts where we have extensive individualized evidence informing our expectations of treatment. For example, the black sheep of the family might lack assurance at a family gathering, and this lack of assurance may have nothing to do with her race, gender, or sexual orientation.

[23] If it is widely believed that a group is widely seen as a rightful target of respectful treatment, but in fact members of the community generally believe that the group's members are *not* rightful targets of such

absence of such a widespread normative belief or, more precisely, of such a descriptive belief about *others'* normative beliefs, the pattern of deferential treatment does not constitute social status. If it comes to light that everyone thinks the nobles are wielding power wrongfully, they might still be able to elicit deferential treatment, but they would no longer enjoy high status. Or, to take a more pedestrian example, shoppers might treat a mall Santa with all the deference befitting a visiting dignitary to make an impression on their children, but the mall Santa's social status is not thereby elevated, because the adults know that their deferential treatment is a kind of game. In short, the descriptive facts that constitute social status include facts about the community's normative beliefs about status-bearers' entitlement to such treatment.

The final ingredient in the notion of a rightful claim to social status is the *rightful claim*—a thoroughly normative notion. A person has a rightful claim to a certain social status if they are in fact normatively entitled to be treated in accordance with that status. Most of our rightful claims to social status are rightful claims to equal status (Anderson, 1999; Miller, 1997; Scheffler, 2003; Waldron, 2012a).[24] In virtue of our humanity we are all entitled to certain forms of respectful treatment: others should make room for us to move through space, pay attention when we say "excuse me," and help us up if we fall down. Moreover, in some local contexts, some of us are normatively entitled to high status in a hierarchy. To take a familiar example, the status of professor entitles those who occupy it to elicit certain behaviors from students: ending conversations when the professor begins lecturing, accommodating the professor's time constraints, addressing professors by their proper titles, and so on. For such claims to high status to be *rightful*, they must be justifiable to others in the community (Scanlon, 1998). Because a justifiable social system may permit professors, police officers, doctors, and judges to command deference, these professionals may come to have *rightful* claims to high social status.[25]

Regrettably, our actual social status may come apart from our rightful claims to social status. On one hand, a person can wrongfully command high social status, as feudal lords did; on the other hand, a person may have a rightful entitlement to social status that is not realized in practice, as feudal serfs did.[26] In the latter case, the problem may be a failure of behavior (people do not generally perform the respectful gestures that are called for) or a failure of belief (the community lacks a widespread belief that this status is normatively warranted).

In what follows, I assume that individuals have rightful status claims, and that we are entitled to remediation when our rightful status claims are not honored. But to establish that we are entitled to *assurance*, I need to show that we are entitled to a

treatment, then the community is subject to pluralistic ignorance. In such a case, the status of the group is vulnerable, even though it might not be widely thought to be vulnerable.

[24] Jeremy Waldron points out that our rightful claims to equal status may themselves be claims to high status, where "high" is understood objectively rather than relatively (2012a, 13–46).

[25] Of course, such a social system is justifiable only if these professionals' entitlement to deference is restricted to professional contexts and appropriately defeasible by other contextual considerations.

[26] I am assuming here that even if Waldron is right that all of us are normatively entitled to be treated as nobles, the fact that this high status is shared equally means that the status we would rightfully command could not be quite as high as the status that feudal lords enjoyed.

body of evidence that licenses confidence that we will be treated in accordance with our rightful status. I turn to this idea next.

In *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Jeremy Waldron defends the view that we are entitled to assurance.[27] Waldron anchors his argument in the Rawlsian view that in a well-ordered society, "everyone accepts, and *knows that everyone else accepts*, the very same principles of justice" (Rawls 2005, 35, emphasis added). Because society is fundamentally a cooperative enterprise, Rawls claims, we need to know that others in our community take themselves to be engaged in the same enterprise that we are, and that they are willing to undertake it for the same reasons that we are. Waldron links these abstract ideas to social status by highlighting the significance of assurance for vulnerable social groups—those who have reason to doubt that their rightful claims to social status will be honored:

> [F]or the members of vulnerable minorities, minorities who in the recent past have been hated or despised by others within the society, the assurance offers a confirmation of their membership: they, too, are members of society in good standing; they have what it takes to interact on a straightforward basis with others around here, in public, on the streets, in the shops, in business, and to be treated—along with everyone else—as proper objects of society's protection and concern. (2012b, 5)

In short, restoring assurance is a necessary prerequisite for the reciprocity that Rawls characterized as the foundation of a just society, because without assurance, members of marginalized groups reasonably doubt that their compatriots are committed to a conception of justice that they can share.

Waldron's argument reveals a connection between a social group's vulnerability and the obligations generated by its members' entitlement to assurance. For a group whose assurance is secure, a one-off instance of disrespectful treatment cannot diminish its status. After all, social status is constituted by a robust pattern of treatment, and a few incidental deviations cannot disrupt the pattern. But for a group that lacks assurance, a single disrespectful act (say, a shouted racial slur or wolf-whistle) contributes to a competing motif—one in which the group's actual social status falls short of its entitlement. For this reason, our entitlement to assurance generates feeble pro tanto reasons to conduct ourselves respectfully toward groups whose rightful claims to social status are secure, but it generates powerful pro tanto reasons to conduct ourselves respectfully toward vulnerable groups. Calling a heterosexual person *breeder* may be disrespectful, but it cannot erode assurance unless it becomes part of a larger pattern. On the other hand, calling a lesbian *dyke* (in an unreclaimed context) erodes the assurance of all lesbians, and may also threaten the assurance of other queer people.

This observation returns us at last to the domain of political etiquette. We have established that our entitlement to assurance gives us pro tanto moral reasons to generate social evidence that members of vulnerable groups will be treated in accordance

[27] Waldron's notion of assurance differs slightly from my own: while I take assurance to be a strictly evidentiary state, Waldron sometimes uses the term to denote a mental state.

with their rightful status. In the next section, I show how political etiquette norms hitch the moral force of this background obligation to their prescriptions and proscriptions by transforming the meaning of conspicuous norm-responsive conduct.

3.2 Synchronic moral reasons of political etiquette

Recall Hancock's remarks about the word *gyp*. According to the summary conception of political etiquette, the reason to adopt Don't Use *Gyp* as a policy is that (a) whether or not we have such a norm, using the word *gyp* inflicts indignity on Romanies and (b) adopting Don't Use *Gyp* therefore guides us to comport with our antecedent moral reasons. All of this may be right. But on the practice conception, we can say something further: an up-and-running political etiquette rule itself might conventionally code the word *gyp* as disrespectful to Romanies, and where it does, this convention gives us a further moral reason not to use the word. This reason comes apart from any antecedent, norm-independent reasons. Therefore, even if the offensiveness of *gyp* depends on a supposed etymological connection between *gyp* and *gypsy* and etymologists are unable to substantiate such a connection, the practice conception of political etiquette would still generate the verdict that we ought not use *gyp* when an up-and-running political etiquette norm prohibits doing so.

This feature enables the practice conception to overcome the objections that faced the summary conception. A political etiquette norm may be established to demonstrate respect for a group whose rightful status claims are vulnerable, even if the prescribed conduct is not particularly valuable to the target group. The expectation that Hanukkah be included in businesses' and schools' winter decorations, and that people greet one another with "Happy Holidays" rather than "Merry Christmas" in December, exemplifies this possibility. Hanukkah is a minor holiday on the Jewish calendar, but its status is inflated in Christian-dominated communities because it often falls close to Christmas. The social expectation that non-Jews acknowledge Hanukkah can be embarrassing, since it causes non-Jews to disclose ignorance about Judaism in the midst of what is meant as an inclusive gesture toward Jews. (For example, non-Jews might disclose a mistaken belief that Hanukkah is still approaching when it has already passed, or that Jews will need time off work for Hanukkah, when in fact most Jews work on this holiday.) And yet, the norms calling for Hanukkah-inclusive gestures in December still generate pro tanto moral reasons to conform, and these reasons are rendered weighty in contexts where Jews are marginalized.

When a political etiquette norm requires conduct that does not benefit its target group, the practice conception and the summary conception produce divergent verdicts on the rule's moral force. The summary conception suggests that the obligation of political etiquette is extinguished if norm-compliant behavior does not serve the group's antecedent, norm-independent interests. In contrast, according to the practice conception, a political etiquette norm may give us moral reason to engage in conduct that, apart from the norm, would be neutral or even antagonistic to the target group's interests. I think this is the right conclusion to reach. But it may leave us with the worry that the practice conception attributes moral force to norms that we would be better off without. The next subsection addresses this concern by identifying another kind of pro tanto moral reason that political etiquette generates according to the prac-

tice conception. Where this section discussed the pro tanto moral reasons given by the present content of an up-and-running political etiquette norm, the next subsection considers the moral reasons to shape political etiquette's content.

3.3 Diachronic moral reasons of political etiquette

Political etiquette is conventional and therefore subject to change. Other things being equal, actions that comply with or flout a political etiquette norm contribute to that norm's fortification or erosion, respectively. The fact that we can contribute to changes in political etiquette gives rise to a further complication: the criteria for something's *being* political etiquette are not identical to the criteria for something's being *good* political etiquette.

One thing that makes a particular norm of political etiquette bad is that it supports non-rightful status claims. Jim Crow racial etiquette, which operated to reinforce white supremacy, exemplifies this problem. On the account I present here, norms that support non-rightful status claims cannot produce *any* synchronic pro tanto moral reason to conform, because the meaning we are expected to express by conforming with these norms is something that we morally ought not express.

Another thing that can make a political etiquette norm defective is that it demands too much on behalf of groups whose rightful social status is not vulnerable. The political etiquette norms of the men's rights movement exemplify this feature, if we interpret these norms as aiming to redress men's subordination and restore men to their rightful status as women's equals.[28] Granted, there is nothing inherently wrong with using social norms to support *secure* status claims (as opposed to vulnerable ones), but these norms have a tendency to outrun their justification. We have comparatively weak synchronic pro tanto moral reasons to comply with norms that reinforce secure claims to rightful status, because a failure to recognize such claims (or even an outright denial of rightful status for a secure social group) does little to harm its target's assurance. When norms are instated to reinforce *secure* claims to rightful status, the costs of conformity and enforcement tend to eclipse our weak pro tanto reasons to conform with and enforce the norm.

A third characteristic that might make a norm of political etiquette bad is that it calls for conduct that is not beneficial to its target group, or even conduct that harms the target group. The Hanukkah Inclusion norm discussed in the preceding section arguably exemplifies this defect. Despite this flaw, Hanukkah Inclusion still confers moral force to its prescriptions so long as its target group (Jews) is vulnerable. How, then, does the practice conception accommodate the intuition that there is something regrettable about this norm's moral prescriptions?

Alongside synchronic reasons of political etiquette, the practice conception also accommodates *diachronic* reasons of political etiquette, which may conflict with the synchronic reasons. Diachronic reasons are reasons to contribute to a good political etiquette system—that is, to act in a way that tends to fortify the good norms and

[28] Some men's rights advocates see men's rightful status as superior to women. Norms that promote men's superior status are bad for the same reason that Jim Crow political etiquette is bad: they support non-rightful status claims.

erode or ameliorate the bad ones. Often, these reasons counsel us to engage in behavior that is not governed by the political etiquette norms themselves. We might, for example, advocate for the adoption (or abandonment) of such-and-such a general rule on behalf of this-or-that group. But in some cases, diachronic reasons may counsel us to operate squarely within the domain of conduct regulated by political etiquette. For instance, we might conspicuously violate a rule or decline to enforce it in order to contribute to its erosion. To encourage the adoption of a novel political etiquette norm, we might engage in proleptic enforcement, using informal sanctions to hold others accountable to a norm that is not yet well-established. (Think of someone who criticizes people for using "Latino" rather than "Latinx.") Diachronic considerations may give us additional pro tanto reasons to conform with a norm we approve of, and to sanction those who violate it, in order to fortify that norm.

Finally, in the case of a norm that prescribes conduct that is not in the target group's interest (such as Hanukkah Inclusion), we might strategically violate the norm in order to bring about its erosion. We have a pro tanto diachronic reason to do so if that strategic violation is liable to contribute to the norm's erosion. In cases like these, political etiquette's diachronic pro tanto reasons and its synchronic pro tanto reasons come into conflict.

3.4 Virtues of the practice conception

In discussing the summary conception of political etiquette, I highlighted an attractive feature of that account. I am now in a position to show that the practice conception shares this feature. Like the summary conception, the practice conception correctly and elegantly generates the verdict that some political etiquette norms morally command our allegiance (e.g., Do Not Display Nazi Iconography) while others do not (e.g., Do Not Display Queer Iconography), and provides an intuitive justification for the difference: Nazi iconography is banned on behalf of groups that lack assurance, including Jews, Romanies, queer people, and people with disabilities. Prohibitions on queer iconography, on the other hand, are based on a wrongful status claim—namely, the notion that straight people are entitled to higher status than queer people. Moreover, those who disagree with my verdict and endorse Do Not Display Queer Iconography invariably do so by disputing that it is rooted in a wrongful status claim: perhaps because they believe that straight people have rightful claims to superior status that are threatened by queer iconography, or because they think that the target of this norm is some other social group whose rightful status claims they believe to be vulnerable.

Unlike the summary conception, the practice conception can also accommodate our intuitions about norms whose contours seem over- and under-inclusive relative to their underlying moral justification, without resorting to excessive deference or strained claims about the moral status of the etiquette-governed conduct. Recall that the summary account had a hard time explaining why wearing blackface is impermissible while singing "Oh, Susanna" remains acceptable. On the practice conception, if a political etiquette norm targets a group whose assurance is vulnerable, the message conventionally communicated by conspicuous norm-responsive conduct gives us a strong reason to conform. It does so even if the conduct itself warrants no strong

moral judgment, and even if there is no morally significant distinction between the prescribed or proscribed acts (wearing blackface) and other acts in the vicinity (singing “Oh, Susanna”) that are not similarly regulated by political etiquette.

4 Conclusion

I have argued that the practice of political etiquette gives rise to *synchronic* and *diachronic* pro tanto moral reasons, distinct from the antecedent reasons that we have to engage in or refrain from the conduct prescribed or proscribed by political etiquette norms. We have synchronic reasons to comply with political etiquette (and, in some cases, to enforce others’ conformity) when doing so contributes to a social group’s assurance, and those reasons are rendered weighty when that group’s rightful status claims are vulnerable. We have diachronic reasons to engage in behavior that tends to erode bad political etiquette norms, preserve good ones, and alter those that are in need of reform.

Of course, we disagree about many of the moral and social facts that undergird these political etiquette obligations. Supporters of the Movement for Black Lives believe that black people are vulnerable, while their counterparts in the All Lives Matter camp deny this; meanwhile, those who sport Blue Lives Matter flags would insist that police officers are the social group whose vulnerability ought to concern us. We may disagree both about the status that groups actually command and about the status that they normatively ought to command. This philosophical analysis of political etiquette alone does not equip us to answer any of these questions, so it cannot render verdicts on particular norm-responsive behaviors.

Nonetheless, a theory of political etiquette can help by shedding light on the structured set of considerations that bear on such choices. The analysis presented here may not only help us distinguish the considerations that bear on our own conduct, but may also help us identify the normative and empirical disagreements that underly the culture wars of political etiquette. By carefully regimenting these considerations, we can at least clarify what we are so vehemently disagreeing about.

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