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Civility, Trust, and Responding to Echo Chambers

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Abstract

Due to the rampant epistemic distrust present in echo chamber members towards outsiders, responding to echo chambers with civil debate is unlikely to lead to any agreement or compromise. Moreover, a civil response may contribute to the echo chamber's inflated sense of epistemic status, which is precisely what needs to be dismantled or diminished if agreement/compromise is to be made possible. When responding to particularly dangerous and resistant echo chambers, a moderately uncivil response may be warranted.

Résumé

En raison de la méfiance épistémique généralisée que ressentent les membres des chambres d'écho envers les étrangers, il est peu probable que de répondre à ce phénomène par un débat civil conduise à un accord ou à un compromis. De plus, une réponse civile peut contribuer au sentiment exagéré, dans la chambre d'écho, de jouir d'un haut statut épistémique, qui est précisément ce qui doit être démantelé ou diminué si un accord ou un compromis doit être rendu possible. En réponse à des chambres d'écho particulièrement dangereuses et résistantes, une réponse modérément incivile peut être justifiée.

Keywords: civility; epistemic trust; echo chambers; conspiracy theories; applied ethics; social epistemology

1. Introduction

According to a poll cited in a *Global News* article published in June 2021, 9% of polled Canadians said they will refuse to be vaccinated against COVID-19 (Boynton, 2021). In the United States, as many as 25% of the population refuse,

which could put herd immunity at risk (Brumfiel, 2021). Individuals mentioned several reasons for their vaccine hesitancy or refusal, such as lack of trust in mRNA technology as well as concern over the fact that the science of COVID-19 is rapidly changing (Bogart et al., 2021). Such concerns may be valid. However, it is likely that many — though certainly not all — such vaccine refusers are trapped in a particularly harmful version of what C. Thi Nguyen calls an “echo chamber,” i.e., “an epistemic community which creates a significant disparity in trust between members and non-members,” while systematically discrediting the testimony of outsiders (Nguyen, 2020, p. 146). In this case, they may be trapped as a result of unfounded conspiracy theories circulating online about the COVID-19 pandemic, such as those in the widely discredited documentary, “Plandemic” (Cook et al., 2020), the theory that COVID-19 vaccines alter recipients’ DNA, and/or the theory that the vaccines contain microchips to be used for social surveillance made by Bill Gates (Dickinson, 2021). For the sake of discussion, let’s say that there are enough vaccine refusers trapped in anti-vax echo chambers as a result of such conspiracy theories to pose a significant risk to the safety of those individuals and others. Should the concerned public insist on civil debate and a cool, rational exchange of facts and reasons until sufficient consensus is reached, or rather opt for a less ‘civil’ strategy?

Currently, vaccine refusers are facing many restrictions (e.g., travel). While these restrictions encourage many vaccine-hesitant people to receive their doses, such restrictions are precisely the sort of move that conspiracy theory fuelled anti-vax echo chamber members expect, and such measures are unlikely to sway their beliefs. Moreover, many people may view these restrictions as a coercive violation of liberty, and, as such, the restrictions run the risk of creating even further distrust of governments, scientists, and medical professionals. While coercion may be undesirable for various reasons, I am sceptical of relying on civil debate to reach consensus or compromise where conspiracy theory fuelled echo chambers are involved. In this article, I will argue that in a debate between epistemic communities or networks where one or more of them is an echo chamber, and the echo chamber(s) involved is both morally and epistemically problematic, a less than civil response(s) is warranted. Relying on entirely civil debate to deal with these sorts of echo chambers may itself be morally problematic. Reaching a middle ground between unconditional civility and coercion is preferable when it comes to dealing with the problem of echo chambers.

I will start by giving a brief explanation of Nguyen’s account of echo chambers, and I will explain why there is a chance that many COVID-19 vaccine refusers are trapped in them. Next, I will offer two conditions an echo chamber must satisfy in order for my thesis to apply to it. To be clear, however, I intend to use such anti-vax echo chambers as an example to illustrate a broader point about morally and epistemically pernicious echo chambers in general and the practical and moral challenges they pose to governments and individuals attempting to respond to them. Even if it turns out that I overestimate, or am mistaken, about how harmful COVID-19 anti-vax echo chambers are, I believe that my arguments will apply to others, such as neo-Nazi echo chambers and climate change deniers. I will then turn to Cheshire Calhoun’s (2010) account of civility as a potential model and source of guidance.

Finally, I will offer a critique of Calhoun's position, and I will argue that we should not insist on responding entirely civilly to particularly dangerous anti-vax (and other) echo chambers, and that a (moderately) uncivil response is justified. The epistemic distrust towards outsiders present in echo chambers prevents civility from functioning as a means to reaching agreement or compromise. Moreover, to respond with civility might be to reinforce or confirm the echo chamber's inflated sense of epistemic standing, which is precisely what must be dismantled (or at least diminished) if the goal of the debate is to reach a reasonable compromise or increase convergence between opposing views.

2. Echo Chambers and Anti-Vaxxers

According to Nguyen's analysis, echo chambers are epistemic communities or social-epistemic structures where "general agreement with some core set of beliefs is a prerequisite for membership," and which manipulate the trust of their members leading to excessive distrust — particularly, epistemic distrust — towards outsiders (Nguyen, 2020, p. 146). Insiders' "epistemic credentials" have been amplified and outsiders are excluded through "epistemic discrediting" (Nguyen, 2020, p. 146), i.e., discrediting of outsiders' status as knowers. This leads to echo chamber members being actively insulated and "alienated from any of the usual sources of contrary argument, consideration, or evidence" (Nguyen, 2020, p. 147); it also leads members to hold a high level of (epistemic) trust towards insiders. Moreover, echo chambers can contain what Nguyen calls a "disagreement-reinforcement mechanism," which are mechanisms by which the presentation of contrary beliefs and evidence from outsiders lead to a reinforcement of the echo chamber members' beliefs (Nguyen, 2020, p. 147). Nguyen's concept of a disagreement-reinforcement mechanism is influenced by Endre Begby's analysis of "evidential preemption" (Begby, 2021), which works roughly as follows. Suppose a leader or some other member of an echo chamber wants to make a claim, *p*. Before making this claim, that person will predict that outsiders will say not-*p* for such and such reasons. Thus, not-*p*, and various arguments and reasons in not-*p*'s favour will have been predicted and taken into account by the echo chamber's background beliefs, and thus outsiders' claim, not-*p*, is neutralized in its epistemic force (Begby, 2021; Nguyen, 2020). Furthermore, this prediction by echo chamber insiders will reinforce members' trust towards insiders and their beliefs while also reinforcing distrust towards outsiders (Begby, 2021; Nguyen, 2020). As Nguyen points out, the disagreement-reinforcement mechanisms present in echo chambers can explain why the beliefs of some members of, for example, anti-vax echo chambers seem to be entirely impervious to widely accepted scientific evidence. For example, if a scientist or medical professional presents evidence for the claim that COVID-19 vaccines do not alter DNA, this is likely to be predicted by the conspiracy theory that claims that they do alter DNA. This conspiracy theory groups' beliefs will then be reinforced, and will likely view that scientist or medical professional as untrustworthy and part of the conspiracy.

It is likely that many (though not all) communities surrounding conspiracy theories function as echo chambers, including vaccine conspiracies (Nguyen, 2020).

See, for example, a 2010 study conducted by Ana Kata that showed that all of the known anti-vaccination websites at the time contained themes of conspiracy theories and expressed distrust for scientific experts. While Kata's study is now 11 years old, there's a good chance that similar results could be shown for many anti-COVID-19-vaccination groups, especially given the fact that an elaborate conspiracy theory has been developed that suggests that Bill Gates is behind COVID-19 and plans to use the vaccine to insert microchips into those who receive it. According to a *National Post* article, almost 15% of polled Canadians believed the theory that Gates is behind the pandemic, which is a striking number (Osman, 2020). It is plausible that some Canadians are trapped in anti-vax echo chambers, considering that many conspiracy theory groups possess all or many of the elements of an echo chamber (Nguyen, 2020).

Such anti-vax echo chambers also satisfy two requirements that, I will now suggest, must be met if my thesis is to apply to them. Namely, they satisfy both what I call (1): the 'harm requirement,' and (2): the 'poor epistemic standing requirement.' Below, I will argue that moderate incivility is a justified response to some echo chambers. While I do not think such a response is justified response to *all* echo chambers, I will argue that it is justified for those echo chambers that pose a significant risk of harm to either their members, outsiders, or both; those that are on very shaky epistemic ground; those that are epistemically vicious insofar as they lead their members to hold more false beliefs than true beliefs; and those that are relatively impervious to, or actively reject, the best current empirical evidence. The extent of harm that anti-COVID-19-vaccination groups pose to themselves and others is currently unclear due to the rapidly changing science of COVID-19. The new Delta variant has proven to be more resilient to current vaccines, and moreover, fully vaccinated individuals can still carry and transmit the virus. Nevertheless, recent evidence has shown that current COVID-19 vaccines remain highly effective against disease caused by the Delta variant (Bernal et al., 2021; Nasreen et al., 2021), and that current vaccines continue to be effective against hospitalization and death caused by all variants (Nasreen et al., 2021). As such, experts still recommend vaccination as the most effective way to combat the COVID-19 pandemic by reducing transmission and protecting against severe disease (Christie et al., 2021). Thus, those who refuse to be vaccinated may be putting themselves and others at risk of substantial harm, and as such, those conspiracy theory fuelled anti-vax echo chambers satisfy (1), i.e., the harm requirement, insofar as they contribute to that risk. Furthermore, many of these echo chambers' core beliefs are not based on reliable evidence or are based on information that has been debunked by relatively uncontroversial evidence, satisfying (2). Mohammad Saiful Islam et al. (2021) investigated 57 conspiracy theories about COVID-19 vaccines and found that 97% of them were false. Marios Constantinou et al. (2021) also found that stronger belief in COVID-19 conspiracy theories predicts distrust in science and unwillingness to follow what current scientific experts recommend as the best options for combating the pandemic.

This leads us to another potential way in which conspiracy theory fuelled anti-vax echo chambers may be harmful, and thereby satisfy (1). Whatever turns out to be the best means to combat the pandemic, it is safe to say that it should be informed by our best current science. Conspiracy theory fuelled echo chambers

lead their members to distrust outsiders, including doctors and scientists who disagree with the echo chamber's beliefs. If echo chambers have the potential to grow by recruiting other members, they may pose a social risk independent of public health, i.e., a risk to others' epistemic character and to others' capacity to make informed decisions in general. This, in turn, may pose a risk to the health of democracy, and may be morally pernicious on top of being epistemically pernicious. Consider an analogy. Imagine a nutritionist who promotes consuming some plant and claims that doing so will be the key to all of one's health problems. This claim, however, has no firm epistemic foundation and is based on false information and pseudoscience. After a while, the nutritionist convinces a group of people to consume the wonderplant and that, indeed, it is the key to good health. Moreover, the nutritionist convinces everyone in that group that modern science is to be distrusted. After some time, the group gains some traction and tries to convince the general public that its beliefs about the wonderplant are true and that people should distrust science. I think, at this point, the nutritionist, and perhaps the larger group, will have done something wrong. Even if the current science, both about the wonderplant and in general, are unsettled and perhaps mistaken, the wonderplant's supporters will have had their epistemic character manipulated such that their ability to make responsible and scientifically informed decisions about their health is compromised, as is their ability to participate effectively and responsibly in democratic debates about public health. This is harmful to both the wonderplant supporter's epistemic character and to informed democratic debate, even if it turns out that not much public health risk results. Thus, the spreading of misinformation that leads members of the public to become trapped in a social epistemic community that leads them to distrust scientists and develop more false beliefs than true beliefs about an important domain like medicine is likely harmful even if the risk of physical harm posed to the wider public turns out to be small.

Before proceeding, I want to emphasize that I do not believe that *all* those who are opposed to COVID-19 vaccines are stuck in echo chambers or are conspiracy theorists. Many who are resistant or hesitant have genuine worries about safety and bodily autonomy, and others may have legitimate political, philosophical, and/or religious reasons to avoid the vaccine. My concern in this article is with anti-vax echo chambers fuelled by harmful and unlikely (and/or false) conspiracy theories, and with socially harmful and epistemically vicious echo chambers in general. It is one thing to be sceptical of the current science surrounding COVID-19 or be hesitant to receive vaccines as a result of the rapidly changing science. It is another to distrust the science as a whole and fail to engage with it. So long as anti-vaccination groups (and social-epistemic communities in general) continue to engage with science and scientific experts in a rational and empirically informed fashion, they will not satisfy requirement (2). However, if a (false or highly unlikely) conspiracy theory fuelled anti-vax echo chamber simply distrusts the science and fails to engage with it, or views any evidence presented by scientists and doctors as a cover-up or part of the conspiracy, they will satisfy requirement (2), and my arguments in this article will apply to them.

3. Calhoun on Civility

Before we answer the question as to whether an entirely civil response is desirable, we must first get a grip on the model of civility with which I am working. I will draw primarily from Calhoun's account in her article, "The Virtue of Civility." According to Calhoun, civility is a moral virtue that functions to communicate and/or display respect, considerateness, and tolerance (Calhoun, 2000, p. 259), without being reducible to respect, considerateness, or tolerance in virtue of civility being "essentially communicative" (Calhoun, 2000, p. 260). One might be disrespectful or intolerant, but insofar as disrespect or intolerance are not communicated in some act, one is not being uncivil. However, one can engage in respectful acts while failing to communicate respect or even communicating disrespect to the target, resulting in incivility. Thus, civility is neither reducible to social norms governing what counts as civil behaviour, nor to what is genuinely respectful, tolerant, and considerate behaviour, according to a critical moral framework like Kantianism or utilitarianism. Agents will often have to choose between being civil and what — according to their preferred moral framework — is genuinely the right thing to do (Calhoun, 2000, pp. 262–263). What counts as civil behaviour in a society may be grounded in sexist norms, for example, and will thus fail to be genuinely respectful towards women. However, to avoid such behaviour and be genuinely respectful may be regarded as rude by many in that society.

We can draw two functions of civility from Calhoun's account. Insofar as civility communicates moral attitudes and expresses recognition of the target's moral worth, civility performs (1) a communicative function, i.e., civility communicates moral attitudes and recognition towards others. However, according to Calhoun, civility also performs (2) a regulative function of keeping moral dialogue and debate from breaking down, which is important for reaching consensus or compromise between moral opponents. Calhoun points out that a significant goal of morality is not only "getting it right" but also reaching moral convergence or agreement (Calhoun, 2000, p. 275). Insofar as social consensus has not been reached regarding some moral practice or belief, we owe its defenders and opponents a civil response, no matter how intolerable or wrong we find their views. To decide, from some critical moral framework, what deserves a civil response would itself be intolerant, according to Calhoun. Being uncivil towards those who defend a view we find intolerable is to fail to communicate our recognition of their moral worth, leading to their withdrawal from dialogue and debate, preventing the possibility of reaching moral agreement (Calhoun, 2000, p. 275).

While it's unclear what, exactly, counts as social consensus on Calhoun's account, it is clear that anti-vaccination is not as widely condemned in our society as is, say, slavery. As suggested above, let's assume for argument's sake that enough people are trapped in an anti-vax echo chamber fuelled by conspiracy theories such that their moral and epistemic position is on the table, i.e., widespread social consensus has not been reached in regards to their credibility. In this imagined (though potentially currently real) scenario, Calhoun would say that we are morally required to respond to members of the anti-vax echo chamber civilly so that we may engage in effective dialogue and eventually reach a moral consensus or compromise in a morally permissible way. I will now argue against this view and reveal some problems with responding civilly to echo chambers in general.

4. Responding to Echo Chambers

I contend that a fully civil response to harmful and epistemically suspect echo chambers is undesirable, and that a moderately uncivil response is justified. I suggest that we can view civility as a *pro tanto* reason that becomes overridden by further considerations in contexts where we must respond to the problem of such echo chambers. Here is why. It is well recognized that some level of epistemic trust between members of society is required to engage in moral and democratic deliberation (see, e.g., Allard-Tremblay, 2015). By ‘epistemic trust,’ I mean trust in one’s (or some community’s) status as a knower, one’s commitment to truthful utterances, and one’s ability to engage in effective inquiry to obtain accurate beliefs. In order for democratic debate to function appropriately, “political agents must be able to believe that their political opponents are sufficiently competent for ... accurate and sincere utterances” (Allard-Tremblay, 2015, p. 379). The issue with echo chambers is that they systematically lead their members to possess excessive and unwarranted epistemic distrust in outsiders. So, insofar as this excessive distrust is present, no amount of reasoning or evidence from outsiders will sway uncompromising members of echo chambers. These members will fail to see their opponents’ reasoning and evidence as genuine reasoning and evidence. Some epistemic trust in one’s opponent is a prerequisite for the capacity of civil debate to lead to any moral and/or political convergence on some issue. Echo chambers, by definition, do not meet this prerequisite. Therefore, a civil debate will be, at best, useless in this scenario. Echo chambers pose a significant challenge and/or threat to Calhoun’s understanding of what I have called the ‘regulative function’ of civility, insofar as a goal of that function is to reach compromise or convergence between opposing views.

However, I think matters are actually even worse if we insist on remaining entirely civil, and I am not merely worried about a stagnant debate. When debating with morally problematic echo chambers, the communicative function of civility also risks becoming morally problematic. Recall that civility involves the communication of respect, considerateness, and tolerance. To communicate these attitudes in a civil debate against echo chamber members is to risk communicating to those members that their epistemic and moral standings are legitimate. If we insist on engaging in entirely civil debate with conspiracy theory fuelled anti-vax echo chambers and their questionable epistemic practices, we also risk sending the message to others that the anti-vax echo chamber’s position is epistemically and morally legitimate, perhaps even suggesting that it would not be wrong for people who are unsure to join the echo chamber. However, we have reason to think that voluntarily joining a harmful echo chamber is wrong (Nguyen, 2020), especially when public health may be put at risk as a result. Furthermore, to communicate respect, considerateness, and tolerance towards the views of an echo chamber is perhaps to contribute to its members’ inflated sense of epistemic credibility, which is precisely the issue that leads to rampant epistemic distrust and partly prevents us from engaging with them in effective debate. Communicating these attitudes towards certain echo chamber members may lead to a vicious feedback loop, potentially inflating their sense of epistemic credibility and, in turn, increasing their unwarranted distrust towards outsiders. Thus, insofar as unconditional civility and civil debate run the risk of contributing to the

very problem at issue with echo chambers, an insistence on remaining civil in responding to echo chambers may itself be morally suspect.

This is somewhat similar to the issue members of oppressed social groups face when responding to oppressive behaviour. When victims of racism respond civilly to racist behaviour, they risk sending the message that such behaviour is acceptable (Bell, 2013). Asking them to remain civil might be “asking too much” (Reiheld, 2013). While it might be wrong for victims of race-based silencing, say, to react with violence, manipulation, or coercion, an angry response or a moderate practice of contempt or shaming may be warranted (Bell, 2013; Reiheld, 2013). I suggest that we can draw a similar conclusion regarding a legitimate response to echo chambers. Perhaps some level of socially supported practices of moderate incivility in response to (some) echo chambers — such as responding somewhat angrily or contemptuously, or perhaps with some level of ridicule, towards the target’s views in public debates — may provide a social disincentive for subscribing to the echo chamber’s beliefs and may even sway some members who are not completely trapped. Moreover, such practices may result in targets coming to question their background assumptions and epistemic character. Think of a case where a student expresses anger and frustration towards another student who is relying on biased assumptions in a classroom discussion. Once, as a student, I had a fellow classmate express her anger and frustration towards the Eurocentric biases that were rampant in the discussion. It led me, and hopefully other students, to question my assumptions and my epistemic practices. If my fellow student had responded in a more civil manner, I’m not sure it would have had the same epistemic effect on me. Perhaps a similar response in communicative exchanges with members of echo chambers could have a similar effect on some members. While our ultimate goal in responding to and engaging with echo chambers should be to attempt to foster trust between echo chamber members and outsiders, as Nguyen (2020, p. 158) rightly suggests, I have already pointed out why relying on civil exchange to reach this goal is likely, in many cases, wishful thinking at best. Perhaps the kind of moderate incivility described above, by disrupting some of the echo chamber members’ trust in their own epistemic positions, may serve as an alternate starting point for the goal of fostering trust between echo chamber members and outsiders.

Now, of course, we must maintain respect for the personhood of the target of this kind of incivility, especially since many members of echo chambers may be stuck due to no fault of their own (Nguyen, 2020, p. 154). Nevertheless, perhaps we have good reason to show less than full respect for the epistemic characters of members of some echo chambers, since these characters are often extremely questionable and are precisely what prevents effective and genuine debate and potentially puts others at risk. Furthermore, as Macalester Bell (2013) points out, certain practices of incivility (her focus is on contempt) may not be disrespectful if they avoid coercion and manipulation, and they may help the targets to appreciate their reasons for changing their views and behaviour (Bell, 2013, p. 225). It will be an empirical question as to whether such practices will work as an effective response to anti-vax echo chambers, but it may be worth trying in an attempt to combat them.

5. Objections

At this point, one might reply that any socially supported lapse of civility, however moderate, will only lead to further distrust. One may argue that a person's or group's failure to engage in a cool, polite exchange of reasons and evidence will only lead their opponents to view the epistemic character of that person or group poorly. However, incivility need not always lead to distrust. For example, if a person responds angrily and with moderate incivility to an instance of race-based silencing, this may foster a deeper sense of trust between those committed to fighting racial injustice. Responding with incivility proves to others that one's moral integrity is more important to her than smooth social interactions. An overly civil response would not convey such integrity, and thus would not foster trust. Moreover, I think that for governments and individuals to always respond civilly to echo chambers such as anti-vax echo chambers may foster even more widespread distrust than would moderate incivility. This seemed to be the case in the U.S. earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic. One might think that the Trump administration was *too* civil, and even encouraging, in its response to those who did not take pandemic restrictions seriously, which, ultimately, led to the U.S. having a terrible death toll. This, no doubt, led some people to question the administration's competence. Thus, in certain contexts, a moderately uncivil response to the public might foster significantly less distrust than a complete commitment to civility.

Another objection to my position might run as follows. One implication of Nguyen's account of echo chambers is that it is likely the case that *most* individuals are stuck in some echo chamber or another. Nguyen explicitly points out that "particular academic sub-disciplines," for example, may function as echo chambers (Nguyen, 2020, p. 150). Perhaps we are all infected by certain political or philosophical views, for example, that we would not abandon no matter how much rational argument we are faced with. We might think that civility and civil exchange is now more important than ever due to the prevalence of echo chambers.

In fact, I'm not entirely unsympathetic to this view. If people simply responded with rudeness anytime there was a disagreement between different worldviews, opinions, theories, etc., then matters would certainly be much worse than they are. Making any kind of progress in reaching moral/political compromise in the social arena would be much more difficult, if not impossible, without general adherence to civility norms. Moreover, if various echo chambers prevent the possibility of agreement or even compromise, adherence to civility will ensure that we can at least reach some level of social cooperation. Nevertheless, certain echo chambers might prove to be significantly more dangerous and resistant than others, especially ones that result in beliefs that fly in the face of relatively uncontroversial empirical evidence. Anti-vax echo chambers might be an example due to the potential threat to public health posed by them, and the prevalence of distrust towards scientific experts present in these echo chambers. A commitment to scientific inquiry and empirical evidence, thankfully, provides a somewhat stable (but by no means infallible!) common ground between many disciplines or worldviews that may very well function as echo chambers, allowing for the potential for some traction in debates between them. Not all echo chambers are impervious to scientific evidence, nor do all echo chambers

pose a risk of harm to their members or outsiders. Imperviousness to scientific evidence, especially when this imperviousness poses a potential threat to the public, may mark a significant difference between particular kinds of echo chambers. This difference may very well warrant a different, less than civil, response.

6. Concluding Remarks

Before closing, I want to emphasize again that I do not think that moderate incivility (e.g., expressing contempt for the target's views in public debate) is a warranted response to all echo chambers, nor to all those who are currently opposed to COVID-19 vaccines, so long as their beliefs aren't causing much harm. For example, flat-earth echo chambers certainly disregard scientific evidence, but I'm not sure that their views are harmful enough to warrant an uncivil response. Moreover, I am well aware of the dangers of governments and privileged social groups using the label 'echo chamber' to justify the unjust suppression of civilly disobedient groups, and the potential dangers to civic life of normalizing even moderate incivility. However, I do care about public health and the ability of the public to make scientifically informed decisions, and the possibility that it might be threatened by widespread unwarranted distrust of medical and scientific experts. Given the virtual impossibility of swaying conspiracy theory fuelled echo chambers with empirical evidence and clear reasoning, some *moderate* incivility might be justified in responding to them.

There is much more to be said on this topic, which I have been unable to work through in this article. For example, it is unclear precisely to which social contexts my thesis applies. While I have been speaking about general public debate between different groups organized around a core set of beliefs about some domain (e.g., vaccines), it may be that civility should be maintained when responding to harmful and epistemically suspect echo chamber members in, say, a classroom.¹ Furthermore, the extent to which many echo chamber members are morally responsible for their being a part of a morally suspect group is unclear, and may affect what ought to be viewed as the morally correct response to those individuals. Nevertheless, I hope to have made some progress on the question of how we ought, morally and practically speaking, to respond to harmful and epistemically vicious echo chambers.

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¹ Thank you to Nicole Ramsomair for pointing this out to me.

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