Recovering Civility during COVID-19

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Introduction

As of 27 January 2021 there have been nearly 100 million reported cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) worldwide resulting in over 2.1 million deaths.[1] The number of infections and fatalities continues to rise and new waves of infections have devastated many countries, including those that had initially managed to contain the virus. Many governments failed to initiate prompt and effective interventions to tackle the pandemic. This resulted in death rates well beyond what would have been seen in the presence of a quicker response. The failure to act in a timely manner has resulted in outcomes in line with worst case scenarios predicted at the onset of the pandemic for some countries.[2]

Beyond the human costs, COVID-19 has severely affected the economic, social, and political lives of people around the world. The international community has had to contend with a global recession.[3] Governments have scrambled to implement measures to curtail the economic costs of the global health crisis and to provide support for individuals and businesses affected by COVID-19.[4] The health crisis also has clear political implications. Some states have responded to the pandemic with extreme measures, including international border closures, travel restrictions and prohibitions, as well as far-reaching controls like curfews and stay-at-home orders. In some contexts, leaders and politicians have used the situation to advance nationalist political agendas,[5] spread extremist ideologies,[6] or find advantage in an ongoing contest for hegemony in the global political order.[7]

The health crisis has also radically altered people's social lives. Isolation, whether voluntary or imposed, has increased separation between people and reduced opportunities to connect. Where people are still able to interact, whether in person or virtually, the social costs of the crisis have manifested in a variety of ways. For example, people have questioned or sought guidance regarding norms of etiquette related to 'social distancing' practices.[8] Physical altercations in supermarket aisles over toilet paper at the onset of the pandemic were a clear indication that norms of politeness and etiquette would come under threat.[9] Furthermore, we have witnessed more frequent instances of self-interested behaviour and disregard for the common good, as citizens have often ignored mandates regarding congregating and socializing in public spaces like beaches, bars, and nightclubs. This has sometimes resulted in various forms of public shaming targeting perpetrators.[10]

This book examines many of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic through the distinctive lens of civility. The idea of civility appears often in both public and academic debates, and a polarized political climate frequently leads to allegations of uncivil speech and behaviour. Norms of civility are always contested, even more so in moments of crisis such as a global pandemic. A focus on civility provides crucial insight and guidance on how to navigate the social and political challenges resulting from COVID-19. Furthermore, it offers a framework through which citizens and policymakers can better understand the causes and consequences of incivility, and devise ways to recover civility in our social and political lives.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the human, economic, social, and political costs of COVID-19. In doing so, it offers the background against which we develop our analysis in the subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 introduces the concept of civility and identifies its two main components. The first, politeness, is related to norms of etiquette and good manners. We illustrate the structural and agential dimensions of politeness as well as the importance for individuals to critically assess politeness norms in different contexts. We also analyse the functional dimensions of politeness, namely the way it can be used to signal respect and consideration for others as well as its role in facilitating social cooperation. The second dimension of civility, public-mindedness, involves treating others as free and equal. This requires avoiding, for example, hateful and discriminatory speech and behaviour (moral civility), and refraining from justifying

political rules based on self-interested or sectarian reasons (justificatory civility).

Chapter 3 considers how norms of politeness have become unclear or contested during the pandemic, and how this has led to several additional problems: politeness signals may go awry; unclear politeness norms can hinder social cooperation and exchange; and citizens and politicians can exploit this uncertainty to engage in what would normally be considered impolite behaviour. Chapter 4 examines the way COVID-19 has contributed to various types of morally uncivil behaviour such as discrimination and hate speech. It also considers how a number of challenges can hinder justificatory civility: people may use the pandemic as cover to pursue individual and sectarian interests; some policies may result in additional burdens on some sectors of the population more than others; and governments may rely on limited or flawed scientific evidence, while some policymakers politicize science for personal or partisan advantage. In both chapters we also identify potential solutions that can mitigate the negative effects of these challenges.

The book draws from primary and secondary sources to illustrate the problems that arise from shifts in politeness norms and challenges to public-minded goals. We provide anecdotal evidence from cases across the globe and base our analysis on material from emerging academic research, government reports, and popular media outlets. We supplement these materials with personal interviews drawn from our social networks. The interview subjects included scholars, leaders from civil society organisations, business owners, and members of the broader public that could provide insight into specific economic, social, or political challenges brought on by COVID-19.

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CHAPTER 1

The Human, Economic, Social, and Political Costs of COVID-19

Introduction

The origins and evolution of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) can be traced back to the Chinese province of Hubei, where the first cases were identified in December 2019.[1] The World Health Organization Director-General officially declared a global pandemic on 11 March 2020 as the virus spread rapidly around the world.[2] The virus initially took hold in Western Europe and the United States, with disproportionate spread in specific high-traffic cities that serve as transportation hubs for international travel. Some studies suggest that SARS-CoV-2 genomes might have already been present in Spanish wastewater from as far back as March 2019[3] and in Italy from December 2019.[4] This chapter offers an overview of the human, economic, social, and political costs of the pandemic in order to prepare the ground for our analysis of the implications of COVID-19 for civility in the remainder of the book.

The Human Cost

The human cost of COVID-19 is significant, yet its true scale is still uncertain. In addition to its immediate negative health effects, it is likely that the pandemic will also lead to a number of long-term health problems such as persistent pulmonary damage, post-viral fatigue, and chronic cardiac complications.[5] Furthermore, researchers have already connected policies aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19 through social

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isolation to other negative outcomes, such as a spike in suicide rates.[6] Moreover, it has become apparent that COVID-19 is having disproportionate effects on specific subsections of the population in many of the countries affected. Factors may include age, race and ethnicity, class, and gender, among others. It is well known, for example, that older people face a higher risk of experiencing severe illness from COVID-19.[7] In many countries, aged care facilities have become hotspots of infection and residents experienced higher-than-average death rates.[8] Gender also seems to be a factor in mortality rates. There is growing evidence that men are more likely to die from COVID-19 than women, although the reasons are not yet clear.[9] Furthermore, public health experts estimate disproportionate effects on maternal and child mortality rates in lower- and middle-income countries as a direct result of the virus, the subsequent strain on health systems, and reduced access to food.[10]

When it comes to race and ethnicity, some groups have been affected more than others. For example, black Americans have been disproportionately susceptible to infection and died at higher rates early on in the pandemic.[11] The Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the US found that racial and ethnic minority groups have been particularly affected by COVID-19 due to such diverse factors as discrimination; low levels of health insurance, access, and service utilization; disproportionate representation in occupations with greater exposure to COVID-19; educational, income, and wealth inequalities; and housing conditions that render prevention strategies more difficult to implement.[12] Other categories of vulnerable people who have been especially affected by COVID-19 include prisoners,[13] as well as asylum seekers and refugees in camps and detention centres.[14]

Social class has also had a profound effect on the ability of people to protect themselves or recover from the virus. Data suggest, for example, that wealthier people have the resources to better adhere to social distancing policies and norms; are less likely to suffer from pre-existing health conditions; can more easily afford to stock up on food, medical, hygiene, and cleaning supplies; and are more likely to perform higher-skilled jobs that allow them to work from home.[15] At the extreme end of the wealth spectrum, global elites have been able to stockpile supplies and make use of remote properties[16] or yachts[17] to isolate from broader society during the pandemic.

Socio-economic inequalities have had an impact on the effects of COVID-19 not only within individual countries, but also on a global

scale. Many lower- and middle-income countries face significant economic contractions in terms of growth and income levels as a result of the pandemic.[18] However, the challenges go beyond economic production and outputs. In some cases, healthcare systems already under stress have faced additional pressure. Furthermore, in the case of India, to cite just one example, the government has had a limited capacity to reach rural areas and experienced political pressure to limit testing to keep official case tallies low.[19] The effects have been disastrous, with infection rates and death tolls well beyond the reported numbers. This will have carry-on effects on social welfare services aimed at those in need as resources are diverted to help combat the pandemic. But there are also success stories. Cuba, for example, has been able to respond to the pandemic promptly and efficiently, at least compared to other countries in the Caribbean and their Central and South American neighbours. Its free universal healthcare system proved crucial, combined with the highest doctor-to-population ratio in the world and the presence of an efficient national emergency planning structure.[20]

The Economic Cost

In addition to the human costs, COVID-19 has also taken a significant toll on the global economy, particularly due to severe travel restrictions and lockdown measures aimed at reducing its spread. A significant number of workers across various sectors have lost their jobs, and this trend is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.[21] From early on, the World Bank predicted the worst global recession since WWII, with the global economy expected to shrink drastically.[22]

The pandemic has also disrupted international trade relationships. For example, it rendered post-Brexit trade negotiations between the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) more challenging[23] and has exacerbated existing tensions in the trade relationship between the United States (US) and China.[24] Furthermore, some regional markets (e.g. in Latin America) are experiencing significant economic downturns as a result of the pandemic.[25] Moreover, financial markets have become increasingly volatile[26] and the pandemic has also significantly disrupted global supply chains.[27] Economic downturns in states like Victoria, Australia may be especially strong compared to other parts of the country. Waves of coronavirus cases have resulted in border closures that make

interstate and international migration nearly impossible in Australia. The tourism, hospitality, and education sectors that rely heavily on migrant labour and international travel have been the most affected.[28]

Some sectors of the economy have been particularly affected by the pandemic and are experiencing significant contraction, as is the case with higher education. In some countries, such as the US, the UK, and Australia, many universities rely heavily (from a financial point of view) on the recruitment of international students, who generally pay higher enrolment fees than their domestic counterparts. Travel and visa restrictions during the pandemic have resulted in withdrawals and lower enrolment numbers among international students, with significant financial implications for the universities most affected.[29]

The creative arts sector has also struggled to cope with and adapt to the pandemic. Many music venues, theatres, and cinemas around the world were forced to keep their doors closed in the first half of 2020 due to social distancing rules and to reduce risks associated with the spread of COVID-19 in indoor environments. Some places reintroduced these measures during subsequent waves of the pandemic. The music industry has been significantly affected, with shows and festivals cancelled and album releases postponed.[30] Unable to perform in person, production companies have had to reimagine theatrical performances for online audiences that still want to see a live show.[31] Furthermore, many major theatres and opera houses across the world have made some of their performances freely available to the public via online streaming platforms.[32] The global film industry has also been severely hit by the pandemic, with many cinemas closed, film festivals cancelled or moved online, and significant delays in the release of major motion pictures for fears that studios would be unable to recoup investments.[33] The movie industry has been forced to evolve as movie theatre chains have responded to these challenges by negotiating agreements with movie studios on how to release films and charge audiences for access.[34] In some cases, cinemas have tried to adapt to the new social distancing rules by rearranging their spaces and implementing strict health and safety checks.[35] In other cases, we have witnessed unexpected changes, such as the revival of drive-in cinemas.[36]

The transportation sector will also feel the economic impact of the pandemic for the foreseeable future. Industry experts forecast a record-breaking financial loss for the commercial aviation sector. International

flights in and out of many countries have been severely restricted, demand for air travel has plummeted, and airlines must take costly safety precautions to limit proximity to other passengers such as leaving middle seats empty. Cruise ship operators have not been immune to the pandemic either, especially due to people's concerns regarding difficulties in abiding by social distancing rules in confined spaces.[37] Likewise, those working in the 'gig economy' as drivers for rideshare services like Uber or Lyft face restrictions and lowered demand for service.[38] Yet, some industry operators have benefitted from changing travel patterns and preferences among the general public. For example, sleeper trains have regained popularity among European travellers who are reluctant to fly between different cities and countries.[39]

Relatedly, the tourism industry faces unprecedented economic challenges due to travel restrictions and lower levels of disposable income among consumers who have been financially hit by the pandemic, resulting in hundreds of billions US$ in losses across the sector.[40] The hotel industry has suffered similar hardships due to a sharp decline in hotel bookings.[41] COVID-19 will force the entire tourism industry to rethink its focus and priorities to reduce susceptibility to shocks related to the pandemic and looming crises tied to global warming.[42] The public may be forced to reimagine how it travels and start to prioritize local destinations, transforming the economic outlook of the sector.[43]

The restaurant and food services sectors have faced significant obstacles to profitability, and many businesses have been forced to shutter their doors. In some cases, the government has stepped in to force temporary closures or implement measures that require significant adjustments to a standard restaurant business model. Restaurants have had to contend with a severe reduction in consumer demand, a lower capacity to seat patrons, and unexpected expenditures to address safety concerns like adding plastic partitions to protect staff or redesigning seating arrangements, sometimes by prioritizing outdoors spaces.[44] Many of them have adapted to this new environment by finding new ways to reach their customers. For example, an employee at one restaurant in Melbourne explained:

> We knew that our restaurants would be very quiet so we immediately pushed our online orders when COVID-19 restrictions came into play. We're lucky that we manufacture all our own pasta, sauces, pizzas and other products so pushing [these products] through clever marketing worked well for us. We introduced our 'Door-to-Door Service' which saw us

> visiting various suburbs on various days and this was very well received… It's something our customers love and therefore something we'll continue even when restrictions lift… We also decided to hold an online event. Like a dinner dance, but streamed online where customers purchase tickets to watch the entertainment and then they also have the option of purchasing a dinner pack that's delivered to them before the event. This has also been well received.[45]

Following the easing of restrictions after the first wave of the pandemic, some governments stepped in to provide financial support for the industry by encouraging people to dine out.[46] Cafes and the coffee industry have also been negatively impacted from an economic perspective.[47] Conversely, grocery stores have generally benefited from changes in consumer behaviour as more people eat at home. However, they have also had to adapt their business model to the changing retail environment, prioritizing online shopping, expanding delivery services, and even exploring the potential to introduce mobile stores to replace brick-and-mortar markets.[48]

The sports industry has also been significantly affected by the pandemic, with major sporting events cancelled or postponed all over the world. Mass gatherings and large-scale events generate crowds where the risk of COVID-19 transmission rises exponentially. In March 2020, Japan's Prime Minister and the president of the International Olympic Committee announced the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Games, marking the first time the Olympics have been rescheduled for a reason other than war.[49] The pandemic has forced diverse forms of professional and college sports leagues to halt play or devise alternative ways to reach audiences if they are to weather the storm. Many leagues and franchises have been unable to generate previous levels of advertising revenue because of postponements and find themselves in dire financial straits. Players themselves have been apprehensive about resuming play and moving forward with seasons. Sports like Major League Baseball could suffer losses in the billions of dollars, leading to tense negotiations between team owners and players regarding compensation and risk, with some asking whether athletes should be seen as 'exploited workers or greedy millionaires'.[50] US and Australian rules football leagues have faced similar challenges, with some players simply deciding to opt out.[51] Football (soccer) leagues throughout Europe made the decision to simply

suspend or cancel their seasons in 2020.[52] When play resumed, it generally occurred behind closed doors. As sports teams and players suffer the financial costs of these disruptions, the public should be aware of the disparate capacity elite men's clubs may have to contend with the financial challenges compared to women's clubs, as is the case of English football.[53]

The agricultural sector has also faced considerable challenges. At the early stages of the pandemic, the prices of agricultural goods fell significantly, particularly due to lower demand from hotels and restaurants.[54] While growing demand from grocery stores seems to have gradually offset those initial losses, farmers face new difficulties resulting from labour shortages and from the need to adapt to new social distancing rules.[55] Labour shortages may also result in higher prices for fruit and vegetables.[56] Furthermore, the meat industry has been particularly hard-hit by the pandemic. Many meat-processing plants have been the epicentres of COVID-19 outbreaks, resulting in shutdowns and meat shortages in the food supply chain.[57]

In addition to the areas examined in the foregoing analysis, other sectors that have been affected by COVID-19 include the manufacturing industry, the financial sector, the healthcare and pharmaceutical industry, and the real estate and housing sector.[58] Other businesses on the economic fringes have also been hard-hit, especially those related to vice. For example, gambling hotspots in Las Vegas had to shutter their doors for some time, but gambling online has thrived even while sports betting has declined.[59] Illicit drug trafficking and local distribution markets have faced novel challenges in supply chain and consumer demand too.[60]

Sex workers have also been affected by the social distancing restrictions implemented during the pandemic, given the central role that physical contact plays in the industry. Moreover, the stigma and discrimination that those working in this industry already experience has increased during the pandemic, further contributing to economic hardship across the sector. Some have responded by either demanding government support or by adapting their business model to emphasize other online services.[61] The Australian Sex Workers Association clearly articulated the difficulties for sex workers who have been 'placed in the impossible position of having to balance the need to protect [them]selves and the community against the prospect of no income and no access to financial relief'.[62]

The Social Cost

In addition to its extensive economic implications, COVID-19 has also had a drastic effect on social life around the globe. Government measures related to social distancing rules, stay-at-home orders, business lockdowns, and curfews have in many cases eroded community relationships by drastically reducing opportunities for physical face-to-face interaction. These measures have significantly affected family life, both by increasing proximity among those forced to shared confined spaces during lockdowns[63] and by keeping families apart to prevent risk of infection. For example, one grandmother we spoke with who lives in California described what interactions with her granddaughter looked like during the pandemic:

> [My husband and I] were both looking at her and she's looking at us and she's hugging a dolly. And they're through the glass. It was her birthday. And she came up to the glass, she puts her hand up [to ours] and she kissed the glass and I kissed the glass. We kissed each other through the glass and it was just heart-wrenching… I said, 'I wish I could hug you, I miss you, I'm gonna throw you kisses'. We would go out into the yard and we stayed far away. We kind of did it all. [At first] we just did FaceTime. Then we started between the windows—we could at least see her there.[64]

Likewise, a grandmother in Italy whom we also interviewed explained:

> The pandemic has taken away spontaneity from normal gestures of affection. There is fear but, at the same time, there is also a desire to hug grandchildren, children, and friends during the lockdown. [The pandemic] has taken away physical contact and people have had to replace this with video calls or messages, both with relatives and friends, in an attempt to exorcise fear.[65]

The pandemic has clearly rendered relationships among family and friends more difficult for many.[66] However, it has also brought some people closer together thanks to greater flexibility in time schedules, alternative working arrangements, and reduced opportunities for other social activities.[67] Relationships with both family and friends have also been sustained by the use of communication technologies during the pandemic.[68] Furthermore, social media have played a key role in reducing isolation for both older[69] and younger[70] people, even though these platforms have also contributed to spreading rumours and misinformation.[71]

Romantic relationships and dating have also had to adapt to the new social distancing and travel restrictions. Some dating apps, for example, have altered user guidelines and introduced new video technology options so users can continue to interact with others while minimizing risks and adhering to social distancing guidelines.[72] More generally, COVID-19 has had an impact on romantic love,[73] and in some cases contributed to increasing stress among romantic partners, compounding factors that may lead to greater infidelity.[74] Big social events like weddings had to be postponed in places like metropolitan Melbourne, Australia during its strict Stage 4 lockdown.[75]

Relationships between humans and non-human animals, and social practices surrounding them, have also been impacted. For example, data show that there has been a significant increase in pet ownership and adoption, as pets help reduce stress and loneliness, or encourage healthier and more active lifestyles.[76] There has also been contention around the implications of the pandemic for certain animals. For example, the dog racing industry in Victoria, Australia saw an exemption from strict Stage 4 lockdown measures amid debates about potential animal welfare issues.[77]

The pandemic has also resulted in a housing crisis, as many people can no longer afford their rent or mortgage payments, thus risking eviction and homelessness.[78] This has sometimes generated extreme and violent responses.[79] In other cases, it has compounded pre-existing social harms like increased violence between intimate partners and other forms of abuse. Early indicators show that households in Brazil, Spain, the UK, and Cyprus saw spikes in domestic and family violence.[80] A study in Dallas, Texas found a spike in domestic violence during the first two weeks of the stay-at-home order that subsided afterwards.[81] The long-term isolation, stress, and uncertainty during the pandemic may also exacerbate alcohol and drug consumption. Furthermore, these conditions can increase the likelihood of relapse among recovering alcoholics and drug addicts too.[82] There has also been a rise in online gambling.[83]

COVID-19 has also changed social practices in various everyday environments due to the need to re-imagine spaces and people's interaction within them in ways that comply with social distancing norms.[84] There are obvious logistical challenges to in-person education and how to manage students on school campuses. Options have included a combination of closures and social distancing practices.[85] Educational institutions now rely on online learning to a greater degree, raising new challenges.[86] For example, we spoke with a school teacher in Italy who explained that

the transition to distance learning had several advantages, but suffered from a number of shortcomings. The new teaching format was not always suitable for younger pupils or students with disabilities. Furthermore, online teaching tended to sharpen the 'digital divide' between families with different levels of access to suitable spaces in the home, tablets, and highspeed Internet connections. He also described ongoing unruly behaviour and cheating among students, then added:

> When our school reopened… the space was reorganized with single-seat desks… pupils always had to wear surgical masks and could only remove them in 'static' moments, sitting at their desks. They could not move nor could they pass materials among themselves… The interaction between teachers also profoundly changed. Teachers used to gather in the faculty lounge, which could no longer be used due to COVID-19. Opportunities for meetings and interactions with colleagues were clearly reduced; at the same time, teachers began to meet in online spaces like Google Meet, especially to share teaching practices. Yet, the ability to interact was decidedly reduced.[87]

Universities have also been forced to adjust courses and curricula for online delivery. While this is practically feasible, students may have fewer opportunities to participate in the off-line social networking that is crucial for career development.[88] Furthermore, many universities may not survive the financial hit resulting from the pandemic.[89]

The pandemic has also affected the way people eat and drink. Restaurants, for example, have had to undergo several changes, including redesigning their spaces, accommodating lower numbers of customers in order to respect social distancing rules, making greater use of smart technologies (e.g. for menus and meal orders), and expanding their takeaway and delivery services.[90] Some of them have adopted creative strategies in order to guarantee social distancing between patrons.[91]

Likewise, government restrictions have forced some bars to close for extended periods of time in many locations. Those that have reopened or remained open had to reimagine how they serve customers and manage interactions between staff and patrons. Complex rules around indoor and outdoor spaces, as well as food service as it relates to the sale of alcohol, affect whether we visit these establishments and our experiences while there.[92] An array of 'multi-touch' items like menus, salt and pepper shakers, cutlery, and coasters are now kept away from customers.[93] One Irish pub in Spain's Canary Islands used humour to communicate some of

the real dangers associated with social practices in bars, putting up a notice that patrons should avoid singing the Neil Diamond hit 'Sweet Caroline' at all costs. Employees wrote some lyrics on a chalkboard explaining that, as a health precaution under COVID-19, '[t]here will be no: touching hands, reaching out, touching me, touching you'.[94]

Cafes have been forced to respond to the pandemic in creative ways as well, with some selling their stock as groceries and expanding their takeaway and delivery services.[95] Furthermore, in many countries the pandemic has undermined the role of cafes as 'third spaces' between home and work, crucial for socializing and networking.[96] The pandemic may have long-term effects on coffee culture around the globe.

Barbershops and hairdressers have also been at the epicentre of public debate concerning lockdown measures during the pandemic, with disagreement as to whether they constitute 'essential' businesses that should be exempt from lockdown restrictions. Barbershops traditionally serve important social functions for some cultural groups as spaces for community building, leisure and entertainment, gossip and local political engagement,[97] as well as local education initiatives.[98] They can also be important for men's mental health.[99] Likewise, hair salons can provide 'a comforting source of self-care and community'[100] and serve as 'an important channel between members of the community and services such as family violence shelters'.[101] This partly explains why many customers opposed and, in some cases, managed to revert government decisions to close down these businesses during the pandemic.[102] In one extreme case, an armed militia group helped keep a barbershop open in a small US town in the state of Michigan.[103]

Beyond its direct effect on people's health, COVID-19 has also indirectly affected people's ability to stay healthy. For example, lockdown and social distancing restrictions aimed at reducing its spread have changed the way people exercise,[104] with online streaming classes and programmes becoming a popular way for people to connect and participate in workout activities.[105] Furthermore, when they have not been forced to close down, gyms have had to comply with strict health and safety measures, including the introduction of 'hygiene marshals'.[106] Partly due to risks associated with exercising in closed spaces, outdoor exercise has become increasingly popular.[107] However, research shows that overeating and other unhealthy eating behaviours have also increased, thus posing additional challenges to individual and public health.[108]

The pandemic has affected other areas of social life related to leisure and recreation. Event-based social networks like Meetup, for example, have been forced to transition to virtual platforms in order to interact.[109] A recent study in Australia found that activities within Meetup decreased by 86% during the pandemic. The researcher explains:

> Participants in this study mentioned that Meetup was one of the main avenues in which they were exposed to new, potential relationships and that, due to lockdown measures, they had no way of expanding their social networks and thus making new friends. COVID-19 also had an amplifying effect on existing relationships within Meetup groups in the sense that close relationships became closer, and weak ones, weaker. Where relationships were strong enough, participants often used other social networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram to maintain contact during lockdown, which highlights the importance of polymedia use.[110]

The way people travel for holidays and tourism has also changed.[111] For example, both customers and business owners at beach destinations face unprecedented challenges that include new social distancing rules as well as stigma and public shaming for those who fail to respect them.[112] People's ability to access and experience national[113] and local[114] parks, as well as public spaces more generally,[115] has also been deeply affected by the pandemic.

Travelling by public transport now includes additional demands to maintain social distance on crowded buses and subways. Passengers must also take new precautions to avoid handles and other surfaces that could spread the virus. Forward-thinking researchers will need to develop safer public transport infrastructure[116] and new transport technologies to prevent an unsustainable shift back to a car-driven transport system.[117] When it comes to pedestrians, proposed measures to contain the spread of the virus include touchless pedestrian crossings[118] and crowd simulation technology to encourage social distancing.[119] Rideshare services such as Uber have had to find ways of responding to reduced customer demand. For example, at times they have emphasized food delivery rather than taxi service to help keep drivers working and to mitigate issues of food insecurity.[120] However, disruptions to their business model have had important social implications for sectors of the population with disabilities who normally depend on rideshare transportation services.[121]

The broader social effects of COVID-19 also concern the tensions that may arise between different individuals and social groups. Instances of social hoarding were particularly common at the onset of the pandemic, with people fighting over such products as toilet paper, hand sanitizer, flour, and pasta in shops and supermarkets.[122] There have also been incidents of extreme rage over facemask policies, leading to the death of innocent bystanders and fatal confrontations with law enforcement.[123] Furthermore, ageism and intergenerational tensions are on the rise in online spaces, especially between the 'millennial' and 'baby boomer' generations.[124] Social stigma targeting infected people and those who have recovered from the illness, as well as doctors and health workers, has also become a widespread phenomenon.[125] COVID-19 has also fuelled racism and xenophobia.[126] Hate speech, hate crimes, and discriminatory practices targeting people with Chinese and East Asian backgrounds,[127] Muslims,[128] Jews,[129] and Romani communities[130] have been especially common. At the international level, the pandemic has generated negative attitudes towards countries with high levels of infections.[131] One study, for example, revealed spikes in incivility directed at China on South Korean social media.[132]

The Political Cost

The global pandemic has generated a range of international and domestic political problems. The COVID-19 health crisis constitutes an exogenous shock to the broader international system, disrupting international politics and creating new tensions between adversaries and allies alike. It will undoubtedly have profound implications for and lasting effects on geopolitics for years to come.[133] Political leaders from major powers like the US and China may seek to use the crisis to find advantage in an ongoing contest for hegemony in the global political order.[134] In many contexts, states have been left scrambling to secure sufficient supplies and resources to effectively contend with the virus, prioritizing national interest and the well-being of their own citizens. The US, for example, requested that the firm 3M refrain from selling protective masks to Canada and countries in Latin America to keep them for domestic use.[135] A form of 'vaccine nationalism' took hold in a race to develop a vaccine for the virus that created barriers to cooperation and prioritized domestic delivery when mass production got underway.[136]

The pandemic has the potential to exacerbate ongoing political conflicts between states. For example, COVID-19 risks inflaming tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. As political leaders in both countries focus on fighting the virus, we could see further entrenchment of the militarized status quo, as well as local efforts to highlight the inadequacy of Indian governance in Kashmir. There is the potential that hardline Indian nationalist policies might be used to divert public attention from the COVID-19 crisis. However, the scale of the pandemic threat will most likely shift attention in India and Pakistan to the immediate demands of public health services and the need to alleviate economic hardship domestically.[137]

Polities with supranational governance structures like the European Union have experienced discord over new policies. EU member states eventually managed to compromise on an economic recovery plan in July 2020, despite tensions during the negotiation process, especially due to concerns of so-called 'frugal' countries about the cost of the plan.[138] However, tensions within the EU have also been driven by disputes concerning seasonal migrant labour, with some business, especially farmers, demanding access to foreign workers, and some populist leaders calling instead for tighter restrictions on immigration.[139]

The pandemic has also compounded pre-existing international problems related to the movement of people. Asylum seekers and refugees have been particularly affected,[140] especially since the pandemic risks exacerbating existing humanitarian crises.[141] The pandemic has also had an impact on temporary economic migrants, particularly as a result of the economic downturn that has forced many companies to lay off employees. Even when governments have introduced economic measures to support businesses, temporary migrants have often been excluded from these programmes.[142] Some governments are also considering changes to migration rules[143] and taking drastic steps in modifying the way they address asylum claims, including limitations to face-to-face interviews, introducing new physical barriers, or even encouraging applicants to 'bring [their] own black or blue ink pens'.[144] Internal migration has also been affected by the pandemic, as many governments have imposed restrictions on internal travel.[145]

The public health crisis is also affecting domestic political divisions in multiple contexts. For example, during post-Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU, some politicians exploited the pandemic for partisan political gain.[146] In some cases, politicians have challenged

the authority of experts, undermining citizens' trust in evidence-based knowledge.[147] They have also mischaracterized or appropriated scientific expertise around issues like mask wearing to advance their positions.[148] Debate about the pandemic in some countries has been driven by and exacerbated pre-existing political polarization, stoking tensions between regional/state and national/federal political authorities. However, calls for unity and coordinated action has sometimes also helped to reduce ideological and partisan divides.[149]

The pandemic poses unique challenges to state stability and could compound risks of political violence, internal armed conflict, and incidents of state failure. Rebel groups and other militant actors have seized opportunities to expand control, advance political objectives, and demonstrate a capacity to govern and enforce rules. For example, armed actors operating along the southwest coast of Colombia made public declarations that curfew violators would be treated as 'military targets'.[150] COVID-19 has provided a chance for armed opposition groups to scale up attacks and target government opponents in some cases, while in others groups have seized on the opportunity to improve claims of legitimacy and demonstrate their capacity to provide public services and govern. For example, the Islamic State, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda affiliates have all provided guidance and local support to contend with the pandemic.[151]

Political participation has also been affected by the pandemic. Protest politics, for example, has been at the epicentre of public debate. On the one hand, citizens in some countries have taken to the streets to protest against government restrictions to contain the virus, such as lockdown and stay-at-home orders.[152] On the other hand, protests such as those organized by Black Lives Matter activists around the world became a topic of contention as citizens and political leaders disagreed as to whether those gatherings may have contributed to new COVID-19 outbreaks.[153]

The effects on political participation also extend to electoral politics. For example, in some countries local and national political authorities decided to postpone elections[154] or reimagine electoral procedures and practices. Governments have taken steps like increasing the use of postal voting[155] or introducing measures to guarantee social distancing, health, and safety during the voting process.[156] There has also been an impact on campaign practices due to the need to restrict traditional rituals and habits like shaking hands.[157] Furthermore, political rallies constitute extreme

health risks for the spread of the virus.[158] This point became especially prominent after former US President Donald Trump resumed large political campaign events shortly after his hospitalisation from COVID-19 treatment.[159] Other politicians experimented with virtual rallies and events to mark important milestones in campaigns like the Democratic Party's announcement of a presidential candidate in August 2020.[160] The content of political campaigns and party politics has also evolved as a result of COVID-19. Issues such as public health and socio-economic and racial inequality, for example, have become more salient,[161] and parties traditionally divided over fiscal responsibility and public spending have sometimes converged on more similar positions.[162]

Trust is an important aspect of political life as it relates to politicians, law enforcement, and the media, among others. High-profile incidents of politicians who ignore their own stay-at-home orders[163] or who publicly contradict or undermine health experts[164] can lead to general confusion and the erosion of trust in public officials. The politicization of issues like mandatory mask wearing illustrates how a lack of consensus and divergent policies can frustrate public health measures and lead to greater distrust not only towards politicians but also towards law enforcement officials tasked with ensuring compliance. In extreme cases, law violators have lashed out in violence against police officers enforcing these new laws.[165] In a particularly sensational case, members of an extremist militia were arrested in relation to alleged plans to kidnap Michigan's Governor and put her on 'trial' for restrictive pandemic policies.[166] Furthermore, the media can have a compounding effect on public trust (or lack thereof), by employing framing techniques[167] or prioritising specific content as they deliver information to the public.[168] Social media can further complicate political trust, as they are a popular channel for politicians to spread misinformation about COVID-19 and related policies.[169]

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the human, economic, social, and political costs of the pandemic. The world faces unprecedented challenges related to COVID-19, including an immense strain on relationships and the way people interact with one another in different aspects of their lives. Uncertainty and disruptions to social and political life will require a better understanding as to how the broader public needs to prepare and respond. Politicians and other decision-makers will face increasing

pressure to come up with policies that are effective at containing the pandemic, limiting its economic impact, and minimising harmful social and political consequences. They face the difficult task of balancing diverse interests, values, and demands, while also having to ensure that they rely on sound scientific evidence. In the remainder of this book, we will examine all these challenges through the lens of civility.

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CHAPTER 2

Understanding Civility

Introduction

This book examines COVID-19 through the lens of civility. A focus on civility is important for two reasons. First, the concept of civility often features prominently in public debate. Society expects people to adhere to acceptable behaviours in a range of contexts in public life. Some individuals are quick to levy accusations of incivility against those deemed to have violated these norms of behaviour. For example, when American football player Colin Kaepernick began to kneel during the national anthem as a protest against racial and social injustice, US President Donald Trump viewed the action as uncivil and disrespectful. Trump suggested: '[y]ou have to stand proudly for the national anthem or you shouldn't be playing, you shouldn't be there, maybe you shouldn't be in the country'. He went on: '[t]hat's a total disrespect of our heritage. That's a total disrespect of everything that we stand for'.[1] Kaepernick's actions infuriated Trump, who offered vocal support when former Vice President Mike Pence and his wife left the stadium as a counterprotest before a 2017 49ers-Colts NFL game in Indianapolis.[2] Kaepernick faces ongoing accusations of incivility. But his case also raises an important question: should we always be civil? As Kaepernick himself more recently reasoned, 'When civility leads to death, revolting is the only logical reaction'.[3] Sometimes we need to be uncivil in order to highlight injustice and fight against it, especially when other means of doing so are not (or no longer) effective.[4]

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In another recent high-profile US incident, the owner of a restaurant in Lexington, Virginia asked former White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders to leave the premises. Several LGBTIQ + waitstaff objected to her defence of President Trump's discriminatory policies aimed at transgender people. The incident raised important questions regarding moral and tactical choice in an 'age of outrage' and contentious politics.[5] Those who supported the action viewed the request as appropriate given the administration's violation of moral principles of equal respect for all citizens—a key dimension of civility, as we will explain later in this chapter. However, pundits from the political right also saw the restaurateur's action as uncivil, since asking Huckabee Sanders to leave the premises violated widely recognized politeness norms. This deterioration of civil exchange can have far-reaching effects.[6] Both sides identified transgressions of civility norms by the other party but each focused on a distinct dimension of civility.

This leads to the second reason why it is important to focus on civility: the contested nature of the concept in the scholarly literature, particularly in political theory and philosophy. There is disagreement, first, regarding the meaning of civility (and therefore incivility). Second, even when there is agreement on the meaning of (in)civility, there may be disagreement as to whether specific instances of speech or behaviour should be considered civil or uncivil based on the agreed upon conception.

So, what is civility? Existing academic work provides different and often contrasting definitions of the concept. However, we identify two main understandings. On the one hand, civility is often associated with norms of etiquette and politeness: to be civil, in this first sense, implies to speak and act in ways that comply with these norms. On the other hand, it is linked with the idea of public-mindedness: to be civil, in this second sense, means to display a commitment to the public good, not just to one's personal or sectarian interest, and to treating others as free and equal. This second understanding of civility is famously captured by John Rawls's claim that we have a 'duty of civility' to only appeal to public reasons (i.e. reasons that our fellow citizens could understand and find persuasive) when we justify political rules.[7] But civility as public-mindedness, we will see, can also be understood in a non-justificatory sense, requiring that we refrain from treating others in ways that are discriminatory or hateful. In this chapter, we provide an overview of the politeness and public-mindedness dimensions of civility in order to set the stage for our analysis in the subsequent chapters, which will focus on how COVID-19

challenges our ability to be civil, but also creates opportunities for people to find new ways of being civil towards one another in these challenging times.

Civility as Politeness

Much of the scholarly literature in political theory and philosophy views civility as a virtue linked to etiquette and good manners. Derek Edyvane, for example, argues that 'civility is bound up with the idea of what it means to be civilised, to be well-mannered or polite; its focus is on standards of behaviour in our dealings with others in everyday life'.[8] Likewise, Cheshire Calhoun refers to 'polite civility', which 'has been understood as the mark of the competent participant in the social settings of everyday life'.[9] According to her, 'polite civility enables the social participant to avoid barbaric and potentially disgusting bodily displays'.[10] In line with these accounts, we view politeness as a feature of speech or action that complies with certain social norms prescribing appropriate modes of exchange and interaction.

A key feature of civility as politeness is that it is intrinsically dependent on 'generally agreed upon, often codified, social rules'.[11] Importantly, such rules are always contextual, since they are based on norms and customs that vary between (and within) different societies. Furthermore, these norms constantly evolve.[12] Partly for these reasons, Strachan and Wolf observe that 'measuring the level of civility present in society…is especially difficult because the specific behaviours defined as appropriate in one culture, or even in different settings within the same culture, can be inappropriate in others'.[13] Likewise, in his analysis of what he calls 'republican civility', Daly observes that 'the bodily and linguistic techniques that constitute civility [as politeness] are highly encoded partly because they embrace a situational or cultural specificity which will appear arbitrary and perhaps incomprehensible to those not already endowed with it'.[14] In summary, civility as politeness is grounded in cultural and social norms that vary between contexts and may evolve over time, sometimes rather quickly.

The politeness dimension of civility involves both structural and agential elements. We will examine them in turn in the following subsections.

Structural Elements of Politeness

The social norms of politeness constitute its structural elements. These norms are generally based on social or cultural identities, as well as on social actors' role(s) and context, and may reflect different degrees of formality depending on the situation.

Social identity is a clear source of politeness norms. As individuals, we all occupy multiple and simultaneous identities. These include identities based on gender, race/ethnicity, class, religion, culture, and language, among others. These different identities can be sources of various politeness norms. For example, a person's religious faith may contain norms of politeness concerning how one should relate to or greet other individuals (both co-religionists and not) or how one should dress when entering a place of worship.[15] Some of these norms may interact with gender dimensions of identity, establishing more specific guidelines on how one should relate to people of the opposite sex or how men and women should dress in public.[16] And gender itself can be tied to politeness norms independently of religion.[17] Language may also be a source of politeness norms, by providing its speakers with socially legible ways (e.g. through its lexicon, grammar, idiomatic expressions, or even the tone and pitch in the way we speak) of expressing politeness.[18]

Norms of politeness also arise from the many social roles that we occupy, regardless of whether they are connected to specific social identities. For example, particular norms often guide our interactions with family and friends. Those norms may differ from those of other families or other groups of friends, for example with regard to eating times and etiquette, or the way we make interpersonal requests.[19] Similarly, norms of politeness also exist in the workplace. Co-workers greet each other on a daily basis following specific norms, and may adhere to politeness norms that regulate the use of a shared kitchen or a shared printer. Norms of politeness can regulate interactions between employers and employees, in ways that may reflect the hierarchical relationship between them.[20] Furthermore, politeness norms may influence forms of participation in political and social movements[21] and can structure the relationship between leaders and followers.[22] For example, followers may be expected to bow or not turn their back to leaders in public/official settings and those same leaders must abide by norms of politeness to maintain status

and respect. This may involve restraint in speech or behaviour, acknowledging and greeting their followers, and more generally maintaining the so-called 'dignity of the office'.[23]

In addition to social identity and roles, the context of politeness matters too. In the above situations, different factors affect how much, when, and where different social norms apply. Context involves, first of all, power and authority relations. These clearly affect the intensity with which different social norms apply in asymmetrical contexts, such as the aforementioned workplace context and leader/follower relationships.[24] The latter may affect the predominant direction and quality of politeness norms, regulating the behaviour of those in subordinate positions more (or, at least, in different ways) than in the case of those who occupy dominant positions.[25] In summary, power and authority affect the form of, and compliance with, social norms.

Politeness is also linked to environmental considerations. For example, since politeness is often understood as regulating social distance (as well as psychological distance), spatial considerations are relevant,[26] especially in public spaces and urban environments.[27] In this sense, different norms of politeness may often apply in physical as opposed to digital spaces. Moreover, even though norms of politeness often mandate maintaining a certain distance from other people in public spaces (unless other constraining factors—e.g. a crowded bus—prevent one from complying with them), maintaining too much distance from others may sometimes also be perceived as impolite, as when someone decides to sit in the last row of an empty seminar room during a talk.

Furthermore, one might speculate that certain features of our environments can constitute an affront to senses (e.g. loud noises, unwelcome sights, or bad smells), something that Joel Feinberg famously labels 'offensive nuisances'.[28] This seems to suggest that politeness norms may also be tied to the design and form of that environment, and that certain buildings, materials, and colours (and not only the people who act within them) could sometimes be perceived as offensive or impolite. And, indeed, Welsh architect Trystan Edwards once famously claimed that we could distinguish between 'rude' and 'polite' buildings.[29] Take, for example, the so-called 'Walkie Talkie Building' in London, which has been criticized for reflecting intense sunlight off its glass windows.[30] Likewise, the use of certain colours in the visual environment might be perceived as more or less impolite in different contexts depending on the relevant social and cultural norms.[31]

Digital spaces may also involve different degrees of spatial proximity. For example, recent research has shown that the kind of online forum through which people interact creates higher or lower levels of virtual spatial proximity among users, resulting in different levels of politeness and impoliteness. More specifically, forums to which users contribute anonymously and on a one-off basis create a greater virtual spatial distance between them, resulting in higher levels of impoliteness. Conversely, forums in which users engage in more individual one-to-one iterated interactions tend to result in higher levels of politeness.[32]

Norms of politeness also vary in their degree of formality and informality. Most politeness norms tend to be informal, and violations are only accompanied by social sanctions. Think, for example, of norms concerning the practice of gift giving at Christmas.[33] In other cases, politeness norms may become codified via law and rigid etiquette (or protocols within organizational contexts). Consider, for instance, norms of etiquette preventing people from accessing certain venues unless they wear a suit and tie, or laws that make swearing illegal.[34] In some cases, informal or non-legal social norms may gradually acquire legal status, as when norms that attach impoliteness to certain behaviours in relation to sacred places become legally enforced. Moreover, norms of politeness may include norms of display and norms of concealment, where one can be polite either by saying/doing something or by refraining from doing so.[35]

Finally, we should consider two additional dimensions of politeness norms. First, so far we have focused on norms that are linked to specific social identities and roles, and which are in many ways contextual. There is general consensus around the view that politeness norms are socially and culturally specific.[36] However, one might argue that at least some politeness norms have a (nearly-)universal scope. Some scholars, for example, have pointed to a universal desire for not 'losing face' as evidence of the presence of universal norms of politeness.[37] Furthermore, one might also argue that some of the aforementioned affronts to the senses[38] may also constitute instances of impoliteness across different social and cultural contexts, perhaps because they are generally types of offenses not mediated via culturally specific beliefs. Second, politeness norms are not static.[39] The structural factors that we examined in this section are not fixed or rigid—politeness norms continually evolve. The actors involved, whether in a family, a workplace, or a broader political community, continually (re)negotiate those norms. The next section focuses on these agential dimensions of politeness.

Agential Elements of Politeness

In addition to the structural elements of politeness—i.e. the sources of social norms that define what it means to be polite—scholars must recognize the role of agency in acting politely. Not only do norms of politeness change and evolve, but individuals also need to navigate such norms. As one scholar observes, civility [as politeness] is the 'practical ability of individuals to distinguish between different social roles and contexts and to differentiate their behaviour accordingly…[which] crucially involves an element of judgment.'[40] So, how is this practical ability or judgment exercised?

Agents need to exercise a degree of critical engagement in order to be polite. Humans learn what norms of politeness are and subsequent practices usually reinforce expected behaviours.[41] Under normal, everyday circumstances, politeness norms are reasonably clear. People mostly understand the demands of a situation and how to interact with others. Decisions about how to comport oneself on public transportation[42] or how to greet a stranger can be routine in familiar contexts and require minimal reflection.[43] Yet, some situations prove more challenging to navigate. For example, travelling to culturally distinct tourist destinations or attending an unfamiliar religious site during an interfaith wedding ceremony may introduce moments of uncertainty regarding polite behaviour. The uncertainty and challenges can become even more pronounced in moments of crisis that disrupt social life in unprecedented ways—the COVID-19 pandemic is one of those moments.

Critical engagement requires recognising and learning new politeness norms, as well as how they apply when we interact with others across a range of contexts. This involves several dimensions. First, people need to undertake information-seeking actions that include identifying, studying, and questioning new behaviours. They also need to observe and interpret the actions or others. Furthermore, critical engagement involves self-awareness and the ability to identify and rationally assess one's own behaviour and how it relates to old and new expectations. Novel circumstances demand that individuals reflect upon new conditions before they take action, rather than simply relying on disposition or habitus.[44]

Second, people need to become aware of and overcome additional cognitive limitations and information access issues. For example, motivational and confirmation biases, framing effects, and information

processing capabilities may present obstacles to learning and adaptation in these environments.[45] Access issues related to information infrastructure, technology, and language issues—as well as imperfect information or overt attempts to mislead the public—could all complicate the transmission and adoption of new politeness norms. Situational tendencies related to risk assessment further complicate decision-making and behaviour.[46]

Third, an absence of scientific consensus regarding which information is accurate and appropriate may inhibit the adoption of and adherence to some politeness norms. People internalize and observe a wide range of normative social behaviours, and science may support or refute the assumptions behind those behaviours. For example, party etiquette might ask that attendees refrain from 'double-dipping' a chip into salsa after taking a bite, and we are encouraged not to eat food that has fallen on the ground based on a 'five-second rule'. However, it seems that research findings confirm the social harms only for the former scenario,[47] but not for the latter.[48]

Finally, other people and institutional structures may affect the way in which people navigate norms. This might take the form of political leaders intentionally passing along biased or distorted information based on politicized or self-interested agendas. For example, the prominent Italian politician Matteo Salvini, as well as some Italian right-wing media, often accuse their critics of being impolite.[49] This is problematic since the ability to discern when norms of politeness ought to be complied with and when they might be breached should be central to our critical engagement with such norms. Indeed, in some cases incivility expressed as impoliteness can be used as a tool for signalling and contesting unjust policies or institutions.[50] Public accusations of impoliteness, while technically correct (e.g. Salvini's critics may well be impolite when they swear at him), might delegitimize some people's use of impolite speech or behaviour in ways that prevent the audience from critically assessing their appropriateness in certain circumstances (e.g. protesting against restrictive policies targeting migrants, such as those Salvini himself endorses).

Various forms of censorship could prevent people from learning about relevant politeness norms as well. Those who lack exposure to norms of polite behaviour or speech, for instance, could (un)intentionally stigmatize others. Education levels, generational gaps, and class divides could hinder people's ability to identify and fully understand the content and meaning of different norms of politeness. For example, older white

residents in the American South may not observe shifts in politically correct racial references to blacks.[51]

Overcoming all these obstacles involves individual costs, both financial and in terms of time and effort. Learning new things when filling a new role or in the context of cultural difference may require significant investment in time and information-seeking activities. Intercultural competencies are crucial in many settings, including tourism, where a traveller or volunteer may need to acquire translation dictionaries or take short language courses in preparation for a visit.[52] Alternatively, the investment in training for scenarios like international disaster deployment[53] or relationship-building during counterinsurgency campaigns[54] can have much higher stakes. There are also various kinds of social and cultural costs. These may involve 'individual compromising' if certain actors temporarily give up preferred norms to comply with those that apply to the relevant situation they find themselves in. Individuals might also incur social and political opportunity costs associated with various forms of in-group stigma and loss of legitimacy or authority within their group. For example, some former white supremacists are often stigmatized by other extremists when they attempt to politely engage with members of minority groups they used to target.[55]

The Functionality of Politeness: Signalling and Social Cooperation

The politeness dimension of civility serves an important function in social and political life. Acts of politeness can be used as a signal. For example, for Edyvane, civility as politeness represents a mode of interaction that displays or communicates a recognition of 'one another as people among whom [we] must live',[56] through compliance with a particular set of social norms. Furthermore, some expressions of politeness norms can move beyond simple recognition and communicate respect to others and acknowledge their dignity.[57] For example, Calhoun argues that politeness 'involves a display of respect, toleration, or considerateness'.[58] Central to Calhoun's conception of civility is the idea that 'civility…is an essentially *communicative* form of moral conduct'.[59]

The signalling function of politeness is important for several reasons. While there are obvious implications for economic exchange, we focus on the social and political aspects. Politeness norms facilitate and reinforce social cooperation in the presence of disagreement—they allow for and promote a healthy and well-functioning society. Sune Lægaard

actually describes this aspect as the primary function of civility; it has the pragmatic role 'to ease social tensions in order to facilitate social interaction and collaboration across differences and the resulting disagreements'.[60] Civility as politeness essentially acts as a 'lubricant' for social cooperation.[61]

The politeness dimension of civility affects social interactions and behaviours across a range of sites including the home,[62] the workplace,[63] educational settings,[64] and public places in the community.[65] Politeness also influences interactions in familial, friendship, romantic, and business relationships. For example, (im)politeness in the workplace can have significant and far-reaching effects on important outcomes like team cohesion,[66] as well as employee productivity.[67] Furthermore, polite behaviours can reinforce cooperative relationships in an office setting, while incidents of impoliteness can harm prospects for ongoing productive exchange.[68] Overtly rude behaviours have also been shown to reduce performance levels and helpfulness in experimental settings.[69]

There are also implications for (im)politeness in the political realm. Politeness can have direct effects on outcomes related to specific election debates,[70] along with how the public reacts to politicians' behaviours in electoral politics.[71] Perceptions about even 'minor incivilities' can have far-reaching effects on public perceptions and fears, as well as subsequent policies.[72] Impolite political discourse can have lasting effects on matters of decorum that help to structure party politics, and a political atmosphere of ongoing impoliteness can further reinforce entrenched political positions.[73] However, an insistence on polite behaviour could also stifle acts of dissent aimed at unjust policies that threaten desirable political ideals.[74] We should also recognize that political interactions can take place in public or private spheres and in physical or virtual spaces.[75]

Politeness is also important for diplomatic relations,[76] as well as for the efficacy of foreign policy[77] and prospects for international cooperation more broadly. How states treat migrants and asylum-seekers during processing may affect their international and domestic reputation. For example, polite or impolite behaviour by officials at border checkpoints or during processing can provide an indicator as to whether a state lives up to the fair assessment of applicants and to practices expected from liberal democratic countries.[78] In the realm of contentious politics, the form that civil resistance movements take on, including how

they may or may not comply with social expectations regarding strategy, influences the likelihood of their success and failure.[79] Even in extreme circumstances like violent armed conflict, civilians can create institutional mechanisms to encourage polite and respectful behaviour by insurgent and counterinsurgent forces.[80]

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted politeness norms across the globe in economic, social, and political spaces. These disruptions will undoubtedly have implications for how people and states interact with each other. When politeness norms are uncertain or changing, as during the current pandemic, it is more difficult for people to comply with them. This will in turn also affect their ability to use polite speech or behaviour to effectively signal their commitment to social interaction and cooperation, thus potentially creating or exacerbating social tensions. We will return to these points in the next chapter.

Civility as Public-Mindedness

Politeness, especially when understood as a communicative virtue, constitutes an important dimension of civility, as we explained in the previous section. However, it is not the only dimension. Several scholars understand civility mainly as a political virtue, specifically a civic virtue that is inherently related to liberal politics.[81] The political dimension of civility emphasizes our responsibilities and duties as *citizens* of a liberal democracy, rather than simply as individuals interacting in different everyday social settings. Edyvane, for example, points out that this political understanding of civility is 'bound up with the idea of an association of citizens, and includes cognate ideas of the civic, the civil and the civilian; it concerns one's status and duties as a member of a political community, as a citizen with certain rights and responsibilities'.[82] Central to this understanding of civility is compliance with fundamental liberal democratic values, as well as a commitment to the common good rather than to personal or sectarian interests. To be civil in this political sense means to engage in 'a *kind* of politics, a *type* of political discourse that does not harm, injure, or offend fellow citizens'.[83] Doing so can contribute to better democratic governance and social coexistence in the long term.

While this second dimension of civility is often referred to as 'political civility',[84] we prefer the term *civility as public-mindedness*. The label 'political civility' might inadvertently suggest that this kind of civility is solely relevant to limited aspects of the political realm like institutions,

political parties, or electoral campaigns. Civility as public-mindedness has a broader meaning, and involves recognizing others as free and equal members of society. According to Richard Boyd, for example, civility involves 'the mutual recognition of others as our moral equals'.[85] Likewise, Robert Pippin claims that civility entails acknowledging others' 'equal status as free agents within a cooperative enterprise'.[86] However, it is important to distinguish between two different sub-dimensions of civility as public-mindedness. While these two aspects overlap, and both involve treating others as free and equal citizens, each of them points towards a specific dimension of public-mindedness and specific duties associated with it.

Moral Civility

The first dimension of civility as public-mindedness refers to the way we interact with others via our actions and speech in societies characterized by diversity and disagreement. We call this *moral civility*. According to this dimension, to respect others as free and equal means to respect their fundamental rights, liberties, and equal civic standing. It means, for example, refraining from using physical violence against others,[87] discriminating against them,[88] or using racist or other types of expression that portray members of certain groups as physically, intellectually, or morally inferior. When it comes to the latter point, perhaps the most prominent defence of moral civility in recent years is provided by Jeremy Waldron in his book *The Harm in Hate Speech*.[89] As Teresa Bejan points out, '[f]or Waldron…[s]ome speech about others and their fundamental identities and commitments is simply *so* uncivil, so intolerant, degrading, and disrespectful that it constitutes a form of *persecution* against which a tolerant society can and should act'.[90] Here two clarifications are required.

First, while apparently overlapping, civility as politeness and moral civility are not the same thing. In some cases, these two dimensions of civility can be tightly connected. As we mentioned earlier, civility as politeness can be used to communicate respect to others and acknowledge their dignity, two key aspects of moral civility. According to Sarah Buss, for example, 'by behaving politely we are, in effect, "saying" something to one another…[and]… acknowledge[ing] one another's special dignity'.[91] Yet, in other cases, politeness and moral civility may come into tension, as when polite means are used to advance morally uncivil causes, or impolite behaviour or speech is employed to advance morally civil goals.[92]

For example, 'polite Nazis' may abide by norms of good manners and etiquette for purely strategic reasons, while advancing political goals that are morally uncivil since they deny a free and equal status to members of certain groups.[93] Conversely, the use of impolite behaviour or speech can signal dissent towards unjust policies or institutions to help advance morally civil goals.[94] Second, while moral civility is often tied to liberal democratic institutions, this is not always the case. For example, while all liberal democracies have laws against physical violence, not all of them have laws regulating racist or hate speech, at least not in the same way. Where (most) racist speech is not regulated (e.g. in the US), it can be argued that citizens have the legal right, sanctioned by liberal democratic institutions (e.g. the US First Amendment), to violate moral civility with particular speech acts.

Justificatory Civility

The second dimension of civility as public-mindedness concerns the public justification of political rules in liberal democracies. According to this view, in societies characterized by reasonable pluralism and disagreement, citizens and public officials treat each other as free and equal if they justify political rules by appealing only to public reasons. These are reasons that all of them could in principle understand and accept, rather than reasons grounded in their different worldviews, identities, and beliefs. We call this *justificatory civility*. The most influential account of justificatory civility is perhaps the one provided by John Rawls, for whom the duty to appeal solely to public reasons during the process of public justification is a 'duty of civility'.[95] Complying with this duty means renouncing the use of religious or other controversial arguments when justifying political rules, thus engaging in 'reasonable public discourse'.[96]

Here we should draw a distinction between two different components of justificatory civility. The first consists of fundamental political values that are widely shared in liberal democratic societies, and include for example civil and political rights and liberties, equality of opportunity, and values linked to the promotion of the common good.[97] These constitute the *moral content* of justificatory civility. It is important to stress that justificatory civility demands not only that we appeal to these values, rather than to sectarian or controversial ones, during the process of public justification; it also requires that we balance them in reasonable ways. To do this, we need to provide reasons that 'represent a plausible

balance of political values. An argument, even if based on a political and free-standing value, fails to be a reasonable public justification if it does not plausibly address other political values that may be at stake'.[98] The second component of justificatory civility includes what Rawls refers to as 'guidelines of inquiry: principles of reasoning and rules of evidence in the light of which citizens are to decide whether substantive principles properly apply and to identify laws and policies that best satisfy them', as well as 'the methods and conclusions of science when these are not controversial'.[99] These form the *epistemic content* of justificatory civility.

Accounts of justificatory civility differ in many respects. There is disagreement, for example, as to whether the duty of civility only applies to constitutional matters or also more generally to all legislation.[100] Furthermore, while some only assign that duty to legislators and public officials,[101] others extend it to citizens more broadly.[102] More importantly, there are different accounts of the structure of public reason. Some, following Rawls, endorse a consensus approach to public reason and argue that public reasons (or, at least, the premises and standards on which public reasons are grounded) should be shared among all (idealized) members of the public.[103] Others reject this position and defend convergence accounts of public reason where justification does not require shared reasons or premises but only that political rules be justified to each and every citizen based on reasons that they will find persuasive from the perspective of their own beliefs and values.[104] Convergence accounts of public reason therefore are in tension with the Rawlsian duty of civility. The latter demands that we refrain from appealing to religious or other controversial values during the process of public justification, but such appeals may be permissible under convergence accounts if they help citizens or legislators to justify political rules to those who endorse those views, e.g. members of certain religious groups.[105] This does not imply that one is uncivil (in the justificatory sense) if they endorse a convergence account of public justification. However, civility grounded in the convergence view will have different implications for public justification: to be civil in this sense will mean to provide each of our fellow citizens with reasons in support of political rules that they can find acceptable from their own perspective, rather than striving to articulate widely shared reasons that all our fellow citizens may accept.

A final aspect should be considered. The duty of civility concerns the public justification of political rules, which is tied to their aims and goals, rather than their outcomes and consequences. For this reason it is often assumed that as long as laws and policies are publicly justified (based

on whichever conception of public justification one endorses), the fact that they might end up favouring or burdening certain citizens more than others is not morally relevant from the perspective of public justification. However, this constitutes an incorrect, or at least incomplete, account of public reason and public justification. The outcomes and consequences of political rules are and *should* be relevant to public justification. Based on Rawls's idea of the 'strains of commitment',[106] some scholars point out that it would be unreasonable to implement political rules (even if in principle justified based on public reasons) that would impose intolerable strains upon certain citizens.[107] For example, members of religious groups could not reasonably be expected to accept laws that would make it overly difficult for them to pursue their religious beliefs and practices, even if these laws in principle aim to realize public-minded goals.

In this book, our analysis of justificatory civility is based on a number of premises, which we assume without further defence. First, we contend that justificatory civility concerns all political rules and not only those concerning constitutional matters; therefore all legislation related to COVID-19 ought to be publicly justified. Furthermore, we postulate that when it comes to the public justification of policies, the Rawlsian duty of civility applies solely to those who occupy decision-making positions, like politicians and public officials. We also share the belief that consensus accounts of public reason are more desirable than convergence ones, and that justificatory civility should take into account the outcomes and consequences of political rules that result in strains of commitment for some individuals and groups within society.

At this point it is important to acknowledge that both moral and justificatory civility, as we presented them in this chapter, may be contested by some. For a start, only those liberals who, like Rawls, are committed to political liberalism and public reason, will be prepared to consider justificatory civility a key dimension of civility as public-mindedness (or of civility *tout court*). Liberal perfectionists who criticize the ideals of public reason and public justification,[108] for example, might embrace moral civility but reject justificatory civility. Furthermore, some may consider moral civility itself too demanding. In her book *Mere Civility*, for example, Teresa Bejan rejects Rawls's justificatory civility and criticizes Waldron's moral civility. More specifically, she argues.

> [f]ollowing Rawls, some theorists invoke civility in arguments about public reason and other constraints on public deliberation, while others, like Waldron…, stress the negative effects of uncivil speech on diversity and

> dignity for members of tolerant societies…[T]hese theorists' robust understandings of civility often do create covert demands for conformity that threaten to civilize disagreement by putting an end to it entirely…[T]he 'uncivil' are left only two options: a sincere conversion to the fundamentals of political liberalism or silence.[109]

Against the Waldronian and Rawlsian views of civility, which roughly correspond to what we call moral and justificatory civility, Bejan defends the idea of 'mere civility' advocated by the Puritan exile and dissenter Roger Williams, who founded the colony of Rhode Island. Mere civility involves 'a minimal adherence to culturally contingent rules of respectful behavior compatible with, and occasionally expressive of, contempt for others and their beliefs'.[110] We stipulate, without further argument, that Bejan's conception of civility is too narrow to most effectively engage many of the social and political challenges posed by COVID-19. We contend that our more expansive view of civility as public-mindedness, with its moral and justificatory dimensions, offers a richer framework for understanding those challenges.

From Civility to Incivility

Based on the foregoing analysis of the different dimensions of civility, we identify a number of ways in which incivility can manifest in liberal democracies. Each of these dimensions of incivility will be relevant to our analysis in Chapters 3 and 4, where we illustrate how COVID-19 has resulted in a loss of civility across a number of areas and settings, and what responses have been or could be adopted to recover civility in the current pandemic and during future crises.

First, incivility can manifest as a failure to comply with norms of politeness. Swearing, not greeting one's co-workers, failing to say 'please' or 'thank you', are just some examples of how individuals might be impolite under this dimension. However, simply identifying instances of incivility as impoliteness is not sufficient. Based on our earlier analysis, it is also important to understand why people behave impolitely, and what implications this might have for their social coexistence, especially in times of crisis. Answering the former question requires delving into the structural and agential factors that may prevent individuals from abiding by norms of politeness and etiquette, especially when those norms may become uncertain, as during a crisis. Addressing the latter question entails instead

examining the implications of impolite speech and action for social interaction and cooperation. We will consider both aspects in Chapter 3 in relation to the current pandemic.

Second, incivility may manifest itself as moral incivility. This may involve speech or behaviour that fails to respect other citizens as free and equal, by denying or violating their individual rights, liberties, and/or equal civic status. Physically assaulting other people, destroying property, or addressing members of certain groups with discriminatory and hateful speech, are clear instances of moral incivility. According to Jeremy Waldron, for example, hate speech denies the civic dignity and equal social status of those it targets.[111] This, as already pointed out by Bejan, seems to be a clear instance of moral incivility. Here, however, it is important to distinguish between moral incivility and incivility as impoliteness. The latter, unlike the former, only involves a violation of social norms of politeness and etiquette but not an attack on other individuals' free and equal status, or an infringement on their rights and liberties. Of course, what starts as merely impolite speech or behaviour (e.g. swearing) may sometimes escalate into moral incivility (e.g. hate speech and physical violence), but this shift is not inevitable and it is important to keep the two dimensions of incivility separate for analytical purposes.

Third, incivility can take a justificatory form. To be uncivil, under this dimension, means to fail to comply with the Rawlsian duty of civility, which requires appealing to public reasons when publicly justifying political rules. Here, we need to disaggregate justificatory incivility into two subtypes, based on the two elements of the content of public reason (moral and epistemic) that we illustrated in the previous section.

On the one hand, justificatory incivility may involve a failure to recognize or appeal to the moral content of public reason during the process of public justification. For example, one might appeal to reasons that overtly or covertly deny that certain citizens are entitled to basic rights and liberties. This instance of justificatory incivility clearly presents points of connection with moral incivility. After all, a racist politician who verbally abuses or physically assaults members of certain ethnic minority groups, thus being morally uncivil, is also likely to violate justificatory civility when defending or opposing certain policies and laws. Yet, the two sub-dimensions of incivility as non-public-mindedness should be kept separate. One (moral incivility) concerns how we speak to and act towards our fellow citizens in our everyday interactions. The other (justificatory incivility) relates solely to the process of public justification, which is a distinct dimension of public and political life. But justificatory incivility

concerning the moral content of public reason does not manifest itself only through a failure to recognize others' rights and liberties. It also, and perhaps more often, occurs when policymakers appeal to reasons which, while not denying others' basic rights and liberties, are rooted in one's self-interest or in the interest of their family, narrow social group, or partisan cause, rather than a commitment to the common good. For example, defending a tax cut based solely on the argument that it will advantage one's party and the businesses that support it (rather than, say, contribute to economic growth for the entire society) constitutes an instance of justificatory incivility. Relatedly, one can violate justificatory civility by appealing solely to reasons grounded in controversial religious, ethical, or philosophical doctrines (e.g. Catholicism, Islam, or Millian liberalism) to justify political rules. Furthermore, politicians and public officials are also uncivil in the justificatory sense when they overly prioritize certain political values and fail to address others, or when they neglect the strains of commitment that may result from certain policies.

On the other hand, the content of public reason also involves an epistemic dimension. From this perspective, employing flawed guidelines of inquiry, or relying on controversial scientific arguments and/or methods, may result in publicly unjustified political rules. Instances of this kind of justificatory incivility may include, for example, the use of conspiracy theories to justify or oppose certain laws or policies.[112] Likewise, one might display justificatory incivility by appealing to flawed or incomplete scientific evidence, flawed methods, and/or flawed chains of causation. Another instance of justificatory incivility related to the epistemic dimension of public reason involves the selective use of non-flawed scientific evidence for non-public-minded goals. Scientists often disagree with each other even if there are no inherent flaws in their methods or conclusions.[113] In such cases, a policymaker might be guilty of justificatory incivility if they deliberately select (e.g. for ideological or partisan reasons) specific scientific methods and conclusions (even if not inherently flawed) to support their preferred policies, while failing to acknowledge alternative ones.

Conclusion

In this chapter we provided an account of civility that distinguishes between its politeness and public-mindedness dimensions. With regard to civility as politeness, we illustrated its structural and agential elements, as well its functionality. When examining civility as public-mindedness,

we focused instead on the distinction between its moral and justificatory sub-dimensions. This allowed us to articulate different types of incivility, setting the stage for our analysis of COVID-19 in the next two chapters. More specifically, in Chapter 3 we will examine the many ways in which COVID-19 poses unprecedented challenges to people's ability to be polite, and what this might imply for social coexistence and cooperation, both in the short and long term. In Chapter 4 we will shift our focus to civility as public-mindedness and analyse instances of moral and justificatory incivility during the pandemic. Throughout both chapters we will also consider various measures that have been or could be implemented to counter greater incivility along these different dimensions.

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CHAPTER 3

Civility as Politeness During COVID-19

Introduction

This chapter examines new challenges to the politeness dimension of civility presented by COVID-19. As we explained in Chapter 2, politeness involves complying with norms of behaviour that aim to facilitate peaceful exchange and positive social interaction. At the very onset of the pandemic, compliance with politeness norms and other-regarding behaviour served as an early bulwark against the spread of the virus. As the director of the Division of Medical Ethics at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine Arthur Caplan said, '[a]t least for now, we don't have treatment or vaccines. All we've got is behaviour. And there is evidence that the behaviour works, if we're diligent about it'.[1] How people behave during a crisis such as a pandemic has very real consequences. In the absence of clear guidelines and policies, polite other-regarding behaviour can save lives.

However, the crisis resulting from the pandemic also disrupted politeness norms themselves. We focus on some of these disruptions in this chapter. More specifically, we identify four problems posed by the pandemic to people's ability to behave politely. First, the current crisis has made it difficult for people to identify norms of politeness and behave appropriately in circumstances that were previously less contested and problematic. Second, the signalling function of politeness has also been undermined: communicating respect and consideration towards others via polite speech or behaviour is more likely to go awry during the

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pandemic. Third, new problems regarding social cooperation may arise as a result. When acts of politeness are unclear or misunderstood, they may no longer help to mitigate conflict or facilitate cooperative social exchange. Finally, citizens and politicians can exploit disruptions around politeness norms to engage in behaviour that under normal circumstances would be considered impolite.

Navigating New Politeness Norms

As we explained in the previous chapter, behaving politely implies complying with social norms grounded in people's social identities and roles, which are often affected by contextual and environmental factors. However, politeness also involves an agential dimension, namely the ability to be aware of, critically assess, judge, and comply with those norms based on the circumstances. In normal times, agents exercise this kind of critical engagement against the background of relatively stable politeness norms. However, COVID-19 has disrupted this stability and forced agents to navigate a social environment characterized by greater uncertainty, where it is more difficult to identify, evaluate, and comply with politeness norms. In this sense, critical engagement with norms of politeness has not only become increasingly difficult, but also more necessary during the current pandemic: when the structural dimensions of politeness are unstable or contested, agents are less likely to find and adopt ready-made polite behaviours. Instead, they need to make a greater effort to understand what behaving politely entails in different circumstances. Yet, people are endowed with the capacity to adapt to these disruptions and formulate solutions to problems raised by this kind of crisis. In this subsection we evaluate whether and how individuals or groups have responded to the disruption of politeness norms during the current pandemic.

In what ways has COVID-19 rendered critical judgment related to norms of politeness more problematic? It seems evident that people have often faced a lack of clear information regarding the virus, the way it spreads, and its short- and long-term effects—especially at the beginning of the pandemic. However, the problem persists due to limited or uncertain scientific evidence regarding how the virus spreads in everyday environments such as gyms, restaurants, cafes, or on public transport.[2] This points to an ongoing challenge since many of our polite interactions with others happen in these kinds of spaces. For example, if it is

unclear how the virus spreads within a restaurant, then it will be difficult for people to understand how to interact politely with their table companions, the waiting staff, or other customers; what in normal circumstances used to be considered polite (e.g. handing over a menu, passing the salt, or exchanging pleasantries with a neighbouring table) might no longer be viewed as such. Furthermore, and relatedly, in the absence of clear information people may end up making different judgments about what constitutes politeness and how to express it in different contexts and circumstances. This may risk creating different and separate 'politeness bubbles', thus undermining the 'social lubricant' function of politeness, a point to which we will return in more detail later in the chapter.

This 'piecemeal' approach to politeness, where people adopt different norms of politeness (and to different degrees) in the absence of clear information, constitutes one of the most significant challenges COVID-19 poses to the politeness dimension of civility. Responding to this situation requires interaction and communication between various agents within society. For example, governments might help to coordinate and disseminate findings from scientific research on the virus in order to provide citizens with clearer guidelines, including guidance regarding other-regarding behaviours that might constitute polite action in view of the current pandemic. This might involve issuing press releases as well as providing clear information about how to behave politely under the current circumstances in popular public locations such as beaches and parks. This might take the form of signs or ropes and fences to clearly deter use (Image 3.1). People already provide these kinds of information tools concerning etiquette for visiting mosques,[3] Buddhist temples,[4] or churches.[5]

In the remainder of this section, we will consider three examples regarding uncertain politeness norms: queuing, interactions in sites related to the food industry such as restaurants and cafes, and greetings. We will illustrate how COVID-19 has caused a disruption of politeness norms in all three contexts, and how citizens, businesses, and governments have reacted to this crisis in order to restore such norms.

Queuing During COVID-19

Queuing provides a clear example of a politeness norm that is simple and universally understood as a polite act regardless of levels of compliance. While we may observe subtle variation in queuing practices across contexts, an Italian (for example) would understand how to stand in

Image 3.1 Roped off outdoor gym equipment in Melbourne, Australia

a line in the United States and vice versa. Yet, at the start of the pandemic, considerations related to the transmission of COVID-19 disrupted previous practices and added new layers of complexity to queuing. New demands emerged about maintaining physical distance in public places, but solutions came quickly. People acknowledged the need to make small changes to their behaviour and almost immediately began to help others understand new expectations. For example, in Seattle, Washington vendors at a local farmer's market provided additional guidance with tape, chalk, and signs to help patrons adhere to new best practices.[6]

Explicit measures such as floor markings can communicate emerging politeness norms related to queuing—reducing uncertainty and making compliance with new norms more likely. The solutions may be formal or informal and the norms more or less codified. Some governments stepped in to provide guidance and a more authoritative stance on physical distancing. For example, the state government in Tasmania, Australia

encouraged businesses to act: '[t]o maintain physical distancing, place appropriately spaced floor markings at queuing points, such as check-outs and the entrance to the store. At larger stores, queuing stations need to be clearly identified outside the store.'[7] Supermarkets added markings and moved especially long queues to outside spaces.[8] Some businesses adopted more technology-based solutions and implemented digital queuing systems to further reduce risk and avoid potential impolite (and unsafe) behaviour altogether[9] (Image 3.2).

The public began to understand and adapt to new queuing norms quickly in most cases. While in some contexts physical queuing is customary (e.g. the UK), in others (e.g. Italy) 'queuing' in normal times

Image 3.2 A business providing guidance on queuing practices in Melbourne, Australia

may not involve an actual queue. Instead, the public may adopt alternative methods of ensuring fairness and order like taking a number or simply recognizing others who are there first waiting their turn. In those contexts, 'queuing' during COVID-19 may now entail physical queuing compliant with new social distancing norms. Regardless of how it was done before, queuing serves as a politeness norm to ensure fairness and orderly cooperation, but now includes considerations related to health and safety.

However, things may still go wrong even in the presence of new, clear queuing norms. In extreme examples we have seen physical altercations when people fail to observe social distancing in queues, as was the case at a Walmart store in Colorado Springs in the United States.[10] One US resident we spoke with recalled his initial impressions when visiting a Costco warehouse store in the early weeks of the pandemic:

> It was really weird because it was like two tribes. There were the people who were very courteous, who understood [the rules] and had the same fears that you did to stay away. And there were other crazy people that were just going in there, you know, that kind of a thing. And, you know, it was really tribal.[11]

Despite some of these unfortunate incidents, new politeness norms related to queuing were introduced immediately after the onset of the public health crisis. Overall, they were adopted quickly and universally in part due to their simplicity; queuing involves politeness in a physical space and entails relatively uncomplicated demands in practice.

Dining and Drinking with Others During COVID-19

More complicated environments and diverse forms of interaction can introduce additional challenges regarding norms of politeness. For example, interaction in sites related to the food industry such as restaurants, cafes, bars, and grocery stores can add additional layers of complexity. We may need to interact with waiting staff, place an order, conduct a transaction with a cashier, or use the toilet. These sites are central to social life and therefore become places where we observe many politeness norms. We also purposefully engage with other people in these spaces; we might meet a friend for drinks after work or eat dinner at a restaurant with family. The demands and practices related to politeness

norms in these spaces can vary significantly across contexts and differ by country as well.

Disruptions like COVID-19 can lead to greater uncertainty and introduce new problems related to politeness in these more complicated environments. People recognized many of these challenges to etiquette and politeness norms early on during the pandemic. Experts weighed in on how to alter the way we thought about previous social practices.[12] Popular news outlets provided some basic advice on behaviours when restaurants reopened after mandatory shutdowns.[13] The public had some guidance as to the new 'dos and don'ts' for restaurant patrons.[14] However, different locales could adopt distinct approaches. Furthermore, each business may have a different hierarchy of concerns based on its own priorities and circumstances.

Customers face some distinct challenges in the way they engage with businesses and can become disoriented in these uncertain environments. As a customer in one place you may quickly learn some basic rules to be polite to waiting staff, while in a different place where you order your own food at the counter you might need to learn different norms regarding where and how you might wait for your order to be taken away. Restaurants have been especially hard hit and face a precarious business landscape; recognizing and accommodating these circumstances has become part of the process through which new politeness norms are being formulated. In supporting local restaurants, customers might come to terms with the fact that menus may not be complete; place orders earlier in the day in consideration of preparation and supply-chain complications; tip generously to support staff; and familiarize themselves with policies related to curbside takeaway service so that employees do not have to wait.[15] Not showing up for a reservation has always been impolite, but the consequences for businesses in the pandemic climate are especially severe.[16] Efforts to educate the public as to the dire financial effects could help, but some businesses may need to adopt new deposit policies so as not to rely on the politeness of their customers.

Businesses and their employees also face new challenges related to etiquette and politeness norms, with a special emphasis on obligations to ensure health and safety. Simple practices like greeting customers have to be adjusted. For example, an employee at a Melbourne restaurant described the disruption to the way they greet patrons: 'our customers are like an extension to our family. It's not uncommon for us to greet with a hug so this has been very difficult for us to acclimatize ourselves

with'.[17] Policies related to food preparation and service need to account for new concerns and expectations too. The seating plan for customers must now consider physical distancing requirements. Businesses should recognize new risks for viral transmission related to touching surfaces and take precautions when using specific technologies related to ordering and payment. In the United States, where it may have been customary to provide a gratuity to your waiter in cash even while paying with a credit card to ensure they keep most of the money, it may now be more polite to add the gratuity on the card to avoid touching the money, or take some precautionary steps. For example, lifestyle and etiquette expert Elaine Swann recently advised: '[i]f you do have to tip in cash, to put [workers] at ease, put the cash in an envelope in advance…One of the core values of etiquette is to make sure we're doing everything we can to put others at ease'.[18]

Customers have also had to more carefully consider how they might interact with other patrons they do not know while inside restaurants. Polite behaviour when waiting to be seated and in passing other customers largely relates to physical distancing. Restaurants can help customers to be polite in this way. Normally, physical distancing in restaurants includes basic etiquette related to not touching others, respecting privacy, and being unintrusive. We generally respect a 'personal bubble', though the specifics can differ by country.[19] These expectations have become especially important during the COVID-19 crisis.

Restaurants, bars, and cafes have taken measures to help patrons become aware of the need to maintain physical distancing and in many cases provided some tools to help them do it. For example, a Paris sidewalk cafe used giant teddy bears placed in seats to ensure adequate spacing between customers at neighbouring tables.[20] Restaurants all over the world employed mannequins, dummies, and cardboard cut-outs to communicate the need for and to help enforce social distancing measures.[21] Some locales maintained a sense of humour about how to best adhere to new public health guidelines. For example, a cafe in Germany asked patrons to wear hats with long pool flotation noodles attached to the top to help with spacing.[22] A US bar in Maryland placed customers inside giant rolling 'bumper tables' to keep them two metres apart while drinking on its outdoor patio, and a restaurant in Amsterdam seated diners inside miniature greenhouses built for two.[23]

In addition to polite behaviour during interactions with other parties in a restaurant, the public has also had to adjust to new etiquette concerning

eating with co-diners. For example, the way we eat differs across cultures and has changed throughout history.[24] The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new challenges and considerations to the way we interact with our family, friends and colleagues in environments related to food service. As a result, customers might need to change their eating habits in some contexts. For example, communal seating and sharing platters may become less common moving forward,[25] and health risks have affected long-standing cultural traditions tied to dining behaviours.[26] These changes could have carry-on implications. For example, research suggests that acts like sharing plates and meals facilitates cooperation and reduces competitive behaviour among acquaintances and strangers alike.[27] Where sharing a meal was previously seen as polite, potentially building trust and strengthening social bonds, this may now prove more challenging.

Greetings During COVID-19

Politeness norms related to other common human interactions like greetings are often situational and culturally dependent. For example, you might hug a family member or friend when you meet for a coffee, while a simple handshake would be more appropriate when meeting a colleague from work. In different cultural or professional contexts, you might demonstrate politeness with a formal bow, a rigid salute, or a casual fist-bump. We learn the best practices to facilitate smooth exchange with others through socialisation.[28] With the onset of a pandemic, previously understood expectations regarding appropriate greetings are less clear. A polite handshake meant to initiate a pleasant social exchange might make the other party uneasy or be perceived as unsafe at best or offensive at worst. COVID-19 has turned some of the politeness norms related to greetings on their head, where an other-regarding demonstration of care may now entail abstention from previous polite behaviours. Given the health risks associated with proximity and touch, the public could benefit from a 'hug and handshake hiatus' and develop alternative ways to exhibit politeness when greeting others.[29]

Specific cultures and social environments have been affected in distinct ways. For example, politicians in France have urged the public to refrain from *la bise*, a customary French greeting of air kisses on the cheeks.[30] Those living in Muslim societies face similar disruptions as a result of social distancing measures. A customary handshake followed by a hug between friends and acquaintances of the same sex has largely fallen

out of practice.[31] Disruptions and changes to the way we greet others has consequences for subsequent interactions and the trajectory of our relationships. This issue extends to the business world as well. A bank employee in Italy explained to us:

> The handshake has always been considered a sign of trust in the other person, more so in the banking sector. The customer is placing their life savings in the bank's care; this is an act of great trust. Not being able to shake hands with customers [during the pandemic] has certainly led to a situation of freezing relationships— everything is more impersonal.[32]

Likewise, when a commercial real estate agent in New York ended a lunch meeting with someone he had known for ten years without a parting hug, he remarked that it 'felt like we didn't close the loop'.[33] The disruption leaves something of a 'norm gap' when expressions of politeness transition from one form to another. The communicative and signalling functions of civility as politeness are in flux (a point to which we will return in the next section) and we must develop alternative practices.

In more formal contexts, politicians will need to develop novel forms of official protocol to guide diplomatic exchange between leaders.[34] How politicians interact with one another, as well as with their own citizens, has become more complicated. For example, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has had to learn how to balance conflicting politeness norms. Early in the pandemic he joked about shaking hands with coronavirus patients: 'I'm shaking hands continuously, I was in a hospital the other night where I think there were actually a few coronavirus patients and you'll be pleased to know I shook hands with everybody!' He went on: '[a]nd I continue to shake hands', then he smiled and concluded, '[o]ur judgement is wash, washing your hands is the crucial thing',[35] rather than abstaining from handshakes. Johnson's statement shows how previously ingrained politeness norms around greetings might sometimes take priority for some people over new concerns for health and safety. The medical community recognizes the problematic nature of the handshake in healthcare settings,[36] but shaking hands can represent an especially important act for politicians to relate to constituents.[37] Johnson contracted the virus shortly after.

Public consensus regarding the potential dangers and inappropriateness of the handshake has led to a range of alternative greetings. Early substitutes included smiles and air kisses from afar, but subsequent mask requirements placed additional limits on visibility. Other gestures might

include a small head incline, a hand to the heart, a namaste gesture, or even a *Star Trek*-inspired Vulcan salute.[38] More animated greetings could include 'jazz hands', a footshake, an elbow bump, or a somewhat riskier fist bump in the appropriate circumstances.[39]

Politeness Signals Going Awry

The second challenge posed by COVID-19 to civility as politeness concerns the communicative and signalling function of polite speech and behaviour. We saw in the previous chapter that 'civility…is an essentially *communicative* form of moral conduct' since it helps convey respect and considerateness for others.[40] However, this is only the case if polite signals are successful and receive uptake from those at the other end of the polite interaction. If politeness signals misfire, those using them will fail to communicate their respect and considerateness to their interlocutors.

Politeness signals can go awry even in normal times. For example, people in different cultures may adopt different politeness norms regarding how to initiate a conversation; some may prefer a more direct approach whereas others may favour greater circumspection and ambiguity.[41] Agents who are not aware of these differences and employ their ready-made vocabulary of politeness might inadvertently send the wrong signal to their interlocutors, coming across as rude, offensive, or disrespectful. This can have significant implications for the remainder of the interaction, since empirical evidence shows that the early stages of a conversation affect the extent to which the conversation will remain polite and civil in the long term.[42] Likewise, norms of politeness concerning giving up one's seat for older passengers on buses may be culture-dependent; while this gesture may be perceived as polite in most Western countries, it is considered rude in Japan, where older people view it as an impolite reminder of their advanced age.[43] If you are unaware of this cultural difference, by giving up your seat to an older person you will unintentionally send the wrong politeness signal.

Politeness signals may also go awry when politeness norms are in transition or when old norms are still in place but have become contested. Take, for example, the act of a man holding a door for a woman. In the past, this would have normally been perceived as an act of politeness and chivalry, whereas in more recent times it might be interpreted as an instance of sexism by some.[44] This may have two potential consequences. On the one hand, a man facing the choice of whether or not

to hold a door for an approaching woman may make the 'wrong' choice and, therefore, send her the 'wrong' signal. When a politeness norm is in transition, it is plausible that some people still interpret it in the 'old' way (in this case, an act of politeness and chivalry) whereas others will assign it a new meaning (in this instance, a sexist act). Therefore, if a man decides to hold the door open but the approaching woman endorses the latter interpretation, that act of intended politeness will go awry and not have the desired effect.[45] Alternatively, a man may decide not to hold the door open for a woman by appealing to the value of gender equality but, by doing so, may be considered impolite by the woman, if the latter still endorses traditional views concerning door-holding.[46] Of course, holding the door for another person may also be devoid of a gender dimension and simply be intended or received as a generic act of politeness.

All these problems have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Due to the norm identification challenges illustrated in the previous section, the pandemic has made it more difficult for people to find a ready-made vocabulary of politeness to communicate their respect and consideration for others, even in the absence of cultural barriers. Since many politeness norms have become contested or are in transition, people may sometimes inadvertently come across as impolite, rude, and disrespectful: their politeness may backfire. However, this unintentional impoliteness may result not only from the use of the 'wrong' politeness signals but also from the decision not to use *any* politeness signals, given the uncertainty surrounding politeness norms and practices. For example, if we are no longer sure whether to greet others with a handshake, an elbow, or in some other way, we may decide not to greet them *at all*. But those we interact with may interpret abstention itself as rude and impolite.

In the remainder of this section, we consider three examples of how politeness signals can go awry within the context of the current pandemic. We focus specifically on workplace communication (both online and face-to-face), mask wearing, and interactions in everyday spaces such as sidewalks, gyms, and outdoor exercising areas.

Workplace Communication During COVID-19

COVID-19 has created new points of confusion as to norms of communication in the workplace, especially regarding the best ways to express politeness in email correspondence and proper etiquette during meetings. The way we communicate politely via email may include elements related

to aesthetics, length and content, as well as greetings and other social niceties.[47] A strict adherence to decorum in more formal correspondence might signal an appropriate level of professionalism and regard for the recipient. Employees who frequently use email also recognize that some transgressions and impolite 'flaming' behaviours (e.g. all-caps that might be perceived as aggressive) can have adverse effects, creating tensions, antagonistic relationships, or overt conflict in the workplace.[48] Those should be avoided.

Making adjustments to our email correspondence during the pandemic entails mostly only minor accommodations to still effectively signal politeness. However, it is crucial that we demonstrate an awareness that we are all living through challenging times. It is polite to acknowledge the broader disruption to our social lives, as well as how we relate to others in workplace roles.[49] For example, leading off a correspondence with 'I hope that this email finds you well' may sometimes feel inadequate. Likewise, as we conclude our emails, many of the old sign-offs like 'all the best' or 'regards', may no longer suffice. These expressions seem to fall short in signalling that you are a good colleague. Effectively signalling politeness in correspondence during COVID-19 requires an even greater degree of compassion and genuine concern for the other party.[50] Employees ultimately need to transform workplace communication into something of a 'recognition sandwich', acknowledging the situation and the well-being of others at the beginning and end of the correspondence.[51] This can prove more difficult in some contexts than others. For example, the authors found it quite challenging to encourage colleagues to 'have a good weekend' at the end of an email when the entirety of Melbourne, Australia lived through strict lockdown measures that included a curfew and only one hour outside the home for exercise or groceries, all within five kilometres of their homes.

The content of email correspondence also has implications for the signalling function of politeness. In the context of a global pandemic, making simple everyday requests of others that may have previously been quite normal can now seem unnecessary, insensitive, or impolite given other concerns and responsibilities. For example, academics gently nudging a colleague about a submission deadline for a book chapter or peer-review comments on an article manuscript could come across as impolite. However, scholars in these positions still need reviews and chapter submissions as part of their jobs. In light of the new circumstances, people might employ new work-around practices of politeness;

perhaps recognising the plight of others, pointing out the apparent absurdity of the request given the state of the world, or even using humour in a strategically self-deprecating way to acknowledge what may be an inappropriate request. These practices conceal a business-as-usual outlook in some way and constitute a new way to be polite, send the 'right' signal, and reduce incidents of perceived inconsiderate behaviour. Our ready-made norms of politeness may not be enough, and in this context we need to add an extra step. This might include an additional performative layer to ease what might be an objectively inappropriate request as the other party could be bereaved, suffering from acute mental stress from long-term social isolation, or be overly burdened with increased caring responsibilities, in addition to their everyday work requirements.

Expectations regarding interpersonal interactions during work meetings are also less clear during the pandemic. Public health measures have forced employees in many industries to work from home. Many meetings now take place remotely, using popular video conferencing tools like Zoom. Employees face uncertainty and new challenges regarding signalling politeness and respect in virtual environments. The norms regarding best practices and behaviour in these spaces are still emerging. Zoom has provided its own guidance regarding video meeting etiquette with some simple suggestions like introducing other participants, keeping a professional visual background, and looking into the camera when you speak.[52] Popular media commentary has helped to identify particular social *faux pas* to avoid and best practices to ensure a more positive experience.[53] There is an emerging consensus about what may be deemed polite or impolite. Some key issues include muting your microphone when not speaking, or your video when performing certain actions that might be perceived as visually unpleasant by others (e.g. eating); minimizing background noise; being mindful of camera position and stability; avoiding multitasking like writing emails or completing other work tasks; and remaining mindful of your appearance and dress.[54] Users should also consider potential technological issues like a weak Internet connection and be prepared to engage without the video function in those cases. However, turning off the video has now come to be seen as impolite by some, as an indication that the user might not be fully engaged with the conversation or meeting, and simultaneously focused on other tasks.

Politeness and Mask Wearing During COVID-19

COVID-19 has high transmission rates and the virus can spread through surface contact and via airborne particles. Mask wearing has therefore become an important preventative measure to reduce its diffusion and mitigate health risks now associated with so many activities in public life. However, a mask can hinder our ability to communicate with others, especially people with hearing difficulties and those who speak other languages. Wearing or not wearing a mask is also a signal unto itself. Beyond its functional role, a mask can communicate messages to other people about yourself and how you see others. When masks are not required by law, wearing one might send ambiguous signals. While some could see it as an expression of other-regarding behaviour, others could interpret it as a sign of distrust. For example, a dentist in Australia reported having been subjected to verbal harassment when a customer yelled at her for wearing a facemask in a supermarket at the onset of the pandemic. The Australian public had not yet come to see wearing a mask as a demonstration of other-regarding behaviour and the customer was offended not being able to see the dentist's face. In reality the dentist wore the mask to keep others safe because of the high level of contact with others in her profession.[55]

The type of mask can complicate signals even further, and the meaning and intention behind mask wearing may not always be clear. A large face shield, for example, might be seen as excessive and antisocial, while a simple cloth covering, although less effective at preventing transmission, could be seen as a gesture of solidarity given the need to ration medical grade masks.[56] Furthermore, *refusing* to wear a mask can signal dissent and communicate a specific political position, representing a disregard for public safety and an empty act of defiance to some audiences.[57] Conversely, in polarized political climates, wearing a mask could be seen as a 'smug liberal' act by some.[58] However, a mask-wearing culture can change quickly and its meaning can transform just as fast.[59]

Wearing a mask may also obscure other ways of sending signals. Smiling, frowning, and other facial expressions help to signal emotions like happiness, surprise, anger, or disapproval, which are often crucial to polite interactions.[60] However, different parts of the face are responsible for communicating emotions. Positive emotions generally emanate from the bottom half of the face and widespread mask-wearing provisions keep them hidden, while negative emotions are more visible through the top

half of the face. A reduced capacity to visibly communicate emotions or perceive others' expressions inhibits the signalling function of polite facial expressions.[61] For example, one woman in Italy reflected on this challenge:

> We Italians used to greet relatives, friends, but also acquaintances with a handshake of course, but also with hugs and kisses. I haven't seen this done since [the pandemic began]. Now we greet each other with a 'hello', perhaps raising our voice because the mask limits a lot. It happened to me personally running into an acquaintance, instead of a hello I greeted her with a simple smile. Then I realized that since I was wearing both a mask and sunglasses, she must have thought that I had not responded to her greeting and I felt guilty.[62]

We might develop alternative ways to overcome these new signalling limitations that masks create. For example, as one potential solution to the communication difficulties that result from reduced facial visibility, some manufacturers have started to create transparent 'civility masks' with a new 'smile-through' design.[63] Alternatively, we may need to place more emphasis on the importance of tone and use more body language, given the potential impediments that wearing a mask poses for facial expressions. Our words and gestures, along with the manner in which they are delivered, can be important (im)politeness signals. For example, sitting with arms and legs crossed may signal closure, while facing away or looking in a different direction from someone with whom you are engaged in conversation may communicate discomfort or disinterest. Carefully choosing our words and gestures will become crucial during the pandemic.[64] A mask might also force people into uncertain situations where there might be a tension between different politeness norms. In these cases, people may need to make judgments about the signals they want to send and assess whether the other party has received the intended message. For example, when crossing paths with a friendly neighbour, showing your face and trying to be kind and social, even from a distance, may actually come across as inadvertently impolite during the pandemic.

Another solution that many people have adopted in response to mandatory mask wearing involves the use of personalized homemade face coverings, which were initially a pragmatic response to mask shortages among medical workers. Personalized masks also have the potential to communicate a range of messages[65] and provide new opportunities to

signal politeness to others. The form and design can allow its wearer to express various messages. Pattern and image content might provide a space to communicate politeness, as well as identity, personal affinities, or a humorous message to others. Furthermore, some designs can be more inclusive or message-neutral than others, such as Hawaiian aloha print designs.[66] People might also be able to use personalized masks to signal a political identity that expresses solidarity with the LGBTIQ+ community or the Black Lives Matter movement through specific colour patterns or messaging.[67] Alternatively, masks could include aggressive, offensive, or highly politicized content,[68] and some mask wearers might signal an oppositional stance in the way they wear a mask incorrectly, or alter it to visibly counteract its intended public health function.

Politeness in Everyday Spaces During COVID-19

COVID-19 has disrupted etiquette and politeness norms in contexts where they were previously well-established. Simple gestures like holding a door open for strangers or delaying a lift to allow for another passenger are no longer straightforward acts of politeness that signal social cooperation and consideration. People have had to adjust previously polite behaviours to accommodate new priorities that place health and safety first. Holding the door for a stranger would unnecessarily place you within the recommended physical distancing guidelines. However, you might still signal the intention of being polite by communicating why you refrained from holding the door. One etiquette and culture expert explained: 'Kindly tell them, "Normally I'd hold the door for you, but I'd be within 6 feet"'.[69] The public is still learning to navigate new health risks and how to share spaces with others in the context of the pandemic.

Norms of politeness are not static. Even prior to COVID-19 we lived in a world characterized by uncertainty regarding how to be polite in different contexts and environments, and the public grapples with contested norms or norms in transition on a regular basis. The practice of holding doors, already mentioned at various points in this chapter, has its own complicated history as an everyday ritual that may differ based on factors such as age, gender, or social status, among others.[70] Likewise, expectations around politeness in online discussion groups are still evolving.[71] Tone and directness of speech during in-person conversations can be seen as impolite to varying degrees across time and context, but individuals can make accommodations with relative ease.[72] The global

pandemic has disrupted (or further disrupted) previous politeness norms in everyday spaces and the public will need to adapt and learn to be polite together.[73] This may require novel guidance in line with new knowledge about risks related to viral transmission, but also general pragmatism on the part of the public at large. Politeness norms may also evolve in ways that depart from health and business guidelines. For example, new lift guidelines at an Australian public university campus suggest that two people are allowed inside at the same time based on social distancing guidelines. Two passengers can fit in the space and still maintain a distance of 1.5 metres. However, the authors found that the polite gesture in practice quickly became for the second waiting passenger to allow the first to use the lift solo and wait for the next one. In this kind of situation, the passenger might adopt new practices like pressing the ground floor button as they exit the lift to send it back down immediately and to reduce waiting time below.

Another example of uncertainty regarding norms of politeness in everyday spaces involves our behaviour on the street. Social distancing norms have taken on a greater importance during the course of the pandemic. By the middle of 2020, maintaining a greater degree of physical distance from others became the best practice in preventing community transmission. Overt efforts to adhere to distancing guidelines became the most important way to signal politeness. However, before the COVID-19 crisis was declared a global pandemic on 11 March, many people still made decisions on how to behave in relation to others on the street in relation to other politeness norms. Prejudice towards people of Chinese or East Asian descent became more pronounced in some places owing to the origins of the virus. An academic from Israel described his own experience regarding uncertainty on how to behave politely in the street:

> The other day I was walking my dog; it was very early in the morning and the sidewalks were empty. Then suddenly I noticed that opposite me on the sidewalk was a Chinese person walking towards me. I suddenly felt that I was afraid to pass by him, and I thought this was terribly strange. I kind of forced myself to continue walking towards him and not be afraid, as it would appear very impolite and maybe humiliating to move to the sidewalk on the other side of the street.[74]

This shows the academic's difficulty in choosing the correct action in terms of his own safety, but also his awareness of the potential risk of communicating distrust and fear by crossing to the other side of the road. At that moment, crossing the street might have been perceived as an act of prejudice, but perhaps not doing so could have been seen as a disregard for the other person's safety in light of the emerging threat presented by the virus. As the pandemic progressed, the public began to perceive efforts to create additional physical distance (including crossing the street, if necessary) as the polite thing to do.

Many places around the world have experienced restrictive measures aimed at curtailing the spread of COVID-19. For example, between August and September 2020 residents in Melbourne, Australia became subject to a Stage 4 lockdown that included a stay-at-home mandate that only allowed for travel to buy groceries and one hour of exercise within five kilometres of one's homes, accompanied by an 8pm–5am curfew. Many people began to take regular walks outdoors and were not prepared to behave appropriately and exhibit politeness to others in these spaces. A simple acknowledgement of other people in passing would no longer suffice. Given the new demands around physical distancing, people needed additional guidance on how to behave politely on walking paths along the bay, in public parks, or when using outdoor exercise equipment in proximity to others (Images 3.3 and 3.4).

The state government restricted access to some spaces at various times during the lockdown, including skate parks and outdoor gym equipment. Some residents chose to comply and others ignored these guidelines. When the use of outdoor fitness spaces became permissible again in Melbourne, users had to adapt to new politeness norms. Previously, the dominant way to signal respect and cooperative behaviour involved simple, considerate acts like time limitations on pieces of equipment or acts of fairness like waiting turns. However, politeness now requires greater consideration, with general gym etiquette emphasising norms specific to hygiene and cleanliness, and providing enough space between yourself and other users. You should also wear proper attire, use a towel, wipe down equipment after use, and refrain from excessive socialising.[75] If you decide to perform yoga or conduct a fitness class in a public space, be mindful of how your behaviour might affect others' ability to share the space. Residents should also remain mindful of official policies and comply with public safety measures (Image 3.5).

Image 3.3 Guidance for walking path rules including distancing, stopping, and behaviour in busy areas

In this section we have so far examined unintentional and involuntary acts of impoliteness. However, given its signalling function, people can also be *intentionally* impolite. While they might sometimes do so in order to express disagreement about specific norms (without challenging the need for 'a' norm), or to demonstrate dissent from unjust government policies,[76] in many cases they might simply be acting out of self-interest and showing a general disregard for others. We might counter the latter type of intentional impoliteness in several ways, by introducing avenues and pressures toward compliance while also constructing barriers to non-compliance. This can be achieved through interventions around costs and by introducing mechanisms for informal or formal sanction for violating norms. Programming that helps foster awareness, legitimacy, and acceptance of particular norms can also help encourage compliance. When, instead, impoliteness emerges from dissent, governments might need to prioritize the creation of spaces and tools for channelling that dissent into

Image 3.4 Circles on the grass to help people observe social distancing rules

engagement, debate, consultation, and deliberation, so as to reduce the need for purposeful acts of impoliteness that may lead to greater social tensions in society rather than cooperation.

Image 3.5 A skater failing to comply with COVID-19 rules

Impoliteness and New Barriers to Social Cooperation

As we highlighted in the previous chapter, one of the key functions of civility as politeness is to act as a social 'lubricant'[77] by facilitating social interaction and cooperation and reducing the potential for social tensions.[78] Uncertainty regarding politeness norms and their signalling

function (as discussed in the previous sections), combined with general anxiety resulting from COVID-19, can create a barrier to social cooperation. It is important to recognize that impediments to social cooperation can be either intentional or unintentional. On the one hand, a person might decide to deliberately breach norms of politeness, or use the 'wrong' ones (given the circumstances) in order to signal their disrespect for others and thus generate social tensions. On the other hand, an inadvertent impolite action might have a similar negative effect on social relations.

For the first scenario, imagine a man who holds the door for female colleagues at his workplace daily when he *knows* the action will be perceived as sexist and disrespectful (e.g. because those colleagues and/or his manager explained this to him before). Or in the political sphere, consider when US President Donald Trump refused to shake hands with German Chancellor Angela Merkel during a visit to the White House in 2017 despite requests from journalists and from Merkel herself. Trump's behaviour was interpreted by some as 'a sign of the tensions between the two leaders',[79] a tension which, one could argue, Trump deliberately sought to create. The intentional refusal to shake hands can be inferred from contextual cues. First, Trump is usually keen to shake hands with other political leaders, as exemplified by his participation in a traditional 'group handshake' at an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Manila in November 2017,[80] or when he shook Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's hand for an impressive 19 seconds in February 2017.[81] Abstaining from a handshake with Merkel could be seen as a clear departure from a norm of politeness Trump normally complies with enthusiastically.[82] Second, as one CNN journalist pointed out at the time, '[t]he tense moment between the American and German leaders [came] after Trump repeatedly bashed Merkel on the campaign trail and accused her of "ruining Germany", citing the nation's policies allowing refugees into the nation'.[83] In other words, the handshake refusal could be understood not as an isolated incident but rather as part of a broader tense relationship between the two leaders at the time.[84]

As an instance of *unintentional* impoliteness leading to social tension, consider another incident involving Trump where he walked in front of Queen Elizabeth II during his royal visit to the UK in July 2018.[85] This breach of protocol generated significant interest and immediate negative reactions on social media, even among those who considered themselves critics of the British monarchy. For example, one Twitter user said: 'I'm

not a monarchist by any stretch of the imagination but this is such an insult to Britain. Absolutely clueless, classless, thoughtless, lacking in any dignity and without a shred of respect'. Another wrote: '[t]his is an important point. I see a lot of people bashing the monarchy, and okay. Whatever. She's a 92 year-old woman that he's walking with. Simple respect and decorum would cause him to walk at her pace regardless of who she is'. A third one stated: '[m]e: I hate the Royals, they are leeches on society. Also me: DONALD TRUMP DON'T DO THAT TO THE QUEEN'.[86] These reactions clearly show that breaches of protocol, decorum, and politeness norms can create social tensions, in this case between two countries and their citizens. Tensions also arose between the UK and Italy when then Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi shouted in the Queen's presence during a G20 summit photo-shoot at Buckingham Palace in April 2009.[87]

Social tensions resulting from breaches of politeness norms may also arise outside of political contexts. They have the potential to undermine business relationships, especially in multicultural business contexts where politeness norms grounded in different cultural and religious traditions exist. For example, when conducting business in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 'one never extends their left hand and one does not address another with their first name unless having been given permission do so', and '[i]t is advisable to ask open ended questions that will not require a yes or no answer. Furthermore, it is important to "save face" with all communication conducted in a harmonious and non-aggressive style'.[88] Failing to comply with these and other related politeness and etiquette norms is likely to cause tension and undermine business relationships.

Road etiquette provides another area to illustrate the relationship between politeness norms and the easing of social tensions. Of course, every country has legal rules regulating traffic on the road. However, these may not always be sufficient to guarantee peaceful and smooth interactions among drivers. Road accidents can escalate from tensions on the road, more often a result of a drivers' temperament and lack of politeness than infringements of traffic laws.[89] Conversely, not cutting other drivers off or giving them right-of-way are acts of politeness that can contribute to easing social tensions on the road and thus reduce road rage and the risk of accidents.[90] Likewise, using a 'friendly wave' to thank other drivers when they give way or pull over and let you pass (even when this

is legally required) can go a long way towards creating a more peaceful (and, therefore, safer) road experience for all drivers.[91]

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, uncertainty concerning norms of politeness has created additional moments for social tension and new barriers to cooperation. As we have already pointed out, new politeness norms emerged soon after the initial onset in some areas. However, ongoing uncertainty in many contexts may lead people to act impolitely in ways that risk undermining smooth social interactions and cooperation. In some cases, impolite action may be driven by misguided beliefs, as when people hoard goods from supermarkets, shouting at and pushing one another in the unfounded fear of shortages. In other cases, people may intentionally and consciously act impolitely for self-interested reasons, because they do not want to spend the time required to learn about or observe certain politeness norms (e.g. when they decide not to clean shared gym or outdoor exercise equipment after working out). In the following subsections, we engage with three examples that show how impolite behaviour during COVID-19 can undermine social cooperation: snitching, politeness in the workplace, and the impact of (im)politeness on international cooperation.

Snitching During COVID-19

Snitching is the act of informing on another. There are, of course, moral implications related to snitching, and there is a growing debate on the related topic of whistleblowing in political theory and philosophy.[92] Etiquette related to snitching is endowed with its own social norms and expectations in how it is seen and practiced. As the famous saying 'snitches get stitches' suggests, snitching is often understood as something that 'you are not supposed to do', and which may result in social stigma and ostracism on the part of others, or even worse.[93] All of this suggests that in addition to being a morally significant behaviour (the permissibility of which may be contested), snitching is also relevant to the issue of politeness. More specifically, snitching is impolite since it contravenes norms of social etiquette which demand that we abstain from snitching on others. And, indeed, like most impolite acts, snitching can have negative implications for social cooperation and increase social tension.

Snitching has become a prominent issue during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context of stay-at-home orders and laws around lockdown measures, some people have been reporting fellow citizens, neighbours, and businesses that violate the rules. However, many of those reporting on others have become targets of public shaming and criticism, as when in July 2020 someone in Melbourne posted a photo of and criticized people in a park not wearing masks, and was strongly condemned for doing so.[94] Likewise, when a Melbourne pizzeria received an order for eight pizzas, and its owner posted comments suggesting that perhaps he had the duty to report this to the police (since a party of eight people contravened social distancing rules at the time), some of the responses he received included the following: 'I would mind my own business and not make assumptions' or '[b]e grateful for the business and don't just assume'.[95] While in both examples there were those who supported snitching, the overall response suggests that the act of snitching is often frowned upon and socially stigmatized.

One Melbourne resident we spoke to recalled hearing neighbours throwing a party in violation of lockdown rules. Given the potential public health and safety effects, one might understand snitching in this context. However, she ultimately decided to adhere to the general 'abstention from snitching' politeness norm, and explained:

> I am hesitant to get police involved when I do not know the full circumstances and there is not an immediate danger: I wasn't completely sure where the party noise was coming from—there were at the time two separate residences that had people over—and there may have been a reason for people to meet, such as shared custody arrangements. Some of my friends had also already mentioned to me that police wouldn't attend for gatherings of less than 10 or 20 people, so by contrast the potential numbers at the neighbours' gatherings were lower and it would have been a waste of my time to notify the police. In discussing the situation with my partner I reflected on how I was feeling about missing significant moments in our lives with family and friends, and how other friends of mine were experiencing the same thing. So we just closed the patio doors and tried to make the best of things together.[96]

Violating an anti-snitching politeness norm can have negative implications for social cooperation. Some have argued for example that 'hotlines for reporting "non-compliance" [are]…evil tools that will damage the very trust we'll need to rebound from this crisis'.[97] Likewise, political

philosopher Daniel Weinstock has pointed out that '[i]nforming against our neighbours is highly corrosive to social relations, in ways which may continue to have echoes after this crisis is over', and that it may often be preferable to maintain a 'certain amount of good faith among our neighbours'.[98] Clearly, then, snitching during the current pandemic risks undermining social cooperation. Some have referred specifically to 'an etiquette to dealing with someone flouting rules that defy basic social behaviour'.[99] Rather than snitching, this etiquette requires that we step up and challenge our fellow citizens and neighbours directly, when necessary. As suggested by etiquette and protocol consultant Nancy Kosik, when doing so,

> you should be polite, assertive and ensure your body language is friendly. Don't yell from your car. Maintain an appropriate distance, and maintain a positive tone…You should greet the group politely…and then say something like, 'I don't know if you've heard, but the government is urging us to speak up if we see people putting themselves at risk. I'm asking you to please wrap up and go home for obvious reasons, even if you're feeling fine'…Once you've said your piece…stay there. 'Don't just leave. See them disassemble their group. Reinforce that you mean what you say'.[100]

Kosik's recommendation signals the importance of politeness on two levels. First, challenging others directly, rather than snitching on them, is the polite thing to do. Second, the challenging itself should be done in a way that is polite, lest it be ineffective, counterproductive, and escalatory.

On the latter point, famous etiquette expert Judith Martin, aka Miss Manners, provides similar advice. When facing those who fail to wear masks or comply with social distancing norms, she argues,

> [y]ou don't insult them because, among other things, it doesn't work…When you start screaming at people, 'You're trying to kill me', and, 'Back off', and that sort of thing, do they say, 'Oh, excuse me', and back off? No, they get hostile…[therefore we should instead say]… 'I think we should have more distance here'…You're giving the person the opportunity to do what you want that person to do without being embarrassed…because if they get embarrassed, they're going to get mean'.[101]

Once again, we can see the clear connection between politeness and social cooperation. Even if we avoid snitching and decide to directly challenge

those who violate COVID-19 rules, we should do so politely, otherwise we risk increasing social tension.

Workplace Politeness During COVID-19

The workplace provides another example concerning the potential negative effects of impoliteness on social cooperation during COVID-19, especially around relationships between co-workers. COVID-19 has clearly increased the level of anxiety and paranoia within the workplace, with colleagues becoming suspicious of one another for a variety of reasons and thus increasing social tension. For instance, a company spokesperson of UK-based health and safety software providers Protecting.co.uk stated:

> I've heard many workplace horror stories since the coronavirus outbreak, of rumours being spread and increasing tensions between colleagues…People are stifling coughs to avoid bullying and harassment from colleagues, while others are feeling like they're being avoided unnecessarily because of office hearsay.[102]

In a specific case, a worker who became the target of suspicion recalled:

> I've been allergic to the air freshener in the office for the last five years, but now everyone seems to be on high alert and has a huge problem with me when I sneeze. I know we have to socially distance from each other, but they are going out of their way to avoid being anywhere near me. I find it really rude, and I'm actually quite upset.[103]

Likewise, especially at the early stages of pandemic, when domestic and international travel was still allowed in many countries, there were cases of employees returning from overseas trips becoming the target of suspicion, accusations, and social stigma. Both authors returned to Australia from overseas business travel in late February and early March 2020 and experienced moments of minor apprehension and uncomfortable humour related to potential exposure to the virus during travel. All these examples show that COVID-19 can result in the disruption of norms of politeness and courtesy in the workplace, thus undermining collegiality and workplace cohesion.

The disruption of norms of politeness in the workplace concerns not only relationships between co-workers, but also between workers

and customers. This has been especially pronounced for businesses with public-facing staff, such as supermarkets and other kinds of retail stores. There have been many cases where tensions between staff and customers escalated due to the latter's rude behaviour, thus undermining the social cooperation that is central to everyday commercial transactions within the marketplace. For example, a bank employee in Italy described interactions with customers during the first wave of COVID-19:

> Several quarrels and disagreements with customers have arisen due to the latter's noncompliance with the rules…Many customers enter the branch without a mask, others do not want to wait outside for more than a few minutes and become hostile towards employees…There have been multiple attacks on bank employees—stones have been thrown at some branches…For us bankers it hasn't exactly been a good time, we were at the forefront in the days when there were thousands of deaths.[104]

Kind and polite behaviour on the part of both staff and customers, e.g. via common courtesy expressions such as 'please' and 'thank you', can indeed go a long way towards facilitating smooth and efficient interactions and transactions. Disruptions to or noncompliance with these norms of politeness can result in closure and may undermine the smooth working of the marketplace. During the early stages of the pandemic in Australia, for example, many supermarket workers became the target of rude and abusive customers and refused to serve them. Furthermore, the presence of impolite customers led others to leave the stores.[105] Both responses to this impolite behaviour were clearly deleterious to smooth and efficient market transactions, by depriving some customers of staff assistance and some stores of customers. In response to these incidents, Barbara Nebart, Newcastle branch secretary of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA), stated:

> [P]lease respect our retail workers…They are not supplying the goods. They are just trying to serve you to the best of their ability…If companies have put limits on buying items, please respect those limits…I think people just need to calm down. Everyone should try and be a little kinder to each other…I must say, so far companies are trying to do the right thing. Woolworths [supermarkets] have started twice hourly announcements to please respect staff.[106]

The fact that supermarkets had to proactively make announcements to ask customers to be polite towards their staff not only signals the seriousness of the problem, but also the importance of educating people to politeness. Politeness, we explained in the previous chapter, involves an agential dimension. We must make an effort to acquire information about norms of politeness, context, and other factors on which our polite behaviour depends. But often we cannot do this on our own, and we need others' support. Politeness is often built together, in cooperation with others. In this example Nebart and Woolworths tried to do just that: explaining to customers the sources of the problem, in order to mitigate their anger and frustration, and inviting them to be kinder towards supermarket staff. Hopefully these kinds of interventions can help to recover politeness and the resulting social cooperation.

Incidents involving rude behaviour have affected not only banks and supermarkets but also other businesses. For example, in July 2020 one woman in San Francisco allegedly decided to urinate on the floor of a mobile phone store to show her opposition to its policies regarding mandatory mask wearing.[107] This incident shows yet another extreme violation of norms of politeness regulating and facilitating interactions between staff and customers. But it also suggests that COVID-19 might have created greater uncertainty as to how to communicate objections to new norms and social expectations—how best to express disagreement and exercise noncompliance. If incivility (as impoliteness) can be used to signal dissent,[108] those who take action might not always be able to rely on a ready-made vocabulary of speech and behaviour: sometimes, people may need to be creative in order to be uncivil and communicate their dissent.

Tensions between staff and customers in the airline industry have also become especially strained during the pandemic. Travel, as we have already stressed, has been severely disrupted by COVID-19. However, some airlines have continued to operate, albeit often only via domestic routes and with reduced frequency. During one incident in the US, tensions erupted on a flight from Denver to Los Angeles when a couple refused to wear masks despite repeated requests from flight attendants. They invoked their 'constitutional right' and as a result the flight was delayed until the couple was asked to disembark. The delay caused disruptions for the other passengers onboard, some of whom feared they might miss their connecting flights. One passenger remarked: 'I can't believe that you were so rude. Why? Why couldn't you just wear a mask?'.[109]

This example shows how impolite behaviour can clearly undermine social cooperation in such everyday situations as travelling and catching a flight. Even when there are clear policies regulating people's behaviour (in this case, the airline had a no-exception mask policy), full compliance cannot be achieved solely via formal means. To be more precise, full compliance *can* be ensured via formal enforcement mechanisms like insisting that the couple disembark from the aircraft. Likewise, another US carrier started to issue 'yellow cards' to passengers who refuse to wear masks on its flights, explaining that this might lead to bans from future flights.[110] However, these more formal sanctions may not always be conducive to (or sufficient for) greater social cooperation. If every traveller behaved like the couple in the example, social cooperation would be undermined or at least seriously disrupted. Polite behaviour is the lubricant of social cooperation because it helps facilitate interactions without recourse to (or alongside) more formal sanctions and regulations.

Politeness and International Cooperation During COVID-19

A final example in this section concerns politeness and international cooperation. For instance, in May 2020 Australia called for an independent international inquiry into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic in China. The request added additional stress to ongoing tensions between the two countries, with terms such as 'downright despicable', 'petty tricks', 'menacing', and 'irrational'[111] being used by various diplomats and MPs. In response to Australia's move, China's ambassador to Australia Cheng Jingye said:

> The Chinese public is frustrated, dismayed and disappointed with what you are doing now…if the mood is going from bad to worse, people would think why we should go to such a country while it's not so friendly to China…The tourists may have second thoughts. Maybe the parents of the students would also think whether this place, which they find is not so friendly, even hostile, is the best place to send their kids to. So it's up to the public, the people to decide. And also, maybe the ordinary people will think why they should drink Australian wine or eat Australian beef?[112]

Some have tried to justify this kind of approach. For example, Ruan Zongze, vice-president of the China Institute of International Studies, stated:

> Calling for an investigation is just buck-passing behaviour…[this is just]…self-defence against irresponsible accusations made by Western political figures. China isn't provoking anything…China should choose to be tough on people who just try to throw mud at our country, because they never hesitate to demonize and degrade China. How can you be polite to impolite people?[113]

Therefore, China's own impolite behaviour towards Western countries is viewed here as a response to those countries' earlier impolite acts, manifested in demands for an international investigation in the origins of the global pandemic. But this can only contribute to a spiral of impoliteness that risks undermining international cooperation. The Australian Government perceived the aforementioned statement by China's ambassador as a threat. And verbal threats are certainly a clear example of impoliteness,[114] especially in a context like international relations and diplomacy: relationships between states may become difficult when one or more of them adopts this kind of language. Indeed, Australia's foreign minister responded to the Chinese statement in the following way: '[w]e reject any suggestion that economic coercion is an appropriate response to a call for such an assessment, when what we need is global cooperation'.[115]

One point to stress is that the spiral of impoliteness in this example also involves references to international students, who have been particularly affected by COVID-19. Soon after the onset of the pandemic, many countries around the world closed their borders to international students by imposing various travel bans. For example, in March 2020 Canada issued new statements and policies intending to prohibit entry by new international students and only allowing those who previously held a visa.[116] Likewise, Australia closed its borders to international students in March 2020,[117] having previously banned all travel from mainland China at the beginning of February 2020,[118] a measure considered controversial by many at the time. More generally, international students, especially those from China, have become targets of offensive and hostile comments in a number of countries, leading many to feel unwelcome as a result.[119] Even when this has not escalated into incidents of racism and hate speech (discussed in the next chapter), it has created a climate that could impede international cooperation. This is exactly what emerges from Cheng Jingye's aforementioned statement that '[m]aybe the parents of the students would also think whether this place, which they find is not so friendly, even hostile, is the best place to send their kids to'.[120]

This student-boycott threat could be seen as impolite and is in itself a response to a broader impolite and hostile environment. An exchange of this kind can have serious negative consequences for international cooperation since international students can play a significant role as cultural mediators contributing to smooth international relations.[121]

In another example, consider US President Donald Trump and other politicians' use of the terms 'Chinese virus' and the 'Wuhan virus' to refer to COVID-19. In addition to causing allegations of racism, the use of these terms had the more immediate effect of preventing G7 countries from agreeing on a joint declaration at a meeting in March 2020. It constituted something of a breach of diplomatic decorum. According to a diplomat from a European country, '[w]hat the State Department has suggested is a red line…You cannot agree with this branding of this virus and trying to communicate this'.[122] Clearly, in this case, the use of inappropriate language by the US administration prevented or delayed international cooperation to tackle COVID-19: if countries could not even agree on how to refer to COVID-19, it is difficult to see how they could agree on a common strategy for tackling it. Furthermore, the branding itself may also already contain certain normative assumptions regarding the policy response required to tackle it. For example, calling COVID-19 the 'Chinese virus' may signal not only one's views about where the virus originated but also about who is mainly responsible for its origins and spread (i.e. China) and, therefore, what should be done about it (e.g. asking China for reparations).[123]

To minimize disruptions to international cooperation in cases like the one concerning Australia and China, governments should recognize the consequences that impolite statements and behaviour have on international relations. Countries make decisions based not only on material interests and norms, but also on their perceived treatment and status recognition by other states.[124] Impolite and disrespectful behaviour by officials can harm cooperation and stoke tensions. Each country should take steps to renew its commitment to diplomatic decorum and exercise restraint in criticism and threats of economic retaliation. These actions, and any dispute settlement, should take place through existing international institutions that are designed to reduce conflict and strengthen cooperation.[125] Moreover, each state might look for alternative ways to repair deteriorating relations and challenges to social cooperation. For

example, Australia and China might work to improve regional agreements and trade partnerships to mitigate the potential breakdown of social cooperation caused by these impolite exchanges.[126]

Besides the broader geopolitical implications of impoliteness, there are also more specific issues faced by politicians and diplomats at the micro level, as they engage with each other in meetings and other diplomatic contexts. One of the main consequences of COVID-19 has been the transition of many international and diplomatic interactions to the online sphere. This has two main implications. First, social distancing has removed many of the opportunities for physical interactions and displays like a diplomatic handshake. These types of actions demonstrate that one is a trustworthy cooperator, especially in situations of tension or conflict. As Stephen Carter points out, '[s]haking hands traditionally signaled a lack of aggression. The open palm holds no weapon, and, while locked with someone else's, cannot draw one'.[127] Within the context of international diplomacy, disruptions to this practice can have significant implications. Carter continues,

> Consider the iconic 1993 photograph of Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin shaking hands at the White House to symbolize their agreement to the Camp David Accords. Around the world, the image was cited as evidence that the violent standoff in the Middle East would finally change. The handshake mattered precisely because it was so hard to believe it had happened. Socially distance the two leaders and the photograph becomes incomprehensible, signaling nothing in particular.[128]

Due to public health considerations, politicians and diplomats have put the handshake on hold, as they navigate new ways to signal trust and cooperation with actions such as a friendly elbow bump.[129] However, as Carter points out, '[b]umping fists or elbows cannot carry the same signal'.[130] It is difficult to predict whether we will gradually witness a new diplomatic etiquette emerge in the international sphere, where gestures such as elbow bumps become normalized, or whether, as Carter seems to suggest, there will be 'a bifurcated future…in which traditional manners continue fading from popular use but survive in such specialized arenas as business and international relations'.[131]

Second, social distancing is forcing diplomatic relationships to move online. As stated by Maricela Muñoz, Minister Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the United Nations in Geneva,

> diplomats are facing multiple challenges, which encompass a broad range of elements, including access to adequate technology, the re-shaping of communication protocols, and the need to continue their work in virtual negotiation settings. The impossibility to meet face to face, given the confinement, social-distancing, and other sanitary measures, has demanded an overnight transformation of the diplomatic business as we know it.[132]

Shortened meetings and time zone differences are posing special challenges to diplomatic relationships. These include, for example, the difficulty of including technical experts and representatives from civil society, as well as a growing need for diplomats to 'think on their feet'. Furthermore, it has often proved difficult to include delegates from developing countries due to technological and staffing issues. Some proposed solutions include a greater focus on permanent delegations at multilateral hubs like Geneva, New York, and Vienna; improving access to technological platforms and working procedures; and expanding diplomats' skill sets, including their ability to interact with others in virtual environments.[133]

Cover for Impolite Behaviour

The final problem we address in this chapter concerns the (mis)use of COVID-19 in order to provide an excuse for impolite behaviour. Even outside times of crisis, people often try to justify their (or others') impolite behaviour by deflecting responsibility to their personality,[134] communication style,[135] or 'personal frustrations and system failures'.[136] Like overt breaches of politeness norms, these more covert forms of impoliteness can also create tensions and undermine social cooperation, for example in the workplace, where impoliteness can result in very real financial effects.[137] Within the context of COVID-19, this problem has been exacerbated by the disruption of (and uncertainty surrounding) politeness norms that we have highlighted throughout this chapter. This has often contributed to facilitating disinhibitions, therefore reducing barriers to what might have previously been considered impolite behaviours.

Personality and Impoliteness During COVID-19

Personality type can play a significant role in the way people experience the pandemic. Extroverts have had an especially tough time in social isolation under stricter lockdown orders.[138] For example, one woman who self-identifies as an extrovert described her experience in this way:

> That's what the doctor told me: 'go out once a week…go out somewhere and even have friends over but stay on the opposite side of the yard' or things like that for my mental health because I am a people person. And it's really getting me down. You know, it's very difficult [to be an extrovert during the pandemic].[139]

Conversely, COVID-19 has been described as 'an introverts dream' in that it can provide introverts with an excuse for avoiding social situations and for 'flaking' on other people, which is admittedly an instance of rude behaviour.[140] Even before the pandemic, appealing to one's introverted personality in order to justify rude behaviour was not unusual. In a 2016 article in *The New York Times*, for example, writer and editor KJ Dell'Antonia admitted: 'I've started to develop [a suspicion] that my introversion is an excuse for something else. I'm shy, yes. But am I also rude? In a contest between my manners and my preferences, am I allowing my preferences to win?'.[141] While this rhetorical question suggests that introversion can indeed be used by some as an excuse for impolite or overtly rude behaviour, we should also consider other factors involved. First, some people genuinely have little control over their anti-social tendencies, and expectations around social behaviour can be anxiety-inducing. But, more importantly, the impoliteness for which introverts are often criticized may actually have positive implications. More specifically, one of the reasons why there is often a tension between an introverted personality and compliance with norms of politeness is the fact that those norms, and social institutions more generally, are grounded in (and tend to reward) extroverted behaviour.[142] In other words, the problem might be structural, not (only) agential: if the rules of the game are set up in line with extroverts' interests and preferences, then it will be inevitably more difficult for introverts to comply with them and be polite. Furthermore, this structural bias can have significant negative repercussions for introverts' lives and opportunities. For example, research findings have shown that introverts generally earn less than extroverts[143] and that they tend to be neglected or stigmatized in educational contexts.[144]

By bringing the tension between introversion and established politeness norms to the forefront of public debate, COVID-19 may actually provide an opportunity for critical reflection on existing social structures. This might promote a better understanding of the relationship between mental health and social institutions; create greater awareness of the distinct challenges that introverts and extroverts are experiencing during the pandemic[145]; and, more generally, encourage societies to embrace a more diverse approach to politeness. The latter point is especially important. In the same way multiculturalism theorists have demanded fairer terms of integration for minorities,[146] scholars of civility (and the public more generally) may need to question the adoption of uniform norms of civility as politeness that disregard the many ways in which individuals and groups differ in terms of identity, personality, and social roles. This kind of critical judgment and reflection, as we already know, is itself central to what being polite means. Relatedly, and in line with the idea of 'incivility as dissent',[147] some impolite behaviour during COVID-19 can be perceived as a challenge to unjust or unfair norms of politeness around which social structures and institutions have been shaped.

Public Officials and Covert Impoliteness During COVID-19

In addition to ordinary citizens, the uncertainty concerning norms of politeness during COVID-19 has also been exploited by political figures as a cover for impolite behaviour. Here, though, it is important to distinguish between mere impoliteness and the kind of moral incivility that we will examine in the next chapter. The latter includes such instances of incivility as racist and sexist speech, which constitute a denial of their targets' free and equal civic status. Conversely, impoliteness only involves an infringement on politeness norms, which are not tied to citizens' free and equal status per se.

Returning again to the issue of wearing a mask, Donald Trump used impolite remarks more than once against the Democratic Party presidential candidate Joe Biden for wearing a mask in public. For example, in September 2020 he mocked Biden for letting his mask hang off his ear while delivering speeches, saying: '[d]id you ever see a man who likes a mask as much as him?…He has it hanging down. Because it gives him a feeling of security. If I were a psychiatrist, right, you know I'd say: "This guy's got some big issues. Hanging down. Hanging down"'.[148] On another occasion, he ridiculed Biden by asking: 'What the hell did

he spend all that money on the plastic surgery if he's going to cover it up [with a mask]?'.[149] One might argue that even in the absence of COVID-19 Trump would have probably found other ways to mock his rival. Yet, COVID-19 provided him and others with further opportunities for mocking, which in this example are closely related to the politicization of mask wearing in the US.

Here, we should take care to clarify the context of Trump's remarks. Despite his initial scepticism regarding the importance of wearing a mask at the onset of the pandemic, Trump gradually accepted the overwhelming evidence provided by the scientific community regarding the importance of masks for containing the virus.[150] However, Trump also stressed that in his view the appropriateness of mask wearing depends on context. For example, during a visit to Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) in July 2020, he declared: 'I think when you're in a hospital, especially in that particular setting, where you're talking to a lot of soldiers and people that, in some cases, just got off the operating tables, I think it's a great thing to wear a mask…I've never been against masks, but I do believe they have a time and a place'. On another occasion, he said: 'I don't know, somehow, sitting in the Oval Office behind that beautiful Resolute Desk — the great Resolute Desk — I think wearing a face mask as I greet presidents, prime ministers, dictators, kings, queens, I don't know. Somehow, I don't see it for myself'.[151]

These statements are particularly interesting as they reveal two distinct aspects of Trump's approach to mask wearing. One is the appropriateness of masks from a public health perspective: Trump agrees that people should generally wear them in some crowded places, especially hospitals. The other concerns norms of politeness and decorum: according to Trump, there are places and situations, such as official meetings with other heads of state, when wearing a mask is inappropriate, i.e. does not conform with etiquette and protocol. In such cases, Trump seems to argue, it is impolite to wear masks, even though this would be the appropriate thing to do from a public health perspective. On another occasion, Trump seemed to conflate the two dimensions, when he said the following about Biden: 'Joe Biden can wear a mask, but he was standing outside with his wife, perfect conditions, perfect weather… And so I thought it was very unusual that he had one on. But I thought that was fine. I wasn't criticizing at all. Why would I ever do a thing like that?'.[152] Here Trump seems to hint at the inappropriateness of wearing a mask from both a politeness and a public health perspective—this was *both* a

low-risk public health situation *and* one in which decorum and etiquette would have required Biden not to wear a mask. The main problem is that, due to the ambiguity of statements like these, some might understand Trump as implying that it is *always* safe not to wear a mask in non-hospital contexts. As a participant in one of Trump's political rallies stated:

> I don't believe in the mask. That's all…I don't care. I just don't believe in it. Because I don't understand what good it's really going to do, unless you're in a high-risk area like a nursing home or a hospital. I think the left is playing the mask thing to the hilt all the way to the election. In my opinion, they're trying to steal the election.[153]

The foregoing analysis illustrates the uncertainty and disagreement regarding norms of politeness surrounding mask wearing during COVID-19. On the one hand, there are norms of politeness and etiquette that tell us we should be wearing a mask in public. These norms, like many general etiquette norms (e.g. sneezing into a tissue or your elbow, using a napkin rather than licking your fingers, flushing the toilet after using it) are grounded in public health evidence, e.g. preventing the spreading of germs and viruses.[154] On the other hand, there are norms of politeness and etiquette (e.g. concerning diplomacy and formal political occasions) that are unrelated to public health but which, according to Trump, should also be taken into account when deciding whether to wear a mask or not. Trump exploited this context of uncertainty and disagreement, to which he himself had contributed, in order to cover for his impolite behaviour towards Biden and other mask-wearing US citizens.

The Australian politician Pauline Hanson provides another example. As a member of the Australian Senate, and leader of the right-wing populist One Nation party, Hanson has often been a vocal critic of immigration and multiculturalism in Australia. It could be argued that COVID-19 has provided Hanson with cover and opportunity to speak in negative terms about populations she often disparages in a way that is perhaps more widely accepted given the circumstances. For example, when in early July 2020 a sudden and strict stay-at-home order was imposed on 3,000 tenants in nine housing commission towers in Melbourne in order to contain a COVID-19 outbreak, Hanson referred to the tenants as '[t]hese people who cannot speak English, don't know what the hell to do and they are actually then, spreading it to other people'.[155] Setting aside the

allegations of racism that followed Hanson's statement,[156] we suggest that COVID-19 provided cover for the impolite tone and delivery of her statements.

A final example concerns public officials, more specifically police officers in Australia. Speaking in early September 2020 about planned anti-lockdown protests by some Melbourne residents, Victoria Police's Assistant Commissioner Luke Cornelius referred to them in the following way: '[t]he tin-foil hat-wearing brigade are alive and well out there in our community…I mean it's just crazy. It's bat s*** crazy nonsense'.[157] We contend that this is impolite language that a high-ranking police officer would not use in ordinary circumstances, when it would be perceived as inappropriate by the vast majority of the public. However, the disruption of politeness norms resulting from COVID-19 has rendered this kind of language more acceptable. But unlike the previous examples concerning Trump and Hanson, we believe that Cornelius's language can be defended. Its purpose was not to mock or ridicule certain individuals or categories of citizens per se (something which, especially in the Hanson example, closely resembles hate speech, an aspect of moral incivility to which we will return in the next chapter) but rather to disparage their decision to mobilize against public health efforts. In this sense, the use of impolite language by public figures to counter self-interested behaviour and promote public-minded goals could be considered a 'top-down' counterpart to the aforementioned 'incivility as dissent' paradigm. In the same way in which citizens can use incivility as impoliteness to signal and contest unjust laws and institutions from the bottom-up, public officials can use impolite messages from the top-down in order to foster just policy goals and norms and to hinder unjust ones, as long as these messages target certain people because of their actions rather than because of who they are (e.g. their ethnicity, religion, nationality, etc.).

Name-Calling and Insults in International Politics During COVID-19

A final example of the use of COVID-19 to cover for impolite behaviour concerns name-calling and insults in international politics. Consider again Trump's and other politicians' decision to refer to COVID-19 as the 'Wuhan virus' or the 'Chinese virus'. In addition to undermining international cooperation, as we saw in the previous section, the use of this kind of terminology highlights Trump's use of COVID-19 as a cover

for impolite language that breaches international norms of etiquette and protocol. Such norms certainly admonish name-calling and insults. Given the ongoing tensions between the US and China, one might argue that Trump used COVID-19 as a justification for using impolite language that he would have already preferred to use prior to the pandemic, in order to signal a stronger stance on China to his political base.

Here, however, we should be careful. Calling COVID-19 the 'Wuhan virus' or the 'Chinese virus' might be much more than impolite language. As many have pointed out, these statements may constitute instances of racist speech. Even though Trump stated that '[i]t's not racist at all. No, not at all. It comes from China, that's why. It comes from China. I want to be accurate',[158] various commentators have suggested that Trump's statement may conceal a racist undertone. More specifically, according to some, the statement has contributed to an increase in anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racist incidents in the US, and can be traced back to a longstanding history of anti-Chinese sentiment in the US. For example, according to University of Minnesota professor Erika Lee,

> [t]here is something very particular about the stereotype of China, Chinese people and Chinese faces as being unsanitary, teeming with millions of people living in crowded and dirty conditions, the weird habits that no civilized people would deign to follow, and Chinatowns as places of disease and contagion…Those stereotypes were used to justify quarantines and also immigration enforcement.[159]

If, as it seems plausible, these comments are correct, this example constitutes an instance of both impoliteness and moral incivility. Calling COVID-19 the 'Wuhan virus' and the 'Chinese virus' was both a breach of norms of international etiquette and protocol and an instance of anti-Chinese racism. The latter is not simply impolite. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, and will discuss more extensively in the next chapter, racist speech is an instance of moral incivility, which involves failing to treat others as free and equal. And, in relation to the problem examined in this section, it can be argued that COVID-19 provided Trump and other politicians with an excuse and cover for both impoliteness and racism. The former may have been driven by the pre-existing political and economic tensions between the US and China; the latter by a more general anti-immigrant and anti-multiculturalism rhetoric.

Conclusion

This chapter examined new problems that COVID-19 poses for the politeness dimension of civility. From its onset, the pandemic has disrupted many of the norms that regulate people's polite interactions in their everyday lives, resulting in a series of unprecedented challenges. First, COVID-19 has called into question previous norms of politeness that were widely recognized, making it more difficult for people to know how to behave politely in different circumstances. Second, this uncertainty has often deprived people of unequivocal ready-made polite signals to communicate their respect and consideration to others; speech or behaviour that in the past may have been unambiguously perceived as a polite signal might now go awry during the pandemic. Third, when people no longer know for sure how to be polite, or their polite signals misfire, this can also pose an obstacle to cooperative social interactions. Finally, citizens and politicians might sometimes exploit the uncertainty surrounding norms of politeness to engage in what would normally be considered impolite behaviour.

Responding to these challenges is crucial if we want to safeguard politeness and its key contributions to social coexistence. Both governments and citizens, we have seen, can play important roles in this response. To start, policymakers can remedy the lack of clarity surrounding norms of politeness by disseminating information, including scientific findings, to improve polite behaviour. This might include new signs and tools aimed at fostering awareness of how to behave politely in everyday spaces, in ways that are consistent with public health goals. While many of these interventions must ultimately come from governments, businesses and citizens should also do their part and make a proactive effort to acquire (and help each other acquire) the knowledge necessary to be polite in this new social landscape. They might also need to rely on creativity to develop new politeness norms when required, as in the case of greetings. These combined efforts can also help reduce the chance of politeness signals going awry. Developing new guidelines for both offline and online polite interactions, for instance, can help ensure that those signals do not misfire. Finding alternatives to signalling tools that are no longer easily available can help as well, including greater and more creative use of verbal communication and body language to compensate for reduced face visibility and expressions resulting from mandatory mask wearing.

Furthermore, promoting politeness during the pandemic can also help to minimize the social tensions that can result from breaches of politeness norms. There is an important space for both governments and private actors (e.g. retail businesses, airlines, etc.) to use informal and formal tools to encourage polite behaviour and sanction noncompliance. Within the international realm, adherence to norms of decorum and etiquette (sometimes adjusted to take into account public health goals) should be accompanied by the use of institutions to mitigate the challenges to cooperation posed by impolite behaviour. Finally, the pandemic might also help governments and citizens to develop a more critical and inclusive approach to politeness. They might even go so far as to recognize that impoliteness too can sometimes be employed by policymakers to promote public-minded policy goals, as when public officials rudely chastise those who refuse to comply with mask-wearing requirements.

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CHAPTER 4

Civility as Public-Mindedness During COVID-19

Introduction

This chapter examines the implications of COVID-19 for civility as public-mindedness. This dimension of civility, as we explained in Chapter 2, can be understood in two ways, both grounded in the view that we should recognize and respect others as free and equal members of our political community. The first understanding of civility as public-mindedness entails using speech or behaviour that respects other people's fundamental rights, liberties, and equal civic standing. This view, which we call *moral civility*, rules out physical violence, discrimination, and the use of various forms of racist or hate speech. A second more expansive understanding of civility as public-mindedness relates to the idea of public justification. According to this view, which we call *justificatory civility*, citizens must not only comply with the demands of moral civility; they also need to offer public justifications for the political rules and policies that they advocate. Such justifications should be based on public reasons, i.e. reasons that all citizens could in principle accept at some level of idealization despite their different worldviews and beliefs. Public reasons include appeals to widely shared political values like freedom and equality (a moral dimension) as well as to uncontroversial scientific methods and conclusions (an epistemic dimension).

Both moral and justificatory civility offer normative guidelines as to how we ought to interact with others in societies characterized by diversity and disagreement. And both of them provide us with a useful

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analytical lens for examining some of the social and political implications of COVID-19. In this chapter, we use this lens in order to evaluate the way in which different types of actors and institutions, at both the local/national and international level, have responded to the pandemic, and the extent to which they have complied with demands of moral and justificatory civility. More specifically, we identify four problems related to civility as public-mindedness that have arisen during COVID-19. First, we show how different forms of discrimination and hatred that have emerged during the pandemic (e.g. government-driven, in the workplace, and within society more broadly) threaten moral civility and the free and equal status of citizens, especially members of vulnerable groups. Second, we argue that COVID-19 has created opportunities for political actors to advance sectarian agendas that fail to comply with the demands of justificatory civility. They may do so either by appealing to partial interests and controversial beliefs, or by overly prioritizing certain political values in relation to others. Third, we contend that many of the policies implemented by liberal democratic governments in response to the pandemic have imposed unreasonable 'strains of commitment' upon certain social groups whose members may already suffer from various forms of marginalization and vulnerability (e.g. racial minorities, women, LGBTIQ+ people, and older people). The excessive burden borne by these groups, we argue, ought to be taken into account in the process of public justification, and governments should also implement measures to mitigate the uneven effects of their policies. Finally, we consider the role of science in the public justification of policy responses to COVID-19. We argue that the limited understanding of the virus within the scientific community, the dearth of research on the social and cultural dimensions of COVID-19, and the politicization of science for personal or partisan gain, pose serious obstacles to justificatory civility during the pandemic.

Covid-19 and Moral Civility

As we explained in Chapter 2, the first dimension of civility as public-mindedness is moral civility. This differs from both civility as politeness (which we examined in Chapter 3) and justificatory civility (which we will consider in the subsequent sections of this chapter). Moral civility rests on a commitment to liberal democratic norms and institutions. It requires refraining from perpetrating physical violence against others[1];

from using racist or other types of expression that portray members of certain groups as physically, intellectually, or morally inferior[2]; or from discriminating against others.[3] When citizens or governments engage in speech or behaviour that fails to comply with these demands, and do not treat people as free and equal, we are in the presence of moral incivility. We should also recall, as explained in Chapter 2, that while moral civility might sometimes overlap with civility as politeness, the two are and should be treated as distinct dimensions of civility; polite manners can sometimes be adopted to cover for morally uncivil speech or behaviour and, conversely, impolite conduct can be employed to advance morally civil goals.

In this section, we examine the implications of COVID-19 for moral civility using three examples that show how some governments and citizens in liberal democracies have responded to COVID-19 in ways that could be considered morally uncivil. First, we consider instances of government-driven discrimination in relation to the allocation of scarce resources concerning healthcare or financial support; we argue that some political leaders have exploited the pandemic in order to advance or reinforce pre-existing political agendas that discriminate against specific members of their political community. Second, we focus on discriminatory practices in the workplace during COVID-19 and explain how these differ from instances of impoliteness examined in the previous chapter. Finally, we analyse the rise in incidents involving racism and hate speech directed at members of various minority groups since the onset of the pandemic. All three examples show how the pandemic has provided fertile ground for moral incivility, raising the need for prompt institutional and social responses.

Government-Driven Discrimination During COVID-19

Political leaders can use crises like the COVID-19 pandemic to advance political agendas that foster higher levels of racism and discrimination against some groups in society or that degrade liberal democratic institutions. Governments might prioritize some people over others when they make decisions about how to allocate scarce health resources or economic assistance. Some politicians and public figures have also used the pandemic strategically as was the case with Italy's former interior minister Matteo Salvini who has been especially vocal about border security. The pandemic provided cover for him to criticise his political

opponents and further advance an uncivil and discriminatory anti-migrant agenda, specifically targeting those who have arrived from Africa.[4] These kinds of messages and policies can have dire consequences for traditionally marginalized groups that are even more vulnerable in the context of COVID-19.[5]

Politicians might also use the public health crisis as cover for an ongoing assault against liberal democratic institutions and freedoms. The pandemic can exacerbate threats of authoritarian overreach and an opportunistic consolidation of power by populist politicians. Leaders may further silence opposition groups and take unilateral action against some segments of society in the name of public health, safety, and general national welfare. For example, Hungary's Viktor Orbán has placed strict limitations on free speech, giving himself complete discretion to enforce new laws allowing up to five years in prison for interfering with quarantine efforts or publishing material he deems 'fake news'.[6] These measures can effectively silence political opposition groups and healthcare workers who might criticize public health policies. Orbán has described the virus as a menace and a threat linked to unwelcome migrants.[7] He has made this link between the virus and migrants explicit, explaining: '[w]e are fighting a two-front war. One front is called migration, and the other one belongs to the coronavirus. There is a logical connection between the two, as both spread with movement.'[8] It appears that Orbán will use his emergency powers to advance nativist policies that target groups he sees as threats including foreign corporate interests, cosmopolitan elites, international students, and migrants.[9]

A broad range of regimes around the globe are finding opportunities for discrimination and overt repression under COVID-19. Expanded surveillance, widespread censorship, limitations on freedom of movement, and excessive punishments have provided dozens of governments with the capacity to place further restrictions on liberal democratic norms and to discriminate against some of their citizens.[10] Potential threats to political and social freedoms and other human rights are especially pronounced, with widespread suppression of basic civil liberties.[11] Prominent international organisations like the United Nations have been proactive in identifying many of the dangers COVID-19 poses to liberal democratic norms and institutions, and have developed recommendations governments can follow to help avoid racism and discrimination during the pandemic.[12]

Selective lockdowns in many countries illustrate some of the challenges that governments face in balancing concerns for public health

with ensuring the rights and welfare of the broader population. For example, protestors in Madrid accused the regional government of class discrimination, ordering selective lockdowns in predominantly low-income neighbourhoods. The government insisted that the measures were implemented in the areas with the highest levels of infections. However, one official suggested that the higher rates of infection were partially due to 'the way of life of immigrants', complicating arguments that decisions were based solely on pragmatism.[13] Residential towers in Melbourne, Australia also experienced a targeted lockdown to stem an outbreak among residents. A 'heavy-handed' hard lockdown of 3,000 public housing tenants drew criticism from those who saw the measures as discriminatory and believed they placed an especially heavy burden on residents from already marginalized groups.[14] A former UN special rapporteur went so far as to say that the way the government handled the response was not only 'shocking and deeply discriminatory' but perhaps even an 'assault on human dignity'.[15]

The pandemic has created numerous challenges to the principles of moral civility. In some of the worst cases, overt hate and religious discrimination can create further tensions in already polarized societies. For example, in a particularly horrific incident, Islamophobia and a hospital's refusal to treat two Muslim women in India led to the death of their newborns.[16] Political and social leaders need to take immediate steps to address overt discriminatory practices and better meet the needs of marginalized groups. The public must remain mindful of the disproportionate effects that the pandemic has on some communities and help to protect the most vulnerable while attempting to counter discrimination and threats to liberal democratic norms. Domestic governments and international organisations alike have a role to play in understanding and countering these threats—enhancing justice, oversight, and the rule of law.[17]

Policies that might protect and enhance elements of moral civility should not only address actions that directly encroach on liberal democratic values; they should also include steps to promote better governance more broadly. The virus can disproportionately affect the most culturally and linguistically diverse segments of many large cities, sometimes as a result of intentional discrimination. However, discrimination may also be indirect or unintentional, resulting from language barriers or limited government engagement with some minority communities. Governments and public health officials can benefit from multi-pronged strategies that

include effective translation, consistent messaging across communities, and purposeful engagement with a target audience to better disseminate messages. For example, English-language messaging could target younger family members in multilingual communities with the aim of a subsequent 're-narration process' among other family members in their native tongue.[18] In addition to involving multicultural communities in the development of effective strategies, it is important to tailor messages to their values, deliver information via messengers who are trusted among their members (e.g. religious leaders), use accessible communication channels (e.g. social media), and create multicultural bodies that can advise national governments on health matters.[19]

Consultation is essential to understand the distinct needs and challenges different communities face, and in providing the information necessary to ensure the uptake of effective public health policies. Efforts to account for and amplify marginalized voices can help to curtail some of the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on communities that can be seen as (un)intentional discrimination. Consultation can also help improve decision-making across identity markers such as age. For example, at various times during the pandemic we saw spikes in cases of viral transmission among young people, including massive outbreaks at US universities.[20] There is an urgent need for consultation and co-design with young people to develop effective ways to limit the spread of the virus, to come up with tailored strategies to reduce stresses on mental health, and to enlist them in a campaign to combat misinformation on social media.[21]

Workplace Discrimination During COVID-19

In normal times, moral incivility in the workplace can constitute a 'veiled manifestation of sexism and racism' that may disadvantage some employees.[22] This form of workplace incivility differs from the impoliteness dimension discussed in the previous chapter. It does not concern politeness norms in communication that serve as a social lubricant, but rather various forms of bias, prejudice, and discrimination experienced by some people in the workplace.

COVID-19 can lead to greater moral incivility in the workplace in the form of discriminatory behaviour and outcomes. For example, the origins of the virus have led to discriminatory conduct targeting employees with

Asian backgrounds. One worker in Monterey, California described their experience:

> I was the only Asian American at a conference with work colleagues and I had an allergy flare up that day. One woman, seeing me sneeze, told me I couldn't be there, that I needed to leave, and ordered me not to touch any of the coffee and cookies put out by the convention. She singled me out when other people in the conference were sneezing, sniffling and coughing.[23]

The pandemic may also place strain on hard-fought improvements related to gender equality. In many cases, changes to workplace conditions and practices can disproportionately affect some groups over others. The gender dimension highlights inequalities related to job security, access to economic support programming, additional safety risks in certain sectors with higher levels of women workers (e.g. nursing, aged care, social work), and adjustments to accommodate additional childcare responsibilities.[24]

Companies across sectors have had to contend with mounting pressures to adapt to the 'new normal'. Large companies have had to make health and safety decisions in this new environment and some have implemented contentious policies that may come across as discriminatory. For example, one mining company faced allegations of ageism and racism after workers were told to stay at home if they were of a certain age or of indigenous descent. While the company justified its actions as a way to reduce risk to populations seen as more vulnerable to transmission and to the negative health effects of COVID-19, not everyone found this explanation persuasive.[25] In the US context, the American Bar Association expects a 'flood' of age discrimination lawsuits moving forward.[26] The pandemic has generated additional decision-making scenarios where firms will have to be especially careful to avoid discriminatory behaviour as it relates to decisions about workplace COVID-19 testing, selections for leave-of-absence requests, and rehiring practices.[27] In some cases, employers will have to make additional accommodations for vulnerable employees who still see risks in returning to work when the pandemic subsides.[28]

Steps must be taken to manage and mitigate the effects of the pandemic on immediate discriminatory practices, as well as their implications for broader inequalities. Employers must resist what may even be

well-intentioned decisions, if these risk being discriminatory against some employees.[29]

Discrimination and Hate in the Public Sphere During COVID-19

The pandemic has also exacerbated morally uncivil acts of discrimination and hatred in the public sphere more broadly. Due to the geographic origins of the virus, we have seen a rise in overt anti-Chinese discrimination and racist incidents in many parts of the world. An initiative called Stop AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) Hate has collected incident data in the US to show the scale of the problem, whom it affects, and where these types of incidents take place.[30] Descriptive statistics in a recent US report show that verbal harassment in businesses and on the street are the most common and disproportionately target women. Qualitative data from the report provides illustrative examples. One complainant in New York City recalled: 'I'm a healthcare worker. I saw a mask-less man sit across from me on the subway. I moved to the other side of the train car and he followed. He spat and coughed on the subway while yelling racial slurs. No one stood up for me'. Another victim in Georgia described a hate-inspired assault: 'I was in line at the pharmacy when a woman approached me and sprayed Lysol all over me. She was yelling out, "[y]ou're the infection. Go home. We don't want you here!" I was in shock and cried as I left the building. No one came to my help'.[31] Some of the language used by political actors to describe COVID-19 in the media, such as 'kung flu' and 'China virus', can embolden those who might perpetrate more overt acts of discrimination and racist behaviour in the public sphere.[32]

These incidents of hate and discrimination often reflect pre-existing social divides tied to ethnicity, religion, and other characteristics. When we spoke with the Founder and National Convener for the Asian Australian Alliance, Erin Wen Ai Chew, she pointed out that 'COVID-19 is not the cause of the anti-Asian rhetoric, it's just a symptom of a bigger problem'.[33] However, the pandemic has both amplified and normalized these kinds of incidents. Leaders from different parties across the political spectrum have contributed to this antagonistic climate. Media messaging and the broader geopolitical tensions have further aggravated public attitudes towards people of Chinese origins and other Asian backgrounds. As Erin Wen Ai Chew observes, this social and political climate 'has normalized the idea that it's okay to walk around, and if you see an Asian person

walking in the street, it's okay to call them "the Chinese virus", so it's okay to tell them not to eat dogs or bats or any kind of exotic animals. So that idea has been a lot more normalized, particularly during COVID'.[34]

The pandemic can also provide new opportunities for individuals and groups to advance causes motivated by religious and racial hatred. For example, some have taken advantage of greater social 'strain' to advance Islamophobic messaging. Key 'trigger' events like the current COVID-19 crisis can lead to spikes in both offline and online hatred aimed at Muslims.[35] The same can be said regarding other religious groups. Researchers at Tel Aviv University, for example, have found that the pandemic 'unleashed a unique worldwide wave of antisemitism'.[36] Conspiracy theories and misinformation feed into biases and can lead to misdirected attribution of blame targeting religious minorities. For example, a study at Oxford University found that nearly 20% of respondents in a survey of the English population agree to some degree with the statements that 'Jews have created the virus to collapse the economy for financial gain' or that 'Muslims are spreading the virus as an attack on Western values'.[37]

The broader far-right has been especially active in exploiting COVID-19 to help advance a range of goals. In the Australian context—where the far-right largely pursues a diverse and shifting anti-Islam, cultural and racial superiority agenda[38]—far-right groups have integrated nationalist and anti-egalitarian messaging into their public commentary about the global pandemic.[39] Anti-Chinese racism features in a prominent way, as does anti-globalist rhetoric targeting bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO). Public narratives that emerge as a result of the global pandemic around self-sufficiency and isolation may now resonate with more Australians, among whom views that globalization is bad for the country have nearly doubled from 15% in 2017 to 29% in 2020.[40]

Countries around the world that face similar shifts in public attitudes must remain vigilant in confronting and counteracting morally uncivil speech and behavior tied to nationalist and anti-globalization attitudes and policies. The COVID-19 virus has disrupted social and political life in such a way that agendas advancing xenophobia, racism, and religious intolerance could find a more receptive audience. Leaders might glean insights from strategies to combat hate speech and behaviour outside of the global health crisis. For example, a plan of action will require officials and partner organisations to monitor and analyse data; identify and address root causes; engage with a range of civil society actors to build coalitions across sectors; and incorporate media and new technologies in

creating tools for programme delivery.[41] States need to collect data to analyse and understand the problem. These efforts can raise awareness about acts of discrimination and hate, while providing a stronger evidence base for informed policy recommendations.[42] Solutions may range from informal initiatives to more formal measures aimed at using the rule of law (e.g. improved anti-racism legislation) to better protect victims and more effectively prosecute perpetrators.[43] Governments should also recognize some of the constraints on institutional responses. While a government can pass laws, formulate regulations, and establish procedures to counteract discrimination and hate in broader society, they may not be prepared to respond to micro-level incidents. For example, the Australian Human Rights Commission adopts a conciliatory or mediation process to resolve these kinds of incidents. It is unlikely that a perpetrator and victim would agree to engage via this type of process during normal times, and even less likely in a situation like a pandemic because of limitations of movement and face-to-face interaction.[44]

Sectarianism and Issue Prioritization

The remaining sections of this chapter are devoted to the analysis of the second dimension of civility as public-mindedness: justificatory civility. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, while virtually all liberal political theorists are committed to moral civility, justificatory civility is more closely related to the political liberalism strand of contemporary liberal theory. Rawls and other political liberals argue that citizens of liberal democracies characterized by reasonable pluralism and disagreement have a 'duty of civility' to explain to each other how the political rules 'they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason'.[45] Those political values include basic rights and liberties that are widely endorsed in liberal societies as well as epistemic rules of inquiry and scientific evidence. Being civil in the justificatory sense therefore means appealing to these broadly shared values when justifying policies and laws. This is especially important in the case of politicians, who have a more direct impact on decision-making than ordinary citizens. Conversely, appealing to controversial reasons such as those grounded in religious worldviews, or to flawed scientific evidence, constitutes an instance of justificatory incivility.

In this section we focus specifically on one way in which some political actors have violated justificatory civility during COVID-19: the advancement of sectarian aims and political agendas. Sectarianism is antithetical

to public-mindedness and public reason.[46] It involves the promotion of the interests, values, and goals of specific individuals and groups within society, rather than the advancement of the common good. To stress the point again, not all liberals express concern about the advancement of political agendas grounded in controversial beliefs and sectarian interests. Some critics of political liberalism, for example, contest the imposition of public reason constraints on political debate and decision-making, arguing that it is antidemocratic.[47] Others defend political perfectionism, arguing that states should promote valuable conceptions of the good life; for them, public reason imposes undue burdens on this goal.[48] For these critics, the fact that a political party might advance a sectarian political agenda only reflecting the interests of a specific social group, or that a politician might employ religious arguments to justify the policies they advocate, do not constitute a problem for liberal democracy. However, since we embrace public reason liberalism, we believe that sectarianism is problematic for liberal democratic states. In the remainder of this section, we show how COVID-19 has imposed new strains on public-minded behaviour, providing more scope for individuals and groups to pursue sectarian interests.

Sectarian Political Agendas: Horizontal and Vertical

The COVID-19 crisis has provided new opportunities for some actors to pursue overtly sectarian agendas. Despite facing a common public health challenge, actors with divergent interests and goals have, at times, attempted to steer policies in ways that prioritize their own particular agendas over those that might advance more public-minded goals. It may be useful to distinguish between two kinds of sectarianism that have emerged during the pandemic.

The first, which we call *horizontal sectarianism*, concerns political actors that have advanced policy proposals grounded in the interests of their party or constituents. Party politics has featured prominently in policy formulation and implementation in a lot of cases. Many politicians have used the current health crisis to advance personal and party interests, along with those of their constituents, rather than the common good of the broader political community. For example, the US Senate struggled to pass an emergency stimulus package as Democrats and Republicans disagreed about certain provisions—e.g. measures concerning corporate stock buybacks and executive pay, as well as unemployment insurance

and worker protections. Furthermore, electoral considerations continued to influence pandemic policies leading up to the November 2020 US Presidential elections.[49] Sectarian agendas and lack of consensus across partisan lines have created significant obstacles to the development and implementation of effective and publicly justified policy responses to the pandemic.[50] Another example of horizontal sectarianism is provided by the decision to add Trump's name to stimulus checks sent to millions of US citizens to help them respond to the economic effects of the pandemic (Image 4.1).[51]

While the economic stimulus per se can certainly be considered a reasonable and publicly justified response to COVID-19, aimed at promoting economic growth and protecting jobs, its politicization by Trump seems to be difficult to justify based on the standards of public reason and appears to be mainly driven by his personal and partisan political interests.

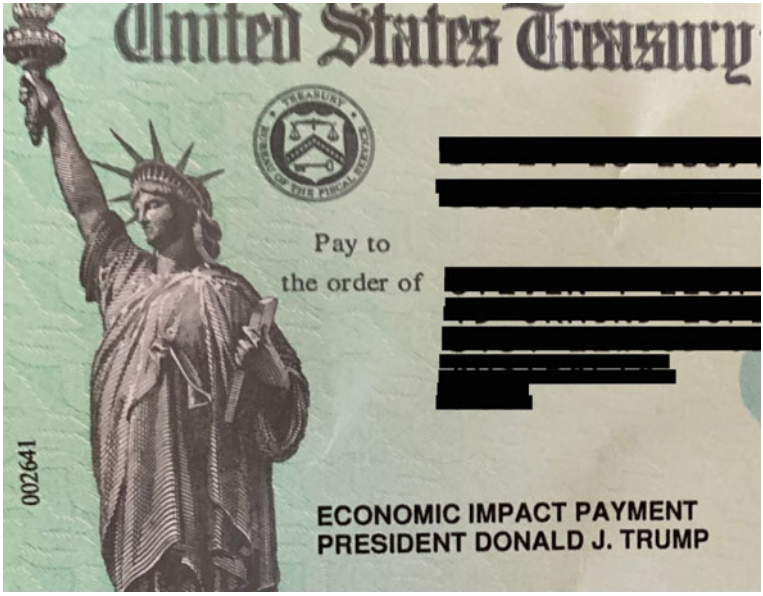

Image 4.1 US economic stimulus check that included the name of President Donald J. Trump

Another instance of horizontal sectarianism concerns appeals to controversial religious arguments in order to justify opposition to mask-wearing regulations. As one recent study points out, opposition to wearing a mask and other cautious behaviours in the US is often correlated with a conservative Christian background.[52] Consider, for example, the following statement made by Ohio state representative Nino Vitale in May 2020:

> This is the greatest nation on earth founded on Judeo-Christian Principles. One of those principles is that we are all created in the image and likeness of God. That image is seen the most by our face. I will not wear a mask…That's the image of God right there, and I want to see it in my brothers and sisters.[53]

Vitale's statement clearly contains an appeal to a controversial religious argument that could not be accepted by atheists and arguably by most religious believers who do not embrace his particular take on Judeo-Christian values. In this sense, it is clearly an instance of justificatory incivility based on a sectarian and controversial religious doctrine.

Alongside horizontal sectarianism, we have also witnessed what we call *vertical sectarianism* during the current pandemic. Rather than the use of controversial arguments or the advancement of the interests of a specific party or sector of society, vertical sectarianism involves the specific decision-making level within a system of multi-level governance. For example, when Italy asked other EU member states for help with medical assistance and supplies at the onset of the pandemic, those countries did not provide the requested support. This 'shameful lack of solidarity'[54] signalled a clear concern for their own national interest which hindered the pursuit of a publicly-minded goal at the EU level.[55] It is difficult to see how this kind of response could be publicly justified if one considers the EU as being the relevant constituency of public reason in this instance. The same argument may often apply to other cases[56] when the national interest is prioritized over that of the international community at times when coordinated action and solidarity would seem to constitute the publicly-minded attitudes necessary to tackle a crisis like the current pandemic. We understand, of course, that whether public reason and public justification should apply beyond the traditional nation-state remains an ongoing dispute.[57] However, we also think that at least within the context of a political and economic union like the EU, notions

of justificatory civility, sectarian arguments, and public-mindedness are increasingly relevant.

But it is perhaps within the nation-state, which constitutes the traditional site of public reason, that the vertical dimension of sectarianism becomes most visible. What this dimension involves is the advancement of policy goals grounded in the interests of specific regional or state sub-units in relation to the national or federal level. In the US, for example, the allocation of economic aid resources to different states seems to have been driven by partisan concerns, sometimes favouring Republican states less affected by the pandemic than Democratic states facing immediate difficulties.[58] This example also demonstrates how the horizontal and vertical dimensions of sectarianism are sometimes intertwined. In this case, contention within the vertical level of governance was driven by horizontal partisan interests.

In another example, some US states formed alliances such as the West Coast Pact and the East Coast consortium in April 2020 to counter President Trump's minimized COVID-19 threat assessment and his insistence on the need to re-open for business, thus re-igniting the perennial debate in the US about states' rights.[59] Regardless of the substance of the dispute, this signals a policy approach grounded in the interest of specific states or groups of states rather than the general interest of the broader national political community, which is what justificatory civility and public reason would demand.

In other cases, however, the interests of specific states or sub-units have been presented as related to (rather than in tension with) the national interest. For example, when the Australian Government's Acting Chief Medical Officer, Professor Paul Kelly, expressed his concerns about a new COVID-19 outbreak in the state of Victoria in July 2020, he stated:

> This latest outbreak is not a Victorian problem. It is a national problem. It is everyone's problem. Support is being provided by the Commonwealth and other states and territories – several hundred clinical and other staff are helping with testing, contact tracing and public engagement. I am very heartened – and, I might say, not the least surprised – by this national response to get on top of the virus.[60]

In sum, in this section we have shown that when political actors appeal to controversial values or partial (e.g. personal, partisan, or local) interests

to justify or oppose laws and policies related to COVID-19, this undermines public justification and constitutes a violation of justificatory civility. It should be stressed that the justifications for sectarian-minded policies are not always stated explicitly. But it is often possible to infer from the policy itself, and/or from the broader behaviour of the relevant political actor, whether the policy could be justified by appealing to public reasons. In many instances, the implementation of a policy that clearly advances the interests of a specific political party or leader can hardly be considered consistent with justificatory civility.

Confronting sectarianism, both during COVID-19 and more broadly, can take on two forms. The first involves designing and strengthening institutional mechanisms that can prevent encroachment on justificatory civility. For example, judicial institutions like the US Supreme Court, which for Rawls constitutes the 'exemplar of public reason',[61] can stand as a bulwark against laws that may advance sectarian religious values.[62] Likewise, institutional responses to counteract disagreements across different levels of governance will require competing partisan actors to acknowledge the scope of their rights and duties at each level. When there are uncertainties or disagreements at different levels of governance, there should be clear channels of communication between the parties involved in a dispute and appropriate mechanisms for its resolution.

The second kind of response to sectarianism involves promoting compliance with the moral duty of justificatory civility among politicians and citizens. That duty, recall, demands that citizens justify to each other the political rules that they defend by appealing to the shared political values of public reason. Schools and other educational institutions could play a key role in educating children to the virtue of justificatory civility, e.g. by familiarizing them with key constitutional principles that reflect shared political values in their society. Such principles constitute the shared vocabulary of public reason that citizens ought to employ when participating in the process of public justification in the political realm. Another solution might be to introduce or enhance channels for citizens' participation in decision-making, such as consultation mechanisms or deliberative forums.[63] These can encourage policymakers and citizens alike to acquire reason-based and other-regarding perspectives on political matters, informed by the value of reciprocity, in the spirit of justificatory civility.

Issue Prioritization 1: Public Health vs. Economic Growth

In the previous subsection, we considered instances of sectarianism that emerge when political actors appeal to controversial values or partial interests in defence of or in opposition to public policies related to COVID-19. However, an additional problem that we would like to consider in this section concerns the relationship between different political values in the context of public justification. That is, policies may sometimes be unreasonable not because they are grounded in sectarian values but because they balance different non-sectarian political values in unreasonable ways. Indeed there are often tensions between widely shared political values in liberal democratic societies. While this does not necessarily preclude public justification, it does require that those advocating or opposing certain laws and policies offer reasons that 'represent a plausible balance of political values. An argument, even if based on a political and free-standing value, fails to be a reasonable public justification if it does not plausibly address other political values that may be at stake'.[64]

One type of balancing concerns different understandings of how the same shared category of political value should be best realized. Take, for example the 'values of the common good'[65] that are central to political liberalism and public reason. Within the context of COVID-19, there has been an ongoing debate regarding the potential trade-off between public health and economic growth, arguably two policy goals that advance the common good. The tension between public health and economic growth has led people to conceptualize the harms resulting from COVID-19 in different ways, with some prioritizing the harm to health and others the long-term harm to the economy and livelihoods. From the very beginning of the pandemic, some countries clearly embraced a public health-oriented approach and acknowledged the almost certain costs to the economy. For example, on 18 March 2020 Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated:

> If you work in a restaurant, drive a cab, organize events, or freelance to pay your bills, working from home is not so simple. Just like if you work in the oil and gas sector or the tourism and seafood industries, you're looking at the uncertainty in the global economy and probably wondering not only how long this is going to last, but how long your savings are going to last. No matter who you are or what you do, this is a time when you should be focused on your health and that of your neighbours. Not whether you're

> going to lose your job. Not whether you're going to run out of money for things like groceries and medication.[66]

Likewise, before introducing extreme lockdown measures to counter Australia's second wave of COVID-19 infections, the Premier of the state of Victoria Daniel Andrews explained to the public:

> As Premier, I've spent every day fighting for workers and fighting for jobs. I understand deeply: a job means financial security – but it also means stability, purpose and the foundation to build your future. Truthfully, I never thought I'd find myself in a position where I'd have to ask people not to go to work. But if we're serious about driving this thing down – and we absolutely must be – we need to take unprecedented steps in limiting the movement of people, and therefore limiting the movement of this virus.[67]

It is important to stress that Trudeau and Andrews, like other leaders who clearly recognized the importance of prioritizing public health goals, did not disregard the urgent economic circumstances they faced. In addition to acknowledging the inevitable job losses and economic repercussions that would accompany strict lockdown measures necessary to save lives, these leaders also took measures to help businesses and workers who were affected by government responses to the pandemic.[68]

Conversely, other political leaders stressed the importance of prioritizing the economy over public health outcomes early on. For example, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro downplayed the severity of the pandemic as 'just a little flu' and insisted that 'the economy must come first'.[69] In late March 2020, Bolsonaro stated: '[l]ife must go on, employments [sic] should be kept, people's income should be preserved, so all Brazilians should go back to normal'.[70] Likewise, in the same month, Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick stated:

> My message is that let's get back to work. Let's get back to living. Let's be smart about it… And those of us who are 70 plus, we'll take care of ourselves. But don't sacrifice the country… I just think there are lots of grandparents out there in this country like me—I have six grandchildren—that's what we all care about… And I want to live smart and see through this, but I don't want the whole country to be sacrificed. And that's what I see… No one reached out to me and said, as a senior citizen, are you willing to take a chance on your survival in exchange for keeping the

> America that all America loves for your children and grandchildren? And if that's the exchange, I'm all in.[71]

Even in Italy, one of the first countries where the government imposed an almost total lockdown at the beginning of the pandemic, the tendency to prioritize the economy among some sectors of the population contributed to delaying the shutting down of key businesses and factories, arguably helping the spread of the virus in those early stages. This was particularly the case in the Bergamo province, one of the richest and most productive of Italy, and one characterized by a strong work ethic. On 29 February 2020, the Confindustria Bergamo, a body representing 1,200 businesses employing 80,000 people, published a reassuring message in English aimed at the region's foreign export partners, and started a Twitter campaign via the hashtag '#Bergamoisrunning'. The key message by the president of Confindustria Bergamo, Stefano Scaglia, was 'work goes on, we remain open'.[72]

The examples discussed so far therefore reveal an apparent trade-off between public health and economic growth goals, as two different ways of promoting the common good. However, a closer look at the empirical reality suggests that in fact there might be synergy between protecting public health and protecting the economy.[73] An analysis of GDP data and death rates across cases, for example, concluded:

> Contrary to the idea of a trade-off, we see that countries which suffered the most severe economic downturns – like Peru, Spain and the UK – are generally among the countries with the highest COVID-19 death rate. And the reverse is also true: countries where the economic impact has been modest – like Taiwan, South Korea, and Lithuania – have also managed to keep the death rate low.[74]

More empirical evidence might be needed in this area, and it is likely that policymakers will continue to face difficult trade-offs, especially as measures like lockdown and stay-at-home orders impose increasing strains upon businesses. However, the more general point is that policymakers should engage in this kind of reflection in order to ensure that the policies they implement meet the standards of justificatory civility by addressing all the relevant political values at stake, and different interpretations of them. And, of course, things are not static. For example, when introducing new measures to counter a second wave of infections in October 2020, Italian

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte stated: '[w]e must act, deploying all the measures necessary to avert a new generalized lockdown. The country cannot afford a new setback which would severely jeopardize the whole economy'.[75]

It is likely that political leaders will continue to make adjustments to policies based on changing circumstances, while having to balance public health and economic concerns. From the perspective of justificatory civility, it is important that they recognize the trade-offs inherent in prioritizing either goal.

Issue Prioritization 2: Public Health vs. Individual Rights and Freedoms

Alongside distinct notions of what the common good should entail, COVID-19 has also often highlighted the need to balance the common good of public health with individual rights and freedoms. Here one might point out that this trade-off is only apparent, given that priority that Rawls famously assigns to basic rights and liberties over the promotion of the common good. According to him, 'the principles of justice are to be ranked in lexical order and therefore the basic liberties can be restricted only for the sake of liberty [rather than to advance the common good]'.[76] However, this objection overlooks another important aspect of Rawls's theory. In his view, citizens can only enjoy their basic rights and liberties if they also have access to a social minimum set of goods that protect them from such conditions as hunger or disease.[77] This implies that under political liberalism the promotion of the common good of public health is not in tension with individual rights and liberties but, at least in principle, instrumental to it. That said, it is implausible to argue that *any* (temporary) infringements on individual rights and freedoms are permissible if they help protect those rights and freedoms in the long term. If that were the case, one might be able to justify any types of authoritarian policies in the name of public health. Instead, justificatory civility demands that policymakers offer a reasonable balance of political values by carefully weighing the promotion of public health to help citizens enjoy their basic rights and liberties in the long term against the restrictions of those very rights and liberties that public health policies often involve in the short term.

Consider again, for example, the opposition to mask wearing displayed by certain religious believers. Some people may justify their opposition by

appealing to controversial arguments tied to a specific religious tradition, as in the aforementioned example concerning Ohio state representative Nino Vitale. However, in other cases, resistance to mask-wearing regulations has been justified by appealing to the right to religious freedom, as exemplified by plaintiff claims in the recent Florida legal case *Tillis v. Manatee County*.[78] The right to the free exercise of religion is protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution and it certainly is one of the shared political values central to political liberalism and theories of public reason. Appealing to this right is distinct from appealing to arguments rooted in a specific religious faith.

That said, appeals to religious freedom cannot be used to contest any piece of legislation that even mildly infringes upon that right. US courts normally apply a 'rational basis test' or a 'strict scrutiny test' to assess the constitutionality of a specific law, especially when the latter involves an alleged infringement on citizens' basic rights. The former test demands that in order to be constitutional '[a] statute or ordinance must have a legitimate state interest, and there must be a rational connection between the statute's/ordinance's means and goals'.[79] The latter is more demanding and requires that '[t]o pass strict scrutiny, the legislature must have passed the law to further a "compelling governmental interest", and must have narrowly tailored the law to achieve that interest'.[80] Both tests are likely to result in the Courts deeming mask mandates constitutional since '[such] mandates do advance a compelling state interest – the protection of public health – and do so in a way that minimizes the restriction on the constitutional right involved, whether of speech or religion'.[81] Within the context of COVID-19, these tests can therefore help the courts to strike a reasonable balance between different shared political values that are central to the public culture of a liberal democracy like the US. More generally, these tests can provide policymakers with normative guidelines for prioritizing one particular political value (e.g. public health) while addressing others (e.g. religious freedom) that may be temporarily curtailed as a result. This can contribute to formulating and implementing policies that abide by the standards of justificatory civility.

Other individual freedoms have also been invoked in opposition to government measures such as lockdown and stay-at-home orders, including freedom of movement and freedom of speech. Several months into the global pandemic we witnessed a significant number of protests around the world, with some highlighting the 'alleged erosion of rights "that's been ramped up in unprecedented ways during this Covid-19

crisis"'.[82] In some cases, protests took a much more extreme and violent form.[83] Culpability for these extreme cases may lie with political leaders, as when Trump posted messages on Twitter calling on citizens to 'LIBERATE' states like Minnesota, Michigan, and Virginia.[84] Protests against lockdown and stay-at-home orders have also often been led by the so-called 'sovereign citizens' movement, rooted in the US but now with a global presence. Movement members have specifically contested the way in which government orders during the pandemic have infringed upon their rights. Some of them have even expressed their anger by assaulting or baiting police.[85]

These protests are relevant to civility in two ways. On the one hand, they can act as an important reminder for governments to seriously consider individual rights (e.g. to free movement and speech) when implementing measures to promote public health, thus justifying those policies based on a reasonable balance of political values. On the other hand, the protesters' demand for greater justificatory civility is often accompanied by both incivility as impoliteness and moral incivility. The former manifests itself when protesters use rude language or behaviour to communicate their views and express their anger. For example, during anti-lockdown protests at the Michigan state capital, protestors chanted 'Lock her up!' at Governor Gretchen Whitmerand and purposefully caused traffic disruptions with the symbolic 'Operation gridlock' because she was 'driving them out of business'.[86] The latter can be witnessed when they harm other members of the public or assault police officers. Whether and when these forms of 'incivility as dissent'[87] aimed at promoting justificatory civility are permissible is an issue that we do not have the space to fully address here. However, some factors that might need to be considered include the type of incivility adopted by protesters (e.g. impoliteness seems much less serious than moral incivility); the opportunities that protesters might have to convey their message in alternative civil ways; and, finally, the extent to which governments are failing to address individual rights and liberties when justifying their policies.

Another case highlighting the need to balance different political values concerns the tension between the common good of public health and economic freedoms, where in one example bar owners participated in the so-called 'Bar Lives Matter' protests.[88] Here it seems that the trade-off might be easier to resolve. First, economic freedoms (e.g. bar owners' freedom to keep their establishments open), while certainly important in a liberal democracy, are arguably less important than fundamental rights

and liberties like freedom of speech or freedom of religion from the perspective of political liberalism.[89] And second, within the context of COVID-19, the potential harm to public health caused by drinking in bars is much more significant than that resulting from other risky activities. For example, during a US Senate committee hearing in late June 2020, Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, stated: '[b]ars: really not good. Really not good…-Congregation at a bar, inside, is bad news. We really got to stop that right now'.[90] For both reasons, governments would seem to be justified in prioritizing public health and fundamental political rights over the economic freedoms advocated in campaigns like 'Bar Lives Matter'.

In some cases, the government has entrusted businesses with the implementation of new health and safety regulations, leaving *them* to balance those rules against employees' rights, such as the right to privacy. For example, the President of a large personal care manufacturing firm in Southern California described his experiences with the pandemic and responding to employee safety concerns at the office and production facilities:

> It spreads like the flu, and I have no idea what people are doing on the weekend. I had one employee come to see me and she was very upset. One of her colleagues that she shares a workspace with had posted a photo on Instagram where they were at a large barbeque. Now they're in the office, but I can't do anything about what they do on their own time. I want all employees to feel comfortable, but the rules don't always allow for it.[91]

This example demonstrates how the tension between different political values is not always one policymakers face directly, leaving citizens and businesses with the difficult challenge of addressing these matters on their own with unclear regulations and insufficient guidance.

In sum, to avoid the instances of justificatory incivility discussed in this chapter, governments need to come up with ways to achieve policies that can promote immediate public health outcomes that help stop the spread of the virus and reduce deaths, while at the same time minimizing the temporary infringement of fundamental political rights. This is also for the benefit of businesses or other actors whom governments entrust with the implementation of public health policies, and who may need clearer guidance to balance different political values. How transgressions of basic rights and liberties are justified to the public is crucial, and governments

should clearly articulate the criteria for when and how certain political values may be prioritized over others. Some ethical frameworks can help to guide and justify those decisions.[92] At the very least, policymakers should acknowledge when certain political values are being undermined or curtailed by their interventions. For example, when liberal democratic governments implement policies that infringe on certain rights and liberties, e.g. via coercive measures, they should stress that these measures are temporary and allow for exemptions (e.g. from uniform travel bans[93] or mandatory mask wearing[94]) for particular citizens or circumstances when possible.

Policy Compliance and Strains of Commitment

As we pointed out in Chapter 2, justificatory civility concerns not only the reasons invoked in defence of political rules and policies but also their potential effects. Public reason liberalism is not consequentialist; it does not base the legitimacy of political rules on their effects but rather on the justifications and reasons for them.[95] However, the likely or foreseeable outcomes of a policy are still relevant to public justification. More specifically, a policy that would impose excessive 'strains of commitment'[96] on specific citizens is not one that is publicly justifiable; those who are likely to be overly burdened by the policy could not be reasonably expected to accept the policy and its justification. As Jonathan Quong points out,

> Although laws should be impartial in terms of their justification and not necessarily in their consequences, it's important to be clear about what justificatory impartiality requires. Non-discriminatory intent is a necessary but not sufficient condition of justificatory impartiality. There are many laws that might meet the condition of being non-discriminatory in their intent, yet would clearly be unjustifiable on account of the unreasonable burdens they impose on certain persons. Justificatory neutrality requires not just that we avoid discriminatory intent, but also that we imagine what impact a given policy will have on all affected parties. We fail to reason impartially if we don't consider how the burdens and benefits of a policy will be distributed. In addition to the condition of non-discriminatory intent, impartial justification requires something along the lines of Rawls's 'strains of commitment' condition. I fail to reason impartially if I support a policy whose burdens and benefits are distributed in such a way that I wouldn't agree to place myself in the position of those who are worst-off under the policy.[97]

In this section we examine the 'strains of commitment' problem in connection with COVID-19. We pay particular attention to the fact that every society presents certain structural inequalities, which may result in some groups being overly burdened by policies that would in principle appear to be public-minded. Many of the policies implemented by liberal democratic governments in response to COVID-19 present this kind of problem. At first glance, they seem to be public-minded, insofar as they aim to protect lives, advance the common good of public health (which, we have seen, helps protect individual rights and liberties in the long term), and restore economic well-being. However, it is undeniable that in some cases those policies, no matter how well-intentioned in principle, have had uneven effects on different categories of citizens and imposed excessive burdens on some but not others. In this section, we focus particularly on the unequal burdens those policies have imposed on individuals characterized by differences in race, gender, and age.

One of the main implications of our analysis—beyond those immediately related to COVID-19—is that justificatory civility demands that policymakers be aware of the social and political realities that characterize their society, and of how the policies that they intend to implement will interact with those conditions and produce certain effects. No policy can have neutral effects. Whenever governments legislate on, say, tax-related matters, it is inevitable that their policies will have negative effects on some citizens more than others. Likewise, it is undeniable that lockdown and stay-at-home orders implemented by many governments during COVID-19 have negatively affected certain individuals and businesses more than others. These effects cannot be entirely dissociated from the public justifiability of such policies, if they impose excessive burdens on certain persons and groups. Therefore, the likely or foreseeable consequences and social impact of such policies should be built into their public justification. This is also important because in some cases those policies may even exacerbate structural inequalities that render them overly burdensome for certain groups.

COVID-19 and Race

The pandemic has highlighted some of the deep structural inequalities in many societies related to race. COVID-19 has affected certain groups more than others because of differences in access to health services, housing type, levels of economic precarity, and employment types.[98]

In this section we focus specifically on the effects and implications of structural racial inequality for policy responses to the pandemic.

Some segments of the population have faced distinct economic effects resulting from COVID-19 policies. While many people have had to contend with greater financial uncertainty, current unemployment rates and the eventual 'economic fallout' will continue to affect racial and ethnic minority communities in more pronounced ways.[99] Financial safety-net programs in countries like the US will prove especially crucial to reduce disproportionate strains related to race. Measures taken in the name of public health have led to a severe economic downturn and affected black workers especially hard with higher unemployment rates overall. Many sectors with high proportions of black workers have been deemed 'essential', making those able to continue in their jobs more vulnerable to infection.[100] Policies that do not consider the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on minority and disadvantaged groups risk placing additional unreasonable burdens on those groups. In the US context, efforts to alleviate these burdens might involve identifying and targeting industries with greater numbers of employees from precarious workforces (e.g. nonprofit and public-sector employment which have higher proportions of minority employees) and adjusting policies to provide focused support and minimize burdens.[101]

Indigenous communities are especially vulnerable to some COVID-19 policies and face a particularly grave situation worldwide.[102] In many countries across South America, for example, policies aimed at mitigating the economic effects of the pandemic among the broader population may not adequately provide relief for those in low-skilled and unstable employment.[103] Policies in Brazil, Colombia, and Peru have left some indigenous communities neglected and in dire straits. For example, even when economic support targeting some vulnerable communities arrives, poor distribution practices like cash payments at remote regional banks have led to long lines and increased risks for viral transmission in the Peruvian Amazon.[104] Governments should address these shortcomings in their policies if they want to prevent the strains of commitment that risk undermining their public justification.

There are also clear political effects related to COVID-19 and race. In the US context, public health measures presented additional challenges to voter turnout in the November 2020 presidential election and are likely to contribute to ongoing trends in racial disenfranchisement. Issues related to polling place access for in-person voting, excessive wait times

that can deter participation for different reasons, and biases in the rates of rejection of mail-in ballots might all contribute to the ongoing and disproportionate marginalisation of voters based on race and ethnicity.[105] English language skills, familiarity with voting procedures, flexible work schedules, and access to reliable transportation also make voting easier, allowing some citizens to more easily exercise their political rights. A Human Rights Watch report documenting the experience of Abd'ullah, a voter in Philadelphia, during the June 2020 primaries proves illustrative of new obstacles to voting during the pandemic, especially in minority communities. He arrived at his regular polling station to find it closed. There was no indication as to an alternative site and technical difficulties with the elections website forced him to drive around looking for another option. He eventually found a school where he waited in line for over an hour to cast a provisional ballot. He recalled: '[s]omeone else would have been discouraged. I myself was very, very discouraged, to the point of almost giving up. But I had my own car, so I was flexible. If I had been taking public transportation, it would not have been possible. I would have given up.'[106] He suggests that some members of minority groups are often also economically disadvantaged and therefore may not always be able to find ways around the restrictions imposed during the pandemic in order to exercise their fundamental rights and liberties. Policymakers should be aware of the unreasonable burdens that those measures impose on these citizens if they want to implement publicly justifiable policies.

COVID-19 has also created additional obstacles for some citizens to exercise their right to protest. Public health measures like strict lockdowns, stay-at-home orders, and restrictions on public gatherings can place limitations on citizens' ability to fully exercise that right. The measures have been especially challenging for blacks in the US when organizing protests in response to several incidents of lethal police violence. Some posed questions as to a trade-off between protesting racism and risks to public health. The difficulty in maintaining physical distancing in large crowds or in complying with mandatory mask rules, shouting and chanting, and some of the more aggressive police responses like pepper spray that elicit gasping and coughing, can all put protest participants at greater risk of contracting the virus.[107] However, abstaining from protests around such an important issue would constitute a significant strain for all those committed to mobilizing for accountability in the face of racial injustice, but even more so for members of marginalized groups who are most affected. Over 1,200 health professionals signed an open

letter arguing that the protests against racism were actually crucial for public health outcomes. The letter stated that '[w]hite supremacy is a lethal public health issue that predates and contributes to COVID-19' and concluded that '[p]rotests against systemic racism, which fosters the disproportionate burden of COVID-19 on Black communities and also perpetuates police violence, must be supported.'[108]

The pandemic has laid bare many structural inequalities tied to race. The protests related to police violence against black Americans became a space to link specific racist actions to systematic discrimination in other sectors like healthcare. Infection and death rates were significantly higher among blacks at the beginning of the pandemic, especially among those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.[109] Based on these structural factors, some have come to see being black in the US as its own form of health risk.[110] One black protester in Washington, DC described the situation of people he knew who lost their lives to COVID-19: '[t]hey were living in impoverished areas. Couldn't get proper treatment. Lived in crowded conditions, so social distancing was hard to do. And they were still forced to go to work and be put in harm's way'.[111] Ultimately, research suggests that widespread Black Lives Matter protests may not have contributed to virus transmission rates overall.[112] Any policies regarding protests against racial discrimination and police violence should certainly consider the potential public health risks and consequences. However, policymakers should also recognize the effects limitations on protests will have on racial minorities' ability to redress systemic inequalities.

COVID-19 and Gendered Effects

The impact of COVID-19 on society also highlights a clear gender dimension, with different gender groups facing distinct challenges. In Chapter 1 we briefly mentioned that men are more likely to die from the virus than women for reasons that are still unclear. But beyond rates of mortality, men have also been especially vulnerable to mental distress during the pandemic. This is particularly the case for fathers with young children and those who are unemployed.[113] However, women have been affected to even a greater degree by the pandemic. Aside from the higher maternal mortality rates in developing countries also mentioned in Chapter 1, COVID-19 has in many ways also compounded existing gender-based economic inequalities. But perhaps one of the most

significant effects of the pandemic on women has been the sharp rise in domestic and family violence.[114] Lockdown and stay-at-home orders have forced people to live in confined spaces for significant lengths of time, causing or exacerbating tensions related to health and financial issues. In a statement highlighting the emergence of a 'shadow pandemic', Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, pointed out that

> [c]onfinement is fostering the tension and strain created by security, health, and money worries. And it is increasing isolation for women with violent partners, separating them from the people and resources that can best help them. It's a perfect storm for controlling, violent behaviour behind closed doors. And in parallel, as health systems are stretching to breaking point, domestic violence shelters are also reaching capacity, a service deficit made worse when centres are repurposed for additional COVID-response.[115]

The gendered impact of COVID-19 also concerns issues related to caring responsibilities. An Australian Government report, for example, shows that while men are also facing greater caring and domestic responsibilities, women have been especially affected by these demands. More specifically,

> [w]omen are likely to increase time spent on caring responsibilities. They comprise the majority of the healthcare workforce, and are more likely to care for sick family members at home and take on education-related responsibilities while children are home from school…The increase in caring responsibilities can heighten feelings of stress and limit women's economic opportunities.[116]

Furthermore, a study of female academics working at Australian universities shows that many women have struggled to manage remote work and caring, and have not received much support by their institutions.[117] One female academic at an Australian university described the difficulties in achieving this balance:

> Experiencing the rolling lockdowns with an infant brings unique challenges. I have had to negotiate caring and work arrangements in my own home, which had up until that point been a space largely undisturbed by my job… Since March I have not had sustained thinking time. Despite this, I have attempted to maintain some kind of normal research and writing

> level, with incredible difficulty, just so my research trajectory is not unduly shattered by the dual dimensions of caring and COVID-19.[118]

More generally, lack of institutional support for women has resulted in reduced numbers of remunerated working hours and higher levels of stress, as women continue to undertake most of the unpaid 'care economy' work tasks such as cooking and childcare.[119]

Finally, COVID-19 has also had a significant impact on the LGBTIQ+ community. In the Australian context, for example, it has compounded pre-existing disparities among members of this community related to health, rates of depression and suicide, experiences with discrimination when accessing healthcare and support services, and when engaging with law enforcement.[120] Mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic will require abiding by a number of key guiding principles. These include complying with human rights legislation, taking into account the distinctive needs and circumstances of LGBTIQ+ people, ensuring that economic stimulus interventions offer support for LGBTIQ+ people and organizations, and providing institutional mechanisms for ensuring that LGBTIQ+ people are given democratic voice and included in consultation processes.[121]

The same considerations should apply across all marginalized or especially vulnerable groups. Policymakers should take into account the social and political realities that characterize their society, and how their proposed policies in response to COVID-19 will interact with those conditions and produce certain effects. When the empirical evidence suggests that a policy imposes (or is likely to impose) disproportionate burdens on certain individuals and groups, in order to comply with the demands of justificatory civility policymakers may face a choice between renouncing the policy, modifying it, or implementing additional measures aimed at mitigating its uneven effects. Ultimately, the key point is the following: justificatory civility demands not only abstract reasoning but also attention to the concrete circumstances in which (and for which) political rules are designed and implemented.

Older People During COVID-19

A third social category which has been particularly burdened by policy responses to COVID-19 are older people. We already pointed out in Chapter 1 that older people are at greater risk of contracting and dying

from COVID-19 than children and younger adults. Aged care facilities have become sites for significant outbreaks with high fatality rates as well.[122] However, older people's greater vulnerability also becomes apparent when we consider the implications of some of the policy responses to the pandemic. For example, data show that rates of unemployment have been higher than in previous recessions for workers who are 65 and older.[123] Furthermore, many older people have also experienced disruptions to their retirement plans and may not be afforded the same opportunities to resume travel when the pandemic subsides. One recent retiree in the US described his disappointment with the timing of the pandemic:

> These were the years that we have set aside between, you know, 66 and maybe early 70s, where we were going to do all of the things that we had put off because we were raising a family and we were at the end of the most productive years in our careers. We didn't take extended vacations, we didn't do a lot of things because our jobs were demanding; our careers were demanding. We said that we were going to retire at an earlier age than some people…[W]e had a couple good years where we [traveled in] Europe, Australia, and a lot of the US, and all of a sudden, all of that's gone. And at the same time we're progressing in our age, and these are years that we'll never get back. It's not like you can travel [in the same way] when you're 77.[124]

A more significant problem, however, is posed by the social isolation resulting from such measures as stay-at-home orders and social distancing rules. These measures have often prevented older people from engaging in social interactions that are central to their well-being, such as those with their relatives and family and those occurring at stores, among community groups, in places of worship, or during other day-to-day activities.[125] For example, we spoke with one woman in Italy who described the measures she took during the first wave of the pandemic: '[t]o try to safeguard the health of my elderly mother, who lives one floor above mine, for two months I only met with her for a few minutes [each day], wearing a mask'.[126] This kind of isolation can cause or exacerbate 'depression, feelings of despair and, in older adults with dementia, further cognitive decline'.[127]

Older people living in long-term care (LTC) facilities have been particularly affected, due to significant limitations imposed upon the number, timing, and modalities of visits by friends and relatives. Visitors are often

required to be tested before attending LTC facilities, and the visits are often short and conducted outdoors. All those involved must physically distance and wear masks and other personal protective equipment. This inevitably has an impact on the quality of the meetings. In the Canadian context, health researchers and practitioners observe that

> [t]he impracticalities of such visits are obvious: spouses of residents are often older adults themselves and face mobility challenges getting tested, residents have hearing and vision loss making communicating during a physically distanced visit outdoors challenging, and covering visitor faces with masks is not helpful or comforting for residents with memory loss. Some residents have been socially isolated for over 3 months due to COVID-19 outbreaks, spending all day and every meal trapped alone in their rooms; held hostage by ill-conceived policies… Such policies are out of touch with the needs of residents and are causing emotional distress.[128]

This suggests that some of the key policies implemented by governments in response to COVID-19 have imposed excessive burdens on older people. This risks undermining their public justifiability and demands that policymakers be aware of these policies' uneven social impact, especially given the vulnerable position many older people already find themselves in. There are, however, potential ways of reducing the impact of such policies on older people. In the context of LTC facilities, for example, this might involve

> [refocusing] care on the resident and reintroduce person-centred care into countermeasures… This means welcoming and advocating for innovation, user-friendly digital technologies that promote connections to loved ones, and leveraging [nurses'] close relationships with residents to advocate for more person-centred policies.[129]

Online resources have also been used more broadly beyond the context of LTC facilities. For example, in addition to Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp social networking tools, older people in the UK also have access to the Nextdoor App, which enables communication and social interactions between neighbours. Online platforms have also been used to enable older people to attend religious services, play board games online, and attend virtual music concerts. Since many older people do not have high levels of IT literacy, some have proposed additional forms of support

such as letters, cards and parcels, telephone conversations, and cognitive behaviour therapy.[130]

Justificatory civility does not demand that governments always renounce policy responses to COVID-19 just because these might have a disproportionate effect on older people. After all, these policies are necessary to reduce the virus's spread and save lives. However, policy-makers must at the very least acknowledge those uneven consequences and, where necessary, make a genuine effort to either modify their policies or implement and promote measures to mitigate their uneven effects. This could be done either through direct efforts like providing older people with the financial and technological means to access online resources in their homes, or perhaps indirectly by organizing public information campaigns encouraging citizens to adopt some of the aforementioned supporting behaviours in their daily interactions with older people.

Science, Health and Justificatory Civility

The final problem we address in this chapter concerns the relationship between science and justificatory civility. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, and as Rawls himself highlights, scientific methods and findings should play a key role in public justification. However, this is only on the condition that these methods and findings are not controversial. Politicians who appeal to conspiracy theories[131] to justify certain laws or policies, for example, are in clear breach of the duty of civility. But those who rely on flawed or incomplete scientific evidence, or who deliberately select certain pieces of (sound) scientific evidence but disregard others for political convenience, are also being uncivil from a justificatory point of view.

The link between scientific expertise and public justification is particularly relevant to COVID-19. No other policy challenge in recent times has perhaps elicited greater debate on the role of science in public policy than the current pandemic, rendering the need for a fusion of science and policy especially urgent.[132] Measures to contain the virus's spread such as social distancing rules, mask-wearing regulations, and lockdown or stay-at-home orders, rely heavily on scientific expertise and evidence. In the absence of such evidence, it is not clear how governments could legitimately impose upon their citizens such burdensome rules, especially given the significant toll of these policies on rights and liberties.

One of the greatest challenges posed to the science/policy nexus during COVID-19 is the politicization of scientific evidence. As stated by

Fauci, a simple motto should guide scientists who advise policymakers, especially in times of crisis: '[y]ou stay completely apolitical and non-ideological, and you stick to what it is that you do. I'm a scientist and I'm a physician. And that's it'.[133] In other words, scientists must rely on facts and data, even when these contradict the political goals of decision-makers. This is especially important when evidence-based policies can help save human lives. But this is, of course, not an easy credo to follow. Fauci recalls how he was once advised that '[w]hen you go into the White House, you should be prepared that that is the last time you will ever go in. Because if you go in saying, I'm going to tell somebody something they want to hear, then you've shot yourself in the foot'.[134] It comes as no surprise that there were tensions between Fauci and Trump during the pandemic, with the former US President often suggesting potential treatments for COVID-19, only to see them quickly corrected or refuted by Fauci.

In the remainder of this section, we will examine the challenges posed by COVID-19 to the connection between science and policy by focusing on three specific issues: the first concerns the scientific community's ongoing limited understanding of the virus and its long-term health effects; the second relates to the lack of scientific research on the way in which COVID-19, and the policies implemented in response to it, interact with various social and cultural contexts; and the third involves the problems posed by the politicization of science and by the lack of clear communication channels between scientists and policymakers.

Understanding COVID-19, How It Spreads, and Its Long-Term Effects

The first issue that we examine in this section concerns the scientific understanding of COVID-19. Justificatory civility demands that when policymakers appeal to scientific evidence to justify legislation, the evidence and the methods employed to produce it should be uncontroversial. Whether these criteria have been met in the scientific study of COVID-19 remains unclear. The scientific community has invested significant time and energy in the study of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. However, there has been ongoing disagreement among scientists regarding key aspects of the virus, including the effectiveness of wearing a mask in preventing its spread; the degree to which people who

have had the virus become immune to it; and the question of how cases should be estimated and reported.[135]

The study of COVID-19 in everyday environments has left us with additional unanswered questions. Most of the scientific research on COVID-19 has focused on studying the virus in laboratory settings, away from the everyday environments in which the virus exists and spreads. This is problematic since a full understanding of how the virus can be transmitted requires having a grasp of how it interacts, for example, with everyday objects such as furniture, lifts, and door handles.[136] For instance, a recent study pointed out that the 2-metre social distancing rule implemented by many governments to reduce COVID-19 transmission might be based on incomplete evidence. More specifically, the study claims, '[s]afe transmission mitigation measures depend on multiple factors related to both the individual and the environment, including viral load, duration of exposure, number of individuals, indoor versus outdoor settings, level of ventilation and whether face coverings are worn'.[137] This has important policy implications. As the study concluded,

> safe social distancing limits differ widely between settings, with outdoor environments likely associated with lower risk of transmission at a given distance. Staggered social distancing rules alongside other public health interventions may be required to recognise the importance of the environmental context in determining transmission risk.[138]

Scientists have also stressed the need for more research on COVID-19 in relation to air,[139] water,[140] and specific types of surfaces.[141] While a growing number of studies have begun to address these gaps, e.g. by analysing in more detail how COVID-19 spreads in restaurants,[142] airplanes,[143] and humid vs. dry environments,[144] more research is required in these areas.

Research regarding COVID-19 transmission on airlines provides an interesting case for discussion. The US Department of Defense partnered with United Airlines and university researchers to examine risks of COVID-19 transmission on airplanes under a range of control conditions while stationary and in-flight. The study generated some encouraging conclusions for those who would like to see a return to more frequent air travel, finding that a person would have to sit next to a contagious passenger for over 54 hours to become infected through aerosol transmission.[145] Continuous use of a surgical mask, combined with

seat layout and powerful air filtration systems, eliminate much of the risk for transmission in these controlled environments. However, there are still limitations to the study and many of its assumptions. As one researcher at Johns Hopkins University noted about the study, 'you take the element of human behavior out'.[146] The study assumes that passengers do not remove their mask, eat a meal, use the lavatory, or interact with other passengers or flight crew. Indeed anecdotal evidence of known instances of onboard transmission seem to involve acts like using the lavatory.[147] Other research scientists find the prospect of experimental studies hopeful, but also question some of the data used in a broader campaign to portray air travel as relatively free from health risks.[148]

Finally, there seems to still be significant uncertainty regarding the long-term health effects of COVID-19 and their exact causes, for example in relation to the heart[149] or the brain.[150] Likewise, a recent study published in *The Lancet*[151] lists a number of long-term complaints raised by former COVID-19 patients, including extreme fatigue, muscle weakness, inability to concentrate, memory lapses, and difficulty sleeping. The authors highlight the need for more research in this area, pointing out their inability to provide patients with clear answers to a number of questions related to the long-term effects of the virus: 'does acute COVID-19 cause diabetes? Or other metabolic disorders? Will patients develop interstitial lung disease? We are still in the first months of the pandemic and we do not know what to tell our patients when they are asking about the course and prognosis of their ongoing complaints'.[152]

The controversy and uncertainty surrounding many scientific studies of COVID-19 does not imply that the evidence provided by these studies should be automatically disregarded, or that their findings are always unsuitable for public justification. Scientific evidence can be controversial and still be used for public justification. Expecting *all* scientists to agree on *every* scientific finding and *every* method employed in scientific inquiry would mean setting the bar too high, given that scientists regularly disagree with one another and that this disagreement is a healthy aspect of scientific research. In this sense, abiding by more general standards of research that are broadly agreed upon within the scientific community, e.g. Thomas Kuhn's five desiderata of theory choice, might in principle be sufficient to produce scientific findings that can be used in public justification.[153]

However, public justification should not be seen in simple black-and-white terms. There can be degrees of public justification, and the

more controversial and uncertain scientific findings are, the more difficult it will be for policymakers to justify public health policies based on them, especially when those policies curtail individual rights and liberties. Conversely, relying on less contested scientific findings can make it easier for governments to justify public health interventions. For example, if scientific research were to consistently show that COVID-19 can have significant long-term consequences for many of those who have contracted it, including those from groups with lower mortality rates (e.g. young people and children), this could raise the stakes and have significant implications for policy responses to COVID-19. The prospect of a generation with severe long-term health problems, and the resulting strain on public health infrastructure, would strengthen the public justifiability of demanding policy responses to COVID-19, including those that significantly curtail people's rights and liberties.

In some cases, however, the scientific study of COVID-19 might be not merely controversial or uncertain but inherently flawed. For example, some researchers concluded that 'several diagnostic and prognostic models for covid-19…are all at high risk of bias, mainly because of non-representative selection of control patients, exclusion of patients who had not experienced the event of interest by the end of the study, and model overfitting'.[154] Other studies were found to be based on flawed datasets.[155] In such cases, we are not observing healthy scientific disagreement but rather what could be described as 'gross epistemic error'.[156] The scientific findings resulting from this kind of flawed research cannot reasonably be invoked to justify public policy; to do so would be uncivil in the justificatory sense.

Understanding COVID-19 in Different Social and Cultural Contexts

A second example we consider here concerns the importance of understanding COVID-19 within different social and cultural contexts. The scientific understanding of the virus is, of course, important for the public justification of government responses to the pandemic. And we highlighted in the previous section some of the current shortcomings that characterize the scientific study of COVID-19. However, beyond the kind of evidence and data that the natural sciences can provide, it is also important for policymakers to draw on evidence concerning the social and cultural dimensions of the pandemic. These include both the social and cultural environment within which the virus exists and spreads, and

the potential social and cultural effects of the policies implemented to contain the virus—it would be unreasonable to apply the same policies indiscriminately across different cultures, countries, and contexts. Absent this broader understanding, such policies might be both ineffective and inconsistent with the demands of justificatory civility.

In the previous section we highlighted the urgent need for additional scientific research on COVID-19 in everyday environments in order to understand how the virus spreads in different spaces and via different surfaces and materials. Studies conducted in the lab, in isolation from everyday contexts, cannot always provide this kind of evidence. But beyond a better understanding of the *physical* dimensions of everyday environments, it is also important to study their *social and cultural* dimensions, for example how people interact in different everyday contexts and spaces. In restaurants and cafes, for example, knowledge about what materials chairs and tables are made of, or how ventilation works within these environments, is not sufficient to understand how COVID-19 spreads. It is also necessary to understand the kinds of interactions people engage in, such as whether they tend to eat together or alone, whether they share plates or not, whether they sit or stand to drink coffee, as well as how frequently they visit these venues and for how long. These questions, however, cannot be answered in the abstract. It is necessary, instead, to acquire knowledge and understanding of different food and coffee cultures. Knowing, for example, that people in a certain country tend to eat at restaurants in large groups over long periods of time, whereas in another they tend to have quick meals on their own, may have implications for how policies to counter COVID-19 are designed, since those different social and cultural habits are likely to affect the spread of the virus in different ways.[157]

Acquiring this knowledge requires interdisciplinary research beyond the natural scientific study of the virus. More specifically, it demands that policymakers draw on the expertise of social scientists (e.g. sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and political scientists) who study the virus in relation to people's behaviours and beliefs. Drawing on this expertise is important in order to understand not only how the virus spreads in different everyday contexts but also how to respond best.[158] For example, knowing about the religious make-up of a country is important since religious believers in many countries have sometimes opposed or failed to fully comply with lockdown policies targeting places of worship.[159] Likewise, knowing whether the political culture of a specific country

emphasizes norms of individual freedom or solidarity will be relevant to understanding how its leaders can best justify policy responses to COVID-19, and the extent to which they can curtail individual rights and freedoms in ways that that majority of citizens will find publicly justifiable.

For example, a recent statement by Prime Minister Boris Johnson contends that one of the reasons why measures to contain the virus have not been very successful in the UK is its citizens' love for individual freedom. During a parliamentary speech, Johnson stated:

> Actually, there is an important difference between our country and many other countries around the world… That is that our country is a freedom loving country. If you look at the history of this country over the last 300 years, virtually every advance – from free speech to democracy – has come from this country. And it is very difficult to ask the British population uniformly to obey guidelines in the way that is necessary.[160]

In contrast, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has often emphasized the importance of solidarity within German society, a point that she stressed in a speech to the nation at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020:

> Since German reunification, no, since the Second World War, there has not been a challenge for our country in which action in a spirit of solidarity on our part was so important. Everything I tell you about this comes from the Federal Government's ongoing consultations with the experts from the Robert Koch Institute and other scientists and virologists. These are not just abstract numbers in statistics, but this is about a father or grandfather, a mother or grandmother, a partner – this is about people. And we are a community in which each life and each person counts.[161]

Recognizing these kinds of cultural differences can be very important for policymakers' ability to provide better public justifications for their policies, i.e. justifications that better align with those values. After all, it is a key assumption of political liberalism that public reasons must be grounded in ideas that are implicit in the public political culture of a society.[162] Those ideas, or how they are prioritized against each other, may not be the same across different societies, including across liberal democracies. And if policymakers cannot provide a public justification that aligns with shared ideas and values in their society's public political culture, they may need to formulate new policies that are more consistent with those ideas and values.

Beyond issues concerning religious and political worldviews, other social and cultural factors influence how we understand and counter COVID-19. For example, shaming could provide a powerful psychological mechanism to limit challenges to social order during the pandemic. At the onset of the public health crisis, for instance, many Australians started to hoard and fight over toilet rolls. Prime Minister Scott Morrison referred to that behaviour and, more generally, to non-compliance with anti-COVID-19 policies, as 'un-Australian'.[163] Mask-wearing norms further illustrates the importance of additional cultural factors. Whether people are more or less likely to wear masks to contain the spread of COVID-19 depends very much on local cultural norms. For example,

> in some parts of Asia everyone wears a mask by default – it is seen as safer and more considerate. In mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan, the broad assumption is that anyone could be a carrier of the virus, even healthy people. So in the spirit of solidarity, you need to protect others from yourself… For many of these countries, mask-wearing was a cultural norm even before the coronavirus outbreak. They've even become fashion statements – at one point Hello Kitty face masks were all the rage in the street markets of Hong Kong.[164]

Likewise, cultures where friendly kissing and hugging are common might be more conducive to the spread of the virus.[165] Furthermore, a society's ability to respond to a threat like the current pandemic also depends on previous experiences of natural disasters. As one study shows,

> [e]cological and human-made threats increase the need for strong norms and punishment of deviant behavior in the service of social coordination for survival—whether it is to reduce chaos in nations that have high population density, deal with resource scarcity, coordinate in the face of natural disasters, defend against territorial threats, or contain the spread of disease. Nations facing these particular challenges are predicted to develop strong norms and have low tolerance of deviant behavior to enhance order and social coordination to effectively deal with such threats [tight cultures]. Nations with few ecological and human-made threats, by contrast, have a much lower need for order and social coordination, affording weaker social norms and much more latitude [loose cultures].[166]

Knowing whether a society's culture is 'tight' or 'loose' can be very important for understanding its people's response to COVID-19, the

extent to which social norms can regulate behaviour, and the level of compliance with policy responses to the pandemic.

In sum, knowledge and understanding of the social world in which COVID-19 exists and spreads is fundamental for justificatory civility. To reassert our central point in this section, such knowledge is important for two reasons. First, it can help policymakers to better understand the virus and improve the efficacy of the policies implemented to contain it. This can enhance the epistemic dimension of the public justification for those policies. Second, a better understanding of a society's political culture can also help policymakers to better align the moral dimension of their public justification for those policies to the ideas, values, and norms that are widespread and prevalent within that society.

Disconnect and Subversion in the Science-Policy Interface During COVID-19

So far in this section we have examined the problems posed to public justification by limits or flaws in our scientific understanding of COVID-19. These might be due to shortcomings in the natural or social scientific study of the virus, or a combination of both. Here we examine a different set of problems, which also constitute obstacles to justificatory civility. The first is related to the lack of clear communication between policymakers and the scientific community (even when sound scientific evidence is available); the second concerns problems associated with the politicization, subversion, and manipulation of science.

The first problem is sometimes characterized as a failure of the so-called 'science-policy interface'. More specifically,

> The science-policy interface is a short-hand description of the system by which the best scientific information and advice is provided by the most knowledgeable institutions and experts, acted upon by key decision-makers in government, and provided to the public. Many of the failures are due to incompetence in government, but there have also been failures by scientific institutions and advisors who recognized the emerging threat but were unable to marshall support for timely effective action.[167]

We speculate that in addition to incompetence among policymakers and failures within the scientific community, other factors might also hinder the smooth transmission of scientific findings from the latter to

the former. More specifically, the way in which scientists communicate their findings to policymakers can play an important role in how they are received. Take, once again, the example of Fauci discussed earlier. It is plausible that Fauci's pragmatic approach, characterized by an apolitical, non-ideological and goal-oriented stance, has contributed to his ability to influence US Presidents and other key political leaders over several decades.[168] Furthermore, the uptake of scientific findings by policymakers (and citizens in general) may sometimes also be affected by the level of politeness with which they are communicated.[169] That is, polite exchanges can help uptake, a testimony to the role of politeness as a 'social lubricant' that we examined in the previous chapter. During a pandemic, when tensions are often high among citizens and policymakers, exercising restraint and abiding by politeness norms when communicating scientific evidence can therefore facilitate the uptake of that evidence by those in charge of policy-making, thus resulting in policies more in line with public justification. This also reveals an interesting synergy between civility as politeness and justificatory civility.

In addition to the failure of the science-policy interface, the inability of scientific evidence to contribute to the public justification of policies during COVID-19 may also result from the politicization, subversion, and manipulation of science carried out by policymakers. These phenomena may manifest themselves in various ways.

Politicians might make false scientific claims, as when Trump stated that '[t]aking hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 is safe and effective',[170] a claim he continued to make even after the scientific community challenged his assertion.[171] Trump's claim was based on a French study[172] that was later found to be scientifically flawed.[173] This example also reveals another problem: sometimes politicians may think that their beliefs about what is scientifically viable and effective to tackle the health crisis are on a par with evidence-based policies. When Fauci, following Trump's claim, was asked whether the drug hydroxychloroquine is effective at preventing coronavirus, he responded, '[t]he answer is no'. President Trump then returned to the microphone to offer a rebuttal: '[i]t may work, it may not work. I feel good about it. That's all it is, it's just a feeling, you know, right, smart guy'. He added, '[y]ou know the expression, "[w]hat the hell do you have to lose?"' and reasoned, 'I've been right a lot, let's see what happens'.[174] This statement shows that in recommending the use of hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19, Trump relied on a flawed method, i.e. appealing to his feelings rather than

to findings based on valid scientific methodology. Since public reason and justificatory civility involve appeals to knowledge based on sound science in support of legislation, drawing on feelings about flawed studies can exacerbate justificatory incivility.

In other cases, politicians may adopt a selective approach to scientific evidence, citing data that are sound but incomplete. For example, when in July 2020 Trump cited low rates of contagion and mortality among children to justify his support for re-opening schools, he neglected important evidence about community transmission, especially to older people who are much more vulnerable to the virus.[175]

In other instances, we have witnessed politicians misinterpreting or misapplying sound scientific evidence. For example, when hearing that COVID-19 dies faster when exposed to sunlight and heat, and that bleach or isopropyl alcohol can kill it within minutes, Trump suggested that perhaps the virus could be treated by irradiating patients' bodies with UV light or injecting disinfectant into their bodies. His suggestions, however, were quickly dismissed by scientists. While his claims were in principle based on sound scientific evidence, Trump committed a gross epistemic error by inferring that the effectiveness of sunlight and disinfectants at killing COVID-19 *outside* the human body imply that these 'treatments' would also be effective *inside* the human body, and by neglecting the serious harm they could cause to the body in the process.[176]

In addition to the flawed or selective use of scientific evidence, another obstacle to the contribution of science to justificatory civility arises from its politicization. Sometimes politicians make overt attempts to undermine science when its findings prove politically inconvenient. For example, under pressure from various business sectors, Trump refused to implement the Centers for Disease Control and Preventions 17-page draft recommendation for reopening the US, expressing his preference for pre-COVID-19 opening rules rather than abiding by the more cautious recommendations of the CDCP.[177]

Beyond the actions of specific leaders, the politicization of science can affect society more broadly. Partisan divides may influence and distort how individuals perceive and respond to scientific evidence about COVID-19. In the US context, for example, the way in which people approach scientific evidence regarding COVID-19 has become deeply polarized along partisan lines, with clear differences in beliefs about basic facts related to the pandemic. Some commentators suggest that many

people are living in 'alternative realities'.[178] There is also evidence, for example, that US Republican supporters tend to be more skeptical about scientific evidence related to COVID-19 than their Democrat counterparts.[179] The politicization of science can have far-reaching implications. For example, collective bodies that usually abstain from adopting positions of support for individual candidates may see the affront to science as a motivation to adopt political positions. For instance, for the first time in its 175-year history, the popular science magazine *Scientific American* openly endorsed a presidential candidate in 2020, justifying this decision by arguing 'that Donald Trump has badly damaged the U.S. and its people—because he rejects evidence and science'.[180] This kind of response can further exacerbate the distance between some politicians and the scientific community, thus undermining the uptake of scientific evidence by the former.

Finally, the contribution of science to justificatory civility can be undermined by the presence and spread of conspiracy theories, such as the view that '[t]he COVID-19 pandemic is part of a strategy conceived by global elites — such as Bill Gates — to roll out vaccinations with tracking chips that would later be activated by 5G, the technology used by cellular networks'.[181]

How can these problems be addressed? In addition to educating people about awareness and assessment of scientific evidence, we may also resort to the use of ethics frameworks.[182] We have already seen before that these frameworks can help policymakers navigate the difficult ethical dilemmas they face, especially when they need to balance different political values, rights, and liberties. However, they can also provide guidelines for conducting[183] and communicating[184] scientific research during the pandemic.

Conclusion

This chapter examined new challenges that COVID-19 poses to both the moral and the justificatory dimensions of civility as public-mindedness. Different types of actors and institutions, at both the local/national and international level, have responded to the pandemic in ways that sometimes failed to comply with the demands of moral and justificatory civility. First, various forms of discrimination and hatred have targeted members of vulnerable groups, thus undermining their status as free and equal citizens in ways that are morally uncivil. Second, a number of political actors

have exploited COVID-19 to put forward sectarian political agendas, or overly prioritized certain political values in relation to others, in ways that defy the requirements of justificatory civility. Third, some governments have implemented policies that imposed unreasonable 'strains of commitment' upon certain categories of citizens, especially groups that already experience structural marginalization and disadvantage. This, we argued, risks undermining the public justifiability of these policies. Finally, threats to justificatory civility have also emerged from the limited scientific understanding of COVID-19 and of its social and cultural dimensions, as well as from the politicization of science for personal or partisan gain by some actors.

There is an urgent need to respond to these challenges if we want to prevent an escalation of moral and justificatory incivility. We suggested a number of ways in which governments and citizens can undertake this endeavour. When it comes to moral civility, governments can take steps towards more inclusive policies that can reduce discrimination and improve conditions for marginalized segments of the population. This might involve multi-pronged strategies that include consistent messaging as well as translation, consultation, and co-design of policies. Furthermore, policymakers can help counteract increases in racism and hate speech by identifying their causes, monitoring and collecting data, engaging with civil society actors, employing media and new technologies for programme delivery, and improving legal mechanisms like hate speech laws.

Responding to the challenges posed by COVID-19 to justificatory civility also requires multiple forms of interventions. First, sectarianism can be averted via institutional bulwarks against incivility such as judicial mechanisms that can help to prevent religious beliefs from encroaching on political rules. At the same time, governments should promote justificatory civility by advocating the values of cooperation, other-regardingness, and reciprocity via educational institutions, as well as through the use of consultative and deliberative bodies. Furthermore, the adoption of ethics frameworks could help governments and citizens to articulate more clearly the criteria for establishing when and how certain political values should be prioritized over others in the public justification of policies. Additionally, in order to reduce the strains of commitment that some policies might impose upon certain groups, policymakers ought to acquire greater awareness of the social and political realities that characterize their society, especially structural inequalities that place additional burdens on certain

groups; develop more tailored policies that prioritize marginalized groups; engage in greater dialogue with these communities; and devise interventions to mitigate the burdensome effects of policies on some groups when these cannot be avoided.

Finally, governments need to ensure that they do not implement policies that are grounded in flawed or incomplete scientific evidence. This will require promoting and funding more scientific research on COVID-19 (including both medical research and research concerning the social and cultural dimensions of the virus) and ensuring that there are transparent and effective channels of communication between governments and the scientific community. Policymakers themselves will also need to acquire greater scientific literacy in order to avoid using scientific evidence in ways that are unsound and unfair, and which therefore threaten justificatory civility.

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Conclusion

The human costs associated with COVID-19 have been devastating. Some countries have done very well in curbing some of these effects whereas others have failed miserably at containing the virus, and suffered significant death counts as a result. In addition to the human costs, the pandemic has had far-reaching economic, social, and political effects. As we saw in Chapter 1, some of these issues included a global recession, mass unemployment, severe restrictions on mobility and social relations, as well as various forms of political conflict and opportunism.

In this book, we have examined these complex challenges through the lens of civility. As we explained Chapter 2, civility is a contested concept. In our analysis, we identified two key dimensions of civility: politeness and public-mindedness. The former relates to good manners and norms of etiquette that can signal respect and consideration for others and facilitate social cooperation. We were careful to highlight both structural and agential components of civility as politeness, to emphasize the need for individuals to navigate complex and evolving social environments. The latter involves treating others as free and equal, by refraining from racist, hateful, and discriminatory speech and behaviour (moral civility), as well as from the pursuit of self-interested or sectarian policy goals (justificatory civility).

In Chapter 3 we examined many ways in which COVID-19 might impede or confound people's ability to be polite and to engage in prosocial and cooperative behaviour. We focused on four problems that have emerged during the pandemic. One concerns the difficulty people face in

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identifying norms of politeness when they are contested or become problematic. Another involves the signalling function of politeness: words, gestures, or actions aimed at communicating respect and consideration for others may often misfire in times of uncertainty and crisis. Relatedly, absence of clarity regarding politeness norms can create barriers to social cooperation and exchange. Finally, citizens and politicians can capitalize on this uncertainty to act in ways that under normal circumstances would be seen as impolite.

In our analysis of these problems we also identified potential solutions that can mitigate their negative effects. These might include government actions—e.g. signs and information campaigns—aimed at informing the public about new expectations of appropriate behaviour that align with public health goals. Citizens also have an important role to play in helping one another to behave politely in this new social landscape. They may need to both learn and develop new norms related to issues like greetings and interactions with others in online and offline spaces, e.g. using more words or body language to get around limitations that result from social distancing requirements or mandatory mask wearing. Breaches of politeness norms can contribute to the breakdown of social cooperation and exacerbate tensions between individuals and groups alike. Government and private actors (e.g. businesses and civil society organizations) can help to prevent this by using both informal and formal mechanisms to encourage polite behaviour and punish transgressors. In international politics, changes to decorum and etiquette may be necessary as diplomats and political leaders adapt to new public health concerns and policies. Furthermore, any challenges to cooperation that might arise from impolite actions between states could be remedied via pre-existing institutions that are designed to promote peaceful relationships.

In Chapter 4 we shifted our attention to the challenges posed by COVID-19 to civility as public-mindedness. We examined four problems related to civility as public-mindedness that have arisen during the pandemic. First, we addressed how COVID-19 has exacerbated various types of morally uncivil behaviour—such as discrimination and hate in workplace and educational settings, as well as in the public sphere—that have undermined the free and equal status of many citizens, especially among vulnerable groups. Furthermore, we highlighted how the pandemic has enabled some political actors to put forward sectarian agendas that breach the demands of justificatory civility. We saw that some have appealed to partial interests and controversial beliefs, or assigned

too much importance to some political values at the expense of others. Additionally, we stressed how some policies have resulted in unreasonable 'strains of commitment' for members of marginalized sectors of the population—e.g. racial minorities, women, the LGBTIQ+ community, and older people. We argued that governments cannot overlook the disproportionate negative effects that some policies may have on some members of the public in relation to others. At the very least, they must recognize these disparities when they provide justifications for these policies and attempt to minimize their unequal effects. We concluded the chapter by addressing the role of science in relation to justificatory civility. We identified numerous obstacles to the science-policy interface during the pandemic, including uncertainty around particular aspects of the virus itself as well as social and cultural factors that may affect public responses. The politicization of science for personal or partisan advantage during COVID-19 has emerged as another prominent issue that needs to be addressed.

In response to these challenges, we advanced numerous suggestions to counteract many threats to moral and justificatory civility. Both governments and citizens alike can play a key role in defending and recovering civility in moments of crisis. Measures to protect moral civility include more inclusive policies; consistent messaging and translation; and mechanisms for consultation and policy co-design with members of marginalized communities. It will also be important for governments to monitor, analyse, and counteract threats to moral civility like racism and hate speech. This could include developing and employing media and technology resources as well as appropriate and effective legal mechanisms. Governments should also strengthen and put trust in institutions that can both offset sectarianism and foster the values of justificatory civility among the public. Furthermore, they could rely on ethics frameworks in order to better understand and address tensions and trade-offs between different political values during public justification. It is also essential for policymakers to acknowledge and rectify the uneven impact of government interventions on different social groups (especially vulnerable ones) via policies informed by the voices of those most affected as well as through measures that mitigate some of those effects. Lastly, there is an urgent need for evidence-based policies grounded in natural and social science. Ensuring justificatory civility may also require additional resources aimed at facilitating communication between scientists and governments as well as improving the scientific literacy of policymakers and the public.

In this book we looked at COVID-19 through the lens of civility. However, based on our analysis, we find that there is a broader applicability beyond a global pandemic. The civility lens can help to provide insight into social problems that emerge in other types of crises. For example, rapid-onset natural disasters, famines, and ongoing armed conflicts also cause major disruptions to social life. The civility lens can provide a useful framework to guide the way we analyse the economic, social, and political consequences in these contexts. It can also help scholars and policymakers to understand and respond to disruptions to social and political practices, and perhaps help to improve policies that advance governance guided by moral principles and public-minded goals.

Second, there is a general need to apply theoretical analyses of civility to other real-world contexts beyond crises. Political theorists and philosophers who work on civility mainly focus on conceptual and normative questions like 'What is civility?', 'Is it always wrong to be uncivil?', or 'Should the state promote civility?'. They tend to analyse the concept in very abstract terms and disregard empirical evidence relevant to understanding civility and its effects on society. This constitutes a significant shortcoming. More specifically, relating the theoretical analysis of civility to empirical findings can help to contextualize it in real-world terms and to ensure that the normative analysis and the policy proposals resulting from it are not grounded in empirically flawed assumptions. Conversely, much of the empirical work on civility—in diverse disciplines such as political science, sociology, and linguistics—tends to focus on pressing practical problems and policy issues such as 'Is anonymity on social media a barrier to civility?', or 'Does an increase in incivility damage trust in institutions?'. However, these studies tend to disregard the more theoretical work. This can result in a lack of conceptual nuance, flawed measurement, and unsound conclusions. The potential for mutual learning and improvement is obvious: what people perceive as civility should not be neglected in theoretical discussions, and empirical studies need to acknowledge that establishing whether there is an 'increase in incivility' strongly depends on how we define the concept.

Finally, from a theoretical perspective, our book has shown that while civility presents distinct dimensions, these may often be interrelated. Impolite actions, for example, may hinder the process of public reasoning that is central to justificatory civility. Conversely, political actors may sometimes use impoliteness to foster public-mindedness among citizens, especially those who act in self-interested ways and advance sectarian aims.

Politeness too can be used to achieve different goals. On the one hand, it may help realize moral and justificatory civility. On the other hand, it can be used strategically by various actors to promote their own interests, sometimes in ways that conflict with the goals of moral civility—as in the case of 'polite Nazis' or men who advance sexist worldviews in a polite way. There is a need for more work examining these and similar instances where the different dimensions of civility interact, by either reinforcing or undermining each other.

During the pandemic, the state government of Victoria, Australia adopted the motto that 'Staying apart keeps us together'. This simple statement captures many of the important points addressed in our book. It communicates norms of behaviour based on scientific evidence about physical distancing (i.e. 'staying apart') and helps to advance public-minded goals like improved public health and a socially cohesive community (i.e. 'keeps us together'), thus providing a public justification for the very restrictive policies implemented by that state during the pandemic. The best way to move forward in light of the challenges posed by the pandemic remains uncertain. However, it is clear that recovering civility should play a central role in this endeavour.

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