

## On Giving and Taking Offence

### A cautionary tale

1. The joke that went wrong. A familiar tale and a closer look

### Rethinking offence

2. Where the action is: mostly, not the court of law
3. The bad reputation (or, three mistakes about offence):
  - (i) A character flaw
  - (ii) A new culture that's bad for society
  - (iii) A threat to free speech
4. Feinberg's account and the public bus  
But there is a distinct way it feels to be offended
5. Offence and affronts to standing
  - The paradigm cases
  - A contrasting view of social standing: dynamic, not static; up for negotiation; and encompassing what we take to be valuable about ourselves
  - That gets acceptance – or resistance – from others
  - Positive signals and their occasional – or not so occasional – lapses
6. Taking offence described:
  - (i) Perceiving (or judging/believing) an affront to one's standing
  - (ii) Feeling estranged, often only momentarily
  - (iii) A tendency towards acts of withdrawal

### Rehabilitating offence

7. From taking offence as mere hurt feelings and expressed vulnerability to:
  - Not always a hurt, nor an unpleasant way to feel
  - An act of resistance, rejecting, dissuading
8. From taking offence as bad for society, to the goods for society:
  - Status conscious, status seeking creatures, and the motivation to act well
  - Guarding against others claiming too much

- The value of politeness and other social norms

9. Moral panics: it is bad. And it is new!

- Offence as nothing new
- And how the targets of offence change

**But what about free speech?**

10. Why public shame and offence aren't the same

- on mixed motivations and small-scale acts
- But taking offence can be an effective strategy – and so a chilling one?

11. What free speech is – and isn't

- No right to a receptive, acquiescent audience
- Taking offence as a contribution to a conversation (if not a wordy one)
- The real threat to free speech: the institution

12. Both sides of the culture wars

- Not catastrophic to take offence
- And so (it ought not be) catastrophic to have given it.

**“Only joking” and other dubious apologies**

13. Puzzles of the aftermath

- Apologies often make it worse
- And jokes both often offend, and yet ‘only joking’ is used as a defence

14. “I didn't mean it (like that)”

- The foot stepping and the offensive remark
- Worse: you've misunderstood!

15. “Only joking”

- On decommitment and distancing

16. What apologies *can* do

**Concluding** - The ordinary, domestic, but potent emotion of offence