

# THE ART OF ~~POLITICAL~~ CORRECTNESS

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It's no secret that a war of words is being waged across society. In the one corner is political correctness, demanding that we mind our speech. In the other corner is authenticity, calling on us to speak our mind. This war is being played out on the campaign trail, on college campuses, and on television sets and personal social media pages throughout the country.

Lost, however, in this battle over *how* our ideas (and ourselves) are presented and perceived, is *what* those ideas are.

## ***Acting Politically (Correct)***

At its core, political correctness is a societal standard, implemented to make society more inclusive, by eliminating feelings of animosity. It asks the question “what is socially acceptable?” and not “what is correct?”—the burden for political correctness is on the political aspect, not the correctness aspect.

For example, a debate occurs every December over the proper holiday greeting to say in public. The politically correct holiday greeting is “Happy Holidays,” as opposed to a holiday-specific well wish such as “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Hanukkah”. The politically correct “Happy Holidays” does not mean that Christmas or Hanukkah are not holidays celebrated at this time of year but, rather, it seeks make those not celebrating the particular holiday feel included all the same.

Society's demand to act in a politically acceptable manner ultimately elevates feeling over substance. To label a statement politically correct, then, is not to declare the statement correct, but merely acceptable to society.

## ***Reacting (Politically) Incorrectly***

As political correctness has risen to prominence in recent years, many have begun to question how much of a role it should play in our dialogue. How far should society go to include everyone and not offend anyone? For example, universities, urged on by the protests of students, have begun to disinvite speakers from their campuses due to viewpoint differences and even political affiliation, prompting many to say that the movement has grown out of control.

Reacting to this rise, many have done a 180, turning toward an intentional disregard for the politically correct, applauding those who speak their mind, regardless of the consequences. To them, the politically incorrect honesty strikes a refreshing tone.

We have witnessed this throughout the 2016 election cycle, as numerous supporters of Republican candidate Donald Trump cite the top reason for their support as his disregard for political correctness. Meanwhile, Democratic candidate Senator Bernie Sanders has campaigned on his honesty, that even his fiercest opponents applaud his honesty and authenticity.

This reaction, however, yields the same result as the political correctness it is protesting: an elevation of feeling over substance. The only difference is that a different, even opposite, feeling is being elevated. In neither situation, however, is any focus or emphasis put on the actual matter in question and its merits. The burden of proof remains on the political aspect instead of the correctness aspect.

To return to the aforementioned examples, Trump's disregard for political correctness and Sanders' honesty may be refreshing, especially in politics, but neither are a close look at the ideas of the candidates. This is the first step down the dangerous road to demagoguery.

### ***Responding Correctly***

Rather than setting off a chain reaction that never comes around to address the actual substantive matter in question, we need to take our focus and energy off the political altogether and refocus on question of correctness. The primary focus of any debate should be the merits of the matter in question; how it makes one feel is secondary at best. When this becomes reversed, as it often has in our society, nobody learns and nobody benefits but, rather, all of society suffers.

President Barack Obama echoed this sentiment when he addressed a townhall meeting in Des Moines, Iowa in 2015:

I've heard some college campuses where they don't want to have a guest speaker who is too conservative, or they don't want to read a book if it had language that is offensive to African Americans or somehow sends a demeaning signal towards women. I've got to tell you, I don't agree with that either—that you, when you become students at college, you have to be coddled and protected from different points of view. Anybody who comes to speak to you and you disagree with, you should have an argument with them, but you shouldn't silence them by saying, “You can't come because I'm too sensitive to hear what you have to say.”

So next time, before we decide whether an idea or statement is politically correct or not, let us first discuss whether it is correct or not, notwithstanding politics. In doing so, may we never become too sensitive to hear what each other has to say.

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