August 9, 2018

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for reading this paper. I know from talking to some of you that the position I take can be challenged on many fronts, and that the examples I discuss are only a tiny fraction of those that might be addressed. I am confident that the paper will be much improved based on what I learn from you all.

The paper is reasonably short. But the journals I anticipate sending it to do not allow manuscripts that are much longer than this version. Since I know that you will urge me to address additional issues, I would very much appreciate any thoughts you have on areas that can be shortened. As well, if you have suggestions on improving the writing, please feel free to share them.

I have asked that the workshop be recorded. I find it hard to take complete notes during the workshop. So having a recording makes it easier for me to absorb everything that is said. I will destroy the recording once I have made revisions. So I hope that no one will be inhibited from speaking your minds.

Again, thank you in advance.

Scott
Are Boycotts, Shunning, and Shaming Corrupt?
Scott Altman∗
8/8/18

Introduction
Boycotts, shunning, and shaming are powerful tools, sometimes used by oppressed groups to combat injustice, and sometimes used by the powerful, or merely energetic, to vilify and harass. These tactics can produce civil-rights victories, but they can also aid in oppression. As well, they can exacerbate tension and distrust among political opponents, undermining reasoned debate and cooperation.1 All these effects have been magnified by social media. This article focuses on a single feature that sometimes makes the tactics morally objectionable: their potential for corruption.2

To briefly preview the argument, those who boycott, shun, or shame often aim at one of two outcomes, both of which I will argue are corrupt. Sometimes they seek to change the target’s views by imposing (or threatening) financial or social harms. The prospect of lost income or lost social connection are not reasons for belief—for example are not relevant to whether abortion is murder (the topic of a Domino’s Pizza boycott). Trying to persuade people that abortion is not murder through a boycott is asking them to adopt a belief for a bad reason. This effort is both disrespectful and harmful, treating targets as irrational, corrupting their deliberative processes, and compromising their capacity to respond appropriately to moral reasons. In other cases, those who boycott, shun, and shame often aim to change the target’s behavior. In the Domino’s case, the boycotters sought to prevent the owner from donating to anti-abortion causes. This too, I argue, is corrupt because the boycotters sought to prevent the Domino’s owner from acting on his principles, impeding him from living authentically.

Defenders of these techniques may respond that they do not aim to subvert reasoning or to inhibit authenticity. Rather, they have other goals: punishing bad behavior, persuading their targets, avoiding complicity, reinforcing social norms, or combating political opponents. In some cases, these

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1 “Social pressure as opposed to persuasion for political beliefs must cease at some point or a society fails to respect freedom of political beliefs.” Michael Bayles, Political Process and Constitutional Amendments, 18 Southern J. Phil. 1, 5 (1980).
2 Other tactics that raise similar problems include blockades intended to cause disruptions, civil disturbances, and insurrections.
accounts are persuasive. But sometimes, I will argue, they are not. And even when those who boycott, shun, and shame do aim at these alternative goals, they sometimes wrongly risk corrupt outcomes.

A boycott, according to one definition, is an organized and publicized collective action using the withdrawal of consumer or cultural interaction to protest perceived misdeeds.3 Other definitions are broader, describing as boycotts actions that are neither public, nor collective, such as individual decisions not to shop at a particular store because it employs nonunion labor. But the boycotts that most threaten corruption involve public, collective actions. These include boycotts that target companies based on their owners’ charitable contributions, such as the Domino’s boycott for antiabortion contributions and the Chick-Fil-A boycott for anti-LGBT contributions.4 Other possible examples include boycotts targeting governments for their ideologically motivated behavior, including boycotts of Israel (for its treatment of Palestinians), Colorado (for its anti-LGBT laws), or South Africa (for Apartheid). Similar concerns are raised by boycotts of companies on ideological grounds, such as the boycott of companies that affiliate with the NRA, and even the Montgomery bus boycott.

Shunning typically includes a broad refusal of social (rather than just commercial) interaction. Potentially corrupt examples include religious communities (or families) that shun former members, denying them access to ongoing relationships, business connections, and even their own children;5 companies that hire only people who share their ideological commitments;6 and recent university incidents, such as calls for law schools not to hire a lawyer who argued that waterboarding is not torture, or to fire a tenured professor who made racially insensitive statements, or for a philosophy department to rescind its offer to a professor who made inflammatory claims about Israel.7

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4 “People should not be threatened with the loss of their livelihood for the honest and open expression of their political convictions.” Claudia Mills Should we Boycott Boycotts at 141.
Shaming involves drawing public attention to someone's bad character or personal flaws, often by mocking or humiliating them. Not every action that causes shame counts as shaming. For example, public criticism might cause its target to feel shame. But criticism is not shaming unless it focuses mainly on the person, rather than specific behavior, identifying the person with a negative trait, and trying more to humiliate the target than to inform others. One example of shaming is Lindsey Stone, who posted an arguably racist joke to social media. Her name and the joke were forwarded to millions of people, who in turn ridiculed and criticized her for months. Eventually she lost her job and could not go out in public. Other examples include posting the names of those who donate to ballot measures, knowing that they may be harassed or subjected to humiliating online attacks, or identifying Nazis who march in public, hoping that they will lose their jobs.

The lines between shaming and criticizing are, admittedly, not always easy to see. Sometimes public criticism of bad behavior leads to intentional shaming of the person whose behavior is criticized. For example, a video of a lawyer yelling at restaurant workers for speaking Spanish recently captured public attention because it demonstrated racist harassment. Although criticism was the initial purpose for distributing the video, the lawyer was quickly targeted for humiliation, including the posting of bad Yelp reviews of his law practice.

Boycotts, shunning, and shaming sometimes overlap. For example, in the Scarlet Letter, Hester Prynne is shamed by being forced to wear the letter A on her clothing. Having been shamed, she is then shunned by the community. Harvey Weinstein was initially shamed for his behavior and shunned by his peers. But threats of boycotts also led to his ouster from the Weinstein Company.

These tactics might seem unrelated to corruption, which usually brings to mind institutional (rather than personal) corruption, such as bribery and nepotism. Those are corrupt because they violate...
norms that help sustain institutional goals. In this sense, corruption is always a derivative concept;\(^\text{14}\) we cannot know what is corrupt unless we first have some account of an institution’s purposes and the norms or role expectations that support those purposes. Corrupt acts are those that violate norms needed to support valuable institutional purposes.

This widely accepted account omits a key feature: how corrupt acts undermine institutional purposes. Corruption typically undermines goals when someone acts for reasons that institutional roles, or norms, exclude as wrong.\(^\text{15}\) Bribery works just this way. We want a safety inspector to issue permits based on whether a building is safe, rather than on whether issuing the permit enhances the inspector’s wealth, because focusing on building safety rather than on money will produce safer buildings. Because acting for financial self-interest undermines the point of having building inspections, we declare it to be a forbidden reason for action, and therefore corrupt. In general, corruption is acting for reasons that institutional norms declare inappropriate because acting on those reasons subverts important goals.\(^\text{16}\)

Personal corruption operates in a similar way. Offering you money to be my friend is corrupt because it undermines the value of friendship by making personal gain a reason for the relationship. Feigning religious belief by attending church and praying—despite being an atheist—is corrupt if done to enhance one’s political career. The reasons for worship are undermined if motivated by self-interest rather than devotion.

In this paper, I advance the following claims: boycotts, shunning, and shaming are sometimes corrupt because they give reasons that undermine important individual aims. They do this in one of two ways. Either they undermine appropriate belief formation in ways that disrespect and harm their targets, or they unreasonably impede their targets’ efforts at living authentically, deterring them from declaring their beliefs in public or from pursuing projects that they believe important. These tactics are particularly objectionable when they aim at these corrupt ends, but are also sometimes wrong if they risk these outcomes while pursuing other goals. At the very least, these harms need to be taken into account in evaluating the moral permissibility of boycotts, shunning, and shaming. Too often, they are ignored.

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\(^{15}\) Acting for excluded reasons is not the only kind of corruption. Sometimes institutions are said to be structured corruptly. See Lawrence Lessig, Republic Lost (2015 revised edition).

\(^{16}\) Excluded reasons usually self-interested, but not always. Those who think corporate directors must only protect shareholder value might regard as corrupt a director who spends corporate resources on moral goals. See Miller, Roberts, & Spence, Corruption and Anti-Corruption 83 (2005).
Boycotts, shunning, and shaming are not always corrupt. Most labor disputes and many consumer boycotts (including the Delano grape boycott, and the delete Uber campaign) do not give inappropriate reasons for belief or action. As well, these techniques can sometimes be justified despite corruption concerns when used for social punishment (for example shunning Harvey Weinstein) and for some civil-rights activism (including the Montgomery bus boycott). The distinctions between problematic examples and these disputes will be explored below.

I. Are Incentives for Belief Corrupt?

Incentives for belief could operate in two ways – as unconscious influences on how we evaluate reasons, or directly as reasons. Consider an example. My parents offer me $25,000 if I become a vegetarian for moral reasons. Initially, I am unpersuaded by the moral arguments favoring plant-based diets. But over time, and seeming to have forgotten my parents’ offer, I become persuaded by those arguments. The prospect of much-needed money unconsciously made me more receptive to the arguments for vegetarianism. Money might operate in this way -- as an unconscious influence, rather than as a reason. The alternative possibility, that I regard financial gain as a moral reason in favor of vegetable-based eating, seems unlikely. So I will assume that financial and social incentives for belief operate, if at all, as unconscious influences rather than as reasons for belief.

Although this hypothetical is contrived, the phenomenon it relies on seems possible given the pervasive influence of unconscious motives. Studies show that people are self-preferring in moral situations, even when they believe they are not, and that people’s beliefs derive from fears. Such influence is unlikely in typical boycotts. The NRA leadership will not suddenly oppose gun rights because someone boycotts their donors. But it might be plausible in shaming or shunning cases. For example, members of a religious group that shuns former members might be disinclined to question their faith knowing the terrible financial and social costs that departure brings.

Incentive for belief are corrupt because they subvert valuable aspects of moral reasoning. For those who believe in discoverable moral truth, incentives for belief undermine the search for truth,

diverting us from reason and evidence toward self-interested interpretation. For those who are skeptical about moral truth, incentives for belief interfere with efforts to evaluate moral reasons free from influences that we regard as distortions, undermining our aspirations about belief formation.  

Of course, these aspirations might no value, perhaps because they reflect an impossible goal. We often depart from idealized forms of deliberation, instead coming to believe things because our parents or teachers said them, because we want to fit in, or because we prefer to avoid the hard work of moral reasoning. Given this imperfect belief formation, why worry if the desire for financial gain or social connection also contributes to our beliefs?

Financial and social incentives differ from many non-deal elements in belief formation. Incentives from boycotts, shunning, and shaming are sometimes intentional efforts to change beliefs, rather than simple facts about the world. We might resent having belief-formation controlled by other people more than non-agential influences. As well, unconscious influences do not always undermine moral reasoning. For example, an early-childhood experience might make me feel terrible guilt when I harm others unnecessarily. Because this unconscious influence improves my capacity for moral reasoning, I have no reason to reject it as illicit. Financial influences are different. I do not want financial gain to act as a shadow reason, altering the way I evaluate other reasons for beliefs. I recognize as a moral failing in others that they adopt moral views to suit their financial self-interest; I do not want to fail in this way. The problem with financial incentives for belief is not just that they affect my beliefs through unconscious means, but that they do so intentionally and in ways that I have reason to reject.  

Corrupting belief with financial or social influence is a serious wrong for two reasons. First, offering incentives for belief is usually disrespectful. It treats people as unable to respond appropriately to relevant reasons, offering incentives as if they were relevant reasons. It presumes that our irrational beliefs are just as good as our rationally formed beliefs. Despite our many frailties, some of our beliefs rely on rational foundations and change in response to arguments. Incentives for belief are corrupting because they subvert our efforts to be rational, undermining our valuable aim of rational self-government—an aim that is no less valuable for the fact that we achieve it imperfectly.

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20 Philosophers debate whether belief formation is governed by practical reason—i.e., by norms of means-end rationality that depends on having particular goals. See, e.g., Thomas Kelly, *Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique*, 66 Phil. & Phenomenological Research 612 (2003). Even if belief formation sometimes depends on practical goals, financial incentives for belief would be corrupt. No one wants their evaluation of evidence to be shaped by financial goals.


Second, incentives for belief are harmful. They might harm people’s characters, habituating them to forming beliefs based on incentives, and then perhaps to acting on those corrupted beliefs. Or they might make people’s lives go less well, either because they fail to respond appropriately to moral reasons, or because the experience of responding to these reasons will be less rich and fulfilling than the experience of responding to appropriately-formed reasons.

These harms can all be rendered plausible, though they rely on controversial philosophical and psychological claims. To see how they work, consider a hypothetical.

The Death Penalty Penalty: Alice and Bob lived in a small, conservative town. Like almost everyone there, they supported the death penalty. When Alice was offered a university teaching position in a liberal city, they relocated, and were shocked that almost no one in the city shared their view. The university’s principles of community prohibited public support for the death penalty and imposed serious penalties for violations. Bob—who sold insurance for a living—joined a church where he hoped to cultivate customers. As part of a church campaign against the death penalty, the minister posted on social media his wall of shame, identifying people who donated to pro-death-penalty politicians. Over a period of years, Alice and Bob reversed their views on the death penalty. Unconscious fears—of losing a job, of lost income, and of personal humiliation—influenced their change of view.

Whether Alice and Bob have been harmed might depend on more facts. Bob has no interest in moral questions. His former support for the death penalty was unconsciously influenced by the sense that selling insurance in a small town would be difficult if he held a different view. Alice is different. She supported the death penalty based on carefully considered reasons and was little influenced by factors that she or others would regard as irrelevant.

Alice seems to have suffered a harm, while Bob has not. Bob’s view about the death penalty is no less rational than before. Alice is worse off in several ways. She is less rational because her view on an important topic relies less than it did on relevant reasons. Perhaps her experience of acting morally is less satisfying. If she is unaware of how her view changed, she is also worse off for being deluded about the basis for her beliefs. If she is aware, she likely suffers from a form of alienation; she holds beliefs, but also disapproves of the basis for the beliefs she holds.

These psychological worries—about alienation and less-fulfilling experiences—are speculative. Many people appear to hold moral beliefs that are influenced by self-interest. Yet we have no obvious

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evidence that they suffer from alienation, that they notice the origins of their views, or that they lead less-fulfilling lives.

Bob and Alice might both be worse off if their characters are corrupted by this single change in belief. Perhaps they will become habituated to accepting moral views when doing so advances their interests. But this too is uncertain.  

Complicating all of this is the possibility that both Alice and Bob are now better off because, let’s stipulate, they now hold a correct moral view. It is not obvious whether holding the right moral view is beneficial if it is held for the wrong reasons or for reasons that are insufficiently understood. According to some theories, a person who holds correct moral views without understanding the reasons for those views has not developed good character and cannot be said to act with moral understanding. Yet even if this is correct, holding the right view for the wrong reasons might still be better than available alternatives, such as coming to the wrong moral view without fully understanding the moral reasons.

This seems to characterize Bob, who might be better off now than he realistically could otherwise have been, even if he is not as well off morally as one might hope.

All of this complicates my corruption claim. Whether incentives for belief will harm someone depends on details about the individual, on unresolved philosophical questions, and on psychological speculations. But the complexity also reveals why incentives for belief are wrong. They are disrespectful because they presume that the recipient is like Bob rather than like Alice (and that even if he is like Bob, that he is doomed to stay that way). They can be harmful because they interfere with moral deliberation, rendering people less rational and undermining effort to assess moral arguments appropriately. They also risk other harms. We do not know whether incentives will lead recipients to have worse characters, to lead less successful lives, to have less fulfilling experiences, or to become alienated. But incentives for belief risk of all of these outcomes. Imposing these risks is not justified by the offsetting benefit that the recipient will hold true beliefs, which might not be a benefit. We should not impose such risks on others merely because we believe our own moral conclusions to be superior. After all, we might be wrong.

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25 The literature on crowding out worries that people who respond to incentives become less able to respond to moral reasons. See, e.g. Samuel Bowels, *The Moral Economy* (2016). An opposite view comes from a Jewish tradition that says once people begin to act well, for whatever reason, they become habituated to good action and come to understand the reasons for it. I thank Dan Klerman for alerting me to this.


II. Are incentives for hiding beliefs or for not acting on beliefs corrupt?

Boycotts, shunning, and shaming do not always aim at changing beliefs; often they aim at changing behavior. Unlike with beliefs, these incentives might operate consciously, as direct reasons.

Aiming to change behavior through financial or social incentives can harm people by making it unreasonably difficult to live authentically. Living authentically means living so that one’s actions and one’s values generally correspond. On many accounts of human good, a life goes better if a person can pursue projects that match her values and avoid actions that conflict with those values.²⁸ It also goes better if, at least sometimes, people can reveal their views to others.

Authenticity requires that people live generally in accordance with their values, not that every aspect of a person’s life matches her view of the good. The harms from boycotts, shunning, and shaming that concern me thus involve pressure to hide or suppress important life goals or values: feigning religious belief or hiding (or not acting on) moral or political views. These incentives differ from other social pressures on behavior. For example, norms of etiquette might prevent us from telling people exactly what we think of them. But pressure for such occasional silences (sometimes derided as political correctness) does not undermine authenticity in important ways. Despite norms of etiquette, people are able to live according to their values, even if they are limited in expressing those values in a few contexts.

Authenticity does not require that we be free from all incentives. People must often be resilient in the face of modest pressures, protecting their own capacity for authentic action and resisting incentives for hypocrisy. If I hold an unpopular belief, I might be tempted to hide it, lie about it, or act against it in order to gain popularity or to avoid having my views criticized. Giving in to this temptation shows my weak character. People are entitled to criticize me, to protest against me, or to withhold their friendship, even though the prospect of protest, criticism, or denials of friendship might induce me to disguise my views or change my behavior.²⁹

How can boycotts, shunning, and shaming be unreasonable interferences with authenticity if protest, criticism, and withholding friendship are not? Whether people must resist incentives depends,

²⁸ See William Galston, Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice (2002); Scott Altman, Reinterpreting the Right to an Open Future: From Autonomy to Authenticity, 37 Law & Phil. 415 (2018).
²⁹ Linda Radzik says about financial incentives “[t]argets should resist letting such concerns lead them into behaviors that they sincerely believe are wrong or that threaten their integrity.” Radzik at 120. I agree that targets must sometimes take responsibility for their own integrity. But sometimes, boycotters have a duty not to make this resistance difficult.
in part. on how much pressure a person can normally withstand while living a happy life. On this
criterion, boycotts do not differ from protests. But the duty to resist also depends on the intent of the
person creating incentives, on the value of allowing that pressure to be applied, and on the centrality of
the particular action to living authentically. People should be responsible for resisting the pressure of
criticism because criticism can be personally and socially valuable and because critics typically do not
aim to prevent the objects of their criticism from living authentically (but instead to change their views
by giving reasons).

Boycotts, shunning, and shaming differ from protests, criticism, and denials of friendship in their
likely effects, their social value, and particularly in their intent. All six of these behaviors have the
potential to corrupt – i.e. to offer incentives against living authentically. But not all of them aim at
undermining authenticity: protests and criticism aim to persuade (both the target of the protest and
other audiences) using reasoned argument. Any incentive they create to change or hide views is
unintended. For denials of friendship, the aim is primarily associational (and perhaps constitutive) –
reserving intimacy for those one likes and admires, because intimacy requires these features. For
boycotts, shunning, and shaming, incentives to hide views or act against views may not be incidental,
but the intended goal. For example, the boycott against Chick-Fil-A aimed to deter its founders from
funding the anti-gay causes they supported.\footnote{Daniel Reynolds, \textit{Bill de Blasio Urges Boycott of Chick-fil-A}, Advocate, May 8, 2016, \url{https://perma.cc/FLS6-UQX6}.} Corrupting them – leading them not to act on their
principles – was central to the aim. It was not exactly the aim. The boycott organizers would not have
objected had the founders become enlightened. But leading them to act against their own moral views
was the intended plan. Because persuading them was unlikely, the means through which the boycott
aimed to change their behavior was by inducing them to abandon their moral commitments for financial
reasons. Were this not true – had the boycott aimed to change their views or not to change their
behavior at all – then the boycott would have been unnecessary; criticism or protest would have been
adequate substitutes with less risk of corruption.\footnote{See Martha Nussbaum, \textit{Against Academic Boycotts}, 54 \textit{Dissent} #3, 30 (2007).} Many boycotts are corrupt in just this way – aiming
to change the behavior of their targets without changing their targets’ belief.

This argument -- that boycotts, shunning, and shaming intend to corrupt -- can be challenged in
several ways. Before exploring those challenges (in Part III), I want to return to a topic mentioned
earlier: that most labor and consumer boycotts are not corrupt.
Labor boycotts aim to shape employer behavior through economic and social pressure, but the incentives created are not corrupt. In labor disputes, the employer has provided employees with pay, benefits, or working conditions that the employees regard as insufficient. The employees may express moral claims: that the working conditions are unreasonably dangerous, or that the pay reflects an unfair distribution of the proceeds from joint effort. But employers rarely claim that morality demands the current working conditions, benefits, or pay. In this respect, the employees are not asking the employer to change, act against, or hide moral beliefs or otherwise to live inauthentically.

The same is true of most consumer boycotts. For example, boycotts against garment manufacturers who run sweatshops, or against factory farms that raise animals in cruel conditions, do not raise corruption concerns. Improving conditions for workers or animals does not require the company owners to change, hide or act against their beliefs. It simply asks them to be more generous than they think morality demands.

The claim that most labor disputes and consumer boycotts do not risk corruption might be disputed on two grounds. First, an employer might morally oppose a demand, such as a seniority-based pay system, believing that pay should depend on individual merit. This strikes me as atypical. But even if true, the demand does not compromise authenticity to the same extent as boycotting Chik-Fil-A over its anti-LGBT advocacy. Leading an authentic life not does mean never being forced to act against one’s moral views. We regularly compel people pay taxes that fund causes they dislike and to abide by laws they think immoral. Incentives are most problematic when they induce people to endorse beliefs they reject, to hide beliefs they hold, to abandon important aims (such as being a parent, or working for gender equality or for the preservation of fetal life), or to violate norms they believe to be morally important. Only the last of these might be implicated by labor disputes, and even then far less what we usually ask of conscientious objectors. Pacifists might be entitled not to serve in the military; Libertarians are not entitled to avoid paying minimum wage. Pacifism is more likely to be at the core of a person’s life aims than is paying someone no more than you think they deserve.

Second employers might be thought to act inauthentically if they accede to employee demands because they are acting as though they have a moral duty that they reject. I do not agree. Imagine that

32 Shaming is also widespread in labor disputes, such as publicly identifying workers who violate a strike. See, e.g., Scab Lists, Labor Watch, April 2015, https://perma.cc/9JT5-HU4Q.
you urge me to become a vegetarian for moral reasons, but I reject your arguments. My doctor then
demands that I become a vegetarian for health reasons. If I do so, I am not hypocritical. I have simply
agreed to do what you think morality demands based on a prudential concern. If I worry that others will
perceive me as having accepted your moral view, I can state my real reasons. This is certainly how an
employer might describe her decision to meet employee demands for higher wages—stating that she
thinks the prior wages were more than fair, but that she has agreed to pay more in the interest of
settling a dispute.

Having distinguished consumer and labor boycotts from ideological boycotts, I can explain why I
framed my critique in terms of corruption and authenticity rather than autonomy. Autonomy might
seem a more natural focus. After all, my argument centers on how boycotts, shunning, and shaming
undermine freedoms of belief, expression, and conscience, all of which can be understood as harms to
autonomy.

Had I analyzed these issues in terms of autonomy and coercion, the distinction between labor
and consumer boycotts and ideological boycotts would be harder to see. Labor and consumer boycotts
are no less coercive than ideological boycotts. By focusing on corruption, my framing makes more
salient the specific concerns of distorted (rather than coerced) decision-making.

The connection between corruption and authenticity might seem to impose stringent demands
on people, perhaps calling corrupt everyone whose life plans, values, or public declarations are shaped
by concerns over money or social connection. For example, many people make prudential decisions
about how publically to advocate for their views. Someone who earns a living from sales, or who hopes
to become a judge, might decide not to have political yard signs or bumper stickers for fear of alienating
potential customers or supporters. Unless I think they are corrupt — which I do not -- why is it corrupting
to induce someone to refrain from donations by making those donations financially or socially costly?

The corruption of making authenticity difficult comes not from the fact that people consider
consequences when deciding how to act. It comes from making it difficult for people who want to
exclude such considerations from particular decisions to accomplish that task. Perhaps the salesperson
and the would-be judge place no great importance on declaring their political views in public. Such
values need not be important to people. Corruption arises from incentives that make it unreasonably
difficult for people to express their views when such expression is important to the person. If this
happens, I do think they have been corrupted.

When most people make decisions about values—that is about matters that they regard as
morally important or as key to their pursuit of the good -- they do not want to focus on the financial or
social costs of those decisions. Inducing them to do so is corrupting. Certainly, people often fail when trying to immunize certain decisions from financial or social influences. But just as the frailty of belief formation does not undermine the importance of protecting our imperfect efforts at rationality, so too our frailty in trying to shelter moral decisions from social or financial pressures does not make our efforts irrelevant.

III. Non-Corrupt Aims of Boycotts, Shunning, and shaming

I return now to whether boycotts, shunning, and shaming typically aim at preventing authentic behavior. Advocates of these tactics might argue that they instead aim: (a) to punish wrongdoers or protect victims; (b) to persuade targets; (b) to avoid association or complicity; or (d) to persuade the public or to reinforce social norms.

Before considering these arguments, I note that even if boycotts, shunning, or shaming aim at these goals, they might still produce corrupt outcomes if they impose too much pressure to conform without sufficient reason. For example, some states prohibit employment discrimination based on political-party affiliation or political activity. The discrimination forbidden by these bans likely does not aim to alter the views or behavior of discrimination victims. Rather, it aims at associational goals. But jobs are important to people, which might make it unreasonable to ask those with dissenting views to withstand the prospect of unemployment as the price of openly embracing their moral positions. The associational rights of employers or other employees are less urgent. Exactly this issue arises for some boycotts and shunning if they aim to exclude targets from employment.

A. Punishment and Rescue

Some boycotts, shunning, and shaming aim at punishment. A punishment account might emphasize retributive or rehabilitative goals, rather goals of deterrence, in order to avoid the charge that the tactics aim to induce hypocrisy. For example, boycotts might aim at rehabilitation, seeking to

35 The California code supra forbids coercing or influencing employees' political activities.
37 For example, the US women's national soccer team included on its roster Jaelene Hinkle, a professional soccer player with strong religious views who has spoken out against same-sex marriage. Because the team refused to shun Hinkle, there were calls for a boycott of the national team's games. Christina Cauterucci, Kick Her Off, Slate, July 20, 2018, https://perma.cc/4YX2-9TGD. A short time later, Hinkle was removed from the team.
jar targets into noticing the moral seriousness of public condemnation, and shocking them into examining whether beliefs so widely condemned are really justified.\(^\text{38}\) Alternatively, if deterrence is a legitimate punitive goal generally, then boycotts, shunning, and shaming might be justified as deterrence, offering appropriate reasons for good behavior—or at least reasons that are appropriate for those who are not adequately motivated by other reasons.

Boycotts, shunning, and perhaps shaming can sometimes be justified as social punishment—with the well-known caveats that these techniques can unjustly harm innocent bystanders, can punish targets for wrongs they did not commit (or for which they have excuses), and can impose excessive punishments. Keep in mind, the same tactics that brought Harvey Weinstein to justice also ruined the careers of those who suffered under the Hollywood blacklist.

Social punishments seem particularly apt when state punishment has failed—whether because the state wrongly under-enforces its law, or because the target has been shielded from punishment by wielding power. Boycotting companies where sexual harassment is widespread is one example. When official punishment does not vindicate important norms, then social punishment may be necessary.

Shaming as punishment raises some distinctive concerns.\(^\text{39}\) Among the strongest are that efforts to shame often impose punishments that are disproportionate to the wrong committed because collective shaming is difficult to contain. As well, the public nature of shaming often leads to permanent stigma, which is often unwarranted as punishment. Finally, public humiliation may not always encourage self-reflection and repentance, and may have limited deterrent value.\(^\text{40}\)

Although boycotts, shunning and shaming are sometime justified as social punishment, many punitive uses of these tactics are unjustified. Punishment is appropriate for wrongdoers, not for everyone whose views opponents regard as immoral—even if they act on those views. A CEO who donates money to a cause that others regard as abhorrent has not committed a wrong deserving punishment. Certainly, this is so if the cause is something about which reasonable people might disagree. People who donate money to ISIS might deserve punishment; people who donate to Planned Parenthood, the NRA, or the Family Research Council do not.

\(^{38}\) Duff, supra.


This position might be questioned. The NRA supports rules that make guns widely available, which in turn causes many avoidable deaths. Those with different political perspective might say the same about Planned Parenthood and their advocacy for abortion rights. From the perspective of someone opposed to these groups, their behavior deserves punishment because it is both culpable and harmful. They knowingly contribute to undeserved deaths.

I disagree. Social punishment plays an important role in society. Private groups justly punish their members for violating group norms. Perhaps we all may reasonably punish people for behavior that is deemed criminal or tortious by the state, that is recognized as wrong by social consensus, or that exhibits indecent views that no society should tolerate. But social punishment outside these circumstances violates the liberal value of tolerating reasonable disagreement. Most positions on gun rights and abortion rights can be supported with morally decent arguments. The same is arguably true of some debates over gay rights. A liberal society will, of course, have to choose one side or another—protecting abortion rights, or gun rights, or the rights of religious wedding vendors, or not. But it will not punish the morally decent advocacy of controversial positions.

Beyond the injustice of punishing those who advocate for controversial views, there is also a structural problem with such punishment. We have no deliberative or democratic process for deciding whether people deserve social punishment. Leaving that to whoever has the desire and capacity to punish risks descent into mutual mistrust and cycles of retaliation. In extreme cases, this has led to terrorism, such as the killing of doctors who perform abortions, or of police officers in the wake of controversial police shootings. But even if violence is not contemplated, the decision to punish those who advocate controversial views threatens social practices of mutual respect by assuming the power to resolve those controversies unilaterally. Social punishment for controversial, but morally decent, behavior in this sense threatens to corrupt an important social practice in addition to corrupting individual decisions.

Defenders of ideological boycotts might respond that punishment is not their goal; they aim to protect victims of the target’s harmful behavior, without necessarily aiming to punish the target. Perhaps abortion-rights advocates boycotted Domino’s to protect women from reproductive-right violations. The difficulty with this argument is the same as with the argument for punishment. In

circumstances of deep social disagreement, individuals should not have the right to decide unilaterally who needs rescuing any more than they should have the right to decide who needs punishing. Wrongly presuming this right led Operation Rescue to block access to abortion clinics, and animal-rights activists to liberate animals from research labs.44

Even when we have social consensus on the wrongfulness of behavior, social punishment can be complex. One difficult example is punishing someone for harmful speech. We might all agree that racist speech is harmful and wrong. But the morality of doxing the Nazis who protested in Charlottesville, of boycotting a company that uses racist images in its advertising,45 or of firing a professor whose writing is regarded as racist46 is not obvious because we lack consensus on whether this speech should punished or protected. Some people think that only the government should be restrained from punishing speech. Others think that speech should be immune from all punishment.

B. Communicating with Targets

Boycotts, shunning, and shaming might aim primarily to communicate with their target, conveying both substantive arguments and moral outrage. Boycotts are not silent about reasons. What they add to reasoned argument is (1) showing how widespread the boycotters’ viewpoint is (something boycotts have in common with protests and petitions); and (2) showing that participants regard this problem as serious (something boycotts have in common with hunger strikes). Boycotts communicate by jarring targets into recognizing the widespread condemnation of their actions so that targets might reflect carefully on opposing viewpoints. The same is sometimes true of shunning and shaming.47 These techniques thus share with criticism and protest the legitimate aim of persuasion. But their emphatic message cannot be replicated using protest and persuasion alone. They rely on initial shock to make recipients more open to reason in much the way a glass of cold water thrown at a panicked friend might precede efforts at reason.

This justification does not seem to match most actual acts of boycott, shunning, and shaming. Boycotts in particular seem rarely interested in changing the moral perspective of the boycotted person

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46 See supra (FN 8?)
or company. As well, boycotts are not likely to be effective as persuasion. People who are publically confronted in aggressive ways sometimes change their behaviors. But often they entrench their views in response to aggressive opposition rather than calmly reconsidering. 48

Shaming as communication faces a similar challenge. Inducing people to feel shame—which often requires more than just rational argument—can sometimes help people to gain moral understanding. For this reason, several scholars favor “invitations to shame,” by which they mean private expressions of contempt or ridicule intended to show targets in vivid ways that they are behaving badly. The goal is to help the target see themselves as others see them. 49 Sometimes ridicule can be effective in circumstances that mere argument cannot. 50 It is not clear, though, why shaming—public acts intended to humiliate or ridicule a target—is needed for this communication. Not only is the public humiliation less likely to succeed than private communication, it also dramatically increases the punitive aspects, which may be unwarranted for reasons discussed above. 51

Shunning is more complicated as a communicative effort. Religious communities that shun former members sometimes aim at this sort of shock. But two features of religious shunning make communication an insufficient justification. First, shunning is often permanent. If a former community member does not shift views in response to shunning for many years, it is difficult to see how continuing to shun can be justified as a communicative effort. Second, religious shunning sometimes takes such cruel forms that it is hard to believe communication, rather than punishment or incentives for conformity, are genuinely the purposes being pursued.

C. Non-Association and Non-Complicity

A third version of the non-corrupt purpose response (on behalf of boycotts and shunning, but not shaming) is that they aim at non-association or non-complicity. Participants do not want others to

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48 See Claudia Mills, Should we Boycott Boycotts at 138 (“Threats from without generally inspire a reactive, wagon-circling solidarity within.”).  
50 Id.  
51 See Thomason, supra; Nussbaum, Hiding from Humanity. The claim that shaming is ineffective does not make that shame useless. People behave better if they believe they are being watched (which might be explained by concern for anticipated shame). See, e.g., Rand, Yoeli, & Hoffman, Harnessing Reciprocity to Promote Cooperation and the Provisioning of Public Goods, 1 Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences 263 (2014). But see Ariely, Bracha & Meier, Doing Good or Doing Well? Image Motivation and Monetary Incentives in Behaving Prosocially, 99 Am. Econ. Rev. 544 (2009) (finding a prosocial effect for making good behavior visible, but no prosocial effect from making bad behavior visible). Rather, efforts to humiliate usually do not succeed in using shame to have this effect. See Tom R. Tyler, et al., Reintegrative Shaming, Procedural Justice, and Recidivism: The Engagement of Offenders’ Psychological Mechanisms in the Canberra RISE Drinking-and-Driving Experiment 41 Law & Soc. Rev. 553 (2007).
perceive them as associated with the target, or do not want to be complicit in (or tainted by) the target’s activities.52

Many people seek to make morally pure commercial choices, aiming not to be associated with or to support businesses whose views or behaviors they condemn. Socially conscious investment funds are one example. The boycott of Uber for the behavior of its executives is another.53 At the level of individual decisions (including perhaps the choice to participate in boycotts and shunning), this consideration is sometimes important.

But people who organize boycotts must have aims beyond non-association or non-complicity. Pursuing non-association does not require collective action, or the efforts at publicity and ongoing pressure that characterize boycotts. Those who organize boycotts aim at punishment or at changing the target’s behavior, not just at avoiding complicity or helping others to do the same.54 Often boycott leaders state this aim explicitly.55 When the target whose behavior is being protested is insulated from effective boycotts— for example because they sell no products—boycott organizers target associated businesses as a way to gain leverage.56 Were non-association the main point of boycotting, such secondary boycotts would not be common.

Martha Nussbaum offers a possible response. She claims that sometimes people engage in complicity-avoiding collective action that does not intend to influence the behavior of targets. She cites as examples alerting the public to working conditions in the garment industry, and creating food labels that explain whether meat was produced using cruel methods. No boycott was explicitly mentioned.57

I am unpersuaded. People who disseminate information about garment workers and food production aim at more than providing information so that consumers can make informed choices. They want to influence consumer choices and in turn to shape the behavior of producers. That they do not explicitly call for boycotts does not prevent us from seeing that they want to change target behavior.

52 On the distinction between complicity and taint, see Christopher Kurtz, Complicity 45 (2000).
54 See Friedman at 235 (arguing that while non-complicity may motivate boycott participants, boycott leaders seek behavioral change).
55 When the NAACP boycotted South Carolina to protest the confederate flag flying at the state capital, it explicitly said the goal was to pressure the state into lowering the flag. See NAACP Boycotts Tourism in S.C., Los Angeles Time, October 17, 1999, https://perma.cc/6WPX-Q8HH. See also Richard Ford, Capitalize on Race and Invest in Justice, 126 Harv. L. Rev. F. 252 (2013) (“Whenever civil rights groups boycott... the hope is that the financial injuries and threat of bad publicity will induce the institution to open itself up to more minorities. The main goal is not to transform the sincerely held values of bigoted managers: it’s enough that the institution caves in to the pressure.”)
56 The recent effort to boycott companies that partner with the NRA is an example. Against Academic Boycotts, 54 Dissent 30, 31-32 (2007).
Even when boycotts aim only at non-association, they sometimes risk corrupt outcomes. A particularly difficult example is the Masterpiece Cakeshop case in which a baker refused to prepare a gay couple’s wedding cake because he did not want to facilitate a same-sex marriage. His refusal was motivated by non-complicity. Although he acted alone, not seeking to organize all bakers in the area, his efforts nonetheless raise significant risks for the gay couple’s ability to live authentically. The history of discrimination against LGBT people includes widespread shunning and shaming. If these tactics become widespread, so might the kinds of social pressure that led people to remain closeted. The issue is challenging because authenticity is clearly at stake on both sides. If discrimination is permitted, gay couples may face unreasonable barriers to living openly as couples. If it discrimination is not permitted, religious shop owners may be compelled to violate moral norms that they regard as central to their religious lives or else to change their professions.

Individual shunning and boycotts that aim at non-association do not always risk corruption. This is especially so when participants are strangers, since the harm of lost intimacy is not involved. For example, the owner of the Red Hen restaurant recently refused service to Sarah Huckabee Sanders (President Trump’s press secretary) because the staff and owner disapproved of her actions as press secretary. Although this refusal of service can be criticized on several grounds, it does not pose the same corruption worries as concerted boycotts, concerted shunning, or intimate shunning. Because the harm involved being denied a single restaurant meal is far smaller, the incentives to alter beliefs or behavior is far less.

Collective shunning has a problem similar to boycotts: it often aims not just to avoid complicity, but also to change target behavior or to punish. For example, academics might rely on non-association or non-complicity to justify excluding from their ranks those whose views or behavior they condemn. But people in workplaces regularly associate with those with views they do not share. No one infers from proximity that coworkers approve of each other’s views. So perceived-endorsement versions of

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61 Even in in this case, there is some risk. Recently, there was a call for all employers to shun Sanders so that she cannot find a job after leaving her current position. Morgan Gstalter, Conservative columnist: Sanders should be shunned after White House Job, The Hill, August 5, 2018, https://perma.cc/8ATX-K5R6.
non-association seem weak justifications. Arguments from complicity and taint seem similarly weak: we do little to aid anyone’s political goals merely by sharing a workplace with them.

Shunning by religious communities might be justified by non-association. Members of some religions avoid contact with outsiders. If they shun former members in the same way they treat outsiders, then the shunning may be part of a broader effort at non-association. Religious shunning can also be justified as constitutive of religious community: excluding someone from a religious community after the person violates religious norms could be inherent in the nature of that religious community. Neither of these justifications is corrupt.

But some religious shunning seems to aim for more than non-association. When shunning of former members is more intense than avoidance of outsiders generally, it raises questions about whether this is because former members are thought to be more tainted, or whether the added features of shunning are actually punitive and deterrent. Even if religious shunning does not aim at punishment, its consequences are sometimes quite severe—loss of access to minor children, and of an ability to earn a living within the community. In these cases, the consequence of shunning may be corrupt.

D. Communicating with the Public and Reinforcing Norms

Boycotts, shunning, and shaming might aim to communicate with people other than the target or to reinforce norms. For boycotts, the goal may simply be to draw attention to their cause. Most calls for boycotts do not persuade consumers to stop purchasing from a target at all, and fewer still sustain boycotts for an extended time.62 This may never have been the organizers’ goal. Rather, boycott organizers seek publicity.

The Domino’s Pizza boycott, for example, was initiated by the National Organization for Women, nominally to deprive Domino’s of funds that could be used for anti-abortion advocacy.63 But that goal might have been less important than raising funds for NOW and rallying interest in the pro-choice cause. This aim is not corrupt. But one might ask if it is reasonable to use individuals as a means of energizing opposition if the effort risks corrupting them, particularly when there are alternative methods of raising awareness and interest.

Shunning and shaming might aim to communicate with community members—reinforcing norms by declaring those who violate them to be outside of the community.64 For example, in The

64 Why do the Amish practice shunning?, Amish America, https://perma.cc/2AQL-Z9YH.
Scarlet Letter, after Hester Prynne is first shamed and then shunned, the community uses her separation as a frequent reminder of the norm she violated. Perhaps they spared her from a death penalty so that she could regularly reinforce the norm against adultery.

This argument too is problematic. Reinforcing norms through boycotts, shunning and shaming is appropriate when the norms being violated are universally applicable, such that violators deserve condemnation – appropriate for the violent southern racists who demanded segregation, and for the modern Nazis who preach hate. They are also appropriate for Harvey Weinstein and his fellow sexual predators. Shunning and shaming have been key to the #MeToo movement, which both publicized and reinforced all-too-fragile (and under-enforced) social norms against sexual harassment and predation.

The difficulty with extrapolating from these examples is that Harvey Weinstein deserved to be punished. Shunning and shaming are inappropriate norm-reinforcing techniques when the target has done nothing wrong, even if shunning that person might help to reinforce a norm. We would not applaud norm reinforcement if the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences evicted from its ranks all members of the NRA, who were then blacklisted from working on film projects, or if Google adopted a policy against hiring anyone who voted for Donald Trump. Unless the norms are so basic that we expect any decent person to accept them, or the norms are applied to people who voluntarily accept them when joining a community, we ought not reinforce contested norms on those who have no obligation to accept them. Because norms can usually be enforced with less harmful means, shunning and shaming are appropriate for norm promotion only when punishment is also due.

IV. Objections

A. First Objection: Normal Moral Norms do not Apply to Political Battles

Boycotts, shunning, and shaming might be defended as appropriate forms of political combat. Perhaps the paper’s arguments have mistakenly relied on demands of personal morality—demands for respect and restraint— that do not apply to politics. This idea offers a justification for the Montgomery bus boycott, for civil-rights-era lunch-counter sit-ins, and perhaps for boycotts of Israel and apartheid South Africa.

The bus boycotts and the sit-ins were partly communicative— aiming to shock the country into taking their message seriously, and to shame the country into reevaluating its positions. But they also aimed to desegregate the busses and restaurants by making segregated busing and foodservice unprofitable. This goal was possibly corrupt if evaluated in normal interpersonal terms; the civil-rights
activists offered financial incentives to segregationists, hoping that they would be moved by money not
to act on their deeply held beliefs.

But normal moral duties perhaps did not apply. The movement faced opponents who used
violent tactics and who had at their disposal the power of the state. Segregationists sought to deny
rights to the protesters on the often-explicit theory that the protesters were not due respect. Surely,
civil-rights advocates were not constrained to use only respectful forms of dialogue when demanding
their rights. Shaming, shunning, and boycotting were justified as necessary for self-defense.

I accept this argument about the bus boycott and sit-ins. Aggressive tactics that would not be
justified in other realms are sometimes appropriate in political battles, especially by oppressed groups
whose opponents wield power, resort to violence, and justify oppressive outcomes based on the
inferiority of the oppressed group. But this does not make such tactics appropriate in every dispute over
important policies—even when rights are at stake.

Several reasons counsel that we treat civil-rights era battles as among rare exceptions to anti-
corruption duties rather than as the norm. First, people on opposing sides in many current debates do
not deserve to be vilified in the same way as segregationists. Their positions might be wrong. But they
do not rely on justifications that treat others as inferior. Debates over abortion, gun rights, and
environmental protections all fall into this category. Although some participants in these debates are
disrespectful, the moral claims being advanced by each side can be (and often are) defended on morally
decent grounds.

Second, the level of violence associated with these debates pales in comparison to violent
tactics used against African Americans seeking civil rights. This makes the necessity claim for aggressive
tactics weaker.

Third, aggressive tactics often escalate, with each side using the other’s behavior as a
justification for their own. Boycotts are met with counter-boycotts.65 This is particularly likely when
each side sees itself as a victim—identifying with the civil rights protesters in Montgomery, and viewing

65 When companies cut ties with the NRA after the Parkland shooting, gun-rights advocates targeted those
companies for counter-boycotts. See Kate Taylor, More than a dozen companies have cut ties with the NRA — and
companies boycotted Israel over its treatment of Palestinians, several states enacted laws that ban hiring these
companies as state contractors. Jesse McKinley, Cuomo to Halt State Business with Groups that Back Boycott of
boycott-bds-movement.html. When the Red Hen restaurant refused service to Sarah Huckabee Sanders, her
supporters organized a boycott of the Red Hen. Justine Wise, Virginia GOP calls for boycott of restaurant that
the other side’s boycott as equivalent to McCarthy-era blacklists. Both sides in the abortion debate view the other side as an oppressor, wielding state power to violate fundamental rights. In such cases, norms of engagement should foster de-escalation.

Urging a gentler form of political engagement might be though naïve, inattentive to power imbalances, and perhaps unseemly when voiced by a privileged writer. Over the long history of oppression, we have more reason to regret the failure to boycott, shun and shame than we do their excessive use. Oppressed people ought to use whatever effective tools they can find.

My only response is that powerful groups too use these techniques. The NRA organizes boycotts (in addition to being the target of boycotts). The Nazis boycotted Jewish businesses before the war. The Hollywood blacklist of perceived communists was combination of boycott and shunning. And antifeminist activists have regularly employed shaming as a means of oppression. It is not obvious that removing these weapons from our political arsenals—or removing them in certain cases—favors the powerless over the powerful.

One might argue that only oppressed groups may legitimately use these tactics. But as a practical matter, people who employ these tactics usually perceive themselves as oppressed. This includes white nationalists, religious groups, men, gun owners, anti-abortion activists, and conservatives. Even if from some outside perspective, it makes sense to approve aggressive political tactics only for the truly oppressed, as a rule of political engagement, this exception would be invoked by everyone, returning us to the undesirable position of escalating reprisals among political opponents.

A more limited version of the “all is fair in politics” argument might focus on one narrow case—boycotts of wealthy companies and their owners. Perhaps we ought to approve such boycotts because large donors unfairly advance their own moral agendas with donations and therefore cannot complain when less wealthy people strike back with the only tool they have.

I see several problems with this argument. First, unlike campaign donations—which give wealthy donors outsized influence over public policy—donations to social causes do not undermine our democratic process. They do not so obviously buy influence over politicians. And they do not typically advance the donor’s financial interests. Nor are these donations as out of scale as those in electoral

66 More than a dozen companies have cut ties with the NRA — and pro-gun-rights activists are furious, Business Insider, February 26, 2018, https://perma.cc/K8KC-34AY.
68 Donations from gun manufacturers to the NRA are a notable counterexample.
politics. The anti-abortion donations by the owner of Dominos were allegedly only about $100,000.69 If less-wealthy people need a means of counteracting the voice of wealthy donors, they can band together as donors themselves. Unlike political donations, combat by donation seems feasible in these cases. Second, there are wealthy donors on both sides of many important social issues, including abortion, gay rights, and gun control, making it unclear why we should regard the influence of wealthy donors as distorting debate. Finally, boycotts over donations are not limited to wealthy donors or large donations. For example, in 2008 a restaurant manager donated $100 to a campaign in favor of Prop 8 – California’s anti-gay-marriage initiative. When people discovered the donation, they targeted the restaurant with an organized boycott and restaurant-review campaign, and the manager was forced to resign.70

B. Second Objection: Actions Should have Consequences and Social Norms need Social Enforcement

My argument might be thought contrary to a basic notion of responsibility: that people’s actions ought to have consequences. If Nazis traffic in hate speech, or NRA supporters ridicule shooting victims as “crisis actors,” they should be treated as outcasts.

I agree with this. My point is not that people’s actions should have no consequences. It is rather that we sometimes should not target them for punishment or aim to change their behavior with incentives. These norms leave extensive room for people’s actions to have consequences. For example, individual acts of non-association (rather than collective boycotts) will often leave people somewhat isolated. If NRA leaders behave badly enough, their organization will lose membership and they may find themselves without friends. As well, companies may decide that their business interests are not advanced by affiliating with the NRA. This choice need not be part of an organized boycott. Rather, the companies may see the genuine associational costs of affiliation. They do not want the public to


associate them with the NRA. Something like this happened when Laura Ingram lost sponsors for her show after she ridiculed a Parkland shooting survivor. 71

As well, my account leaves substantial room for imposing social consequences on those who behave badly. In some cases, such as Harvey Weinstein, they deserve to be punished. In other cases, such as with businesses that underpay their employees, boycotts and other harms impose little risk of corruption.

Still, it might seem that I do not want social pressure being applied to enforce certain norms, which I think ought to be decided based on internal rather than external factors. It might be objected that this misunderstands how social norms work. Even if we never boycott, shun, or shame, we must rely on social pressure to enforce social compliance. If I interrupt my colleagues in faculty meetings, or speak dismissively of their views, they might criticize my behavior in public (which I might find humiliating) or they might stop inviting me to lunch. Surely, this social enforcement of social norms is as it should be.

I fully agree. Enforcing social norms—either those that ought to apply to all people, or those that are particular to sub-communities—sometimes depends on social pressure. My concern is with applying social or financial pressure when norms are reasonably contested and so punishment is not appropriate, or when the punished person is not a member of the community whose norms are being enforced. Excluding me from lunch for being a boor is not the same as excluding me from a job for being a Republican. The difference is not only that the consequence for the Republican is more severe. It is also that the community has no right to punish him; he has not offended any norm that he is obligated to accept.

71 Daniel Victor, Advertisers Drop Laura Ingraham after she Taunts Parkland Survivor David Hogg, New York Times, March 29, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/29/business/media/laura-ingraham-david-hogg.html. In both the NRA case and the Ingram case, there were also organized boycotts seeking to advance these outcomes. My point is that the companies may have decided to dissociate themselves for reputational purposes without the need for organized boycotts.