

# ***AN ESSAY ON NO PLATFORMING***

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## Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE SPECIAL EPISTEMIC PURPOSE OF UNIVERSITIES .....	3
3. UNIVERSITIES AND NO PLATFORMING.....	6
3.1 NO PLATFORMING, TEACHING, AND RESEARCH .....	6
3.2 NO PLATFORMING AND EXTRAMURAL SPEECH.....	12
3.3 NO PLATFORMING BEYOND THE FACULTY .....	15
4. CONCLUSION .....	17
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	19

## 1. Introduction

“No Platforming” entered our collective vocabularies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, cementing itself as something of note in any conversation about free speech. The National Union of Students adopted a no platforming policy in April 1974 obligating student unions of UK universities to discriminate against representatives of the National Front Party by refusing to give them speaking opportunities on campus.<sup>1</sup> No platforming was seen as a moral tool, with an aim to ‘deny freedom of speech to those advocating what they [its utilisers] saw as immoral speech’.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I will make an argument in defence of no platforming at universities, but on the grounds of it being used to prevent speech that does not meet the relevant disciplinary standards rather than ‘immoral’ speech. One could accurately describe the argument I make in this dissertation as a defence of a revisionary account of no platforming. The defence presented is not one of *student* led silencing efforts attempting to remove a platform from speakers at universities. Instead, it is an argument which identifies an obligation that *universities* have: to uphold the intellectual standards of their speakers. When I speak of ‘no platforming’ in the remainder of this essay, I refer to the act of *universities* disinviting speakers, removing speaking platforms, including lectures, from faculty members, and, in the most extreme cases, the removal of staff from their faculty positions. How it is that universities carry out this obligation

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<sup>1</sup> (Smith, 2020, p. 87), (Simpson & Srinivasan, 2018, p. 187)

<sup>2</sup> (Rich, 2015, p. 174)

is not of particular interest in this essay.<sup>3</sup> As I like to think of it, I make as a defence of what no platforming is, not what should be.

No platforming at universities is necessary in any democratic society because:

- (i) Universities have a special epistemic purpose.
- (ii) To fulfil this special epistemic purpose, universities must:
  - a. Give their faculty *academic freedom* extending to:
    - i. Intramural speech. Including:
      - 1. Research.
      - 2. Teaching.
    - ii. Extramural Speech.
  - b. Impose a limit to academic freedom in that speech must be within *relevant disciplinary standards*.
  - c. Maintain epistemic standards by taking appropriate action, either the removal of a speaking position or potentially termination of employment in more extreme cases, when there is evidence that a faculty member is not *fit to serve* because their speech does not meet the relevant disciplinary standards.
  - d. Maintain epistemic standards by refraining from extending speaking platforms to non-faculty members when there is evidence that they are not *fit to serve* in the same way as above.
- (iii) Thus, any individual, faculty member or guest speaker, who is not fit to serve and is speaking within the university space should be no platformed by the university.

This argument is one that justifies no platforming as a tool that universities should use not based upon the potential harm of speakers *to individuals* but based upon the potential harm of speakers *to the democratic competence of our society*. It provides a pragmatic principle through which cases can be evaluated: is there evidence that the individual does not meet the relevant disciplinary standards? This doesn't mean that deciding whether to no platform an individual or not is always a simple process, there are many grey areas including the blurry borders

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<sup>3</sup> My initial suggestion would be that it is the job of departments, through their pre-existing governing structures, to assess cases brought to their attention which concern platforms given by their department. The central university itself could benefit from also having a permanent committee to which particularly controversial cases can be taken, but the focus of this committee, although outside of the department, should always be given on the intellectual standards of the relevant discipline, rather than *anything* else. I am open to the idea that there may be better models available and invite thoughts and comments on this subject. As long as the obligations I identify can be properly fulfilled, I am indifferent as to *how* they go about being fulfilled.

between disciplines, between extramural and intramural speech, and between university-affiliated platforms, department-affiliated platforms, and platforms which aren't affiliated with the university but have strong connections to it. In other words, there are some hard cases when it comes to no platforming. However, this fact does not detract from the argument that I make for the necessary presence of no platforming in the tool kit of any and every university, it simply highlights the difficult job that these universities are obliged to fulfil.

## 2. The special epistemic purpose of universities

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, universities in the United States had moved past a time where their purpose was to 'instruct young men in received truths, both spiritual and material' and towards a new purpose: the idea of 'systematizing and expanding knowledge' as inspired by the German idea of *Wissenschaft*.<sup>4</sup> We now live in a world where few but those who question the nature of knowledge itself question whether universities are a key part of the knowledge-production process.<sup>5</sup> There is now wide acceptance of the ideas that the university's 'most immediate aim is to discover what there is to be known and what becomes of us through knowledge'.<sup>6</sup> However, *wide acceptance* is not a suitable foundation for a philosophical argument. We should seek more stable foundations by justifying the idea that universities have a special epistemic purpose.

Post provides such a justification through a distinction that he draws between 'democratic legitimacy' and 'democratic competence'. A democracy is *legitimate* if it embodies the 'egalitarian premise that every person is entitled to communicate his own opinion', but this communication is only *competent* if it is the communication of opinion which is influenced by expert knowledge.<sup>7</sup> By 'expert knowledge' I refer to 'forms of knowledge that are constantly expanding through speculation, observation, analysis, and experiment' that we cannot acquire 'merely by observing the world and by trusting [our] senses'.<sup>8</sup> 'Expert knowledge is prerequisite for intelligent self-governance' because expert knowledge provides

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<sup>4</sup> (Post, 2012, p. 63)

<sup>5</sup> I will refrain from entering what Post, (Post, 2012, pp. 6-7), labels the 'epistemological thicket' surrounding the analysis of knowledge and will instead move forwards from this point with an understanding that knowledge is both possible and produced by the disciplinary processes of universities.

<sup>6</sup> (Jaspers, 1960, p. 2)

<sup>7</sup> (Post, 2012, p. xiii)

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion of what expert knowledge is see (Post, 2012, p. ix), which I quoted in this sentence.

‘empowerment’ to persons in ‘public discourse’ – in other words, without access to expert knowledge, the public discourse, which shapes public opinion, which in turn is the true ‘author[s] of government decisions’, would not be capable of competent decision making in the best interests of the people who are governed by the laws resulting from those decisions.<sup>9</sup> For example if there is public discourse about vaccinations then that discourse can only create a competent public opinion – which *should* then guide competent policy – if there is expert knowledge accessible to the public. The public then can build their opinions upon expert knowledge about vaccinations, their efficacy, and their risks and point towards this knowledge in their discourse. Without expert knowledge, there is no way that the sphere of public discourse alone could successfully and repeatedly produce policy which is in the best interests of the people.

However, the relationships that democratic legitimacy on the one hand and democratic competence on the other have with speech, specifically with discrimination *about* speech, contrast with one another. The public discourse necessary for democratic legitimacy requires ‘equality of status in the field of ideas’, meaning that democratic legitimacy requires all speech to be equally valued.<sup>10</sup> In public discourse, the idea that 5G towers cause COVID-19 is an idea with equal worth to the idea that it is a virus which causes COVID-19. The ideas themselves are both of an equal value. It is the collective opinion of individuals about these ideas which shapes public opinion and policy, but this opinion is external to the value of *the ideas themselves* in public discourse. On the other hand, the production of expert knowledge necessary for democratic competence ‘demands an *inequality* of status in ideas’.<sup>11</sup> We must be able to alter the value that the ideas themselves carry to differentiate the expertise that a virus causes COVID-19 from nonsense that 5G towers cause COVID-19. Post recognises this inconsistency between democratic legitimacy and competence, labelling the relationship between the two notions as ‘difficult and challenging [to understand], because democratic legitimisation both requires democratic competence and is in many ways incompatible with it.’<sup>12</sup> Simply put, a democracy cannot be made both legitimate and competent *in the same space*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> (Post, 2012, pp. 15, 17, 32-34) and see (Rosenberger v. University of Va., 1995) for a discussion on public discourse shaping public opinion.

<sup>10</sup> (Meiklejohn, 1960, p. 27)

<sup>11</sup> (Simpson & Srinivasan, 2018, p. 196)

<sup>12</sup> (Post, 2012, p. xiii)

<sup>13</sup> Here, and throughout this essay, I refer to a ‘space’ not in a geographical/spatial context, but rather as the domain in which something occurs. For example, the university space is not the university campus. Lectures, teaching, research, and conferences all happen within the university space, whether they be on campus, off campus, or online. Similarly, things can occur on the university campus which are not in the university space, like the majority of socialising and student society activity (notably that of debating societies which I will talk

The space which makes a democracy legitimate necessitates free speech whilst the space which makes democracy competent necessitates discrimination about speech. That there is a differentiation in free speech norms in different spaces in any legitimate and competent democracy is the cornerstone of my argument in defence of no platforming. Hegel identified the need for the isolation of the production of expert knowledge, or ‘great’ advancements in science in his words, from public discourse and opinion:

[public opinion] in itself... has no criterion of discrimination, nor has it the ability to extract the substantive element it contains and raise it to precise knowledge. Thus, to be independent of public opinion is the first formal condition of achieving anything great or rational whether in life or in science. Great achievement is assured, however, of subsequent recognition and grateful acceptance by public opinion, which in due course will make it one of its own prejudices.<sup>14</sup>

All the above establishes two things:

- a. There is a need to produce expert knowledge.
- b. This production of expert knowledge cannot happen in the *same space* as public discourse.

Thus, we have motivated the need for *some* space where expert knowledge production occurs. I suggest that in line with their *Wissenschaft* ideologies, universities shoulder the democratic responsibility of this special epistemic purpose. Even if it is not the case that they have been *established with* the epistemic purpose of maintaining democratic competence, they are certainly the *best placed* institutions to carry it out. Universities ‘are institutions that paradigmatically develop and apply the disciplinary practices that define modern forms of expert knowledge’.<sup>15</sup> They are the gatekeepers of knowledge in our modern society, holding the authority to distribute disciplinary qualifications, deciding who can access educational

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about later in this dissertation). Drawing the dividing line between the university space and the wider space for public discourse is difficult – which is one of the reasons that no platforming can involve genuine hard cases. However, the line should not be drawn based on the geographical boundaries of the university campus.

<sup>14</sup> (Hegel, 1942, p. 205)

<sup>15</sup> (Post, 2012, p. 63)

resources, and employing professionals for the purposes of teaching and researching. We can now confidently assert the first premise of the argument in defence of no platforming:

- (i) Universities have a special epistemic purpose.

### **3. Universities and No Platforming**

No platforming is a tool which *should* be used by universities to ensure that they achieve their special epistemic purpose. Demonstrating this, and demonstrating *when* it should be used, will be the task of much of the remainder of this essay. I will begin by establishing the freedoms required by faculty members, known as academic freedom, before turning to look at the limitations of that freedom, the conditions where platforming a speaker would contradict the epistemic purpose of the institution. It is through an acknowledgement that no platforming and academic freedom are both motivated by the same higher principle – the production of expert knowledge – and that they apply in a different space to public discourse, which is governed by freedom of speech and the harm principle, that I suggest we can dissolve the apparent tensions between academic freedom, freedom of speech, the harm principle, and no platforming.

#### **3.1 No platforming, teaching, and research**

To understand academic freedom, its limitations, and when no platforming should be used as a tool, it will help to first look at the mirroring case, how freedom of speech and its limitations work outside of the university space. To differentiate academic freedom from freedom of speech is ‘an entirely necessary move’.<sup>16</sup> In the space of public discourse, Mill’s argument that there should be freedom of speech, limited only by the harm principle, acts as the standard normative guide. Mill’s holistic argument for the freedom of speech in *On Liberty* is supported by four individual arguments:

- 1) We are fallible and free speech allows us to be corrected when we are wrong.
- 2) Someone may say something that we object to but that could still show us something that is missing from our current understanding even if what they say is in part false.

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<sup>16</sup> (Bérubé & Ruth, 2022, p. 67)

- 3) By rigorously testing our commonly held beliefs we demonstrate their rationality.
- 4) By allowing open discourse we encourage a progressive environment in which individuals can question the widely asserted and make progress on it.<sup>17</sup>

But Mill does not hold that we should embrace *all* speech. He recognises that there should be limitations to free speech, and so introduces his harm principle which argues that individuals should be free to act as they wish unless their actions harm others:

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise.<sup>18</sup>

Mill advocates for the freedom of expression for the individual but with a limitation in the form of a single principle. This dynamic of argument is replicated in the university space (see figure 1). The freedom of expression comes in the form of academic freedom, whilst the limiting principle is *fitness to serve* – as enforced by universities through no platforming.

	<b>Inside of the university space</b>	<b>Outside of the university space</b>
<b>Freedoms</b>	Academic freedom	Freedom of speech
<b>Motivations for these freedoms</b>	The production of expert knowledge necessary for democratic competence	Mill's four arguments
<b>Limitations of these freedoms</b>	One should have academic freedom as long as they do not demonstrate that they are unfit to serve	One should have freedom of speech as long as they do not harm others

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<sup>17</sup> (Mill, 2011, pp. 97-98)

<sup>18</sup> (Mill, 2011, p. 17)



<b>Tools used to enforce these limitations</b>	No platforming as enforced by university institutions	Prison, fines, community service, and criminal records as enforced by the state
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*Figure 1 – A table to show the parallels between, but differentiate, academic freedom and freedom of speech.*

Certain freedoms are needed if the epistemic purpose of universities is to be fulfilled. Lovejoy summarises this point:

'[the university's] function of seeking new truths will sometimes mean... the undermining of widely or generally accepted beliefs. It is rendered impossible if the work of the investigator is shackled by the requirement that his conclusions shall never seriously deviate either from generally accepted beliefs or from those accepted by the persons, private or official, through whom society provides the means for the maintenance of universities... Academic freedom is, then, a prerequisite condition to the proper prosecution, in an organized and adequately endowed manner, of scientific inquiry...' <sup>19</sup>

So, academic freedom is the freedom for faculty *from* being 'shackled' by a worry that work challenging norms will result in adverse repercussions. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) recognises this freedom *from* shackles to manifest itself as the *freedom of* three elements in their 1915 declaration: 'freedom of inquiry and research; freedom of teaching within the university or college; and freedom of extramural utterance and action'. <sup>20</sup> This was then reaffirmed in their 1940 statement which remains the standard to this day, albeit with a few notes from 1970. <sup>21</sup>

That academic freedom is comprised of teaching and research is not controversial nor should it be. Universities 'exist for the purposes of teaching and research' in that their epistemic purpose is fulfilled *by* teaching and research. <sup>22</sup> The research conducted by faculty members must be free to 'separate true ideas from false ones'. <sup>23</sup> Research is one of the two formal

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<sup>19</sup> (Lovejoy, 1930, pp. 384-385)

<sup>20</sup> (American Association of University Professors, 2015, p. 4)

<sup>21</sup> (American Association of University Professors, 2015, pp. 13-19)

<sup>22</sup> (Simpson & Srinivasan, 2018, p. 195)

<sup>23</sup> (Post, 2012, p. 9)

avenues for ‘criticism and critical transformation’ which lies at the ‘heart of the conception of a discipline’, a criticism which makes the discipline ‘legitimate’ by attempting to differentiate what is true from what is false even when it is controversial.<sup>24</sup> This means that ‘healthy’ disciplines are no strangers to controversy.<sup>25</sup> Freedom of research for faculty members is a key ingredient in *producing* this expert knowledge. I mentioned that research is one of two formal avenues for this critical analysis - the other is questioning in the classroom during teaching, which alone would necessitate freedom of teaching. There is also a stronger argument for the freedom of teaching. Although research produces expert knowledge, democratic competence is not maintained simply through the presence of expert knowledge in academic circles in universities, expert knowledge must also be accessible to the public and this is made possible through teaching. The teaching of research to university students allows it to trickle down into popular culture through conversation. Although research is read and referred to in times of need, and by fellow academics, to have freedom of research but not of teaching would contribute towards an expert knowledge bottleneck.

Nevertheless, freedom of teaching and research does not come without limitations. It has boundaries. The very same epistemic purpose which motivates the freedoms of faculty members also motivates the limits of those freedoms. The production of expert knowledge requires an environment which ‘exclude[s] cranks and shills from valuable communicative platforms in academic contexts’.<sup>26</sup> Specifically, an individual should be excluded from these communicative platforms if they have demonstrated an unwarranted disregard from the relevant disciplinary standards: I propose that it is this disregard that deems an individual ‘unfit’ and justifies no platforming.<sup>27</sup> To clarify:

If an individual demonstrates unwarranted disregard for the relevant disciplinary standards, then they are unfit for service.

And:

If an individual is unfit for service, then they should be no platformed (where no platforming them is removing their speaking platform either through

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<sup>24</sup> (Scott, 2019, pp. 32-33)

<sup>25</sup> (Post, 2012, p. 97)

<sup>26</sup> (Simpson & Srinivasan, 2018, p. 196)

<sup>27</sup> (Bérubé & Ruth, 2022, p. 77)

disinvitation, removal from lecturing opportunities, or potentially removal from faculty employment).<sup>28</sup>

The notion of ‘fitness for continuing service’ has its roots with the AAUP, but has become commonplace in the literature on no platforming.<sup>29</sup> I argue that whether an individual is fit to serve or not is a question best answered on a case by case basis, due in part to the ever-changing intellectual standards and norms of disciplines and the legitimacy of challenging them rigorously, and in part because of the nature of some of the hard cases we will move to later.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, there is no doubt that *at least some* arguments deviate from the intellectual standards of disciplines and do not rigorously challenge them. Instead, these arguments make a ‘joke’ of these standards.<sup>31</sup> These are the cases in which there is not just a defensible argument permitting no platforming, but an obligation that universities *should* no platform individuals. Universities have no problem with excluding ‘phlogiston, the philosopher’s stone, and the efficacy of human sacrifice’ from discussion.<sup>32</sup> The historian submitting a paper to academic journals claiming that Winston Churchill was a Nazi or the biologist teaching undergraduates that the COVID-19 pandemic was caused by 5G are easy cases where we can identify the flagrant disregard for their respective *relevant* intellectual standards, and it is clear to see that no platforming these individuals would not detract from but enhance the intellectual culture of the university in order to promote the epistemic purpose it holds. Here, I use the term ‘relevant’ to refer to a relationship between the subject matter of the speaker and the discipline which their argument belongs to. It is not contrary to the epistemic purpose of the university that the interpretation that a Shakespeare scholar gives of *Hamlet* doesn’t meet the intellectual standards of the discipline of mathematics, for example, because it involves levels of speculation and imagination which don’t align with the tight logical intellectual standards of mathematics. Instead, what is important is that the interpretation of *Hamlet* is that it has the

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<sup>28</sup> The idea of academics being fired for their speech may alarm some people - especially those with a strong understanding of and attachment to tenure. I won’t offer a complete breakdown of what levels of disregard for disciplinary standards warrant what degree of action from the university, but I would suggest that termination of employment should be reserved for only the most extreme of cases or repeat offenders.

<sup>29</sup> (American Association of University Professors, 2015, p. 31)

<sup>30</sup> The intellectual standards of disciplines should be challenged and do move over time. Thus, not every argument made which deviates from the disciplinary standards should result in no platforming, some of them will result in a re-evaluation of the disciplinary standards themselves. It is for this reason that I sometimes refer to the threshold for no platforming as evidence of ‘unwarranted disregard’ for disciplinary standards or as evidence of deviation from relevant disciplinary standards that doesn’t ‘rigorously’ challenge them. My attention was brought to the fact that change should be ‘anticipated’ of disciplinary standards by (Scott, 2019, p. 32)

<sup>31</sup> (Simpson & Srinivasan, 2018, p. 199)

<sup>32</sup> (Bérubé & Ruth, 2022, p. 88)

clarity, artistry, and contextual understanding necessary for integrity in the discipline of English literature.<sup>33</sup>

Deciding which intellectual standards are the relevant standards for a speaker or academic is not always easy. A discipline like gender studies holds the moral permissibility of homosexuality as axiomatic (to deny it is to fail to meet the intellectual standards of the discipline), whilst discussion of the moral permissibility of homosexuality is acceptable in a discipline like theology.<sup>34</sup> A speaker can be simultaneously within the intellectual standards of the theology department and outside of the standards of the gender studies department theology department, and the platforming of that speaker may undermine the academic integrity of the gender studies department whilst the no platforming of that speaker may undermine the academic integrity of the theology department. It is worth noting the role of the discipline of philosophy, one where there is minimal commitment to axioms and most things are ‘up for grabs’.<sup>35</sup> The intellectual standards of the discipline of philosophy mean that it often comes into conflict with other disciplines to create hard cases like the example given above. In the presence of these hard cases, decisions must be made to prioritise the academic integrity and expert knowledge producing environment of one discipline over another. There is no easy way around this problem. Leiter provides an attempt, but only insofar as advocating for the openness of disciplines to critiques from other disciplines.<sup>36</sup> Academics and speakers of the theology department should be open to critique from the gender studies department and vice versa. Such a view seems to imply that meeting the disciplinary standards of *at least one* relevant discipline deems an individual fit for service for at least *that* discipline. This gives us a way of moving forwards in terms of cases inside of departments. There is no reason for the theology department to no platform an individual giving lectures for their department on the moral permissibility of homosexuality, so long as they otherwise meet the other intellectual standards of the department, but there is reason for that individual to be no platformed by the gender studies department by being denied lecturing opportunities for their department. Note, however, that Leiter’s suggestion gives us no guide for university events which are not directly connected to departments. Should the individual be given a platform by a university itself as

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<sup>33</sup> A few things worth noting here. Firstly, I don’t wish to make the claim that clarity, artistry, and contextual understanding are the disciplinary standards of English literature, determining what these standards are is the right of English literature *as a discipline*, not me. Secondly, there is a valid argument to be made that the interpretation of *Hamlet* could deviate from these standards, whatever they may be, and be far from justification of no platforming: when it may rigorously challenge the disciplinary standards (see footnote 28). Thirdly, this account needn’t stifle humour in the classroom or workplace, jokes needn’t fall within disciplinary standards.

<sup>34</sup> (Simpson & Srinivasan, 2018, p. 202)

<sup>35</sup> (Simpson & Srinivasan, 2018, p. 202)

<sup>36</sup> (Leiter, 2018, p. 132)

an institution, a university-affiliated publisher, university-affiliated societies, or a college in a collegiate university to give a lecture on their research? I will return to such cases later (§3.3).

Nevertheless, we have now laid the relevant groundwork to be able to properly articulate the argument in defence of no platforming which I advocate in this paper:

*An individual should be no platformed if they have demonstrated that they are not fit to serve by disregarding the relevant intellectual standards of the discipline in such a way that is not a rigorous and legitimate challenge of these standards.*

The argument of this paper is far from over, though. This principle raises as many questions as it answers. Can extramural speech be used as evidence that an individual is not fit to serve? What exactly is extramural speech? What justifies the extension of no platforming past university staff?

### **3.2 No platforming and extramural speech**

Extramural speech stands in contrast to teaching and research which are examples of intramural speech. Intramural speech is seen as speech *within* the scope of the role of a faculty member whilst extramural speech is speech *outside of* the scope of that role. Finkin and Post argue that ‘freedom of extramural expression refers ... to speech made by faculty in their capacity as citizens, speech that is typically about matters of public concern and that is unrelated to either scholarly expertise or institutional affiliation’.<sup>37</sup> Note the reference to both ‘capacity as citizens’ and ‘scholarly expertise’ here, it is a point that we will shortly return to. The inclusion of extramural speech in the AAUP’s understanding of academic freedom is less obviously motivated than the inclusion of teaching or research. By its very definition, extramural speech happens outside of the university space in which knowledge production occurs. At first glance, one could be forgiven for assuming that extramural speech is thus the speech of faculty members which should be governed by freedom of speech and the harm principle, rather than by academic freedom and its limitations. Indeed, this is the view that Butler argues for:

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<sup>37</sup> (Finkin & Post, 2009, p. 127)

Academic freedom and freedom of expression are not the same. The professional activities pertaining to one's academic position should be protected by academic freedom. The extramural utterances any of us make about the world we inhabit, the institutions in which we work, or any matter of public concern should be protected by rights of free expression.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, most no platforming controversy comes from cases in which it is extramural speech, rightly or wrongly, which is being used as evidence of unfitness to serve.<sup>39</sup> For someone like Butler, someone who believes that extramural speech is not part of the university space and thus should not be subject to the governing norms of the university space, these controversies are easy cases: extramural speech should never be used as evidence for an individual's fitness serve. I believe that a reasonable amount of the dispute in the literature surrounding extramural speech is dissolvable. I flagged Finkin and Post's use of both scholarly expertise and an individual's speech in their capacity as a citizen in their definition of extramural speech, and which of the two one uses to differentiate extramural speech from intramural speech can have a large effect on the validity of extramural speech being used to demonstrate unfitness to serve. Butler is committed to the view that speech is extramural if it does not concern the expertise of the speaker. On this view, it is a respectable argument to make that extramural speech cannot be used as evidence of unfitness to serve. There is no speech that an expert in biology could make that would demonstrate a disregard for the relevant intellectual standards of the discipline of biology which would be extramural speech, perhaps with the noteworthy exception of an admission of fabricating research or other speech reflecting on the discipline.<sup>40</sup> All other speech which could be construed as disregarding *relevant* intellectual standards would be intramural due to that very relativisation.<sup>41</sup> If a professor in biology were to speak out about their belief in "intelligent design", even if that speech were to happen in a pub or in a supermarket, it would intramural speech for Butler, because it is speech related to the scholarly expertise of the individual.

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<sup>38</sup> (Butler, 2018, p. B15)

<sup>39</sup> (Bérubé & Ruth, 2022, p. 66)

<sup>40</sup> Even the most aggressive defendants of views like Butler's would be in agreement here, or perhaps would be inclined to consider such speech as intramural rather than extramural.

<sup>41</sup> For these thinkers, something is extramural if it does not concern their expertise. Thus, anything which does concern their expertise is intramural concerning *some* aspect of their expertise (for any individual can have multiple areas of expertise). If that individual says something which doesn't met the relevant standards for some area of their expertise, it must be in relation to that expertise, and thus must be intramural.

We can look at the very same example from the perspective of extramural speech as speech outside of the context of the university space. Here, it is difficult to argue that the speech of any individual in a pub or supermarket can be properly understood as intramural speech. The speech, however, indicates the same unfitness to serve whether we identify it as extramural or not. For the remainder of this dissertation, I will identify extramural speech using context: something is extramural speech if and only if it is speech outside of the context of the university space. In doing so, I argue that extramural speech straddles the university space and wider space for public discourse. Extramural speech is sometimes subject to the norms of academic freedom and limited by intellectual standards and sometimes subject to the norms of free speech and the harm principle. A huge majority of extramural speech, however, belongs to the space of wider public discourse. This aligns with the AAUP, who stated in *Committee A Statement on Extramural Utterances* that ‘extramural utterances rarely bear upon the faculty member’s fitness for continuing service’ and still then that it should be only with ‘weighty evidence of unfitness’ that enforcement tools like no platforming should be used.<sup>42</sup> The possibility of extramural speech demonstrating unfitness to serve, and thus resulting in the no platforming of an individual, is motivation in itself for the inclusion of extramural speech in our understanding of academic freedom. Confusion about extramural speech – whether it be about what extramural speech is, or whether some speech which is understood as extramural speech is ‘exposed to punishment’ – could lead to self-censorship, which would be contrary to the epistemic purpose of universities.<sup>43</sup> The extension of academic freedom in this way is a ‘prophylactic protection for freedom of research and teaching’ because it helps to create a culture which doesn’t self-censor and in which people don’t fear repercussions for ‘relatively minor ideological transgressions’.<sup>44</sup> Butler’s argument aims to defend scholars from persecution and support their ‘right to extramural political expression’.<sup>45</sup> I agree wholeheartedly that scholars have the right to extramural political expression, but our differing accounts of what constitutes extramural speech mean that I disagree that scholars deserve absolute freedom from no platforming regarding their extramural speech. It is wholly possible, however, that Butler and I may agree and disagree in complete consistency about whether individual cases warrant the no platforming of an individual. Although I hope the recognition of this possibility helps to dissolve this issue, I still promote a case-by-case analysis of many of the harder no

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<sup>42</sup> (American Association of University Professors, 2015, p. 31)

<sup>43</sup> (Finkin & Post, 2009, p. 139)

<sup>44</sup> (Bérubé & Ruth, 2022, p. 89)

<sup>45</sup> (Butler, 2018, p. B16)

platforming cases, especially those concerning extramural speech, to ensure that universities act in the best possible way to fulfil their epistemic purpose.

### 3.3 No platforming beyond the faculty

The picture of no platforming that I have painted so far has focussed on faculty members. Let us now turn to external speakers. Should there be a difference between the way that we handle no platforming cases for the biology faculty member mentioning their support for “intelligent design” at the pub and the celebrity publicly endorsing the same opinion in the same setting? The grounds upon which we are defending no platforming are epistemic grounds – we are seeking to protect and maintain the intellectual standards of disciplines to promote the production of expert knowledge. There is no reason why the argument shouldn’t extend past faculty members to members of the wider public or faculty members of other university institutions if they enter the university space as guest speakers or lecturers. The extension of ‘apparent credibility or symbolic esteem’ to unfit guest speakers has the same potential to undermine the intellectual standards of disciplines as the employment of unfit faculty members does.<sup>46</sup>

Being a guest speaker does not, then, *in of itself* present any reason why we cannot apply our unfitness principle. Guest speaker cases are often harder cases because they commonly involve other factors which are grey areas: notably the aforementioned conflict between the intellectual standards of different disciplines and the status of events as university-affiliated, department-affiliated, or tenuously affiliated or somehow connected to the university. The latter are particularly difficult cases. Imagine a speaker is invited as the guest of a university-affiliated debating society. The society is not a department. A debating society in particular seems to be an example of a space for public discourse – a space in which it is the norms of free speech and the harm principle acting as the normative guides, rather than academic freedom and fitness to serve. An argument can be made, however, that the nature of such an institution’s affiliation to the university gives it epistemic esteem. The argument continues that this esteem is then passed on to invited speakers, and thus that their views are given a platform which either reaches university faculty and influences their research and teaching or reaches members of the public and is mistaken for expert knowledge produced by the university itself. Both possibilities seem to infringe on the success of the universities’

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<sup>46</sup> (Simpson & Srinivasan, 2018, p. 199)



epistemic purpose. Although there is doubtless reason for frustration, especially from experts who find their hard work undermined by ‘cranks’ platformed by university-affiliated societies, it is my belief that this frustration is not reason enough to defend the use of no platforming in this circumstance. A Geography department may be furious that a climate-change denying executive from a large oil company is given a platform at the university-affiliated debating society, but the fury that they feel here gives the university no more reason to try to no-platform the speaker than they would have to try to no-platform a speaker’s platform given to them by a YouTube channel or news corporation. Even at the university-affiliated debating society, there is good reason to think that the speaker is in the wider public space, and that the role of the university in this space is to do little more than provide the expert knowledge necessary for members of the public to be able to determine which policy decisions are in their best interests despite outside noise from parties with less accurate or outright misleading information.

Whether all societies are parts of the university space or the wider space for public discourse is the matter which makes this a grey area. Would the very same speaker be subject to the norms of the university space if they were to speak at the geography society of the university, ran by faculty members, postgraduate, and undergraduate students of the geography department? Here the affiliation with a department seems to be at the very least much stronger, and the status as an area of public discourse rather than university space much less obvious. Yet, my intuition remains that the society is a part of the wider space for public discourse rather than a university space. Events hosted by university faculty members on university grounds in which speakers seem to make a joke of relevant intellectual standards are other occasions which seem to lack an affiliation strong enough to result in university action restricting the guest speaker. What it may result in, though, is the no platforming of the faculty member who hosts the event if they express support for the views that other speakers at the event may express which would deem them unfit to serve in their own faculty positions. The no platforming of *anyone* at the event itself, however, seems untenable. There may be cases where no platforming should occur at department-affiliated society talks when the affiliation is strong enough that the society is not much more than an extension of the department, but these cases may be few and far between.

Speakers at official events ran by the university itself, like graduation ceremonies, charity galas, or anniversary dinners also live in a grey space. These speakers will undoubtedly speak within the university space, and so we don’t run into the issue of strength of affiliation that plagued our previous cases. The university as an institution has an obligation to support the knowledge production of its departments – and the platforming of a speaker who flouts the

intellectual standards of one of those departments plausibly undermines the department's ability to fulfil its epistemic purpose. Such a case becomes incredibly difficult, though, if the speaker can claim that they may not meet the intellectual standards of one discipline, but they do of another. Let's imagine the university invites a speaker to their anniversary dinner who advocates for the innocence of a peer based upon a denial of the persistence of a self. Stephanie cannot possibly be responsible for paying a parking ticket because she is not the same woman who was responsible for the parking, they argue. Such an argument blatantly disregards the intellectual standards present in the discipline of Law but is more than acceptable when considering the intellectual standards of the discipline of Philosophy. The platforming of the speaker at the dinner could undermine the Philosophy department, whilst platforming them could undermine the Law department. In such a case, the university must make a decision about which discipline and department to prioritise. I would advocate for the platforming of the individual on this occasion, but I am a philosopher who recognises the intellectual standards of my discipline as superior to those of other disciplines. I am in little doubt that many lawyers would feel aggrieved by my support, and justly so. In this case, and the *very few* just like it, I will say that the no platforming of an individual is permissible but not obligatory.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The defence I have presented in this dissertation was of a revisionary account of no platforming. It was an account of no platforming which identified no platforming as a tool that universities should use to uphold the standards of disciplines so that they can best fulfil their special epistemic purpose of producing expert knowledge in order to maintain democratic competence. It moves away from the current popular culture understanding of no platforming as a form of protest and political pressure applied by students and members of the public on universities, and instead identifies a principle which universities should follow on silencing individuals. How exactly these individuals are silenced, be it through disinvitation, removal from lecturing opportunities, or termination of employment, is a matter that I have left relatively undiscussed – as is how an institution as large and de-centralised as a university should go about determining whether relevant disciplinary standards are violated. They are both interesting topics and necessary conversations to be had if we are to implement such a model of no platforming in universities, but they are conversations that were not pressing to the central argument of this essay, which was that, *somehow*, universities have an obligation to no platform individuals if are not fit to serve. That argument is now complete. However, there are plenty of interesting

questions relating to this topic which I did not have the time or space to answer in this dissertation. Most pertinently, there are two questions concerning issues closely related.

Firstly, is there a defence for no platforming individuals which uses the same basis of discrimination about speech based on expert knowledge in spaces *other than* the university space? It seems plausible to me that democratic competence may produce more obligations than simply the production of expert knowledge in universities. Does it also produce obligations for media outlets and social media companies to no platform in order to prevent the spread of misinformation and promote the spread of expert knowledge? Can social media platforms be thought of as spaces of public discourse if they use algorithms which create confirmation bias echo-chambers?

Secondly, is there a defence for the type of no platforming present in popular culture and undertaken by students and members of the public based upon the norms of the space of public discourse? These individuals often claim that harm is being done by speakers being given a platform. Whether this is the case or not was unexplored in this essay, but if there is genuine reason to think that a speaker is causing harm, then there may be another reason to silence speakers on university campuses. On this argument, I will comment only this: that the bar for this harm should be set high enough that harm-based arguments for silencing can't be used by those who are ideologically opposed to one another to silence views that they disagree with. This doesn't mean, however, that such a bar could never be met.

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