10-1-2007

Liberalism, Faith, and the Virtue of Anxiety

Derek Malone-France

LIBERALISM, FAITH, AND
THE VIRTUE OF 'ANXIETY'

Derek Malone-France

I argue for a re-appropriation of the religious/philosophical concept of 'anxiety' regarding human finitude and fallibility as an 'epistemic virtue' that should frame the relationship between personal (including religious) belief and political participation and procedures. I contend that moral justifications of liberal norms based on 'respect for persons' and 'tolerance' are insufficient without relation to such a (complementary) epistemic basis. Furthermore, I argue that a careful examination of the internal logic of religious belief, *per se*, undermines traditional understandings of 'faith' (as being categorically opposed to 'doubt') and reveals support for liberal norms as an necessary implication thereof.

The liberal personality thrives not on a harmonious inner life,
but on both 'internal' and 'external' value plurality,
and a consequent unease or dissatisfaction.[1]

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue.[2]

In his essay "Charting Liberal Virtues," quoted above, political theorist Stephen Macedo gestures toward a central feature of the psychology of classical liberalism: a permanent—and productive—sense of *epistemic anxiety*, especially in relation to value judgments and the knowledge claims that frame them. Indeed, as I will argue below, principled liberalism requires acceptance of such a sense of anxiety as an inescapable aspect of authentic human experience. For the logic of liberalism depends upon an open-ended acknowledgement of the uncertainty of human understandings, including one's own. If one is utterly certain, beyond any measure of doubt, about the rightness of one's own perspective, morals, lifestyle, etc., then one has no reason to be either epistemically anxious or liberal.[3]

Of course, some measure of liberalism may be embraced simply as a *modus vivendi*. One may not have the necessary numerical, economic, or technological advantage to be able to enforce one's will (piece meal or wholesale), in which case one may compromise with others in order to avoid having someone else's will enforced on oneself. But such a purely pragmatic affirmation represents a merely strategic, not a principled, liberalism. Genuine liberalism is not simply a political *technique*. It is a commitment to certain fundamental moral, anthropological, and, even, metaphysical assumptions—and their normative implications. Liberalism makes use of political techniques in order to manifest its commitments,

but it shouldn't be confused with these techniques on account of that fact. *The Federalist*[4] is not just a user's manual; it is also an argument for a liberal understanding of the human condition. The quintessentially liberal pledge to "defend to the death" the right of another to speak an opinion of which one disapproves[5] would represent a violation of the very rationale for accepting liberal norms from the point-of-view of the merely pragmatic democrat. And such a pledge is pure lunacy from the perspective of anyone claiming an inerrant understanding of the right or the good. To repeat, then, an authentic (and steadfast) affirmation of classical liberal values requires a certain epistemic stance, a stance that involves some measure of anxiety, the sort of anxiety that is bred of doubt.[6]

One aim of this essay is to show that the inverse of this logic also holds true. Insofar as one acknowledges, even implicitly, that one is fallible and, therefore, incapable of "utter certainty," then one must feel some anxiety about the epistemic status of one's beliefs and judgments. And insofar as one feels such anxiety, one is *normatively obligated* to affirm basic liberal democratic principles, especially as relating to individual autonomy, the right of dissent, and the normativity of non-coercive deliberative discourse. More specifically, I will argue that the sort of anxiety just described represents an *epistemic virtue*, a cognitively basic response to the reality of human fallibility that should be understood as not only absolutely central to the liberal ethos and foundational to liberal norms but also definitively required by authentic religious commitment.

I will begin with a brief discussion of the historical context from which I am drawing this understanding of 'anxiety' (and its connection to classical liberalism), highlighting the contact between philosophical and religious themes that has been associated with the history of this concept. Next, I will explain my characterization of such anxiety as an 'epistemic virtue' and why I believe that it is the most fundamental of all liberal virtues, more fundamental, even, than 'tolerance' (which, I will show, ultimately rests on anxiety). Then, I will describe the phenomenology of epistemic anxiety and its role in democratic politics, contrasting my understanding with that set forth in a recent study of the function of anxiety in American democratic discourse by the political scientist George Marcus.[7] And, finally, I will discuss, in detail, the connection between epistemic anxiety and social and political tolerance, with particular attention to the relationship between anxiety and religious faith.

Modernity, Anxiety, and Liberalism

The notion of 'anxiety'—*angst, anxiété*, etc.—played an important role in late-modern philosophy and theology, beginning with Kierkegaard's psycho-philosophical explorations of human subjectivity and belief and culminating in prominent philosophical and theological anthropologies of the early- and mid-twentieth century. In both its philosophical and theological formulations the term 'anxiety' generally denoted a profound awareness of human finitude and the various existential predicaments associated with it. One such predicament arises from the epistemic implications of finitude: On the one hand, we are rational beings, with the capacity to explore the nature of the world around us and to construct

interpretations of its structure and significance. On the other hand, we are also finite beings, whose perspectives and, therefore, understandings are contingent and incomplete. Hence, our conceptions of 'the truth,' particularly with regard to human purpose and moral judgment, are not, and never can be, absolutely reliable.[8]

In the early-modern west, the *systematic* recognition of humanity's fallibility-in-finitude emerged along with the rise of deism during the seventeenth and (early) eighteenth centuries and found support in the critiques of ecclesiastical authority that took root in both philosophical and theological discourse during the Enlightenment.[9] Yet, during this period, absolute faith in the authority of canonical religious texts (and clerical interpretations of them) was not merely abandoned; it was, for most thinkers, replaced with an equally absolute faith in the authority and power of 'reason.' Thus, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century—when the 'unity' and ultimate verifiability of the conclusions of reason began increasingly to be called into question—that the *problem* of human fallibility truly emerged in an acute form.[10]

Kierkegaard may have been the first fully to perceive both the philosophical and religious dimensions of modern anxiety, and his writings on the subject spurred the development of important philosophical and theological perspectives that took human finitude as the starting point of their analyses. In philosophy, the various problems associated with human finitude became a central focus of perhaps the most culturally prominent school of philosophical thinking of the twentieth century, existentialism. In theology, the anxiety provoked by an awareness of the implications of human finitude found prominent and perspicuous formulations in the writings of thinkers like Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.[11]

Although fallibilism has remained a significant theme in both philosophy and theology, however, the concept of anxiety has largely disappeared from the current discourses of these fields. In epistemological terms, any systematic appeal to anxiety regarding human fallibility has been supplanted by the formulation of 'coherentist' understandings of knowledge and cognition. In moral and political terms, the notion of 'tolerance'—representing the positively formulated, prescriptive flip-side of epistemic anxiety—has come to dominate much of the discussion. Of course, methodologically speaking, such a shift from a negatively framed to more positively framed formulations of the issue was quite natural. Yet, in making this shift away from theorizing the notion of anxiety itself, contemporary liberal philosophical and religious thinkers have given up a powerful methodological concept, one with the capacity to provide vital support to liberal norms.

There are challenges associated with attempting to use 'anxiety' in this way, to be sure, the foremost of which is to overcome the natural resistance to such a use of this term because of the common association of 'anxiety' with negative psychological states. This is a legitimate concern, especially given the fact that there are other terms, such as 'humility,' which, *prima facie*, may seem to bear the same relevant denotation but which do not carry the same negative connotations in common usage. I will defer responding to this concern fully at this point and refer the reader to the remainder of the essay. In particular, the relationship of anxiety to humility—and I

do believe that there is an important relationship here—will be taken up explicitly in the second and third sections below. However, I will at this point offer one very general historical rationale for attempting to resurrect the sort of explicitly epistemic use of anxiety that I am referencing here.

The anxiety about their own fallibility as human beings that gradually emerged among a significant portion of the literate public in the west during the modern period was one important element in the development, evolution, and survival of political liberalism. This idea is closely connected, but not reducible, to the commonplace historical claim that liberalism emerged out of the chastening effect that the European 'wars of religion' had on evangelical and sectarian enthusiasms. Certainly, all sections of society tired of the bloodshed that prefaced European modernity, but there was also an anxiety that sprang most directly from the erosion of the epistemic authority of religious institutions and the historical normativity of the biblical narrative. This is an anxiety that owed more to the persistence of the deists than to the excesses of the Cromwellians, and its power only increased as nineteenth-century thinkers like Darwin and Strauss further undermined the bedrock assumptions on which religious (and other) groups had predicated their competing claims to historical and normative orthodoxy. And, if such epistemic anxiety was an important psychological and social precondition for the development of pluralistic liberal norms, then it seems reasonable to assume that its maintenance is a necessary condition for the preservation of such norms.

Though western intellectuals have long comforted themselves with the myth of a so-called "secular age," the empirical evidence has never supported it. The vast majority of Americans identify, as they always have, as religious, and the very great majority of religious Americans identify as Christian. That does not make the United States a "Christian nation," but it does suggest that the potential tension between religious faith and political principles remains one of enduring concern in the US. Moreover, for those who are both religious and liberal (in the broad and classical sense), the continuing influence of dogmatic religious and moral claims in sociopolitical discourse suggests that we face much the same struggle against absolutism today that our Enlightenment predecessors faced in their time. Hence, we would do well to promote the sorts of attitudes that helped to shape their response to this challenge (which was successful enough to reconstitute the very nature of political society in the west).

Of course, one may object that, insofar as basic liberal values are related to respect for the 'dignity' or 'sacredness' of the human individual, there may be other routes to authentic liberalism than that which runs through anxiety. After all, historically speaking, 'liberalism' (even in its classical sense) is a multivalent term, encompassing various related, but differentiable, conceptions. But the question is whether each of the various forms of 'liberalism' that emerged out of the Enlightenment are equally authentic, equally steadfast in their commitments to those principles that distinguish liberalism from more authoritarian modes of moral-political consciousness and practice. I cannot, here, offer an exhaustive survey of all of the particular diverse forms of liberalism that sprouted from the fertile theoretical ground of the Enlightenment. However, a very brief discussion of the divergence of the two most historically important branches of clas-

sical liberalism will, I think, be sufficient to indicate the basis for my claim that only a liberalism that refers, in some way or another, to a sense of epistemic anxiety is, ultimately, authentic and sustainable—as well as to indicate, in a preliminary way, the relevance of this view for religious faith.

Beginning with Isaiah Berlin's seminal essay "Two Concepts of Liberty,"[12] political theorists have widely recognized a fundamental distinction between the liberalism that very early took root in modern English political philosophy through the works of thinkers like Milton, Locke, and (later) Mill, and the quite different form of liberalism that emerged in France and Germany, through the combined influence of Rousseau and Kant (certainly there are also important differences within these groupings, but we are here focusing on their basic epistemic stances). For our purposes, Kant provides a perfect example of an Enlightenment liberal who arrives at a respect for human dignity and a principle of moral autonomy through an alternative route, one that bypasses the requirement of anxiety for which I am arguing. Indeed, Kant, perhaps more than any other philosopher, represents the urge to rescue some element of certainty from the jaws of epistemic doubt.

For our purposes, Berlin's discussion of Kant (and Rousseau) is particularly useful because it takes a teleological view, tracing the connections between the inner logic of Kantian liberalism and the successive, illiberal, developments in Continental political thought that followed. Critics have observed that Berlin simplifies matters for himself by ignoring, or at least minimizing, certain statements by Kant (and Rousseau) that do not fit neatly into his tidy analytical distinctions and historical narrative. There is certainly truth to this criticism. But it also, I think, misses the point. Berlin is interested in examining the theoretical and practical consequences that follow from various perspectives on human freedom. He adopts a broadly evolutionary perspective with regard to Kantian liberalism, rather than offering a more complex and nuanced exegesis, because he is less concerned with how Kant himself mediated the various tensions in his formulation than with how these tensions played themselves out in the thought (and practices) of those who took themselves to be following in his footsteps, as a measure of how well suited Kant's formulation really is to the task of grounding support for liberal norms. Since this is also our concern here, Berlin's analysis is *apropos*. Two points should be born in mind, though. First, the issue of whether liberalism can be adequately supported without explicit appeal to the implications of human fallibility does not map simply onto Berlin's famous distinction between 'negative' (Locke, Mill) and 'positive' (Kant, Rousseau) conceptions of liberty—though we may suspect that fallibilism fits more naturally with negative conceptions. Second, in drawing on his critique of Kant's positive conception of liberty, I am not endorsing Berlin's own particular negative conception as the only viable alternative.[13]

Rather than referencing human fallibility and an attendant sense of epistemic anxiety regarding that fallibility, Kant invokes the *majesty* of human reason in its capacity as moral lawgiver as the basis for his validation of individual autonomy. True freedom, according to Kant, consists in obedience to the moral law. And, although the moral law is unitary, one and the same for all, obedience ideally arises voluntarily, through the

autonomous exercise of the individual's practical judgment, a product of the self-legislating function of rationality. The problem, however, is that people do not always agree about what rationality reveals to be the proper moral judgment in a given situation, nor even what abstract "maxims" (to employ Kant's terminology) ought to govern our conduct in general. But this can only mean that not everyone is as rational as everyone else. And, given the nature of the relationship between the faculty (and capacity) of rationality and right belief and conduct on Kant's view, this imbalance presents a potential challenge to the logic of autonomy. Berlin observes:

> [For] Kant and rationalists of his type . . . the limits of liberty are deter-mined by applying the rules of 'reason,' which is more than the mere generality of rules as such, and is a faculty that creates or reveals a purpose identical in, and for, all men. In the name of reason anything that is non-rational may be condemned, so that the various personal aims which their individual imaginations and idiosyncrasies lead men to pursue . . . may, at least in theory, be ruthlessly suppressed. . . . The authority of reason and of the duties it lays upon men is iden-tified with individual freedom, on the assumption that only rational ends can be the 'true' objects of a 'free' man's 'real' nature.[14]

Combine such a view of rationality with some claim of absolute authority (be it political or spiritual), based upon some process or sign purportedly revelatory of the imprimatur of reason (or "truth"), and one has opened the door to the most severe abridgments of the very freedom of conscience that Kant begins by validating.

This is certainly not to suggest that Kant's own defense of liberal norms was halfhearted or insincere. As Berlin is careful to acknowledge, Kant's *intent* was to shield the individual from illegitimate encroachments by "authority," whether political or religious, not to provide justification for such encroachments (just as Rousseau's intent was almost certainly to ar-ticulate a model for deliberative self-governance among mutually autono-mous individuals, not a totalizing communitarianism that swallows up the freedom of the individual in the name of the good of the 'sovereign' whole). Yet, as Berlin shows, despite their own best intentions, Kant's con-ception of rationality and its connection to the law (both moral and civil), in historical conjunction with Rousseau's often naïve assumptions about the moral and practical reliability of the regulatory expressions of the 'gen-eral will,' led, more or less directly, to the State-deifying conception of the relationship between political and moral right found in the Romanticism of Fichte and Hegel, the anti-liberal and deterministic stance of Marx's communism, and the totalitarian sensibilities (and, ultimately, practices) of their political successors in both Germany and the Soviet Union.

Noting the irony in this progression, Berlin asks, "What can have led to so strange a reversal—the transformation of Kant's severe individualism into something close to a pure totalitarian doctrine on the part of thinkers some of whom claimed to be his disciples?" The answer, it seems to me, lies precisely in Kant's failure to link his defense of moral and political autonomy to a recognition of human fallibility and its implications in rela-tion to claims of authority. Kant is correct, in my view, to connect support

for liberal norms to epistemology, but he neglects to take sufficient account of human epistemic *limitations* in his formulation of this connection. It's not that respect for the dignity of the human individual *qua* rational agent has no role to play in the logic of liberalism. Respect for the individual's capacity to reason for herself is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition in the establishment of this logic. It requires a complementary relation to the sort of fallibilist delimitation of the claims of authority supported by an attitude of rationalized epistemic anxiety.

Kant's prescription that the individual never be treated merely as a "means" but always as an "end" does *not* necessarily translate into a proscription against illiberal coercion *if* one believes that the individual's salvation (be it political or spiritual) depends upon the acceptance of a set of beliefs and practices for the validity of which one claims absolute assurance. Under such circumstances, one may—consistently with Kant's principle (even if not his intent)—determine that it is crucial that the individual adopt the relevant point of view, even if coercion is required to guarantee this outcome. Similarly, one may determine that the use of force to prevent the dissemination of *alternative* beliefs and practices is required to ensure that the individual (or community) not be led astray from the "proper" path.

Though his intent was otherwise, Rousseau expresses the logic of such coercion in his famous proclamation that "whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body, which means only that he will be forced to be free."[15] Fichte, then, provides the necessary bridge from republicanism to totalitarianism when he adds: "To compel men to adopt the right form of government, to impose Right on them by force, is not only the right, but the sacred duty of every man who has both the insight and the power to do so."[16]

Thus, there is an historical case for the claim that 'liberalism' unconditioned by the moderating influence on ideological absolutism provided by a sufficiently robust recognition of fallibility, in the form of an attitude of epistemic anxiety, cannot ultimately sustain itself without sliding over into an aggressively dictatorial illiberalism. The potential authoritarianism implicit in the logic of Kant's and Rousseau's works gradually revealed itself in the thought of their successors and, tragically, in the form of actual totalitarian regimes—with which the nations that had, contrarily, adopted the liberalism of Milton, Locke, and Mill were forced to struggle, in order to defend (among other things) the value of individual autonomy over against the claims of the state. Kant and Rousseau surely would have been appalled by what their "disciples" wrought, but that does not change the (revealing) fact that it was *their* disciples—not Milton's, Locke's, and Mill's—who drifted to totalitarianism.

The relevance of this discussion in the context of religious belief should be obvious. If we replace the abstract political individual with a hypothetical religious apostate or heretic, and the state with the church, then we immediately see the consonance between Fichte's position and those forms of religious orthodoxy that privilege some particular (fallible) conception of "the truth" over the right of the individual to exercise moral and intellectual autonomy. Fichte's pronouncement is, of course, regarded with horror in light of the historic consequences of the adoption of this

attitude as a principle of socio-political regulation in both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Similarly, such an attitude in the context of religious belief provokes horror in those who see the historical abuses of Christian dogma in, for example, the Inquisition, the brutal suppression of "heretical" views in Calvin's Geneva, or Christian missionizing in the context of western colonialism, as profoundly immoral—and, indeed, unchristian—and who hear echoes of this attitude in the belligerent dogmatism of contemporary fundamentalism and ultra-orthodox Catholicism. To be sure, contemporary religious conservatives do not advocate such methods of "discipline" or conversion as were applied in the above historical examples. But there is no hard and fast line to be drawn between the attitude of the contemporary orthodoxists and that of their religious antecedents, and it is worth remembering that the current cultural and political consensus repudiating such methods developed *in spite of* the attitudes (and efforts) of past orthodoxists, not because of some internal check that they set on themselves out of respect for the dignity of others. Historically, the slippery slope into genuine brutality in the name of religious orthodoxy has been all too slick and the slide all too common (if not inevitable), when religious zeal is unqualified by an acute awareness of the fallibility of human understandings.

<center>*'Anxiety' as an Epistemic Virtue*[17]</center>

Despite the range of responses to the issue of epistemic anxiety offered by philosophers and theologians during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was a common tendency to understand such anxiety precisely as a *problem* in need of solution. Niebuhr, for example, blames human anxiety about the limitations of finitude for the ideological impulse that leads to absolutism in religious, moral, and political conviction. His description of the psychology of absolutism is worth quoting at some length:

> Man knows more than the immediate natural situation in which he stands and he constantly seeks to understand his immediate situation in terms of a total situation. Yet he is unable to define the total human situation without colouring his definition with finite perspectives drawn from his immediate situation. The realization of the relativity of his knowledge subjects him to the peril of skepticism. The abyss of meaninglessness yawns on the brink of all his mighty spiritual endeavors. Therefore man is tempted to deny the limited character of his knowledge, and the finiteness of his perspectives. He pretends to have achieved a degree of knowledge which is beyond the limit of finite life. This is the 'ideological taint' in which all human knowledge is involved and which is always something more than mere human ignorance. It is always partly an effort to hide that ignorance by pretension.[18]

Thus, for Niebuhr, anxiety is not only an inescapable consequence "of the paradox of freedom and finiteness," but also "the internal precondition of sin," where 'sin' is understood as the illegitimate adoption of an absolutist stance with regard to one's own perspective, opinions, values, etc.

Yet, as Niebuhr goes on to observe: "[A]nxiety is not sin. It must be distinguished from sin partly because it is its precondition and not its actuality, and partly because [anxiety] is the basis of all human creativity as well."[19] In other words, it is not the attitude of anxiousness itself but, rather, the all too human tendency to attempt to purge oneself of unwanted anxiety, by ignoring both the feeling and its implications and indulging in the self-delusion of epistemic privilege, that debases human consciousness and freedom through an abandonment of responsibility (or, as Niebuhr's philosophical counterparts would say, 'authenticity'). Niebuhr is right to say that, "Anxiety is the internal description of temptation."[20] But temptation is only a natural, ineluctable concomitant of moral freedom. To be morally free is, by definition, to be tempted. Temptation is not, in itself, an evil. To the contrary, it is the precondition of all moral achievement—one cannot laud the right choices of angels, for they are no choices at all.[21]

Accordingly, Niebuhr speaks of 'faith' not as a means to purge the individual of anxiety but, rather, as a means to "purge anxiety of the tendency toward sinful self-assertion."[22] Thus, he raises the possibility of an unproblematic, even empowering, form of anxiety. Drawing on Kierkegaard's suggestive references to "'anxiety over nothing'—that pregnant anxiety that is directed toward the future and that is a pristine element in every human being,"[23] Niebuhr describes this positive form of anxiety as the psychological ground of human creativity. Niebuhr calls such creative anxiety 'anxiety about perfection,' which he contrasts to the more insidious 'anxiety about insecurity.'[24] Anxiety about perfection is occasioned not by fear of uncertainty but, instead, by the desire to push one's understandings and creative accomplishments ever forward, to further the bounds of one's knowledge in the face of the seemingly limitless possibilities presented by human experience and activity.[25]

Niebuhr claims, however, that "Anxiety about perfection and about insecurity are . . . inexorably bound together in human actions and the errors which are made in the search for perfection are never due merely to the ignorance of not knowing the limits of conditioned values. They always exhibit some tendency of the agent to hide his own limits, which he knows only too well."[26] And this is surely true. But the fact that no human can achieve a perfectly unadulterated embodiment of the virtuous form of anxiety does not make such anxiety any less virtuous in character, nor should it keep us from encouraging the individual to cultivate the virtue of a *more* perfected, *less* adulterated anxiety. It is common to virtues that they exhibit within themselves the potentiality for vice, when they are taken to extremes, or aimed in the wrong direction. Thus, thrift may become greed or acquisitiveness, confidence may become pride, open-mindedness may become licentiousness, etc. Moreover, as already discussed, it is not 'anxiety about insecurity' itself that constitutes the error of unqualified absolutism but, rather, the reaction against such anxiety in the adoption of a dogmatic consciousness.[27]

Again, all human beings are necessarily fallible. Thus, fallibility is an epistemic *condition* of humanity as such, but, like other epistemic conditions, it can be ignored (at least at a conscious level). Anxiety, on the other hand, is *both* a condition of human existence (a universal one, according to Kierkegaard and his successors) and a *response* to such existence. As a

condition, anxiety represents a central element in what was once called 'philosophical anthropology': the elucidation of the fundamental conditions of human nature and existence, both ontic and epistemic. But its status as such a condition is derivative from its status as a (universal) response to the (definitive) condition of fallibility in which each human being finds herself, *qua* human being.[28] And, it seems to me, to the extent that anxiety about fallibility causes one to adopt a more generally circumspect point of view, it is a virtuous response. For it is only in the acceptance of some level of ultimate insecurity—some fundamental preservation of anxiety within the context of committed belief—that one can overcome the temptation to deify one's understandings. Only thus can one act on one's own convictions always in such a manner as to respect the right of others to hold and act according to contrary convictions. Hence, an appropriately moderated, but consciously sustained, sense of epistemic anxiety should be viewed as a sign of intellectual and psychological maturity. Indeed, my claim is that such anxiety represents the central epistemic virtue bequeathed (unintentionally) to contemporary democratic society and theory by our Enlightenment predecessors and that this epistemic virtue can help to support and sustain moral, religious, and political virtues, such as humility and tolerance.

An underlying and permanent sense of epistemic anxiety among a democratic citizenry is a socially and politically healthy thing, precisely because it serves to maintain citizens' acknowledgement of their own fallibility (both as individuals and as members of religious and other groups) and, thereby, discourages the sort of illegitimate absolutist and exclusivistic attitudes that tend to undermine the reasonability and productivity of democratic discourses. While an overly anxious attitude regarding one's beliefs can lead to an undesirable moral and political paralysis (or an overly reactionary assertion of supposed "certainty" meant to mask the deeper sense of insecurity), an appropriately moderated and rationalized attitude of anxiety can go far in promoting other democratic virtues, such as intellectual curiosity, cooperativeness and a willingness to compromise, and genuine tolerance of others' beliefs and lifestyles.

Moreover, anxiety, in the sense just outlined, represents a powerful, and in some ways less problematic, alternative to the notion of 'tolerance' as the organizing virtue in discussions of the basis of democratic norms. The notion of tolerance has frequently been criticized as seeming to imply an attitude of mere grudging agreement to coexist. Simply to 'tolerate' another in no way obligates one to attempt more fully to understand the other's perspective or beliefs, nor does it compel one to question the supposed certainty of one's own views. Tolerance, as a mode of engagement with others, can signal just as stalemated and stagnant a conversation as does intolerance. Reasonable anxiety regarding one's own positions, on the other hand, does obligate one to attempt more fully to understand and more fairly to assess alternative positions. And this is so precisely because anxiety, unlike tolerance, is an explicitly epistemic, and not merely a moral-political virtue. Insofar as a reasonable sense of anxiety about one's own epistemic limitations promotes an acknowledgement of the provisionality and revisability of one's opinions, one is encouraged to take democratic discourse seriously, as a cooperative (and relatively

non-coercive) mode of inquiry, will-formation, and action. Democratic legal prohibitions against prejudice and forced social or moral conformism gain a normative force that is absent when one is merely constrained by law to "tolerate" those whom one is, nevertheless, "certain" are wrong.[29] In short, a reasonable level of mutually sustained anxiety among citizens regarding their respective beliefs and opinions is the precondition for a democratic society of good-faith.

To be clear, my point here is not that anxiety should wholly displace tolerance from discussions of liberal norms. Rather, I am proposing that epistemic anxiety provides the necessary normative warrant for liberal norms such as tolerance. The logic of my argument is straightforward: Fallibility is an inescapable condition of human experience and understanding. The proper response to this condition is the adoption of a stance of epistemic anxiety (as I am here defining that term), because an unqualified confidence in one's own beliefs—in spite of the recognition of fallibility—would represent a failure adequately to account for the truth of one's fallibility in the formation of one's beliefs (and one's attitude towards them). Furthermore, classical liberalism represents the proper *sociopolitical instantiation* of epistemic anxiety, because the norm of non-coercion that it propagates is the procedural manifestation of such anxiety in the context of interpersonal action. To deny the liberal principle of non-coercion in the face of human fallibility is to willfully evade the epistemic anxiety that naturally attaches itself to human subjectivity by virtue of its finitude and fallen-ness. And to express such an evasion is to idolatrously deify one's own understanding and to violate the sacredness of other human beings' moral and intellectual autonomy through an expression of a self-validating "will to power" masquerading as a righteous concern for the salvation of those who are coerced.

The Phenomenology of Epistemic Anxiety

So far, I have characterized the particular notion of anxiety upon which my argument is predicated in terms of a conscious acknowledgement of the intrinsic fallibility of human understanding (especially one's own). In order further to clarify precisely what I mean by 'anxiety,' it will be helpful to contrast my use of this term with certain other, somewhat related, usages of the same word.

First, as should be obvious at this point, the form of anxiety that I have in mind must be distinguished from the common, everyday sense of the word, referring to mental stress or tension associated with some negatively anticipated event, challenge, or trial, as well as the related clinical sense of the word, referring to some form of persistent, neurotic attitude associated with some—real or imaginary—object of dread. Both of these types of anxiety can lead to precisely the sort of hardening of sentiment and opinion—as a reaction against the feelings of uncertainty they represent—that I wish to discourage. Just as Kierkegaard and his existentialist successors are careful to distinguish anxiety from 'fear,'[30] the former must similarly be distinguished from *nervousness*. To be 'anxious' about one's epistemic limitations as a finite being is to be self-consciously aware of one's existential situation and motivated to account for it adequately in

one's beliefs, claims, and behavior. To be 'nervous' about these limitations is to neurotically react to them in a way that, paradoxically, denies their inescapability, because such a reaction inevitably leads one either to seek succor in the false comfort of an absolutist mentality (that seems to erase, but in fact merely represses, the unpleasant insecurity from which one takes flight) or to embrace despair, indifference, and nihilism.

On the other hand, when it is associated with some particular issue of policy or social or ethical concern, the common, non-clinical variety of emotional anxiety can sometimes motivate people to open up to an exchange of ideas aimed at solving some problem or formulating some course of action. George Marcus has discussed the political psychology of such deliberation-inducing anxiety in *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics*.[31] According to Marcus, citizens tend to think and act according to habituated patterns of behavior except when some unanticipated or novel stimulus triggers the emotional response of 'anxiety' about how to think and/or act in light of this new datum or question. Marcus claims that only such visceral, stimulus-specific anxiety provokes the engagement of the subject's rational capacities, motivating the 'anxious' subject to employ her deliberative consciousness to come to some resolution of the problem or question at hand and, thereby, alleviate her anxiety.[32] "Reason," he says, "does not come from reason's own prompting."[33]

There are some problems with Marcus's account of the role of anxiety and deliberation in the democratic sphere, however. First, he makes ordinary citizens overly dependent upon political elites, such as members of government and the media, who are given almost sole responsibility for recognizing emerging problems and issues and employing emotive rhetoric in order to inspire the requisite anxiety among the people at-large.[34] This is a problem precisely because, in a democratic society, it is ultimately the underlying attitudes and inclinations of the *demos* itself that are reflected in the choices that politicians and the media make about what sorts of discussions to have and how to portray those discussions to the public. If the public doesn't maintain a constant sense of engagement with emerging issues, then they will not demand, nor will politicians and media outlets provide, the sort of discourse that promotes genuinely democratic and deliberative decision-making.

Also, Marcus seems not only to invest too great a trust in political elites not to abuse the power of anxiety provoking rhetoric, but also too readily to assume that the mobilization of public anxiety will, more often than not, lead to reasoned discourse, as opposed to reactionism and narrowed sentiment and imagination. This problem is directly related to the previous one: a populace that is accustomed to maintaining a *reasonable* level of deliberation-inducing anxiety *at all times* will be less likely to fall prey to waves of *irrational* anxiety associated with specific socially or politically traumatic or revolutionary events or circumstances.[35]

Finally, Marcus's account of anxiety remains superficial precisely because he views anxiety only as an emotive state, without significant or coherent cognitive content—part of the "unaware and inarticulate" realm of emotional response, which he sharply divides from conscious thought.[36] Hence, he is unable to appreciate the cognitive significance of anxiety as an intellectual, and not merely an emotional, state or response. Nor is he

able to formulate the possibility of a systematic (or methodological) anxiety that permanently maintains the engagement of deliberative openness by permanently maintaining a sense of anxiety associated with the absence of both ultimate certitude and static socio-political equilibrium.

Nevertheless, as a description of the psychological connection between the emotional component of anxiety and its intellectual, moral, religious, and political implications, Marcus's account can provide a first step toward a deeper phenomenology of the more thoroughgoing epistemic anxiety I am advocating.[37] In a sense, one might view such epistemic anxiety as a systematic intellectual and practical generalization of the mindset of deliberative openness that Marcus describes as the ideal outcome of issue-specific anxiety. The transient emotive state of anxiety that he describes can represent the psychological precursor to the adoption of the deeper, permanent epistemic anxiety of the self-reflective democrat, but only insofar as this transient state of uncertainty and deliberative engagement is consciously detached from, and generalized beyond, the provoking stimulus in relation to which it arises. The *feeling* of anxiety must be intellectually internalized and transformed into an explicit awareness of one's own, and others', intrinsic fallibility.

Obviously, one who adopts a stance of epistemic anxiety will, at times, experience the psychological correlate of emotional anxiety. Yet, such emotionally weighted anxiety must not take on an urgency that contravenes the impulse to remain open to dialogue. Nor should it sink into a morbidity that relinquishes deliberation for despair. Indeed, it is important to note the difference between 'anxiety' and 'despair,' where the latter indicates not merely a recognition of human fallibility but also an abandonment of the ideals of objective rationality and truth that are presupposed by deliberation as such. This is the point at which the present defense of epistemic anxiety departs most sharply from the existentialist tradition it references. The anxiety that I am advocating here does not presuppose the dissolution of the idea of objective reasons (or even values). It recognizes our character as self-defining beings who make choices about what to believe, choices that are limited by our own finitude and that are, therefore, fallible. And it acknowledges that it can be "anguishing to know that our freedom is so far-reaching as to leave our existence permanently unsettled in this way."[38] But it need not go so far as to pronounce, as the existentialists typically do, that there is no source of values that transcends finite human understandings and to which such understandings can legitimately make reference.

It is no less 'authentic' to believe, wholeheartedly, that one has apprehended some objective truth about the human condition or right conduct but, in recognition of one's own fallibility, to avoid any imposition of one's view onto others, than it is to toss aside the notion of moral objectivity entirely and simply "own" one's choices as though they made reference to nothing outside of the arbitrary (or perhaps anthropologically imposed) conditions of one's own will. One need not accept Sartre's claim that "nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value,"[39] in order to be true to the insight that one's choices among possible values or actions may be flawed or incomplete, or may (at least in some cases) have equally valid alternatives. *Mauvaise foi* is expressed in claims such as that one could not possibly be mistaken in one's belief

about 'x,' or that one's belief about 'x' is exempted somehow from the normal rules of reason and evidence, or that some beliefs are epistemically privileged, or that some interpretation of a text is self-evidently 'inerrant.' There is no bad faith or self-deception in the claim that one holds firmly to certain beliefs or accepts certain interpretations for reasons that seem to transcend the caprice of mere self-definition, uninformed by objective reference, if one simultaneously acknowledges the possibility that one is mistaken about these reasons. So long as one abstains from leveling unqualified judgments at those with whom one disagrees, or trying to force them to submit to one's view irrespective of their own wishes and beliefs, and remains open to being persuaded otherwise, there is no illegitimate flight from anxiety.

Kierkegaard sees the embodiment of authentically lived anxiety in the person of Socrates,[40] who remains in a permanent state of epistemic anxiety precisely because he—unlike Kierkegaard's 'knight of faith'—refuses to make the subjective leap into 'the absurd.' Instead, Socrates relentlessly confronts the limits of his own understanding, while simultaneously bursting the epistemic bubbles of his various interlocutors. Socrates' wisdom lies in his consistent awareness of his own "ignorance," and his generalization of this awareness as an epistemic principle that leads him to be suspicious of all unqualified knowledge claims and to compulsively pursue deliberative debate with others. Such wisdom, or "Socratic ignorance,"[41] as Kierkegaard calls it, does not preclude personal commitment. Indeed, Socrates is willing to die for his beliefs. But what Socrates would presumably not be willing to do is to take the life (or infringe illegitimately on the freedom) of another in order to promote his own beliefs. *Socratic anxiety*, as I would now like to call it, requires circumspection and humility, but not indecision or paralysis.

Hume—who consistently recognized the imperatives of belief and action, in the face of his own skeptical doubts about human understanding—beautifully characterizes the attitude and practical implications associated with Socratic anxiety in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.[42] At one point, his skeptical character Philo responds to the charge that skepticism, like stoicism, represents a philosophy that can be entertained at an intellectual level but that is impossible to live out in a truly consistent manner. Philo replies:

> I allow of your comparison between the Stoics and the Skeptics. . . . But you may observe, at the same time, that though the mind cannot, in Stoicism, support the highest flights of philosophy, yet, even when it sinks lower, it still retains somewhat of its former disposition; and the effects of the Stoic's reasoning will appear in his conduct in common life, and through the whole tenor of his actions. . . . In like manner, if a man has accustomed himself to skeptical considerations on the uncertainty and narrow limits of reason, he will not entirely forget them when he turns his reflection on other subjects; but in all his philosophical principles and reasoning, I dare not say, in his common conduct, he will be found different from those who either never formed any opinions in the case or have entertained sentiments more favorable to human reason.[43]

I have no intention to equate Socratic anxiety with outright 'skepticism,' and I, for one, certainly do entertain "sentiments more favorable to human reason" than those, at times, expostulated by Hume. Yet, as a committed democrat, I find his description of a mode of reasoning and living that is chastened by a recognition of one's own (and everyone else's) ultimate fallibility very appealing.

I, personally, do believe that human understanding can claim some genuinely objective knowledge of the world as it is independently of our own mental-linguistic constructions—even if this knowledge can only be *expressed* through the employment of such constructions. I also believe that there are certain logically necessary, *a priori* truths, such as that expressed by the 'law of non-contradiction.' But there is no obviously correct, no 'self-evident,' set of moral regulations or judgments that can simply be deduced from such knowledge with unambiguous certitude. (Nor is there any legitimate shortcut around fallibility through the arbitrary epistemic privileging of certain 'scriptures' or other supposed repositories of infallible wisdom.) While I have strong opinions about many issues, and may even feel at times that I cannot understand how any reasonable person could disagree with certain propositions, I always know that equally reasonable people do in fact disagree over even the most fundamental moral, religious, and political issues (which, of course, is not to say that all positions in any such dispute are equally reasonable[44]).

Given the acknowledgement that it is, in principle, always possible that I am the one who is mistaken, even regarding my most deeply held beliefs, I cannot legitimately claim the right to coerce others to believe as I do. Nor can I—in the absence of some voluntary agreement to the contrary—claim the right to force them to act in accordance with my principles rather than their own. Of course, this position need not imply pacifism, and it certainly does not imply anarchism. Indeed, one of my central points is precisely that the recognition of human fallibility that is represented by this doctrine of anxiety has normative implications at a meta-political level, implications such as that the use of force or coercive power may be employed to prevent others from violating the freedom of their fellow human beings out of some misguided sense of epistemic or moral superiority. Anxiety about fallibility would have been a good reason for the nineteeth- and twentieth-century struggles against slavery and fascism, for example, not a reason to have tolerated such practices.

Hume (through Philo) continues, in the same passage quoted above, to remark: "To whatever length anyone may push his speculative principles of skepticism, he must act, I own, and live, and converse like other men; and for this conduct he is not obliged to give any other reason than the absolute necessity he lies under of so doing."[45] Since the bearer of Socratic anxiety is not necessarily quite so pessimistic about human reason as the Humean skeptic, "the absolute necessity" to act, live, and, especially, converse may be understood by the Socratic liberal not as an arbitrary and imposed requirement of human existence but, rather, as a valuable epistemic compensation. Yes, we are thrust into a world that showers us with data while limiting the perspective from which we apprehend it. But we are not thrust into this world alone. We have the company of others, who likewise perceive the world from limited perspectives, but perspectives

not our own. And our differing perspectives offer opportunities for cor-relation and contrast, for verification and falsification—or at least concur-rence or challenge.[46] Thus, we stand also under the obligation (not "abso-lute" but normative) to condition our belief with humility—for humility is one fundamental moral and religious virtue that follows directly from the epistemic virtue of anxiety.

We can and should advocate our respective views. We must argue. And we've every right to attempt through all legitimate means to persuade. But we cannot arrogate to ourselves the right to coerce (at least not outside of the legitimate coercive requirements of democratic decision-making procedures). For in doing so we deify our own, decidedly non-divine and finite, understandings. The phenomenology of epistemic, or Socratic, anx-iety encompasses various levels, from the emotive to the intellectual, and it has both methodological and practical implications. In practical terms, though, it boils down to a genuine respect for disagreement; a principled preference for substantive dialogue as a means of decision-making; an af-firmation of compromise over unilateralism in moral, social, and political affairs; and a strong reluctance to call upon force to reshape circumstance before all other viable options have been exhausted.

Anxiety and Tolerance

The idea that genuinely recognizing human fallibility requires allowing the free exchange of ideas, respect for others' opinions, and remaining open to the possibility that one is mistaken is hardly revolutionary. It was revolutionary when Milton put it forward in his *Areopagitica*,[47] and again when Locke reiterated the theme in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*.[48] And it was less revolutionary but importantly expanded and clarified when Mill championed it in *On Liberty*.[49] But Milton could not—because of his own religious commitments—take his argument to its logical conclusion, and he ends up with a significant residue of epistemic privilege in his stance towards the truth claims of (Protestant) Christianity, a residue that survives in Locke. Mill's theorization of fallibility (largely) achieves the consistency that Milton and Locke failed to realize. But Mill himself sets the stage for the methodological transition away from theorized fallibility by following Locke in turning immediately to the notion of 'tolerance' as the moral-political virtue *non plus ultra* of political liberalism.[50]

The problem with tolerance, from a non-liberal perspective, is that the-oretically it is presented as a sort of meta-virtue that ought to transcend all various substantive points-of-view, but practically it presents itself as an externally imposed mandate that is inconsistent with the prescriptions of some substantive points-of-view. In other words, the claim that tolerance represents a perspective-neutral principle of rational discourse is chal-lenged on the grounds that tolerance conflicts with certain religious and moral conceptions that stress the need for universal adherence to some set of epistemically privileged doctrines. Hence, the issue is often treated as a conflict between the civic virtue of tolerance and the religious virtue of 'faith.' But, as the preceding discussion of epistemic anxiety suggests, this strictly polemical view of the relation between liberal tolerance and reli-gious faith rests on fundamental misconceptions of each of these notions.

In his classic work on the relationship between faith and knowledge in religious belief, the contemporary philosopher of religion John Hick observes that, "According to the most widespread view of the matter today faith is unevidenced or inadequately evidenced belief." He then goes on to add:

> Faith thus consists in believing strongly various propositions, of a theological nature, which the believer does not and cannot *know* to be true. To know here is taken to mean either to observe directly or to be able to prove by strict determination. Where this is possible, there is no room for faith. It is only that which lies beyond the scope of human knowledge that must be taken, if at all, on faith or trust. When in such a case we do adopt some belief, the lack of rational compulsion to assent is compensated by an act of will, a voluntary leap of trust.[51]

The problem with this view lies in the qualification expressed in the first line of the quote: "of a theological nature." This implies that 'faith' is not an element in decisions about what to believe in other arenas. In other words, this formulation assumes that in all of the non-theological realms of human inquiry and belief it is possible always (or at least very often) to "observe directly or . . . to prove by strict determination." Furthermore, this view assumes that it is generally the case in non-theological matters that interpretations of that which is "observe[d] directly" and outcomes of "strict" proofs are uncontroversial, because there is a "rational compulsion to assent." But is this the case?

To be sure, it sometimes *seems to me* that the evidence or arguments regarding some issue so strongly support one view of the matter that I feel rationally compelled to assent to that view. Yet, almost invariably there is someone else—someone whom I would not be willing to simply dismiss as "irrational"—who disagrees. Moreover, even in the most 'objective' (and I do not mean to belittle this term) fields of inquiry, it is often simply not possible to directly observe or strictly demonstrate the answer to questions of real significance. This does not mean that thought shuts down in the face of such uncertainty. Inquiry, like life, must proceed in the absence of final certainty. Thus, science, very much like religion, proceeds in agreement where agreement is possible, and it is the backdrop of general agreement that allows for the pursuit of those points about which no such agreement exists, sometimes leading to discoveries or new theories that destabilize or demolish the prior consensus from which they proceeded. This is the pragmatic-evolutionary character of scientific inquiry, and of life in general.

Thus, 'faith' is present in all aspects of human understanding.[52] To be clear, I do not deny that there is a significant difference in the degree of faith required to affirm, say, the basic principles of the theory of natural selection, as opposed to the claim that the Nicene Trinitarian formula expresses some fundamental truth about ultimate reality. The latter certainly rests on a thinner evidential foundation. I am simply denying that there is a *categorical* difference between the two. That is not to say that there are not generally reasons to believe in one way rather than another. But such

reasons rarely, if ever, "compel assent"[53] for everyone who encounters them—and those who believe that they do may be mistaken. The failure to recognize that thought and action always depend on some degree of faith that one has seen things rightly not only encourages non-religious people to unjustifiably disdain the notion of religious faith *per se*, but also encourages many religious people themselves to accept the notion that the objects of belief relevant to their religious lives lie "beyond the scope of human knowledge" and are, therefore, exempt from the normal rules of evidence. Strict *fideism* makes no sense if questions such as "Is this text demonstrably the 'Word of God'?" are in fact open to some measure of rational adjudication.

The putative uniqueness of religious belief, as being a matter of faith, provides support for the traditionalist (monotheistic) religious notion that faith is a mysterious, divinely-bestowed third element standing between the believing subject and the object of belief, encouraging some 'believers' to view the 'unbelief' (notice, not 'alternative belief') of others as a product (and sign) of the latter's moral degeneracy or spiritual deficiency, rather than simply a matter of intellectual disagreement over an issue on which it is possible for reasonable people to disagree. This misconception further obscures the too little discussed resources for combating absolutism that exist within religious traditions, like Christianity, in which the urge to absolutism has been historically pronounced.[54] Such intolerant believers embrace what we may call *Calvin's contradiction*, after the theologian who, perhaps, most brazenly weds the notions of religious certainty and textual and interpretive 'inerrancy' with the directly contradictory notion of humanity's moral and epistemic 'fallenness.'[55] Calvin's steadfast refusal to consider the implications of his view of human 'depravity' for his own claims regarding the nature and meaning of 'scripture' has conditioned Protestant belief ever since, setting the stage for the flight from anxiety that has helped to push the self-satisfied certainty of many Christians in tragically (and sinfully) aggressive and intolerant directions.

Indeed, this all too common propensity to circumscribe the epistemic implications of finitude within the bounds of an absolutist and exclusivistic religious understanding represents one important reason why the traditional virtue of 'humility' cannot play the role I am ascribing here to anxiety. Humility, like tolerance, is a religious, moral, and political virtue, not an epistemic one. Humility certainly can be connected to the epistemic conditions of finitude, and, yet, one need not genuinely recognize these conditions in order to affirm humility as a virtue. Many religious absolutists acknowledge the rightness of a humble attitude, but they envision such humility as part and parcel of their fideism. From this perspective, one has humility towards God, not towards one's own beliefs about God. Perhaps one also is encouraged to remain humble in one's relations to other humans, but, again, this is encouraged as a requirement of, but not with respect to, one's religious and moral convictions. It was not humility but, rather, anxiety that helped provoke the modern west's move towards liberalism. The relationship of anxiety to humility is not one of equivalence, it is one in which the former grounds the latter more deeply.[56]

The notion of epistemic anxiety stands as a corrective to the tendency among many religious believers to conveniently ignore the implications of

human finitude for religious belief. Fundamentalism is idolatry. This is a language that will strike closer to home for many who are not persuaded by the notion of tolerance. The same people who most vociferously hurl the charge of "playing God" at those who extend their technological reach beyond what the former think appropriate are those most often guilty of playing God epistemically, of deifying their own finite, fallible understandings. And this argument leaves little room for strong rebuttal. Even the most conservative traditionalist will not be so brazen as to claim infallibility. Of course, they will claim it on behalf of some person or group of persons portrayed in their religious tradition (e.g., Jesus and the biblical authors), but even setting aside the *a priori* argument from finitude and granting, hypothetically, the possibility that some person(s) might have possessed infallibility, the problem remains that only another infallible person could inerrantly recognize the infallibility of the first. And no religious tradition of which I am aware licenses such a claim by the practitioner.[57]

At this point, some readers may object that there is an apparent paradox or self-contradiction implicit in my account of epistemic anxiety and/or in the general liberal principle of non-coercion that I seek to justify through this account. Such an objection might take several different forms: First, there is a formal conception of the (putative) paradox that is as old as the liberalism it is meant to counter. This version of the objection claims that the principle of non-coercion is, if enforced, self-violating, because it requires (or may require) the employment of coercive means in order to prevent actions[58] that are judged to be contradictory to or inconsistent with the principle—e.g., the use of federal law enforcement powers to ensure compliance with civil rights statutes and judicial determinations at state and local levels. Traditionally, liberal theorists have responded to this criticism by drawing a distinction between 'substantive' and 'procedural' norms and by arguing that liberal political regulation is purely procedural—and, therefore, substantively 'neutral'—in character.[59]

Thus, the liberal prohibition against coercion is viewed as categorically different in character from any substantive belief or principle of action that might be enforced contrary to such a prohibition. And this difference stems, in part, from the fact that liberalism leaves untouched the individual's right and capacity to believe and personally to act upon whatever beliefs she may acquire (through whatever relevant process of belief formation one might identify), so long as she does not violate others' right to this same freedom. Hence, the validity of the enforcement of liberal norms is connected to the ineluctable, pragmatic exigencies of social life.[60]

Human beings must socialize across ideological lines,[61] and the only way to do so without enduring endless cycles of violent conflict or arbitrary oppression of some individuals or groups by others is to adopt procedural regulations regarding such socialization that mutually maximize the respective rights to substantive freedom of all members of society. But such mutual maximization of rights requires the minimization of the capacity of any particular substantive viewpoint to intrude upon any other. While it is true that the latter form of regulation limits the former (at least for those perspectives that validate intrusiveness), it does so *of necessity*, and, thus, the complaint against it is what Berlin would call a mere "counsel of perfection." Every perspective is limited in the same way, and

none more so than any other—and this includes the liberal perspective, which is uniquely self-limiting (see below). Furthermore, as Charles Larmore rightly observes: "If just laws serve to check the arbitrary will of others, their impact on our conduct and the prohibitions they impose do not amount in themselves to a reduction in our freedom. By doing away with our vulnerability, they bring into existence a realm of freedom that we would not otherwise have."[62]

Alternatively, one might object that my affirmation of the principle of human fallibility, upon which my conception of epistemic anxiety—and, therefore, my formulation of the basis of the principle of non-coercion and other liberal norms—is based, is self-refuting, because such an assertion of fallibility itself is subject to doubt on its own grounds. In other words, my claim that all human understanding is fallible is also, on its own logic, fallible and, therefore, dubitable. But does this really represent a paradox or self-contradiction? I do not think so, because 'fallible' is not the same as 'false.' I can perfectly well admit that my own conception of human fallibility is, itself, fallible, while maintaining my conviction that it is, also, true. Indeed, this is the only self-consistent manner in which I can maintain this conviction. I am simply admitting that it is possible that I'm wrong about all of this. That doesn't mean that I *am* wrong. Possibility is not actuality.

This particular possibility does have normative implications, however, which is precisely why, as I noted earlier, I (and other liberals of my type) stop short of seeking to coercively disabuse others of their own absolutist perspectives. As I just discussed above, the claims of liberalism are inextricably linked to the conditions (and necessities) of social life. The enforcement of liberal norms supported by my conception of human fallibility and epistemic anxiety is—consistently with its own logic—self-limiting as well as regulatory. That is, the regulatory reach of this conception of the normativity of liberal norms is limited by its own internal check on the claims of authority, including its own authority. Obviously, this is not to say that I will not attempt by all appropriate means of persuasion to convince others that absolutist understandings are inherently flawed and pernicious, just as I expect that they will attempt to convince me otherwise. I value such dialogue precisely because of my recognition of my own fallibility (indeed, that is the point). Moreover, my obligatory affirmation of the fallibility of my own view is the reason why I have deployed various arguments to support my claim regarding the ineluctability of human fallibility vis-à-vis religious beliefs. If I could somehow infallibly prove human fallibility (now, there would be a paradox), then such arguments would be superfluous (and, in the case of the example just given, mistaken).

Finally, one might formulate the objection substantively, rather than formally, by challenging the logic of epistemic anxiety in relation to the very dynamics of belief. This form of the objection might proceed thus: Imagine that I hold a set of beliefs that, among other things, implies that I have an obligation to enforce a particular doctrinal orthodoxy by preventing the dissemination of heretical views and, if necessary, to do so coercively. Further, assume that this set of beliefs is at least *prima facie* rational, because it is based upon my considered assessment of the relevant evidence. The foregoing account of the normative implications of epistemic anxiety appears,

in this case, to require that, given any doubt whatsoever regarding the certainty of my beliefs in general, I must reject as false a specific belief that currently I hold as true upon the basis of the preponderance of evidence as I construe it. This seems to be a paradoxical conclusion (and, perhaps, an impossible requirement in practice, given the often involuntary character of belief formation as a function of evidential consideration).

But this objection misconstrues the relationship of epistemic anxiety to the dynamic of belief that informs our hypothetical orthodoxist's conviction. My point is that human fallibility itself is an ineluctable element *in* the body of evidence that our erstwhile believer must consider in forming her beliefs in the first place. In other words, epistemic anxiety does not require that she paradoxically find false a belief that she heretofore held to be true on reasonable grounds; rather, it *calls into question the assumed reasonableness of her belief that she is justified in approaching others coercively* because such a belief necessarily ignores the epistemic implications of the fact of human fallibility (and it is worth emphasizing that my claim is limited to her belief in her right of coercion; she may, on my view, continue reasonably to have faith in her overall belief system, despite her recognition of its fallibility, since there can be no rational obligation to eschew substantive belief in general—because "ought implies can"). Thus, the normative connection between fallibility and anxiety, and, in turn, between anxiety and liberalism, is founded on the very rational obligation to consider all relevant and available evidence in the formation of one's beliefs to which this objection refers.

Now, one might attempt to avoid this implication for religious belief by admitting that fallibility is, indeed, an ineluctable condition of human nature and, therefore, a significant evidential factor that must be considered in the formation of rational belief but, also, claiming that *revelation*—when added into the mix of evidential support for a certain set of beliefs—can override the normative implication of fallibility by providing a touchstone of certainty that trumps all reasonable doubt. But, as I have already shown, this position involves a vicious regress, because any claim to an infallible, revelatory understanding could only be inerrantly identified as such by one who was, already, also infallible (and therefore without need of such a revelation, in any case).

The same logic obviously holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for any revelatory text, act, etc. Indeed, with things like texts and acts, the problem is compounded by issues of interpretation.[63] Hence, appeals to revelatory knowledge can validate the claims of faith only when that faith is conditioned by an acceptance of the fallibility of the very "knowledge" provided by (and deciphered from) the revelation(s) in question—that is, only when that faith embraces the virtue of epistemic anxiety.

Nor will it do to admit that human fallibility must be considered as one element in the evidential mix but claim that a consideration of the whole of the evidence might still, legitimately, lead one to affirm an orthodoxist position (if that implies a willingness to coerce others to think as one does or to force them to act in accordance with an ideology they do not share). The implications of acknowledging one's own fallibility must be viewed *categorically*, not as a matter of degree, in relation to one's interactions with others. For there is a categorical difference, morally speaking, between

voluntarily adopting and adhering to a perspective or ideology on the basis of one's own fallible construal of the evidence for and against it and forcing someone else to adopt and/or adhere to it contrarily to her own judgment on the matter. It is one thing, to take a currently prominent example, for an individual to suppress and refrain from acting upon her own homosexual tendencies on the basis of her commitment to a religious perspective that proscribes them. It is quite another thing for her and other members of her religious community to seek coercively to impose the same proscription on others.

This is the point at which epistemic anxiety connects with respect for the dignity of the individual. As I indicated in my discussion of Kant, liberalism certainly depends upon such respect, but it also depends—crucially, I think—on the recognition that respecting human dignity requires respecting the right of others to construct, and live in accordance with, diverse conceptions of what contributes to and what derogates from that dignity. And, I submit, it is epistemic anxiety, as I have formulated it here, that produces and supports this further recognition. If one could know *infallibly* that one's own perspective on any matter of moral judgment were correct, then such knowledge would (at least arguably) override the moral distinction between adopting the requirements of this perspective for oneself and imposing them on others. Without such a guarantee, however, one must respect the right of others to adopt contrary perspectives as a matter of highest principle.

Therefore, tolerance is *not* an "externally imposed mandate" that stifles the spirit of religious belief by holding in check its naturally evangelical impulse. Rather, it is an internal requirement of the logic of the religious mentality, which is founded upon the recognition of humanity's inadequacy in the face of forces and questions that are larger than us, holding in check what Niebuhr calls "the tendency toward sinful self-assertion." Thus, true religious faith does not imply a 'teleological suspension of the ethical,'[64] nor, for that matter, the liberal. For such faith—insofar as it makes even implicit reference to the distinction between the infinitude of its object and the finitude of its subject—necessarily includes recognition of the inadequacy of the individual's understandings and, therefore, prohibits dogmatically motivated action that transgresses contractual ethical norms and freedoms. In other words, genuinely self-reflective faith in something that is believed to transcend the human, *eo ipso*, implies the normativity of liberal norms, like tolerance.

Tolerance is not the foundational virtue of liberalism. Tolerance is derivative from anxiety, psychologically, historically, and theoretically.[65] Anxiety about the limitations of one's own understanding—an inescapable byproduct of the erosion of appeals to epistemic privilege that helps define the Enlightenment mentality—is the true *sine qua non* of liberal democratic culture. In a society in which epistemic anxiety is suppressed, neither tolerance nor liberty can long survive.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to say a last word regarding the common connotations of the term 'anxiety.' While I have tried to show that there are good

reasons for accepting a use of the term that is positive, rather than negative, it should also be clear that the mindset that I am propounding is a difficult one. The conscious acceptance of anxiety, in the sense I have outlined here, represents the embrace of a higher level of self-responsibility. This is not an easy task, nor should we expect it to be. If virtuous attitudes and behaviors came easily, we would all live in near utopias. This is one thing that religious consciousness understands and that liberals have been too reluctant to insist upon. Genuine liberal democracy, like genuine spirituality, makes serious, sometimes even unpleasant, demands on its practitioners. We must give something up, in order to gain something immeasurably greater—in this case, the ignorant bliss of a self-satisfied understanding, for a society in which people are free to choose for themselves not only how to interpret the world but also how to live in it.

Sartre, at one point, observes that the existentialists' diagnosis of the human condition is rejected "not [because of] our pessimism, but the sternness of our optimism."[66] We live in a world in which only a stern optimism is a credible optimism. Anxiety regarding our inescapable fallibility-in-finitude represents more than a past turning point in human history; it represents the maturation of human consciousness, and maturity, like civilization, has its discomforts. But without an ever-present sense of such anxiety, we fall back into a self-satisfaction (or worse, a nervous bellicosity) that belies the fundamental truth revealed in all of the world's great traditions of wisdom: we are imperfect.[67]

The George Washington University

NOTES

1.   Stephen Macedo, "Charting Liberal Virtues," In *Virtue*, ed. John W. Chapman and William A. Galston (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 215.
2.   II P. 1:5 (KJB).
3.   As I will discuss, at various points, below, this notion of permanent 'epistemic anxiety' is not meant to signify, or imply, either global skepticism or unqualified relativism. Nor is the uncertainty that I am prescribing meant to contradict the legitimacy of deep affirmational commitment to one's own understandings. The normative thrust of the requirement I am articulating here is aimed at the level of sociopolitical intercourse. It is perfectly reconcilable with personal *confidence* in one's beliefs, so long as that confidence does not pass over into an unqualified certainty or express itself coercively.
4.   Terence Ball, ed., *The Federalist, with Letters of "Brutus"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
5.   Widely attributed to Voltaire, but probably of later origin.
6.   Again, as noted above, the "doubt" I have in mind here is not the doubt of the skeptic. As I will explain in much greater detail below, when I speak of a "permanent—and productive—sense of epistemic anxiety," I do not mean to suggest that one should maintain a constant state of aversion to belief or conviction. Nor do I mean to suggest the adoption of a relativistic stance that would hold that all beliefs are *equally* dubitable. Some beliefs—e.g., my own belief that I am currently typing these words—approach absolute certainty

in their justification, while others—e.g., that the natural procreative relationship between male and female human beings implies a normative prohibition against sexual relations between members of the same gender—are necessarily less certain, partly because they require extensive relation to a complex of other (controversial or potentially controversial) presuppositional beliefs for their justification.

7.   *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics* (University Park Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

8.   Kierkegaard, for example, writes: "Not for a single moment is it forgotten that the subject is an existing individual, and that existence is a process of becoming, and that therefore the notion of the truth as identity of thought and being is a chimera of abstraction . . . not because the truth is not such an identity, but because the knower is an existing individual for whom the truth cannot be such an identity as long as he lives in time" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941], p. 176).

9.   To be sure, the recognition of the epistemic limitations imposed by human finitude pre-dates the modern turn. Augustine and Aquinas, for example, both explicitly discuss the limits of human understanding in such terms, but they apply the recognition of such limits only *within* the context of accepted Christian dogma, not *in relation to* this dogma itself.

10.   There were, of course, dissenters from the Enlightenment cult of reason, Hume chief among them, but I am speaking here of the general character of Enlightenment thought, and it is notable that, for example, Hume's status and influence among his contemporaries was minor, compared to what it is today.

11.   See especially Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) and Tillich's *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

12.   In *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), pp. 191–242 [the essay was first published in 1953].

13.   As Charles Larmore observes, there is a "third" concept of liberty at work in classical Western political theory, one that has reemerged in a prominent way in recent republican political theory, namely, liberty as 'non-domination.' This conception of liberty fits into Berlin's schema as a 'negative,' rather than 'positive,' conception, but it differs from Berlin's own (Hobbesian) formulation of negative liberty in two important ways: First, republican theorists, unlike Berlin, count not only actual but also possible interference by others as an infringement upon liberty. That is, one is less free not only if another acts so as to limit one's choices but also to the extent that another has the power so to act, even if that power is voluntarily unexercised (whereas Berlin claimed, for example, that negative liberty was consistent with the existence of a benevolent despot). Second, this republican conception of negative liberty does not understand all government regulation as necessarily contravening liberty in some way—that is, as a "necessary evil"—because such regulation can, in fact, produce and support types and degrees of liberty impossible in its absence (I will return to this point near the end of this essay). See Larmore's unpublished essay "The Meanings of Political Freedom." On my reading, this conception of liberty as non-domination is highly consonant with the conception of liberal norms that I am linking to epistemic anxiety in this essay. Indeed, as Larmore observes, proponents of this conception "defined liberty as not living at the mercy of another's will and did so not least with an eye to that form of domination which springs from according some single but contested vision of the human good a favored status in the political community" ("Meanings," p. 12—see, also, pp. 13–15).

14. Ibid., p. 224, n.1.

15. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, chap. VII ("On the Sovereign"), in *Classics in Political Philosophy*, 3rd Ed., ed. Jene M. Porter (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000), p. 412.

16. *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Sammtliche Werk*, ed. I. H. Fichte (Berlin, 1845–1846), vol. 4, p. 436.

17. It may be useful at this point to clarify what I mean by 'epistemic virtue.' Just as a 'civic virtue' is generally one that has to do with the manner in which one relates to one's fellow citizens, an 'epistemic virtue' is one that has to do with the manner in which one relates to one's own beliefs—and which generally, therefore, has normative implications regarding how one decides to act on those beliefs.

18. *Nature and Destiny*, p. 182.

19. Ibid., p. 183.

20. Ibid., p. 182.

21. Kierkegaard appreciatively refers to the German theologian Franz Baader's recognition of "the misunderstanding of conceiving temptation one-sidedly as temptation to evil . . . , when temptation should rather be viewed as freedom's 'necessary other'" (*The Concept of Anxiety*, Reidar Thomte, with Albert B. Anderson, ed. and trans. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980], pp. 39–40, n. *).

22. *Nature and Destiny*, p. 183.

23. Reidar Thomte, "Historical Introduction," *Concept of Anxiety*, xiii. See also pages 42–43 of this work, where Kierkegaard describes "The anxiety that is posited in innocence . . . [which one] observe[s] in children . . . as a seeking for the adventurous, the monstrous, and the enigmatic." This anxiety is found, according to Kierkegaard, "in all cultures where the childlike is preserved. . . . The more profound the anxiety, the more profound the culture."

24. *Nature and Destiny*, 185. As Niebuhr points out, Heidegger recognizes a "distinction between *Angst* and *Sorge*," a distinction that points toward a more positive conception of the function of anxiety (*Nature and Destiny*, pp. 183–84, n.4).

25. *Nature and Destiny*, p. 183.

26. Ibid., p. 185.

27. To be clear, I am not suggesting that we ought to cultivate temptation. Though the possibility of being tempted is a precondition not only for sin but also for moral excellence, this certainly does not imply that one should seek out temptations in order to test or prove oneself morally. My point is simply that the connection that Niebuhr draws between anxiety and temptation should not be seen as undermining the notion of anxiety (in the creative sense of "anxiety about perfection") as functioning positively in the manner that I am advocating.

28. Hence Kierkegaard's claim, in *The Concept of Anxiety*, that angels, whose wills are infallibly attuned to the divine will (so that they cannot 'posit sin'), have neither anxiety nor, therefore, freedom—and, therefore, "an angel has no history." (49).

29. I am not suggesting that tolerance is *necessarily* connected to an underlying assumption of the wrongness of alternative perspectives, only that it does not, in and of itself, provide any check against such an assumption.

30. Heidegger, echoing Kierkegaard, observes that, "The existential meaning of anxiety is such that it cannot lose itself in something with which it might be concerned. If anything like this happens in a similar state-of-mind, this is fear, which the everyday understanding confuses with anxiety. . . . Fear is occasioned by entities with which we concern ourselves environmentally. Anxiety, however, springs from Dasein itself" (*Being and Time*, trans. and ed. John

Macquarrie and Edward Robinson[San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962], pp. 394–95 [H 344]).

31.   Thanks to Troy Dostert and Vivian Wang for bringing Marcus's view to my attention.

32.   "The . . . assertion of this book is that people are able to be rational because they are emotional; emotions enable rationality. . . . Rationality is not an autonomous faculty of the mind, independent of emotion; rather, rationality is a special set of abilities that are recruited by emotions systems in the brain to enable us to adapt to the challenges that daily confront us" (*Sentimental Citizen*, 7).

33.   Ibid., p. 108 (and *passim*).

34.   Ibid., p. 140 (and *passim*).

35.   In light of recent events, Marcus's claim that, "The ability of the government and of social and economic elites to dictate the news, to present a common and united front, to demand and gain deferential acceptance from the populace has never been weaker," (*Sentimental Citizen*, 2) will, I think, sound naïvely credulous to most informed observers.

36.   *Sentimental Citizen*, p. 63, n.15. I am obviously using the term 'cognitive' here in the common sense of conscious thought, which Marcus rightly distinguishes from the technical neuroscientific use of the term, which includes reference to all forms of 'information processing' in the brain, including the 'unaware and inarticulate' functioning of 'emotion systems.'

37.   Marcus's emphasis on anxiety's "crucial function" of "inhibiting ongoing habit," without which "reliance on habits would be so dominant that it would preclude the consideration of alternatives" (*Sentimental Citizen*, p. 101), is obviously consonant with the current account of the virtue of anxiety, and his empirical evidence of the positive impact of anxiety on political judgment (pp. 102–03) is valuable in helping to establish the validity of this account.

38.   Steven Luper, *Existing: An Introduction to Existential Thought* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 2000), p. 7.

39.   Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 76.

40.   See *Postscript*, pp. 180–88.

41.   Ibid., p. 188. See, also, *Fear ad Trembling*, pp. 42 and 69, in *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

42.   David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, and the Posthumous Essays*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980).

43.   Ibid., p. 6.

44.   Philo goes too far when he claims, for example, that "We know so little beyond common life, or even of common life, that, with regard to the economy of the universe, there is no conjecture, however wild, which may not be just" (*Dialogues*, p. 69).

45.   *Dialogues*, pp. 6–7.

46.   As Aquinas—prefiguring liberalism in his defense of monarchy—says in *De regno, ad regem Cypri*: "It is not possible for individual human beings to attain all things . . . through their own reasoning. It is therefore necessary for humans to live in a multitude, so that one might help another and different ones might be occupied in finding out different things" (Thomas Aquinas [and Bartholomew de Lucca], *On the Government of Rulers*, trans. James M. Blythe [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997], p. 61).

47.   John Milton, *Of Education, Areopagitica, The Commonwealth*, ed. Laura E. Lockwood (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911), pp. 31–141.

48.   John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990).

49. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (London: Penguin Books, 1974).

50. As Marcus points out (*Sentimental Citizen*, p. 27), the thinker from the early era in liberal theory who perhaps most profoundly and straightforwardly espouses a falliblist justification for liberal freedoms from too pervasive moral and social regulation (and, in so doing, anticipates the direction of very late-modern and early postmodern arguments) is James Madison—see, for example, *Federalist #37*, in *The Federalist, with Letters of "Brutus,"* Terence Ball, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

51. *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 11.

52. J. Budziszewski has a wonderfully succinct discussion of this point in his brief essay 'Religion and Civic Virtue,' *Virtue*, ed. John W. Chapman and William A. Galston (New York: New York University Press, 1992) pp. 49–68.

53. *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 15.

54. Budziszewski notes that Christian thinkers as far back as Tertullian have defended tolerance of diverse views. Tertullian, for example, "suggests that 'it is the law of mankind and the natural right of each individual to worship what he thinks proper'" (*Virtue*, p. 55).

55. Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion I–II* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c1960).

56. This is certainly not to deny that humility can be adopted in a way that transcends the delimitations of dogmatic frameworks. And when it is adopted in such a way, it is certainly a virtue. But even when humility plays such a role in an epistemic sense, so that it is understood as proscribing absolutism, it cannot, in and of itself, fully stand in for anxiety, in the sense I am discussing, because it does not carry the latter's implication of a creative striving after further and better understandings. That is, humility, unlike anxiety, even when it takes a virtuous form and underwrites a noncoercive political ethic, does not, further, underwrite the deliberative norms of democratic discourse in the way that epistemic anxiety does so. I can be humbly resigned to my limitations, such that I see no need to (or, perhaps, no point in) striving for deeper and better understandings. Virtuous anxiety, on the other hand, provokes (and motivates) discourse. (It also provokes and underwrites humility; so, the two do go hand in hand, as I have suggested above.)

57. In a sense, some forms of Buddhist enlightenment (such as the 'satori' of the Zen master) might be taken as counter claims on this point, but (setting aside questions of the proper interpretation of such states) it is important to notice that even here there is an explicit recognition that the content of such a cognitive infinitude is, if it exists, necessarily incommunicable (at least in discursive terms).

58. I am, here, using the term 'actions' in a way that *excludes* reference to thoughts and (most forms of) speech. I favor allowing private individuals and groups as wide a latitude as possible with regard to the formulation and communication of their own beliefs, right up to the point where such latitude becomes problematic in a concrete way in relation to the equal sociopolitical enfranchisement and liberty of other individuals and/or groups. That is to say, I would *not* endorse any governmental intrusion into non-public spaces—such as the home, church, or meeting hall—aimed at restricting, for example, the transmission of racist attitudes and opinions among family members or citizens engaged in voluntary association. Nor would I endorse the restriction on public speech intended to communicate such attitudes or opinions (so long as it were engaged in peacefully). I *would*, however, endorse governmental action to prevent such individuals and/or groups from imposing their views on

others, for example, through their introduction into public school curricula or enactment in discriminatory laws.

59. Obviously, there can be (and are) controversies over procedural norms, just as there are over substantive norms. Indeed, liberal theorists have proposed many diverse, and sometimes inconsistent or contradictory, formulations of liberal procedural norms, but this does not invalidate the distinction between the two.

60. Where most contemporary liberal theorists have gone wrong, in my view, is in accepting John Rawls's argument, in his later work, that liberalism—in the shadow of Weberian disenchantment—must dispense with any attempt to provide a foundational warrant for the normativity of its proceduralist neutrality (see Rawls, *Political Liberalism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1993]). Since, once they are enacted, the liberal principles attain a uniquely unchallenged regulative status, it is incumbent upon the principled liberal to offer a substantive argument as to their normative validity, which is precisely my aim in this paper.

61. This, indeed, seems to be an inescapable fact of human social existence. There probably never has been a society that exhibited unqualified ideological homogeneity, and, even in highly homogeneous and insular societies, history has shown that disagreements are inevitable in the long stretch of time. Whether differences emerge out of purely ideological concerns or in conjunction with other factors, such as social, political, or economic interests, orthodoxism can mask but not indefinitely contain them.

62. "Meanings of Political Freedom," p. 6.

63. Thus, Madison writes, in *Federalist* #37: "When the Almighty himself condescends to address mankind in their own language, his meaning, luminous as it must be, is rendered dim and doubtful, by the cloudy medium through which it is communicated" (p. 172).

64. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1985).

65. Macedo observes that, "liberalism may temper or attenuate the devotion to one's own projects and allegiances by encouraging persons to regard their own ways as open to criticism, choice, and change, or simply as not shared by many people whom one is otherwise required to respect" ('Charting Liberal Virtues,' p. 215). What is missing here, however, is a recognition that the basis for regarding one's "own ways" in this manner or being "required to respect" the ways of others is circular if it is simply referred back to tolerance as a meta-norm. Tolerance itself requires grounding in the bedrock assumption of human fallibility and the correlated virtue of anxiety, which pushes one to maintain a critical stance towards one's own ways and to remain open to learning from those of others.

66. *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1973), p. 42.

67. I am grateful to the anonymous readers who provided much helpful feedback on this article. I would also like to thank Simon Cook, Patrick Horn, Elizabeth Kiss, Katherine Malone-France, and Kevin Schilbrack for helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper, as well as members of the Society for Philosophy of Religion and the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion who responded to versions of the paper at their respective 2005 annual meetings with many useful questions and comments.