

misdemeanour are not indicted for what they have done, nor for what they said, and not even for what they think they think – but for their unconscious thoughts. Micro-aggression is represented as a form of non-intentional cultural harm whose recognition is monopolized by the victim. Unlike conventional acts of aggression, which are visible, there is little tangible evidence of micro-aggression, other than the subjective reaction to it.

One reason why the concept of micro-aggression has gained influence is because it provides a narrative that resonates with personal insecurity. Micro-aggression highlights the subjective experience of rejection, anxiety and isolation, and recasts it as an insidious threat to personal safety. The concept of micro-aggression helps reframe the experience of disappointment, rejection and pain through a language that diminishes the role of conscious intent. Like the concept of bullying, discussed in the previous chapter, micro-aggression serves to explain and validate the ontological insecurity confronting an individual. Through its emphasis on the harms of interpersonal communication, it highlights the close connection between fragile identities and the quest for personal security.

WHEN WE FEAR ON OUR OWN

Though it has acquired its most systematic expression within identity politics, the concern with psychic survival prevails throughout society. The growing preoccupation with identity has important implications for the way that fear works and safety is perceived. Fear has become increasingly privatized: far more than in previous times, people experience threats as isolated and lonely individuals. Consequently, instead of helping to forge a sense of solidarity, the act of fearing encourages fragmentation. Even in circumstances such as wars and conflicts that tend to encourage a display of solidarity, the public's response often adopts a personal tone. Frequently, it is not 'we' but 'I', as in 'I don't feel safe'. Such a response is often solicited by the media after a disaster or a terrorist outrage. Questions like 'how do you feel?', 'describe your emotions' or 'what did it mean for you?' personalize the response to what is in fact a blow to an entire

community. Such questions inevitably focus attention on 'my story'. One newspaper headline cited a television presenter Vogue Williams stating, 'I don't feel safe living in the UK anymore'²¹ – following the terrorist bombing in Manchester in May 2017. This story about an individual's anxiety about her personal safety pushed concern for a community's security to the background.

Despite a common culture of fear, the response to perceived threats often assumes an individuated character. The absence of a shared experience of fearing both exposes and reinforces the relative weakness of a common web of meaning through which society makes sense of the threats it faces. The therapeutic language of trauma and anxiety guides people to experience their fear in an individuated and atomized manner. In contrast to previous times when threats were often experienced as a danger to the community, they tend to be internalized as a private problem of personal safety. For example, the UK's National Police Chiefs' Council has issued a statement that advises the public that in case of a terrorist attack, people should 'Run, Hide, Tell'.²² Some security experts have rightly criticized this guidance as being far too passive, claiming that the advice adopted by the FBI in America, 'Run, Hide, Fight', is a more effective way of securing a community's safety.²³

Bereft of the reassurance offered by the sense of solidarity and community security, people who fear on their own can perceive a vast range of issues as a potential threat to their security. As Bauman wrote, 'with fears privatized' there is 'no hope left that human reason' will help us, 'to end up in a secure and agreeable shelter'.²⁴ One study, in which people were interviewed about the personal risks they faced, found that respondents tended to represent 'crisis, fears and anxieties as self-produced and individual problems, the products of "personal biography"'.²⁵ In the absence of a master-narrative that endows security with shared meaning, a concern with safety has become a permanent feature of life.

THE PROJECT OF TRANSFORMING SAFETY INTO A VALUE

Throughout history, people have reflected on the relationship between safety and fear. 'Fear is the foundation of safety,' noted

the Christian Church Father, Tertullian (c. AD 155-c. 240). But the meaning attached to safety has undergone important modifications. Until modern times, the safety of an individual tended to be seen as far less significant than the safety of a community. As Cicero explained: 'For just as the laws set the safety of all before the safety of individuals, so a man who is good, wise, law-abiding and conscious of his civic duty will care for the advantage of all more than of a single individual - himself.'²⁶ No doubt Cicero's civic-minded account of safety served as an ideal that was violated by people who, in practice, regarded their personal security as more important than the welfare of their community. Nevertheless, the coupling of safety and civic duty lent a public dimension to the meaning of the term.

As noted previously, Thomas Hobbes is the philosopher most widely associated with the project of assigning safety a central role in political discourse. In the aftermath of the upheavals of the English Civil War, Hobbes attempted to harness people's basic impulse of self-preservation to justify a theory of sovereignty underpinned by fear. However, although Hobbes relied on people's instinct of self-preservation, his concept of safety was based on the outlawing of violence and through the action of the Sovereign, securing peace for the community. His was not an individualist concept of safety, but that of public safety.²⁷

Safety has frequently featured as a subject of political discourse. But in many instances, it was not regarded as a moral norm. Moral norms are rules of morality that serve to guide people's behaviour and a community's conventions. Despite the pragmatic necessity for security, numerous sources questioned the ideal of safety as a value in itself. The concern with safety was sometimes portrayed as a distraction from tackling the challenges faced by a community. Tacitus declared that 'the desire for safety stands against every great and noble enterprise.'²⁸ This sentiment was widespread in ancient Athens, whose culture promoted taking risks and seizing opportunities. It avowed the ideals of fame and heroism and regarded safety not as a value, but as a matter of pragmatic necessity.

In his fascinating account of Athenian culture, the sociologist Alvin Gouldner explained that its people did not attach great value to safety. According to Gouldner, an illustration of Athens' risk-taking approach was its decision to evacuate the city in order to concentrate on defeating the overwhelming Persian forces in a sea battle.²⁹ The audacious Athenian culture was widely admired during the centuries following the demise of this city-state. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche praised the Athenian leader, Pericles, who in his famous Funeral Speech celebrated his people's 'indifference and contempt for safety, body and life.'³⁰ Nietzsche characterized society's preference for safety and comfort over risk as a form of slave morality.

Many nineteenth-century philosophers and thinkers shared a modified version of his contempt for the valuation of safety. John Stuart Mill admonished those for whom safety trumped all other causes. It is worth citing his view at length:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth a war, is much worse. When a people are used as mere human instruments for firing cannon or thrusting bayonets, in the service and for the selfish purposes of a master, such war degrades a people. A war to protect other human beings against tyrannical injustice; a war to give victory to their own ideas of right and good, and which is their own war, carried on for an honest purpose by their free choice, — is often the means of their regeneration. *A man who has nothing which he is willing to fight for, nothing which he cares more about than he does about his personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself. As long as justice and injustice have not terminated their ever-renewing fight for ascendancy in the affairs of mankind, human beings must be willing, when need is, to do battle for the one against the other.* (My emphasis.)³¹

Mill, who was an admirer of the Athenian spirit of audacity, argued that 'a certain degree of insecurity, in some combinations

of circumstances, has good as well as bad effects, by making energy and practical ability the conditions of safety'. From this 'perspective, safety was not the outcome of a 'passive prevention of harm' but, as Aaron Wildavsky argued, 'safety must be discovered, and cannot be merely chosen'.³²

The sentiments expressed by Mill were informed by a moral outlook that regarded duty and responsibility for the welfare of others as essential to the conduct of a good life. In recent times, the displacement of a moral by a therapeutic code has altered the way that duty has come to be understood. From time to time, public rhetoric still refers to the importance of duty in its classical sense, as the assumption of responsibility for others and for the community. But this version of public duty is frequently contradicted by the claim that the duty that really matters is duty to oneself. 'Values are personal preferences, inclinations and choice,' observed the sociologist James Davison Hunter.³³ According to Ulrich Beck, one of the key components of this therapeutically influenced value system is the 'principle of "duty to oneself"'.³⁴

The valorization of safety even influences institutions that are involved in violent conflicts and in the business of fighting wars. Timothy J. Edens, a Brigadier General in the American Army, has argued that 'safety can be one of the core elements to our Army's values', and that he hoped that soldiers will see 'safety as part of the Warrior Ethos'.³⁵ This point is reiterated by a company producing military armour, which states that 'our core value is safety; our core mission is to help bring you home safe!'.³⁶

The contemporary narrative of safety privileges the personal and deals with its public aspects in a technical and instrumental manner. Though it uses the rhetoric of values, it eschews a moral framework which provides values with their normative foundation. There are tens of thousands of webpages that are devoted to affirming safety as the 'core value' of their institutions. 'Change Safety from a program to a Core Value' announces the webpage of Contracting Business, explaining that: 'there's a big difference in how a company thinks and behaves when safety is a *value* as opposed to a program or a customer

requirement. A company that has safety as a core value has a safety culture. This means that safety has become a way of life.³⁷ Virtually every values-related statement insists that they take their core value of safety so seriously that it has 'become a way of life'. So the website of Enbridge echoes the usual refrain: 'Safety isn't just a priority. It's our way of life. It's a core value that makes us Enbridge'.³⁸

Our inspection of 150 value statements selected randomly online, indicates that they use similar platitudes regarding safety as a 'core value'. They all evidently understand that safety dominates society's preoccupations, and that anxiety about its absence is integral to the spirit of our times. Institutions frequently use the term 'safety culture' to describe their way of life. Businesses and institutions often declare their commitment to their 'safety philosophy', describing this as people-oriented and personal -- for example: 'People do safety, not systems and processes'.³⁹ One energy company explains that its philosophy of safety is directed at 'our employees', who are 'our most valuable resource', and that 'no phase of business is more important than their personal safety'.⁴⁰ The company points out that it really means business:

To foster this [safety FF] philosophy Parman Energy has a full-time safety manager to develop and administer safety training for faculty and staff. The Safety and Compliance Manager's chief focus is not only to ensure this philosophy is followed, but to motivate employees to act safely in all aspects of their life (work and home) so that they can be there for their families.⁴¹

Narratives that promote a safety culture or philosophy attempt to convert technical and practical security measures into a language of values. Yet, the meaning of the value of safety is rarely explained through a moral language that pertains to ideals about right and wrong or good and evil. Instead, it is communicated in instrumental terms as a series of practical tips. In fact, the use of the term 'core value' has little to do with values that are moral. It is worth noting that decisions about embracing a particular core value are based on

business and public relations concerns. Consultants and websites offer to provide institutions with advice about what core value to choose, with one offering a 'Core Values List with 500 examples' and devoting a page to the question of 'How to Create Your Own Core Values List'.⁴² Other companies offer off-the-shelf mission statements, whose core values are tailored to meet the needs of their customers.

The instrumental imperative that motivates institutions to advertise their commitment to the value of safety is founded on the recognition that there is a real demand for security. The attempt to turn safety into a value is also prompted by the recognition that it is the absence of agreement on shared values that enhances the public's sense of anxiety and insecurity. Through the attempt to transform safety into a value, the very absence of a sense of security is transformed into a shared positive affirmation of a common code. Yet there is a world of difference between what we value – safety and security – and what is a moral value, such as autonomy or freedom. The valuation of safety represents a statement about harm. In practice, the real driver of the deification of safety is the aspiration to achieve a harm-free world. As one mission statement, titled 'Safety – Making it Happen', explains, 'the term "safety" means different things to different people, but essentially it captures an ideal of "absence of harm".'⁴³

THE DANGERS OF A HARM-FREE WORLD

The idealization of a harm-free world speaks to a culture that regards the consequences of harms as far more damaging and catastrophic than previously imagined, and attempts to negate it through an expansive regime of safety. It is the intolerance directed at potential harm that underpins the project of transforming safety into a value. The mission statement, 'Safety – Making it Happen', explicitly linked the translation of 'safety into a value' to the 'goal of "zero" (injuries, accidents, tolerance, etc.)'.⁴⁴

The promoters of safety philosophy often advocate the goal of zero harm. As one advocate of 'Treating Safety as a Value' outlined:

The 'safety is a value' ethos is founded on the fundamental philosophy that all injuries are preventable and that the goal of zero injuries can be achieved. To introduce this concept to a workplace, company leaders must develop a vision and commit to it. This commitment must be cascaded down through the management structure.⁴⁵

The author of this statement promises that the 'reward of zero injuries over the long term will make the effort worthwhile – in both financial and human terms'. From this perspective, the objective of a zero injury environment is not only realistic but also worthwhile. The importance that advocates of a zero harm society attach to safety means that all other concerns and principles have to be subordinated to this goal.

Back in 2012, General Peter Wall raised concerns about the influence of Britain's anti-risk culture on the army, noting: 'I sense there is an expectation in some circles in society that this sort of zero risk culture that is understandably sought in many other walks of life ought to be achievable in the battlefield.' Wall argued that society had to accept that the 'zero risk culture sought in other walks of life' should not in fact apply to the battlefield⁴⁶ – that he even needed to make this argument illustrates the widespread influence of zero harm attitudes over society.

Though the safety utopia outlined by the advocates of zero harm often comes across as a form of cultural fantasy, this objective is vigorously pursued by numerous institutions and campaign groups, which regard the word 'accident' as an expression of a secular blasphemy. Calls to ban the use of this word are motivated by the belief that the injuries that people suffer are avoidable. In 2007, 'accident' was expunged from the new edition of Britain's *Highway Code*, published by the UK Department of Transport – the words 'collision', 'crash' or 'incident' serve as substitutes for describing events that once were known as accidents.⁴⁷

The mantra that states that 'all harm is preventable' encourages a mood of blame to be directed at people involved in accidents. Injuries

suffered by children are constantly scrutinized for evidence of parental irresponsibility or abuse. That is why in 2014, the UK government took it upon itself to introduce a rule that ensures that all children who visit an Accident and Emergency unit in a hospital are logged on a national database set up to identify potential victims of abuse.

The introduction of a rigorous safety regime in workplaces, public institutions and throughout society has made a significant contribution to the reduction of physical injuries. As a result, most economically advanced societies are safer than in any previous stage of human history. But paradoxically, the achievement of unprecedented levels of physical safety coincides with a heightened sense of insecurity. As the previous chapter noted, this reaction is precipitated by the way that people have been socialized to respond to threats. In these circumstances, the constant pursuit of a utopian vision of a harm-free world does little to help people feel secure. Since it continually draws attention to safety as an absent condition, it reinforces the sense of insecurity.

Although mission statements celebrating safety tend to focus on preventing physical injuries and harms, in recent times the threats that preoccupy society are increasingly directed at damages caused to people's emotions. Emotional injury to the individual is frequently portrayed as more damaging than a physical injury; as something that can leave the person 'damaged for life'. Unlike physical harm, emotional harm is limited only by the imagination. Regardless of intent, a gesture or a comment can be perceived in a way that causes damage. According to child protection guidelines used in Britain, emotional abuse can refer to virtually every parental failing, from 'failure to meet a child's need for affection' to being so 'over protective and possessive' that they prevent their children from experiencing 'normal social contact or normal physical activity'.⁴⁸ The expansion of the diagnosis of emotional harm is not confined to children: as discussed above, contemporary cultural norms work to continually lower the threshold of acceptable distress and therefore encourage individuals to interpret unpleasant experiences as damaging to their health and emotions.

The omnipresence of emotional harms lends the deification of safety an expansive and intrusive dimension. The adverb 'safe', as in 'safe sex', 'safe drinking', 'safe eating', 'safe schools' and 'safe space' signals responsible behaviour; the exhortation to 'stay safe' is a secular version of the call 'may God be with you'. That is why the demand for safety and protection from harm is so readily recognized as a legitimate claim for an entitlement to be validated and recognized. The attribution of safety to an experience or to a product endows it with qualities that automatically earn our approval, while individuals and institutions are frequently attacked for not exercising enough caution.

INVERTED QUARANTINE

Inverted quarantine is a concept developed by the sociologist Andrew Szasz in his study *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves*.⁴⁹ Unlike a traditional quarantine, which seeks to isolate a disease to keep it from spreading to the public, an inverted quarantine represents the opposite impulse of people isolating themselves from the harms that they perceive as threatening them. Inverted quarantine constitutes a response to the fear that the human condition is inherently unsafe.

Arguably the most striking example of a demand for an inverted quarantine is the emergence of the ideal of a safe space. Like a gated community set up to keep out undesirable outsiders, the purpose of a safe space is to protect its inhabitants from unwelcome criticism and thoughts.

It was in 2015 that media attention directed at the demand for safe spaces in Anglo-American universities led to the widespread recognition of this phenomenon. However, the demand for this form of inverted quarantine emerged a long time before that. The concern with psychic survival that surfaced in the late 1970s provided the initial impetus for the emergence of attitudes that eventually led to the formulation of the demand for safe space. This early relationship between psychic survival and safe space was captured in the title of psychiatrist Anthony Fry's 1987 book *Safe Space: How to Survive in*

a *Threatening World*. For Fry, a safe space was necessitated by the perilous world that exists outside the self. He wrote: 'as I looked carefully at this rather threatening world, it seemed that safe space for many of us was becoming increasingly hard to find and that for a whole variety of reasons, material, social and personal conditions were becoming ever more unsuitable for human beings.'⁵⁰ Fry's ideal was what he described as the 'protected spaces of childhood', and in many respects his metaphor of safe space captures the security of the child still in the womb.⁵¹

The equation that Fry drew between the ethos of child protection and the aspiration for safe spaces underlines the infantilized version of personhood that is attracted to this form of inverted quarantine. More than any aspiration thrown up in our culture of fear, the concept of safe space highlights its two key features – the contention that the space inhabited by humanity is fundamentally unsafe, and the assertion that people are inherently 'at risk' and 'vulnerable', and therefore unlikely to cope with the challenges that life hurls at them. The survivalist outlook that corresponds to the consciousness of being vulnerable directs people to imagine their world as unsafe. 'Everyday life has begun to pattern itself on the survival strategies forced on those exposed to extreme adversity,' observed Lasch.⁵²

The absence of safety is the premise for the argument for safe spaces. But from what types of threats do safe spaces provide protection? Typically the demand for safe space is justified on the grounds that, since people are emotionally fragile, they need to be quarantined from the toxic effects of criticism and judgement. From this perspective the issue of personal safety is enmeshed with the provision of protection from words and ideas that are likely to damage an individual's identity further. The fears expressed by safe space advocates are not so much directed at physical injury but at threats to their psyche and identity.

A safe space aims to regulate social distance and psychic boundaries between people, and the language used to articulate safe space policies frequently deploys the metaphors of space, distance and boundaries. The protest campaign Occupy Bristol

demand respect for 'people's physical and emotional boundaries', and exhorted its supporters, 'Be responsible for your own actions and safety and the safety of those around you.'⁵³ Occupy London's Safe Space Policy also focuses on the enforcement of maintaining a psychic space, advising: 'respect each other's physical and emotional boundaries' and 'Be aware of the space you take up and the positions and privileges you bring.'⁵⁴ This inverted quarantine is directed not simply at isolating people from external threats but at keeping them safe from those closest to them, in case they intrude on their personal space.

Campaigners and activists have raised the demand for safe spaces in a variety of settings. Social workers, school teachers, psychologists, educators, doctors, sex workers and probation officers are some of the interest groups who have raised support for safe spaces. Safe space is often portrayed as a human right for vulnerable groups such as refugees,⁵⁵ and it has also become integrated into the vocabulary of twenty-first-century political protest. As indicated above, the international Occupy Movement, which emerged in September 2011, is committed to the provision of safe spaces, often on the grounds that these are vital for helping the movement's supporters gain confidence. During the conference of the British Labour Party in Brighton, a safe space was established for female delegates fed up with listening to heated debates.⁵⁶ The demand for safe space is not confined to the left of the political divide: a leader of the University of California at Los Angeles' Bruin Republicans described her group as 'a space for conservative students to share opinion without facing criticism or attacks from faculty and students who disagree with them.'⁵⁷

Anxiety about the absence of safety in general, and the demand for safe spaces in particular, are most systematically formulated and developed within institutions of higher education. It is within the university system that the arguments that support the different manifestations of the culture of fear have acquired a systematic and quasi-ideological underpinning. If the arguments advanced by academic fear entrepreneurs are valid then, by all accounts, the university has become one of the most dangerous places of work.

Claims that universities are enveloped by an epidemic of harassment are quickly followed by reports that campuses face an unprecedented epidemic of stress. In some instances the scale of the problem simply beggars belief. In April 2017, a report on an 'epidemic of stressed students' in Australia suggested that more than 70 per cent of students reported high or very high levels of psychological distress, and apparently more than a third of the respondents stated that they contemplated self-harm or suicide.⁵⁸ In Britain, a National Union of Students' survey in 2015 indicated that 78 per cent of students had experienced mental health problems, and a third of the respondents claimed to have had suicidal thoughts.

One would imagine that a university is a relatively benign and comfortable institution within which to work. But that's not how things function in the culture of fear. 'Academics "face higher mental health risk" than other professions' is the headline of an article that contends that the 'majority of people' working in British universities find their job stressful.⁵⁹ It appears that in comparison to other professions – surgeons, emergency workers, the police, the military – teaching in a university is an unusually stressful and dangerous experience.

The main impulse fuelling concern with campus safety is anxiety about people's psychic security and identity. A safe space should be interpreted as a metaphor of validation: for its supporters, the appeal lies in the immunity it promises from being made to feel uncomfortable. As the legal scholar and former head of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Nadine Strossen has stated, the meaning of this metaphor now implies protection from 'exposure to ideas that make one uncomfortable'.⁶⁰

That many university students are emotionally drawn towards practices that promise to protect them from judgement is not surprising. From an early age, school children are socialized into the commanding pedagogic values of empathy, self-esteem and unconditionally respecting the view of others. With so much time and resources devoted to affirming the identity of young people it is not surprising that they believe that they have a right to be

validated. So when they arrive at university they regard an ideal classroom environment as one where their selves and their views are accepted and affirmed. Many undergraduates may have never heard of a safe space, but their socialization has disposed them to expect their institutions to validate their identity. Conversely, many undergraduates regard serious criticism and debate as an unacceptable challenge to their persona.

In effect, a safe space provides a quarantine from the threat of judgement. That is why free speech and robust debate are often diagnosed as unsafe and a danger to mental health. Supporters of safe space regard the absence of judgement as one of the most cherished features of the university, and this point is explicitly recognized by many higher education institutions. The Student Services Value Statement of St Andrew's University promises to 'actively reflect' on its 'practice to ensure our environment is non-judgemental'.⁶¹ Universities regularly portray their safe spaces as havens from judgement. 'Safe Zone provides an avenue for LGBTQ individuals to be able to identify places and people who are supportive, non-judgmental, and welcoming of open dialogues regarding these issues,' declares Montana State University.⁶²

Commentaries and studies dealing with the subject of fear tend to overlook the dread of judgement, which is often experienced as the most intimate of threats. This development is implicitly recognized by the changing language that surrounds judgement. Judgement has acquired ominous and threatening associations. The recently invented term *judgy* conveys the connotation of condescension to others,⁶³ and is attached to someone who is seen to be over-critical. The contrast between the negative connotation of 'judgy' and the positive association of 'non-judgy' is clearly expressed in Anne Regan's 2012 story *Animal Magnetism*, in which one of the characters 'lowered his eyebrows and crossed his arms and tried to look non-judgy even if he felt a little judgy'.⁶⁴

Contemporary society's fear and dislike of criticism and judgement is manifested in its adoption of *shaming* as a cultural epithet. Shaming is promiscuously applied to condemn different types of criticism

and judgement. Body shaming, Fat shaming, Slut shaming, Skinny shaming, Weight shaming, Snack shaming and Online shaming are just some of the dozens of ways that the unwelcome words are treated as a cultural crime. Asking a mother why she does not breastfeed her infant immediately leads to the charge of Formula shaming. Even the hint of an act of judgement is regarded as a direct threat to a person's identity.

The attempt to curb the exercise of judgement on campuses can be seen as a version of the zero harm utopia promoted by non-academic institutions. As discussed above, arguments for zero harm are often expressed through the idiom of 'zero tolerance for injury'.⁶⁵ Like the argument for safe spaces, the case for zero harm insists that there should be zero tolerance for practices that might cause physical or emotional injury. The metaphor of 'zero tolerance' conveys the notions of zero judgement and zero discretion. These are policies that are meant to be applied indiscriminately and punish without regard to circumstances. It spares judges and officials from having to think about the circumstances affecting a particular event and exempts them from exercising their capacity to discriminate and judge. In the case of zero tolerance towards offensive speech on campuses, it means sparing people the burden of having to draw their own conclusions about the merits of an argument.

The idea of zero tolerance is also informed by risk aversion. It represents an attempt to abolish, administratively, the risks associated with the expression of an unwelcome idea or belief. Of course, in one sense, tolerance is risky. Once conventional restraints on belief, opinion and speech are removed it becomes difficult to predict the future course of public life. The freedom to speak and to pursue knowledge has a habit of going off in unexpected directions.

Predictably, anxiety about safety and the demand for safe space feeds on itself. No sooner is one concession made to a safe space advocate than a demand for another one is raised. The meaning of safe space continually expands to embrace greater and greater claims for safety. At one time the term safe space referred to a specific physical area – usually a room – where students felt

comfortable and safe to discuss their problems. In recent times, safe space has expanded to encompass the entire university. That's what members of the Goldsmith University's Islamic Society meant when they stated that the 'university should be a safe space for all'. This conceptual inflation of safe space is frequently advanced in policy documents on the subject. For example, the Union Council of Imperial College, London, has a Safe Space Policy, which 'encompasses all Union-run venues'. Similarly the Safe Space Policy of the Student Union of King's College London covers 'any KCLSU space, or event'.⁶⁶ Advocates of safe space often argue that it should encompass every classroom.⁶⁷

The conceptual creep of safe space is grounded in the recognition that safety enjoys a unique status as an uncontested value. Yet precisely because support for an inverted quarantine is driven by the presumption that the world is unsafe, those devoted to the cause of safe spaces can never feel secure. Indeed, the very demand for safety contains an inner logic towards discovering more and more threats to fear. By definition, the intangible harms to the psyche are not bounded by space, and not even the most heavily policed safe space can reassure the fearful subject.

Many observers are bemused about the rapid escalation of the demand for safe space. Some of those who find the safe space idea melodramatic or incomprehensible dismiss it as a temporary fad that will soon give way to a different target of campus protest. That may well be the case. But so long as the powerful animosity directed at the act of judgement continues to dominate the cultural landscape, it will continue to demand protection from free speech and criticism and spontaneous interaction between people.⁶⁸

THE FREEDOM-SAFETY TRADE-OFF

One of the most unattractive features of the deification of safety is the apparent tendency to subordinate the value of freedom to its dictates. Within the moral framework of the culture of fear, safety and security are first-order values, while freedom is reduced to a second-order value, at best. In numerous instances on American campuses, free