

SHAMING, CANCELING, NO-PLATFORMING: BOUNDARIES OF SOCIAL PUNISHMENT PRACTICES

[summary for the general public]

Consider a case of a person who shares misogynist and racist content on a popular social media platform. Assume that the account of this person is followed by a large number of users, and that all posts gain a lot of attention. Finally, assume that although the shared content is morally repugnant, it does not violate any law, and state officials are not allowed to intervene. Considering the unavailability of any legal response, one may ask whether some other, that is an informal sanction could be applied in this case. Contemporary public discourse offers a range of interesting options, nonetheless it seems that three forms of social punishment are the most plausible candidates here. The first possibility is to speak up and publicly criticize the person for her wrongdoing. The second option is to unfollow the account in social media, and depending on the particular circumstances, boycott other public activities of the person. The third possibility is to ban the social media account, and prohibit the person from sharing misogynist and racist views. This last course of action is available to the platform provider.

The abovementioned options stand for three main strategies of informal responding to violations of moral norms, or in other words, three forms of social punishment: public shaming, canceling, and no-platforming. All these strategies have roots in the past, but their contemporary social significance seems to be incomparable to any moment in human history.

The general objective of the research project is to investigate the idea of social punishment, and in particular, to provide an account of the moral permissibility, and proper legal limits of three abovementioned ways of sanctioning moral wrongdoing. The research team is going to answer three main questions:

- **[RQ1]** The Conceptual Question concerns the issue of meaning of social punishment (with a special emphasis on practices of public shaming, canceling, and no-platforming).
- **[RQ2]** The Legitimacy Question concerns the issue of moral acceptability of different social punishment practices.
- **[RQ3]** The Regulatory Question concerns the issue of legal boundaries of different social punishment practices.

The main research hypotheses of the project are the following:

- **[RH1]** Practices of public shaming, canceling, and no-platforming should be recognized as distinct forms of social sanctions that are *pro tanto* appropriate responses to different types of moral wrongdoing.
- **[RH2]** Social punishment practices are legitimate only if criteria of moral acceptability are met, and since these criteria are met very rarely, social punishment is legitimate in a very limited range of cases.
- **[RH3]** State officials should take a non-interventionist stance towards social punishment practices, and in particular, are under a duty to establish a neutral legal framework open for different moral discourses