

In his classic dissent in the *Abrams* case (1919), Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes set forth his interpretation of the First Amendment to the Constitution as follows:

Persecution for the expression of opinions seems to me perfectly logical. If you have no doubt of your premises or your power and want a certain result with all your heart, you naturally express your wishes in law and sweep away all opposition. . . . But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution.

As I have reflected on these words, it seems to me that I am certainly one who believes more than he believes the very foundations of his own conduct that the ultimate good he desires is better reached by free trade in ideas, and so on. What other than such a belief could lie behind my commendation of a critical, nondogmatic way of holding one's religious beliefs? Or my argument that what genuine dialogue requires is not the recognition of one another's truths and values, but only a recognition of one another's truth- and value-*claims* as exactly that—*claims* to validity that are equally in need and equally deserving of critical validation?

Also, considering what I take to be implied by such recognition—namely, the further recognition of one another as persons, who, as such, can both make and critically validate such claims and who are, therefore, entitled to a distinctive kind of moral respect—couldn't one say, somewhat as Justice Holmes does, that I understand myself to be bound to respect more than I respect the moral and/or intellectual virtues of another simply her or his being as a person who can make and critically validate claims to validity?

But, then, if the respect that respects this more is precisely "fundamental and unconditional respect" (so William Christian), can't much the same be said about the belief that believes more than the very foundations of the believer's own conduct, i.e., that it is foundational and unconditional belief? If the right answer is affirmative, there would clearly seem to be a convergence also with Paul Tillich's distinctions between "theistic faith" and "absolute faith," and "the God of theism" and "the God

above the God of theism." But, more than that, I seem to see a connection between, on the one hand, the dialectical relationships between conditional and unconditional respect/belief and, on the other, the dialectical relationship between "the world" and "faith" in the New Testament senses of these terms. In other words, to live in the world by faith means, whatever else it may mean, both to believe more than one believes the very foundations of one's own conduct that the ultimate good one desires is better reached by free trade in ideas, and so on, and to respect more than one respects the moral and/or intellectual virtues of others their being simply as persons.

11 December 2002