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HON 331: How To Be a Killjoy

Essay #2

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Title: Civility, Complaining, and the Role of Killjoys in Social Change

In today’s world, figuring out how to communicate can be tricky, especially when it comes to being civil while also voicing our dissatisfaction. This essay dives into the thoughts of Amy Olberding and Kathryn Norlock on these topics. Olberding believes that rudeness and incivility really mess with social trust, making it harder for us to build meaningful relationships and ultimately affecting our ability to lead a good life. She even points out that “rudeness creates barriers to effective communication” (Olberding, 2013, p. 45). On the flip side, Norlock argues that complaining—when done the right way—can actually be a valuable and justified way to express ourselves. The main idea here is that these two viewpoints aren’t really in conflict; instead, they can work together. For social change to happen effectively, we need to find a balance between having civil conversations and honestly expressing our frustrations, especially when we look at things through the eyes of those we might call righteous killjoys.

Olberding’s main point in The Wrong of Rudeness is that rudeness really gets in the way of social trust, which is super important for building meaningful connections with others. She argues that being civil isn’t just a nice thing to do; it’s actually a moral duty we owe to each other. As she puts it, “Civility is a prerequisite for any kind of meaningful relationship” (Olberding, 2013, p. 67). When civility starts to break down, it makes it harder for us to communicate and work together, which can seriously mess up our shared quest for a good life (Olberding, 2013). This view highlights that polite interactions help people cooperate and understand each other better. On the flip side, a lack of civility can create a culture full of mistrust and isolation. Olberding believes that practicing civility improves our relationships by encouraging empathy, respect, and a sense of community. Ultimately, this moral obligation to be civil not only benefits us as individuals but also helps build a more harmonious society where we can all work together toward common goals.

In her essay "Can’t Complain," Kathryn Norlock really changes how we think about complaining. She points out that it’s not just about venting; when we talk about our frustrations—especially with unfair situations—it can actually make a difference. Complaining lets us speak up against the things that don’t sit right and hold people and systems accountable. When we share our frustrations in a thoughtful way, it opens the door for important conversations about tough issues like inequality and discrimination. By viewing complaining as a tool for change, Norlock helps us see how it can lead to deeper discussions about social justice.

The link between civility and complaining is pretty fascinating. Amy Olberding points out that being civil is super important in how we interact with each other, but Norlock reminds us that you can totally voice your concerns without being rude. In fact, when we complain constructively, it can lead to some really meaningful conversations that help us connect better. Take movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, for example—these are perfect cases where people brought up serious issues and sparked important discussions that can lead to real change. Rather than being disrespectful, these complaints highlight the importance of empathy and understanding. Sharing our frustrations can actually be a key part of pushing for social justice.

Complaining can be tricky—it can be neutral, hurtful, or even really helpful, depending on how we go about it. It’s super important to think about why we’re complaining and how we say it. If we come off as rude or aggressive, it can really turn people away and kill the conversation. For instance, using a harsh tone can make others feel defensive, which makes it tough to have a genuine discussion. When we shift from giving constructive feedback to making personal digs, it can make people think twice about speaking up, and then important issues end up getting ignored.

On the flip side, “righteous killjoys” are those who call out things that many might ignore. They challenge the status quo and shine a light on injustices that need attention. According to Norlock, these individuals can be key to social change because their complaints reveal uncomfortable truths and inspire action. It’s important to remember that they don’t have to be uncivil; they can express their frustrations respectfully. Balancing the need to voice concerns with maintaining respect is crucial. For instance, environmental activists often use civil disobedience to raise awareness about climate change while still engaging in constructive conversations with others. This shows that you can complain effectively and respectfully to encourage understanding and spark important discussions.

Some folks think complaining is just plain rude and only makes things worse. This usually comes from the idea that if you’re voicing your unhappiness, it means you’re being negative and will just stir up more drama in conversations. Complaints can seem like a way to push back against what everyone else is okay with, which makes them feel disrespectful or disruptive. But here’s the deal: when we frame complaints in a positive light, they can actually help build civility instead of breaking it down. As Norlock (2019) points out, “Complaining can be a form of engagement that encourages dialogue” (p. 50). This means that when we express our concerns, we’re opening the door to real conversations where we can work together and understand each other better, instead of creating more tension. So, when we share what’s bothering us in a thoughtful way, we can really spark some important discussions that lead to positive changes.

Some people might see righteous killjoys—those who aren’t shy about expressing their discomfort with the way things are—as negative or a little annoying. It’s easy to think of their criticisms as attacks on the things that hold our communities together, making them seem like troublemakers. But here’s the thing: their disruption is actually super important for starting conversations about the tough stuff we often just ignore. By challenging the status quo, these killjoys force us to face uncomfortable truths that we might rather not think about. They bring attention to issues like inequality, discrimination, and environmental problems, creating opportunities for real growth and understanding that wouldn’t happen if they kept quiet. Their voices kick off essential discussions, encouraging all of us to think more deeply and engage with the complexities of the world around us.

Think about the activists out there who are always calling out systemic injustices. Yeah, their protests and complaints can definitely ruffle some feathers and make those who benefit from the status quo feel a bit uneasy. But that’s part of what makes them so important! By pointing out the inequities, they’re pushing everyone to pay attention to the real issues that affect marginalized groups and to reflect on their own roles in all of this. So instead of seeing this disruption as a negative, we should recognize it as a crucial spark for awareness and action. It’s often exactly what we need to get people talking and moving toward change.

You know that awkward vibe we sometimes get from what people call “righteous killjoys?" Well, it turns out that can actually be a good thing! It’s like a little push to help us think and grow. When someone questions the norms we usually just go along with, it gives us a chance to stop and think about what really matters to us. This kind of self-reflection helps us understand each other better and opens up conversations with different perspectives. So even if complaints feel a bit uncomfortable or rude at first, they can lead to some really important discussions and spark positive change. By welcoming those awkward chats, we can all work together toward a fairer and more equal society. In the end, it helps us see complaining in a new light and appreciate the vital role these “killjoys” play in keeping those essential conversations alive.

To wrap it up, Amy Olberding and Kathryn Norlock have some really interesting views on civility and complaining that actually work well together to help spark positive change in society. Being civil is super important for building trust and strong relationships, which sets the stage for good conversations. When we treat each other with respect, it creates a vibe where people can really understand and cooperate with one another. This solid base is key for tackling the challenges we face as a society and for managing the ups and downs of our relationships.

On the flip side, complaining can be super important for pointing out what's not working and addressing injustices that often get ignored. When people voice their frustrations, it shines a light on bigger issues and holds those in power accountable, sparking collective action. Norlock emphasizes how valuable complaints can be for kicking off conversations that lead to real change. Complaining isn’t just about venting; it can also rally others to think about their own experiences and join discussions that challenge the status quo.

Righteous killjoys are super important in this whole mix because they shake things up and spark conversations that we often avoid. These folks, who might come off as disruptors, really help challenge the status quo and call out the injustices and inequalities around us. By pointing out those uncomfortable truths, they create chances for meaningful discussions that can help everyone get a better grip on the issues. Their courage to speak up about what’s bothering them can motivate others to think critically about their own beliefs and actions, which helps build a culture of accountability and awareness in society.

Finding the right balance between being civil and expressing our frustrations is super important for creating a more engaged and responsible society. It can take some effort to have respectful conversations while also pushing for the changes we need, but it's definitely worth it. When we realize that our voices can be powerful tools for both criticism and collaboration, we open the door to really meaningful discussions. Framing our complaints with good intentions can actually make civility stronger instead of weaker. By building a culture where respectful dialogue and real concerns can coexist, we can work toward a fairer society. When we see that civility and complaining can go hand in hand, everyone feels more comfortable sharing their thoughts while still being respectful. This kind of approach not only strengthens our personal relationships but also helps build up our communities, pushing us all closer to social justice and progress together.

References

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