

Coffee + Conversation
Professor Ned Hall



Wednesday, May 8 | 7:30am to 9:30am



THE HARVARD CLUB PRESENTS:

Coffee and Conversation with Ned Hall, Norman E. Vuilleumier Professor

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2024
7:30 AM - REGISTRATION AND
CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST
8:00 AM - CONVERSATION
9:00 AM - NETWORKING
9:30 AM - EVENT CONCLUDES

Join us for a lively morning discussion as we have Professor Ned Hall engage our members in a discussion about Freedom of Speech on campus.

Some philosophical thoughts from Professor Hall:

How – if at all – should colleges and universities regulate speech within their communities? That question is as important as it is difficult to productively discuss. Professor Hall will suggest that we take a step back and ask three interconnected questions: What's the point of having colleges and universities at all? (Why think our society would be impoverished, even desperately so, without them?) What are the different things we can mean by "freedom of speech"? What are the different forms that "regulation" of speech can take?

Professor Hall will argue for three interconnected answers, focusing especially on free speech in the classroom and its adjacent intellectual spaces. One key point of having colleges and universities is to develop in our youth the ability and motivation to diagnose and combat ignorance, along with the paired ability to engage in collaborative disagreement. To achieve this, we must distinguish and uphold two very different kinds of "freedom of speech" - freedom from fear of reprisal and the freedom to be heard. Cultivating both forms of freedom together does require regulation. But it's the subtle regulation that consists in having strong norms – not rules – governing the way we talk to each other, norms designed to promote a culture of intellectual vitality where curiosity trumps fear.

Price per person: \$15 per person (plus Club Fee and Tax)

Price includes a continental breakfast, coffee/tea and select juices.

About Professor Ned Hall - in his words:

I work on a range of topics in metaphysics and epistemology that overlap with philosophy of science. (Which is to say: the best topics in metaphysics and epistemology.) Are there “fundamental” laws of nature? What are they – as distinct, say, from accidentally true generalizations, or the causal generalizations that seem to figure in the special sciences? Suppose it's a truism that one of the central aims of scientific inquiry is to uncover the causal structure of our world (at many different time- and length-scales); what does “causal structure” need to mean, for this truism to be not merely true but illuminating? What are the varieties of probability, and can any of them be said to be properly “objective”? What would it take for one science to “reduce” to another? Must fundamental physics have an intelligible ontology – and if so, what does this constraint amount to? Is there any need for a conception of ‘metaphysical possibility’ that outstrips physical possibility? Can there be any basis for skepticism about unobservable structure that is not also, and equally, a basis for skepticism about unobserved structure? (And so on.) I firmly believe that philosophical discourse always goes better if the parties involved resolutely avoid any “burden-shifting” maneuvers, and that teaching always goes better if you bring cookies.

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