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## Book Symposium: Jeremy Fantl's *The Limitations of the Open Mind*

# Introduction to a Symposium on *The Limitations of the Open Mind*

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### Abstract

I introduce the book symposium on Jeremy Fantl's *The Limitations of the Open Mind*. The symposium began as a session at the 2023 American Philosophical Association meeting in Montreal; it features replies to Fantl's book by Nathan Ballantyne and Miriam Schleifer McCormick with replies to the replies by Fantl.

### Résumé

Je présente la tribune du livre sur *The Limitations of the Open Mind* de Jeremy Fantl. L'échange a débuté par un symposium tenu en 2023 lors du congrès de l'American Philosophical Association à Montréal ; il inclut des réponses au livre de Fantl signées par Nathan Ballantyne et Miriam Schleifer McCormick, ainsi que des réponses aux réponses par Fantl.

**Keywords:** applied epistemology; open-mindedness; closed-mindedness; problematic speakers; no-platforming; amateurism

In 2018, Oxford University Press published Jeremy Fantl's *The Limitations of the Open Mind*. In some counterfactual history, a group of philosophers met during 2020 or '21 to discuss Fantl's book in a symposium or author-meets-critics session at a professional conference. But COVID-19 intervened in our world's timeline, disrupting meetings of academic philosophers and much more besides. At the same time, the pandemic and its social and political disorders seemed to push the central themes from Fantl's book more and more into consciousness. Should we think carefully about arguments against our beliefs and listen to those who reject our views? When is there an obligation to engage? Is it always good to be open-minded? These questions bear on trust in science and political discourse, but science or politics alone can't deliver satisfying answers. Philosophical tools are called for.

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It might be expected that a philosopher would argue for greater open-mindedness, in light of the human tendency toward dogmatism and overconfidence. Sometimes philosophers, like Socrates, are stereotyped as “following arguments where they lead,” even to relatively unusual beliefs or unpopular scepticism. Surprisingly perhaps, Fantl argues that in some important situations you should *not* be open-minded toward arguments against your beliefs. Why? Well, because you know you are right. Even when you can’t expose a flaw in a complex counterargument against your view, Fantl contends that you might well be reasonable in holding your view with no less confidence after you have encountered that counterargument. His book explores the implications of a type of “dogmatism” for a range of themes. When should we engage closed-mindedly with others’ views? How seriously should we take the possibility of existence of psychic phenomena? How can amateurism protect someone’s knowledge from challenges from experts? What obligations surround inviting problematic speakers to college campuses?

On 7 January 2023, Fantl and two other philosophers — Miriam Schleifer McCormick and myself — met to discuss Fantl’s book during a symposium session at the American Philosophical Association’s Eastern Division meeting in Montreal, Quebec. This book symposium contains revised versions of the papers presented at that session. McCormick’s contribution investigates Fantl’s claim that if you know someone’s view is false, you should rarely engage closed-mindedly with them. She grants that in many key cases — say, with a friend who has turned to QAnon — the only way to legitimately engage is closed-mindedly. However, she argues that there are nonetheless important reasons to do this, and that there are ways to do it that can be effective, compassionate, and non-deceptive, *contra* Fantl. In my paper, I argue that Fantl’s defence of the advantages of amateurism fails on the assumption that amateurs reflect on their intellectual situation.

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