



SAFS Newsletter

Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

Maintaining freedom in teaching, research and scholarship
Maintaining standards of excellence in academic decisions about students and faculty

Number 76

www.safs.ca

April 2017

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THE IRONY OF—AND THE NEED FOR— THE HETERODOX ACADEMY

Stephen Perrott

I remember the excitement, more than thirty years ago, when I shifted to a life in the Academy following a ten-year career in law enforcement. I was entering, or so I thought, a world that welcomed debate and where contentious issues would be addressed with strong argument and evidence. I also relished the notion that I was entering the domain of the rebel where the unjust status quo could be challenged in a milieu that valued viewpoint diversity. I didn’t believe this simply because my undergrad professors proselytized about it; I had, after all, lived through the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war protests, and entered adolescence during The Summer of Love. Whatever one might say about the ultimate naivety of that generation of (mostly privileged) students, they were all about freedom of expression and challenging orthodoxy.

I wasn’t long in grad school before I realised that I had been had. Rather than challenging orthodoxies, it became apparent that to be a good scholar, indeed a decent human being, one needed to undergo a process of homogenization. The lights came on completely by the time I took up my current position, 26 years ago, just as the forces of political correctness hit universities. It became obvious that there was an inverse relationship between the degree to which my colleagues clamoured to have their departure from orthodoxy protected, accompanied by cries for academic freedom, and the degree to which they worked to suppress those very same aspirations from those failing to embrace their ever-narrowing ideological platform. These so-called rebels, who supposedly represented all that is good in the university, turned out to actually be defenders of the orthodoxy! It struck me as ironic that university professors as a group were much less tolerant of dissent than were my former police colleagues.

During that initial wave of PC, I mostly kept my head

SUBMISSIONS TO THE SAFS NEWSLETTER

The SAFS Newsletter is published three times a year (September, January, and April) by the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship and is edited by the Society's president, Mark Mercer. ISSN: 1704-5436

The editor welcomes articles, case studies, news items, book reviews, and letters. Send submissions by email to president@safs.ca or by letter mail to SAFS, PO Box 33056 Quinpool Centre, Halifax, NS B3L 4T6.

down in the pursuit of tenure and that first promotion, justifying my cowardice by rationalising that the intolerance was at least directed towards making the world a more just place (which, in retrospect, is no justification at all, even were the dubious premise true). As we re-entered a relatively tolerant, if still ideologically unbalanced, period at the beginning of the new millennium, my growing displeasure with the phoney rebels cost me relationships and annoyed administrators, but never, at least in my mind, really threatened my employment status.

Today, and beginning perhaps 5-7 years ago, intolerance has returned at levels much higher than could have been anticipated during the 1990s phenomenon. The university take-over by postmodernist thought and intersectional identity politics, all nested within a Marxist foundation, has already wreaked havoc in the humanities and social sciences and has moved on to attack the natural sciences. Not simply satisfied to have altered the Zeitgeist of the Academy, the authoritarians now seek to silence by vilification and name calling those rare voices who resist the betrayal of the university. When even these strategies fail to silence all, techniques like "no platforming," the "Heckler's Veto," and efforts to have iconoclasts fired are invoked.

It is hardly surprising that undergraduates fall into line with their authoritarian professors. Like students from the 60s, they find the call to revolution seductive:

without an appreciation for the sweep of history, and in the absence of competing perspectives, they fail to realise that they are conforming to the orthodoxy. Where they differ from their 1960s counterparts is that in increasing proportions, today's students are content to eschew the value of freedom if freedom conflicts with the pursuit of social justice as narrowly defined and ideologically imposed on them. Despite the good efforts of organizations like the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) in the US, and SAFS here in Canada, it's not at all clear that this illiberal train will be turned around this time.

A recent development mitigating my pessimism is the 2015 emergence of the Heterodox Academy, formed by a group of leftist, centrist, conservative, and classically liberal scholars whose sole creed is

I believe that university life requires that people with diverse viewpoints and perspectives encounter each other in an environment where they feel free to speak up and challenge each other. I am concerned that many academic fields and universities currently lack sufficient viewpoint diversity—particularly political diversity. I will support viewpoint diversity in my academic field, my university, my department, and my classroom. (www.heterodoxacademy.org)

As argued on their website, "Promoters of orthodoxies often create an environment of intolerance for diversity of ideas and dissent in the very institution in which free exchange of ideas is its raison d'être."

Although refreshing to see those of all political stripes come together in this venture—protecting the university should not be a left versus right thing—it is those who rebel from the supposed ingroup who are likely to have the greatest influence in challenging orthodoxy and dogma. In the case of the Heterodox Academy, that person is social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, whose roots are on the left of the political spectrum. Haidt is a world-class scholar, a persuasive speaker, and is blessed, unlike this writer, with an unshakeable reservoir of "calm" in his countenance. He appears to be immune to provocation.

The Heterodox Academy launched at about the

same time that Jose Duarte, Lee Jussim, Haidt, and others published, in Behavioral and Brain Science, their already seminal article, “Political diversity will improve social psychological science.” Here, they make a compelling argument for the social good of viewpoint diversity, illustrating how it is the one type of diversity not valued in today’s university. I found the article to be such a breath of fresh air that I shared it with a non-academic (but intellectually minded) friend.

His response? He didn’t find it to be profound at all, but rather simply “common sense” and reflective of the mission of the university. This became a “from the mouths of babes” moment for me. My initial response to the paper as a revolutionary piece of work, when it rather simply supports the goals of the university, goes to show how far we have moved from our mission.

It is correct to be concerned about the post-fact world in which we live, so readily seen in the Donald Trump phenomenon. I fully support my academic colleagues who decry the lies and distortions coming out of today’s White House but I am incredibly frustrated that they are unwilling to acknowledge a similar phenomenon in our own house. We live in scary, polarized times in which young people are increasingly likely to perceive that they must either cast their lot with the Alt-Right or the Regressive Left. Let us hope the work of the Heterodox Academy will aid in demonstrating this to be a false dichotomy and will otherwise help steer the university back to its primary mission.

Stephen Perrott is a professor of psychology at Mount Saint Vincent University, in Halifax.

CRITICIZE RELIGION, NOT PEOPLE

Frances Widdowson

Should women be segregated from men in Canada? Does freedom of speech include the right to mock all religions, even if this causes believers great offence? Until recently, most Canadians would have answered

no to the first question and yes to the second. The increasing deference to multiculturalist arguments in Canada, however, has led to less certainty in both responses. How can respect and inclusion be practiced if minorities are criticized for their sexual segregation practices, or their religious beliefs criticized and ridiculed?

These questions have become much more fraught since the mass murder of Muslim worshippers at a mosque in Quebec City. There is now much soul-searching about this violence, and some argue that it was the heated rhetoric in discussions of Islamic beliefs and practices that led to the targeting of the mosque. It was this connection of speech and violence, in fact, which led Quebec’s premier Philippe Couillard to make the following comment: “Words can be like knives slashing at people’s consciences and we have to be more cognizant of that”.

But why should opposition to religious beliefs and practices result in violence toward the people who embrace them? Seeing religion as an ideology means that the *people* who believe are not the problem; instead, it is the irrational and oppressive *ideas* that encourage them to behave in destructive and discriminatory ways. The Koran, for example, asserts that men are in charge of women and disobedient wives should be disciplined by their husbands (Verse 4:34), and the mosque that was attacked in Quebec City unapologetically separates women from men to maintain women’s modesty and chastity (a practice that is also present in many other religious traditions). Canadians should criticize these practices, as well as the religious texts that promote them, so as to encourage gender equality and other progressive interactions in all aspects of our society.

This ability to distinguish people from their beliefs and practices is not happening in the current discussions of the mosque killings. The two are being conflated, and so a criticism of Islamic beliefs and practices is perceived as being hostile to those religious victims who have been indoctrinated and choose to follow the dictates of the Koran. While supporters of multiculturalist arguments see this as politically expedient, as it makes people reluctant to voice an-

ti-Islamic sentiment, it actually justifies the killing of believers.

It has been the continuous conflation of beliefs and practices with people—seen most clearly in the accusation that any criticism of Islam is “racist”—that has created a fertile ground for violence against Muslims. Because if religious beliefs are seen as being permanently tied to a particular group of people, what can be done if the beliefs that are held by them have destructive consequences for the society they inhabit? This conflation means that a believer cannot abandon their devotion to a religious text because it is being perceived as an inherent aspect of who they are as a person.

Separating beliefs and practices from the person who holds them will enable us to tackle both of the problems that are increasingly facing us as a society – 1) religious beliefs that are contrary to important values such as freedom of speech and gender equality and 2) the notion that people who hold these beliefs should be ethnically cleansed. People who espouse pernicious beliefs, religious or otherwise, are entitled to all the protections offered to us because of our common humanity. All beliefs, however, should be fearlessly analyzed so that we can try to persuade others to help us create the conditions for a more just and equal society.

Frances Widdowson is an associate professor in the Department of Economics, Justice and Policy Studies at Mount Royal University. Dr Widdowson is the Coordinator, Membership Outreach of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship.

FREE EXPRESSION: A MEANS TO SUBSTANTIVE SPEECH

Stuart Chambers

Genuine debate involves a three-step process: first, a claim is made about a given topic of interest; second, one is open to debate surrounding the assertion; and third, criticism is leveled to examine the merit of competing truths. Lately, however, the process has

been interrupted. Both left- and right-wing political adversaries have developed new tactics to stifle discussion. Some of these methods include: shouting down opponents, censoring deliberations, and dismissing rival commentary.

These strategies are problematic because without a dialogical exercise — a civil conversation with others — the accuracy of a given claim cannot be assessed. Hence, free expression never realizes its full potential as substantive speech. The latter involves a genuine exchange of ideas that leads to higher truths. Without the freedom of others to posit alternative perspectives — and the ability to assess their merits — substantive speech remains unattainable.

Recently, extremists have made it their *raison d'être* to inhibit dialogue. For instance, in 2014, Janice Fiamengo, a University of Ottawa English professor, questioned the existence of rape culture at a talk organized by the Canadian Association for Equality (CAFE). Before Fiamengo could begin the discussion, she was continuously interrupted by members of the campus's left-wing Revolutionary Student Movement. A representative for the organization clarified the group's political goals: “We feel that these (Fiamengo's) ideas have no place on our campus and refuse to legitimize them by allowing them space to organize.” To avoid hecklers, Fiamengo attempted to move to another room, but a fire alarm was pulled to thwart her efforts.

In 2016, University of Toronto psychology Prof. Jordan Peterson said he will refuse to use non-gender-specific pronouns when addressing students and was subsequently berated by transgender activists. On *The Agenda* with Steve Paikin, panellist Nicholas Matte, lecturer on transgender studies at the University of Toronto, dismissed Dr. Peterson's position outright, maintaining that it was a form of “hate speech,” something tantamount to “violence.” One guest who declined to participate in the panel discussion provided the following rationale: “Holding a debate which places a false equivalency between the views expressed by Peterson and the human rights concerns of the trans community would be an act of transphobia.”

More recently, on February 1st, 2017, riots broke out during a protest at the University in California, Berkeley, after *Briertbart News* editor and right-wing provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos arrived as part of a campus speaking tour. To silence Yiannopoulos, a small group of agitators set fires, hurled rocks at police and broke windows. Amid the chaos, however, freedom of expression and substantive speech became conflated. As the *National Post* commented, “The rioters presented the ‘argument’ that Yiannopoulos’s (aborted) talk was an act of violence, while ever so superciliously they maintained that their acts of violence were free speech.”

That said, Yiannopoulos’s own mean-spirited rhetoric hardly constitutes substantive speech. Rather than engage with others, Yiannopoulos uses such opportunities to humiliate his rivals. At a recent presentation at West Virginia University, he referred to one of its faculty members, Daniel Brewster, as a “fat faggot” and then further denigrated Brewster’s discipline of study: “Prof. Brewster teaches sociology, which comes in just above gender studies in my rankings of ‘burger-flipping majors.’”

There are other instances in which the behaviour of right-wing ideologues mirrors the antics of their ideological opponents. Alt-right devotees rely heavily on insults to deflect criticism away from their own entrenched positions — namely, their continued justifications for the 2003 illegal invasion of Iraq, their caricatures of Islam, and their attacks on multiculturalism. To discredit leftists on these issues, arch-conservatives label the former as “terrorist sympathizers,” “anti-Semites,” and “liberal elites.” Ironically, this kind of stigmatization represents the hard right’s own form of political correctness. Dissenting voices that make ultra-conservatives feel uncomfortable are simply ridiculed or ignored.

For example, on Fox News’s *The O’Reilly Factor*, host Bill O’Reilly is well known for telling his own guests to “shut up” whenever their positions on Islam, Middle East politics, or patriotism offend his sensibilities. Just as dismissive is American conservative writer David Horowitz. He asserts that Islamophobia is a “meaningless term,” and that instead of

discussing its damaging effect on society, it would be better “to remove the term from our active vocabulary.” In the American neoconservative publication *National Review*, op-ed writer Brendan O’Neill is equally evasive: “Islamophobia is a myth” and “the idea that there is a climate of Islamophobia... is an invention.”

Not to be outdone, Canadian media personality Ezra Levant once described a Muslim law student, Khurram Awan, as a “serial liar” and an “illiberal Islamic fascist.” In a libel suit, a judge found Levant’s comments were motivated by “ill will” and “showed a reckless disregard for the truth.” When condemned by the media for his conduct, Levant doubled down, insisting he was just another victim of the assault on “free speech” by the left. That his expressed views, and those of other far-right pundits, are void of any real substance appears irrelevant.

Tactics that involve degrading opponents, censoring speakers, or dismissing contentious perspectives represent partisan forms of expression. Their only purpose is twofold: to limit truth telling and to diminish our capacity as critical thinkers. Whenever free expression’s potential is left unfulfilled, the substance of a given truth claim remains disputed. There can be no consensus as to its value.

Fearing that an open, adversarial review of truth claims would expose flaws in their thinking, zealots resist efforts at free and vigorous inquiry. For both left- and right-wing ideologues, an exchange of ideas is viewed with either suspicion or contempt. It’s no wonder honest deliberation has become a process too frightening for the insecure among us.

Stuart Chambers is a professor in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa. He teaches media ethics in the Department of Communication. Dr Chambers’s opinion pieces on assisted dying and other topics have appeared in newspapers across Canada.

**ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO TEACH
INDIGENOUS SCIENCES:
A Response to Root Gorelick**

Albert Howard

One has a right to their own opinions, but not to their own facts. Teaching one's personal opinions as truth is not academic freedom – it's propaganda, and often simply false. When clear and conventional opposite views exist, academic responsibility is to present both (or all) views for peer review and debate. The Ontario science teacher Timothy Sullivan, who was found guilty of professional misconduct for telling students that vaccinations could lead to death, presents a case in point. Sullivan's claim was not a conventional view, but a contradiction of fact. A lawyer for the college (there is a publication ban on the name of the school), recommended a reprimand, a one-month suspension of his teaching certificate, and that he attend courses on professional boundaries, ethics and anger management (Sullivan was apparently disrespectful to visitors who were legally authorized to be at the school). There is no scientific evidence for the claims, made by Sullivan and others, that vaccinations are harmful in the manner he claimed.

This incident reflects Root Gorelick's article in the January SAFS Newsletter, touting the teaching of "Indigenous sciences," and Carleton University's rejection of his proposal to teach a course in "Indigenous perspectives[,] ecology and evolution" as a science course. As part of his rationale for the course, Gorelick says he could have "injected bits of Indigenous ways of knowing into routinely offered biology courses," but he wanted to initiate a "standalone biology course in this subject." In other words, he proposed to present indigenous perspectives, "ways of knowing," and other unverifiable beliefs as legitimate science. Surely indigenous knowledge (or traditional knowledge as it is often referred to), should be examined in the context of reason and critical thought—but Gorelick wants to teach it outside the discipline of the scientific method; thereby, it seems, avoiding the burden of scrutiny.

I am dismayed that Dr. Gorelick resorts to sophistic

arguments in support of his promotion of pseudoscience, citing the London Royal Society as founded to study the occult, especially alchemy. In fact, the Society investigated the many theses of alchemy, an endeavour that generated the conclusion that alchemy is a pseudoscience, and contributed to the basis of modern sciences like chemistry, astronomy, and physics. The Society was founded for the stated purpose of improving natural science, not legitimating the occult.

I attended a recent forum at Mount Royal University that featured not only Dr Gorelick but David Newhouse, the Chair of Indigenous Studies at Trent University, and a persistent promoter of the imposition of unsubstantiated Indigenous knowledge on university students. In the question period, I asked Professor Newhouse to define the difference between Indigenous Science and the universal science that is acknowledged globally. After some extensive prevarication, Newhouse determined the difference to be that Indigenous Science does not depend on evidence. So, Gorelick seeks to "teach" outside the most significant elements of science: evidence and critical thought. That is not teaching—it is propaganda.

Gorelick slides into postmodern doublespeak when he uses the term "science" to describe culture. He compares the modifying of the term "science" with *Indigenous* to the categories of science used to indicate the disciplines examined through evidence. These are not different kinds of science, but the distinctions of categories of scientific enquiry—chemistry, astronomy, physics, etc. He further attempts to justify his unscientific objective by misrepresenting comparisons to historical scientific methods that, through critical review, were altered to accommodate, include or reject hypothesis determined to be false. The method of progressive science—absent in indigenous mythology—of interpreting new data, and updating knowledge according to "justified, true belief" (Plato), equates to the different prior beliefs of "Indigenous knowledge" and the prior beliefs of true science. The indigenous beliefs are unsubstantiated myths, whereas the prior beliefs of real science are evidential facts. Science does not "agree to disagree," but logically views difference as the possibil-

ity that either one, or both, views are wrong.

Where did Gorelick get the absurd claim that “the best way to solve any problem is usually to throw a suite of methods at it, hoping that something works”? This notion was repeated at the MRU discussion, where Dr Massimo Pigliucci opposed it on the same general terms offered here. Real science methodologically rejects unreasonable, irrational and mythological premises as obstructions to scientific epistemology. The teaching of “alternative knowledge” is a setback for progressive education and the decision to reject his proposal acknowledges that. In his introductory paragraph, Gorelick correctly states that professors are hired to teach students how to think, but how to think is not learned by indiscriminate exposure to a slew of diverse ideas; it is determined through knowing how to evaluate those ideas according to scientific methodology, and discarding the nonsensical ones—the kind of examination Gorelick seeks to bypass.

Finally, Dr. Gorelick’s interpretation of academic freedom as the freedom to misrepresent fact, to present cultural mythology as alternate truth, and to pretend that opposing views can both be correct, would, if instituted, result in a setback for scientific education. It was a sound decision by Carleton academic authorities to reject Dr. Gorelick’s reactionary initiative. “There were serious concerns about creating a precedent for ‘Science’ courses based on mythological and folklore traditions,” the official report stated. Indeed.

Albert Howard is an independent researcher who has worked as a consultant for government and Native groups. With Frances Widdowson, he is co-editor of Approaches to Aboriginal Education in Canada: Searching for Solutions (2013) and co-author of Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception Behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation (2008).

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 2017

Keynote Speaker: Jordan Peterson

Saturday 13 May 2017

Western University, London, Ontario

10:00-11:00 “When Science is Political,” Jan Narveson, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Waterloo

11:00-12:00 “Equity hiring in the post-academic university,” Mark Mercer, President of SAFS and Professor of Philosophy, Saint Mary’s University

1:00-2:15 Keynote Address: “Why freedom of speech is not just another value,” Jordan Peterson, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto

Jordan Peterson is a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. Dr Peterson has spoken publicly against Bill C-16, federal legislation that modifies the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to include the terms “gender identity” and “gender expression,” charging that it infringes upon freedom of expression. He has also publicly stated that he will refuse requests from students that he use non-standard pronouns.

His criticism of the bill and his stance regarding pronouns have earned him letters of warning from the chair of his department and from his dean and vice-provost.

Materials related to the issues around Dr Peterson are available on the SAFS website: <http://www.safs.ca/issuescases/jordanpeterson/>

TEACHING PSEUDOSCIENCE SUBVERTS THE PUBLIC GOOD

Robert Thacker & Richard Zurawski

For better or worse, we live in a world that is increasingly technologically sophisticated, especially so in Western countries. The technologies that are arguably slowly taking over our world, Google search algorithms, for example, are not broadly understood by the average citizen. At the same time, widespread communications technology has also made individuals far more aware of relative social and economic inequities. The political and ethical questions facing humanity become more complex as our interconnectedness grows. Consequently, the teaching of morals, ethics and arguably science are perhaps more important now than they have ever been.

Throughout this letter we take the position that a belief in pseudoscientific claims that are strongly discredited is a bad thing for individuals, and the wider public good. While a precise definition of pseudoscience is not possible (see Pigliucci & Boudry 2013 for numerous concerns and a discussion of the “Demarcation Problem”), broadly we assume it to include homeopathy, astrology, crystal healing and faith healing, among many others, which have no significant statistical support from studies. We do not want to devolve into an argument over whether “poor science” exists, it clearly does, and much harm has been brought on people in the name of science, but equally well there are significant examples of theories of remarkably excellent predictive power and countless lives science has saved. It is also worth noting that in an era of increasing pressure on scientists to provide results with commercial viability the requirement of reproducibility is being failed by much medical research, although suggestions for improvements have been published (Ioannidis et al 2014).

But regardless of issues facing mainstream science, many pseudoscientific ideas actively seek promotion as well through the use of unproven arguments (“the power of crystals simply isn’t understood”), with perhaps a secondary effect of encouraging individuals to perceive the world as an apparently sim-

ple place. A cadre of individuals promoting ideas through social media, particularly with well-known influencers, for example, anti-vaccination advocate Jenny McCarthy, also leads to rapid dissemination of misinformation. Indeed studies of pseudoscience and science communication emphasize the power of framing (e.g. Nisbet & Mooney 2007) to help spread ideas.

Some have argued for increased science teaching as a mechanism for addressing these challenges (Sagan 1996). However, research (e.g. Johnson & Pigliucci 2004) strongly suggests the mere teaching of science facts has little impact on the abilities of individuals to discern science from pseudoscience. Indeed in some countries, notably France, a positive correlation between belief in the paranormal and educational attainment has been reported (Broch 2000).

It appears, and there are some significant studies that support this perspective, and that two major factors may contribute to the rise of pseudoscience, both falling under the theories of Etienne Wenger and his concepts of ‘Communities of Practice’ (Wenger 1998, Wenger, MacDermott & Snyder 2002). The communities of practice (CoP) concept states that once a practice or method or way of doing things is established, it forms a self-preserving role in society through those practices, and moves from establishers to those not yet indoctrinated. It ripples through society and fills a void which makes it difficult for other practices to establish themselves. In the case of the sciences vs pseudosciences, CoP states that both elementary teaching and the media can play a dominant role in determining how the public comes to choose and support one over the other. From this context, it is worth noting that in almost all teaching jurisdictions of North America, teachers, from primary through to grade seven, are non-specialists when it comes to teaching the sciences and mathematics, and according to Ingersoll (1999) are under-qualified to provide grounding in scientific method. In Nova Scotia (Dept Ed 2016) an elementary school teacher is only required to have one post-secondary credit in the sciences and one in mathematics to qualify to teach math and science at an elementary school level, and remedial courses in mathematics and sciences

are accepted.

The second issue in the sciences vs pseudosciences, is that of the traditional media. Studies have shown that once out of the formal education stream the main educational driver in the sciences are mainstream media, particularly television. Miller et al (2006) tells us that 80% of all adult education in the US comes from nightly television newscasts. What further exacerbates this dire situation is that with recent changes in the traditional media, along with media consolidation and cutbacks, fewer and fewer journalists who provide content for the nightly newscasts have any post-secondary science backgrounds at all (Zurawski 2010a, 2010b, 2012).

An argument can be made that perhaps what is missing from science curricula is the teaching of critical assessment and a better understanding of process. Broch (2000) reports success in terms of the ability to differentiate between science and pseudoscience by actively developing courses that do this. Both of the authors of this article have attempted to take this idea out of the classroom and into mass communications. By presenting science as a discovery process, not a collection of facts, and giving people the frameworks to better understand how science works, we can potentially greatly improve public understanding of science. Of course, determining how effect such efforts are requires a proper study.

Integrating these concerns leads us both to be deeply skeptical of the value of using Academic Freedom as a means to justify the teaching of pseudoscience. While we cannot speak to how an academic might put together a course on anti-vaccination, for example, a number of consistent themes behind that movement include (1) that vaccinations cause autism (2) vaccines contain unsafe toxins (3) natural immunity is somehow better than vaccine acquired immunity (4) vaccination isn't required because diseases are so rare today. Each of these concerns, and, for that matter, a number of others, have been shown in published literature to have essentially no merit. This is not of course to say that vaccinations cannot have side effects, they of course do, but the overall public health benefit of mass vaccination versus side-effect

risk is not seriously debated by the medical profession.

Consider the following scenario: Under the guise of academic freedom a course is taught with an emotionally appealing but ultimately false criticism of vaccination. Picked up by popular media and a tide of growing support, the arguments presented cause thousands of people to choose to remove their children from vaccination. Child mortality for the disease rises.

As much as this sounds like an implausible nightmare, arguably Jenny McCarthy's promotion of anti-vaccination arguments has led to this scenario being realized across North America. Following child inoculation rates for the influenza virus falling from 52% to in the 2011-12 season to 40% in the 2012-2013 season, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was sufficiently concerned to report in a "news flash" that 90% of all pediatric influenza deaths that year were in children who had not been vaccinated. Accurately predicted vaccination campaigns reduce the probability of catching influenza by between 50 and 60%, and tend to reduce the seriousness in cases where the disease is still caught. While admittedly anecdotal, social media and news reports highlight that many parents of children that might have been saved by vaccination are now taking stands against the anti-vaccination movement.

Thus our biggest concern about using academic freedom to teach any particular branch of discredited pseudoscience is laid out: the damage it can do in a

BEQUEST TO SAFS

Please consider remembering the Society in your will. Even small bequests can help us greatly in carrying on SAFS's work. In most cases, a bequest does not require rewriting your entire will, but can be done simply by adding a codicil.

Thank you,
Mark Mercer, SAFS president

public context. Many other concepts, especially conspiracy theories, root themselves in argument frameworks that often cannot be disproven, indeed the most popular ones are actually reinforced when criticized. Members of the public who subscribe to these ideas have varied reasons for doing so. From anti-establishment viewpoints, through to simple confirmation bias, there is no single dominant thought framework that leads people to believe ideas shown to be false.

Within this construct lies an equally important concern. One of the single most disturbing elements in modern culture is the rise of argument without evidence, or at the very least, the conflation of facts with opinion. Rhetorical techniques such as the “Strawman argument”, “pious fraud”, or “cherry picking” are so common that incoming students use them as a natural form of argument. Could such approaches be intimately tied with propaganda and the rise of “fake news”? Anyone with a significant social media presence who supports the scientific method may well have been faced with dogmatism such as: “You can’t believe anything from the BBC, they supported the child abuser Jimmy Saville.” Such techniques draw on numerous logical fallacies but nonetheless, to those without skeptical viewpoints, they can have elements of persuasion.

So if, as academics, we choose to teach things that we know are either almost certain to be false, or at the very least do not present these ideas in a way that is reflective of honest and broad assessment, we contribute to an undermining of the public good. The biggest irony for one of us, speaking as a physicist, is that the individuals most guilty of this over the past few decades are in fact physicists by training (Oreskes & Conway 2010). Although perhaps, given that the attacks were aimed precisely at science, it shouldn’t be entirely a surprise that the best people to do that would be scientists.

Academic freedom is a significant privilege that takes considerable achievement to earn. There is no doubt it has to be vigorously protected especially when it comes to criticism of institutions. But equally well, we fail to see how using it to justify the teaching of debunked pseudoscience is in anyone’s benefit.

Rob Thacker is a professor and Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in the department of Astronomy and Physics at Saint Mary’s University, in Halifax. Richard Zurawski is a science communicator and Halifax city councillor who teaches at both Saint Mary’s and Mount Saint Vincent universities. Until recently, Richard was host of Science Files, a Halifax radio program featuring Rob.

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“AUTHOR FIGHTS BAN ON MAVIS GALLANT MEMOIR”

Walter Bruno

Introduction

For thirty years, author Mavis Gallant and I maintained a platonic relationship, first, in Toronto and then, somewhere in Canada or Paris. We corresponded frequently and I kept her letters (and copies of mine). In matters of politics and culture, discussed in the letters, she and I were a pair. We admired the writing canon, 20th-century modernism, and left-liberal civic values.

Mavis’s health deteriorated, and by late 2010, the last time I saw her, she was nearing infirmity. In the following year she could not sustain a phone conversation. Nor was her financial health good; she had savings that barely covered two years’ rent, and, by the end, she was unaware of even that.

On the other hand, material legacy was a non-item for Mavis—she scoffed at writing a will. She had no family and little concern for the future. Most of her estate would have consisted of private notes, a diary, and anything unpublished set onto paper by her.

Under copyright conventions (never legally tested in Canada) an estate would hold “moral” rights to the

content of unpublished letters, even when the receiving party owns the letters. Mavis died in 2014. For me to know about a will and legacy, or even a death certificate, I’d have had to hire a lawyer in Paris.

A year later, I began writing my memoirs and built them around our letters. I’d been cut off from her for three years—she was physically and mentally incapacitated. During that time, a group organised as her supporters had entered her life in Paris. I did know they were helping her. What I didn’t know was that some of them had urged her to make a will. In the final will, an academic in Nova Scotia became her beneficiary, and here is the rest:

Press release: Author fights ban on Mavis Gallant memoir

Montreal—MARCH 15, 2017

Writer Walter Bruno announced today he is fighting to publish his book, *Notes from the Gate: A Remembrance of Mavis Gallant*, despite an attempt to suppress it. The book is a memoir of the first decade of his 30-year friendship with Mrs. Gallant, the world-famous Canadian author who died in 2014.

The book is based on private letters he exchanged with Mavis Gallant. In many of them, Gallant documents her alienation from the *New Yorker* magazine as the latter is taken over by S.I. Newhouse. In other letters, Gallant bemoans the counter-culture of the early 1980s, as publishing becomes infused with identity politics and social engineering.

Bruno’s book is anchored in half of his 500-piece archive, and wanders through gender-feminism, post-modernism, and post-colonialism. Icons of those contemporary trends, such as Margaret Atwood, Marguerite Duras, and Doris Lessing, are examined, as are Canadian political figures. Other key topics include early multiculturalism and cultural nationalism.

Suppression

The attempt to suppress the book is being led by Mary K. MacLeod who is employed in Gender and

Women's Studies at University of Cape Breton. MacLeod, although unrelated to Gallant, is the executor and heir of the Gallant estate, a collection of materials retrieved post-mortem from Gallant's Paris apartment. Under copyright conventions, estates extend to an author's unpublished letters sent to third parties.

Bruno reports that MacLeod has rebuffed all requests to negotiate his publishing rights. This is believed to be the first time in Canadian history that the estate of a writer has acted to suppress the writer's correspondence, not in its possession.

In September, 2016, the existence of a legal estate was asserted. A warning was issued to Bruno, who was astonished: Mavis Gallant had vowed, throughout her life, never to write a will nor appoint a literary executor. In fact, says Bruno, he doubts the durability of the will, drawn up when Mrs. Gallant was mentally incapacitated.

Nevertheless, Bruno immediately suspended his on-line distribution. His lawyers then asked to see the will in order to assess MacLeod's claims. In reply, on March 2, 2017, MacLeod's lawyers sent copies of documents, but stated that they were not entering into negotiation.

Bruno was "put on notice that, should he publish, distribute, or sell [the book] or any private letters of the late Mavis Gallant," MacLeod would launch legal action against him.

The defence campaign

In response, Bruno has launched a GoFundMe campaign to collect funds for his defence. The fund is located at <https://www.gofundme.com/freedom-to-read-gallant-memoir>. Its goal is to allow Bruno to proceed with publishing and be able to defend his rights in court. Along the way, he is inviting Canadian publishers to look at the merits of the book and to defend the principle of a free press.

Background reveals fears

The book is not just a collection of letters; it is a private memoir of 260 pages that traces the Mavis Gallant story within a narrative of Bruno's life. There was a connection; it happened that Bruno and Gallant were birds of one background and one political nest, despite their difference of age.

They both grew up on the soils of ethnically conflicted Quebec. As they separately worked through those conditions, they explored many of the same conflicts. Then, together, they saw how Canadian cultural policy changed in the 1980s, as culture was validated by Ottawa and centralized in Toronto.

They were not always impressed, especially when the reading canon followed suit.

This makes many of Gallant's letters politically eye-popping. Indeed, what really bothers MacLeod, Bruno feels, is not sharing book profits, but revealing the debates within the quoted letters. Among other things, they explore the new and loosened criteria for literary depth and universality.

More strikingly, their chatter questions gender-feminism, women's-lit departments, identity silos, and such current tempests as "appropriation of voice." They also question language revisionism, speech codes, and affirmative action.

Bruno points out that these notions have underlain the creation of MacLeod's department at UCB. Thus, there is much in the book that might irritate MacLeod and her employers.

"Here," says Bruno, "is the real issue. It appears that UCB Gender Studies controls the gender-study-averse papers of Mavis Gallant, while claiming to tout Gallant's work. For me, the picture is clear: release of my book could reveal how MacLeod is mis-appropriating and perhaps misrepresenting the very author she is promoting.

"At the very least," he adds, "she seems to be preventing her own students from reading the inconve-

nient truth.”

Walter Bruno is a poet, playwright, and translator, and a long-time SAFS member. He retired from teaching in 2010.

IT'S TIME TO RE-EVALUATE COPYRIGHT

Darren Abramson

I dedicate this article to the memory of Donna Balkan, who was always telling me to “write something about copyright.”

Suppose you write a short story. Do you “own” that story? Yes and no, under copyright law, and each of the “yes” and the “no” answer has good reasons behind it. After briefly explaining what I mean, I’ll introduce a puzzle for copyright and offer some thoughts on how you can help solve it.

Let’s start with the claim that you don’t own the short story. If you own a car, and someone drives that car away, then they have deprived you of your possession. Unlike a car, if someone makes a copy of your short story, then you might still have your short story. All of the things that are protected by copyright law are “intangible” in this sense. It is for this reason that we need copyright law for you to have special rights over the short story you wrote—property law won’t cut it.

Early [industry association advertising campaigns](#) took on the task of blurring the distinction between theft of a tangible good and violation of a copyright. The term “piracy” intentionally confuses criminal theft with unauthorized copying, which makes [satire of those early ads](#) all the more satisfying,

In what sense do you “own” your short story? Strictly speaking, you don’t. But in Canada and most other countries you have copyright over it: a temporary monopoly over the right to make copies of the short story. Copyright is a legal mechanism to make it as though you own the short story. Ownership of intangible goods doesn’t actually make sense, since there

is no safe that can hold an intangible good. But creating a right to sue someone who makes unauthorized copies of your short story means that you can monopolize all the financial benefits of that short story.

For about 400 years, Western democracies have held that copyright is a good idea for society. The downside of copyright is that it limits our freedoms. I can’t make copies of other works, or substantially borrow from them when making my own works, as long as they are under copyright. The upside is that, given the knowledge of the financial monopoly that they’d accrue from the publication of a popular original work, creators of intangible goods are highly incentivized to create. So, via copyright law, societies end up with lots of very high quality intangible goods, created by authors seeking not only fame but also fortune.

Richard Stallman, recipient of a MacArthur genius grant, and father of the idea of “free and open source software”, understands these opposing tendencies in copyright between limiting freedom and incentivizing the creation of new works (see section “Finding the right bargain” [in this article](#)). The following puzzle is due to him.

Suppose we agree that copyright law is an expression of what our society thinks is the right balance of these opposing tendencies. Then, in order to get clear on what that balance should look like, we must ask: how much freedom should be curtailed? What incentives should be offered for the creation of intangible goods like books, movies, music and software?

To see the complexity of this question, consider the cost involved to create and distribute music. Vinyl records are expensive and time-consuming to transport, but the digital transmission of music is cheap and nearly instantaneous. Assuming that people who create intangible goods are at least somewhat rational, if the risk associated with investing time, energy and money goes up, so too must the incentives go up, if they are to fulfil their incentivizing role. Conversely, as the costs go down, people will need fewer incentives to invest in the creation of intangible goods.

This shows that the “right balance” for society be-

tween liberty ceded and incentives gained in copyright is a moving target that must be determined by investigating practical consequences. In other words, solving Stallman's puzzle can't be done from the armchair.

For the last 100 years, copyright has expanded in one direction, granting ever-longer copyright terms. In Canada, the former Federal government recently told its citizens that due to the economic necessity of new global trade treaties, [copyright terms must be extended as a part of the budgeting process](#). From what I can tell, there is no shortage of new content being created. Instead, what we find is that business models that couldn't have existed when trucks transported reels of film to movie theatres are thriving. Consider: ad-free broadcasting that offers on-demand content for a monthly fee, a fee that is an order of magnitude lower than the price of cable television, is doing quite well (yes, Netflix).

Should you feel less free, or more free, to use new technology to make copies of intangible goods? Or, just as public libraries now have limited licenses to allow for simultaneous viewing of digital books (5 at a time for some at the Halifax Public Library, 2 at a time for others) that can be copied at no cost, should we use technology to make it harder to make copies?

Let me emphasize: the creation of culture isn't just about money. It also isn't just about labours of love. In Canada, [it is also about "honor and reputation."](#) The puzzle above isn't about finding the right point in two dimensions, or even three. If you've ever been in Toronto's Eaton Centre, named after an early casualty in the war between the Internet and Retail, you might have noticed the sculpted geese. Canadian copyright gives the right to the artist who sculpted the geese to deny the owner of the sculpture the ability to put festive hats on them. The geese are tangible, but the owner's inability to alter them is prevented by the law governing what copies we make of the tangible good.

Should there be greater protections for the intangible property of artists? Lesser? This is a hard question. But, let's return to money, or rather to the deliberate

lack of money, for a second.

An interesting feature of Canadian copyright law, but only since 2012, is that if you make creative use of other folks' copyrighted output, but don't charge any money for it, you are scot-free. Almost no one seems to have noticed this (with notable exceptions, such as [Murray and Trosow](#)).

Here's what section 29.21 says, in plain language ([compare the legal language here](#)). If you create a new work that contains copies of another work, you have not infringed on the copyright of the work you copied so long as you

1. are not trying to make money from your own work;
2. provided attribution for the work you copied;
3. didn't violate copyright to get a hold of the copy you used of the other person's work; and,
4. your work wouldn't spoil the market for the other work.

The fourth condition is stated in terms of a "substantial adverse effect, financial or otherwise" on the market for the work you borrowed from, and might mean that you can't put festive hats on the other person's work. This hasn't been tested in the courts. It is very common for young artists to learn their craft by "remixing" other people's works, and this practice has caused [significant controversy](#) in the United States. I hope people discover that if they build a Soundcloud-equivalent on Canadian soil, and find a not-for-profit way to support it, then musicians can have a place to practice remix culture without fear of takedown notices and copyright attacks. I also hope that this clause on "user-generated content" survives the upcoming review of Canadian copyright.

We live in an age of record economic inequality in which powerful actors have a strong vested interest in keeping copyright the same. Traditional publishers that succeeded under older conditions for making and transporting intangible goods are strongly incentivized to keep things the same, or even to extend copyright terms and conditions. Don't get me started on [digital locks](#), which some have argued could take

2017 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND SCHOLARSHIP

Saturday 13 May 2017, 9:00 am-3:15 pm Western University, Somerville House, Room 3317

9:00-10:00 Registration and Conversation

10:00-11:00 “When Science is Political,” Jan Narveson, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Waterloo

11:00-12:00 “Equity hiring in the post-academic university,” Mark Mercer, President of SAFS and Professor of Philosophy, Saint Mary’s University

12:00-1:00 Buffet Lunch (in Somerville House – The Garden, Room 3320)

1:00-2:15 Keynote Address: “Why freedom of speech is not just another value,” Jordan Peterson, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto

2:15-2:30 Refreshment Break

2:30-3:15 Annual Business Meeting (SAFS members only)

Registration Fee: \$30.00 per person, may pay at the door. (Registration includes coffee and lunch, but not parking.)

To confirm attendance (please reply by 1 May) or for further information about the meeting contact Mark Mercer: president@safs.ca.

To register in advance, send your cheque for \$30 to SAFS, PO Box 33056 Quinpool Centre, Halifax, NS B3L 4T6.

For further information about parking or Western University contact Daniella Chirila: e-mail: dchirila@uwo.ca; or by phone: 519-661-2111, ext. 84690.

Accommodation: On-campus rooms at Western Bed & Breakfast are \$62.00 per night including continental breakfast. The rooms are in a modern, air-conditioned residence, located in Elgin Hall on University Drive, off Richmond St. North (www.StayAtWestern.ca). Also, The Station Park on Pall Mall (1-800-561-4574), and Windermere Manor (1-519-858-1414), have UWO rates at ~ \$120.00 per night.

Getting there: From the 401, take Wellington Road North to its end, then jog one block west to Richmond Street, go North to University gates (on your left), just North of Huron Street. On campus, follow this road over the bridge, turn left at the light and continue to traffic circle. Visitor parking is on your right next to Alumni Hall once you are almost around the circle. Rate: \$7.00 flat rate. From Highway 7, take Highway 4 South (it becomes Richmond Street). At the fork after Fanshawe Road you can either stay left on Richmond to University gates (now on Richmond Street) as above, or stay right and go down Western Road, turn left at 3rd light (Lambton Drive). Visitor parking is on your right as you enter traffic circle. Somerville House is across the traffic circle. On Saturday there is usually no one at the Information booths.

away the exceptions that the Copyright Act provides, including user-generated content. Those of us who accept my argument here that the social utility that copyright promotes could thrive with a law that permits greater liberty might heed the words of Robert Heinlein, who got his start when he discovered he could get paid per page writing pulp sci-fi in the 1950s.

There has grown up in the minds of certain groups in this country the notion that because a man or corporation has made a profit out of the public for a number of years, the government and the courts are charged with the duty of guaranteeing such profit in the future, even in the face of changing circumstances and contrary public interest. This strange doctrine is not supported by statute nor common law. Neither individuals nor corporations have any right to come into court and ask that the clock of history be stopped, or turned back, for their private benefit. That is all. (From Heinlein's first published story, *Life-Line*, 1939, in *Astounding Science Fiction*.)

So, the time is ripe for a re-evaluation of copyright. Thank goodness that Canadian copyright law has, built into it, a mechanism for periodic review. Apparently this will be happening this fall. I've given an argument here for what I think should happen, but I encourage you, reader, if you're a Canadian citizen, to tell your Member of Parliament what you think about copyright.

Darren Abramson is an associate professor of philosophy at Dalhousie University, in Halifax. He works mainly in cognitive science, philosophy of computing, and philosophy of mind.

THE DEATH OF DEBATE IN ACADEMIA

Henry Srebrnik

There was a time when true contrarians and those who questioned ideological hegemony found a place in institutions of higher education. Not any more, it seems.

The examples are numerous and all around us. In March McGill University in Montreal, one of the most respected institutions in Canada, effectively forced out Andrew Potter, a professor who upset Quebec's political class because he wrote an opinion piece about the province that they didn't like.

Periodic eruptions of this sort are par for the course in this touchy province, and they happen every few years. The former *Globe and Mail* journalist Jan Wong and the late novelist Mordecai Richler both fell afoul of such hysteria, both of them accused of what today might be termed "Quebecophobia."

A friend and I suffered a similar fate after publishing an article on the Jewish community's fear of Québécois nationalism in the *Jerusalem Post* in 1982.

Potter, the director of McGill's Institute for the Study of Canada, penned an article, "How a Snowstorm Exposed Quebec's Real Problem: Social Malaise," in the March 20, 2017, issue of *Macleans*' magazine, in which he criticized what he called Quebec's "political dysfunction" and argued the province was beset by "low trust and alienation."

The roof fell in on him. Premier Philippe Couillard denounced the piece, while the nationalist newspaper *Le Devoir* published a letter comparing the column to the type of hate speech that led to the Rwandan genocide.

Even though the poor man was forced to grovel by posting an apology on Facebook, it wasn't enough. It is not clear that he resigned of his own free will or under duress from McGill's administrators; either way, he resigned as director.

McGill University's principal, Suzanne Fortier, said in the statement that, while "academic freedom is a foundational principle" of the university, Potter had failed to uphold the institute's "mission," which is "partly to promote a better understanding of Canada and its heritage." George Orwell would have been proud of that remark.

She described concerns about political meddling

in university matters as “unfounded rumours.” We might remember something the 19th century German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck once said: “Nothing can be confirmed until it has been officially denied.”

Andrew Coyne, in his March 24 *National Post* column, “This is Not How a Liberal Society Responds to Criticism,” also weighed in on this shabby treatment. “It is simply incomprehensible in a modern democracy that anyone, let alone a distinguished scholar,” could lose their job “over a piece of social criticism.”

Why this vehemence, when francophone writers are often equally critical? As Don Macpherson of the *Montreal Gazette* explained in his March 23 column, “Andrew Potter and la famille québécoise,” Potter’s “real crime is not what he wrote; it’s who wrote it, the language in which he wrote it, and for whom he wrote it.

“That is, Potter is an anglophone, who wrote in English, for a publication from outside Quebec.” For nationalists, “to belong to the English-speaking community in Quebec is to be excluded, or to choose to exclude oneself, from the French-speaking one, the true Québécois nation.”

Coyne, too, thinks that “the heat in the response, the very language,” with its reference to “attacks” and comparisons to “racism,” is of a kind that one would expect in response, not to a good-faith critique of society, but an ethnic slur. In other words, Potter is being condemned for being an “outsider.”

As for McGill, Emmett Macfarlane, a political science professor at the University of Waterloo, asserted that it was simply not the place of McGill to issue a statement disavowing itself from Potter’s opinion.

After all, as Macfarlane wrote in “The Chilling Effect of a University Tweet on its Scholars,” in *Maclean’s* on March 22, “academic freedom is only meaningful if it protects ideas, arguments, or research that we don’t all agree with.”

Globe and Mail columnist Margaret Wente summed it up very well in “Academic Freedom? McGill Caves

in to Tribal Politics,” published March 24. “The message they have sent the researchers and professors and students could not be more clear. We didn’t stand up for him. So why should we stand up for you?”

I earned a BA and an MA from McGill many decades ago. Back then it was a place of intellectual ferment and critical thinking. Clearly that’s long behind us.

Henry Srebrnik is a professor of political science at the University of Prince Edward Island, in Charlottetown.

UNCOMMON NONSENSE ON CAMPUS

Jack Edwards

The exercise of free speech, within certain limits, is a cultural good, a concrete expression of a value that not only is worth defending but also provides support for a variety of other values, equally worthwhile, not the least of which is the long-term survival of a free culture.

Over the last two or three decades, considerable changes have taken place on college campuses that appear to threaten the value of free speech. What are those changes, why have they occurred and what is being done to challenge them in a way that conveys understanding, purpose and resolve?

There are many examples within the campus milieu that are cause for concern: student protests have resulted in disinvitations to speakers, last-minute cancellations, shout-downs after a speaker has taken to the stage and even violence. In those cases, the speaker has been silenced and those who came to hear have only heard the voices of protesters and, on occasion, found themselves in harm’s way.

What values do protesters claim justify their actions, sometimes to the point of violence, in preventing others from speaking on campus? Will such values endure, flow into the mainstream to become part of the “cultural good” and will they contribute to the survival or decline of a free society? Actually, what

has taken place in the larger culture has been flowing into the academy for some time and, in that crucible, has been transmuted into something that is of questionable value. How did this happen?

Minority rights and human rights were an emerging focus in the West even before WWII and the subsequent formation of the United Nations. The civil rights movement in the US in the 60s, along with the *Ethnic Heritage Studies Program Act of 1974*, the 1982 Canadian repatriation of the Constitution, incorporating the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the passage of the 1988 *Multiculturalism Act* more or less formalized group rights and multiculturalism in North America. Add to that the massive migration into Western Europe from the East and that of millions of Mexicans into the US that continue to change the West dramatically.

In 2000/2001, the UN produced a report that served as a warning that migration levels into the West would be such as to destabilize Western culture and values. The confluence of migration and the legal and policy changes, necessary to justify and support those migration levels and prevent major internal strife, has contributed to the forcing of new values into the culture of the West. Those values have been making their way into public schools and universities for more than a quarter of a century.

As the new values, reflected and emphasized in words like *diversity, tolerance, racism, compassion, equality, bigotry, misogyny, victimhood, prejudice* and the like entered the lower grades of the educational system, occupied by an increasing number of migrants, they served as a form of social control. As those children have come of age in their university years and in the context of growing independence, youthful rebellion and protest, a significant number now find themselves supporting policies and behaving in ways that are overprotective of some and threatening to the free speech of others.

Those who support trigger warnings, safe spaces, sensitivity to micro-aggressions, and speech codes as part of university life insist that such things are necessary for “the good” of all. They claim stu-

dents ask for trigger warnings and that safe spaces serve therapeutic purposes. Both are also claimed to protect victims of assault and violence and prevent *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD). They are said to mitigate the experience of bullying, mental stress caused by overt and subtle racism and a devastating loss of self-esteem.

Adopting values consistent with this new reality of university life serves to justify protecting them by punishing those who threaten them, especially those from outside the university who are invited to speak. The forms of protection range from mild and respectful protest against an invited speaker to demands that others not be invited or be disinvited. Unable to prevent some speakers from arriving on campus, protection of those new values justify shouting speakers down when they try to speak; on occasion, the new values justify violence.

A recent example, which involved the more extreme forms of protest, was the reaction to an invitation to Milo Yiannopoulos to speak at Berkeley, the ostensible home of the *Free Speech Movement (FSM)* in the '60s. In response to a request from the Berkeley College Republicans (BCR), the controversial firebrand, a gay British journalist, was scheduled to speak at the UC Berkeley campus on Wednesday, February 1st, 2017.

Despite the controversy that had been swirling around Yiannopoulos, including previous cancellations of speaking engagements at NYU, the University of Miami, Florida State, UC Davis and others, Berkeley's Chancellor Nicholas Dirks sent a letter to the campus community affirming Milo's right to speak.

The administration's support for free speech was laudable, and especially so, given an earlier letter sent to Dirks and signed by thirteen faculty members. Among other things, the letter referred to Yiannopoulos' “noxious views,” which “pass from protected free speech to incitement, harassment and defamation once they publicly target individuals in his audience or on campus.” “Such actions,” they stated, “are protected neither by free speech nor by

academic freedom.”

As with other speakers at other institutions, administrators at Berkeley insisted that BCR pay the cost of security, which was estimated at \$10,000. Although this was rescinded after the event was cancelled, such practices raise a serious question: Does such a cost indirectly prevent groups from bringing controversial speakers to campus? Celine Bookin, the head of communications for BCR, wondered whether such unreasonably high costs serve as “a backdoor attack on free speech.”

Shortly before Yiannopoulos’ scheduled speech, some 1,500 peaceful protesters were joined by as many as 150 armed individuals, clad in black, wearing masks and, reportedly, having come onto the University from outside. They threw rocks and professional-grade fireworks at buildings and at the police. They set fires, painted graffiti on walls, threw Molotov cocktails and smashed the windows of the student union center where Yiannopoulos was to speak. The damage was estimated at \$100,000. A number of people were injured, one seen bleeding from his eye and another pepper-sprayed while being interviewed. As a consequence of the violence and destruction of property, Yiannopoulos was unable to speak and had to be escorted from the campus by security.

In the aftermath, Chancellor Dirks released a second statement condemning the violence, describing the preparations they had made to secure the event and reaffirming Berkeley’s commitment to free speech. Vice Chancellor Dan Mogulof, commenting on the violent protesters, stated: “We’ve taken note of the tactics, weapons, discipline, organization and training. We will not be caught unprepared for them again.” Milo was clear: “The days you could silence conservative and libertarian voices on campus and still expect to collect their tax money are coming to an end.” He vowed to return to Berkeley in the next few months.

Cancellation of Milo’s event at Berkeley has not been the only venue where disruptions have spotlighted speech on college campuses and many of the recent high profile disruptions have occurred during Yian-

nopoulos’ tour. The events at Berkeley are particularly significant because of the contrast they bring to the history and reputation of free speech on that campus.

One measure of how restricted free speech has become is illustrated in that letter from the thirteen faculty members. They attempt to justify silencing Yiannopoulos by using pejoratives to describe his speech: “*harassment, slander, defamation, and hate speech.*” It is one thing to characterize Milo’s speech with their words, as opinion, but ironic as a justification to prevent him from speaking.

Since those terms have legal foundations and criminal and civil lawsuits can be launched based on any of them, an obvious question is whether Yiannopoulos has been sued by anyone on any of those grounds. That does not appear to be the case and, in fact, the lawsuits that have been filed, or are being considered, are against institutions like Berkeley for failing to protect people from physical harm.

Terms like those of the Berkeley faculty have become part of campus life and, by metaphorical extension, have helped create a climate in which any slight, any hint of criticism of almost anyone, can become a cause for high dudgeon, demand for apology, shaming, censorship and expulsion.

Political correctness is a phrase used to push back on the uncommon nonsense of those imaginary threats and on a *language of overprotection* used as political intimidation to guard everyone against criticisms perceived to hurt their feelings. If anyone has shoved their fist into the face of political correctness it has been Milo Yiannopoulos. His “Dangerous Faggot Tour” has done its part to burst that protective bubble and open up discussions on freedom and censorship amid his outrageous and entertaining speech. Although many students were offended, many others found themselves agreeing with points he was making and, in that spirit of youthful rebellion, offering them a chance *to stick it to the establishment*. Similar to Donald Trump, Milo is an in-your-face challenge to the status quo of campus censorship. Consequently, many feel a need to silence him.

Regardless of whether Milo returns to Berkeley, another firebrand is set to speak there in April. Ann Coulter is scheduled to give a talk on immigration with a Q&A to follow. That event should reveal the extent to which the university has made progress in protecting free speech and creating conditions conducive to controversial speakers being heard.

Although censorship and suppression of free speech continue on many campuses, and laws, such as the recent *Bill C-16* in Canada, make individuals, and the academic institutions that provide a venue for their speech, culpable for “discrimination” based on “gender expression,” there are organizations and groups within the culture that are working to provide some measure of counter-control, on and off campus. To mention just a few:

1. In the US, the *University of Chicago* sent a letter last August to welcome students of the 2020 graduating class. In a sign of the University’s commitment to free speech, the letter read, in part:

You will find that we expect members of our community to be engaged in rigorous debate, discussion, and even disagreement. At times this may challenge you and even cause discomfort.

Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called “trigger warnings,” we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual “safe spaces” where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.

Fostering the free exchange of ideas reinforces a related University priority—building a campus that welcomes people of all backgrounds.

2. *The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE)* has, as part of its mission, to “defend and sustain” freedom of speech as “a fundamental American freedom and human right,” pointing out that “there’s no place that this right should be more valued and protected than America’s colleges and universities.” *FIRE* brings attention to infringements

of free speech, in the case of Berkeley condemning “the violence and attempts to silence protected expression.” In addition to the more than 400 cases in which it has been involved, *FIRE* maintains a *Disinvitation Database*, giving particulars of incidents beginning as early as 2000. In an encouraging sign, *FIRE* reported “an unprecedented decline in the percentage of universities maintaining written policies that severely restrict students’ free speech rights” for 2016. A summary of that report appears in the January 2017 issue of the *SAFS Newsletter*.

3. As a consequence of the incidents at Berkeley, President Trump tweeted, “If U.C. Berkeley does not allow free speech and practices violence on innocent people with a different point of view – NO FEDERAL FUNDS?”

4. Peter Wood, writing for *The Federalist*, points to his initiative of seeking endorsements from college presidents for a *College and University Presidents’ Intellectual Freedom Commitment*. He also mentions other efforts such as that of members of the *Goldwater Institute*, who are providing *model legislation* that could be adapted by States to help protect campus free speech.

These examples are encouraging because they are practical expressions of a resolve to defend the people’s right to speak and be heard without fear of censorship or (violent) reprisal. Free speech is a cultural value that is part of the democratic ideal of the West. These and numerous other examples demonstrate the practice and support free speech continues to enjoy in the culture and points to people and groups working to ensure its survival. In contrast, practices such as trigger warnings, safe spaces, policing micro-aggressions, speech codes, disinvitations, the shouting down of speakers and violence in the service of censorship are maladaptive and sclerotic to the flow of free speech and action. If those and other practices like them persist, they will lead to cultural decline and the loss of many values that have made Western culture such a success. Acting to ensure free speech will prevent much of the current uncommon nonsense on campus from emerging into the broader culture as a new and dubious form of “common sense.”

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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, BUT...: A Response to Adèle Mercier

Grant A. Brown

While reading the first two-thirds of Adèle Mercier's "Reflections on the Scope and Reality of Academic Freedom," in the January 2017 SAFS newsletter, I was thinking to myself that the author was articulate, principled, and knowledgeable about academic freedom issues. I skipped to the end to see who this Adèle Mercier was, and was surprised to read that she is a philosophy professor at Queen's, and a past president of the Canadian Philosophical Association (CPA). I was surprised because I didn't think philosophy professors in Canada cared much about academic freedom, other than to attack its defenders as apologists for racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on in academic research. I was especially surprised to read that a philosopher who defends academic freedom intelligently and with style could have been elected to the highest organizational office for Canadian philosophers. I was beginning to hope that perhaps this was a sign of positive transformation at the CPA.

And then I got to the "but..." in the final column of her article. (Salman Rushdie has said that everyone claims to "believe in freedom of expression, but..." - and as soon as you get to the "but," you realize that they are not really believers after all.) In Mercier's case, the "but" moment comes with the "Pointless Unscholarly Provocation" (PUP) exception that she carves out for tolerating academic freedom. She offers two examples: anti-abortion rallies, and "anti-feminist attempt-at-rallies." I have objections to what she says about both.

"You know an argument is a fallacious PUP," she says about the anti-abortion rallies, "whenever it

is supported mainly by pictures." Apparently, she knows nothing about the central role of visuals in the campus rallies against the Vietnam war, against apartheid and Jim Crow laws, against fossil fuels, against police brutality in the Black Lives Matter cause - and for that matter, in favour of legal abortion in the form of what happens to women when they have to go to "back-alley butchers." I have nothing against the legal provision of abortion services - although I suspect that a lot of the psychological and medical consequences of the practice are probably buried in fear that unpleasant truths could incline more people to want to put more restrictions on it - but to make the use of visuals a litmus test for what counts as a "pointless unscholarly provocation" is extremely weak.

Which brings me to Mercier's second example of a PUP, and her personal hostility to the Canadian Association for Equality (CAFE). I have a long-time but mostly casual awareness of CAFE, and they have always impressed me as an exceedingly careful, truthful, moderate voice for equality (or "men's rights") in Canada. So I was surprised to see Mercier attack them with such vitriol and irrationality. (As an example of the irrationality - the academic "malfeasance" - of her attack on CAFE, I cite her linking CAFE's charitable status to Harper's tenure as PM. The link is manifestly utterly gratuitous on several levels, and suggests more than a hint of Harper Derangement Syndrome in her rather than a defect in CAFE.) If what she had said about CAFE were true, it would be concerning (but still no reason to deny their academic freedom, or freedom of speech), so I dug into the matter a little deeper.

It seems that CAFE had an event on the Queen's Campus in April 2014 - just a month after Janice Fiamengo gave a talk there about which was written: The Fiamengo lecture will attract "Queen's Most Likely To Rape," etc., etc. So that gives a flavour of the heated and irrational culture of gender politics on Queen's campus into which CAFE was wading. Anyway, from what I can gather from a quick web search, a spokeswoman from CAFE cited some study which claimed that 95% of boys in juvenile detention had been sexually interfered with by female staff. This

seems to have set Adèle Mercier off like a mad thing.

She wrote a letter to some campus publication, non-responding to that statistic. She claimed to have done the “responsible” thing - go back and read the study to see if it actually supported what the spokeswoman had claimed. Her published counter was that (a) the boys mostly wanted to have sex with the female staff, so nothing to see here; and (b) the study showed that most of the rape that went on in juvenile detention centres was of female detainees by male staff. (That response is what Mercier characterizes in her SAFS article as “pointing out flaws in their interpretation of the data”!)

At this point in 2014, some people came to the defense of CAFE, pointing out that (a) statutory rape is not not-rape just because the child who was imprisoned under the attacker’s authority had “consented” to it; and (b) is simply a deflection from the issue at hand - a bit of statistical “malfeasance” of her own. And so some of CAFE’s defenders started calling Mercier a “rape apologist” - perhaps harsh, but I would opine well within fair comment laws and certainly well within the range of rhetorical tactics employed by Mercier and her fellow-travelers in the feminist movement. There is nothing here that I have seen which warrants labeling CAFE a “misogynist hate group” engaged in “cyberbullying,” etc., etc.

(Here is part of the story reported in the *Whig-Standard*: <http://www.thewhig.com/2014/04/09/queens-prof-targeted-by-group>. As usual, you get more complete information in the comments section than from the sympathetic reporter.)

I consider Mercier’s personal vendetta against CAFE in this SAFS article to be a calumny against them, one that SAFS owes CAFE an opportunity to correct on the record. Mercier’s entire discussion of PUPs is itself a PUP - a self-serving, maliciously motivated fabrication full of scholarly malfeasance that illustrates precisely why there must be no “but” to academic freedom.

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JORDAN PETERSON & THE VEXED QUESTION OF FREE SPEECH ON CAMPUS

W. F. Smyth

It seems scarcely a week goes by without news of a speaker—I believe without exception either on the political/religious right or a supporter of Israel—being shouted down or otherwise prevented from speaking on some North American campus. In Canada notorious examples are Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, both at Concordia University in 2002, Ann Coulter at the University of Ottawa in 2010. More recently, Hasbara Fellowships Canada, a pro-Israel advocacy group, was prevented from participating in a 2016 event at University of Ontario Institute of Technology.

On Friday 17 March of this year the tradition continued at McMaster University, where University of Toronto Psychology Professor Jordan Peterson, a critic of Bill C-16, which would add “gender identity” and “gender expression” to the list of discrimination categories in the Charter of Rights & Freedoms, was prevented from speaking by a group of 15-20 protestors. The next day, however, Peterson spoke to an estimated audience of 700 at Western University, receiving a standing ovation and praise even from some who had expected to disagree.

On 20 March Patrick Deane, McMaster President, sent out an “Open Letter to the McMaster Community”, in which he expressed unwillingness to “shut down events, exclude speakers, or prevent discussion of issues”, a welcome sentiment, but at the same time surely a minimal requirement of an administration that, in his inspirational closing words, wants McMaster “to be a place where respectful debate and discussion can flourish”.

The real problem faced by university administrators across North America, entirely unaddressed in President Deane’s open letter, is to *ensure* that “respectful

debate” is *enforced* on campus, as it is by law in the wider society. Of course “respectful debate” is lovely, but if the university fails to take the security precautions required to prevent illegal violent disruption of expressions and explanations of unpopular opinion, then its pious desires amount to no more than the mumblings of a toothless gnome. (My apologies to toothless gnomes everywhere, whose humour I have always greatly appreciated.)

At McMaster there is an organization rather grandiosely titled the President’s Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community (PACBIC), of which, mainly because I have always distrusted inappropriate uses of the word “community” (not to mention “inclusive”), I became a member. Thus I received a statement from PACBIC, dated 16 March, the day before Peterson’s visit, that came very close to denying his right to speak, and justifying suppression of it. Here are some quotes:

“freedom of speech doesn’t now, and hasn’t ever, meant that we can or should be able to say whatever we like in public spaces regardless of the impact of our speech on others”;

“little to be gained from debating Dr. Peterson because he presents no argument based on evidence”;

“speech or action that reduces the humanity of any group is not an exercise in freedom”;

“wherever free speech is valued, protest too must be valued”.

So PACBIC, the President’s Advisory Committee, takes the position that “respectful debate and discussion” with Peterson is useless and inappropriate: no mention of his “humanity”. This unfortunate document was supported by three groups associated with the McMaster Students Union.

On Tuesday 21 March, four days later, one day after President Deane’s open letter, I received another mailing from PACBIC. This time they complained of “messages that have singled out PACBIC members” as being involved in the protest that shut down Peter-

son’s event. After various disclaimers and evasions, it was finally admitted that “in consultation with the President and Provost, we have agreed to not put out any other public statement” that might “draw more hatred and bigotry or threats toward PACBIC”. In view of PACBIC’s hatred and bigotry and veiled threats, certainly a case of “live by the sword, die by the sword”. Still, a great relief to those of us who value “respectful debate and discussion”.

One concludes that President Deane advised his Advisory Committee to cool it. It remains unclear whether PACBIC’s original *cri de coeur* provided motivation for the disruptors of Peterson’s event. PACBIC of course denies this, but how would they know for sure? A McMaster “spokesperson” makes vague mention of the involvement of “someone who is not affiliated with the university”. The President in an interview excuses the McMaster security personnel, saying that it was difficult to “choreograph” an effective security response. He states the obvious when he agrees that it was “absolutely” a learning experience.

But what exactly has been learned? Amidst all the chatter emerging from this incident, there has been no mention of establishing procedures and regulations designed to *really* ensure freedom of speech on campus—freedom from bullying, illegal disruption of peaceful but unpopular events. Bad. But it is worse than that: it is not just at McMaster that nothing will happen—but nowhere in Canada, nowhere in North America. And it is not that hard.

Since the 1960s—1968, to be precise, when the Black Panthers took over San Francisco State University—university and college administrators have walked on eggshells, afraid to permit any challenge to the prevailing “politically correct” fad of the day. There is much talk of “diversity”, “inclusiveness”, “respectful debate”, as we have just heard from McMaster’s president, but when problems arise, as they inevitably do, no university seems to have policies or procedures or regulations in place to deal with them. It becomes a “learning experience”. To take one example, in 2011 a Canadian parliamentary committee proposed several steps that Canadian universities

could take to deal with anti-Semitism on campus, including, for example, “working together to develop protocols and procedures”. The result? Zero—even though a group of us vigorously brought the report to the attention of both McMaster University and the Council of Ontario Universities.

McMaster is just a microcosm of an ailment that has afflicted our campuses for 50 years, a disease much more serious and deadly in its long-term consequences than any Black Death could ever be.

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PREDICTABLY SPECIOUS REASONING FROM McMASTER’S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

John Carpay

McMaster University President Patrick Deane is the latest Canadian university president to join the growing trend of silencing discussion, debate and the expression of ideas on campus. On March 16, 2017, Dr. Deane’s official “Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community” stated that Dr. Jordan Peterson, University of Toronto Psychology Professor, should not have been invited to speak at McMaster University about freedom of speech and political correctness. As the Committee put it: “There is little to be gained by debating Dr. Peterson.”

Dr. Peterson has gained notoriety for refusing an edict to use “gender-neutral” pronouns rather than “he” and “she.” His articulate and principled objections to his university’s demands are readily available to the public.

The day after the Committee’s statement, a mob of loud protesters effectively shut down the March 17 event with Dr. Peterson. The protesters rang bells and beat drums, chanting “Shut him down!” and shouting “Transphobic piece of shit!” Dr. Peterson could not be heard in the classroom, and eventually

went outside. YouTube videos enable people to listen to his outdoor comments, with the intolerant mob as background noise.

One can’t help but remember what happened in Germany from 1921 to 1933, when the “brown shirts” disrupted the meetings of anti-Nazi political parties.

Unlike Hitler’s brown shirts, the intolerant, noisy and debate-hating censors who prevented Dr. Peterson from being heard were non-violent. But disrupting a meeting is easy to do. Discussion, debate and freedom of speech are in fact very fragile. They require the unanimous cooperation of people who are willing to debate their opponents, rather than silence their opponents through noise and disruption.

Dr. Deane’s Advisory Committee called not for debate, but for “public opposition” and “public protest” against the March 17th event. The loud bell-ringing, drum-beating and chanting were no accident. The non-violent brown shirts were successful in ensuring that Dr. Peterson was not heard.

The reasoning of Dr. Deane’s Committee is as specious as it is predictable. Rather than engage in debate (which, God forbid, might result in losing the argument), the Committee asserts that Dr. Peterson should not be heard because of his “callous disregard” for the personhood of transgender people. This accusation is a clever way to avoid addressing the question of whether it is right and just for governments or employers to force people to use words which they don’t want to use. Dr. Peterson objects to the coercive imposition of a speech code, whether by government legislation or by publicly funded universities.

Dr. Deane’s Committee also accuses Dr. Peterson of having little knowledge of his subject, again avoiding the issue of whether the coercive imposition of speech codes is compatible with Canada’s free and democratic society. This ad hominem attack against Dr. Peterson himself, instead of an attack against his argument, is as old as human history.

The Committee’s other arguments boil down to the

same old arrogance that censors always use: “I am so right, and it’s so obvious that I’m right, that I’m entitled to silence those who disagree with me.”

On March 20, Dr. Deane stated that the disruption of Dr. Peterson’s speaking opportunity does not reflect “the standard of academic debate that we would aspire to model on our campus.” However, he goes on to characterize the loud bell-ringing, drum-beating and disruptive chanting as “peaceful protest” which McMaster should allow, and will allow in future. In other words: you can silence your opponents as long as your tactics are non-violent. Would Dr. Deane object if he himself was silenced by drum-beating, bell-clanging and loud chants of “Shut him down!”?

Each year, McMaster and other public universities receive \$17 billion from Canadian taxpayers, by claiming to be a forum for debate, in the pursuit of truth. Dr. Deane and other university presidents betray the public’s trust, by condoning the mob censorship of controversial ideas and speakers. It’s high time for reasonable citizens to revisit their compelled support for universities which do not require students to think and reason, and instead allow students to silence speakers they disagree with.

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FLASHBACK TO EDUCATION BY INDOCTRINATION

Christina Behme

Recently, university campuses in the US and Canada have seen violent protests to presentations by invited speakers (Milo Yiannopoulos, Charles Murray, and Jordan Peterson are examples). These actions in themselves are reason for concern. When, in the name of tolerance, students who want to learn about different points of view are prevented from doing so, and when speakers who attempt to express those points of view are not merely silenced but physically assaulted, talk of academic freedom rings hollow.

The moment one group, any group, uses violence to oppress voices they disapprove of, everyone interested in a multifaceted, open-minded education loses.

Unsurprisingly, the events have been widely debated on campuses, social media, blogs, and in the print media. The opinions expressed are as diverse as the views of the speakers who have been silenced and their critics. In many cases, one can notice opinions different from one’s own and learn from them or agree to disagree. However, some opinions can lead down a dangerous path because they call into question the ideal of freedom of expression for everyone. Regrettably, one of the most dangerous articles, titled “Free Speech Is Not an Academic Value”, by Stanley Fish, has been published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

I do not believe in silencing dangerous views but think we need to critically engage with them. I explain below what the dangers of Fish’s views are and how they can be addressed. While reading Fish’s article I felt more than once as if I had travelled back in time into the East German indoctrination machine. Fish draws a distinction between ‘the academic scene’ and ‘the extracurricular scene’ and wants to limit free speech to the latter.

Fish claims “Freedom of speech is not an academic value. Accuracy of speech is an academic value; completeness of speech is an academic value; rele-

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vance of speech is an academic value. Each of these values is directly related to the goal of academic inquiry: getting a matter of fact right. The operative commonplace is ‘following the evidence wherever it leads.’ You can’t do that if your sources are suspect or nonexistent; you can’t do that if you only consider evidence favorable to your biases; you can’t do that if your evidence is far afield and hasn’t been persuasively connected to the instant matter of fact”.

Superficially sounding reasonable, Fish’s proposal actually is a subtle recipe for indoctrination. Usually it is defended by taking extreme examples (like flat-Earthism) and proclaiming: We do not want this to be included in curricular activity! But the extreme cases do not imply that academic inquiry has produced consensus in all (or even the majority of) cases. How then do we know what speech is relevant or when inquiry is complete? Ordinarily we consult experts. But experts are no infallible gods who have direct access to ‘The Truth’. Like the rest of us they can be (and have been!) mistaken. Roughly 70 years ago wide scientific consensus suggested that homosexuality is a disease that needs to be cured. Defenders of that view certainly believed that their speech was ‘accurate’, ‘complete’, and ‘relevant’. Evidence to the contrary would have been rejected as ‘suspect’. Had all scientists obediently followed Fish’s dictum, we still would expose people to electric shock aversion “therapy”. Our view on homosexuality changed only when views that challenged the perceived wisdom were no longer silenced, when free speech was permitted in the academic scene.

For many of the current debates, we do not have the benefit of hindsight and hence we do not know which speech is relevant and accurate. But individual academics surely believe that their theories are correct and supported by the available evidence (otherwise they would not hold those views). Ordinarily this shapes the topics they choose to investigate and teach, the works they consult and refer to, the readings they select for their students, and so on. This is of course unproblematic. But, according to Fish, these academics are *also* licensed or even obligated to silence opposing views as irrelevant or suspect. Genuine inquiry cannot flourish in such a climate of

enforced conformity. Many of the widely accepted views of today arose from the controversial challenges to the ‘common knowledge’ of yesterday. Allowing freedom of expression in the classroom does not lead necessarily to intellectual anarchy or regress to flat-Earthism. Exploring (and in many cases eventually rejecting) views challenging the ‘established consensus’ fosters critical engagement with academic topics and encourages mutually respectful debates. Student minds are not vessels to be filled but fires to be kindled (as Plutarch put it).

Having shown that Fish’s thesis that academics ought to silence non-conforming views does not apply to the academic scene, I argue now that his proposal for the extracurricular realm is problematic as well. Here Fish wants to allow freedom of expression but insists that the university not only has the right but an obligation to police how conflict between mutually exclusive opinions is to be resolved. He bases this insistence on the premise that “[Middlebury students] are obnoxious, self-righteous, self-preening, shallow, short-sighted, intolerant, and generally impossible, which means that they are students, doing what students do”. It is quite astonishing that Fish would issue such a blanket condemnation of ‘students’ based on the actions of a small group of students at Middlebury who prevented Murray from speaking and attacked him and another professor after the event. Reprehensible as this behaviour might have been, it is hardly representative of how students in general act. While there have been several widely covered events of violent protests, the vast majority of campus debates are entirely peaceful. In fact, the violent attack on Murray attracted so much attention because it was so atypical. The media show little interest in peaceful debates that occur on campuses every day. Ironically, Fish’s condemnation of students as a group would apply exactly to the kind of person who would emerge from the academic scene he prescribes. This climate of indoctrination in which free speech has no room produces intolerant people who believe “we are in possession of the truth, and it is a waste of our time to listen to views we have already rejected and know to be worthless”. Fish calls this attitude “a nice brew of arrogance and ignorance”. Indeed—but the brew is ‘cooked’ according to his

own recipe.

One final point: Fish rejects the idea that free speech was attacked at Middlebury. He seems to base this rejection mostly on the fact that “no government or government agency prevented Murray from speaking”. Technically that is correct. But not even in totalitarian dictatorships (like East Germany) did governments send employees or agencies on university campuses to interfere with free speech. Instead, university teachers implemented the curriculum based on Marxist Science. That is, university teachers were enforcing the communist consensus view based on precisely the principles Fish advocates: they determined what speech was accurate, complete, and relevant. It is of course not necessary that every such a system leads to indoctrination. But eliminating free speech from the academic scene is more than a first step in that direction.

(The version of this article posted on the SAFS website contains links to references and selected news reports.)

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KNOWLEDGE AND THE UNIVERSITY

Mark Mercer

On one view, universities are institutions of knowledge above all else. They collect or create or extend it, and catalogue and preserve it. They teach it to their students and disseminate it widely. They are supported by public funds to do this because knowledge is useful; if one works from knowledge, one will succeed. (More to the point: to work from ignorance or error is to court disaster. Children die of measles; bridges twist in the wind and collapse.)

That the university is a champion of knowledge against error and ignorance and must preserve its

reputation as such underlies positions on all sorts of topics. Here are some: the incorporation of indigenous lore in science curricula; extra-curricular talks and events; directorships of institutes; accreditation; the involvement of administrators in hiring, academic planning, and the like; whether professors should refrain from speaking outside their areas of specialization; and the extent to which professional groups, such as the Modern Languages Association, should guide the disciplines.

There are alternatives to the university as place of knowledge. Some are worse: the university as credentialing agency, for instance, or as an instrument for socializing youth into currently preferred attitudes and values. At least one alternative is better. Universities might organize themselves around the idea that they are places for dispassionate inquiry, interpretation, and discussion.

Many criticisms of the knowledge-factory idea are worth discussing—that much at universities is about know-how, and not knowledge; that much at universities is about meaning and interpretation; that teaching has little to do with getting students to know things; that reputations have little to do with desert; that policing and defending the knowledge factory will consume resources and weary the workers—but I’ll sketch just one.

To certify something as knowledge we need to know that we know it. But our attempts to know that we know can lead only to regress, circularity, or dogmatism. Since, then, we can never know of something that we know it, we can never sincerely certify for the consumer that what she is getting is in fact knowledge.

A wrong-headed objection to my criticism is that some things are indeed known to be true and it’s not dogmatism to protect them using rules and authority. A tougher objection is that sometimes dogmatism is just what is needed (children; bridges).

Mark Mercer is president of SAFS and teaches philosophy at Saint Mary’s University, in Halifax.

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