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### WHY IS ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN CANADA SO INCOHERENT?

*Peter Bowal*

#### Introduction

Academic freedom is often deployed by faculty members as a shield to defend their speech and actions today, but the concept – and especially its scope – is poorly understood. Likewise, academic institutions dismiss claims to academic freedom on case-by-case bases when it serves institutional interests. Academic unions and their lawyers at arbitrations, beyond general yammering about it, do not know how to leverage it as a distinctive, enforceable legal right. While the core concept is widely accepted, it is an unreliable and unpredictable defence in practice. My theory for the weakness of this right is its lack of legal precision and authority.

In this article, I briefly describe what we understand to be the primary pillars of academic freedom and the various influences that have shaped the Canadian conception of academic freedom.

#### Contours of Academic Freedom

In Canada, the fundamental principle of academic freedom protects the independence of scholars in their teaching, research, and public discourse. While detailed definitions and scope vary within and between institutions, the central concept is widely recognized and upheld by Cana-

dian post-secondary institutions and faculty unions. Today, academic freedom is generally understood to include the pillars of:

- research and publication – the right to scholarly inquiry without censorship or interference, and to publish findings, however controversial;
- teaching – the right to choose the curriculum and course content within broad guidelines of the course name and description, to present and discuss material according to professional standards (even on contentious topics), to decide on delivery formats and assessments, and to manage the class and course; and
- institutional autonomy – post-secondary institutions remain free from undue political, corporate, or ideological influence in academic matters.

Many will assert that there is more to academic freedom than these three pillars. What are its limits? The scope of academic freedom is arguable and negotiable, but it is neither unbounded nor unlimited. More likely it is about weighing competing interests within the framework of the three pillars above.

What about, for example, expression as a private citizen? Does a faculty member have the unfettered right to act, speak or write as a private person without institutional discipline? No, this has historically been constrained by professional and occupational ethics. Judges are an example of a professional class whose membership

is ethically circumscribed in what they do and say off the bench. Faculty members are possessed of confidential information about students and research subjects that cannot be shared outside of work. Generally, in employment law, an employer can charge employees' bad off-work behaviour against those employees for disciplinary purposes if that behaviour compromises employees' ability to do their jobs or negatively impacts the reputation of the employer. For that reason, and to pick a contemporary illustration, I would argue that academic freedom does *not* excuse a faculty member who bullhorns racist or anti-Semitic epithets at a community protest if the effect is to make the institution's students feel threatened and to imperil enrollment and class attendance.

### Where Does Academic Freedom Come From?

The roots of post-secondary institutional academic freedom in Canada are embedded in historical, legal, and philosophical developments which have evolved over time, often influenced by the broader intellectual and political context.

#### 1. The British Colonial Legacy

Canada's post-secondary institutions were initially shaped by its colonial history under British rule. British legal traditions, including the principle of freedom of speech, profoundly influenced Canadian universities. Early Canadian universities, such as the University of Toronto (founded in 1827) and McGill University (founded in 1821), were modeled after British institutions and their academic norms. British heritage prioritized academic freedom as part of a broader tradition of intellectual inquiry and institutional autonomy.

#### 2. The Role of Universities in Canadian Society

Academic freedom grew as universities began to play a more central role in society and nation-building after Confederation. Scholars engaged in intellectual debate, research, and contributed to the development of national identity and culture. This freedom was valued as Canada forged its own identity apart from its British and French roots.

#### 3. Early Academic Freedom Movements

In the 1930s and 1940s, Canadian scholars began to advocate vigorously for academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of universities. The rise of fascism and communism brought concerns of political interference, censorship and ideological battles.

#### 4. Canadian Association of University Teachers

<sup>1</sup>United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: United Nations, 1948. (<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.)

<sup>2</sup>The *Constitution Act*, 1982, Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11, <<https://canlii.ca/t/ldsx>>

<sup>3</sup>Section 2.

<sup>4</sup>Section 32.

Canadian academic organizations such as the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), founded in 1951, have continued to advocate for academic freedom. CAUT's national mandate includes the protection of faculty members' rights to engage in research, teaching, and public discussion without fear of reprisal. As a result, today all university members maintain a clause in their respective academic collective agreements to the effect that academic freedom will be respected and preserved. Very few, however, specify the *content* of academic freedom.

### 5. International Influence and Human Rights Movements

Academic freedom had been vigorously defended in the United States since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. American legal and academic thinkers during the 1950s McCarthy era pressed academic freedom as self-governance for universities, insulated from political or governmental interference.

The development of academic freedom in Canada was also influenced by broader international human rights movements, particularly after the United Nations was established. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*<sup>1</sup> does not mention *academic inquiry* explicitly, but it protects foundational freedoms that encompass academic freedom. Articles 19 and 26(2) state:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms...

Together, these articles are understood to protect the essence of academic freedom, such as expressing scholarly opinions, disseminating research findings and accessing and exchanging knowledge internationally. Education – and by extension, academic environments – should foster critical thinking, open inquiry, and respect for intellectual freedom. Academic freedom enjoys the status of a global norm.

### 6. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)* and Legal Precedents

The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*<sup>2</sup> protects individual rights, including freedoms of thought, belief, opinion, expression, and assembly<sup>3</sup> but it does not specifically mention “academic freedom.” The *Charter* expressly only ap-

plies to government action and not to private entities.<sup>4</sup> If an underlying pillar of academic freedom is that universities ought to be independent of government, it follows that universities are not governmental entities subject to the *Charter* and the freedom of expression it guarantees. In other words, faculty members cannot have it both ways: independent of government and at the same time regulated by government and guaranteed free expression thereby.

### The Legal Dance of Universities and the *Charter*

The courts acknowledge this conundrum and even today grapple with applying *Charter* rights to universities for various purposes. In *McKinney v. University of Guelph*<sup>5</sup>, a case challenging the government policy of mandatory retirement of professors at age 65<sup>6</sup>, the Supreme Court of Canada said universities are not automatically subject to the *Charter* just because they are publicly funded. Public does not automatically mean “governmental”, or direct extension of government.

In *Lobo v. Carleton University*, students sued and claimed a *Charter* breach of free speech after Carleton removed their anti-abortion display. The Ontario Superior Court ruled<sup>7</sup> that the *Charter* did not apply because the university was not acting as government or carrying out a government policy. When can universities be said to be performing a government function or implementing government policy? That depends on context and function.

Generally, universities act autonomously and do not implement government policy, so the *Charter* does not apply. Universities are acting as governmental entities – and the *Charter* applies – when they are enforcing government legislation (such as administering a provincial law), when they act as an agent of the government, or their decision is so controlled by the state that it effectively becomes state action. Admittedly, these legal tests sound like circular thinking but examples putting them under the *Charter* would include disciplining students under a provincial statute rather than university policy or enforcing public health mandates issued by the government. Carrying out internal matters like academic discipline, hiring decisions and *Codes of Conduct* (usually seen as private institutional policies) keep them outside of the *Charter* and, therefore, without constitutional freedom of speech and academic freedom that arises from it.<sup>8</sup>

In *Pridgen v. University of Calgary*,<sup>9</sup> twin brothers Keith and Steven, students at the University of Calgary, posted

critical comments about a professor on a public Facebook page, expressing dissatisfaction with the course. The university found them guilty of non-academic misconduct under its *Student Misconduct Policy*, citing “harassment” and “intimidation.” The brothers appealed to court, arguing that the university had violated their *Charter* freedom of expression rights. In 2012, the Court of Appeal agreed that since the university’s disciplinary action was rooted in the provincial *Post-Secondary Learning Act*,<sup>10</sup> it was acting as an agent of government and the *Charter* applied. Those students had *Charter* rights; the Facebook posts were neither harassment nor intimidation but rather free speech-protected criticism. Would non-academic student speech (eg., protests) enjoy the same protection?

Even if the *Charter* applies in a given case, free expression and academic freedom may be subordinated to other interests. The Supreme Court case from 2007 of *Baier v. Alberta*<sup>11</sup> involved teachers who wanted to run as school board trustees but that was prohibited by provincial legislation unless they took a leave of absence to run and resign if elected. Academic freedom did not extend this far and the Court concluded that *Charter* protections of freedom of expression and equality do not guarantee access to a platform like running for office or speaking at a university event.

The Supreme Court, in the *Trinity Western University* case<sup>12</sup>, also decided that a Christian university’s covenant banning LGBTQ+ relationships could not override accreditation requirements since religious academic freedom is subordinate to *Charter* equality rights. Academic freedom must yield to nebulous *Charter* “values”.

### Conclusion

Academic freedom is tossed into disputes, much like “the Rule of Law,” without much understanding or precision. It is poorly conceptualized and is not enshrined in the law. Little wonder that today it is under attack in Canada where most academic disciplinary disputes are now fought on grounds of managerial prerogative, public interest, offended feelings, social responsibility, ethics, and vague declarations of ‘rights’.

The law currently grants autonomous universities broad discretion in internal governance, including discipline of academic members for speech. Academic freedom plays a secondary role in internal governance, and the courts will

<sup>5</sup>*Supra*, at footnote 3.

<sup>6</sup>Mandatory retirement has been generally repealed in Canada since this case.

<sup>7</sup>2012 ONSC 254 (CanLII), <<https://canlii.ca/t/fpl4d>>. This decision was upheld by the Ontario Court of Appeal: 2012 ONCA 498 (CanLII), <<https://canlii.ca/t/fs0mb>>.

<sup>8</sup>Even when the *Charter* does not apply, students, staff, and faculty still have rights through provincial human rights and labour legislation, contract law and administrative law (eg. for fairness in disciplinary processes).

<sup>9</sup>2012 ABCA 139 (CanLII), <<https://canlii.ca/t/fr7w6>>.

<sup>10</sup>SA 2003, c P-19.5, <<https://canlii.ca/t/56fcr>>.

<sup>11</sup>2007 SCC 31 (CanLII), [2007] 2 SCR 673, <<https://canlii.ca/t/1rw0g>>.

<sup>12</sup>*Law Society of British Columbia v. Trinity Western University*, 2018 SCC 32 (CanLII), [2018] 2 SCR 293, <<https://canlii.ca/t/hsjpr>>.

be reluctant to interfere in internal governance decisions made according to policy and fair process.<sup>13</sup>

Academic freedom in Canada is never absolute and gives way to professional ethics (eg. research misconduct, plagiarism), human rights legislation (eg. prohibitions on hate speech, harassment) and internal governance through institutional policies (eg. respectful workplace rules, Indigenous reconciliation commitments).

By default, universities are *not* bound by the *Charter*. Faculty members must make a special case that the institution was carrying out a governmental function in order to enjoy workplace free speech. Legislation neither defines nor guarantees academic freedom. The professoriate, as an occupational category, is not a regulated profession, although some professors are also members of regulated professions.

The courts give passing approval of a stand-alone concept of academic freedom in aspirational terms. However, for faculty members facing discipline for what they say, research, publish and teach in an academic context, the best hope for vindicating academic freedom will be found in expansive and distinct Collective Agreement clauses and arbitrations.

Until then, disputes and academic discipline over faculty statements on Middle East politics, clashes over gender and identity policy, and disagreement on Indigenous reconciliation, indigenization and decolonization will continue to be difficult to predict and resolve.

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#### WHEN A QUESTION OFFENDS: THE DEMISE OF THE CANADIAN EVALUATION SOCIETY

*Gregory Mason*

*“... we live in an era where things that are self-evidently true are denied by maniacs who are then flattered by cowards.”*  
*Douglas Murray*

#### **The Canadian Evaluation Society (CES)**

By the mid-seventies, the federal government, through the Treasury Board, had accepted the potential for evaluation. Its 1977 publication formalized the creation of processes to assess whether Canadians received value for money for their taxes.

In 1980, some federal and provincial civil servants, plus a few academics, met to create a professional body to promote program evaluation within the government and not-for-profit sectors. CES developed quickly and, in 1981, started convening national conferences. The *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, a peer-reviewed academic

publication, started in 1986 and rapidly became a leader in the field.

I served as National President of CES in 1989 and was given the national award for service to CES in 1990. Over several decades, I offered professional training in evaluation methods throughout Canada to public servants at all levels of government and employees of not-for-profit organizations. In 2010, I became a Fellow of the Canadian Evaluation Society; the same year, the society started its credentialing program to recognize evaluators who had reached standards of technical competence, education, and experience. I served on the credentialing board for a decade. I also regularly teach undergraduate and graduate evaluation methodology courses.

In 1988, I founded a research company (PRA Inc.) with two partners. The company completed hundreds of program evaluations under federal, provincial, and municipal government contracts. I retired from PRA in 2015, but the company continues to flourish.

In summary, I consider program evaluation a core academic competency and believe I have an insider’s perspective on both the program evaluation function in Canada, the Canadian Evaluation Society, and by extension courses in public administration

#### **Re-entry**

For family reasons, in 2015 I had to step away from CES and contract work in program evaluation, although I continued teaching evaluation at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Of course, COVID-19 interrupted in-person meetings, and it was not until May 2022 that I started again to attend the national conferences.

I was unprepared for the change in focus that had occurred over the space of seven years. The conference theme was “Diversity, Our Interwoven Experiences,” with two streams: “Diversity Within Evaluation” and “Diversity of Evaluators.” Contrast this with the theme for the 2020 conference, which was “Evaluation Use” with three strands: “Positioning Evaluation Use,” “Achieving Evaluation Use,” and “Questioning Evaluation Use,” which echoed traditional concerns about recognition and proactive evaluation. The Canadian Evaluation Society, like its US counterpart, had changed orientation and now saw the proper role of program evaluation as a change agency for social justice. CES has adopted diversity, equity, and inclusion principles woven throughout the organization.

For example, those proposing to present a paper or a workshop at a National Conference had to attest that the materials and content of the presentation were not the result of cultural appropriation. At least I did not have to certify that “no animals were harmed in creating the workshop.”

<sup>13</sup> *Dunsmuir v. New Brunswick*, 2008 SCC 9 (CanLII), [2008] 1 SCR 190, <<https://canlii.ca/t/1vxsm>> and *Ktunaxa Nation v. British Columbia*, 2017 SCC 54 (CanLII), [2017] 2 SCR 386, <<https://canlii.ca/t/hmtxn>>

As an aside, I am very “pro-diversity;” my financial advisor and I often discuss diversity as a risk management technique. The key difference between the two senses of diversity is that one (policy) has become the end, while investors use it as a means to achieve an end.

Fast-forward to May 2024 and the CES National Conference, where the theme seemed to return to a more traditional focus of “Renewal and Confluence: Navigating the Future of Evaluation.” However, as I was about to discover, CES had “evolved” into a darker place.

### The Questions

The 2024 conference convenors accepted my proposal to conduct a workshop on “Mixed methods, a Bayesian Perspective.” Since I was a Fellow, I was also invited to participate in a “Fellow’s Session,” where the wise and wizened offered insights to the upcoming generation.

As an aside, my approach to pedagogy is training students to ask better questions. One demonstrates increased knowledge not through answers but by refining questions. A quote by Einstein now appears at the start of my all courses:

If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask... for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes.

My workshop on methods can be technical, and I like to inject surprise elements, especially since COVID-19 has disrupted teaching. To demonstrate the process of using questions to drive research, I have asked this question in class: “Why are white people so smart?” Imagine a graduate evaluation course where 80% of my students are international, with half the class from Nigeria and Ghana. This question certainly causes students to put down their phones.

Now, this question does not ask, “Why are white people smarter than any other race,” although many believe that is what is implied. I teach my students to read carefully. My intent with this question is to introduce students to evolutionary biology and clear economic history. Also, I want to expose students to thinkers such as Jared Diamond and Thomas Sowell and offer a counterpoint for those weaned on Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse and Jacques Derrida. The outline of this train of thought appears on my Substack [Thinking Aloud](#). Those who read these posts, especially the three on why white people are so smart, may or may not agree with the argument, even while finding the title disagreeable. In my defence, I do need ways to wake the dead (my post COVID-19 students).

This reference raised no ripples during or after the workshop after I outlined the logic of the argument. As the

three posts on the Substack demonstrate, civilizations' successive rise and fall have little to do with race and arise from a more complex interweaving of causes and chance.

Presentations at the CES national conferences often are case studies of actual evaluations. One session concerned the implementation of a DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiative in a science department – as I recall, it was the National Research Council. The presenters noted that shortly after the evaluation started, the department cancelled the initiative for unknown reasons, but they had persisted and completed the assessment. Setting aside the apparent waste in completing the review of a defunct program, I was intrigued by the lack of curiosity by the team to discover the reasons for the cancellation. This incuriosity is one indicator of the perilous state of evaluation in Canada.

The next day, at the Fellow’s session, four of us offered comments on various aspects of evaluation, generally centred on future evaluation directions. I had the last spot and launched by issuing a trigger warning. I cautioned the audience, “I will speak of dangerous things. Specifically, I want to talk about residential schools.” The tensing of sphincters was palpable.

My choice of subject was purposeful. CES has made a firm commitment to “Indigenicity.” The conference started with the standard land acknowledgement, which went a little further. Appreciation was expressed that the Wolas-toqiyik (Maliseet) First Nation had granted permission for CES to hold its conference on their lands. CES has also endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This is not the place to explore the gathering storm over property rights in Canada – I just wanted to create context for my next question.

I started by meticulously acknowledging that residential schools were associated with considerable harm for “many, if not most” attendees. Then I asked, “Before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we would hear of instances where some First Nations persons would claim that they appreciated their time at a residential school. Why do we no longer hear of these cases?”

I continued: “My concern is with evidence, asking questions, and creating a balanced assessment. This issue is critical both for evaluation and the integrity of Canada.”

These statements created a firestorm of indignation from one individual, who alleged I was coming from a “white colonialist perspective.” A lively discussion ensued, which, in my naivety, I believed had ended with a mutual agreement to both learn.

The immediate reaction from those in attendance was mixed. Some welcomed my call to seek evidence; others hung back. I assumed I had fulfilled my obligation to be controversial and return home. However, a colleague’s

email the next day revealed a ground fire was looming. In a few days, I received notice that the Board of CES had received an official complaint about my reference to “Why are white people so smart?” According to the CES executive, “many complaints had been received about both the workshop and my presentation at the Fellow’s panel.” In June and July, a blizzard of emails occurred between me, individual members, and the “governance” layer of CES as everyone attempted to clarify and reinforce the nature of my crimes.

Apparently, my simple question on evidence had blossomed into an instance of the soon-to-be possible criminal code offence of residential school denialism.

The culmination occurred on August 21, 2024 with a “[Response Requested: C2024 Fellows Panel Restorative Action](#).” The CES National Board, in consultation with the UNDRIP Working Group, found that “several of your assertions related to colonialism are in misalignment with CES positions and constitute conduct detrimental to the Society and its reputation.” The requested restitution comprised the following actions:

- removal of my [blog posts](#) (May 15, 2024 and July 1, 2024), which were alleged to “contain elements that are distressing, racist, and inconsistent with the expectation for CES members to “... address colonial and systemic oppression and resulting inequities, according to recommendations from Indigenous Peoples... [Emphasis added];”
- within 45 days to “identify a personal learning plan focused on skills and knowledge to engage constructively in dialogue to advance Truth and Reconciliation, honour the full breadth of residential school impacts, and demonstrate cultural humility and respect for lived experience of survivors, their families, and those most impacted by intergenerational impacts of colonialism;”
- also, within 45 days, to develop a “statement of reflection and apology for distress and offence, especially among Indigenous colleagues, which has arisen on the panel and in follow-up.”

I did none of this. I added a third post titled “Why are white people so smart?” (October 31, 2024), in which I revised the question in response to additional data.

Most who objected to my posts and questions had attended neither the workshop nor the panel. Further, throughout this process, only one colleague remained in touch to offer support; one other wrote a letter to the President of CES, and another sent me a note after the denouement. Finally, the partners of the firm I had founded and to whom I had sold my shares wrote a letter to CES management disavowing their association with me. In effect, they threw me under the bus.

Before completing this tale, it is worth understanding that

CES was not acting alone but operates within a context of Canadian institutions that are becoming hostile to free speech.

## Denouement

After the August letter demanding I undertake restorative action, the email interactions became increasingly tedious for all involved; on November 26, 2024, I received a final expulsion notice. Rather than signalling that I valued CES by hanging on, I resigned from my membership and the Fellowship, renounced using the CE designation, thereby ceasing to be a certified evaluator.

One could take this as an egregious act of cancel culture. But as Rhett Butler said in *Gone with the Wind*, “Frankly, my dear, I do not give a damn.” This episode says much more about the reality-distortion field that pervades government and professions ostensibly professing to hold power accountable.

Remember, I made no assertions. I asked two questions. However, many in the Canadian Evaluation Society and, by extension our public service, cannot handle this. Program evaluation has become infested with “activist evaluators,” rendering them unfit to challenge government and corporate interests.

I am disappointed that so many colleagues I have worked with for decades remained mute. This episode leaves a question: Am I a prophet or am I wrong? In the spirit of truth this remains at the forefront.

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NO MORE LOUD DISCUSSIONS OF PRIVATE MATTERS,  
THE CABAL DECREES

*Mark Mercer*

The historian and novelist Robert Conquest (1917 – 2015) is best known for his books on Stalin and the Soviet Union, but he’s also known, perhaps erroneously, for three humorous but instructive laws of politics. The second (in some tellings, the third) is: The simplest way to explain the behavior of an organization’s bureaucracy is to assume that the bureaucracy is controlled by a cabal of the organization’s enemies.

The law applies to institutions that either have a publicly available charter or mission statement or are so historically successful that a man on the street could say what their purpose is supposed to be. The goal of the cabal is to turn the institution away from its charter, mission or purpose.

Some political scientists and others have criticized the law on the grounds that not always is the controlling cabal secret in either its ends or its means.

In universities, it's certainly no secret either what the cabal intends or what it is doing to empty the institution of its academic values, ways and mission. The goal at the institutional level is to create a system of sinecures for particular identity groups. Curation would replace critical inquiry in such a university, as I seek to explain in "[Herodotus over Thucydides](#)." The larger goal is to reproduce this system at broader levels in the surrounding society.

The means used by those seeking to reach these ends include brutality—and, indeed, the means centrally include intimidation by threat of brutality. Those administrators who are part of the cabal, drawn both from the university's professoriate and its human resources personnel, who might be deans, vice-presidents, union executives, heads of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) offices or members of the academic senate, come up with plans and policies, create systems of oversight and adjudication, and signal their willingness to attack anyone who steps out of line. The best way to signal this willingness is simply to attack someone, whether he's stepped out of line or not.

The university with which I am associated, Saint Mary's University, in Halifax, has recently reorganized and consolidated its EDI offices. We have a Director of Diversity, Inclusion and Wellness, an Accessibility Lead, a Respectful Workplace Advisor, a Sexual Violence Advisor, and a couple of ethnicity-coded student advisors; soon we will also have an EDI Training Specialist. The consolidation consists in connecting these people and offices more closely to our Department of People and Culture, a (non-academic) department led by an associate vice-president of the university. None of the people in the EDI mix are academics, although that doesn't matter, given that the academics who serve as deans and as union executives have agitated for and installed all this. (Years ago, Len Finlay wondered whether academics who become administrators simply put their commitment to academic values on hold or were ripe for administration because they'd never had any such commitment.)

I should mention that Saint Mary's University is broke. We have no money. The situation is dire enough that the university is dropping most per-course instructors and will cancel courses in which enrolment is low, even upper-level courses necessary for honours programs. Some academic departments have had their complement of permanent members reduced. Philosophy, History and other academic departments will offer fewer courses than they used to and pack more students into the ones remaining. Course options for majors and honours students are minimal.

Well, sacrifices have to be made in the interest of long-term viability. But no sacrifices at the expense of EDI, of

course; not even at the expense of the growth of EDI.

I must also note that, as with most Canadian and other universities, Saint Mary's is neither overtly nor systematically racist, sexist, anti-indigenous or transphobic. Of course, even were a university infected by an oppressive colonialist ideology that soured its research, teaching and atmosphere, the solution would lie in stimulating a commitment to academic values and to the institution's academic mission, not in bringing in EDI values and goals. In any case, there is nothing here for EDI to fix.

Yet, in order to fix what, from an academic perspective, is not broken, the Associate Vice-President, People and Culture, has just announced the "[Respectful & Inclusive Workplace Policy](#)" and the "[University Code of Conduct](#)," two new policies that build on the "[Saint Mary's University Declaration of Respect](#)," a document concocted after the 2013 Saint Mary's rape-chant incident, a document that administrators have a history of abusing.

To say that the Policy and the Code (and their forebear, the Declaration) are bad solutions to non-existent problems is not, of course, to say that no one ever acts badly at Saint Mary's. I'm sure there's as much incivility and rudeness here as elsewhere, even when it is not in the service of colonialism or white supremacy. (Happily, the Policy intends to crack down on "loudly having private discussions in public spaces" (p. 2), while the Code aims to end, finally, the practice of interrupting people when they're speaking (p. 3).)

Bad behaviour, though, is to be addressed through discussion, or at least that's how it's to be addressed at an academic university. Those given to insulting others can be taken aside and talked with. ("Bob, if you're going to insult your colleagues, at least try to do it with some wit.") Through discussion, a miscreant might well come to see how a change in his attitudes and behaviour would promote goals that he himself values. The problem with using rules and penalties is that they create only a veneer of collegiality; they can do nothing to foster sincere good will or warm relations. Our Declaration, Policy and Code are, in fact, instruments of oversight and control that discourage true respect.

Our culture at Saint Mary's is an anti-academic one, as these documents reveal. All three are about respect, but none concerns respect as an academic value. What is it that a person must respect in interpersonal relations, if he or she is to engage rewardingly in the academic endeavour? And what is it that these documents mandate people at Saint Mary's to respect?

Academics come together in community at universities in order to think hard about difficult matters. Each values his own ability to think and value for himself, and each values the ability of others to think and value for themselves. That is, none wants to think or value under any

pressures save those of evidence and argument, and each is concerned not to apply pressures on others apart from those of evidence and argument. Academics want to create and contemplate understandings of how things are, and they don't want those understandings to result from their hopes or fears. People are terribly sensitive to the fear of being excluded and to the hope of being included. Institutions like academic freedom serve to minimize those fears so that one's understandings might respond only to evidence and argument.

The concept of respect in the three documents, though, is not the concept of respect for the ability and willingness of members of the university community to think and value for themselves. It is, rather, the concept of respect for feelings and identities. It is feelings and identities that the documents demand we take into account in our interpersonal relationships. We are to treat others with compassion and empathy (though failure to do so certainly won't be treated with compassion). We are to "acknowledge and [be] sensitive to others' feelings and experiences" (Code, p. 3).

To treat people with respect for their ability and desire to think and value for themselves is to engage them in critical discussion and to be open, honest and candid with them. In a critical discussion, sincerity can easily hurt feelings. As academics, we are committed to taking aspects of our identity, values we treasure, and holding them apart from ourselves so that others, strangers, might investigate and criticize them along with us. We ask others we don't even know to show us where we are wrong about things that matter deeply to us. We learn to live with psychic scars because there is no other way to conduct oneself as an academic.

Thus, to treat someone with respect for their ability and desire to think and value for themselves is always potentially to treat them disrespectfully—disrespectfully, that is, according to the concept of respect in the Declaration, Policy and Code. To treat people with respect for their feelings or identity is to be prepared to avoid certain topics or positions, to honour the taboos they honour, to defer to what they tell you is their experience, to dissimulate, and to exclude them from one's serious academic projects.

The Declaration of Respect, the Respectful & Inclusive Workplace Policy, and the University Code of Conduct seek to remove what little academic oxygen is currently present in our atmosphere and to transform Saint Mary's University into a post-academic institution. And these documents clearly mean to do so through brutality and threats of brutality. Maybe our duty as academics in this situation is to hope the university goes financially bankrupt before it destroys its soul.

<sup>14</sup>Helen Pluckrose and James A. Lindsay. *Cynical theories: How activist scholarship made everything about race, gender, and identity—and why this harms everybody*. Pitchstone Publishing (US&CA), 2020, p. 182.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

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#### ON FEELING UNSAFE AT UNIVERSITY

*Sinclair A. MacRae*

At a recent meeting of my institution's highest academic governing body we reviewed the feedback from a survey of councilors from last year. One of the questions was "Do you feel unsafe?" That this would pass as unremarkable speaks to the normalizing of the subversive dogmas of (bad) critical theory in university life. My aim here is to contribute to the critique of such calls for "safety" and the ongoing threat they pose to academic freedom.

There are at least four ways to interpret calls for safe spaces. I will focus on analyzing three, but the fourth, which has mostly escaped notice, deserves some attention. According to (bad) critical theory, society consists of largely invisible identity-based systems of power and privilege that construct knowledge via ways of talking about things in the service of the interests of the powerful and privileged at the expense of the marginalized and the oppressed.<sup>14</sup> For these anti-science, anti-reason, morally relativistic descendants of post-modernism, all knowledge claims expressed by the privileged and the powerful are oppressive manifestations of the "violence inherent in the system", except that for them, unlike for Monty Python fans, this is no joke. Their belief in such things as "systemic racism" is *total*. As Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay note, proponents of Social Justice Theory (SJT) are committed to a form of conspiracy theory without conspirators.<sup>15</sup> They see threats to the marginalized and oppressed *everywhere*, even if those uttering such "threats" do so unwittingly.

For defenders of SJT the dangers of unsafe spaces are not mainly caused by what those who are regarded as privileged by standpoint theory *say*; the harms are rather a function of the fact that they are the people speaking. This obsession with whatever they say is merely an extension of their general obsession with language, which is manifested in their relentless search for microaggressions and their demands for trigger warnings. It explains their absurd insistence on "impact not intent". Proponents of SJT take the now familiar slogans of safetyism – "Words are violence", "Disagreement is oppression", "Argument is assault" – *literally*. For them the goal of decolonization is to overthrow the "system". They regard attempts to exclude,

or even critique, the knowledge claims of the oppressed (and their “other ways of knowing”) as *epistemic violence* and *epistemic oppression* (while also inconsistently viewing all requests to share the cultural knowledge of oppressed groups as *epistemic exploitation*).

For the true believers of SJT the question “do you feel unsafe?” is a dog whistle. Posing the question is a subversive political act. I have previously written at some length about the threats to academic freedom by SJT. Rather than repeat those claims here, I will instead analyze the other three ways one might interpret their call for safe spaces. Since most people don’t hear their dog whistles, their hopes to subvert the system largely depend (for now) on the success of these efforts.

In a second sense, calls for safe spaces are attempts to protect people from wrongful psychological harms. All moral people agree that university campuses should be welcoming, safe spaces in this sense. No one should be subject to wrongful discrimination, including ignorant and scornful expressions of ridicule. Similarly, since all moral people support protecting the physical safety of people on campus, this third interpretation is also reasonable. But whoever posed the survey question was not referring to physical safety. They were referring to *feelings* of safety, and more specifically, to the *fear* of being unsafe. This fear of being unsafe did not refer to any threat to anyone’s bodily integrity. It was not as if the council were holding meetings at the base of a mountain during avalanche season or in the clearing of a forest surrounded by wildfire. No, the concern they were raising pertained to perceptions of *emotional* safety, with the implication being that the adults voted onto General Faculties Council have a right not to feel threatened by ideas with which they find offensive, or with which they disagree, and that that body should suppress the discussion of such ideas out of a concern for their psychological well-being.

In her book *iGen*, Jean Twenge links the rise of concerns about emotional safety to iGen (or Gen Z), those people born between 1995 and 2012, and who started arriving on campuses around 2013.<sup>16</sup> And in their book *The Coddling of the American Mind*, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt (LH) refer to this phenomenon as the rise of emotional safetyism:

A culture that allows the concept of ‘safety’ to creep so far that it equates emotional discomfort with physical danger is a culture that encourages people to systematically protect one another from the very experiences embedded in daily life that they need in order to become

strong and healthy.

This is what we mean when we talk about *safetyism*.<sup>17</sup>

LH argue that rather than overprotecting young people by shielding them from ideas they find offensive, or with which they disagree, they should instead have to contend with these ideas; that doing so will help them become stronger and more resilient.

There are seven types of expression in Canada that are *not* protected by our right to freedom of expression – child pornography, fraud, defamation, including libel and slander, inciting people to violence, expressing credible threats, the wilful promotion of hatred towards identifiable groups, and promoting antisemitism by denying the holocaust – but none of these fall into the category of ideas commonly expressed by speakers on campuses. LH’s criticism of emotional safetyism instead targets the claim that young people must be protected from legally protected speech that leads them to feeling such unwanted emotions as anxiety, sadness, and anger.

Those who interpret calls for safety in this fourth sense – the sense pertaining to feelings and fears of being unsafe – regard such feelings and fears as a *criterion* for identifying wrongful speech. On this view, if someone feels unsafe or is afraid of hearing what they judge to be offensive ideas, then that speech must be *causing* those undesirable states. And just as common assault, for example, being maliciously struck with a baseball bat, is illegal, so should speech that causes emotional harm. According to this perspective, the historically high rates of anxiety, sadness, depression, and ideations of suicide being experienced by members of iGen has been partly caused by their exposure to ideas that make them feel unsafe.

The threat that such thinking poses to academic freedom is obvious. So what should defenders of academic freedom say in response? LH argue that we should not simply trust our feelings and uncritically assume that they are a reliable guide to reality. Indeed, Haidt argues that adopting such an attitude *contributes* to poor mental health because it entails taking an external locus of control. Those who have an external locus of control do not tend to see themselves as agents but rather view life as something that largely happens to them. In contrast, taking an internal locus of control is self-respect affirming, and there is plenty of research linking people who take an external locus of control with having higher rates of sadness, anxiety, and depression.

In a blog post<sup>18</sup> Haidt cites the journalist Matt Yglesias

<sup>16</sup>Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy--and completely unprepared for adulthood--and what that means for the rest of us*. Simon and Schuster, 2017.

<sup>17</sup>Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt. *The coddling of the American mind: How good intentions and bad ideas are setting up a generation for failure*. Penguin, 2019, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup>Jonathan Haidt, “The Discovery of the Gender-by-Politics Interaction”, *After Babel*, March 9, 2025, <https://www.afterbabel.com/>.

who argues that rather than saying that so-and-so made me sad or angry, we should instead say that so-and-so said or did such-and-such and I responded by choosing to be sad or angry. And much as I agree with this analysis, the support they offer for it is rather thin. We can add to it by better understanding how appeals to safety in the fourth sense rest upon a misunderstanding of the nature of emotion. According to this widespread view, emotions are bodily states. They are “feelings”, literal physical parts of us manifested in such things as racing heartbeats and nausea. As such they physically assail us just like someone wielding a baseball bat, and from which people need protecting. They cannot simply be willed away. Thus, the crucial question to ask is not whether the claims being uttered on campuses are false or hateful, but whether they cause feelings or fears of being unsafe.

To see the error in this view, consider a cognitivist account of emotions, such as the one Martha Nussbaum defends<sup>19</sup>, which insists that emotions are not bodily states. Nussbaum, following the ancients and the stoics, argues that whereas you can be argued or persuaded into being angry or afraid, you cannot be argued into being hungry because hunger is a bodily state, not a state of mind. She cites the example of a woman experiencing grief at the loss of her child and she argues that what is salient about this emotional response, both to her and to us, is not how she was literally feeling but her state of mind. Nussbaum argues that emotions always take on an intentional object, they always depend upon the perspective of the person who experiences it. In the woman’s case, what matters for her feeling grief is not whether her child is deceased but whether she thinks he is. That this entails that our emotions are partly *constituted* by our beliefs is clear from the fact that if you were to reunite the grieving woman with her child, she would instantly stop grieving because she no longer believes that her child is dead. Moreover, our emotions are also partly constituted by our values. The woman is grieving because she loves her child. She would not be grief-stricken by the loss of a paper clip.

Nussbaum argues that this analysis suggests two dimensions along which we can evaluate our emotions for their rationality. We can assess whether the belief is true and whether it is reasonable to hold based on our evidence for it, and we can also judge whether the value that partly constitutes the emotion is apt – for example, do we care too little (as when someone reacts with indifference to the news of the death of one of their children) or too much (as when someone weeps at the loss of a paper clip)? Furthermore, once we recognize that our emotions are constituted by our beliefs and values, we can see that since we can change our minds and adjust our values, we can exercise control over what we feel, thereby rendering the notion that someone else makes us or causes us to feel un-

safe misleading. For now we must distinguish the question whether we feel unsafe or afraid from whether it is *rational* to feel this way. In other words, calls for “safe spaces” in the fourth sense, the one grounded in feelings and fears of being emotionally unsafe, are *irrelevant*. The question is rather whether a reasonable person should judge a campus speaker’s speech to be wrongfully harmful. However, this question is already settled in the law in the statement of the exceptions to our rights to freedom of expression that I noted earlier. There is *no* justification for expanding the restrictions in the way that those posing the “do you feel unsafe?” question desire. Calls to consider the feelings and fears of people who feel unsafe at hearing ideas that fall within the protection of our rights to freedom of expression wrongly threaten academic freedom. They should never carry any weight in determining the limits of an academic’s right to academic freedom.

Unfortunately, many of us remain averse to criticizing our own and other people’s emotional reactions, even when these are irrational. This is reflected in such sentiments as: “You should never question someone’s lived experiences”; “You should never doubt someone else’s ‘truth’”; and “You should never deny someone else’s feelings.” Once we understand the cognitive nature of emotion we can clearly see through these illegitimate dissent-suppression techniques. Defending these sentiments is as absurd as insisting that my weeping at the loss of my paper clip is my truth; that others should not doubt my truth; and that others should never deny my lived experience about the tragic loss of my paper clip.

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#### CAUT, EDI IDEOLOGY, AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM: THE ORGANIZATION’S BLIND SPOT

*Frances Widdowson*

On February 7 and 8, 2025, I attended the Canadian Association of University Teachers’ international academic freedom conference. Entitled, “**Knowledge and Power: The International Struggle for Academic Freedom**”, the conference was intended to examine the major threats to academic freedom throughout the world.

Although there were a number of interesting presentations at the conference, it soon became apparent that a huge blind spot existed. This concerned the failure to acknowledge one of the major threats to academic freedom in the Anglosphere – the incorporation of EDI [Equity, Diversity,

<sup>19</sup>See especially Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of thought: The intelligence of emotions*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

and Inclusion] ideology into all facets of university life.

As I explained in the January 2025 issue of this newsletter, EDI ideology is a combination of totalitarian identity politics (initiated by Herbert Marcuse) and social equity theory (developed in the public administration literature by H. George Frederickson). The latter is about distributing “equal shares” of the administrative state by increasing representation of marginalized groups, while the former demands that the identities of chosen representatives of “ghetto” populations be affirmed so as to bring about a socialist revolution. (The fundamental economic and class-based tenets of historical materialism are thus abandoned in Marcusianism, and so it cannot be considered to be a form of Marxism.) “Inclusivity” in EDI ideology maintains that forcing people to assert that the subjective beliefs of the oppressed are objective truths will create a better world. This will occur, we are told, by enabling the representation of the powerless in elite positions to be increased. Such an increase is thought to be connected to bringing about transformative change and social justice.

The influence of EDI ideology at the CAUT conference could be seen first in the application form that requested one’s preferred pronouns, as well as in the territorial land acknowledgement held at the beginning of the proceedings. This was followed by a number of presentations that decried the threats to academic freedom brought by Trumpism, right-wing Christians, and Zionist attacks on pro-Palestinian academics. Left out were the number of cases of professors being pushed out of their jobs for criticizing trans activism and the ideas of other identities perceived to be oppressed.

As a result of this omission, I responded to a presentation by Jo Grady, the General Secretary of the University and College Union, who was discussing the academic freedom problems facing pro-Palestinian academics in the United Kingdom. I pointed to the cases of Jo Phoenix, Selina Todd, and Kathleen Stock, and explained how EDI ideology was destroying the pursuit of truth, justifying censorship and the poisoning academic environments. Grady reacted by implying that the views of these professors were related to the rise of “social conservatism”, “attacks on vulnerable groups”, “the demonization of...trans people”, and “using anti-trans rhetoric”. Faculty unions, according to Grady, should be “equipping people to have conversations” so as to correct wrongthink and fight against the divisiveness that was being brought about by neoliberalism. My question also resulted in other presenters asserting that the opposition to trans activism was driven by right-wing Christians, and that it was important for unions to “[stand] in solidarity with [trans] people and their needs”.

Furthermore, although there were union representatives from the University of Lethbridge present, no one mentioned the fact that my speaking engagement about “How ‘Woke-ism’ Threatens Academic Freedom” was cancelled

because it was considered to make indigenous faculty and students feel “unsafe” – a common refrain of EDI ideology that has been used to subvert academic freedom principles. This silence of the University of Lethbridge Faculty Association was not surprising because the union itself made a public statement asserting that my talk consisted of “unwelcome and hurtful speech” and that there was a need to “protect students, colleagues, and community members” from my views.

The climax of the event with respect to this blind spot, however, came with the presentation of Randi Weingarten, the President of the American Federation of Teachers. Although the presentation was supposed to be about unions and academic freedom, Weingarten spent most of her time discussing the negative impact of Donald Trump’s election on all facets of American life. In her presentation, Weingarten asserted that “we must protect speech...and we must fight against hate”. She then noted that provocative speech can create fear, and there was a need to find ways for campuses to be safe and welcoming for all. She concluded by asserting that unions must fight against “the weaponization of The Other”.

Weingarten’s linkage of the need to “fight against hate” with EDI ideology led me to respond by asserting that I had been pushed out of my position at Mount Royal University because EDI ideology had weaponized allegations of “hate” to prevent the discussion of contentious ideas. This, I noted, had nothing to do with being a Trump supporter or a right-wing Christian, as I was a socialist and an atheist. Instead, the ideas being censored were often responding to legitimate concerns, such as the problem of “men beating up women in boxing matches in the Olympics”.

Although Weingarten expressed sympathy about how I had been treated, maintaining that this was a misapplication of EDI, my question did not sit well with a number of faculty members attending the conference. In response to the reference to boxers with testes as “men”, Jeff Bale, a representative from the University of Toronto Faculty Association, called out my “anti-trans bigotry” and said this comment had no place at the conference. Bale was cheered on by a number of faculty members who were supposedly supporters of academic freedom. Only one professor came up to me and expressed concern that an ad hominem attack was being used by Bale to try to discourage my attempts to have an open and honest discussion about the institutional censorship that was occurring with respect to trans activism.

When I talked to one of my colleagues about why this had occurred, he told me that it was because I had referred to a male who believed he was a woman as a “man”. This, he noted, had parallels to people saying a few decades ago that being homosexual was a mental illness. In this conversation, it was implied that I should expect this kind of reaction because the male boxers believed they were

women and that claiming otherwise would be offensive to them and their allies.

Leaving aside the differences between trans activism and gay rights (and many would argue that they are actually opposed to each other), one wonders how academic discussions about homosexuality unfolded in the past. When academics were exploring these questions, did they face the same kinds of pressures that we see today with respect to trans activism? If so, this would have impeded our actual understanding of the nature of homosexuality and the ability to refute false beliefs about it. One would expect, therefore, for advocates of academic freedom to be concerned about any attempt to discourage the pursuit of truth because it would negatively impact our ability to align social policy with reality.

Throughout the conference, in fact, we heard how important it was to pursue the truth in universities. When a question was asked that challenged the prescribed doctrines of trans activism, however, this was vehemently opposed. If such an anti-intellectual reaction could occur at a conference specifically about academic freedom, one can see the difficulties facing universities. Those who dare to challenge the dogma of trans activism, and maintain that the category of “women” is a biological fact and not a subjective identity, will have their work environment poisoned and be pushed out of their jobs.

The public often sees universities as esoteric places, where matters are discussed that have little impact on the “real world”. What is happening with regards to policies pertaining to trans-identified people shows that this is not the case. Because of the intellectual intimidation that is occurring in universities in response to saying that people with male reproductive structures are men even if they believe that they are women, all sorts of problems are emerging. This will continue as long as professors do not recognize the threat of EDI ideology to academic freedom, as this ideology prevents the pursuit of truth about that nature of identities perceived to be oppressed. One consequence is that the greatest medical scandal in human history – the mutilation and sterilization of children and vulnerable adults because trans activists claim that they were “born in the wrong body” – is able to continue.

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## TWO TYPES OF FREEDOM: ACADEMIC AND CIVIL

*G.V. Loewen*

Often confused, mainly due to the coincidence of youth matriculating from an unfree state to the relative freedom

of new adulthood, academic freedom and civil freedom appear to blend into one another because the young person, in their daily rounds and as a newly freed and fully human being under the law, now steps onto campus and then steps off. This motion, normative, expected, and quotidian, gives the impression of being seamless and consistent. But all experienced adults understand that social context, when consorting with human freedom in general, is of the utmost importance. Every organization has its intake and internal rules. If one does not wish to conform to them, one should not join in the first place. Yet it is understandable as well, with some little perspective of years, that anyone who has been essentially unfree for the first seventeen years of their life would mistake a sudden and seemingly complete opening up of the space of general freedom in their nascent social being as the all in all. Following directly from this, the ability to speak one’s mind, no matter the issue or context at hand, also appears to be a new reality.

The actual reality is, however, that the institutional unfreedom of childhood and youth is simply loosened, not set loose. Freedom can only be had within society, as Berger notes, even though, for human beings, this also means that the social order has itself, and within it, also by a more adept self-definition, the seeds of its own revolution. In short, all enduring social change comes from within. The young person, who is abruptly an outsider on two fronts – one, and gladly so, forever graduated from the unfreedom of chattel-like status in and around eighteen years of age; and two, suddenly and not by choice, someone who is looking at the adult world from the outside in, and this for a few more years perhaps – has difficulty grasping that the simplest entrance into this second world, and the one that each of us spends the rest of his life inside, is to learn the new rules of conduct and how they both open themselves onto basic freedoms whilst limiting others. The political fashions of the day serve mostly as an exercise in self-expression, which is at best annoying and irrelevant and at worst a satire or parody of authentic freedom. These early experiments in a generalized freedom inevitably come up against certain limits imposed by the adult organizations, such as universities and governments, corporations and benevolent societies. Their push and pull constitutes a rite of passage for youth-into-adulthood and should not be given much credit otherwise.

But let us, before continuing, first define the two major types of freedom that are at stake and which, because of their close contiguity in the societal life course as well as the coursing of social life, become easily conflated at first glance.

### **Academic Freedom**

This is a technical and professional denotation. It is only relevant to conduct on campus and in the scholarly discourses as published and expressed in other vocational or guild-like settings, such as conferences or virtual pedagogic

spaces. It adheres only when a student or a faculty member seeks to make a *discursive* statement about whatever it is in which they have an intellectual interest. A ‘discourse’ is simply the conversation, historical and theoretical, that surrounds a topic, a subject or object, a question, or an idea. Anthropology has a specific discourse, feminism another, economics a third, and so on. That they run into one another, sometimes in a salutary and sometimes in a conflicting manner, is nothing to shy away from, but is rather that which gives continued life to the conversation of humankind and its sense of what our collective brain-trust is capable. Thus, the ‘conflict of interpretations’, to borrow from Ricoeur, is the life-blood of thought itself. Academic freedom means that within each discourse, a student or professional is free to state their case as best as they can, mustering this or that line of argument and evidence as the case may allow, and this is *all* that it means.

### Civil Freedom

This is a much more general phrase connoting the interplay between the law, mores, custom, tradition, and the individual agency which we, in North America, so dearly prize. It frames the ‘open space of the public’, wherein the Agora-like conversation of the day, of the hour, of the moment, as well as that perennial, may take place unadulterated by the ulterior motives of *specific* institutions. It may seem that it is in this space where everyone becomes her own Socratic presence, but it is well to remember that just because any *single* institution or organization cannot, or should not be allowed to, adjudicate the content and rhetoric of this shared space, this in turn means that the *entire* set of oft-competing institutional suasions is very much present. It is by the check and balance of social institutions and their confrontation with personal sensibilities and individuated agency that civil freedom exists. In a word, our general social freedom is framed by the actual work of all of the aspects of society to which we belong; it is not, repeat, *not* the same thing as an idealized human freedom. Its very name should caution us to this regard: it is a freedom which is *civil* and must remain so.

Understood as discrete, it should simply be a matter of committing to memory and thence to practice, for young people, the difference between the two. More than this, one can now recognize that *neither* academic nor civil freedom approaches the abstraction of freedom ‘itself’ or in general. The former is solely about discourse and ideas, the latter about playing a cultural game which has within it the always-already of social change within its loosened harness. To overstate one’s case within the *Offentlichkeit* is to betray its collective trust. To claim that one is solely within the truth of things in a world of competing truth-claims, is to sabotage its historical force. This is what university students, for one instance, are currently engaged in, no matter what ‘side’ they have chosen to demonstrate for or against. What is lost in these *mise-en-scene* is the

very freedom they imagine they are expressing.

This is so not due to topic or ‘issue’ – in the same way, academic freedom may be gutted by a zealotry which is in itself value-neutral; it can adhere to any discursive topic and at any time, pending wider influences – but rather to the manner of enacting one’s claims about such. There are, proverbially, multiple sides to every ‘story’, and even within our own biographies, we can never be utterly certain of our own intents, and with failing memories over time, even our own actions once committed. The worlding of the world is also not entirely known to us in the moment. It often takes a while for things to ‘play out’, to see the effects of our actions in the present.

For the young person, all action seems to account for itself in the *now*, but anyone with a little life experience knows that this is hardly ever the case. This ‘now’ is an artefact of a consumer anti-culture which seeks to compel us to satisfy immediate need and greed, and is thus an interloper with regard to the political conversation which must be present to animate any culture, no matter how sophisticated or simple it may be. But for the newly adult person, schooled only in the now of consumption, trained only to react to a stimulus, market or otherwise, and to never either prevent or at the least consider, freedom takes on the mantle only of a commodity, however ‘priceless’ it is said to be. Generationally, it is certainly necessary that young people test the limits of their respective social bonds, for this is an important way in which we older adults may gain a larger perspective and thus join our younger peers in initiating this or that change. At the same time, what is authentic to generational interplay must at some point upshift itself into a true ‘confrontation with the tradition’. This is something each of us, no matter how aged and experienced, remain a part of until we finally part ways with human life itself.

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### OPPRESSION THEORY AND THE DEBATE ABOUT ACADEMIC FREEDOM

*Tom Vinci*

#### Varieties of Oppression Theory: A Suggested Classification

One of the main approaches to the study of society focuses on differences in prosperity, wealth, power, status, etc. between different groups or individuals, and makes the characteristic assertion that *oppression* is the primary explanatory hypothesis for these differences – “Oppression Theory” as I will call it. Oppression Theory comes in

different varieties, but all contain this assertion. Here I distinguish four varieties of Oppression Theory: *Classical Marxist*, *Neo-Marxist*, *Feminist* and *Stalinist*. These are arranged in partial order of logical containment: the Stalinist version contains the feminist version as part, the Feminist version contains the Neo-Marxist version as part, the Neo-Marxist version contains the Classical Marxist version as part.

*Classical Marxist Oppression Theory.* The characteristic assertion of this version takes the agency and “patency” of oppression to rest fundamentally at the level of classes. An action is something that someone or something (a class of persons, say) does that admits of moral assessment. An agent is someone or something that engages in actions; agency is the capacity which people or things possess enabling their agency. A patient (in my sense) is a person or thing (a class of persons, say) on the receiving end of actions carried out by an agent. Patency is, then, the capacity that someone or something has to be a patient in this sense. Oppression is something that admits of (negative) moral assessment, so oppression is an action carried out by a person or thing (the agent of oppression) against a receiver of the oppression (the patient of the oppression.)

The Marxist doctrine is a metaphysical doctrine according to which it is *classes* of *people* which are oppressors and classes of people which are the oppressed. This is opposed to Classical Liberalism, which locates the source of agency and patency only with the individual person. Often endorsed by Marxists of any stripe is the associated doctrine of *Marxist epistemic praxis*—the theoretical interpretation of facts must be guided by moral and political agendas—which itself depends on a further metaphysical doctrine, that there is no hard distinction between fact and value. In Classical Marxism, the underlying form of oppression is economic exploitation by one class over another.

*Neo-Marxist Oppression Theory.* This theory is like Classical Marxism but without the claim that the fundamental form which oppression takes is economic exploitation. Gender exploitation, racial exploitation, sexual exploitation and a variety of others are given equal billing.

*Feminist Oppression Theory.* In addition to the assertions of Neo-Marxism, the Feminist version asserts that the public discussion of alternative explanations for these differences, especially those that conflict with self-assessments of oppression-status and group identity, *is itself a form of oppression*. This idea then leads, via the Harm Principle, to *suppressing alternatives* to Oppression Theory. This is the characteristic assertion of the Feminist version.

*Stalinist Oppression Theory.* In addition to the characterizing assertions of the Marxist and Feminist versions, the Stalinist version contains a characterizing practice for the suppression of the alternatives—the *cancelling-out* of the people who espouse them. The terminology of “political

correctness” in its current sense originated with Stalin in the 1930s. (Thanks to Norman Pereira for this.)

### Connection to the Academic Freedom Debate

In my experience and in my reading, the current debate on academic freedom seems to depend on the following considerations: we notice that there are differences among groups of people in power, wealth, various kinds of achievements and other things important to human well-being, and we ask: How has this come to be? Various hypotheses are then put forward. For example, there is the hypothesis that the main factor accounting for these differences is that the high-achiever group attained this status by previously oppressing another group, taking their land, for example, or depriving them of equal opportunities for education and advancement in the power hierarchies. Oppression, in this sense, involves the idea of unfairness, and unfairness involves the idea that people are not getting their just deserts.

Other hypotheses do not assert this, that is, do not assert that the main factor in the mechanism that makes for differential achievements germane to wealth and power involve denying anyone their just deserts. There are, of course, various hypotheses about what these non-just-desert-denying mechanisms are — for example, mechanisms involved in genetically determined differential cognitive capabilities, mechanisms involved in socially or environmentally determined differential cognitive capabilities, mechanisms involved in luck. (I assume that a group suffering from bad luck is not thereby denied their just deserts, as bad luck is not injustice.) An example of a social explanation for the differential success of northern Europeans is Weber’s hypothesis that the Protestant “work ethic,” which predominates in these countries, is the main factor involved in their differential success in achievements germane to wealth and power. (That these societies rather than others developed Protestantism may just be their good luck.) Finally, there are eclectic theories that combine various mechanisms, including oppression, as factors involved in differential outcomes on a case-by-case basis.

There are two versions of a dialectic about academic freedom involving these different explanatory hypotheses that I want to distinguish at the outset. The versions differ on how a given discussion is initiated. The first version begins with an initial move by a theoretician espousing a non-oppression theory explanation of differential achievements of a group germane to wealth and power. A countermove is made by the Oppression Theorist, leading eventually to the conclusion that academic freedom must be restricted in the case of those espousing theories that don’t privilege oppression. The second version begins with a defence by Non-Oppression Theorists against charges by Oppression Theorists that the more successful group suffers from various hate-related ideas and attitudes, “phobias” in the current jargon, charges that the members of this group would

regard as unjust, demeaning and false. (Note it may typically be that the Non-Oppression Theorist in question is from the more successful group, but this is not, of course, necessary.) This also leads the Oppression Theorist to conclude that academic freedom must be restricted.

Let's start with a representative example of the first version of this dialectic.

Professor Weber explains that northern Europeans have a high percentage of Protestantism relative to other societies and that a valuing and practice of hard work flows from the articles and attitudes of this Faith. For various reasons, which Professor Weber now outlines, this makes for superior wealth-and-power-accumulating characteristics among northern Europeans relative to others. This is the mechanism that accounts for the differential in wealth and power between northern Europeans and others. This is a social mechanism since it arises from religious ideology and practice.

Classical Professor Marx disputes this explanation, saying that it is self-serving, either deliberately or unconsciously, and is false in its causal claims. The Feminist Oppression Theorist agrees but goes a step further: propagating this hypothesis, even just proposing it, affects members of the other groups negatively psychologically, which effect is one of the mechanisms that explains the differential effects. So, it adds to the harm caused to others in other ways by the more successful groups. It is, thus, itself a form of oppression. This reason, taken together with the Harm Principle, demonstrates that the public propagation of this theory, even its initial public formulation, must be precluded. Hence the restrictions on the freedom of Professor Weber to propose and propagate his ideas, hence the restriction on his academic freedom.

Professor Weber has a reply: Feminist Oppression Theorist has misunderstood the Harm Principle. It is a version of Utilitarian Ethical Theory and, as such, it does not (should not) say that when there is a harm arising from an action, the action should always be prevented; rather, it should say that when all the harms and all the benefits are summed up, and the harms exceed the benefits overall, then, and only then, the action should be prevented. Professor Weber goes on to assert that there are many benefits that arise from the free propagation and formulation of ideas in general, including the benefit of intellectual autonomy and, of course, the benefit of the possibility that a

given theory is true. Professor Weber maintains, of course, that both of these benefits apply in the present case. Thus, the proper formulation of the Harm Principle, properly applied in the present case, warrants the formulation and the propagation of this theory. This requires that academic freedom be available to Professor Weber in an unrestricted form.

This version of the dialectic now moves into further stages taking the form of a back-and-forth on what the overall harm and benefits are, how they are to be measured and how that are to be summed. Of course, in participating in *all* stages of the dialectic, Professor Weber (and the Feminist Oppression Theorist too, for that matter) will have to be allowed to formulate their theories. But once the dialectic is resolved to the satisfaction of each of the parties, action by each of the parties is now licensed. The Feminist Oppression Theorist supposes that it is resolved in favour of greater harm than benefit overall, so the Feminist Oppression Theorist is now rationally entitled to take the appropriate political action, which is to restrict the further propagation of Professor Weber's ideas. This constitutes the *political correctness* of this action. Of course, Professor Weber is also entitled to take appropriate political action should he think that the dialectic is resolved in the opposite direction, which of course he would.

Now I turn to the second version. This is like the previous version, save that the Feminist Oppression Theorist makes the first move: he initiates discussion by claiming that northern Europeans have their advantage through oppression, thus justifying the label of "Oppressor" to northern Europeans, a charge which Professor Weber regards as unjust, demeaning and false against northern Europeans. The first move for Professor Weber is now in response to the opening move.

In the main, his responses go as they did in the first version, but with this difference: Professor Weber is now *disagreeing* with an initial claim put forth by an intellectual opponent. This difference makes a difference—it allows for the application of a new principle (in addition to the Harm Principle), the principle that *every person has a right to disagree with claims put forward by another person, especially when the claims are regarded as unjust, demeaning and false by the first person*. Call this *The Right to Disagree Principle*.

By definition, *rights* are reasons that trump other reasons in the contest for moral superiority. The Harm Principle counts as *another reason* in this sense, the Right To Disagree Principle counts as a *right* in this sense. Consequently, whatever the outcome of a utilitarian calculation regarding the harm/benefit balance in any particular case, the moral situation of an academic worker whose opening move is only to disagree with charges made by an initial interlocutor that they see as unfair, demeaning and false

trumps that of their opponent. This is not the case for the first version of the dialectic.

In that version, the Non-Oppression Theorist *initiates* a discussion of the superiority of a certain group's achievements relevant to wealth and power. To be justified in doing so on grounds of Utilitarian Ethical Theory, they have to establish that the balance of benefit to harm overall is positive. This certainly can be done in a given case, but successfully doing so is not guaranteed. In the second version, the Non-Oppression Theorist has an additional arrow in their quiver, the right to disagree, a right that is especially potent when it concerns defending against an attack on personal and intellectual integrity. This right is logically weaker than the right to an unrestricted freedom of speech. It is important to note this difference. While the latter may *also* be defended, it is not my purpose to do so here. It is, however, my purpose to defend the existence of the weaker right, the right to disagree with claims initially made by another person, especially when the attack concerns personal and professional integrity. This is a *big practical difference* for a Non-Oppression Theorist fighting to defend these values in the present academic environment.

*Tom Vinci (vinci@dal.ca) is a retired Professor of Philosophy at Dalhousie University. He actively works in the areas of Early Modern Western Philosophy, specializing in Descartes, Kant and Leibniz, also in the areas of Science Metaphysics, Epistemology, including Probability Theory and, recently, contemporary political themes. He is the organizer of the Atlantic Canada Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy and lives with his wife in Shediac, New Brunswick.*

#### HAS EDUCATION BEEN USED TO BETRAY THE WEST?

*Alex St. Germain*

Is it possible that we have been conditioned to accept a culture of self-loathing, where in some circles of polite society, oikophobia – the aversion to one's home environment or culture – has become the forward thinking of intellectual elites? Perhaps with blind acceptance of multiculturalism, which has become a model of Karl Popper's paradox of tolerance, evident in Europe, we were too willing to make accommodation. I agree with Ayaan Hirsi Ali who, in her book, *Heretic*, writes: "Multiculturalism should not mean that we tolerate another culture's intolerance." But we do, and here at home, it is difficult, even risky, to speak of a "Canadian heritage," especially since the residential school scandal. So, we remain voiceless while observing the destruction of our past. History is being re-written to constantly remind us that we are squatters on stolen land, with little effort to shine a positive light on our past.

The Western legacy has been linked to plague, famine,

poverty, wars, colonialism, and, of course, slavery. This self-hate, as it were, has been amplified exponentially ever since the death of George Floyd, who was given the status of a martyred saint, resulting in the BLM riots. From then on, we are expected to don sackcloth and ashes with the never-ending assertion that the West is, if anything, a white patriarchal power grab. This sentiment was given a grand theatre with the assistance of the media and the privileged who would "take a knee" in faux supplication to radical ideology. And within the academy, anti-West sentiment is formidable. Education has by no means detoured away from the political arena; in fact, it would exacerbate the feelings of disgrace by using students to ram through an agenda. Though the nuances concerning empires in decline are many, I am left to consider how education betrayed the West.

Admittedly, it could be said that I am overly romantic in my vision of education, believing it to be a sacred trust. As Browning wrote in his poem *Andrea del Sarto*, "Ah but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for." Unfortunately, the idea of heaven, and even God, has been removed from Western thought, replaced by postmodern secularism, where there is no room given for the sublime. From my perspective, as a non-academic, for over forty years, the attempt to school malleable young minds has shifted away from scholarship to that of ideology. Now mediocrity, the subjective over reason, safe spaces and trigger warnings – "the coddling of the American mind," as Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff would argue. The academy has become an over-aged daycare centre, rather than a place of learning that fosters the principle of excellence.

#### The Evidence Exposed

Perhaps it could be argued that the mindset towards the West and its decline was made evident when, on October 7<sup>th</sup>, pro-Hamas supporters across North America and Europe poured out of every nook and cranny applauding the massacre and brutal kidnapping of Jews. And after two years of war, Israel is still condemned for defending itself as it battles a multi-front campaign against an enemy whose only purpose is annihilation. Moreover, the debauchery perpetrated against innocent party celebrants was met with "the Jews had it coming." Even the victim hustlers of radical feminism, knowing well that their Jewish sisters were being maltreated, remained silent. And, in cities and communities, the assault against Jewish owned enterprises, synagogues, yeshivas, and defenceless individuals continued; authorities offered pointless rhetoric but did little to quell the mounting hatred. To add, while the Ukraine struggle is cheered on as a fight for freedom and democracy, the on-going demonstrations against Israel seem to be a rallying cry for the terrorist campaign.

As the antisemitism was amplified, what followed was concerning indeed. We witnessed the construction of ideologi-

cal fortifications on university campuses, armed with placards, flags and banners highlighting derision towards Israel, along with endless platitudes. And within these makeshift ramparts, no quarter was given for rational discussion or debate. And well-guarded behind those makeshift walls were masked demonstrators, many who had donned the keffiyeh as if to declare a willingness for battle. The mounting demonstrations, driven by a reactionary exuberance and outside influences, made it clear that the state of war against the Holy Land was also against the West. Their campaign missive, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," substantiated a lack of reasoning by not recognizing the consequences of this final solution, if it came to pass. Then there was the call from Hamas, and other terrorist groups, for the global Caliphate. With such antagonism towards Israel and the West, it is reasonable to consider if we are being Islamized.

And what followed was the reckless demand that we in the West dissolve all relationships with Israel, without considering the ramifications of leaving it exposed and defenceless. It is a kind of cruel irony that allies of the terrorist death machine were, for the most part, the voices extolling the virtues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. As silent observers, was it that we are too weary as a civilization to care, or are we resolute in our own self destruction? And what was exposed, when the masks of social justice were removed? The rot in education, and a darker intent, was exposed. This was that it has turned away from the inheritance handed down to us from Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome, and has assumed an ideology over reason.

### Looking Back

As it pertains to the present situation of the culture war, it is important to understand history in the context of education, and the consequences for the West. I refer to the Frankfurt School, established in 1923 when it was comprised of Leftist intellectuals discouraged by the failure of communism and the anticipated proletariat revolution. Followers of Marxist ideology were determined to resuscitate the communist experiment but under a new standard. It was to be found in sociology and critical philosophy. The Frankfurt apologists were resolute in their belief that sociological change could be achieved without focusing on the working class. Therefore, dialectical materialism was replaced by shifting economic analysis to the critique of culture. Because of political conditions in Europe, many of the followers of Marx, including intellectuals, made their way to the United States. There, the Frankfurt School would eventually inspire a generation of leftist academicians, who would occupy the seats of learning and play a major role in political and radical thinking.

Though not a member of the School, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) deserves mention as a major influence. This is notably for his theory of cultural hegemony, and how the bourgeoisie use cultural institutions to preserve wealth

and power within capitalism. Gramsci went so far as to argue that socialism should be the religion to overwhelm Christianity, which is linked to the rise of current post-modern secularism. To add, he believed that institutions on which the West was founded, including the family, had to be eradicated. On that matter, we can argue that this is already in play.

Moving ahead to 1964 in Berkeley California, students objected to restrictions imposed by the university limiting political activity on campus. Students vehemently rallied against the university leadership, demanding full constitutional rights, thus Berkeley would come to be recognised as the champion of free speech. What was born out of resistance was the social justice movements that would change society. However, the great days of 1964 are gone, as students today have moved away from freedom of speech to controlled speech, censure rather than debate, and the embracing of the victim cult and grievance culture. And let's not forget intersectionality, which is the fuel for the internal battle among a citizenry.

In 1987, Jesse Jackson marched with 500 students at Stanford University, where they chanted "hey, hey, ho, ho, Western Civ. has got to go," condemning Western studies as too white and Eurocentric. By 1989, the curriculum at Stanford was essentially re-invented, which would have a ripple effect for education across North America. The late Allan Bloom wrote in 1987, in his book *The Closing of The American Mind*, a warning that education was in essence failing democracy. As well, we should note that, in the mid-seventies, there was a seismic shift away from Enlightenment thinking to that of postmodern relativism. What also came in the repackaging of higher education was Neo-Marxism, which bulldozed its way into the classroom, emphasising an us-against-them mentality. With that, much of the Western curriculum was replaced with revisionist rubbish, or by the ghastly "Studies" programs posing as serious scholarship.

### The Latest Betrayal

The Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, based in Calgary, found in a 2020 report that, of the 61 public universities in Canada, 69% are committed to diversity and inclusion and only 21% express a willingness to uphold freedom of expression and open enquiry. A *True North* study found that 63% of undergraduates fear negative consequences for expressing ideas. And, in Europe, universities are being investigated for embracing ideologies that curtail freedom of speech; some like the University of Sussex have been fined. With the eradication of open dialogue, the fear of offending stifles intellect, limits diversity of ideas, and does not support critical thinking, which is the very bedrock of Western liberal education. Without freedom of speech, education loses all purpose and we foster intellectual cowardice.

An article in *City Journal*, “The Campus Peril to Western Civilization,” written By Jacob Howland, echoes my opening remarks. He makes the claim that the student and faculty reaction to the Hamas atrocities demonstrates that elitist educators and institutions are a “fraud.” He goes on to explain that it’s been known that higher education has been broken for some time but never challenged. As for the West, the cheering and applauding for terrorists proves a collapse of education, and “imperils the West.” A lack of edification of the West in higher education has allowed the barbarians to pass through the gates unchallenged, and even to welcome them in honour the new religion of DEI dogmatism. He also makes clear that, far from equipping students to preserve and extend civilization within a Western framework, the goal of universities today is to destroy it. And we should point out that this anti-Western sentiment begins at the elementary level of education.

A further indictment against contemporary education can be found in the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE). It found that thirty-two percent of 50,000 respondents from 258 universities believed violence was acceptable in preventing a campus speech. Such is the fate of expanding ideas. And what is the response when challenging these social justice warriors about what will replace the West? Their limited ability to think using reason makes them retort “Freedom.” I would argue that this amounts to freedom from responsibility that comes from being a member of a caretaker-state.

## To Conclude

At this juncture in history, it is an effort indeed to come up with any positive conclusion that somehow the West can be reborn. If education can be deemed the heart and soul of any civilization, ours has been weaponised against us. And when considering the Hamas-Israeli war, what better way to speed up our own demise than by uprooting something so foundational as the Judeo-Christian heritage? This I am sure will stick in the throat of those who adopt postmodern secularism. We witness the on-going destruction and removal of statues and names of historical personages, further eroding our past. Without a cohesive cultural foundation and a hierarchy of beliefs, we are subject to a destructive ideology. It is here that I am reminded of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who warned that “Stupidity is a more dangerous enemy of the good than malice.” This is because you cannot fight stupidity.

Then, there is Oswald Spengler who believed that we are witnessing our Faustian winter. If you understand the metaphor, you realise the tragic outcome. For myself, I think of the West as a speeding freight train moving at full throttle, and we are running out of track. Can we stop it? That depends if we have the willingness to push back against an anti-intellectual scholasticism that has become toxic. Like it or not, we are in a culture war, and Woke is well entrenched in every facet of human enterprise. We are

told that Woke is in decline. If that is true, this is when any movement is at its most treacherous – in its attempt to stay alive. It will be a hard-fought battle, but one worth fighting to bring back the heritage bestowed upon us, born out of Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome.

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Lukianoff, Greg, and Jonathan Haidt. (2018) *The Coddling of The American Mind*.

Spengler, Oswald. (2020) *The Decline of The West*, Vol. 1. Rogue Scholar Press.

*Alex St. Germain (alexbleo@yahoo.ca) was born in 1954 into a working class family, personally experiencing social injustice as a result of poverty. However, he never adopted the victim narrative so prominent today. St. Germain has worked in various factory settings, was a union man, and served in the military. For 35 years, he was employed in the social service sector, and, during his tenure, witnessed first hand the evolution of the fanatical Leftist, Woke ideology. He has fought against it, especially as it pertains to education.*

## DEMANDS FOR ORTHODOXY BEGIN IN THE SCHOOLS

*Jim McMurtry*

I suppose that not many teachers under three investigations by their employer and under a separate process by their regulator would broadcast to the world that he is the subject of a total of 50 allegations, but modesty is not my strong suit, and if I don’t speak up it will happen again to someone else. In a nutshell, I insist on my liberty to say unpopular things. As George Orwell said, “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” My employer certainly didn’t want to hear that the 423 students who died at Indian residential schools (out of 150,000 from 1883 to 1997) did so from disease and not murder.

Orwell also talked about an orthodoxy or “a body of ideas of which it is assumed all right-thinking people will accept without question.” The B.C. Curriculum requires teachers to emphasize “perspectives in a pluralistic soci-

ety” and “recognize everyone has something to contribute.” It doesn’t state, like my adversaries, that teachers must accept ideas without question or be censured. .

The British Columbia Teachers’ Federation grievance coordinator in 2009, George Popp, said “teachers should be prepared to defend [their] right to professional discretion in the performance of [their] duties or be prepared to watch our craft reduced to techniques and scripts.” Former Deputy Minister of Education Charles Ungerleider said “teachers that are unwilling to tackle controversial issues are delivering a watered-down education that is not worthy of a B.C. graduation diploma.”

The trend, however, is toward more self-censorship, more infantilization of high school content, more coddling of students, more emotional bubble-wrapping around students of certain minorities – even though it is the adversity of the sand particle that makes the pearl. This is compounded by the fact that my employer, the Abbotsford School District, and the Teacher Regulation Branch (my professional regulator), as well as many people in my union, will never engage me in a conversation on what is appropriate to teach or discuss.

What I have learned is that teacher investigations provide no space at all for candid conversation or an exchange of viewpoints. And they are not about truth or facts or educational values (to which Popp and Ungerleider speak), or even the conjectured feelings of the mythically average person of particularly aggrieved minorities. They are only about power. The TRB lawyer even told me that “teachers have little entitlement to procedural fairness,” and it matters not all that my employer and regulator are historically and educationally illiterate; because they are puffed up with power and taxpayer money, they swagger when they walk and demand loyalty, compliance and conformity when they talk.

G.K. Chesterton wrote: “We shall soon be in a world in which a man may be howled down for saying that two and two make four, in which furious party cries will be raised against anybody who says that cows have horns, in which people will persecute the heresy of calling a triangle a three-sided figure, and hang a man for maddening a mob

with the news that grass is green.” We are already in that world. I said disease and not murder had caused the deaths at Kamloops. I was right and qualified to say so, but as a dissident teacher I am being howled down by powerful, performative institutions that say grass isn’t green.

Last week I was targeted with eight new allegations by my regulator. They are similar to previous allegations and seem designed to draw attention away from the old, false, baseless allegations for which the TRB and Abbotsford refuse to disclose evidence. The TRB is not fair or neutral, despite what the inspector said to me in her interview. They’ve been investigating me since 2019, and twice suggested in writing, before hearing from me, that I retire.

The TRB accuses me of calling them “power-drunk bureaucrats” and “shar[ing] confidential information and documentation about [the] ongoing investigation and post[ing] it on social media.” Guilty as charged; otherwise, their administrative evil would grow in the dark. The TRB also says I “made inappropriate public comments on social media about Indigenous Residential Schools,” that I made a video of myself “digging for graves” (#JimCanDigIt), posted a photo on X that said “Where are the bodies?” and “made inappropriate comments on social media about Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) in schools.” The kicker is that not only was I claimed to have violated professional teaching standards but that I “undermined public confidence” in the education system.

My crimes were all committed years after I taught, but, like Winston Smith in *1984*, I will be watched forever by Big Brother.

*Jim McMurtry ([jimmcmurtry01@gmail.com](mailto:jimmcmurtry01@gmail.com)) was a teacher, college lecturer and principal during a career that lasted over four decades. He received a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in Educational Philosophy. In May 2021 he gained national attention for being removed from his French Immersion teaching job in Abbotsford for not telling his students that 215 Indigenous children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School were murdered by their teachers. His union is grieving his dismissal and defending him against his regulatory body, which seeks to cancel his teaching certificate for life.*

SAFS OFFICE

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## SAFS ANNUNAL GENERAL MEETING

**Friday June 6th and Saturday June 7th 2025 at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario**

**FRIDAY JUNE 6**

1:30-2:00 p.m. Registration and Coffee

Senate and Board Chambers

2:00-4:00 p.m. *He Who Pays the Piper: How Government Funding Impacts Research* (Symposium generously sponsored by the Institute for Liberal Studies)

*The Failed Experiment: Government Funding of Academic Science*, **J. Scott TURNER**, National Association of Scholars

*Presentation: Title TBA* **Terence KEALEY**, University of Birmingham

4:00-5:00 p.m. *Cocktails* (Hawk's Nest) 5:00-6:30 p.m. *Dinner* (Hawk's Nest)

6:30-8:00 p.m. *Radical Reactionary: Fixing Our Broken Education System*, **Amy WAX**, University of Pennsylvania  
The Seventh Annual Chris and John Furedy Lecture on the Contemporary University. Senate and Board Chambers

**SATURDAY JUNE 7** Senate Board Chambers

8:00-9:00 a.m. *Registration Coffee*

9:00-9:30 a.m. *Welcome News From SAFS*, **Robert G. THOMAS**, President of SAFS

9:30-10:00 a.m. *Introducing Free Speech Union Canada*, **Lisa BILDY**, FSU Executive Director

10:00-11:00 a.m. *From Truth Comes Reconciliation: An Update*, **Rodney CLIFTON**, and **Mark DEWOLF**

11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. *The Sanctum Menace: Why Universities Belong to the Dark Side*, **Bruce PARDY**, Queen's

12:00-1:30 *LUNCH* (Dining Hall)

1:30-3:00 p.m. *The Threats to Free Expression from within our Universities and Our Democracy*, **Amy WAX**, U Penn

3:10-3:45 p.m. *Business Meeting*, SAFS Members only

4:00-6:00 p.m. *Casual Gathering*, (Location TBD)

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SUBMISSIONS TO THE SAFS NEWSLETTER

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The editor welcomes articles, case studies, news items, book reviews and letters. Send submissions by email to [newsletter@safs.ca](mailto:newsletter@safs.ca).

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,  
Robert Thomas, SAFS president

SAFS MEMBERSHIP FORM

To join SAFS or to renew your SAFS membership for 2024-2025, please complete this form, sign it, and mail it to:

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## NOMINATIONS FOR SAFS BOARD OF DIRECTORS: 2025-2026

The Nominations Committee this year consists of the SAFS president, Robert Thomas (University of Regina), the SAFS past president, Mark Mercer (Saint Mary's University), and two SAFS members not on the Board of Directors, William McNally (Wilfrid Laurier University) and David Haskell (Wilfrid Laurier University—Brantford).

Long-serving SAFS board member Mark Mercer has decided to step down from the board. SAFS thanks Mark for his service to the society.

Any member of SAFS may nominate individuals for election as Director. These nominations must be received at the SAFS Office by May 17, 2025. Each member nomination shall contain the following information: (i) the signature of the person nominating and the signatures of two (2) seconders; (ii) the full name and address of the person nominated; (iii) a statement of the status and attributes of the person nominated, showing each person's qualifications to be a director; (iv) a written consent signed by the person nominated agreeing to be nominated for election and, if elected, to serve.

The current members of the Board being re-nominated are: Paul Erikson, Kirsten Kramer, Steve Lupker, Zachary Patterson, Robert Thomas, Paul Viminitz, and Frances Widdowson.

The Nominations Committee has received the nomination of Geoff Horsman.

Geoff Horsman, BSc, BSA (Saskatchewan), MSc (McGill), PhD (UBC) Associate Professor, Chemistry Biochemistry, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

Geoff has been a member of SAFS since 2021 and has been a Laurier faculty member since 2011. His academic work has focused on the enzymology of microbial natural products biosynthesis, but he has become increasingly involved in advocating for academic freedom and defending classical liberal principles in education. Since 2023 he has been co-chair of Laurier's Heterodox Academy Campus community, which promotes viewpoint diversity and constructive disagreement on campus. <https://www.wlu.ca/academics/faculties/faculty-of-science/faculty-profiles/geoff-horsman/index.html>

The election will occur at the business session of this year's SAFS Annual General Meeting, Saturday 9 June 2025.

## SAFS BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2024-2025

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