SAFS Newsletter

Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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

Number 87 www.safs.ca January 2021

In This Issue

The George Jonas Freedom Award, 2020

Peter Suedfeld

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a remarkable occasion, for the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, for the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS), and for me personally. For the Justice Centre, it's the first time the George Jonas Freedom Award has been given to academics, or to a group; and the first time it has been celebrated in three cities across Canada. For SAFS, it is a mark of honour, appreciation, and alliance. It also reassures us that our efforts have had an impact beyond our specific actions. For me personally, it links together two of my favourite organizations, both of which have upheld values that I hold dear.

Not only that. The previous recipients of the award, Mark Steyn and Christie Blatchford, have been authors whose wisdom, way with words, and wit, have given me hours of pleasure and insight. I was looking forward to meeting Rex Murphy, another admired commentator, and I greatly regret his inability to be here in person. But at least we will hear and see him at a distance; and we have the added stimulation of hearing Ezra Levant, another person whose writing and videos have enlivened Canada's political debates. And I am particularly happy to meet Lindsay Shepherd and the other students present, who encourage me to believe that our cause will survive us.

Last is my shared background with George Jonas himself. Like him, I was born in Hungary, in the same year, 1935. Like him, in childhood I survived the Holocaust in hiding. I should emphasize that these coincidences were the frosting on the cake, not the substance: there is another very famous and politically very active Holocaust survivor from Hungary, also named George, with whom I feel no empathy whatsoever. As a devoted reader of George Jonas's columns in the *National Post*, I feel close to him because of his brilliant writing, keen perception, and above all, his unswerving devotion to the cause of freedom.

SUBMISSIONS TO THE SAFS NEWSLETTER

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

The editor welcomes articles, case studies, news items, book reviews, and letters. Send submissions by email to sergechestnut@gmail.com or by post to SAFS, 6593, rue Jeanne-Mance, Montréal (Qc) H2V 4L1.

Mark Mercer, John Carpay and Jonathan Kay at the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms award dinner, Toronto, 1 October 2020

That devotion is something that the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship has firmly embraced since our founding in 1992. One impetus for that event was the controversy that erupted over the publications of John Philippe Rushton, then Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto. Drawing on multiple sources, of varying credibility, Rushton argued for innate racial differences in a wide range of physiological, psychological, and behavioural factors. Along with some searching and legitimate scientific criticism of his methodology, sources, data analysis, and interpretation, the 1990s version of a Twitter mob descended upon him, including demands that he be fired.

Newly formed by academics across Canada, SAFS set its course by the same compass it still maintains. One of our early presidents and moving spirits was the late Professor John J. Furedy, a psychologist at the U of T, who was yet another Hungarian Holocaust survivor. We gathered and wrote and spoke to protect the academic freedom of both Rushton and his critics, while opposing the pressure of those who attacked him because they didn't like his conclusions, and those who argued by impugning what they thought to be his racist motives. This scenario has been played many times since, too often with little justification or validity.

Academic freedom means that university faculty and students have the right to study, investigate, analyze, speak, and publish within legal limits and without official penalty from any seat of power. The argument in favour of academic freedom was then, and is now, that the best scholarship and research grows out of the freedom to disagree with current orthodoxy and dogma, whether in science or any other field. It is freedom in the service of scholarship, which explains our name. In May, 1956, Chairman Mao famously said, "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend"; ironically, that could be our own motto, but we are gardeners who try to protect those flowerbeds rather than, as Mao and his followers did, uproot the blossoms and pour cement over the soil.

I think our role has become increasingly important in this era of social media trolls, cancel culture, de-platforming, motive mongering, identity politics, and the global reach and influence of those whose concept of freedom is the freedom of all of us to support their ideology.

An increasingly overt threat to scholarship is the growing trend to restrict academic appointments and other opportunities to people of the "correct" sociopolitical opinions or the "correct" demographic categories. In the Joe McCarthy era, there was a strong political trend to force professors to preserve their jobs by signing a loyalty oath, usually focusing on not supporting Communism; these attempts resulted in a storm of refusals, resignations, and counterattacks, as well as some dismissals. In our own time, universities are demanding that applicants for faculty positions not only sign a loyalty oath to support specific "social justice" causes and agendas, but also to include in their job applications evidence of their loyalty to those precepts. So far, there has been no widespread furor against this dramatic intrusion, although SAFS raises an objection each time we encounter it.

There have also been numerous positions advertised as being open only to applicants of a specific sex or a specific ethnic origin. Those who defend such restrictions claim that diversity leads to better scholarship; but whether the presence of more skin colours or different physiological apparatus increases intellectual diversity and improves scholarship has not been tested, and many of its most vocal supporters argue that even to suggest testing it is prejudicial.

SAFS is unswervingly opposed to all attempts to punish what George Orwell called "thoughtcrime." We have been involved in several high-profile controversies focusing on these developments, such as those involving Rushton and more recently, Jordan Peterson; but most of the incidents that we have addressed were known to few people outside or even inside academia. To give you an idea, in the past five years we have intervened in almost 50 separate cases dealing with constraints on freedom of speech and/or violations of academic values. We defend freedom and scholarship regardless of which political or social viewpoint is being attacked.

We have responded to firings, demotions, and pressures to resign; administrative censures; hiring policies based on demographic factors; barring certain speakers and disinviting others based on their ideas; and attempts to establish university policy as a mental straitjacket. We oppose the nefarious requirement that a student group which invites a controversial speaker has to pay for extra security. The charge is often so high as to make the invitation unaffordable. In this way, controversial views are banned without overtly infringing on the freedom of those wanting to hear them. But campus security is the administration's responsibility; and if it is to be transferred, it should be to the potential or actual disruptors, not to their intended victims.

Our interventions, which are usually examples of Canada's "soft power", consist of letters to administrators, student governments, and the media, and are published in the SAFS Newsletter. We often have support from, e.g., the Justice Centre, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, and the National Association of Scholars; and shamefully seldom from the Canadian Association of University Teachers or local university Faculty Associations and Unions. We don't bring lawsuits, or list "censured administrations," as the American Association of University Professors does, much less organize protest meetings or demonstrations. For one thing, such tactics can end up restricting the very freedoms we were created to protect.

So, in the name of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, I thank the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms for this noble award. We look forward to continuing our joint efforts until the principles of academic freedom and integrity are accepted and respected by our institutions, from governments down to individual universities, departments, and classrooms.

Peter Suedfeld, OC, FRSC (psuedfeld@psych.ubc.ca), a member of SAFS from earliest days and a member of the SAFS Board of Directors, is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Psychology at the University of British Columbia. Dr

Suedfeld gave the above address at the George Jonas Freedom Award banquet, sponsored by the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, in Vancouver on 6 November 2020.

Constitutional Freedoms and the Universities

Mark Mercer

The Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS) is delighted to receive the 2020 George Jonas Freedom Award.

We're also very surprised. SAFS is not a civil liberties organization. We promote freedom of expression *on campus*, and freedom of dress and comportment *on campus*, freedom of association *on campus*, freedom of assembly *on campus*, due process *in university matters*, and so on.

We also promote the merit principle, the idea that academic decisions should be made on academic grounds and academic grounds alone.

Our focus, that is, is with universities. Almost exclusively universities—though we've also said a few things about colleges, high schools, and education generally. But universities are our only essential concern.

The civil liberties, on the other hand, are for everyone in every walk of life. Treatments of their nature, value, significance, or plight cannot be restricted to a particular way of life or institution.

SAFS, though, treats freedom of expression on campus only in relation to academic values and the academic mission of universities. We hold that a university must protect and foster freedom of expression on campus because universities should be places of intellectual community and should be places of rigorous investigation. Restrictions on what one can say or how one can say it are inconsistent with intellectual community and can thwart rigour in investigation.

There are two general reasons to explain why an organization like SAFS is useful. The first is that not everyone in Canada is keen on intellectual community, not even at universities. The second is there's much more to life than trying to figure things out. People indifferent or hostile to either intellectual community or to figuring certain things out will be opposed to wide academic freedom and freedom of expression on campus. SAFS, then, can protect academic freedom and freedom of expression on campus by articulating how they express or serve academic values.

SAFS's mission, then, is restricted by our concern to remain within the academic. In our explanations and arguments we do not appeal to human rights or democracy or human flourishing. Our explanations and arguments do not easily generalize or apply outside universities. Defending freedom of expression in a society generally on grounds of the centrality of expression to academic values and the academic mission would be a quixotic quest indeed. It would be to

mistake society as a whole for a university. (Not that a society that resembled a good university wouldn't be wonderful!)

Our concern with the other civil liberties on campus follows the same pattern. We defend and promote the ideas and practices we do not on grounds of rights, democracy, or flourishing, but because of their place in inquiry, teaching, learning, and intellectual community.

Most, but not all, members of SAFS are civil libertarians in the wider society. Yet, as SAFS members, their concern is not with civil liberties and constitutional freedoms but with universities.

So why might the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms have deemed SAFS worthy of this honour? I have a couple ideas and I want to hear what you think.

Let me begin by noting that these times are not at all good times for universities. Never let a good crisis go to waste! Administrators, faculty unions, and university senates have taken advantage of the COVID-19 restrictions and the demonstrations ignited by the killing of George Floyd to accelerate two trends, each of which is harmful to academic values and to the academic mission of the university. Both trends started in the 1980s or earlier but picked up steam in the 2000s.

The first is the trend toward technology in teaching and learning, especially computer technology. My university, Saint Mary's, in Halifax, had even before the advent of COVID-19 restrictions decided to put more and more courses online and to use carrots and sticks to get teachers more heavily involved in technology. That courses couldn't in the Fall semester of 2020-2021 be given online was a godsend to the administrators and planners behind our technological initiatives.

I don't entirely understand the motivation behind the trend to technology and online instruction. I suspect it's financial, to save money or to make money, but I'm not clear how going digital and virtual will serve that purpose. (My own teaching these days employs much less technology than it did a decade ago. I think my teaching is better for being plain.)

The second trend is that toward teaching and research meant to further specific political or social ends. This is the trend toward serving goals such as anti-racism, anti-capitalism, environmental sustainability, and bringing people from historically marginalized groups into society's managerial or professional class.

The trend toward serving these goals has been, and could not *not* have been, at the expense of dispassionate research and free, open and candid discussion. Our universities continue to say that they are informed by academic values, but whenever honouring an academic value stands in the way of another goal, it's the academic value that loses.

Critics of these trends have had almost no success the past couple decades in combating them. The COVID-19 restrictions have made things worse for communicating our criticisms. No one shows up for a Zoom meeting except those already on a mailing list. People disturbed by trends at universities get to talk to themselves and no one else. It's much more difficult to get a message out than it was just eighteen months ago. Since the majority of professors, let alone the public, hears nothing, not even administrators need take note of critical commentary and warnings.

In the old days, posters on and off campus might well bring into an audience for a critical talk about universities people who might learn something new or come to appreciate a different perspective. Vice-presidents academic would be aware that not everyone was happy with the latest initiatives and that not everyone was happy might matter to them.

But it's not just the restrictions. The mainstream university magazines are almost entirely in favour of demoting academic values. *University Affairs*, here in Canada, can be expected to ignore problems, given that it's the official magazine of university presidents. *Times Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, though, are also in the main oblivious to or dismissive of criticisms of university trends. Mainstream newspapers in Canada, for their part, hardly cover goings on at universities and the writers who do write about them are often clueless.

When a publication critical of university trends does, somehow, manage to get published in a mainstream venue, it will rarely make it into the lists of articles universities themselves circulate. My university sends out by email to professors and other members of the university community a bulletin entitled "This Week at Saint Mary's." Since what gets included is up to the editor, a Saint Mary's professor with a critical article in the local newspaper might not see it listed.

Now, again, to the question with which I began: why would the Justice Centre include SAFS among organizations promoting constitutional freedoms when everything we do is about universities and just about only universities? I have three ideas.

I'll describe the first by quoting David Stove, the late Australian philosopher. Stove once wrote:

"For the essence of totalitarianism is contained in the great helmsman's injunction to 'put politics in command'. This is not just Communist-Chinese baby-talk. What it means is this: that you are to take over every institution, whatever it may be, and empty out everything which distinguishes it from other institutions, and turn it into yet another loudspeaker for repeating 'the general line'. Destroy the specific institutional fabric of – a University, a trade-union, a sporting body, a church – and give them all the same institutional content, viz. a political one."

I've distinguished in this address between freedom of expression and freedom of expression *on campus*, but I should recognize that there's little expression in a society that doesn't occur within some venue or institution. Trying to retain in the university what distinguishes the university from every other institution is to choose a particular battleground within the war against totalitarian preferences—it's not its own independent war. Though SAFS limits its business to universities, since universities are a large institution within contemporary society, SAFS contributes to the defence and promotion of civil liberties and constitutional freedoms in society at large.

My second hypothesis why the Justice Centre would think to honour SAFS begins with the observation that our constitutional freedoms, freedoms at risk these days, are the freedoms fit for citizens of free, egalitarian and democratic societies. Universities that serve their academic mission help people (students, primarily) to become intellectually and morally autonomous. That's the connection. It is only morally and intellectually autonomous people who can appreciate deeply and contribute significantly to a free, egalitarian and democratic society. SAFS, in agitating for universities to serve their academic mission, again contributes to maintaining ours as a free, egalitarian and democratic society, for universities serving their academic mission will help students to acquire the skills, knowledge and habits useful in appreciating and discharging their responsibilities as citizens.

Our work here, of course, is only indirect. Professors do not, or should not, aim to create good citizens. They should aim only to help students to engage competently with the matters under study. It is a wonderful effect of being an independent thinker that one is well suited to participate in a democratic society; but professors are traitors to their calling when they *aim* at producing that effect.

My third and final idea how the work of SAFS might fit us for this award is that universities, when marked by academic freedom and freedom of expression, produce understandings of things that benefit society. If people in a society, through their institutions or through their government, are to grapple successfully with the challenges that confront them, including whatever inequalities in standing that continue to exist within that society, they need to be informed. A good heart and good intentions are not enough. One needs to understand how the world works if one is to change it in line with one's good intentions and to avoid at least the foreseeable bad consequences. Universities produce research for public use. But people who are not themselves experts won't trust research if they suspect it had to follow a party line and come to the right conclusions. SAFS, then, because of its commitment to academic values and dispassionate engagement, works to promote trustworthy research.

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The Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship is deeply honoured to have been chosen by the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms to receive this

award. But we were also puzzled. Our remit is universities, not constitutional freedoms. Yet, whether a society is a free society has much to do with whether people enjoy freedom within the institutions they inhabit. Whether a society is a free society has much to do with whether the people in that society are able to think and to value for themselves. And whether a society is a free society has much to do with whether the people in that society know how, in their specific circumstances, to protect and extend their freedoms.

If our little society in its focused and limited endeavours is deserving of the George Jonas Freedom Award, it might then be that we've gone at least a little distance toward promoting a free society in one or another of these three ways.

Mark Mercer (sergechestnut@gmail.com) teaches philosophy in Halifax. He joined SAFS in 2007 and became the president of SAFS in 2015. This article stems from the address he gave at the George Jonas Freedom Award banquet held in Toronto on 1 October 2020.

What They Do in the Shadows

Kathleen Lowrey

I joined SAFS in June 2020 after the Society sent a letter to Dean Lesley Cormack (now Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus) at the University of Alberta, asking that I be reinstated to the Undergraduate Chair position in the Department of Anthropology. Dean Cormack had dismissed me in reaction to student objections to my gender critical feminist views. My dismissal occurred in March, but my case came to wide public attention after it was written about by a colleague in English and Film Studies, Dr. Carolyn Sale, for the Centre for Free Expression blog at Ryerson University in early June, after which my dismissal received wide media attention (Barbara Kay, amongst many others) and due to which I was invited to write about my experiences in *Quillette* in mid-June. There have been several sequelae since June 2020 which I would like to share with the SAFS membership, as I believe they constitute additional grounds for concern about the current state of academic freedom.

First, in July 2020, I was contacted by Adam Lachacz, editor of the University of Alberta student newspaper, *The Gateway*, telling me he was preparing a story about a petition circulated by the University of Alberta Anthropology Undergraduate Association, and asking me for comment. This petition expressed support for the Dean for having dismissed me and charged me – in addition to "transphobic messaging in public spaces" – with "trivializing the lived experience of a Venezuelan student in her class, and denying the existence of a continuous Blackfoot cultural identity that has existed for thousands of years" (the full petition text can be found here). I responded as follows:

"As to my 'denying the continuous existence of a Blackfoot cultural identity that has existed for thousands of years', I urged an honors student who was

using literature written about contemporary Blackfoot cultural practices to interpret archaeological data from around 1,000 years ago to be more cautious and nuanced in directly applying contemporary inferences to the past. Just as it would be inappropriate to directly infer from contemporary settlement and subsistence patterns in France the settlement practices and subsistence practices of people living on that same territory in the year 1020, it is similarly inappropriate to do so when interpreting the Indigenous Canadian past. It is vitally important not to treat Indigenous cultures ahistorically, as if they were static and unchanging across hundreds (let alone thousands) of years. This is a basic tenet of anthropological and archaeological knowledge.

"As to my 'trivializing the lived experience of a Venezuelan student', in this instance the student in question was writing about the experience of Venezuelan immigrants to Canada who work specifically in the oil industry, a community he characterizes as a 'cerebral exodus' from Venezuela and to which his family belongs. In an early draft of the thesis the student was using literature about the very recent experience of Venezuelan refugees in Brazil and Colombia and the discrimination they face there to interpret the experience of Venezuelan petroleum engineers who left Venezuela 10 or more years ago to come to work in Alberta. I pointed out that recent Venezuelan refugees in Brazil and Colombia are overwhelmingly poor and non-white and face a very different situation to that of the relatively affluent, mostly white Venezuelan immigrants to Alberta focused on in his study, though both groups undoubtedly face discrimination. Again, I urged that a more nuanced contextualization of the literature cited was necessary in the context of the thesis."

As I awaited the *Gateway* article, I learned that my departmental colleague Dr. Kisha Supernant had posted the petition to her Twitter account and encouraged her Twitter followers to sign it and to circulate it widely. However, the article failed to appear. I contacted Mr. Lachacz repeatedly asking about it, eventually calling his editorial office phone number when he did not respond to emails. Finally, in late August, he wrote to let me know the piece had "fallen through". This meant, of course, that my public response to the charges made in the petition – and also circulated by my colleague – never got any sort of public airing, even as the charges leveled against me had spread extensively over social media. I learned afterward that the new Dean of Arts, Steven Patten, had been aware of this petition but did not think it necessary to contact me to ask about the truth of the charges it contained. I only learned of its existence when Adam Lachacz contacted me for comment. Mr. Lachacz never explained why the article was spiked; he only told me "I am unable to provide you with an update regarding the article I originally reached out to you about in July. We may or may not be running it at this point. If we do decide to go ahead with it I will inform you promptly. Articles fall through all the time and it is completely normal for something we intended to publish to not happen", although in his original contact email he had said "We are running an article on how the U of A Anthropology Undergraduates Association has started collecting signatures of students who show their support in 'supporting LGBTQ+' students while

referencing your removal from the administrative position". It is my view that he was discouraged by the petition organizers from running the article once he shared my response to it with them, which he would have had to quote at least in part. I also followed up in a department meeting in fall 2020 asking Dr. Supernant and the president of the University of Alberta Anthropology Undergraduate Association about to whom the petition was ultimately submitted; Dr. Supernant said she didn't know and the undergraduate president responded via email that "there was no petition. The signatures I collected were to show support for unheard students from people within and outside of the university. Hopefully that clears up the confusion".

Second, in June 2020, the head of the Research Ethics Office – Susan Babcock – contacted me saying that "It is the normal practice of my office to verify that ethics approval requirements have been satisfied when university researchers who conduct work involving human participants or the use of animals are the subject of news-stories." This surprised me as I had appeared on CBC's *The National* in late 2019 explaining my opposition to Confucius Institute programming in Edmonton public schools and Babcock had not been in touch at that time, but only after I became publicly known as a critic of trans ideology. I explained to Babcock that I had conducted twenty-five interviews with disability support workers in fall 2019 and winter 2020 without having gone through the human subjects review process at the University of Alberta, though I had begun each interview with an explanation of the aims of the research, an explanation of the uses to which the interview would be put, a promise of anonymity and a commitment to sharing any publications (which I had not yet begun to generate on their basis) with the interviewees. At the start of the process, Babcock said it might be possible to "reconsent" these interviews, and she asked me to submit relevant materials within two days of our first meeting over Zoom.

I did so and awaited word. In July. In August. In September. During this time, I was unable to contact my interviewees and explain to them what was happening. I followed up repeatedly over the summer; Babcock explained that a changed living situation, a much-needed vacation, and a heavy workload made arriving at a decision impossible, urging me each time to "Be Well" in closing salutations. Finally, on September 21st, Babcock wrote to me directing me to destroy all the interviews by September 30th. I wrote back pleading for reconsideration: that each interviewee be given the opportunity to confirm or withdraw participation via a new consenting process. Babcock responded on October 8th that were we to proceed in that fashion it would risk my realizing a "scholarly benefit" and asked me to confirm destruction of my materials by October 16th. I said I needed time to contact all the interviewees and explain what had happened and would destroy the materials by November 6th. Babcock initially insisted on a quicker timeline but later relented. I contacted all of the interviewees and destroyed the interviews. It is my view that this draconian decision was retaliation for my gender critical feminist views, and not justifiable on the grounds of any ethical risk to my interviewees.

Third, although my faculty association, the Association of Academic Staff at the University of Alberta (AASUA), initially launched a grievance process relating to my dismissal, in early December they contacted me to let me know that on the basis of external legal advice they had determined my grievance was likely "not viable", though a final decision had not been reached. They said they could not share this legal advice with me unless I agreed not to share it with any third parties. I responded that I could not agree to these terms, which I considered unreasonable given that the advice was paid for with my association dues over many years and those of my colleagues over many years. The reaction of the association to this was, in my view, unsettling: they said I should consult with my "personal legal counsel" about civil action against the University. I explained that I had no "personal legal counsel" (nor am I in a financial position to acquire such), and that I objected to the stipulation of confidentiality because I wanted to be free to write about the entire experience for academic and other audiences. AASUA then responded with a message indicating it was going to pursue an additional legal opinion about my case. At the time of this writing, I have not heard back from AASUA with any final decision regarding whether or not they will pursue my grievance. In my view, my case involves a very clear violation of the collective agreement's academic freedom protections, and I wonder whether the Association's reluctance to treat it as such has to do with the public opprobrium directed at gender critical feminists.

I was fortunate that in the near-immediate aftermath of my March 2020 dismissal, a colleague with outstanding writing skills chose to write about my case in a public forum and that her account received wide public attention in June 2020. Professor Sale, for her part, has been subjected to vile abuse on social media for merely articulating this defense of my academic freedom. Her write-up did not ally itself with the particulars of my views.

But the backlash to that June attention has unfolded in the shadows. In July, students and a colleague circulated damaging assertions about my classroom conduct to which, I learned in August, I would be provided no platform for response. In September / October, I was obliged by a university administrator – with no possibility, at least as the process was articulated to me, of appeal – to destroy a year's worth of research as a result of an investigation set in motion by that since-vanished June attention. In December, my faculty association indicated it would probably be dropping a case that – when wide attention was focused upon it – many observers agreed involved a clear violation of academic freedom.

Although "cancel culture" is often figured as punitive, key to its thriving is an atmosphere of impunity. I have certainly appreciated the solidarity offered to me since March 2020 by many, many people (it has been huge and heartening). But the fact remains that my situation has been made materially much worse by my having articulated heterodox views on gender identity ideology. I have not been restored to a service position of a sort that is vital to building a dossier for promotion from associate to full professor. I have been vilified on social

media and not been permitted to answer scurrilous charges made regarding my pedagogy. I have been obliged to destroy a body of research. I have not had anything like the legal support I would have expected from the faculty association to which I have paid over fifteen years of dues (and to which, on various occasions, I have extended my service).

It is my belief that many of the people responsible for these sequelae have behaved unjustly toward me secure in the knowledge that their actions would not face outside scrutiny. The damage done to me thereby is more or less at an end at this point, or I hope so anyway. But seeing this ethos of impunity in action has been genuinely frightening, as is the knowledge that it remains operative going into 2021 when it will inevitably be turned on new dissenters.

Kathleen Lowrey (klowrey@ualberta.ca) is Associate Professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of Alberta. Her book Shamanism and Vulnerability on the North and South American Great Plains *(University Press of Colorado, 2020) has just been published. Dr Lowrey is now at work on a new book,* The Anthropology of Women.

Nominations for SAFS Board of Directors: 2021-2022

The Nominations Committee consists of Mark Mercer (President), Clive Seligman (Past President), and Stephen Perrott (Mount Saint Vincent) and John E. MacKinnon (Saint Mary's) as two SAFS members not currently on the Board.

The current board is being re-nominated for 2021-2022. The Directors are: Janice Fiamengo, Andrew Irvine, Steven Lupker, Mark Mercer, Clive Seligman, Peter Suedfeld, Robert Thomas, and Frances Widdowson.

Any member of SAFS may nominate individuals for election as Director. Nominations must be received at the SAFS Office by 3 May 2021. Each nomination of a member for election to the Board shall contain the following: (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 and a brief explanation of the person's qualifications to be a director; (iv) written consent signed by the person nominated agreeing to be nominated for election and, if elected, to serve.

The election will occur at the business session of this year's SAFS Annual General Meeting, Saturday 28 May 2021.

The New Anthropology

Philip Carl Salzman

In their recent "Open Letter Demanding the Overhaul of McGill's Statement of Academic Freedom," the Anthropology Students Association and the Anthropology Graduate Student Association of McGill University have schooled us about the new anthropology. Here are some of its dimensions:

The benighted old anthropology began with questions and engaged in research to find answers. Cultural anthropologists would head to "the field," to the people about whom they wanted to learn, whether in the Sudan, the American South, a Pacific Island, a Mediterranean city, or a Middle Eastern desert. They would then live among the people, speak with them, observe them in daily life, follow events as they developed, and collect ritual and other texts, in order to gain an understanding of how people thought, what they valued, how they related, what goals they had, and what they feared, which were sometimes summed up under labels such as "social organization" and "culture."

The new enlightened anthropology does not begin with a *tabula rasa* and research to answer questions, but with universal answers. Its "methodology" is to seek cases to illustrate and prove the *a priori truths*. The central truth of the new anthropology is that everything is about power, and power is always manifested in a class hierarchy, in which the ruling classes exploit, oppress, and demean the subordinate classes. This universal model bypasses the orthodox Marxist economic class hierarchy and struggle in favor of the cultural Marxist identity class hierarchy and struggle. It is the new anthropology's universal truth that whites always oppress people of color, that men always oppress women, that heterosexuals always oppress LBGTQ++, that Christians and Jews always oppress Muslims, and that "social justice" requires that the oppressed victims rise up and overthrow the oppressors, flip the hierarchy, and take control.

The mandate of the new anthropology is to advance "social justice" and the interests of the oppressed victims. This new version of anthropology could be justly labeled "victimology." Social organization and culture other than the identity class struggle are seen as ephemeral, a distraction from the true essence of human life, and probably a purposeful obfuscation by an old anthropology aligned with the rulers and oppressors. "Research" in the new anthropology seeks out females, people of color, LBGTQ++, and Muslims to describe their unfortunate victimization at the hands of the usual suspects.

While the old anthropology finds distinctions among people and peoples due to their differences in social organization and culture, the new anthropology unites people and peoples through the magic of intersectionality. For example, African Americans and Palestinians are seen as allies, due to their being people of color suffering at the hands of American and Israeli whites. The new anthropology does not recognise that Israelis are many colors, or that Arabs are recognized as white by most governments, or that for over a thousand years

Arabs traded African slaves, commonly mutilated, or that in Arabic, the word (*abid*) for black person is the same word for slave. For the new anthropology, these details obscure what's important: the identity class struggle to overcome RACISM!, DISCRIMINATION!, WHITE NATIONALISM!, PATRIARCHY!, HETRONORMATIVITY!, and ISLAMOPHOBIA!

The new anthropological struggle is an international one. That is why cultural relativism, defined by old anthropology as a suspension of the researcher's values in order to understand better the people being studied, has been expanded to moral, ethical, and epistemological equivalence. For the new anthropology, "social justice" requires that we recognize that all societies and cultures are equally good and valuable; think of it as "cross-cultural justice." Well, there is an exception: Western Civilization, which is judged by the new anthropology as uniquely guilty of imperialist and colonialist oppression, as the inventor of slavery and the murder of indigenous people, and therefore uniquely evil. This view is dignified by the label "postcolonial theory."

For the new anthropology, the world, prior to Western imperialism, was a peaceful and loving place in which everyone got along in a cooperative and mutually appreciative manner. Apparently, the new anthropology does not care to mention the hundreds of empires throughout history, their expansionary invasions, or their displacement, killing, and enslaving of indigenous people. Nor are the endless tribal raiding for foodstuffs, valuables, livestock, and captives to serve as slaves, or the tribal wars of expansion and displacement worthy of mention. Slavery and its capture of uncompensated labor was a part of every state system for thousands of years, and invasion and expansion were partially aimed at maintaining the supply of slaves. Pre-industrial states could not support state projects and the luxury class at the low level of production its population was capable of, so uncompensated labor was required.

Even the most superficial acquaintance with history would verify these points, apparently unwelcome truths for the new anthropology. The Achaemenid Empire, founded in 550 BC by Cyrus the Great, conquered and encompassed the Middle East from the Indus Valley though Mesopotamia to the Nile Valley. The Persian Empire fell in 330 BC to Alexander the Great ("Ishkandar" in Persian), whose succeeding empire covered the area of the Persian Empire but extended farther north, including Asia Minor and Greece. The Roman Empire dominated all around the Mediterranean and far north into Europe, up to five million square kilometers, drawing captives from lands as far as Britain to serve as slaves on Roman latifundia and in Roman households.

The Arab Islamic Empire, initiated in Arabia in the seventh century, rapidly invaded Christian and Jewish lands to the north in the Levant, Zoroastrian and Hindu lands to the east in Persia and northern India, Christian Egypt and North Africa to the west, and Christian Mediterranean islands and southern Iberia. Arab historians likened the conquering Bedouin armies to plagues of locusts. Hundreds of thousands of captives, particularly females, were enslaved and distributed to military leaders and Muslim soldiers. The Levant, Egypt,

and North Africa remain Arab colonies in the 21stcentury. Following defeats by the Mongol Empire, Arab-dominated eastern lands were invaded by Turkic tribes, one of which succeeded in eradicating the Byzantine Empire in 1453, replacing it with the Ottoman Empire, which came to dominate Arab lands and the Christian Balkans, also taking over the formal leadership of Islam. The Ottomans drew white slaves from the Balkans to serve the Sultan and beyond, as North African Moors or Saracens slave raided in Europe as far north as Ireland into the twentieth century. In the 21stcentury, the Islamic State invaded and occupied large areas of Syria and western Iraq but was finally terminated by Kurdish and American military opposition.

We learn that in the new anthropology, no negative judgement must be made about any people, culture, or region, lest it hurt the feelings of (and make "unsafe") some who may identify with that people, culture, or region. (The exception of course is Western Civilization and any of its constituent parts, which the new anthropology sees as deserving of being berated, vilified, disparaged, and denigrated in the strongest possible language.) Today's anthropology students believe that to say "the Middle East is a place where doing harm and being cruel to others is regarded as a virtue and a duty" is a great and dangerous offense against individuals who identify with the region. But these anthropology students and those who identify with the region have not spoken out about the atrocities in which a half million Syrians of all ages and sexes were killed in the recent civil war fueled by Sunni-Shia opposition. Nor do they appear to be offended by the cruel practices of the Islamic State, such as cutting off the heads of prisoners and posting videos, the burning alive of opposition soldiers, and the mass capture of "infidel" Yazidi girls and women, gang raping them, holding them as sex slaves, and then murdering many of them. Apparently the "inclusion" of the new anthropology encompasses Syrian and Islamic State atrocities.

As we have seen, the goal of the new anthropology is "social justice," of which "inclusion" is a major component. "Inclusion" means that people should never hear anything about their identity reference group that would hurt their feelings. (This, however, does not apply to unpreferred groups: males, whites, Christians, Jews, and, remarkably, East Asians. In practice, members of these categories are often excluded.) The McGill anthropology students who penned the aforementioned open letter are correct in asserting that "inclusion" and "academic freedom" are not compatible. They opt for inclusion, to the exclusion of academic freedom.

The old anthropology did value what the students claim is an outdated academic freedom and a diversity of ideas. This is because it believed that diverse ideas and their competition in the marketplace of ideas was the best way to increase sound knowledge and to approach truth. But all of that is unnecessary for the new anthropology, which believes it has already grasped the universal truths of social justice. For the new anthropologists, the goal is not to understand the world, but to change it into their own image.

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The Residential Schools and Mount Royal University: Thou Shalt Not Challenge the Narrative of "Genocide"

Frances Widdowson

Throughout 2020, the university where I work – Mount Royal University (MRU) – went through some fundamental changes with respect to promoting academic freedom and open inquiry. Since the killing of George Floyd, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, it has become increasingly difficult to rationally discuss matters pertaining to "BIPOC" (black, indigenous, and people of colour) issues.

Academic discussion has become particularly fraught with respect to the historical nature of the indigenous residential schools system. It has been decided that the "correct" view is that the schools were "genocidal". As a result, on September 11, 2020, General Faculties Council voted overwhelmingly in favour of the following motion:

"THAT Mount Royal University acknowledges the genocide done to Indigenous peoples by colonization and the trauma inflicted by the residential school system, and supports the ongoing work of reconciliation, including the objectives set out in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. This acknowledgement brings a responsibility to provide a culturally-safe learning and work environment in accordance with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings and MRU's Indigenous Strategic Plan. MRU is committed to strengthening our commitment to decolonization, as stated in the five goals of our Indigenous Strategic Plan. We will: 1) Cultivate respectful and welcoming environments that prevail over the legacy of colonization; 2) Foster respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production to increase capacity for Indigenous scholarship; 3) Build strong connections by forging mutually supportive and productive partnerships with all stakeholders in Indigenous education; 4) Work with our communities to enhance the academic, personal and cultural experience of Indigenous learners; 5) Promote culturally responsible and respectful curricula that integrates [*sic*] Indigenous pedagogies and ways of knowing".

At about the same time that this motion was put forward, a petition was circulating demanding that I be fired. One of the reasons given for starting the petition was that I did an interview with the *Western Standard*, where I argued that, while the residential schools had serious problems, they provided an education that would not be otherwise available. This led a number of students to

make comments that MRU had no place for a professor who spread "dangerous information" such as this. The claims of a number of MRU professors were even more strident, asserting that my arguments constituted "racism", "hate", "genocide denialism", and "epistemic violence".

The relationship between the petition and the motion at General Faculties Council can never be known, but the two share an assumption. It is that whether the residential schools were genocidal is not a matter that can scrutinized in academic discussion and debate; that they were has become dogma at MRU. It is an article of faith that cannot be challenged, even by those who have evidence that contradicts it.

This was not always the case. I have been challenging the "genocide" narrative about the residential schools for several years, but it was not until 2020 that orthodoxy was demanded. In fact, my co-author, Albert Howard, and I had stated in 2008 that calling the residential schools genocidal constituted a "hysterical" claim (*Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry,* p. 26). I decided to re-enter debates about the subject in 2017, after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report. Because the discussion was becoming increasingly one-sided as ideological pressure to conform intensified, I presented a paper on the subject at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association. While the presentation was controversial, and required security guards because of the reaction generated by Barbara Kay's column in the *National Post* discussing its arguments, no protest materialized and an informative academic discussion took place.

Although the conference presentation went well, my paper sparked some hostile responses at MRU. Kay's coverage resulted in the President of the Students' Association and three professors claiming that I should be "called out" for my hateful racist views, and that MRU deserved better educators. This, however, was not the dominant position at my university. Most people saw the attacks from my colleagues as inappropriate, and I was confident that my academic freedom would be protected, as it had been in the past, both by the Mount Royal Faculty Association and by MRU administrators.

In 2020, however, I am no longer so self-assured. It is now extremely difficult to challenge the "genocide" narrative at MRU without serious consequences. This is because MRU's slogan "You Belong Here" is used to buttress the claim that my arguments make the university "unsafe" for indigenous faculty and students. "Mount Royal University" has declared that everyone has a "responsibility to provide a culturally-safe learning and work environment in accordance with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings and MRU's Indigenous Strategic Plan". What professor in their right mind would question the "genocide" narrative when doing so results in the professor being mobbed, with the tacit support of their university for not "provid[ing] a culturally-safe learning and work environment"?

How did MRU, which once protected me when I put forward controversial positions, become a place where academic discussions about historical facts now result in demands for sanctions? The story is complicated, but largely involves the increasing prominence of applied postmodernism (colloquially referred to as "wokeism") throughout the university. With the widespread acceptance of this reactionary ideology, it is believed that the voices of those perceived to be oppressed must be amplified to create a highly contentious vision of "Social Justice". This has led to growing support for the suppression of views that are believed to be contrary to indigenous aspirations.

While MRU's original acceptance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's "Calls to Action" was seen as a way of supporting indigenous people, the most recent motion to affirm them shows the negative impact that this is having on academic freedom and open inquiry. From the very beginning, I never understood why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was being used as the rationale to develop various policies at universities. As many professors (and faculty associations) would state in almost any other context, university autonomy requires that academic decisions be made by those with expertise in the area. While we might want to adopt some of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations, shouldn't this be done only after it was demonstrated that they were justified academically?

The most ironic aspect of all of this is that the title of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report implies that truth is necessary in order for reconciliation to occur. The pursuit of truth with respect to the nature of the residential schools is not possible at MRU, however, because we are told that "reconciliation" requires "[f]oster[ing] respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production…" and "[p]romot[ing] culturally responsible and respectful curricula that integrates [*sic*] Indigenous pedagogies and ways of knowing". In other words, MRU is demanding that critical thought be abandoned. And while lip service is paid to the fact MRU's Collective Agreement protects dissent in its academic freedom provisions, this does not consider the hostile climate that has been created for open inquiry regarding this subject. By taking a position on an academic matter, the university is sending a signal to faculty members and students that prescribed doctrine should determine how they think. With one vote, MRU has gone from an academic university to a religious institution that issues commandments.

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Any Resemblance is Purely Coincidental: A Review of *Campusland*

Kris Larsen

Scott Johnston, *Campusland*, St Martin's Press, NewYork, 2019 (Hardcover, 322 pages).

"Trigger warning": Scott Johnston's satirical novel *Campusland* "should not be read by those who lack a sense of humour" (*Kirkus Reviews*). Let's be more expansive (and *inclusive*!) and add that the politically correct and easily offended must avoid it at all costs. By extension, *this same warning must apply to this review.* Good on *Kirkus*, though, for stating "trigger warning". I probably wouldn't have thought of it. Consider yourself *warned*, my learned friends.

It is a joy for those of us who appreciate a good laugh to read this hilarious romp of a novel, set at fictional Ivy League Devon University, a postmodern "progressive" campus committed to "social justice" (what campus isn't these days?) and situated in the aesthetically pleasing New England community of Havenport. This novel is even more humorous than Tom Wolfe's *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, and while more esteemed critics than I will doubtless give higher marks to Robertson Davies' *The Rebel Angels* or Bernard Malamud's *A New Life*, reading *Campusland* is a heck of a lot more fun. Suffice to say, characters, events, and locations in this novel are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, events, or places is purely coincidental. After all, none of the goings on in this novel would ever happen on a real campus. Or would they?

The novel features quite a motley cast, including woke faculty (even one who is "pangender"), a student body of entitled privileged "cupcakes" (some believing they are oppressed), boorish frat boys, and a grievance mongering, race hustling, man hating Diversity and Inclusion Dean ("Where's the Equity??!!"). Her gross salary for saving the campus (and the world?) from racism, bigotry, oppression, misogyny, capitalism, etc., is $570,000 a year. Not a bad gig if you can get it.

For good measure, there is also a spineless wonder of a university president, one Milton Strauss, who always caves to – and throws money at – "progressive" activists, enthusiastically supports freedom of speech (provided it is politically correct), cancels conservative campus speakers, and throws faculty under the bus rather than defend them from the mob.

The lightning rod for much (not all) of the campus ire is Ephraim (Eph) Russell, an assistant professor of English, seeking tenure, who loves his discipline (19th century American literature), his lectures, and his interactions with his students – plus the life he has carved out for himself within the pleasing ambience of Havenport. Also, the meals at the faculty club are apparently quite good. In many ways, Eph is the very model of what an academic ought to be; a published biographer of Emerson, who loves intellectual rigour and the pursuit of knowledge for their own sakes. He believes he's come a long way from his

"embarrassing" roots: the family peanut farm in Ashley, Alabama. Indeed, when he tells folks he did his undergrad at *Sam*ford (in Alabama), they often think he's saying *Stan*ford, a misunderstanding he is content to let stand. He is the very model of a postmodern progressive, or so he thinks.

There are some "concerns", however. Eph, by his own admission, prefers the caffeine jolt of coffee to kombucha, although he will suffer through a glass of the latter when meeting his girlfriend, D'Arcy, at Blue Nation Coffee, the campus café. Am I allowed to say "girlfriend"? Perhaps more egregious is his seeming preference for beer over the finer wines. And if that isn't bad enough, he even has the audacity, the gall, the sheer nerve, to teach Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in his 19th century American literature class (!!), and he doesn't even give trigger warnings(!!). Oh the horror! The N-word is used frequently in this novel, which is too much for the "snowflakes" in the Progressive Student Alliance, headed by the ultra-woke "Red" Wheeler (nicknamed for his hair as well as his politics), a *seventh year* undergrad and multi-million dollar trust fund brat. Of course, Red would love nothing more than to donate all of that money to the "revolution", and he holds in contempt those "little Eichmanns" who refuse him access to the principle. Poor dear Red is left to make do with the hundreds of thousands of dollars he receives each year in interest, which apparently leaves him with little to donate. Life can be difficult.

Let's be clear. A good writer, never mind a great writer like Samuel Langhorne Clemens, creates characters in keeping with the times in which they lived. The American South was very much a racist society in the late nineteenth century (and well beyond) and it is appropriate for a writer's characters to reflect that reality, which includes uttering the N-word. Objectors are free not to take the course. Instead, let me suggest Barrett "Toes" Smallwood's modern American lit offering. He has the woke verbiage down pat, quotes Michel Foucault, and issues trigger warnings for *The Waste Land*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Anyway, the beat continues. Red's rival, Jaylen Biggs, president of the Afro-American Cultural Center, sees racism everywhere, or so he lets on, and adeptly "persuades" (extorts?) sycophantic Devon president Milton Strauss to grant $50 million to his, Jaylen's, organization. No wonder tuition costs are through the roof!! Jaylen hails from tony Rye, New York, went to a private school, and is the son of a neurologist. Yet he is apparently a victim of racism and oppression (as he attends an Ivy League university), while Eph, whose boyhood was spent doing labour intensive work on a family farm that was just making it, and whose honourable older brother died a hero in Afghanistan, is deemed to be "privileged", and hauled in front of the University Bias Response Team for teaching *Huckleberry Finn*.

Oh shoot!! I've hitherto neglected to mention that D'Arcy, the object of Eph's affections and Milton Strauss' executive assistant, is African American, an "inconvenient truth" apparently not known to the Progressive Student Alliance or the University Bias Response Team panel, chaired by the Dean of the Office of

Diversity and Inclusion, that legend in her own mind, Martika Malik-Adams.

Would a racist and a white supremacist date a person of colour? Of course, the diversity and inclusion hucksters would rationalize their way to "yes". And it sure would have been fun reading about them twisting themselves into semantic pretzels trying to make that case. Nevertheless, plots are plots and must be thickened. Indeed, the novel benefits by not having the zealots in the know at this stage, given that Lulu and Title IX wait in the wings.

Enacted in the US in 1972 with the best of intentions, Title IX was broadened and weaponized during the Obama years, enabling university administrators like Martika Malik-Adams to "investigate" allegations of rape, assault (sexual or physical), and harassment. The accused, many of whom were innocent, were denied due process and run out on a rail, their reputations destroyed. Yet again, Eph finds himself in Martika's crosshairs.

Meanwhile, the superficial Lulu is a spoiled narcissistic eighteen-year-old drama queen and first-year student at Devon. She hails from New York, is the daughter of a fabulously wealthy lawyer father and a mother who deserted her shortly after she was born. That would never happen in a politically correct story! Unfortunately, she just happens to be enrolled in Eph's course. To her credit, she is brighter than many of the students in this novel, but she is also obsessed with notoriety and being "liked" on Facebook, Twitter, etc. Those reduced to collateral damage in her wake are of no consequence.

Returning to her dorm one Saturday morning, her face badly bruised, Lulu is noticed by her residence assistant (RA), a Womyn's Collective member, who believes Lulu was sexually assaulted, and reports this to Dean Choudhary. It turns out Lulu was in Eph's office the previous evening to hand in her term paper. While there, she attempted to seduce Eph and was appropriately rebuffed.

In the ensuing firestorm, Lulu meets with Dean DIE – uh, sorry, Martika Malik-Adams – and a Devon staff psychologist, as well as a stenographer. She actually tells the truth about Eph. Of course Martika and the psychologist are having none of it and attribute Lulu's testimony to PTSD, power imbalances, intimidation, and fear of reprisals from a professor.

In the meeting with Eph, the psychologist is replaced by a lawyer. By contrast, Eph has no legal representation and is not allowed to face his accuser. He maintains his innocence.

In essence, we have a miscarriage of justice and no case. There is no corroboration of the alleged sexual assault and no admission of guilt. But Martika is determined to make a name for herself by "taking down" a professor.

Here is a tip for Martika Malik-Adams and the Title IX kangaroo courts stateside. You have a duty to report alleged rapes, sexual assaults, and other crimes to the police; then a duty to get out of the way and let *qualified* people in the criminal justice system conduct proper investigations and prosecute where appropriate.

For the record, readers learn halfway through the novel that Lulu left Eph's office on Friday evening and went to a frat party. She got drunk and "hooked-up". She woke up the next morning in the frat house common room (or reasonable facsimile), very hung over. She disentangled herself from her sleeping "hook-up", scooped up her clothes, staggered across the floor, tripped over a sound cable, and crashed cheek first into the corner of a coffee table.

As an afterward, Johnston writes, "while *Campusland* is written as satire, it doesn't stretch the truth by much, and sometimes not at all". Reducing characters, places, and events to caricatures is an effective means to criticize. It is, at the same time, highly entertaining. Indeed, Johnston's novel is a funny and courageous assessment of what ails the modern campus, an intolerance that has long since spread into the broader society, fueled to a large degree by the media (mainstream and social). His scathing condemnation of Title IX is fitting. One hopes Martika is excessively caricatured, although successful lawsuits against Title IX abuses leads one to conclude she has some basis in reality. And Frances Widdowson, Verushka Lieutenant-Duval, David Lesbarrères, Tomáš Hudlický, Kathleen Lowrey, and Mark Hecht are but a few of the most recent examples of professors in Canada who have drawn the ire of politically correct speech police.

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Showing Civility where Others Lose their Minds: A Review of *Intellectual Freedom and the Culture Wars*

Grant A. Brown

Piers Benn, *Intellectual Freedom and the Culture Wars*, Palgrave Studies in Classical Liberalism, Hardwick & Marsh, series eds., Palgrave Macmillan, 2021; 158 pp., Index.

This volume economically covers a broad range of topics in the culture wars, including controversies surrounding islamophobia, transgender rights, feminism and intersectionality, anti-racism and Black Lives Matter, the clash of political values over Brexit, cultural Marxism, and the ethics of "unfriending" people you fundamentally disagree with – to mention a few. The author deftly moves between philosophical analysis and concrete concerns. His discussions are illuminated with numerous contemporary examples – slightly skewed toward the British experience, but most examples will be familiar to moderately informed readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

While Benn covers a broad range of topics and illustrative examples, he does not delve deeply into them. He sets out the basic arguments on both sides of the debate, makes important distinctions and clarifications, identifies legitimate interests and concerns where there are such, and comes to what most SAFS members will regard as sensible, middle-of-the road conclusions. This book

would serve excellently well to initiate discussions of hot-button issues in an undergraduate classroom.

Despite the title of the series in which it appears, this volume is not written from a classical liberal perspective. Rather, the author self-identifies as a "qualified traditional liberal." Indeed, his left-of-centre political ideology occasionally distracts from (without negating) his main arguments. There is, of course, the *de rigueur* Trump derangement syndrome. Although Trump has many faults, he does not exemplify every fault; and many of his political opponents and critics are at least as blemished as he is. Benn also beats the drum rather too loudly when he asserts that "There is no reasonable doubt that climate change does require decisive action…" – and puts those who are unconvinced of this on a par with anti-vaxers. This is shockingly naïve about the state of knowledge in this complex and relatively new scientific field.

Benn is confident "…we can all agree that feminism has made huge strides, but that is because the position of women for almost all of history was so outrageously bad." I'm not sure I do agree. While I wouldn't want to try to quantify these things, and I'm not an historian who has made a career out of studying them, my impression is that the life of man has been mean, nasty, brutish and short for most of human history, too – "outrageously bad" by contemporary standards. The fact that gender equality movements were sporadic and limited to the upper classes in the course of history might suggests that however bad their lives were, women were not eager to change places with men until recently. I would suggest that perhaps women's recent strides are attributable to ordinary liberal humanism and advances in knowledge and technology in the 20th century. Feminists have a tendency to engage in self-serving exaggeration and divisive rhetoric that generate a backlash.

"Surprisingly," Benn confesses, "…I agree that in Western societies, the right is a greater threat to traditionally liberal values than the left." This is indeed surprising, considering that he consistently finds fault with the more radical positions associated with the progressive left in the culture wars. Cancel culture might have existed since civilization began, but the particular manifestations of it seen today – shaming, shunning, "unfriending," de-platforming, boycotting, internet bullying, mobbing, divesting, protesting-rioting-looting – are overwhelmingly leftist tactics. I'm with Dave Rubin and Douglas Murray on this one: mainstream conservatives are the new liberals; what they are conserving are the traditional liberal values against an onslaught of emotive, anti-liberal left-wing ideology.

The discussion of topics from the culture wars is book-ended by a defense of intellectual freedom. Benn is committed to both freedom of enquiry *and* civil debate; but his position should not be confused with that of Wilfrid Laurier President Deborah MacLatchy, who famously professed her commitment not free speech but to "better speech." Benn is not proposing *limitations* on expression or enquiry in the interests of civility. Rather, he argues that civil debate is a facilitator of genuine enquiry. We should strive to be civil if we hope to advance

the search for truth. That incivility tends to obstruct understanding is hardly controversial (although there may be excuses for occasional incivility, too).

As far as Benn's defense of intellectual freedom is concerned, a classical liberal will have little cause to quibble. It owes much to J.S. Mill's four arguments in *On Liberty*. He distinguishes between offense and harm, rejecting the view that words constitute a form of violence that people must be protected from – with the usual exceptions of incitement, threats, invasions of privacy, and defamation.

Benn reminds readers that the truth of a proposition is not a function of its appeal, moral or otherwise. Confidence in our beliefs should be based upon their pedigree: were they arrived at through truth-sensitive methods, or conversely as a result of social pressures to conform? He makes the standard appeal to reason and evidence as the way to settle differences. Freedom of enquiry fosters the "epistemic virtues" – open-mindedness, humility, curiosity, diligence, rigour – while an oppressive intellectual atmosphere fosters the "epistemic vices" – intellectual pride, negligence, idleness, cowardice, conformity, carelessness, rigidity, prejudice, wishful thinking, closed-mindedness, insensitivity to detail, obtuseness, and lack of thoroughness. (Classical liberals will be quick to make the parallel case for political liberty, which Benn curiously does not.)

Benn addresses the challenges posed by moral relativism and the denial of an objective truth convincingly. I would have gone further by arguing that if an appeal to reason and evidence is itself just a right-wing tactic used by the powerful and privileged to suppress the hitherto voiceless, it would be literally self-defeating for the weak and under-privileged to point this out. If the powerful and privileged could be convinced that there is no objective right or wrong, and that all debate – all communication – is merely a rationalization, a disguised play for advantage, their reaction should be, "So what you are telling me is that you are only trying to manipulate me with your arguments into giving my power and privilege to you, so that you can use it against me in the future. If there is no objective right or wrong, then I will prefer to hold onto my power and privilege." Reason is really all the weak and under-privileged have going for them, so they had better learn to play it well.

There is an interesting discussion of virtue-signaling toward the end of the penultimate chapter, which associates it with the "vain moraliser." Benn concludes the book with a summary of obstacles to sound judgment and productive conversations. These include appeals to anecdotal evidence, conformity, guilt by association, ideological hypervigilance, and the normalization of hyperbole.

The beauty of this book is that the author models in his coverage of the culture-wars topics the standards of civil debate he advocates, thereby disarming much of the arsenal that supporters of illiberal positions in these wars bring to the subjects. He not only claims that civility in debate facilitates enquiry; he *shows* it where others might lose their patience or their minds. This feature alone makes the book an ideal resource for undergraduate teaching of the culture wars.

Long-time SAFS member Grant A. Brown, DPhil, LL.B. (drgrantbrown@gmail.com), runs the Oxford Inn, a bed-and-breakfast in Stratford, Ontario.

Maoist Censorship and Cowardly Capitulation: The Bruce Gilley Affair, Part II

Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann

In April 2020, I published an article in the SAFS newsletter, #85, entitled "Uncomfortable Questions: The Bruce Gilley Scandal," concerning the successful attempt to censor an article by Dr. Bruce Gilley defending colonialism.

I disagreed with much of what Dr. Gilley wrote in that article, but I defended his right to make his argument and have it published.

Dr. Gilley had also been appointed editor of a new series called "Problems of Anti-Colonialism" for Lexington Books, an imprint of Rowman and Littlefield. The first book in this series was to be a biography Gilley himself wrote of Sir Alan Burns, a governor of the Gold Coast (now Ghana). The book was properly reviewed by two other scholars and recommended for publication. Then over a thousand people signed a petition on Change.org against publication of the book. Despite a counter-petition initiated soon after and signed, as of October 8, 2020 by over 4400 people, Rowman and Littlefield "released" Gilley from his contract.

Below is a letter I sent to Ms. Julie Kirsch, the Senior Vice-President and publisher of Rowman and Littlefield, via email on October 8, 2020. As of the date of submission of this article, December 16, 2020, I have received no response. I have added links that were not in the original email, but have not otherwise changed it.

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Ms. Julie Kirsch,

Senior Vice-President and Publisher,

Rowman and Littlefield

October 8, 2020

Dear Ms. Kirsch,

I am writing to express my extreme concern to you upon learning that Rowman and Littlefield has cancelled publication of Dr. Bruce Gilley's book, *The Last Imperialist: Sir Alan Burns' Epic Defense of the British Empire*, and has also cancelled his editorship of a new series to be called Problems of Anti-Colonialism.

The reason for this cancellation appears to be a petition on Change.org entitled "Bruce Gilley's Colonial Apologetics," organized by one Joshua Moufawad-Paul,

who is identified by Wikipedia as a professor of philosophy at York University in Canada, although I cannot find a listing for him on that department's website. He is also listed in his Wikipedia entry as a Maoist. I hope that this is not accurate. A Maoist is someone who follows the teaching of Mao Tse-Tung. Mao Tse-Tung was one of history's most egregious murderers, responsible, for example, for the deaths of 30 to 45 million people during China's so-called agricultural Great Leap Forward (1958-62). Mao also favoured censorship: during the Great Leap Forward peasants and journalists, indeed even children, who protested Mao's policies were tortured to death or executed in various horrible manners. (Howard-Hassmann, pp. 27-33.)

If Mr. Moufawad-Paul is indeed a Maoist, then it would be consistent with his ideological beliefs to wish to censor Dr. Gilley's writings. I do not know if he read Dr. Gilley's article, "The Case for Colonialism," which stirred controversy in 2017. Nor do I know if he, or any of the signatories of the Change.org petition to which Roman and Littlefield appears to have capitulated, have read the book in question. I do know that the Change.org petition is full of misinformation. Indeed, it appears to me that one of the statements in this petition, the claim that Dr. Gilley "endorses a white nationalist perspective," is libelous.

I, on the other hand, have read Dr. Gilley's original article. I attach a copy of a piece I published in the newsletter of Canada's Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship about it. I am also the author of *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Ghana* (Croom Helm, 1978), and I do not agree with Dr. Gilley's defense of colonialism. I do believe, however, that he had a right to publish this article. Others who believed this were Dr. Martin Klein, a distinguished historian of Africa who, like me, disagreed with much of what Dr. Gilley argued, and Noam Chomsky.

I have not read *The Last Imperialist*, but had Lexington published it and had I read it, I suspect I would find it interesting but nevertheless disagree with some or all of it.

I am also the author of *Human Rights in Commonwealth Africa*, published in 1986 by Rowman and Littlefield. Mr. Matthew Held, an editor at Rowman and Littlefield at the time, encouraged me to submit this manuscript to you. This book is very critical of the human rights practices and policies of post-colonial African rulers in nine English-speaking African countries. I am now wondering if you would be willing to publish such a volume today, given your apparent reaction to a petition signed by over a thousand people, the vast majority of whom, I suspect, did not read Dr. Gilley's original controversial article or his book. Perhaps they would find my human-rights perspective indicative of white nationalism.

There is now a counter-petition on Change.org, inaugurated by the (U.S.) National Association of Scholars. I have chosen not to sign it, preferring to write this letter to you instead. However, I agreed with the gist of this petition, especially the call for you to apologize to Dr Gilley, to vindicate his scholarly

reputation, and to re-commit Rowman and Littlefield to publication of *The Last Imperialist* and the series on problems of anti-colonialism.

I am copying this letter to Dr. Gilley for his information. He did not request that I send this letter to you, nor did he in any way influence its content. However, he has my permission to circulate this letter to you as he sees fit.

I am also attaching a one-page professional biography. You will note that I have received several academic awards for my work on human rights. Freedom of speech is a core human right. By your apparent capitulation to a call for censorship on Change.org, you have undermined freedom of speech.

Yours sincerely, etc.

Note: As of December 8, 2020, 1,091 people had signed the Change.org petition against publication of Dr. Gilley's book. 4,569 people had signed the petition defending him. One of the enthusiastic academic reviewers of Gilley's book was Dr. Tirthankar Roy, a Professor of Economic History at the London School of Economics. He wrote to Rowman and Littlefield calling the decision not to publish *The Last Imperialist* "shocking." Roy's letter and other materials concerning what Gilley calls the "Lexington Mob" can be found here.

Gilley has since found a new publisher for his book, Regnery History.

Joshua Moufawad-Paul is still described as "a Maoist philosopher" on his Wikipedia site. Further, I have discovered that under the name Joshua Paul, he is listed as a faculty member for a "modes of reasoning" course offered by the Department of Philosophy at York, apparently for first-year students although he is not listed as either permanent or adjunct faculty. When I first discovered that Moufawad-Paul was teaching this course, I was astonished. How could an avowed Maoist, I wondered, teach a course on reasoning, when Mao himself opposed any reasoning that questioned his rule or his policies? But then I thought, I have not read Moufawad-Paul's course outlines nor attended his classes, so I should give him the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he encourages his students to question his own Maoist beliefs. In any case, he is protected by the principle of academic freedom. I suspect he would quickly avail himself of this principle were anyone to start a campaign to have him dismissed from York University because of these beliefs. Moufawad-Paul did not apply any of these considerations to his own successful campaign to censor Bruce Gilley.

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University Recruitment Should Be Based on Merit

Rodney A. Clifton

Up until now, the University of British Columbia has been a first-rate research and teaching university, not only by Canadian standards but by international standards. Now, UBC's president, Dr. Santa Ono, says he plans to establish new priorities for the university.

In a recent policy statement, Dr. Ono promised that he would begin an extensive overhaul of UBC to "Indigenize" the institution. In fact, he said that UBC will become a world leader in rejecting the university's colonial past and adopting the indigenized present.

UBC is one of the largest universities in the country with more than 66,000 students and annual research expenditures of over $650 million. The university employs some of Canada's best researchers and teachers, and it has some of the best professional and graduate programs in the country. UBC has both "prestige and status," qualities that can be destroyed with one or two bad decisions.

Some aspects of Dr. Ono's indigenization reset plan make sense.

No one—not faculty members, students, or citizens—would object to enrolling more capable and motivated indigenous students and including more indigenous culture and history in relevant courses and programs. No fair-minded student, for example, would object to learning more about the art and culture of B.C.'s indigenous people.

Equally obvious, universities should recruit the most talented students they can find, and they should particularly recruit talented and motivated students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The country needs more well-educated and thoughtful citizens.

Even so, Dr. Ono's plan goes much further than simply recruiting talented students. He says he will hire more indigenous professors and administrators, not because they are the best researchers, teachers, or administrators, but simply because they are indigenous. Certainly, that is a good way to demean indigenous people. B.C.'s indigenous artists got their reputation and sold their work on the basis of their talent.

This policy goes against the merit principle that has been the guiding ethos of UBC (and all other world-class universities). Students, professors, and administrators should be selected because they are the very best, not because they fill a racial, ethnic, or gender quota.

When it comes to indigenizing the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses, as part of Dr. Ono's strategic plan, the pendulum may have swung too far already. Even now, critics are saying that they cannot understand integrating indigenous knowledge into mathematics, physics, or many other science courses.

Of course, some professors support Dr. Ono's indigenization strategy. A number of professors would probably like to begin each of their class lectures with an acknowledgement that the campus is situated on the unceded land of the Musqueam and other indigenous bands.

But Dr. Ono may soon begin to question his plan. He has, of course, read about some extremists in the indigenous community across the country, the blocking of pipelines in northern B.C., the dispute over fishing rights and quotas in Nova Scotia, and the blockage of several housing developments in southern Ontario.

In considering these and other explosive situations, the UBC president needs to engage in some sober second thought about his indigenization plan. He must know that his presidency would not survive a major dust-up with indigenous people.

Above all, Dr. Ono knows that he can't get caught in a web of political correctness. Smart administrators always have an escape plan that they can use when an administrative idea turns into a crisis.

So far, indigenous leaders have applauded Dr. Ono's reset plan. But if he does not deliver substantial changes year after year, he will lose their support. If that happens, these leaders will remind him of his commitment to go further than anyone else: "There is no one, anywhere in the world, that has yet done this in a university setting…"

Dr. Ono also knows that it only takes a few radicals to get many students and faculty members out to protest a promise that has not been honoured. Surely, not honouring this promise will be spun as "dishonouring indigenous people."

Dr. Ono has promised a lot, and soon he will need to deliver on his promise. UBC faculty members, students, and administrators, as well as faculty members at other Canadian universities, are waiting patiently to see how the UBC indigenization plan works out. If Dr. Ono succeeds, then other universities are likely to follow.

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Are Micro-Aggressions Really a Human Rights Violation?

Calum Anderson

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has addressed a letter to the principals and presidents of universities and colleges across the province after receiving reports of racism and other human rights violations. Service providers in Ontario have obligations to their patrons under the Ontario Human

Rights Code, and the Chief Commissioner of the OHRC is concerned that these obligations are not being met on campus.

The Commissioner points to several trends, procured from media reports, which point to the need for "more respectful, equitable, and inclusive" learning environments. The examples which are given include threats of violence, "Zoom-bombing" online meetings hosted by racialized students, the posting of racist images and comments in chat rooms, "gratuitous use" of the "N-word", and faculty microaggressions towards students.

Many of these problems appear to be stimulated not by a toxic academic environment but rather by a toxic online environment. It is effortless to conceal one's online identity, and anonymity gives bullies the courage to do and say what they like without fear of reprisal. If there have indeed been threats of violence on campus, racially motivated or otherwise, universities and colleges should condemn those actions and work with the police to ensure perpetrators are punished. Universities and colleges are not, however, in a position to regulate the internet. "Zoom-bombings" occur because faulty security mechanisms are easily bypassed by internet trolls. Again, online anonymity allows pathetic bullies to disrupt virtual meetings, which their cowardice would not allow for in person.

Racist images and comments are frequently posted in chat rooms and forums, despite the best efforts of moderators and online harassment policies. The price we pay for a "free" internet is the price we also pay for a free society – we may occasionally be hurt by malicious people who use their freedom irresponsibly. Unfortunately, the internet is not – and cannot be – governed by social norms which keep in-person discourse civil. Universities and colleges are only responsible for this reality insofar as they have treated the internet as an alternative to human interaction. Pandemic or no pandemic, it is not.

This leaves us with the two concerns which universities and colleges may be able to address: the use of the "n-word" and faculty microaggressions. The only scenario where it is appropriate to use the "n-word" at a university is when quoting a primary source where that word was used. Similarly, universities ought not to fly swastika flags on campus, but professors may well show images of that hateful symbol as a teaching tool in the context of a history or political science lecture. If this is the context in which professors have uttered the "n-word", its use has not been gratuitous.

The OHRC should have left "microaggressions" off their list of otherwise reasonable concerns. According to the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion office at Brandeis University, microaggressions are verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights which, directly or indirectly, "target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership". The late Chester Pierce, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, claimed that the "subtle, cumulative mini-assault is the substance of today's racism". If somebody makes a genuinely racist comment, they should be held accountable for it, no matter their position. But

how are faculty supposed to engage with students if they are worried that any innocuous comment can be interpreted as a microaggression and thus violate the Ontario Human Rights Code?

The Chief Commissioner identified the source of the problem when she noted that many of the students who have issued complaints are "just a few years out of high school". The concept of microaggressions is absurdly immature. Some students do genuinely feel as though comments their professors make are racially insensitive, and it is conceivable that there are some situations where that was the professor's intention. When someone is emotionally and intellectually mature, however, the appropriate response to an insensitive comment is to speak to the offending party about the comment. Perhaps these students would be surprised if they told their professors, in private, that their words were hurtful. Perhaps the professor would begin to choose his or her words more carefully or would help clarify innocent remarks which had been misinterpreted. The general reaction, however, appears to be to lodge a complaint with an authority figure. This is not dissimilar to when six-year-olds complain to their parents about their siblings. When respectable institutions like the OHRC indulge immature students by issuing heavy-handed letters to the administration, it infantilizes those students who are able to cope with their problems in an age-appropriate way.

Jonathan Haidt has made an important distinction between cultures of honour and cultures of dignity. Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, Haidt argues, Western societies were cultures where honour was earned by avenging insults on one's own. Modern Western societies have transitioned, he continues, to cultures where dignity is assumed rather than earned. This has been a positive transition in many respects. Men are no longer expected to defend their honour in duels to the death; most decent people accept that they should treat others with respect regardless of their immutable characteristics, social status, or wealth. Citing a paper published in *Comparative Sociology*, Haidt notes how some are now observing a transition from a culture of dignity to a culture of victimhood. This transition is evinced by the OHRC's letter.

As Haidt and Greg Lukianoff wrote in *The Coddling of the American Mind*, "the key idea is that the new moral culture of victimhood fosters 'moral dependence' and an atrophying of the ability to handle small interpersonal matters on one's own". The culture of victimhood has also given rise to the intellectually and morally dubious claim that "my truth" ought to be valued over "the truth". If I feel offended, an offense has been perpetrated against me, regardless of the other party's intentions. This is the line Ontario's colleges and universities are being encouraged to adopt by their government. Principals and presidents should think carefully about how they choose to respond. Imprudent measures which will be temporarily satisfying for a small number of students could adversely affect the quality of their education, the veracity of public discourse, and, ultimately, an entire generation's maturation.

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The N-Word that Dare Not Speak Its Name

Stuart Chambers

Academic freedom, which protects professors from sanctions when they dissent from prevailing opinion, has been seriously undermined by the authoritarian left. This was confirmed this past October in a controversy concerning a University of Ottawa professor who spoke the N-word in class.

To clarify, Professor Verushka Lieutenant-Duval did not promote racism. She had the audacity to point out that some historically persecuted minorities have reappropriated derogatory terms to liberate themselves from their oppressors.

At first, she offered the example of the word "queer." Formerly used to denounce homosexuals, it is now employed by the gay community as a badge of honour to signify both identity and difference. Professor Lieutenant-Duval then compared this to the N-word—and not the abbreviated version. Her class was initially suspended but then allowed to resume, amid an outcry by hundreds of CEGEP and university professors who signed a letter in support of their colleague.

In today's social and political climate, any professor—specifically, any white professor—who utters the N-word in class is automatically depicted as a racist, irrespective of application or intent. Take, for example, the editorial position of *The Fulcrum*, the University of Ottawa's student newspaper: "Stop saying the n-word. This should be self-explanatory. Even if it's in a song. Even if it's when quoting a movie. Even if it's in an 'academic context.' If you're not Black, you don't have the right."

Some students were appalled with the suggestion that perhaps a conversation was warranted to help resolve the issue. "[Professor Lieutenant-Duval] kind of opened it up as a discussion and made it seem like it's something that can be debated," one of them told *The Fulcrum*, adding, "it's not a discussion open for anybody."

Administrators, student union representatives, and a handful of professors at the University of Ottawa condemned Professor Lieutenant-Duval outright. Kevin Kee, dean of the arts faculty, was blunt: "This language was offensive and totally unacceptable in our classrooms and on our campus." As well, the University of Ottawa Student Union stated categorically that the N-word remains "offensive, hurtful and reprehensible."

In dissent, four professors within the School of Sociology and Anthropology expressed outrage at "our colleagues' use of their power and privilege to contribute to the structures of systemic racism." Unwavering in their stance, they declared,

"If one uses the n-word, given its history, one should be aware that, we, among others, will consider them a racist for using it."

In today's educational climate, even mentioning the N-word is simply off limits. No campus wants to be perceived as an enabler of systemic racism, even though Professor Lieutenant-Duval was doing just the opposite: explaining how racism operated in the past and how it was challenged by those who experienced it.

In this specific circumstance, there was no attempt to establish a white supremacist narrative. To think otherwise, one would have to have zero understanding of what constitutes an academic argument. However, pluralistic liberals—specifically, those who support restrictions on hateful expressions or grossly offensive remarks—beg to differ. Determined to impose their own set of political causes, these more militant types believe that they—and they alone—should decide what constitutes racism on campus. Anyone who disagrees with their worldview requires diversity training.

Yet, expressing the N-word is appropriate in some scenarios. For instance, Shannon Dea, dean of arts and a professor of philosophy at the University of Regina, asks whether the N-word should be spoken in class. "The answer is yes. Scholars need to be able to say the word in the course of studying it…. For some professors in some contexts, saying the N-word is the right methodological and pedagogical choice." And that is exactly what Professor Lieutenant-Duval was doing in her Art and Gender class: studying the impact of hate and examining how minorities countered its pernicious effects.

Interesting, however, was the fact that those who publicly denounced Professor Lieutenant-Duval never complained about her use of the word "queer." According to her detractors, she can articulate terms meant to demean some historically persecuted minorities (i.e., homosexuals) but not others (i.e., blacks). Nothing arbitrary there.

Of course, militant attitudes do not reflect reality outside of the university's protective cocoon. What about white screenwriters who pen the N-word or the white actor who is urged to speak it? In the movie *Django Unchained*, which uses slavery as its backdrop, it is spoken 110 times. I seriously doubt that director Quentin Tarantino and Leonardo DiCaprio, who plays a slave owner, are suddenly going to apologize for its repeated usage. It is also important to note that Jamie Foxx and Samuel L. Jackson, both black actors, encouraged the use of the N-word by DiCaprio to make the movie more authentic.

Moreover, the classic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, written by white author Harper Lee, played to a packed auditorium this past February. The N-word was spoken by white actors several times in front of 18,000 public school kids at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Black filmmaker Spike Lee was in attendance, calling the performance a "historic moment." Lee made no attempt to ban this Broadway production even though he knew in advance that white actors were going to voice the N-word. Perhaps, context does matter.

Lee should know. His critically acclaimed film *BlacKkKlansman* was filled with racial slurs and disparaging remarks, once again spoken by white actors. So why would Lee participate in such an exercise? He believes that the audience is "always smart enough to know that they [actors] are playing a part, and 'that's not them.' " In other words, one must represent the past as it truly was. Unfortunately, not everyone is this nuanced.

Academic authorities have already begun to wield their power to police language. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board recently announced that it is banning the use of the N-word, along with other demeaning terms, in all classroom discussions. A directive issued was explicit:

"The uttering or writing or use of racial or other slurs or epithets by staff (e.g., the n-word, pejorative terms used to describe Indigenous peoples, racial, ethnic, religious, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and/or disability attributes) including when reading aloud texts, quoting or teaching course content, is not permitted and cannot ever serve educational purposes."

The message "cannot ever serve educational purposes" is strategic: it ensures that a political agenda is prioritized over academic values. Putting an end to all dialogue, the politically correct among us offer ultimatums dressed up in progressive garb.

At first glimpse, pluralistic liberals appear to shine like beacons of tolerance—that is, until someone like Professor Lieutenant-Duval comes along and challenges their self-evident claims. Then they revert to censorship, intimidation, and punishment, all for the sake of safeguarding diversity, of course.

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Infecting Impressionable Minds: from Cholera Flags to Red Lines

Christina Behme

The year 2020 has been different in many ways. But, when it comes to the free speech wars on university campuses and beyond (Dabhoiwala, 2020), there are only minor differences from previous years. Defenders of Freedom of Speech *for everyone* faced the same type of opposition they did previously.

For example, the Covid-19 pandemic has been used in support of the argument that "academic freedom simply isn't the most important principle to defend right now" (Dea, 2020a). In order to justify her opinion, Dr. Dea compares Covid-19 to Cholera. With a sleight of hand, she changes from "Academic freedom in the time of coronavirus" in the title of her article to "academic freedom in the time of cholera" in the text.

Dr. Dea argues that the circumstances (in March 2020) justified actions equivalent to flying the cholera flag in the 19th century. Any potential concerns are

swiftly dismissed: "it's right to be cautious any time the cholera flag leads to the suspension of social norms. But … [w]e are dealing with a literal life-or-death matter and need to deal with it quickly. Now is the time for an extraordinary exception" (Dea, 2020a). Dr. Dea fails to consider the non-trivial differences between the lethality of cholera and Covid-19. "Without [treatment] severe cholera kills about half of affected individuals" (Sack et al. 2004). Recent statistics suggest that in Canada the Covid-19 death rate is 2.86% (deBest, 2020). The actual death rate is likely much lower because reported Covid-19 cases are only a fraction of the actual cases. Hence, it is questionable whether the kinds of measures implemented because of cholera are justified in the fight against Covid-19.

In another recent article Dr. Dea contemplates "May a professor say the N-word in class?" (Dea, 2020b). After quoting three recent cases she focuses "on the St. Jerome's/U of Waterloo case because there the matter of academic freedom rose to particular prominence" (Dea, 2020b). Dr. Dea's main focus is on the academic freedom of "Black and other scholars who study and teach about anti-Black racism." While Dr. Dea wants to be supportive of Black faculty she worries about white faculty abusing their academic freedom. In another sleight of hand, she alleges that "The same academic freedom protections that permit Black scholars like Professor Young to research and teach about 'the six or seven insightful ways the word functions in Black culture' protected Philippe Rushton's ability to engage in racist pseudoscience" (Dea, 2020b).

This equation is fallacious. Academic freedom protects Professor Young's right to teach about the use of the N-word in Black culture. But academic freedom does not protect indoctrinating students with pseudoscience. Rather, in the case of Philippe Rushton, academic freedom would have protected *his students' rights* to challenge the validity of his claims. Academic freedom allows academics to assert X; it does not imply, far less guarantee, that X is true.

The sloppy equations are not the biggest problem with Dr. Dea's arguments. Instead of allowing Black scholars or students to speak for themselves, she cherry picks a few quotes (that make Professor Young sound as if he contradicts himself; he doesn't in the article from which she quotes) and ads her narration. That is, she engages in a practice Professor Young explicitly objects to: "… true allies treat Blacks as partners, not patrons. … Allies consult! They don't just take over" (Young, 2020).

Dr. Dea does not consult. When referring to Black students and scholars, she uses the terms "minoritized students" and "minoritized scholars". This maternalistic talk removes any agency from individuals and suggests being a member of a minority is something done to them. No doubt, some members of minorities feel that way. But implying their experience represents that of every member of a minority group is as cavalier as Joe Biden's infamous "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't black". Dr. Dea's article ends in a grandiose finale: "It is time – long past time – to stop redlining the professoriate". Again, presumably privileged white academics

like Dr. Dea have "to stop the redlining" while Blacks like Professor Young are passively watching.

Someone who equates cholera and Covid-19 is not advocating responsible health and safety measures; she is fear mongering. Someone who equates underrepresentation of Black academics with redlining that excluded families from homeownership is not advocating an inclusive campus climate; she is fear mongering. Unfortunately, such fear mongering and the resulting helicopter-educating has serious effects on minority students. Several students described how they felt about hearing the N-word in the classroom: "I felt embarrassed … I stopped showing up to that class after that happened" (Tamia Chicas quoted in Butler, 2020). "I felt devalued. I felt deeply humiliated and angered…" (Chizoba Oriuwa, quoted in Rodriguez, 2020).

It should worry every educator that students are willing to give up their education upon being exposed to a mention of the N-word. Of course, the students have the right to be outraged. No one denies that. But the question is whether they also have an obligation to react in that way. Since it is not the place of a white immigrant to speculate, I'll give the last words to Professor John McWhorter. In an article discussing the use of the N-word he writes: "The air of grim aggrievement exhibits a certain superficial brand of gravity. Ultimately, however, it proposes a cry of weakness as strength: The properly black position is supposed to be, 'If you even utter this word to refer to it, even in doing so to criticize it, you have gravely injured me.' And white allies look on and commit themselves to decrying the supposedly wounding act. But I wonder how many black people, if given a bit of pause to examine that proposition, can truly say that they see this as a sign of a healthy racial self-image. Why not strength in achievements? After all, we have quite a few to point to" (McWhorter, 2019).

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Applied Post-Modernism Ruins Everything: A Review of *Cynical Theories*

Patrick Keeney

Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender and Identity.* Pitchstone Publishing, Durham, North Carolina, 2020. Pp. 351.

Historically, universities were institutions devoted to the pursuit of truth. This search was guided by Socratic humility and Pascal's dictum that "We know too much to be skeptics, but not enough to be dogmatists." Contrary to romantic myths, there was never a time of cozy accord in university life, and academic disputations are well known for their ferocity. But until recent years, intellectual

opponents could respectfully disagree. Professors believed in argument as the way to truth and engaged in debate in good faith with an open mind, firm in the belief that on any given topic there were truths to be known, provided we had the wit to avoid *ad hominin* attacks and the intelligence to recognize superior reasoning and better evidence. Disagreements could, of course, be explosive. Nevertheless, there was a tacit agreement about the norms of academic debate, including the need for a certain generosity of spirit and the principle of charity. This meant listening respectfully to one's intellectual adversaries, correcting them when they were in error, and conceding to them when they had a better argument or better evidence.

Western universities are currently suffering from a series of self-inflicted wounds that mock such old-fashioned liberality. Notable in the Brave New University is the erosion of free speech and a narrowing of views deemed "acceptable" in the university community; a toxic intolerance for those who hold opposing views, including the de-platforming of speakers whose views fail to conform to the prevailing social orthodoxies; the quickness at which students and faculty take offence at unpopular opinions; the infantilisation of students by indulging them with "trigger warnings" and "safe spaces"; the abandonment of the idea of objective truth, and the growth of an enervating relativism which refuses to maintain distinctions of enduring worth; the arrival of a managerialist class of administrative busy-bodies who seem determined to undermine the educative mission of the university; the widespread embrace of a therapeutic model of education; the brazen commercialising of research labs along with the predictable corruption of science; the misguided belief that university courses must be profitable from a business and industry point of view; and the growth of "identity politics" along with the concomitant erosion of disinterested scholarship. One could easily add to the list.

None of this is news. But recent years have borne witness to an alarming new development, one which threatens the university as never before. The past decade has seen a militant turn toward making universities bastions of woke political correctness. The university's quest for truth is passe; the university's new mission is the seeking of "social justice."

In their new book, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity*, Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay state, "There is a problem in our universities, and it comes down to Social Justice" (215). The authors examine the etiology of social justice and relate how universities are currently being led to the precipice by a toxic admixture of postmodernism and the fiery righteousness of social justice warriors. The authors relate how social justice arose from postmodern Theory (with a capital T) and how it subsequently seeped into the broader society to become the driving force of the culture wars. They conclude the book by proposing a philosophically liberal way to counter its manifestations in scholarship, activism, and everyday life.

The authors are passionate liberals who believe that the secular, liberal, and democratic societies born of the Enlightenment are still the template to measure human prosperity and happiness. They emphasize that the health and well-being of liberal societies are intricately bound with the university's fate. Hence in examining the perilous state of today's university, what the authors are ultimately defending are the core values and culture of liberal society, including "respect for the value of viewpoint diversity and honest debate [and] respect for evidence and reason" (11). They make clear early on the animating spirit of their inquiry: "… we have reached a point in history where the liberalism and modernity at the heart of Western civilization are at great risk on the level of the ideas that sustain them" (12). In brief, that liberalism which sustains the West's secular, liberal democracies is now under siege by the social justice activists.

How did we arrive at such a juncture? According to the authors, the problem for both the university and for liberal society arises from the fact that "The progressive left has aligned itself not with Modernity but with postmodernism, which rejects objective truth as a fantasy dreamed up by naïve and/or arrogant Enlightenment thinkers who underestimated the collateral consequences of Modernity's progress" (13).

The authors are scathing about social justice pieties, including the Foucauldian insistence that history is reducible to power relations. Where there is power, there is oppression, goes the argument, and any form of authority – including the intellectual kind – is illegitimate. Reason and science can be dismissed as nothing more than the daydreams of privileged white men who have used their position to maintain power and status. Likewise, the so-called canon is nothing more than the scribblings favoured by the powerful to maintain their status and privilege and can be safely confined to the dustbin of history.

The book hinges on the concept of "postmodernism," a slippery and contested term that originated in obscure corners of academia. One of this book's merits is that Pluckrose and Lindsay diligently trace the genealogy of the "postmodern turn" through the 1960s and 1970s, a necessary if challenging undertaking. The foundational ideas of postmodernism include the denial of universal truths, a skepticism about objective reality, a suspicion of reason and rationality, a belief in the relativism of moral and ethical discourse, a belief that language is the constructor of knowledge, sensitivity to ideologies of all kinds, and the view that "power" is always illegitimate and is the primary driver of history. Briefly, postmodernism is "that set of radically skeptical ideas, in which knowledge, power, and language are merely oppressive social constructs to be exploited by the powerful" (50).

Postmodernism holds broad sway in the humanities and social sciences and professional programs such as education, law, and social work. Postmodernist thinking also gave rise to new fields of enquiry, including postcolonial, queer, disability and fat studies, and critical race theory, all of which the authors examine in detail. What unites these disparate fields is the postmodern insistence

on examining all social phenomena through the lens of oppression, power, and victimhood, and to "regard knowledge as tied to identity, and to read power dynamics into every interaction" (215).

It is germane to reflect on the consequences of postmodernism for liberal education. One can readily concede that *some* relations are about power dynamics, just as *some* people are oppressed and marginalized. And we all know that language, *to some degree*, shapes our understanding of the world. But to subject undergraduates to a steady diet of these reductionist and dogmatic understandings of society and the individual is anti-educational. It diminishes rather than expands the student's intellectual horizons. More than mere power relationships are at play in history, and one's identity is more than the mere facts of race or gender. Denying alternative understandings of the human condition is to engage in a not-so-subtle form of indoctrination.

The authors write that "Postmodern Theory and liberalism do not merely exist in tension: they are almost directly at odds with one another" (237). Liberalism favours universal human values and human dignity, while postmodernism favours group identity and victimhood. Liberalism encourages disagreements and debate as a means of securing the truth. At the same time, postmodernism rejects these as merely reinforcing the dominant discourse and rejects the notion of "the" truth, insisting that we can only discover "our" truths. Liberalism accepts that statements can correspond to reality, while Theory denies that words can ever correspond to reality, but only to other words in an endless "language game."

The authors characterize postmodern thinking as a form of a "pervasive pessimism," a reactionary skepticism about modernism and modernity, which in turn fuels a "profound cultural crisis of confidence and authenticity alongside a growing distrust of liberal social orders" (25). Postmodernism is radically skeptical of science, or indeed of any "meta-narrative" which claims to discover universal "truths." In the postmodern turn, all such grand themes and their claims to universal truth are merely examples of myopic and arrogant cultural mythologies and more evidence of human hubris. At day's end, postmodernism engenders a profound cynicism bordering on nihilistic despair about scientific or ethical certainties, or indeed about the prospect of human progress.

Among the acute effects of postmodernism was the dissolution of the "boundary between that which is objectively true and that which is subjectively experienced" (29). The effects of this blurring of objective and subjective are profound, with consequences for every aspect of intellectual life:

"The perception of society as formed of individuals interacting with universal reality in unique ways – which underlies the liberal principles of individual freedom, shared humanity, and equal opportunities – was replaced by multiple allegedly equally valid knowledges and truths, constructed by groups of people with shared markers of identity related to their positions in society" (29).

This new, postmodern understanding of the human condition sounds the death-knell for any pretense to universal knowledge. Under such a dispensation, knowledge, morality, meaning, and truth are local and culturally constructed. No one culture can conceivably possess the necessary tools and terms to evaluate the others. As the authors write, "The postmodernists sought to render absurd our ways of understanding, approaching and living in the world and in societies" (45).

If one embraces such a grim and absurdist account of the human condition, how does one survive, let alone flourish? The quick answer is that postmodernism's premises and principles are unsustainable and self-consuming, leading the individual to passivity and quietude, if not nihilistic despair. But as the authors wryly note, "activism was simply not compatible with radical skepticism" (47). So out of the ashes of nihilistic despair grew what the authors refer to as "applied postmodernism," which co-opted the notion of social justice from the civil rights movement and other progressive causes and quickly transmuted into what we know today as the "social justice movement."

The social justice movement's premise is that certain groups in society – primarily those who can be identified by race, gender, or sexuality – are grossly and unfairly disadvantaged and marginalized by society. Such groups are oppressed by those who wield power, most notably by white people, who are "privileged" by their skin colour. Theory reveals these disadvantages, while the enlightened scholar-activist's role is to right these wrongs and re-order society according to their moral vision.

But at this juncture, questions start to crowd in. For example, Theory adopted a number of beliefs about the rights and wrongs of power and privilege and normative ideas of how, ideally, society should be ordered. These beliefs rapidly became as dogmatic and immutable as those of any religious doctrine. And like religious heretics before them, those who dare to question such beliefs are cast into academic perdition, including ostracization and even termination.

But what makes the social justice activist's beliefs immune from criticism? And if we, as good postmodernists, subscribe to the belief that morality is relative, by what right does the activist's understanding of morality and justice claim our allegiance?

The book's concluding chapter proposes a "liberalism without identity politics." The authors provide a welcome and eloquent restatement of the case for liberalism, comparing and contrasting it with the siren call of the social justice activist: "liberalism respects people both as individuals and as members of the human race. It does not respect identities or collectives per se; it values the individual and the universal; the human and humanity" (245).

Predictably, the quest for social justice has not produced liberally educated men and women but indoctrinated wokesters, whose "education" consists of learning how to parrot the latest platitudes about racism, sexism, transphobia, islamophobia, or other modes of oppression. Meanwhile, distinguished speakers are

de-platformed for holding views that rub against the grain of the social justice activist, while hiring committees, in the name of diversity, ignore academic merit and hire based on race or gender.

We are at a weird historical juncture. In the name of social justice, no one in the university community feels safe. Everyone is alert and on edge, as even senior academics can have their careers ended by a disgruntled undergraduate or a spiteful administrative apparatchik. The professor is now answerable to undergraduates and university bureaucrats, which is undoubtedly a sign that something has gone wrong in higher education.

Despite some bright spots and dedicated individuals, the university is in a parlous state. One of the many merits of this lucidly argued book is that the authors show us precisely what is at stake in the seemingly innocuous quest for social justice. Who, after all, can be opposed to justice? Yet as the authors clarify, the quest for social justice is no mere harmless diversion but a subversive toppling of the university's historic mission. Pluckrose and Lindsay conclude by urging us to maintain a belief in liberalism and to find the courage to "stand up and resist something with a lot of power" (266).

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A Cancel Culture Primer and Survival Guide

Barbara D. Miller

Cancel culture is a twenty first-century phenomenon which promotes and executes ostracism (aka "cancelling") in order to exclude targeted persons from social, professional, creative and commercial status and activity. Its cohorts engage through social media and in other ways in accusatory complaints, vehement protests, and public shaming. Cancel culture frequently aims at boycotting and character assassination against those deemed to have spoken, written, or acted incorrectly by the measures of its embraced dogmas. Among practices which cancel culture holds in common with recognized cults are the manipulation of vulnerable and impressionable recruits, the shunning of outsiders and defectors, and the insistence on unquestioning groupthink. *A central issue of cancel culture ethics is proper authority, since its activists characteristically attempt to co-opt legitimate power in order to coerce or prevent individual expression.*

Cancel culture's intimate alignment with identity politics complicates the challenges posed by related attacks. It is crucial to understand that *its adherents do not fundamentally approach others as individuals but instead as representatives of ethnic, gender-linked or other politically determined groups. They further designate these groups dualistically as "oppressed victims" or "oppressors." Targeted persons may be regarded as nothing more than disposable avatars*

of rival factions. It can be disorienting for a person of normal conscience and understanding to experience the intense condemnation typical of cancel culture aggression. What is more, the draconian ideological certainty of cancel culture antagonists can have a "gaslighting" effect, causing unwitting targets to question their own perceptions of reality.

Cancel-culture censoring typically involves vocabulary misleadingly applied as ideological jargon. Examples include:

- "diversity" (not of ideas, but of sanctioned groups)
- "tolerance" (for identity-based in-groups only)
- "inclusivity" (of identity-based "protected" groups for such purposes as hiring quotas)
- "compassion" (toward "victimized" groups)
- "equity" (equality of outcome, which *contradicts equality of opportunity*)
- "safety" (from unapproved words and ideas, as if from contaminants)
- "violence" (deviations from ideological positions are reacted to as if they (contagiously) harmed in-group members)
- "affirmation of existence" (meaning "protected" group members must be treated affirmatively regardless of merit, and never "offended" or "triggered")
- "offence" (expressed difference from identity politics groupthink)
- "triggering" (provoking negative emotion in "protected" group members)

If you, or anyone you know, should become targeted by cancel culture:

1. *You (the target) have probably done nothing wrong and, if baselessly accused, should not experience guilt.* The most likely "trigger" (catalyst) would be a statement of rational opinion, demonstrated fact, or the mere description of a concept, to which an ideological group objected. Even inadvertent use of terms judged as politically incorrect can trigger cancel culture perceptions of transgression. But following your conscience and exercising your legal rights are not wrong actions. It is helpful to know that cancel culture attacks, though often carried out against individuals, are rarely fundamentally personal, since they are collectively based.

2. You are in good company. At least hundreds of successful and innocent people have been "cancelled."

3. *Do not apologize when you know you have done nothing wrong. If you give credence to an unfounded attack*, by conceding as improper anything you do not really believe should have been done differently, *you further empower cancel culture to harm.*

4. *Choose your words in the wake of an attack with utmost care. An expression of regret that a misunderstanding may have caused offense is likely to be exploited*

as if it were an apology for wrongdoing. If in good conscience you feel compelled to apologize for something, address yourself to trustworthy witnesses as well as to complainants, document your words, stress your original intentions, specify precisely what you are apologizing for, and brace yourself for additional reactive condemnation.

5. *Stand firm and model honesty.* Although cancel culture assaults can be devastating, you are much more likely to survive one successfully by refusing to give in to inappropriate demands. Wait until your persecutors inevitably move on to a new target.

6. Insist that targeted persons be treated with empathy and compassion. *You may be able to turn the tables by using cancel culture's own stated values.* Offer reassurance that you are dedicated to fair outcomes, based on commitment to the truth, but that you will not cooperate with violations of standard morality such as vengeful or cruel behavior.

The main drawback of this strategy is conflict between your resolve to treat individuals with fairness and your opponents' possible unwillingness or inability to regard their targets in any way except as obstacles to "social justice." Another potential stumbling block is miscommunication and increased misunderstanding, due to cancel culture's redefinition of terms as jargon.

7. *Stress compassion and common sense.* Cancel culture leaders train their protegees to reject reason, as if it were a tactic intended only to protect "privilege." Thus, you might decide to avoid such words as "reason" or "logic," during relevant interactions.

8. *Join and build support networks among reasonable people, no matter what your political or philosophical differences.* The point is that individuals of good conscience, committed to freedom of expression, demonstrate solidarity. (See number 8 below.)

9. *Foster objectivity, forgiveness, gratitude, and kindness. Resist and undermine bitterness and resentment.*

10. *Improve your listening skills.* Stress that you are listening respectfully, but that complainants must do likewise.

11. *Individualize interactions to maximize empathy.* Try asking the person lodging a complaint about their most positive experience of a targeted individual. If the circumstances are conducive, organize a one-on-one or small group conversation between accuser(s) and target(s), with the pre-agreed goal of calmly reached fair resolution. Participants might begin by introducing themselves (without volunteering information that could increase anyone's vulnerability).

12. *Insist that criticism be addressed toward misunderstanding or disagreement, not toward personal character.*

13. *Stress the importance of intention as a legal foundation.* As a core societal standard, the importance of intention cannot be eliminated or trivialized. Nei-

ther can other elements of normalized Western justice such as the presumption of innocence or the right of the accused to confront accusers or secure impartial judgement.

14. Since hardcore cancel culture proxies will shout down attempts at consensus building, not every encounter can end well. *Use good sense in protecting your own and others' physical safety.*

General Suggestions (from social psychologist Jonathan Haidt and others):

1. Reduce the number of campus enclaves for social grievance groups.

2. Be honest in grading and other evaluation. Yet encourage and affirm the best in people.

3. Encourage others to feel comfortable expressing their opinions while discouraging antagonistic reaction.

4. Model civility. You may decide to respond to hostility with civility. However, it is important to temper friendliness with self-respectful assertiveness.

5. If an exchange becomes hostile, stop for a moment. Calmly insist that the participants interact respectfully.

6. State in a civil way that ideas are debatable. People holding ideas, with no intention to harm, must be treated decently.

7. Refuse to protect people from words, ideas, and facts, while insisting on reciprocally considerate behavior.

8. Connect with those who support openness and freedom. Join the National Association of Scholars and/or the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, or at least subscribe to their mailing lists. These organizations, whose memberships are not restricted to academics, advocate on behalf of "cancelled" community members, and provide information through publications and online projects. Another resource to explore is Heterodoxacademy.org, founded by Jonathan Haidt and associates.

9. Support dissent and *peaceful* protest as legal rights. *But remember that the purpose of a university is the broadening of the mind through exposure to a wide array of disciplines and ideas.* All institutions of higher learning bear a fundamental responsibility to prepare students for the rigors of adult life and to foster intellectual curiosity, as well as honest, competently analytical thinking. These establishments, by definition, must foster freedom of expression and inquiry in a democratic society.

Final observations:

Cancel culture, through its alliance with identity politics, proclaims the infallibility of reactions to "triggers" by social "victims." At the extreme, it rationalizes harsh incivility and even violence. It endorses the fallacy that the experience of the "victimized" unconditionally differs from and supersedes that

of the "privileged" and excuses the "victim's" bad behaviour. As one global gender-studies PhD has explained it, white poverty should be dismissed with the (obviously racist) assertion that whites are implicitly and always privileged; she adds that only whites have the systemic advantages necessary to overcome adversity and are therefore incapable of effective empathy toward people of color. The circular logic of this stock rejoinder also demonstrates the callous nature of identity politics, despite its insistence to the contrary. Such a stance denies the possibility of win-win scenarios, of racially integrated cooperation among people of good character, and the importance of situational variance, as well as the value of individual human beings.

Moreover, such a zero-sum world view is, by definition, identical to that of psychopaths. It is undeniably pathological and authentically dangerous. Further to the point, such beliefs condescend toward members of the very groups for which identity politics and cancel culture agents claim to advocate. Such stereotyping, at bottom, is nothing more than thinly disguised bigotry, weaponized in service of scapegoating and exploitation. It should not be necessary to recall that this behavioral and ideological pattern has been central to phenomena such as Stalinism, Naziism, and the Inquisitions. And just as in those historical infamies, when the tribal agents of identity politics proclaim themselves champions of race- or gender-designated underdogs, one of their primary aims, beyond increasing their own power, is to obscure their true essence through (at best naïve) "virtue signaling."

It should be added that while most cancel culture initiatives are currently driven by the political left, these activities also ensue from the opposite end of the spectrum. Through such familiar situations as coached activism originating in university "cultural studies" programs, and bleeding into corporate society through "diversity and equity" administrations, cancel culture has become ubiquitously systemic. And yet this trend does include cases of peculiar and reactive demands from the political right. For instance, college administrators have been pressured to ensure exact parity ("equity?") in the ratio of conservatively inclined campus speakers to left-leaning ones. It should be obvious that neither politically motivated boycotting nor censorship has ever been exclusive to a single faction.

In any case, cancel culture underpins the malign misconception that everyone is either a permanently helpless victim or an unjustly fortunate beneficiary (parallel to the Marxist terms of "proletariat" or "bourgeoisie.") Tragically, it would follow such misguidedness that minority students, for instance, should not even try to succeed through hard work and self-discipline. Instead "victims" are instructed to "protest," to secure their "just reparations," while supporters outside protected status do so in efforts to compensate for their "inherited" and ineradicable "white guilt." Regarding cancel culture's aggressive protest actions, it is important to recognize that sustained, repeated or strident incivility, let alone physical violence, can deeply harm anyone, regardless of ethnicity or any other classification. For all the reasons addressed here, the malevolent ideolo-

gies of primary identity and victimhood status by politically determined group, which drives contemporary cancel culture behaviors, must be consistently and actively rejected.

Combat cancel culture, whose adherents are often resentful, cynical or despairing, by dedicated habits of treating others humanely, and encouraging those who do not believe in their own individual capabilities, in order to foster their success and self-respect. Take time every day to engage in something uplifting and health-promoting. Do your best as a supportive colleague and neighbor. Take pride in every courageous effort to become part of the solution.

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The Stupidity of Our Times

Sinclair A. MacRae

"The remarkable presence of pseudoscientific beliefs indicates that a considerable amount of inadequate belief formation is taking place – too much to blame solely on the members of our society with low intelligence. Purely on a quantitative basis, it must be the case that some people with fairly high IQs are thinking quite poorly. The 22 percent of our population who believe in Big Foot, the 25 percent who believe in astrology, the 16 percent who believe in the Loch Ness monster, the 46 percent who believe in faith healing, the 49 percent who believe in demonic possession, the 37 percent who believe in haunted houses, the 32 percent who believe in ghosts, the 26 percent who believe in clairvoyance, the 14 percent who have consulted a fortune teller, and the 10 percent who feel that they have spoken with the Devil are not individuals with intellectual disability. A large number of them, however, may be dysrationalic." – Keith Stanovich, *What Intelligence Tests Miss*

Although in one sense "stupid" means "slow to learn or understand" or "lacking intelligence", it is the second sense of the word, which means "tending to make poor decisions or careless mistakes" or "lacking judgment", that I am concerned with here. In this second sense someone who exhibits stupidity may do so because they lack intelligence or for other factors, or partly for other factors, entirely within their control. This is what Stanovich is referring to in the quotation above: "dyrationalia", he explains, means "the inability to think and behave rationally despite having adequate intelligence". One dimension of rationality, epistemic rationality, is characterized by various proclivities: to collect information, to seek out various points of view, to critically reflect before choosing what to believe, and to calibrate the strength of one's beliefs to the degree of evidence available for them. Underlying and guiding these dispositions is a fundamental value commitment – respect for the truth.

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Mark Mercer, SAFS president

One noteworthy aspect of the current rise of irrationalism is its influence on our politics. The essentially private stupidity of the body-detoxers-and-colon-cleansing crowd is being supplemented by a striking public boldness of stupidity as is evidenced by the ongoing anti-masker, anti-vaxxer, and COVID-denying protestors who have been clashing with counter-protestors and the police to exercise their civil rights to assert patent nonsense. Although these protestors have been identified as occupying the right side on the political spectrum, it is not their politics that concerns me. One can easily identify a similar sort of irrationalism by those at the other end of the political spectrum. Consider, for instance, the excesses of the "woke" supporters for what now passes as "critical theory" and "critical studies" where all human interaction is viewed as some variant of the oppressor-oppressed relationship and where science is viewed as – what else? – a tool of the oppressors.

No, to interpret current events through this factional lens is to miss the point and overlook the deeper problem, a problem former US President Barack Obama recently pointed to with his lamentation that the state of politics in his country would not improve as long as the two major factions believe "just completely different sets of facts". Current events teach us that the contesting of interests that ensures that a society's politics remain reasonably healthy rests upon a shared, underlying commitment to the truth. The truth is not like what personal responsibility is to the right or equality is to the left, for without a shared willingness to temper one's political activities by the norms of the sort of evidence-based reasoning that characterizes good science, constructive political disagreement descends into destructive partisanship.

Concern for the truth is not just an aspect of epistemic rationality; it is also a measure of what I call "axiologic rationality", the dimension of rationality that consists in pursuing and endorsing values that deliver authentic happiness. In claiming that the truth is a mark of axiologic rationality I am distinguishing between merely espousing a commitment to it and actually *living* this value. Almost everyone, including those across the political spectrum, *says* that they care about the truth – but the test for being epistemically and axiologically rational is whether one cultivates a proclivity to be guided by this value, that is, whether this alleged commitment is borne out by a person's conscious practice

and habitual actions. This requires that one seek out and welcome attempts to disconfirm one's beliefs as a matter of standard practice and that one endorse institutional mechanisms that do the same.

The philosopher Robert Fogelin observed that we are the only species that places faith in bizarre fictions of our own construction (while, I would add, insisting that these are not actually bizarre fictions at all). This is because whereas other species operate on the basis of intuition, or what cognitive psychologists call System 1 cognition, we also exercise System 2 reasoning. Current events remind us that not only are the forces of System 1 strong but that the exercising of reason itself is value-neutral. One can reason poorly or well, for good or ill. One can cultivate settled dispositions to have one's exercising of reason be guided by the pursuit of the truth, or not. And whereas the development of ideals of freedom and democracy were originally predicated on the promotion of the exercising of good reasoning in pursuit of individual happiness and our common well-being, these enlightenment beliefs about the inevitability of our glorious future, as philosopher Joseph Heath has argued, were never a given.

One of the settled insights of the heuristics and cognitive bias research is that since the exercise of intuition is opaque to us, and since it is the exercising of System 1 that generates the sad range of cognitive biases that plague our existence in our current environments, we are wise to view the good exercising of reason guided by a commitment to seek the truth as a social practice. This insight not only helps explain the value of esteeming our rights as citizens to freedom of expression but it also helps to explain the value of exercising principled dissent as academics and intellectuals. More generally it helps ground our rights and duties pertaining to academic freedom and, therefore, it is also a foundational and unifying value of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship. This is what those who try to disparage SAFS by claiming that it is a meeting place for right-wing extremists do not seem to understand. For the commitment to truth, as opposed to paying lip service to it, requires that whatever the politics of its members, all are unified by this foundational value commitment. Of course, this is hardly a brilliant insight. That it continues to be doubted, especially among academics, further evidences the stupidity of our times.

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2021 Annual General Meeting of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

Friday 28 May 2021: The Annual Chris and John Furedy Lecture on the Contemporary University
Tomáš Hudlický (Professor, Chemistry, Brock University)

Saturday 29 May 2021: SAFS AGM

William McNally (Professor, Finance, Wilfrid Laurier University) & **David M. Haskell** (Associate Professor, Digital Media & Journalism and Religion & Culture, Wilfrid Laurier University) will speak on the state of Ontario universities after a year under Chicago Principles legislation

Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann (Professor Emeritus, Political Science, Wilfrid Laurier University) & **Neil McLaughlin** (Professor, Sociology, McMaster University) will speak on "Ideacide" (with particular regard to the Bruce Gilley and Rebecca Tuvel cases)

1 to 2:30 pm: Keynote presentation
Tomáš Hudlický (Professor, Chemistry, Brock University) will discuss what happened after a journal pulled his critique of trends in chemistry research and teaching

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