



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

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DECOLONIZING, INDIGENIZATION, RECONCILIATION AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Sinclair A. MacRae

What should we make of the growing calls in higher education to “decolonize” and “indigenize” universities? To what extent are such initiatives, along with calls for reconciliation, compatible with the fundamental mission of the university to promote truth and knowledge? What threats, if any, do they pose to academic freedom and the adversarial and open practice of critical inquiry?

Progress on these topics has been impeded for both internal and external reasons. The discussions have been hindered from the inside by the ambiguity and vagueness of the featured terms “decolonize” and “indigenize”, terms that have nonetheless gained a secure place in university policy documents. Consequently, we must clearly specify what we mean by them and insist that those who disagree with us explain what they mean so that we can avoid talking at cross purposes and better recognize the political opportunism that has attended their strategic and equivocal uses. This opportunism, by moderates and extremists

alike, connects to an external reason that explains why this debate has been so circumscribed and unbalanced: the climate of fear generated by the culture of coercive conformity that continues to plague both higher education and wider society. Not only has this fear helped to drive the opportunism of those within administration advocating for more moderate views but it has also depressed the criticisms that should have checked the excesses of standpoint theory and identity politics that characterize more extreme positions.

One might assume that all indigenizing programs are decolonizing but if not, what distinguishes those that are from those that are not? Is reconciliation decolonizing? This question is apt considering that the impetus towards indigenization and decolonization generated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s 94 Calls to Action, some of which pertain to higher education. Consider, for example, #62 subsection (ii): “Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.” What should we make of the qualifier “Indigenous” here? Should we not distinguish between “Indigenous knowledge” and “claims to knowledge

made by and/or on behalf of Indigenous people”?

Consider some examples. Lee-Anne Broadhead and Sean Howard cite Dr. Jane Mt. Pleasant’s claim that corn plants are “conscious living things” that are “surely more than just plants”.¹ They note that Mt. Pleasant, associate professor emerita at Cornell University, was aware of the dissonance between her “Western training” and her “heretical and intuitive” belief. Or consider these remarks by F. David Peat in his book, *Blackfoot Physics: A Journey into the Native American Universe*, as cited by Broadhead and Howard:

I believe the ancient peoples of Central America entered into a deep relationship with the plants around them, including the grasses. The grass that gave birth to corn was not simply a plant but a manifestation of a spirit or energy that moved within the complex pattern of relationships of the natural world. When a people entered into direct relationship with the spirit of the corn, there was an exchange of obligations, a contract between the god of corn and the needs of the human race.²

How should such claims be assessed in a university setting? We can look to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for some useful evaluative standards, namely, truth and reconciliation. According to the Oxford English dictionary the two most common senses of the word “reconcile” are (1) to restore to peace or unity, and (2) to make compatible or consistent. Since the university’s main mission is to promote truth and knowledge, and since this requires that claims to knowledge be subject to the ethically regulated marketplace of ideas, including being subject to dissent and criticism, reconciliation demands that claims to knowledge made by and/or on behalf of Indigenous people be subject to such processes as well.³

Being reconciliatory, however, would arguably disqualify an initiative from being decolonizing. Drawing on the results of an anonymous online survey of “25 Indigenous academics and their allies”, Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz distinguish between Indigenous inclusion, reconciliation indigenization and decolonial indigenization.⁴ *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 14.3 (2018), pp. 218-219. This article was also the subject of (Indigenization efforts vary widely on Canadian campuses, study finds’ *University Affairs*, 16 April 2019). They argue, including by citing the ideas of several survey respondents and other academics, that Indigenous inclu-

sion and reconciliation indigenization fall short of decolonization, and since only decolonial indigenization meets the needs of Indigenous communities, it should be the goal instead.

They claim that a failing in the current model is its “Eurocentric” outlook. They approvingly cite Savo Heleta who insists that this Eurocentrism is “rooted in colonial, apartheid and Western worldviews and epistemological traditions” which therefore “continues to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege” (p. 223). Since these influences threaten Indigenous culture and knowledge, decolonizing is needed to effect “a resurgence in Indigenous culture, politics, knowledge, and on-the-land skills” (p. 224). Decolonial indigenization will “radically transform” higher education (p. 223). It “envisions the wholesale overhaul of the academy to fundamentally reorient knowledge production based on balancing power relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians” (p. 219). The model they endorse is a “dual university” structure (p. 223) created via a treaty that bestows “co-existing sovereignty” (p. 224). This sovereignty, which would make the Indigenous part of this new dual university “administratively autonomous” (p. 224) is needed to “protect the integrity of Indigenous knowledge” (p. 224) and avoid an “intellectual free-for-all” (p. 224) which is unnecessary because Indigenous communities “have their own processes for determining the validity and accuracy of knowledge” (p. 225).

This line of thinking derives from Postcolonial Theory, a branch of Social Justice Theory with roots in postmodernism.⁵ For example, the claim about “Eurocentrism” reinforcing “white and Western dominance and privilege” is a reference to standpoint theory – the idea that knowledge is derived from the “lived” experience of different identity groups – along with cultural constructivism – the belief that knowledge is a product of its cultural context. However, since proponents of Social Justice Theory are also radical skeptics about the possibility of obtaining objective, justified, true beliefs, or knowledge, these references to “knowledge” are either not literal or inconsistencies in their view. Thus when they argue that decolonizing the university means subverting the dominance of Western standpoints by promoting Indigenous “knowledges”, they cannot consistently maintain that Indigenous knowledge claims are any more objective and true than “Western” claims to knowledge are.

Oddly, from their relativist perspective this is not actually a troubling notion. Proponents of decolonial indigenization

¹Lee-Anne Broadhead and Sean Howard, “Confronting the Contradictions between Western Science and Indigenous Science: A Critical Perspective on Two-Eyed Seeing.” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 17.1 (2021), p. 111.

²*Ibid.*, p. 117.

³For some thoughtful analysis of this idea see Mark Mercer’s *Indigenizing Science*, SAFS Newsletter, Number 95 (April 2023), pp. 35-39.

⁴Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz, “Indigenization as Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Decolonization: Navigating the Different Visions for Indigenizing the Canadian Academy.”

⁵See Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity – and Why This Harms Everybody*, Durham, North Carolina, Pitchstone Publishing, 2020, Chapter 3.

believe that the radical transformation of the university will render claims to Indigenous “knowledges” legitimate because they will thereby enjoy equal status and power. In other words, the central merit of these “knowledges” is not that they are justified true beliefs; it is that they hold political sway. Hence the need for “sovereignty” and administrative autonomy. However, attending this autonomy is a rejection of academic freedom. From the decolonial indigenization perspective, allowing claims of Indigenous “knowledges” to be subject to critical scrutiny and criticism would be to “de-legitimize” them not because doing so would expose error, though of course it would do this where there is error to be found, but because it would continue to reinforce “white and Western dominance and privilege”. For this reason on the treaty model academics who are not Indigenous would be forbidden from questioning the purported claims to Indigenous knowledge. For example, a non-Indigenous academic or student could not question or contradict the claims to Indigenous knowledge from Mt. Pleasant and Peat that I noted above. Discussing such criticisms in a classroom or expressing them in a piece of research or scholarship, or writing about them in the SAFS newsletter, would violate the autonomy of the Indigenous part of the university by violating the treaty agreement. Think not? Then ask yourself this: why is there a need for decolonial indigenization considering that the present system provides the means for ensuring that actual knowledge claims made by Indigenous people will be validated just as much as knowledge claims made by non-Indigenous people?

Proponents of decolonizing indigenization, just like proponents of postcolonial Theory and earlier postmodernists, confuse practical questions of politics and the exercising of power with academic questions concerning the conditions that must be met to rationally justify a belief as a piece of knowledge. This anti-academic position aligns with their rejection of “Western worldviews and their epistemologies”, including the methods of science and other forms of rational, adversarial, and open inquiry, but it is grounded in various errors. For example, by claiming that “Western worldviews and epistemologies” “reinforce Western dominance and privilege” they exhibit a process/product confusion that is characteristic of postmodernism’s criticism of science. Postmodernists and their descendants have regularly criticized the objectivity and claims to knowledge of “Western” science on the assumption that science is essentially a set of claims that entrench various hegemonic power interests. According to this view, “Western” science is characterized by its content, just like any other ideology. But this is incorrect. Science is *essentially* a process of self-correction and a methodological antidote to our tendencies to display confirmation bias. As such it does not need to be replaced by superior ideas because it is not a set of ideas. It is a set of methods that endures past the rise and fall of various transitory theories, and since it promotes the

pursuit of truth and knowledge, its self-correcting practice is consistent with the main mission of the university.

Decolonization poses a clear threat to academic freedom, open inquiry, and the main mission of the university. It would indeed “radically transform” the university and cause a “wholesale overhaul of the academy” but this would be for the worse. Universities are primarily socially useful insofar as they promote truth and knowledge, and since academic freedom rights play an ineliminable part in this, undermining or limiting these rights will undermine that pursuit. Whereas this is not a concern for those who endorse Social Justice Theory, including Postcolonial Theory, it matters a great deal to the rest of us, especially considering the essential contribution that discovering and applying the truth plays in promoting our individual and collective well-being.

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THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CRISIS

Philip Backman

“Universities have moved away from inquiry and disputation and toward celebrating identities and venerating certain social goals and movements.” Mark Mercer

On 2 March 2023 I gave a talk, titled “Coal, the Climate, and a Crisis”, to a group of professors and graduate students in our department of biological sciences at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John. I thought a pragmatic talk might be educational, given that conversations (in my classes) and information (coming from my university, and from society in general) around the intersection of energy, climate and a crisis in prospecting for metals seemed to me to be growing steadily more bizarre. Yet recognizing that what I wanted to say ran counter, ostensibly, to a perceived consensus, I knew it was essential I approach these topics cautiously. Notwithstanding this cautiousness – and although I expected some push back – I was genuinely surprised by the magnitude of the paranoia that my presentation generated.

It had been the conversations and the comments arising in my space exploration class that laid a seed for my “Coal, climate, crisis’ talk. In that class, for many years now, I have been ending the term by asking students to answer a question: why should people leave the earth and venture into space? Of course, many reasons are given but a particular one has been common and, by my analysis, excessively bleak:

“The effort to move people into space is largely seeking to flee the effects of climate change..”

“..climate change is likely to put the planet in a tailspin that will end with the inability of earth to support life..”

“ In the not too distant future, humanity could be in extreme danger of extinction either due to issues such as climate change...”

I feigned a small amount of ignorance and in my talk briefly explored why I thought a student might hold such an extreme view about the fate of the Earth. No surprise here; the crisis is coming largely, they almost certainly believe, because the world’s industrial activity is putting too much deadly carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This story of doom is coming at students from many directions. From American President Joseph Biden (“Climate change, climate warming, global warming is an existential threat to humanity”), Greta Thunberg (“People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing”), Climate Scientist Michael Mann (“The warming of the planet caused by our profligate burning of fossil fuels poses perhaps the greatest challenge that human civilization has yet faced”), and from my own university (“Gain the Skills needed to succeed in a world define by climate change”, “This is especially important since climate change is affecting all coastal systems “).

Using a tentative and measured approach, I endeavored to show that such conclusions could, as a minimum, be challenged by evidence, that the abandoning of the earth was most likely – almost certainly – unnecessary, and that negative impacts of fossil fuel use on society must be weighed against benefits.

My talk began with the following.

1. Fossil fuels have contributed significantly to making our naturally unlivable planet unnaturally safe for billions of people.
2. For still billions of other people, energy poverty has been a lifelong barrier to prosperity.
3. Prominent alternative sources of energy – solar and wind – are wholly unsuitable replacements to fossil fuels for powering a modern civilization.
4. CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels have contributed to, and will continue to contribute, a slow rise in average global atmospheric temperature. Climatic impacts of this temperature rise will not metastasize into a crisis.

In support of these claims, I offered what I thought to be several anodyne observations. Energy is important to society; still today 80% of our energy comes from fossil fuels; different forms of energy have different energy densities, and this is important; compared to earlier years, carbon dioxide emissions continue to be significant. And the science of climate change is replete with uncertainty about

the degree that atmospheric carbon dioxide is impacting climate and weather.

In response to my talk, our department chair received a letter drafted and signed by 21 graduate students (about 1/3 of those in the department) - not all who attended my presentation. The letter was eventually disseminated to all faculty and graduate students. In their words, here is a portion of what they had to say.

“This letter was written in response to the talk entitled ‘Coal, the Climate, and a Crisis’ given in BIOL6000 on March 2, 2023. We, the individuals who have signed this letter, feel that this talk was inappropriate for a scientific seminar series and that the content of this talk undermines critical action needed to combat climate change,....”

“Up until this point, BIOL6000 has been advertised as a scientific seminar series intended to give students the opportunity to listen to presentations and engage in discussions that involve science-based reasoning. Accordingly, the talk given on March 2nd conflicted with these objectives, as it ignored the vast majority of scientific research and expertise in the field while highlighting previously debunked conjecture.”

“....this talk included multiple inaccurate claims regarding climate change, and given that climate change is one of the most significant crises facing our generation, we believe it is essential to equip the Department (including students, faculty, and staff) with the knowledge and skills to combat climate misinformation. Since the body of literature on climate change is so expansive and the mechanisms are quite complex,....”

“We believe that providing a platform for climate misinformation, especially in an academic setting, is harmful in multiple ways.”

That these students challenged any of my comments on the climate change science is fine and welcomed; this is what should be happening at a university. I do object, however, to their tacit claim that anything less than perfect understanding renders my talk ‘inappropriate for a scientific seminar’ (if that is where the bar is set, no science talk would ever be given because all claims to knowledge are provisional!), that they confidently judge my ‘information’ as misinformation as measured – I am assuming – against their registry of the correct ‘information’, and that I have undermined the ambiguous ‘critical action needed to combat climate change.’

A further interesting observation is the heavy focus the student letter gave to climate change. I mostly spoke about energy, the different types, and how it is useful, commenting only briefly on climate change and in doing so willingly conceded that change is happening with our climatic system.

The students' letter confirms to me that any level of support for fossil fuels is anathema to these individuals, and that eschewing energy of that type is less about objective reasoning and more about supporting a popular social movement.

As previously mentioned, I have taught students who, purportedly, think the earth will soon be unlivable. But before we abandon the earth – a difficult and serious action – or conclude we are in a crisis, it seems reasonable that the impacts of climate change should be rigorously assessed, in part, by giving many people an opportunity to speak on the topic. Only then will we have best judged a path forward.

I have not been asked to give a talk this year in BIOL6000.

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RESCUING THE UNIVERSITY

Mark Mercer

Academic freedom protections for both extra-mural utterance and criticizing one's university have weakened; professors and students have to watch what they say in and out of class for fear of formal or informal censure; department decisions are being countermanded by deans and vice-presidents academic; deans are taking for themselves what used to be department prerogatives; faculty unions only begrudgingly defend professors who oppose anti-academic equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives; race, ethnicity, sex and other non-academic factors bear heavily in hiring and other academic decisions; scholars who apply for positions as professors or academic administrators must swear fealty to the ideology and practice of EDI; research protocols and results must align with the wishes of certain groups; academic senates are legislating what professors may teach and how they may teach it; standards of academic accomplishment are falling; courses and curricula have become less challenging intellectually; identities and feelings are officially protected and celebrated; universities and faculty associations are keen to tell students and professors to avoid certain words; the professionalization of the professoriate continues unabated; the ranks of academic and non-academic administrators are swelling; Human Resources wants in on everything; civility has declined; relations among members of the university community are less than collegial.... The list of what ails contemporary universities is long.

The list is long because contemporary universities are turned toward social-justice ends and because university administrators and others are happy to use social-justice means to further those ends. The greater the commitment administrators, unions and Human Resources have to current ideas of social justice, the less academic values matter

in their institutions and the greater the oversight and control exercised over students and professors.

How might we seek to turn our institutions toward their academic mission? I would say by animating in students, professors and administrators a commitment to academic values and a love of academic excellence. How might we do *that*? Let's first try to develop a conception of the academic mission.

I propose that we conceive a university to be a place at which people think hard about things. Moreover, students and professors at an academic university think hard about things for the sake of thinking hard about them. They love to engage in study for its own sake.

On this conception of a university, students and professors place thinking hard above all other purposes they might have. They don't guide themselves in their thinking about things by a concern to promote any other end, whether social, political, religious or vocational. This, of course, contrasts with a university conceived as an engine of economics or as a force for social justice. At such universities, study is in service to something outside it, and the institution will prefer relevant non-academic values to academic ones should conflict arise between the two. Academic freedom, for instance, may be limited at such a university for the sake of inclusion.

The mission of an institution that gathers students and professors committed to study is to provide people with the resources useful to thinking hard about things and to maintain an atmosphere conducive to hard thought. Thinking hard about things involves thinking about them publicly, so that one's ideas can be both criticized and used by others. In thinking hard about something, we try to understand that thing. We try, that is, to come to know it, to know the truth about it. But the production of knowledge is not the mission of the university. Attempting to know is integral to the activity of thinking hard, but the point is found not only in the result but also in the process. Playing hockey involves trying to score goals and to win the game; nonetheless, win or lose, the object is to play the game and to play it well.

Now, if people committed to thinking hard about things have control of a university, they will institute no policies or programs that interfere with their commitment. They will value academic freedom, wide freedom of expression on campus, rigour in argument and research, and high academic standards, and so they will protect and promote these things in the structures and policies they create. They will hire as professors scholars doing academically sound and interesting work. They will appoint as officers in their institutions scholars committed to the academic mission and competent to look after it. They will not hire or appoint by race, ethnicity, sex or any other characteristic irrelevant to the academic mission, for they do not wish

to risk compromising that mission.

The problem we face in attempting to reform our universities is that very few people, both outside and within contemporary universities, have a strong love of thinking hard about things, or any love of it at all. What our administrators and many of our colleagues seek are goals outside the academic engagement. For them, thinking is merely a tool to use. To change the culture of our universities, to make them academic universities, we need to instil in people the love of study, the love of engaging with the world academically.

A serious difficulty here is that one cannot, except accidentally, bring another to love something through argument. As soon as one describes the love of study as good or important, one relates it to something outside itself. Good for what? Important to what? The argument in favour of study will then be an argument that study is effective in promoting something other than study. Study is good for its economic effects, or for figuring out what to do with one's life, or for becoming educated, or for solving social or technical problems.

But in light of that point, it might appear that either one loves study for its own sake or one doesn't, and that's it; or that one loves study to the degree one does and no more, so that should what is good for study conflict with what one loves more (social justice, for instance), what is good for study must lose. If this is true, if some people love study for its own sake simply as a matter of temperament and other people don't, then there's not really much that anyone can do to make universities hospitable to the academic mission.

My suggestion is that we who love study for its own sake simply continue to engage in study and, in doing so, model the engagement for our students and our colleagues. While it is true that one either loves something (to some degree) or doesn't, it is also true that loves are acquired. That someone does not currently love study for its own sake does not mean that he cannot love it. We are unable to persuade him to love it, for, as we've seen, at best all we can argue is that engaging in study is useful to attaining something else he wants. But by inviting him to engage in study along with us, to follow our lead, he might well experience study as we do and come to appreciate the engagement in the way that we do. Providing opportunities to engage in an activity and showing by example how to engage in it is what we do when we hope to encourage in people a love of music or sport or gardening or tinkering with electronic devices.

Study consists in activities, various activities all of which involve thinking hard. We participate in discussions, write papers, question students, prepare examinations, conduct experiments, read papers others have written, grade students' papers and contemplate theories and interpreta-

tions, among much else. We can engage in these activities well or poorly. We engage in them well when we apply our skills deftly and thereby manage to meet the standards of excellence inherent in the activity. Participating in an academic discussion, a discussion aiming to resolve an intellectual problem, in a way that helps to make the discussion a good one requires listening carefully to others, offering insights on the matter at hand, suggesting criticisms and explaining one's ideas concisely but in a way that others understand them. Does one anticipate objections to one's position and answer them or does one wait until someone raises the objection? It's a matter of judgement, and what one decides might serves the discussion well or poorly. In meeting the standards of excellence internal to the activity of participating in an academic discussion, one brings into being such goods as narrative tension and release, a shock of insight, a feeling of accomplishment, a deeper or more comprehensive understanding (on one's own part or on the part of others) and, perhaps, a resolution of the problem at hand.

Although an academic discussion will almost inevitably contain arguments, it itself is not an argument but a conversation. And although we seek through the conversation to establish some understanding or interpretation, we do not judge the excellence of the conversation by its results (it might have none; we might draw no conclusion) or by any effects it produces.

What makes academic engagement difficult and unpleasant or upsetting for many is its disputatiousness. In the absence of criticism, vigorous criticism, no activity is an academic activity. An academic university must be marked by a culture of disputation. Yet criticism and disputation trouble and disturb people. When we criticize and reject a person's ideas and beliefs, we attack something important to that person, a part of his identity. That can feel like attacking the person himself. We don't enjoy being criticized or seeing things that matter to us disparaged. And because we feel it is unkind, we don't enjoy criticizing others and might refrain from doing so.

Indeed, it is disputation and criticism that enemies of academic universities seek above all to control and limit, precisely because disputation and criticism are unpleasant and occasionally emotionally wounding. Policies that enjoin members of an academic community to respect each other aim to protect students, professors and both academic and non-academic administrators from criticism and the harm it can cause. Our academic administrators seek through safe-and-respectful-campus policies to create a culture of celebration, the celebration of identities and feelings, a culture to replace the academic culture of disputation.

The tradition of criticism and disputation that runs, however feebly sometimes, through the history of universities is what makes universities strange and puzzling institutions. That humans, clannish creatures who love affirmation and

reassurance, would create institutions marked by a culture of disputation almost beggars belief. Criticism and disputation, like torture and murder, are for humans both natural and repellant. That we tend to dislike criticism and disputation explains why academic universities are both rare and difficult to create or sustain.

A first task, then, in seeking to instil in newcomers (and colleagues and administrators, as well, sadly), is, first, a tolerance of disputation and criticism and, then, a love of it as central to the academic engagement. In socializing our students into the academic endeavour, we have to show by example a willingness to give criticism and to take it. Now, one might suppose that we should encourage our students not to take criticism personally. But that might not be realistic. It is hard not to take to heart attacks on one's cherished beliefs. One might also suppose that the task is to come to be able to give and receive criticism civilly or respectfully. But that would be to offer civility or respect as values from outside the academic engagement, values that constrain it. While participants in an academic dispute might appear civil, it is not civility at which they aim; they aim, rather, to attain a sound understanding of the matter at hand.

The ability and willingness to hold aspects of one's identity at arm's length so that one, and others, can examine them, and examine them critically, is centrally part of what it is to be an academic. There is no way to ease our students into this ability. Students will acquire the attitudes and preferences of academics piecemeal and not all at once, much as we as children came to acquire language. Accepting to give and receive criticism will come late in a student's socialization into the academic way of life, but it marks a turning point, a completion of the first part of the project. Once a student acquires the identity of an academic, the student will tolerate criticism, even should he or she not like it, as necessary to living as an academic. Receiving criticism might remain as painful as taking a bodycheck in hockey, but academics accept it as part of the academic engagement, an engagement they love.

To summarize: 1) When professors and administrators at a university take their institution to serve a goal such as social justice, prosperity or nation building, academic freedom and other academic values suffer. 2) To be an academic university, the professors must value thinking hard for its own sake, and university administrators must be concerned to create an institution that supports hard thought and puts nothing in its way. 3) The primary task for those of us who wish to turn our institutions into academic universities is to bring our students and colleagues to love study, the activities marked by hard thought, for its own sake. 4) Central to study is criticism and disputation. 5) Few people are happy by temperament to be criticized or to engage in contentiousness or disputation. 6) Bringing our colleagues and students to love study re-

quires acclimatizing them to the culture of disputation. 7) It is only through inviting our students to engage in academic endeavours along with us that they can come to love study. 8) Even those temperamentally disinclined to engage in critical discussion will come to appreciate a culture of disputation if they develop a love of study.

My claim is not that by living as academics and inviting others to experience academic engagement along with us in all its disputatious splendor, we professors will rescue the contemporary university. My claim is only that we cannot rescue it any other way.

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THE ASCENDANT INFLUENCE OF CRITICAL THEORY AT THE CFLA-FCAB NATIONAL FORUM

Todd Kyle

On May 17, 2023, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations-Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques held its National Forum as part of the all-virtual Manitoba Libraries Conference. This was only the second such event after the first Forum in Regina in 2018, as plans for a biannual Forum were derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Billed as "a half day of discovery and discourse to inform national policies and practices regarding the current moral panic facing libraries", this year's event focussed on intellectual freedom challenges to library content and programs, in particular materials and programs related to LGBTQ+ themes. (Full disclosure: I was Ontario representative on the CFLA board 2018-2022 and was Chair in 2021-2022).

The keynote speaker was Dr. Lucy Santos Green, Director of the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Iowa. In her engaging talk, she presented her view of the current information ecosystem as one where the barriers to participation, expression, and engagement have never been so low; where user-friendly online tools, ephemeral ownership, and AI have opened the field of information to many contributors. She suggested that in this context, librarians are now playing the role of "information mentor", helping users find the tools they need to access and express their stories in this new "participatory culture".

This led to the crux of her argument, which is that in this new reality, certain vaguely-defined interests are threatened with a loss of power and this has led to the "moral panic" in the program description. Her analysis of the concept of moral panic was systematic and historical. She talked about how all moral panics start with a minor con-

cern about a social trend, but blow it up into hostility towards a particular marginalized group, leading to disproportionate attempts to regain control (such as book bans). So far, so good, but the conclusions she then drew veered sharply into critical social justice theory and away from intellectual freedom values.

In any moral panic, she argued, there is always a “folk devil” seen as worthy of blame for the situation, and in this case, librarians themselves are in that role, because they have “woken up” to the realization that they are not and cannot be neutral, that they need to disrupt the oppressive structure of the “well-behaved white ladies” that dominate the profession. Simply because they have welcomed certain groups (such as the LGBTQ+ community) into the new participatory culture, they are now demonized as “groomers” and “pedophiles” by what she called “patriarchal” elements, from conservative parents to populist politicians. In short, she declared, no one wants to actually call for LGBTQ+ people to be erased; instead they simply transpose their hatred to the proximate cause, the librarians.

To her credit, Dr. Santos Green did admit that moral panics are not the purview of only one political view, and provided many historical examples from various parts of the spectrum, such as “parental advisory” music labelling spearheaded by Tipper Gore, the wife of US Democratic Vice-President Al Gore. She also insightfully identified the fallacy of “age-appropriateness” as used as a weapon by the book-banners—that it often refers to adults’ comfort with a topic rather than a child’s readiness to engage with it.

But when the ensuing discussion directly addressed intellectual freedom in libraries, her argument deepened its slide into anti-humanist and anti-Enlightenment rhetoric. In response to a question (from a friendly host) about the balance between intellectual freedom and the rights of library employees to be free of oppression, Santos Green opined that intellectual freedom and neutrality should not be conflated, that if an employee’s humanity is being dismissed by a library resource, they cannot stand by and be neutral. In other words, their right to be “safe” trumps the right to information access and expression.

In reference to controversial room rentals, she went on to express concern for the position of certain library staff forced to work at an event at which their existence is being denied, seeming to suggest that the renters (which she called “capitalists”) be charged for the staff time in order to dissuade them from renting and even suggesting that rooms be booked in blocks to prevent certain rentals (“they can’t rent a room that’s not available, can they?”). More broadly, she was very clear that library leaders—*white* library leaders, in particular—need to be held accountable for their racial and other microaggressions and be made aware of their position of power and privilege. Santos Green excused her generalizations by saying that the pro-

fession is manifestly largely white and female; at one point she seemed to suggest that any men in the mix were there because they were simply handed jobs due to their gender.

The Forum was, according to the description, “designed to blend an informative session with roundtable conversations that will result in the development of a CFLA-FCAB Task Force and key actions for the CFLA-FCAB member organizations”. However, in the last hour, the hosts announced that instead of initiating breakout rooms for smaller conversations, they would engage in further discussion with the speaker with input from participants in the Zoom chat. Without the opportunity for open discussion or alternative viewpoints, the program was too one-way to be characterized as a true policy forum. Whether or not it will lead to follow-up action for CFLA, it would seem that the Forum was designed to privilege a burgeoning view of intellectual freedom as being of value only for accepted “progressive” viewpoints, a view that has become more influential as the make-up of CFLA’s board evolves.

But if the Forum program did not make that explicit, the intentions behind it may have been betrayed by the conference closing keynote two days later. Billed as a conversation exploring “different perspectives on the concept of Intellectual Freedom within the librarianship discipline” between library scholar (and Forum planner) Sam Popowich and Manitoba Library Association president Melanie Sucha, the conversation was uncritical, almost fawning, and heavily weighted towards only Popowich’s perspective, a self-described Marxist theory under which intellectual freedom is replaced by “intellectual responsibility”, where equity and inclusion are dominant. Responding to a question about how to deal with conservative-minded library employees, Popowich, admitting that he was coming across as authoritarian, asserted that libraries are duty bound to keep to their commitments as “progressive institutions”. He even criticized Dr. Santos Green for not specifically naming the interests she claims are losing power—calling that a “neoliberal” move. In short, the conversation reinforced the notion, now ascendant in the profession, that intellectual freedom is valued only for some political viewpoints and not others.

Let me be clear: the “moral panic” described by Dr. Santos Green is a significant concern and threat to libraries. While certainly controversial, books like Maya Kobabe’s *Genderqueer: a memoir* do not constitute Criminal Code obscenity or child pornography and librarians should not be subject to harassment or violence for such choices. But our defense of these choices needs to be grounded not in progressive activism but in viewpoint agnosticism. We select a wide variety of materials that respond to community needs, user demand, and in this case, current social trends. And in return, we ask that no individual or group, progressive or conservative, be able to limit what others can access. This is the only way to avoid being caught in our own

hypocrisy trap if the next book-banning push is against conservative-minded materials. Remember, it's a fight for our fundamental freedom to read, not a fight against the patriarchy, or capitalism, or "well-behaved white ladies". Let's keep the cultural Marxism and the woke racism out of it.

This article was originally published in the Heterodoxy in the Stacks Substack and is reprinted here with permission of the author.

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LIBRARY NEUTRALITY AND PLURALISM: A MANIFESTO

Michael Dudley

Over the past several years I have become increasingly concerned (along with my colleagues now associated with Heterodox Libraries) that contemporary librarianship is experiencing something of a crisis owing to the fact that an appreciable number of its practitioners are no longer willing to defend its most basic principle, institutional neutrality. Many progressive librarians and librarianship scholars now see neutrality as not just abstract but insensible (if not outright hostile) to the cause of social justice. This tension has a long history in librarianship—and is the subject of a substantial body of literature (e.g. Lewis 2008)—going back at least 50 years to the “Berninghausen debate,” named after University of Minnesota librarian David Berninghausen, who argued that activism on the part of librarians risks undermining their professional obligation to preserve and protect the intellectual freedom of users (see Wenzler 2019).

In this article, I hope to build on this argument for neutrality in a systematic and a holistic way. As a “heterodox librarian,” I believe that this principle is fundamental for our profession because it is not merely a technical professional guideline, but is in fact deeply-grounded in liberal political philosophy (e.g., Immanuel Kant [people must be treated as ends, and not merely as means]; John Stuart Mill [speech with which you disagree or that is actually incorrect strengthens your own ability to argue your case]; Alexander Meiklejohn [we value freedom of speech more for the listener and their ability to make informed decisions as a citizen, than we do for the speaker]; and Karl Popper [we cannot prove our theories, only disprove/falsify them]). In particular, I believe we should be guided by the political liberalism of John Rawls, who argued that pluralistic societies are comprised of too many competing conceptions of the good (held by diverse cultures and stakeholders) for any single such conception to be enforced on the whole; therefore, a politically liberal society would be premised on the means by which a minimum shared sense

of justice on which all can agree should obtain, for only through such a consensus can individuals and the communities of which they are a part enjoy the freedom to seek out these greater conceptions of the good as they so choose. All of these political philosophies as they apply to libraries are especially salient in the North American context, where libraries provide services to communities comprising residents of many races, ethnicities, cultures and faiths, and which hold to a wide range of value systems.

To address these tensions, over the past year and a half I have been assembling ideas and musing about writing a “manifesto” of sorts, in which I’m seeking to reclaim and reframe the traditional Enlightenment values of librarianship, as well as the intellectual freedom principles enshrined in the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights as well as the Canadian Federation of Library Associations’ Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries.

I’d like to reframe library neutrality by stressing pluralism as a *normative political value*, and that neutrality is only the *means* by which this value is affirmed and defended. By *pluralism* I am referring to a humanist view of *difference within the context of universalism*, or a common political culture that assumes a shared humanity among its many diverse citizens. This must be distinguished from ethnic, racial and cultural *particularism* which, in a 1990 article, Diane Ravitch did by stating:

The pluralists seek a richer common culture; the particularists insist that no common culture is possible. The pluralist approach to multiculturalism promotes a broader interpretation of the common American culture and seeks due recognition for the ways that the nation's many racial, ethnic, and cultural groups have transformed the national culture. The pluralists say, in effect, “American culture belongs to us, all of us; the U.S. is us, and we remake it in every generation.” But particularists have no interest in extending or revising American culture; indeed, they deny that a common culture exists. Particularists reject any accommodation among groups, any interactions that blur the distinct lines between them. The brand of history that they espouse is one in which everyone is either a descendant of victims or oppressors(340-341).

With 30 years of hindsight, we recognize this particularist impulse is now manifested in what are commonly referred to as Wokeness, Critical Social Justice, identity politics, intersectionality or Critical Race Theory. The open illiberalism of this movement is best summarized by its own adherents in terms of “questioning the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law” (Delgado & Stefancic, 3). Accordingly, the activism associated with this illiberalism is the desire to “disrupt and dismantle” existing structures; with what exactly these structures are to be replaced is much less

clearly articulated or understood.

By contrast, I wish to further Ravitch's argument that pluralism provides a more unifying, classically liberal and democratic path. Yet, it's important to understand that pluralism isn't merely a value or a static condition but rather a political "commons" —*difference in the context of universalism*—one that must be consciously *stewarded* by its participants. As mathematician Patricio Herbst argues, stewarding pluralism means "resisting any individual's entitlement to use scholarly spaces for unconstrained promotion of ideologies" —a principle I would extend to the practitioner context as well.

Before proceeding, please note that this "manifesto" is my own and does not—and is not intended to—represent the views of my colleagues at Heterodox Libraries (although I do sincerely thank many of them for their input and suggestions!). I'm going to be referencing and building upon on a recent article I wrote with John Wright, "The Role of Multidimensional Library Neutrality in Advancing Social Justice: Adapting Theoretical Foundations from Political Science and Urban Planning," in the *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy*, as well as a previous HxA Libraries blog post of mine, "The Certainty Trap and Taking Sides in Librarianship," so the reader is encouraged to seek those out as well.

Proposed Principles:

An ethos of Pluralist Librarianship would uphold that:

1. the role of the library—in collecting, organizing, preserving, mediating and facilitating access to information and knowledge—is both *conservationist* and *generative*, in the sense of preserving and describing the properties of informational artefacts for the purpose of making them discoverable and available for the production of further, new knowledge on the part of library users [ontology; materialism; *telos*];
2. these library functions are intended to support, to the extent possible, the collection, description and organization of materials representing the fullest and most diverse selection of available knowledge, experience, ideas, theories and perspectives concerning the widest range of topics and making them discoverable and usable [epistemology; viewpoint diversity];
3. however, the fact that libraries are built around "collections" and not the totality of all human intellectual production means that they inherently involve processes of selection and deselection, which necessitate judgment and decisions contingent upon a wide range of factors including institutional and community needs and values;
4. these library functions are therefore not just epistemological but also political (in a strictly non-partisan sense) to the extent that they are situated in communities and support the ability of users to engage in informed, reasoned dialogue, knowledge generation and debate as part of our collective human experience from generation to generation [democratic and temporal justifications];
5. in carrying out these functions, librarians should adopt a stance of principled epistemic humility and fallibility, acknowledging that all knowledge is incomplete and provisional, which means we must be humble in our certainties and willing to learn from others, including those with whom we disagree [epistemological fallibilism];
6. a starting place for such humility is the recognition that publicly-funded libraries are not isolated entities but are agents of larger polities (municipalities, states/provinces, nations) and as such the individual freedoms these libraries promote and facilitate are delimited by the laws of these levels of government;
7. these polities represent and provide for the needs, rights and freedoms of a pluralistic society, comprising peoples from nations, races, cultures, ethnicities and faiths representing a global humanity and a multiplicity of value systems;
8. furthermore, these larger polities are facing a host of "wicked problems" concerning social, economic, environmental and political conditions and issues that affect this multiplicity of stakeholders in myriad ways, the addressing of which is charged to policymakers, planners, scientists and non-governmental organizations, but lies far outside the degreed expertise of librarians;
9. because of these political realities, it is illegitimate for publicly-funded libraries to seek to create their own ideological foundations outside of and exceeding their approved mandates;
10. therefore, given these boundaries and issue-contexts, a philosophical orientation based on *realism* (what can be demonstrably shown to exist in the mind-independent world) and *pragmatism* (the extent to which knowledge claims prove fruitful and resilient in the face of challenges, including confrontation with mind-independent reality) is a more ethically sound and appropriate basis for institutional principles than one premised on idealism and utopianism. While both of these latter motivations may be freely and admirably engaged in by individuals (especially philosophers), once embedded within institutions they have the potential both to imperil pluralistic values by denying multiple conceptions of the good, as well as to contradict the governance of these larger polities [philosophy];
11. as such, librarians, their institutions and their professional bodies should neither adopt, propose, promote nor seek to impose any ideological formulation of their own (or that of a constituency with whom the librarian personally

identifies or empathizes) for an ideal society, beyond facilitating the foundations for individual autonomy, liberty and equal opportunity within the boundaries established above, and including reasoned dialogue concerning diverse viewpoints among a plurality of stakeholder groups [Rawlsian political liberalism];

12. while leading systems of library classification and cataloging are themselves premised on ideological assumptions and cultural values from previous centuries and thus have, in some cases, misrepresented certain peoples and perspectives, they should be seen as being open to ongoing incremental reform, amendment and evolution alongside and as a part of a pluralistic society, rather than being “disrupted and dismantled” [incrementalism];

13. because pluralism is premised on the dialectical relationship between difference and universalism and necessitates a common political culture, it also depends upon the conventions of a common language (or languages); therefore pluralist librarians will resist—in both public communications and in library Metadata—radical and postmodern attempts to unmoor language from shared meaning-making.

14. For these foregoing reasons, publicly-funded librarians acknowledge that all processes associated with the creation and operation of libraries are, consequently, inherently value-laden;

15. and because of this, it is therefore imperative that libraries and library workers strive to adhere to principled, **multi-dimensional neutrality**, in terms of *values* (social, political, religious); *stakeholders* (welcoming equally all users in the community); *processes* (venues and transparent, consistently-applied procedures for engaging with the public); and *goals* (the purposes to which library materials are to be employed by users), so as not to impose on users a single conception of the good. Such neutrality is not a *standard* but rather aspirational and evolving;

16. this ethic applies equally to the work of the individual librarian through the provision of collection, instruction and reference assistance such that the librarian does not seek to censor or prevent the discussion of or inquiry on the part of the user into ideas to which they personally object;

17. this ethic is also fundamentally important to the task of relationship-building with communities in order to avoid, to the extent possible, antagonisms and mistrust;

18. as civic institutions, libraries may therefore best address social problems (e.g., inequality, injustices, environmental issues) through facilitating access data, information, knowledge and opinion so as to enable open inquiry, reasoned dialogue and debate regarding these issues, rather than by adopting or advocating policy positions on them—that such access is, in fact, the positive contribution to ad-

ressing these issues they are uniquely qualified to provide [goal neutrality];

19. library users should be recognized and respected as autonomous individuals embedded in their respective communities – individuals who have the shared right and freedom to use the information obtained in libraries in any way they see fit [goal neutrality; intellectual freedom; Kantian ethics];

20. while all users have a right to access the library’s collections and spaces, none have the right in principle to be free from encounters with ideas, information or groups with which they might disagree and to which they may object, thus maintaining an environment of intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity for all [value neutrality];

21. at the same time, in the case of minors, this environment is constrained by reasonable considerations and protections for age-appropriateness—most commonly through spatial organization according to age range and reading level and within the context of parental supervision—and this obligation is particularly salient in school libraries, which are understood to operate *in loco parentis* and therefore have a duty of care towards their users;

22. as well, because the library is a publicly-funded institution and therefore accountable to its users, it is therefore obligated to provide venues and processes whereby users may express concerns about the appropriateness or suitability of library materials and their disposition. Such concerns and their proponents must be dealt with in good faith through transparent processes [accountability; process neutrality];

23. library users have the right to be free from the influence of the personal opinions of librarians speaking outside of their professional competencies: just as employees of all public institutions are prohibited from using their respective institutions as a platform to promote political or religious causes, so too should the advocacy role of the librarian *in their institutional capacity* be limited to addressing those social issues that directly relate to or have an impact on library services (e.g., homelessness, the need for more social services, etc.). This point is in no way intended to infringe on the academic librarian’s extramural academic freedom, or the librarian’s right as an individual citizen to comment on or influence public policy;

24. while part of that institutional capacity could involve the promotion of discussion and debate regarding polarizing social issues through programming, room rentals, internet access, partnerships, collection development and book displays, this would exclude institutional public advocacy for particular policy positions or socio-political outcomes regarding those issues, or presumptions that the library has any substantive role in or responsibility for their resolution;

25. recognizing the largely insular, practical theoretical foundations of librarianship, pluralist librarians seek to enhance and inform our discipline by way of applicable theories and perspectives from a diverse range of disciplines including communication studies, philosophy, political science, history, urban planning, sociology, etc. [interdisciplinarity];

26. the assertion on the part of the library profession to be representing a pluralist public interest can only be justified and legitimate to the extent that it permits and facilitates heterogeneity and the expression of competing claims on the part of multiple publics. Claims of anticipated harm on the part of one constituency arising from future speech acts or the presence and circulation of certain library materials must be weighed against the possibility that the interests or rights of another constituency may be materially harmed or abridged if the ideas in question are *not* expressed or made available [democratic justification; viewpoint diversity; Millian principles of free speech];

27. while incitements to violence against identifiable groups are (as per current legal frameworks) not acceptable in library settings, librarians cannot assume for themselves the ability to *pre-emptively* define, label or proscribe scheduled public speech in their libraries as “hate speech,” but must instead defer this matter to the proper governmental legal authorities and competencies as a matter of governance [viewpoint diversity; freedom of speech; professional scope];

28. where there are disagreements with colleagues, members of the community, authors and activists, we strive to understand these disagreements to be with ideas, ideologies, values or principles, and not as being in opposition to—or expressed as hostility towards—individuals or groups; that is, we affirm the freedom to not accept others’ ideas or worldviews while still respecting persons, academic and intellectual rights, and the need for civil discourse [viewpoint diversity; collegiality/ethics];

29. owing to this ethic, pluralist librarians abhor *ad hominem* attacks such as condemning individuals or groups as “hateful,” “bigoted,” “fascist,” “---phobic” or employing other such dehumanizing characterizations; and finally

30. to better ensure viewpoint diversity in higher education, the academic freedom of librarians in such institutions is not to be constrained by consideration for any orthodox views on the part of teaching faculty with whom they liaise in a collections or instructional capacity; and should include the extramural freedom as independent academics to comment on matters of public interest [academic freedom; professional autonomy].

Again, these are just proposals presented for purposes of discussion and debate. And I recognize the limitations of the format: many if not most of these points could serve as thesis statements for entire articles (and some are ad-

dressed in more detail in the article I co-wrote with John Wright). However, I hope I have successfully articulated how, by being thus tied to pluralism, neutrality should no longer be characterized as a disconnected “abstract” principle, but instead understood as being not only multi-dimensional in nature (values, stakeholders, processes and goals) but in service of the broader and enduring social, cultural and political value of pluralism that has for centuries defined the American experiment, and which is shared by other Western democracies.

I believe that these principles may (in combination) offer useful guidance for a library profession working towards a pluralistic public interest (as opposed to a unitary “public good”) as *part* of a society dealing with complex social and political issues and problems involving diverse community stakeholders. Indeed, I would argue that the promotion and defense of pluralism *necessitate* multidimensional institutional and professional neutrality. By working within the context of pluralist public interest, librarians can leave it to individuals and the communities of which they are a part to pursue (and share) their conceptions of the good as they see fit.

Inasmuch as I have here defended institutional multi-dimensional neutrality, this analysis may even point to the desirability of actually replacing the term neutrality *with* pluralism—after all, neutrality is only an *instrumental and procedural* value—the means by which this central, *substantive and political* value is embraced, supported and defended.

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HOW “WOKE-ISM” THREATENS ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Frances Widdowson

In November 2022, Paul Viminitz, a professor in the philosophy department at the University of Lethbridge, invited me to give a talk at his university on the threat “woke-ism” poses for academic freedom. After pressure mounted to cancel the talk, the president of the University of Lethbridge, Mike Mahon, proved my point by refusing to provide university space for the lecture because of the “harm” it would supposedly cause. This led me to try to give a “Speakers’ Corner” type of presentation in the Atrium – a large public space on campus. As I tried to do this, I was shouted down by several hundred students with signs stating slogans such as “RACISM IS NOT FREE SPEECH!”

This reaction was celebrated by a number of faculty members. Most surprising, however, was the public reaction of President Mahon. In response to this complete breakdown of open inquiry and critical thinking, President Mahon congratulated the students for their outrageous behaviour. In Mahon’s words: “Tonight’s events were a coming together of our community to show support for each other and a reflection of the values of the University of Lethbridge. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to our community members for conducting themselves in such a peaceful and powerful manner”.

The University of Lethbridge’s actions have prompted two important developments. The first is a lawsuit against the University of Lethbridge claiming that the Charter rights of Paul Viminitz, Jonah Pickle (a student who wanted to listen to my talk) and me were violated. Second, a debate on the question of “Does ‘Woke-ism’ Threaten Academic Freedom?” is planned for the Lethbridge Public Library on September 16, 2023.⁶ It is hoped that this debate can be taken on the road to raise awareness about this serious threat to our academic institutions.

To facilitate greater understanding of the issues involved, this article will give readers a preview of the arguments that I will make. Before discussing the threats involved, however, it is first necessary to define what is meant by “woke-ism”.

WHAT IS “WOKE-ISM”?

In discussions about “woke-ism”, many people confess that they are not quite sure what it is. This is partly due to the fact that the term is colloquial, and not academic, and so it is often used as a label to denigrate opponents. For this reason, I avoided using the term for a number of years, but its prominence in a number of contexts has reluctantly led me to adopt it.

Although references to the term often focus on how it is manifested, not what it is, I have worked to develop a suc-

cinct definition. “Woke-ism” is identity politics that has become totalitarian. This means that instead of just creating space for the identity politics position – i.e. the idea that the “recognition” of oppressed identities leads to their empowerment – one is now expected to affirm and “celebrate” these identities. So, for example, instead of directing that there must be no discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community, there is now encouragement to put pronouns on email signatures (and punishment for criticizing this) and pressure to “support 2SLGBTQ+ individuals coming out”.

In the universities this began with the “postmodern turn” in the 1960s. Postmodernism is a reactionary force that uses relativism to attack the values of The Enlightenment. Objective truth is denied, and any claim to this is alleged to be a ploy to maintain the position of those in power. Instead, subjective beliefs are prized and standpoint epistemology is relied upon. The latter claims that what one knows is not determined by universally verifiable methods; instead, one’s “lived experience” and membership in an oppressed group are seen as important factors to consider when accepting subjective, emotionally driven “truth” claims.

This denigration of reason, evidence and logic enabled programs based on advocacy to gain a foothold in the university. These programs were not organized around subject areas such as history or chemistry, but were oriented towards an activist stance on the matters being investigated. Beginning with black and ethnic studies, which were then followed by women’s studies, queer studies and disability studies, research and teaching was undertaken that started with the “correct” position for solving social problems and then selected information to rationalize it. This was the opposite of scientific and scholarly approaches where any question could be investigated, as long as a rigorous and transparent process was used in pursuing truthful answers.

These programs occupied a marginal position in the academy at first, but changes in the wider society – the distortion of the anti-discrimination goals of the civil rights movement to embrace policies like affirmative action – gradually resulted in the administration offering more support. Various “centres” were then created to promote “diversity, inclusion, and equity” and, as a result, identity politics began to become the official position of the university. Instead of accepting that identity politics was just one position for understanding why certain groups were not proportionally represented, it was demanded that the “world views” and “perspectives” of those claiming to be oppressed be promoted and incorporated into the machinery of academic institutions. Thus advocacy replaced the search for objective truth.

HOW DOES “WOKE-ISM” THREATEN ACADEMIC

⁶This talk went ahead and can be viewed on Frances Widdowson’s YouTube channel.

FREEDOM?

Demands by administration that identities perceived to be oppressed be affirmed or even “celebrated”, while seeming to be an embodiment of “kindness”, pose a serious threat to academic freedom and scholarly standards. This is because academic freedom assumes that faculty members have autonomy to pursue any research question and follow the evidence wherever it leads. The result is researchers like Northwestern University’s Michael Bailey coming to heretical conclusions such as biological males identifying as women tending to be either effeminate homosexuals or autogynophiles (men who become sexually aroused by thinking of themselves as women). This leads the “woke” to respond with calls for cancellation and censorship.

“Woke-ism”’s ring-fencing of ideas, that are espoused by identities claiming to be oppressed, therefore, prevents an open and honest investigation of research questions posed by scholars like Michael Bailey. Similarly, this can be seen in the University of Lethbridge case involving me, where giving my talk was opposed because, as was asserted by the entire indigenous studies department, some faculty members “deplored” what was characterized as my “anti-Indigenous rhetoric”. My “wrong” answers included that I “denounced the TRC’s classification of the Residential School system as genocide and disputed the veracity of the unmarked graves of Indigenous children found at the sites of multiple former Residential School sites”.

The indigenous studies department’s opposition to my talk was directly related to the influence of “woke-ism” on the University of Lethbridge. These faculty members cited the University of Lethbridge’s official territorial land acknowledgement in support of their position: “We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community”. The department of indigenous studies went on to claim that “This honoring [sic] must include a commitment from all faculty to ensure that Indigenous histories, cultures, memories, and lives, past and present, are represented faithfully, truthfully, and safely, on this campus”.

Referring to the words “truthfully” and “safely” in one sentence shows the contradictory character of “woke-ism”, and its postmodern roots. If the truth must be represented “safely”, it is not truth at all. This problem can be seen most clearly in the current discussions about the residential schools. As the “woke” position maintains that indigenous perspectives must be “respected” by forcing people to pretend that they are true, the view of “Knowledge Keepers” - that 215 children are buried in clandestine graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School - must not be questioned.

The problem, however, is such a belief is not supported

by any evidence and is highly unlikely to be true (because there is no parent claiming that a specific child is “missing”). As I have documented in two articles – “Billy Remembers” and “Relative Truths and Rent-Seeking” – the only “evidence” for this claim is the anomalies found by Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). But GPR is not indicative of bodies, as has been shown in the recent excavation of a church conducted by an indigenous group in Manitoba. No remains were found even though “Knowledge Keepers” believed that there were “kids in the basement”.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Critically discussing trans activism and the “unmarked graves” at former indigenous residential schools are just two areas that are obstructed by “woke-ism”. This means that the development of knowledge, the training of professionals like doctors and teachers, and the ability of universities to be a bulwark against autocratic tendencies are seriously compromised.

Those recognizing the problem of “woke-ism” often focus on legal and bureaucratic changes to address it. Although these initiatives are important, they do not get to the heart of the matter, which is the cultural acceptance of suppressing unpopular ideas. This means that trying to increase oversight will only work if it occurs in the context of a public discussion aimed at changing the culture. While our Charter challenge against the University of Lethbridge makes important legal arguments, it is the events exposing “woke-ism” that will have the most impact. There also needs to be much more effective organization, such as the development of local Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship chapters, so as to give strength to individuals who are trying to push back against the threats to academic freedom and open inquiry.

Pushing back, however, is going to be very difficult. This is because “woke-ism” uses the plight of the oppressed to justify its totalitarian agenda. People who wouldn’t normally go along with constraints on freedom of expression accept it if they think it will “prevent harm” and support the empowerment of the oppressed. This is then used by corporate managers in institutions, including universities, to clamp down on dissent and assert greater control.

But people need to understand that the truth cannot be oppressive. In order to find solutions, we need to accurately understand the cause of problems, and “woke-ism” directly interferes with this process. There is also a difference between discussing an idea, and deciding what should be done in response to hearing it. If it is true, for example, that no bodies are buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, or that some trans people are autogynophiles, will accepting this new information automatically result in a particular policy direction? With this information, we could still, as a society, decide to settle indigenous land claims or fund gender affirming care for

trans people.

Opposition to “woke-ism” requires a broad coalition of individuals and groups who are principled in their support of freedom of expression. This is impeded by references to “woke-ism” as a “left-wing” phenomenon, and the failure to recognize that socialists can be supporters of both freedom and equality (as was seen in the works of George Orwell). It is not recognized that left-wing politics focuses on economic factors and accepts the objective character of class conflict, while “woke-ism” promotes the subjective perceptions of boutique identities such as “two-spirit”, “women of colour”, or “Black fat queer femmes” so that privileges can be demanded on this basis. The point is not to challenge capitalism, but to reorder the managerial and professional class to increase representation of these identities. This opportunism needs to be challenged, but the totalitarian tendencies of “woke-ism” suppress dissent and our ability to address the economic conditions that are at the roots of the serious existential problems that desperately need to be addressed.

REVISITING THE VERUSHKA LIEUTENANT-DUVAL
AFFAIR: THE N-WORD, ACADEMIC SINS, AND
MILITANT ERADICATIONISTS

Stuart Chambers

Should white professors say the N-word in class? The question has split university campuses into two competing factions: accommodationists versus eradicationists. Accommodationists oppose restrictions placed on their choice of words, works, or ideas. This includes vocabulary that students, faculty, and administrators find objectionable. In contrast, eradicationists believe that professors have a moral obligation to avoid saying racial epithets, especially those which Black people find dehumanizing.

In October 2020, accommodationists and eradicationists clashed head-on when a controversy erupted at the University of Ottawa. Professor Verushka Lieutenant-Duval, who is white, was teaching an art and gender class when she pointed out how persecuted minorities reappropriate derogatory terms to liberate themselves from their oppressors. Trouble began when she highlighted the Black community’s usage of the N-word without employing the euphemism. She was initially suspended from her course but was later reinstated.

In situations like these, eradicationists believe that the principle of dignity takes precedence over academic freedom and attempt to persuade others in this regard. But the more militant eradicationists (MEs) use different tactics. They brand white professors as racists and want them disciplined. MEs, however, cannot assume the moral high ground without committing several academic sins.

The first involves the *negation of context*. Recall that Pro-

fessor Lieutenant-Duval was teaching her class about subversive resignification, a process by which the N-word is “emptied of its initial meaning and resignified as a powerful marker of identity.” Any ally of anti-racism would have welcomed this dialogue with open arms, but because Professor Lieutenant-Duval did not adhere to social propriety, she was considered a racist by four professors from the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies. Jumping on the white supremacist bandwagon, one University of Ottawa historian referred to the Lieutenant-Duval episode as “a punctuated moment in ... a long history of racism.” The racist tag is an obvious—and I would argue a deliberate—mischaracterization of the circumstances, but ideologies are not exactly known for arguing in good faith.

One reason why MEs ignored Professor Lieutenant-Duval’s motives had to do with her lack of melanin. Had she been Black, her pedagogical approach would have been vital to the conversation. Had her background been biracial or multiracial, MEs would have been hard-pressed to articulate what word crime she committed. Therein lies the irony of invoking racial privilege. Even though the concept of separate races is a lie, MEs want specific aspects of academic freedom divided along racial lines. Context is problematic in that it hinders compliance with this political objective, so MEs minimize its importance or dismiss it altogether. What matters more to them is whether a professor’s expression aligns with her skin tone.

The next academic sin concerns the *erasure of valid moral distinctions*, specifically between use and mention. Accommodationists believe that directing a racial slur at someone is rightly denounced, but mentioning one for the purposes of study is permissible. MEs reject this argument outright. A key anti-racist belief—whites can no longer say *that* word—would be challenged by opening the door to nuanced ethical judgments.

The issue becomes complicated whenever prominent Black scholars uphold the mention exception, even for white professors. According to Harvard law professor Randall Kennedy, students are expected to be mature enough to distinguish between educators who use the N-word to demean Black individuals and those who, like Professor Lieutenant-Duval, say it to expose racism. In Kennedy’s opinion, students who cannot appreciate this difference are “unprepared for university life.”

The mention exception cannot be easily dismissed as an anomaly. In fact, courts of law recognize its appropriateness. Kennedy and his colleague, UCLA law professor Eugene Volokh, found that the N-word was quoted in more than 9,500 legal opinions written since 2000 by numerous American jurists. Because academia prepares students for professional careers, Kennedy and Volokh suggest that “any word emerging in court proceedings should be repeatable in a law school classroom.”

MEs have adopted a fallback position: the classroom is not a court of law. Court proceedings have convincing reasons for airing the N-word in full, as part of witness testimony or transcriptions of evidence, whereas white professors have no legitimate grounds for using it. This defence is untenable. Courts could avoid the explicit use of racial slurs, but for the sake of veracity, they do not. Universities should be no less rigorous in their standards.

Moreover, as part of their field training, law students tolerate the mention exception in court, so it would be disingenuous of them to turnaround and condemn white professors who say the N-word during discussions on hate crimes. Put simply, if law students can cope with hearing racial slurs in one setting, they can cope with hearing them in another. MEs have sidestepped the issue by sending a mixed message: the mention exception is viable, just not on university campuses.

Lastly, MEs practise *strategic hyperbole*. They allege that any mention of the N-word is not merely offensive but genuinely harmful to the health and well-being of minorities. Yet, as University of Toronto philosophy professor Joseph Heath illustrates, the rhetoric of harm is often used to legitimize illiberal methods. If MEs are offended and want a professor sanctioned, this appeal is unlikely to garner sympathy in liberal circles, but as Heath notes, “in order to get other people punished for doing things you don’t like, you have to claim that they have harmed you.” Since academic freedom frustrates attempts at censorship, rhetorical maneuvers are required to weaken its grip. Calling something “harmful” allows MEs to target more effectively those whose words they find abhorrent. It also makes it easier for administrators to justify the suspension or firing of white professors.

This technique is advocated by Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor, associate professor of history at Smith College. In a workshop, she explains how to address racism without harming students. Her ground rules are clear: *the N-word* must never be spoken in class, only “the N-word.” Still, she admits that students will see the actual slur on her PowerPoints, hear it in films, and read it in the histories she assigns. To summarize: *the N-word* constitutes violence if expressed verbally, but somehow, the violence is mitigated whenever other modes of communication are chosen. Professor Pryor does not regard her stance as arbitrary or censorious. Instead, she refers to her methodology as a form of inclusion—an “opportunity for everyone to come to the table.” A consistent standard is hard to discern here.

All this raises the question: what good do racial slurs serve? Their expression helps communities to reconcile with the past by honestly addressing the way language operates as an assault on Black freedom, equality, and dignity. One cannot expose anti-Black racism to the fullest degree without acknowledging its linguistic markers. By referencing the N-word in class, white scholars—like their

Black counterparts—are replicating authenticity, not vilifying racial minorities. Its inclusion is a constant reminder of the way humans treated others as property. However well-intended, censorship makes racists appear less evil than they really were.

MEs remain unconvinced. Any mention of the N-word by white professors is strictly off limits—at least vocally for the time being. But this demand comes at a price. Although Professor Lieutenant-Duval was incorporating anti-racist pedagogy into her lesson, MEs had no qualms about referring to their colleague as racist or about accepting a contested anecdote as proof of systemic racism. These kinds of visceral reactions demonstrate that the first casualty of a culture war is intellectual integrity.

IN DEFENSE OF SATIRE

Heinz Klatt

According to Decimus Juvenal there were so many buffoons, fools and knaves walking the streets of Rome in his time (1st century) that it was hard not to write satires. The Greek god Momos was his divine protector. If Juvenal had the misfortune of walking the streets of Ottawa today, and above all the halls of government, or countless other cities, he certainly would feel compelled to continue his artful, irreverent, and biting commentary on society and humanity with even more conviction and gusto.

Recently, I got an email from a national columnist asking me if I remember how, about 20 or 30 years ago, we agreed that the decadence of society, or at least its public discourse, had arrived at the very bottom and could go no further. Sexual harassment policies, sexual harassment special advisors and prosecutions sprouted up in academia, government and business like toxic mushrooms after a rain. It was a time when professors could be intimidated, harassed, and investigated for two years by their administration for having called a particular student by her self-chosen moniker “Lucky Lucy” for “Lucrecia.” How wrong we were; things have become worse, much worse!

Today we teach oral sex to first graders. We propagandize that gender has nothing to do with sex, that men can be pregnant, and that heterosexual white men are by definition racists, sexists, toxic and colonialists. There is no room for personal responsibility. We replace the “dirty” word “woman” with “bodies with vaginas” (*The Lancet*, 2021).

Blacks are all victims deserving compensation. We have mandatory Drag Queen shows in our schools and impute hatred to dissenting parents, in order to silence them. We allow male criminals, as long as they claim that they *feel* like women, to use communal showers in women’s prisons, and we allow them to be ‘consultants’ in shelters for sexually abused women. We allow men to compete with women

in sports where they snatch away prizes that belong to women, and for a coach to opine that these pretend-women (a.k.a transvestites) have an advantage over women costs him his job. Dogmas are not to be questioned or contradicted. The trans powerlifter Anne Andrews, well shaven for the day, just won first place in the Females Master Un-equipped category.

Some jurisdictions have identified 30 and more genders and in respect of these genders have mandated 30 and more newly minted pronouns to be used in all official documents and correspondence. We allow the term and institution of marriage to be usurped by homosexual couples and grant these pairs all the privileges of married people including that of adopting children, thus, to the detriment of our children, giving the notion of marriage a fundamentally different meaning. As a result, some children are denied the right to have both a father and a mother.

In their latest editions, both Merriam-Webster and the Cambridge Dictionary have changed their definitions of 'man' and 'woman' to include 'men' and 'women' respectively who 'identify' as 'men' and 'women,' irrespectively of what chromosomes and genitals tell us; and we simpletons believed that it meant that God created Adam and Eve as man and woman! When the most authoritative English language institutions redefine basic concepts, it is more than a linguistic change, is it a cultural change.

Another intellectual and moral malignancy of the day, for which only academic freedom and scholarship together with courageous journalism are the remedy, is the practice of quickly approving and implementing hormonal and even surgical intervention for gender confused youngsters. Irreparable harm is done by irresponsible physicians (psychologists, social workers, and diverse trans-activists) who claim to know that only medical treatment (i. e. mutilation) will prevent these children from committing suicide later. To make the outrage even more outrageous, parents are to be kept ignorant of these most intrusive interventions because parents are assumed to be reluctant to agree to them. Indeed, even as a great majority they are reticent because they love their children more than any professional.

A few decades ago my discipline and profession were guilty of other truly harmful if not monstrous innovations: Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), Repressed Memory Therapy (RMT) and Learning Disability (LD). MPD was the most absurd notion among this Triad. Every academic and professional effort - such as conferences, chairs, associations, books - was made to make its absurdity palatable to medical insurance and the public at large. Correspondingly, every intellectual effort including the courts and satire had to be mobilised to expose the inherent fallacies and ensuing injustices of these, at the time, faddish and lucrative concepts. Helpfully, all three of these pseudo-phenomena lent themselves to being satirised which is

probably one reason why at least MPD and RMT by now have practically disappeared from the public eye. The notion of learning disability has proven to have the most enduring staying power, most likely due to the fact that by now too many people are employed, i. e. make their living, assessing this "disorder", which is claimed to have nothing to do with intelligence, although measured with an intelligence test!

In Canada we have become accustomed to accept the propaganda that there are Indigenous graveyards without graves, and have even allowed, even urged, the Pope to come to Canada to do penance at these not-to-be-disturbed holy sites. Hundreds of millions dollars (5 billion in reparations for residential schools) have been provided by the federal government to substantiate these outlandish claims that hundreds of indigenous children have been murdered by Catholic nuns and secretly buried -- monies that have not yet been spent. Not to allow evidence to be produced in support of these monstrous claims clearly has its propagandistic and financial advantages. We truly have lost our heads.

Since in the 1960's, when I was a graduate student in West-Berlin, I was a member of the *Notgemeinschaft für eine freie Universität*. Later in West-Germany, I joined the *Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaft*. After that in the United States, I became for many years a member in the *National Association of Scholars*, and finally in Canada, I have been among the first generation of *SAFS*. I have been an active member of an academic organization dedicated to the preservation of academic freedom and scholarship during my entire career and beyond. Despite many individual battles won, what do we have to show after more than half a century of arguing and persuading?

In 1969, as a doctoral candidate, I left the Freie Universität of West-Berlin, after my alma mater had become the first university in Germany to adopt the model of the *Drittelparitätische Universität* (later abrogated by the *Bundesverfassungsgericht*). According to this SPD legislation (SPD corresponds to our Liberal Party), every assembly and committee of the university had to be constituted as follows: one third of its members had to be professors, one third members of administration and maintenance, and one third students. For me this new university structure meant that I would have to submit my dissertation and defense to a tri-partite "socialist" committee, something I simply would not allow to happen.

Today in Canada we are transforming our universities and practically every other institution into bastions of DIE worship, our new religion. DIE is a university religion, perhaps the first ever, in that it has its origin in academia but then spread its toxicity to society at large. Diversity, inclusiveness, and equity (another unholy Trinity!) in Canada are imposed by the Liberal federal government and enforced with the most powerful means a democratic government

has at its disposal: withdrawal of finances for unsatisfactory compliance. This pressure brings every university president (at least those that we have had) down to his knees, and it appears that no method of the authoritarian state is spared.

If a professor, who has done her research with admirable integrity, then publishes her result that indigenous children in Residential Schools were not murdered, let alone *en masse*, by Catholic nuns, but had succumbed above all to tuberculosis and other diseases that are rampant in closed communities, then she has to go, to hell with her tenure, to hell with all the mendacious pieties rattled off like Tibetan prayer drums by the President and every other university official. Our value system has become thoroughly corrupted and institutionalised in its perversity. The student mob has been given more power and influence than Faculty Council. Every past president of SAFS has written well reasoned, articulate replies to dozens of universities that trample on the rights of their faculty not to comply with DIE, but what have these letters and our publications accomplished?

What we are creating in Canada is an avatar of the former German tripartite university which, however, is based on different social categories. The socialist-Marxist categories have been supplanted by politically correct-woke identity principles. Intolerance and contempt for the merit principle in either system are germane to both. Revamping society (which is not part of the mandate of universities!) is more important than are academic standards and the integrity of research and teaching. If our Prime Minister had been better educated and had some understanding of academic life and purpose, we at least would have a partner in conversation and debate.

The Roman social critic Juvenal was merciless and mordant in his indignation. He was not concerned about the tone and whether or not he was helpful in persuading his critics, as one of my critics wants me to be (cf. "A Professor Emeritus Visiting the University College at Western University", SAFS Newsletter, 95, April 2023, 28f). Archilochus, an even earlier Greek satirist (7th cent. BC), was so "successful" that two of his targets hanged themselves. Obviously, satires can be more consequential than rational arguments.

How important satire is in political debate can be estimated by the fact that *Charlie Hebdo*, the French satirical paper, is published in around 100,000 copies per week, and *Le Canard enchaîné* is distributed in almost 300,000 copies per week. I suspect that every politician in France is afraid of being mocked, ridiculed, laughed at, i. e. satirized, by the caricatures and invectives of these papers. *Der Eulenspiegel* e. g. in Germany is published in 110,000 copies per month to terrify politicians and others.

Satires are not elements or methods of debate. Rather

they are used as commentaries when rational and constructive arguments have all failed and when no "repentance" is forthcoming. When logical arguments have not found a receptive listener, then the critic talks to his sympathizers, who share his values, rather than to his adversaries, and this he can do effectively in the form of satire. Of course, every author ultimately is interested having his message reach his adversaries.

What logical and rational argument has not yet been made to persuade our extraordinarily foolish and inept federal government with its bureaucrats and our academic ideologues to change their course?

What rational arguments can still be made about our Inuit Governor General Mary Simon, whose principal qualification for her position is her race, who in Reykjavik, this admittedly expensive city, with taxpayers' money, spends \$608 for a steak, \$238 for a dessert and \$71,000 for limousine service for four days in a city in which everything is in short walking distance? When she travels it is with an entourage of up to 32, as if she were an Empress on a mission to impress the rest of the continent! She deserves to be reprimanded, blasted, mocked, ridiculed, satirized. On every earlier foreign trip she has misbehaved in the same outrageously corrupt manner, but due to the support of our government has not learned a lesson. After all, our Prime Minister spends \$6,000 for a night in a London hotel. Lack of accountability inevitably leads to parasitism.

What rational, logical, constructive argument can still be made to counter the argument that reason, logic and evidence are manifestations of white privilege, power and oppression and are thus to be rejected? What reasonable argument can be made in the dispute between the university and its aboriginal professor? She has been hired because she is aboriginal, and once employed does not publish because doing research is not part of her culture, and the oppressor university has to honor, even "celebrate" her culture. The last arrows in our quiver rightly are mockery, laughter and indeed satire.

When satire, which has its rightful place at this juncture, reaches the heart of its target, then other psychological reactions are set in motion compared with criticism that reaches the brain. Satire would or should be biting, mordant, invective, censorious, and ideally witty and humorous. Satire preferably leads to laughter. "What we need are books that hit like a most painful misfortune, like the death of someone we loved more than we love ourselves, that make us feel as though we had been banished to the woods, far from any human presence, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us" (Franz Kafka in a letter to Oskar Pollak, 1904).

What is the outlook for the future, after all, when even satire cannot be the final dagger in the heart of unreason and absurdity? The experiences of the last half century

make me rather pessimistic. The woke religion is not a temporary fad to die in the next winter. We have tolerated, even encouraged unreason, we have bred a whole new generation of policy makers who have been trained in ‘Women studies’, ‘Gender studies’, ‘Black studies’, ‘Gay studies’, ‘Fat studies,’ ‘Decolonization studies’, ‘Diversity, inclusion and equity studies’, ‘Intersectionality studies’, ‘Disability studies’, ‘Social justice’, etc. All of these ‘studies’ are activist disciplines and have so little academic value that they should all be dried out of funding and struck from the curriculum. However, as more and more of these graduates become employed into academic and administrative positions the less there is hope for a more rational, libertarian and meritocratic future.

The Humboldtian University, dedicated to research and teaching, has by now been our model for two centuries and has the merit of having given birth to myriad after myriad advances of every conceivable kind. This most successful model is being dismantled in our presence and before our eyes.

The public university used to be secular and is becoming beholden to the woke religion;

it used to be independent from political and ideological tutorship and is increasingly dependent upon political influences, particularly by way of grants and financing of politically charged ‘studies’ and chairs;

objectivity in the pursuit of knowledge used to be the university’s ideal whereas subjectivity in the form of ‘view-points’ is all we can muster today;

diversity always referred to tolerance of different interpretations, not the presence of multitude of races, sexes and genders in classrooms and laboratories.

*Ad usum Delphini**

Prayer and Confiteor

Eternal Spirit,

Forgive us because we have sinned. We have usurped aboriginal lands without having proper documentation as to our entitlement. We have created residential schools for indigenous children under the disguise of wanting to save them from utter poverty, as some so disrespectfully have said, and to feed, clothe and alphabetize them, but instead have allowed these schools to apply the same cruel pedagogical measures that were used at the time everywhere, all over the world. I remember, because post-traumatic stress disorders have a tendency to last a lifetime, how I was punished as a fourth grader, for talking too much, to stand in front of some thirty giggling girls of my age, with the face directed towards them for two hours. I have suffered ever since. Pedagogy a century ago was cruel.

We apologize for having subjected the children to the method of language learning that is widely considered the

most effective and for decades the most widely applied method, i. e. total immersion. We could have been so much better making these youngsters learn English or French, but did, and still do, not know how to improve total immersion.

To our chagrin we delivered these poor children into the merciless hands of Catholic nuns who, armed with their holy vows, in the end, murdered them and clandestinely, probably at night and after evening prayers, buried them in unmarked graves where they are still reposing. Today, of course, we regret that we cannot disturb these graves to satisfy curious white and racist men without offending the spirits of these children. Graves are holy places not to be tampered with.

Please forgive us our niggardliness in offering only 35 billion dollars for “reconciliation” and especially for opening the “graves” and showing the skeletons. Why did we not allot 100 billion to alleviate the post-traumatic stress disorders of the Aboriginals? They would all feel so much better today.

It is with profound regret that I admit that the Church, Synagogue and Mosque, with bourgeois, patriarchal biology in tow, are the guiltiest culprits indoctrinating us with the fantasy that sexuality is binary and that there are “men” and “women.” Guided by the Illuminati of our time we know today better that sex and gender have nothing in common, and that the person who chooses his or her proper gender is the ultimate self-made man, our ideal. No lesser authority than the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Williams of Oystermouth has shown us that “Becoming transgender is a sacred journey of becoming whole: precious, honored and beloved by oneself, by the others and by God.” If all of us, bodies with a prostate and bodies with a vagina, follow this sacred script we will have the same equilibrium between the sexes that we have now because every man will be a “woman” and every woman a “man.” Society, we know, always evolves upwards.

Paul Preciado (former Beatriz Preciado), finally, because of the Church’s many sins, demands that the Notre Dame de Paris, be consecrated to the cult of the transgender: “I propose that the nation of France withdraw from the Church the guardianship of the cathedral Notre Dame de Paris, and that the state transform this space into a welcoming and feminist, queer, trans and anti-racist research centre and into a centre for the fight against sexual violence” (my translation). We should have been thinking of such conversion and approved it a long time ago.

Finally, we urgently need legislation to allow rhinopreputio. The Health Services Appeal and Review Board having already ruled that penile preserving vaginoplasty must be performed when requested and paid for by OHIP, it is only fair to remove the foreskin, to attach it to the nose and to have the procedure covered by OHIP as well.

Rhinopreputio would be recommended for non-binary persons with testicles, it would have great esthetic appeal and the additional benefit of reducing incidences of rhinitis.

We regret that we have always considered white cisgendered notions of reason and logic to be superior to indigenous ways of inspired knowing. Amen.

*On orders of Louis XIV, the instructor of Louis XV annotated the Latin texts to be studied by the Dauphin, by using simpler Latin and by prefacing his commentary with the words *Ad usum Delphini*. In this essay, the dictum means that the following *Prayer* is an example of what the preceding essay discusses.

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BULLYING AND THE NOT-SO-HIDDEN MEDICAL CURRICULUM

David Benatar

Bongani Mayosi, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town [in South Africa], died by suicide on 27 July 2018, less than two years after he had become Dean. Professor Mayosi had been a successful Head of the same university's Department of Medicine for nearly a decade.

His ascent to the deanship coincided with a period of criminal activity by student protesters. He was treated in abysmal ways by those protesters over an extended period, during which his office suite was occupied, he was belittled, and accused of being a "coconut" and a "sellout". His descent into depression was visible to all around him. At his funeral, his sister, Advocate Ncumisa Mayosi, said that:

The vitriolic character of student engagements tore him apart. The abrasive, do-or-die, scorched earth approach adopted by students in navigating what was a legitimate cause, completely vandalised Bongani's soul. Put simply, this unravelled him. To be clear, Bongani believed in the students' cause but the personal insults and abuse that were hurled at him without any justification whatsoever, this cut him to the core. This manner of engaging was inimical to everything that Bongani was about. It was offensive to his core values, how he had lived his life up until that point, his vision as a leader. And so he became withdrawn, his personality changed, he spoke less.

The Faculty of Health Sciences and the University of Cape Town more generally has learned none of the lessons it should have learned from this tragedy. The institution has an anti-bullying policy. However, this, like a Dean signing

off his emails to the Faculty with the words "with care and compassion", is mere talk. The Faculty of Health Sciences and the University of Cape Town have repeatedly failed to walk the walk.

First, the students who harassed Professor Mayosi were not called to account for their actions. They have not been subjected to any disciplinary action. Their names are not (yet) part of the public record. Among the academic staff who aided and abetted this harassment is at least one person who has been promoted to a senior academic leadership position.

Moreover, the bullying continues to be rampant (including multiple accusations that the [now former] Vice-Chancellor herself has been a bully). I have detailed many examples of this in a recent book, *The Fall of the University of Cape Town*. One such instance took place during a meeting of the third-year medical class on 27 August 2019. The students who called that meeting, used much of it to berate some of their classmates, claiming (falsely) that those classmates had been insufficiently compassionate.

At least a dozen members of the academic staff were in attendance. None of them spoke out against the bullying (in at least some cases because they knew the cost of doing so). Representatives from the university's "Office of Inclusivity and Change", who had been invited to facilitate the meeting, left early, evidently because their presence as facilitators was being ignored.

I had received advance notice of the meeting, because one of my bioethics lectures to the medical students had been cancelled (without consulting me) in order to schedule the meeting. I was not present at the meeting, but I did hear a recording.

Because the Faculty of Health Sciences and the University could not be counted on to do anything about this bullying, I wrote about it. The perpetrators and victims were left unnamed, but the shameful episode was exposed.

This elicited an uninformed response from the Health Sciences Students Council, to which I responded. The co-Chairs of the Faculty of Health Sciences' Transformation and Equity Committee then approached their interim Dean, asking for me to be removed from the teaching of Bioethics. In response to this, the Interim Dean asked the Dean of Humanities to find an alternative lecturer for Bioethics. The Dean of Humanities wisely refused to do so.

These and other subsequent developments are recounted in *The Fall of the University of Cape Town*. In that book I noted that the matter had not ended and that I suspected that plans were being hatched to remove me from the teaching of Bioethics to the medical students. That book was published in November 2021.

In February 2022, my suspicions were confirmed by an

email from a Deputy Dean in the Faculty of Health Sciences. I was told, at the eleventh hour, that I would no longer be teaching Bioethics to medical students – after more than thirty years of doing so. It was patently obvious that this was in response to the calls to have me removed.

In other words, the Faculty which had failed (again) to act against bullies, preferred to bully the whistle-blower who was exposing the bullying. The ironies of this were obviously lost on them, but not on me.

I lodged a grievance complaint against the Dean and one of the Deputy Deans. According to the University's own policy, such complaints should be heard and resolved within a matter of days. It took nearly a month. However, the Vice-Chancellor's nominee delivered a deeply flawed report, finding that I had not been victimized, despite the Dean having openly admitted that my article on the bullying had played a role in their decision. (That admission was an understatement of the role that this had played, but it was not insignificant. It is clear that a Dean can now retaliate against an academic for exercising the academic's free-speech rights, then be quite open that he has retaliated, and yet get away with it.)

I appealed the decision within two days. Again, according to the relevant University policy, the appeal should have been heard and resolved within a few days. This time, it took ten months, and even that was not without much cajoling.

In her report, the Vice-Chancellor's nominee who investigated the complaint said that she decided not to address the question of whether I had been victimized. In other words, she decided not to adjudicate on the very issue at hand (even though the victimization continued in other ways). Instead, her report is replete with factual errors and abundant obfuscation.

Universities can teach ethics in the curriculum. Ethics, in this context, is the academic philosophical study of morality. But universities also teach through example. That is one feature of what has sometimes been called "the hidden curriculum".

The axing of an ethics lecturer for acting ethically and calling out unethical behaviour, is itself unethical. This, like the institutional failure to respond appropriately to its own failings, also teaches exactly the wrong lessons. The lessons that the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town is teaching include the lessons: (a) that certain people who engage in bullying can do so with impunity, and may even be rewarded; but (b) those who call out such unethical behaviour will be bullied, also with impunity; and thus (c) if you are not going to bully, at least remain quiet while others are being bullied.

(As an aside, what are we to make of the moral integrity of

any ethics lecturer willing to take on the lecturing responsibilities of a previous ethics lecturer who was unethically axed? What ethical lessons does such a lecturer impart through his or her complicity?)

It should come as no surprise to those running such a university if its students – and staff – imbibe these lessons and act accordingly. Nor should it be surprised if there are further suicides among those who decline those "lessons". The hidden curriculum is not so hidden that it cannot teach.

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JAMES LINDSAY; *THE MARXIFICATION OF EDUCATION: PAULO FREIRE'S CRITICAL MARXISM AND THE THEFT OF EDUCATION*;

Kris Larsen

Education is in crisis. Fads such as, but not limited to, social activism, social justice, and even transsexuality appear to be *en vogue*, while such essential skills as reading, writing, numerical reasoning, higher order thinking, skill development, and intellectual attainment are on the wane. Woke indoctrination is in, while academic rigour is out.

Many are to blame for this disgrace, including the late Brazilian Marxist Paulo Freire, who was an adult literacy educator in Brazil in the late fifties and sixties and lectured at Harvard in the late sixties. Thankfully, American author, mathematician, and public intellectual James Lindsay (co-author with Helen Pluckrose of *Cynical Theories*), sheds additional light on this *faux* educator in his recent book, *The Marxification of Education: Paulo Freire's Critical Marxism and the Theft of Education* (2022).

Strengths in Lindsay's book are also weaknesses. He quotes extensively from Freire, whose word salads and gobbledygook in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968, English translation 1970) and *Politics of Education* (1985) make for painful reading. But it also helps the reader understand what she is dealing with. One hopes Freire's writings are clearer in Portuguese, but please don't bet the farm on that being the case.

Freire grew up in poverty, which may explain his affinity for Marxism. He made the unsubstantiated claim that precolonialism in his native Brazil and other cultures was largely idyllic. He adds that illiterate farmers were at the centre of their communities until colonialism brought education and values which upheld the worldview of the colonizers and marginalized the original inhabitants. His solution: "decolonize" the education system and, in so doing, liberate the natives.

Marxist consciousness and activism is required if this is to

change. Freire believed educators must become “guerrillas” who eagerly apply the “activist wrecking ball to the existing society” (Lindsay quote, p. 96). Shakespeare is out and the Western canon is to be maligned - subordinated to “superior” Marxist consciousness. Mathematics becomes an opportunity to use statistics and word problems to emphasize radical politics, while history's focus should be on slavery and civil rights movements - never mind that slavery existed in all civilizations with the British Empire being first to abolish it and the United States being one of the first.

Anyway, there is much to criticize and Lindsay pulls no punches. He cites a critical 2007 study of Freirean pedagogy in Nigeria, courtesy of *Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband (DVV)* International. Freirean emphasis was on radicalizing students by convincing them they were victims of oppression. Anger ensued to the point where students were demanding change and were no longer willing to partake in the learning process. A critical mass of the poorly educated might be able to destroy with the best of them, but will have no clue how to build back or even maintain a functional civil society. Even someone as frequently wrong as Herbert Marcuse correctly understood that his radical charges must familiarize themselves with the Western canon, if for no other reason but to know and understand what must be effectively combatted.

Bottom line: Freire's society breeds activists and “guerrillas”. Engineers, scientists, bureaucrats, and professionals, never mind skilled trades people, aren't as necessary. Think about that. We become less capable of maintaining all of the mechanical, technological, medical, and scientific advances over the past several decades (and centuries) and things will be better (???). And while we are at it, let's abolish the security and stability of Western civil society and its institutions.

It doesn't get better. Freire actually believed that teachers and students were equals. Teachers should be renamed “educators” and students renamed “learners”, with educators reduced to “facilitators” in an environment where learners are valid knowers in their own right. The intent is to supposedly flatten the hierarchy and thereby eliminate the power imbalance. How Marxist!! It is also absurd. The teacher is an authority in his discipline while the students, lacking knowledge, owe it to themselves to benefit from the teacher's expertise. It's called getting an education.

Indeed, Lindsay adds that this “equality” destroys a crucial boundary, given that “adults and children are not equals, and it is professionally and developmentally inappropriate to engage in relationships as though they are” (p.183).

All of this notwithstanding, Freire's anti-colonialist and Marxist biases earned him adulation from education faculties in the West who were only too happy to spread his gospel to malleable students seeking future careers as

teachers. And the rest, as they say, is history.

According to Lindsay, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the third most cited source in all of the social sciences and humanities and is revered in North American colleges of education. He adds that Freirean destabilization has spawned a number of counterproductive trends such as social emotional learning (SEL) and culturally relevant teaching that have prospered at the expense of academic standards. But much of his contempt is reserved for comprehensive sexuality education and the Drag Queen Story Hour for children craze, a cause championed by Calgary mayor Jyoti Gondek, and a “phenomenon” all too familiar to Calgary pastor Derek Reimer, who has concerns about sexual grooming (imagine that!!!). Reimer was literally given the bum's rush when protesting one of these events at a Calgary library, then subsequently arrested and charged. No punishment for his assaulters, however.

In any event, contemporary American schoolchildren are, to a large degree, failing in basic competency in pretty much every subject at every grade level, even though they are well versed in identity politics, social justice, and cultural Marxism.

For example, Lindsay cites data from Rhode Island where 94% of students aren't proficient in math and 86% can't read or write at grade level. Yet they, with encouragement from teachers, walk out of some Providence schools and lay down for three minutes outside the Rhode Island state legislature in support of “commonsense” gun legislation in wake of the horrible May 24, 2022 school shooting in Uvalde, Texas.

As an aside, most Canadian gun crimes are committed with illegally obtained firearms. But the “LibDip's” idea of “commonsense” gun legislation is to whack farmers, hunters, collectors, and target shooters with registration fees and bureaucratic hoops, even though they commit no crimes. I digress.

Needless to say, we have reached the conclusion of Roger Kimball's “long march through the institutions”. Radicals indoctrinated by faculties of education teach in the K-12 system, spew their propaganda, thereby indoctrinating their students in woke Marxism. Upon graduation, these pupils gravitate towards other venues, spreading their pernicious ideology in the process. Media, government, non-profit, health, high tech, justice, policing, etc are all infected. Even corporations have gone woke (here's looking at you Target and Anheuser-Busch). Some become educators and perpetuate the cycle.

On a final note, James Lindsay is to be commended for valiantly exposing and fighting against a destructive ideology that has taken hold of our education system (and the broader society). Clearly, the education system must return to a time when academic rigour and the “three Rs” were stressed over and above everything else. It must also

provide an *honest and balanced account* of our history and culture. Our civilization depends upon it. The proverbial clock is ticking.

Kris Larsen is a Danish English Baptist settler and retired Nova Scotia civil servant with a background in adult education and social services. He and his wife Lynne Bryant - an Irish Scottish Polish German Anglican settler and retired social worker - live in rural Nova Scotia. Lynne and Kris are members of a "fringe minority" and hold "unacceptable views"

REBEL LIBRARIAN BOOK REVIEWS: THOUGHTS ON THE LEFT, UNIVERSITIES, AND *HOW WOKE WON* BY JOANNA WILLIAMS

Barry W Cull

As a young academic, educated largely in the Western liberal arts tradition, and emerging from Canadian grad school in the mid-nineties, my thoughts on the world were, back then, influenced by an eclectic variety of thinkers, writers and scholars - mostly left-leaning - as well as the only rebel "thinker" and "activist" of whom I've ever really been a fan: Jesus Christ.

As time went on, and years became decades, my intellectual life became increasingly fraught, with the gradual realization that North American public universities and colleges had profoundly lost their way.

Once places that taught the upcoming generation **how** to think, our campuses have largely become places that teach **what** to think.

That is not education.

And it is not healthy for democratic society.

Simultaneously, I was discovering profound and inspirational thinkers and writers within the various catholic and protestant Christian streams of thought - some academics, but many not. Here I found a depth of thought missing from the vapid secular community of activism, navel-gazing, and non-thought which our left-leaning public universities have largely now become.

And for me, I can mark exactly when and where any willingness on my part to align myself with secular leftist thought ended: It was in April 2011 at a public lecture by Noam Chomsky at MIT.

Chomsky spent what seemed like an eternity rambling on about absolutely nothing. If I had paid admission, I would have asked for my money back.

"The left is dead", I said to myself, as I drove back to my young family at our Boston-area hotel.

But then, just a few months ago, someone introduced me to the work of the UK writer and thinker Joanna Williams.

Somewhat reluctantly calling herself (at least privately) a feminist in the leftist tradition, Williams has for me been a breath of fresh air.

And finally, in late May, I met her at Western University at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship. We had a couple of wonderful conversations centred around her new book, *How Woke Won*.

Tracing the history of the word "woke" back to grass-roots black activist thought in the 1920s, in her accessible and engaging 2022 book, Williams points out that woke has now instead ironically become a pretentious top-down set of loosely-connected social ideas, perpetuated by self-serving cultural elites.

There has been a simultaneous and related shift in left-wing thinking in universities and popular culture in recent years, Williams suggests, "away from a focus on social class and economic inequalities and toward identity politics".

Woke left-leaning adherents speak against "white privilege", "microaggressions", "trans-phobia", perceived working-class attitudes, and sexual discrimination - while actually doing **nothing** to seriously challenge any systemic social problems.

It's far easier to naively trot out a few grammatically-incorrect pronouns (don't get me started), wave a few flags, put up a few signs, and applaud the toppling of a few statues.

And meanwhile, to anyone who looks beyond the surface platitudes and symbolic actions, underpinning the woke movement there is actually an interest in perpetuating victimhood, a underlying misogyny, an outright hatred of the working class, an interest in totalitarianism and social control, and a dislike of anything approaching true freedom of speech.

Ironically, especially in our once-free public libraries, and on our once-open university and college campuses.

Sadly, Williams points out, "where students once demanded freedom of speech, woke students want freedom **from** speech."

It's as if murderous Mao himself (see my last book review of Ai Weiwei's "1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows" on Instagram and Facebook) were secretly directing things from beyond the grave. Or maybe something even more sinister is afoot amongst us.

Time will tell, Dear Reader. Time will tell.

Ever the optimist, however, Williams ends her engaging book on a positive note, suggesting that "woke will never gain ground among citizens who recognize that people have far more in common than the cultural elite would have us believe. It is only through coming together that we can

hope to forge a freer, more democratic and truly egalitarian future....Woke may have won, but only for now.”

Williams, Joanna. *How Woke Won: The Elitist Movement That Threatens Democracy, Tolerance and Reason.*

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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, Robert Thomas. ISSN: 1704-5436

The editor welcomes articles, case studies, news items, book reviews and letters. Send submissions by email to robert.thomas@uregina.ca.

See the online version for links and additional references.

Croydon, UK: Spiked, 2022.

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