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Article

The Perversion of Virtue —Causes and Consequences of Threats to Academic Freedom in the Contemporary University

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Abstract: The authors locate contemporary fissures in academic freedom in two interrelated macro-societal developments that intensified across the second half of the twentieth century: *massification*, involving the exponential expansion of higher education, and *standardization*, an isomorphism of structure and content in academic organization. The article develops a theoretic argument that the unfurling of higher education nationally and globally together with its sociocultural consistency creates a supranatural order endowed with unprecedented power centered in the core actors of universities. While these historical developments create for universities a dominant moral authority in the contemporary epoch, they also engender *moralism*—an evaluation of speech, writing, and behavior that venerates emotion. To illustrate the strategies of those who deploy moralism, a comparison is drawn between moralism's contemporary instantiation in higher education and the early medieval Catholic church's approach to perceived competitors. The comparison demonstrates that while displays of moralism in higher education may be comparatively new, their historical uses are well-worn. While massification and standardization have entailed individual and societal benefits, a rise of moralism obstructs the academic freedom on which institutions of higher education depend.

Keywords: academic freedom; higher education; massification; standardization; faculty; students; identity politics

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In this article, we locate contemporary fissures in academic freedom in two interrelated macro-societal developments which escalated across the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. These consist of *massification*, the exponential expansion of higher education as articulated paradigmatically by Martin Trow, and *standardization*, an isomorphism of higher education organizations, faculty, students, and curricula, as conceived and elaborated most extensively by John Meyer and his colleagues. We develop the argument that the spread and build-out of higher education, together with

its likenesses globally, creates higher education as a supranatural order wherein it commands unprecedented power expressed in organizational and individual actorhood. While these historical developments establish the conditions for an extraordinary moral authority of universities in the contemporary epoch, they also give way, we contend, to corruption in the exercise of that authority. This devolution is observed in a moralism that obstructs the academic freedom on which institutions of higher education depend.

The article is divided into two parts. In part one, we present a sociocultural argument about why massification and standardization—acting and intensifying in concert—come to evince threats to academic freedom in the contemporary period. Massification involves a demographic increase in the number of students and faculty, but this is coupled with a strengthening political linkage between higher education and society as the former makes greater demands upon the state. By turn, standardization empowers higher education actors with ministerial voice and authority. In part two, we invoke history to illuminate modern patterns, specifically the Christian church as a growing institution in early medieval society. Comparison of contemporary threats to academic freedom and the early Catholic church serves to reveal similarities in how contests in social exchange are waged. This historical comparison is apposite for its having linked moral judgment and punitive action. Devious as infringement upon academic freedom may sometimes seem in the contemporary period, the behavior is noteworthy for its own conformity with well-worn, if also schismatic, practices. Because the stakes are high for the future of academic life, the transformative potential of this behavior warrants analysis. We conclude by suggesting what institutions of higher education can do, amidst their newly created church-like authority, to preserve academic freedom as a principle of academic work.[1]

Part I: Modern Fissures

Massification and Standardization

Trow advanced a developmental theory that all problems in higher education have their sources in growth.[2] Trow advanced this thesis by accounting for the consequences of change as higher education systems expand and evolve over the course of three prototypical eras: elite, mass, and universal. This evolution is more singularly characterized, whether its referent is to an elite, mass, or universal period or institution, by the encompassing term “massification”.

Trow enumerated the consequences for higher education that evolution through these periods entailed. He predicted a remarkable transformation. Growth has affected and continues to affect education organization and processes, implicating everyone from students, faculty, administrations, and governing boards to the public at large. Trow did not, however, anticipate the effects of “growth” on academic freedom, a void which this article seeks to fill.

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1 We observe a definition of academic freedom as promulgated by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which was founded in the early twentieth century to promote and protect this principle of academic work. See this article’s Appendix for the specifics of AAUP’s definition of academic freedom.

2 Martin Trow. 1974. “Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education.” In *General Report on the Conference on Future Structures of Post-Secondary Education*. Paris: OECD, pp. 55–101. Reprinted in Martin Trow. 2010. *Twentieth-Century Higher Education: Elite to Mass to Universal*. ed. Michael Burrage. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 88–142.

Massification of higher education has been accompanied by democratization in wider society. In his time, Trow foresaw this marriage-in-the-making, and his view of the union was sanguine. Growth entailed individual and consequent collective opportunity, greater equality, freer access to social and economic rights, and improved life chances. Massification over the second half of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century has entailed significant benefits, chief among them greater opportunity and access to higher education, not only for students who are typically cast as the principals of access and opportunity, but also for the increased number of faculty produced to teach them.

Massification has reciprocally facilitated and conditioned another major historical change in institutions of higher education: their standardization, or comparative isomorphism of structure and content. Here we draw on arguments developed by Meyer and his colleagues.

The university has ascended to become a global institution that operates in conjunction with what is termed "the global knowledge society"—a world society predicated on and explainable by the vast organizational, research, and curricular expansion of higher education.[3] As a decidedly institutionalized form, the university becomes timeless and placeless.[4] To frame the significance of this development, Frank and Meyer characterize the modern period, especially after World War Two, as one of "university-ization."[5]

Research, instruction, and curricula become rationalized; "nature is tamed and demystified through the extraordinary development, expansion, and authority of science."[6] By this argument, academic knowledge transforms localized knowledge into a standard content. Fields within institutions themselves expand, in concert with massification, and standardize, such that a "proto-university" encompasses all matter of inquiry communicated in a "hyper curriculum."[7] Albeit through a different explanatory lens, Clark likewise argues how the ascendance of the research university, rationalized in form, radiates extraordinary charismatic authority.[8]

Everything can be researched, theorized, and taught. But the university is global society's source not only of explanation. As an all-knowing vessel of truth, the university comes to operate as a claims-maker of right and wrong, good and evil, desirable and undesirable. This creates empowered actors—faculty and students—"who have

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[3] David John Frank and John W. Meyer. 2007. "Worldwide Expansion and Change in the University." In *Towards a Multiuniversity? Universities between Global Trends and National Traditions*, ed. Georg Krücken, Anna Kosmützky and Marc Torka, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, pp. 19–44.

[4] John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez, David John Frank, and Evan Schofer. 2007. "Higher Education as an Institution." In *Sociology of Higher Education: Contributions and their Contexts*, ed. Patricia J. Gumport, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 187–221.

[5] David John Frank and John W. Meyer. 2020. *The University and the Global Knowledge Society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 25.

[6] John W. Meyer and Ronald L. Jepperson. 2000. "The 'Actors' of Modern Society: The Cultural Construction of Society Agency." *Sociological Theory* 18(1): 103; Gili S. Drori, John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez, and Evan Schofer. 2003. *Science in the Modern World Polity: Institutionalization and Globalization*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

[7] Frank and Meyer. 2020. *The University and the Global Knowledge Society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[8] William Clark. 2006. *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

unprecedented authority to be and do things, both within the university and wider society.[9] As in premodern eras, "Kings and priests were fond of telling people what to do."[10]

This constellation of developments casts the university as a "cultural canopy," and not merely an entity for economic development.[11] The university's consistency of content penetrates all domains and reaches all corners of society. It becomes society's "central sense-making institution."[12] By the reach of what it studies and seeks to explain, the standardized university assumes unprecedented power and consequent moral authority.

Importantly, Meyer and his colleagues conceive of this power as quasi-religious. Like the premodern church, the modern university makes the same promise: "to explain the fundamental nature of being by interpreting local facts in the light of transcendent truths."[13] "Universalistic rationalism permeate[s] and reshape[s] social reality, granting everyday people the status of having access to divine truths. The process occurs slowly over recent centuries and then swiftly [in tandem with massification] over recent decades . . . the flames of globalism jump the firewalls of the nation-state, creating and supporting . . . a world society."[14]

By this thesis, organizational variation, within and between systems of higher education, exerts little decisive influence on institutional behavior. So rationalized, the university is isomorphic.[15] Its achieved power, arguably discernable around the globe, is illustrated by telling analogy. Just as "the meaning of the Catholic mass is decoupled from variations in the organization of the church," the meaning of academic endeavor in the organization of the modern university is standard above what is otherwise unremarkable subpermutation.[16]

Through its sense-making in all realms, the university links people and places to a universal cosmos.[17] Consequently, the university becomes central to the construction of modern actorhood: institutions of higher education worldwide are now sites for producing empowered individual actors "imbued with agency and free will—i.e., the godlike capacity to initiate action," wherein actors "intervene and manage wide domains."[18] "Just as [the introduction of wider] education transformed peasants and tribespersons into 'persons' and 'citizens,' so too does university education transform persons and citizens into strategic 'actors,' with considerably augmented authority."[19] "The status of the individual

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[9] Frank and Meyer. 2020. *The University and the Global Knowledge Society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 61.

[10] Jonathan Haidt and Selin Kesibir. 2010. "Morality." In *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 5th ed., ed. Susan T. Fiske, Daniel T. Gilbert and Gardner Lindzey, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, pp. 797–832.

[11] Frank and Meyer. 2020. *The University and the Global Knowledge Society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 15; Evan Schofer and John W. Meyer. 2005. "The Worldwide Expansion of Higher Education in the Twentieth Century." *American Sociological Review* 70(6): 898–220.

[12] Frank and Meyer. 2020. *The University and the Global Knowledge Society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 17.

[13] Ibid., p. 3.

[14] Ibid., p. 43.

[15] John W. Meyer, John Boli, and George M. Thomas. 1987. "Ontology and Rationalization in the Western Cultural Account." In *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society, and the Individual*, ed. George M. Thomas, John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez and John Boli, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 2–37.

[16] Frank and Meyer. 2020. *The University and the Global Knowledge Society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 41.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 92.

[19] Ibid., p. 132; see also Evan Schofer, Francisco O. Ramirez, and John W. Meyer. 2021. "The Societal Consequences of Higher Education." *Sociology of Education* 94(1): 1–19.

as responsible creature and carrier of purpose and the moral law is greatly enhanced . . . individuals attain sacral standing across more and more dimensions."[20]

From this account the modern university is understood as the cultural linchpin in which everyone can access universal truths and apply them in the name of progress. As the university is implicated in the solution to all types of problems, faculty and students have become more empowered to turn knowledge into action. The university is not merely part of a society, but the prism through which are shaped people's worldviews and resultant behaviors. In "unlocking secrets of the universe" and promulgating "divine truths," the university in modern society parallels the premodern church.[21] If the university is the new church, professors are the new priests, and students the new disciples.

Like Trow on massification, Meyer and his colleagues take a generally sanguine, if not also awestruck, view of standardization. Consideration of the effects of the university's "new role" are, however, not complete. When the university becomes a church, it gains enormous power to control. Indeed, it assumes the power to excommunicate, chiefly dissidents and blasphemers.

Unintended and Unanticipated Consequences

Massification and standardization have brought forth serious problems not pursued by Trow, Meyer and his colleagues, and other scholars of global change in higher education.[22] We argue that new players and an expanded population in higher education institutions exert pressure on discourse employed in the academy whose terms are compatible with the social-institutional goals of universities, namely the extension and transmission of certified knowledge.[23] To these ends, rationality and universalistic standards guide verbal and written communication, which are bounded by: evidence, logic, dispassion, due process, acceptance of expertise, a withholding of judgment until all or as much evidence as available is on hand, and rejection of "particularistic" criteria—irrelevant, personal characteristics of a person—used to assess and adjudicate speech and writing.

It is important to keep terms straight. *Rationalization*, as used by Meyer and his colleagues, is the Weberian term that connotes standardization of practices and procedures on behalf of efficiencies increasingly necessary to handle large-scale operations (e.g., masses of students and faculty).[24] Rationalization is "the cultural accounting of society and its environments, in terms of articulated, unified, integrated

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[20] Meyer and Jepperson. 2000. *The 'Actors' of Modern Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 105.

[21] Frank and Meyer. 2020. *The University and the Global Knowledge Society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 18, 43.

[22] E.g., Brendan Cantwell, Simon Marginson, and Anna Smolentseva. 2018. *High Participation Systems of Higher Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Martin Carnoy et al. 2013. *University Expansion in a Changing Global Economy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; Jung Cheol Shin and Ulrich Teichler, eds. 2014. *The Future of the Post-Massified University at the Crossroads*. Berlin: Springer.

[23] E.g., J. Scott Long and Mary Frank Fox. 1995. Scientific Careers: Universalism and Particularism. *Annual Review of Sociology* 21: 45–71; Robert K. Merton. [1942] 1973. "The Normative Structure of Science." In *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, ed. and with an Introduction by Norman W. Storer. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 267–78; Robert K. Merton. [1957] 1973. "Priorities in Scientific Discovery." In *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, ed. and with an Introduction by Norman W. Storer. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 286–324; Edward Shils. 1983. "The Academic Ethic." *Minerva* 20(1–2): 1–104.

[24] Max Weber. 1927. *General Economic History*. New York, NY: Greenberg.

. . . and causally and logically structured schemes."[25] For clarity in the article, we more frequently use the term "standardization." *Rationality*, used principally by the authors, is understood as the quality based on and in accordance with reason or logic. Rationality is thus differentiated from, for example, emotive, impulsive, or uncircumspect qualities.

As used by Meyer and his colleagues in their argument, *universalism* refers to the empirical phenomenon of widespread finding or applicability (i.e., something found and institutionalized all over). By contrast, we employ the term "universalism" from its source in the sociology of science where it refers to a norm governing academic behavior. "Universalism requires that when a [member of a scholarly community] offers a contribution . . . the community's assessment of the validity of that claim should not be influenced by personal or social attributes of the [individual]."[26] In this usage, universalism stands in contrast to particularism, which "involves the use of functionally irrelevant characteristics, such as sex and race, as a basis for making claims and gaining rewards in [institutions of higher education]."[27]

Finally, *moral authority*, as used by Meyer et al., encompasses knowledge deemed good because it is empirically-based, scientifically sanctioned, and/or rationally conceived (i.e., by rules of reason and logic). Moral authority is to be distinguished from *moralism*. By moralism we refer to evaluative acts and attitudes toward others' speech, writing, and behavior, where the judgments rendered are predicated principally on an evaluator's personal emotions or feelings. As used herein, moralism may feed off of the particularistic, and exists in stark contrast to rationality and universalistic principles of higher education.

While we refer to conditions of discourse consistent with the social-institutional goals of higher education as rational, this does not imply that all exchange takes place free from disagreement and argument. To the contrary, argument is integral to the process by which knowledge is discerned, advanced, and shared. A well-developed sense of citizenship—a notion that a group of people, however disparate and disagreeing, have something fundamentally in common—typically confers civility. Attributes of civility include an ability to deal with conflict and the idea that members of a group seek to accomplish goals together. Inability to deal with conflict about speech and writing from within the academy arguably comes from a decline in the idea of citizenship.[28] Its erosion likely has a source in massification, wherein people feel only tangentially part of something, weakly integrated into a community, and subject to highly permutated social control. Such patterns are indicative of breakdown in mutually understood expectations and shared behavioral norms.

The influx of students and faculty members has resulted in episodic conflict in rational terms of discourse. Massification enables anonymity as well as apathy in members of higher education institutions. Put differently, largeness of scale compromises informal social control,[29] including regulative norms that govern verbal and written exchange. A result is, at times, something other than sound discussion, debate, and disagreement. Battles about speech and writing from inside the academy are evidence of fissures in understanding and/or accepting what these rules comprise.

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[25] Meyer and Jepperson. 2000. *The 'Actors' of Modern Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 102.

[26] Long and Fox. 1995. "Scientific Careers." p. 46; see also Merton [1942] 1973. "The Normative Structure of Science." p. 270.

[27] Long and Fox. 1995. "Scientific Careers." p. 46.

[28] Richard Sennett. 1977. *The Fall of Public Man*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knoff.

[29] Peter M. Blau. 1974. *On the Nature of Organizations*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

Concomitantly, conflict in terms of discourse emanates from divergent goals among competing groups. While the university may be said to be isomorphic in structure and curricular content, this does not mean that all players are of one mind. By default, massification results in pluralization: it is variety on social, economic, and political dimensions.

Trow explained that as systems of higher education expand, they place greater demands upon the state. These demands, as well as increased participation in higher education, give the public a greater stake in the workings of higher education. An increasing plurality lays larger claims on institutions:

> As a system grows it emerges from the obscurity of the relatively small elite system with its relatively modest demands on national resources, and becomes an increasingly substantial competitor for public expenditures . . . And as it does, higher education comes increasingly to the attention of larger numbers of people, both in government and in the general public, who have other . . . ideas about where public funds should be spent, and, if given to higher education, how they should be spent.[30]

Claims on higher education are increasingly made not only in the interests in the distribution of monies, but also on what higher education can and should do for oneself and others:

> Higher education enters into the standard of living of growing sectors of the population. Sending one's sons and daughters to . . . university increasingly becomes one of the decencies of life rather than an extraordinary privilege reserved for people of high status or extraordinary ability. Giving one's children a higher education begins to resemble the acquisition of an automobile or washing machine, one of the symbols of increasing affluence—and there can be little doubt that the populations of advanced industrial societies have the settled expectation of a rising standard of living. But in addition . . . college or university is already, and will increasingly be, a symbol of rising social status.[31]

Higher education institutions thus become increasingly large loci of change. This involves not only personal transformation that was a major goal of elite education, but also social transformation. It is, then, no coincidence that colleges and universities have been enveloped in social and political movements of the broader society as massification has taken deeper root.

The massification in the U.S. that began following World War Two made enrollments and corresponding faculty hiring burgeon in the 1960s.[32] We see in U.S. institutions of higher education the first major contestation in the terms of exchange in the 1960s and 1970s.[33] As Frank and Meyer document,[34] massification intensified thereafter, and we see a second in the 1980s and 1990s.[35] Today, institutions of higher education in the U.S.

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30 Trow. 1974. "Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education." p. 91.
31 Ibid., p. 127.
32 Roger L. Geiger. 2019. *American Higher Education Since World War II: A History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
33 Ellen Schrecker. 2021. *The Lost Promise: American Universities in the 1960s*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; John R. Thelin. 2018. *Going to College in the Sixties*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
34 Frank and Meyer. 2020. *The University and the Global Knowledge Society*.
35 James Davison Hunter. 1991. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

enroll some 19 million students in a given year, almost a 30 percent increase since 2000 alone, and correspondingly large numbers of faculty members to teach them.[36] We see in contemporary times a third major episode of contestation.

These episodes are characterized by conflict between students and faculty, between faculty themselves, and between and among administrations, students, and faculty. The episodes are marked by interaction between higher education and discord in broader society. Historically, the subjects of race and gender are central to each of the conflicts, but the conflicts are not limited to them. For example, in the first episode, opposition to the Vietnam War was enmeshed in the conflict. Students refused to attend classes, occupied buildings, spit on faculty, and, along with subsets of faculty members, called on the firing of untenured as well as tenured faculty members who would not sign-on to the anti-war movement.[37] The second episode, in the 1980s and 1990s, was broadly marked by "political correctness" in speech and behavior.[38] The third, present-day episode is characterized by "identity politics": group-based claims of rights and protections that fundamentally involve speech and writing, conflict about the definition and sanction of sexual harassment, and promotion of "social justice."[39]

The episodes of conflict involve a presentation of interests that some groups seek to have legitimated by institutions of higher education. In each of the episodes, institutions have responded by introducing, or redoubling, plans to address interests of aggrieved parties, such as by creating new programs, departments, or policies.

By Meyer et al.'s account, the moral authority achieved by the university was not instantaneous. It began in the eighteenth century, but has intensified since the mid-twentieth century. It is arguably at an apex in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. To consider its most trenchant consequences, then, is to focus most especially on the present-day period and its predicaments, to which the discussion now turns.

Moralism

We define moralism in higher education as the evaluation of academic work (and authors) which is based on personal feelings and emotions, even to a point where some critics speak of a "weaponization of emotions."[40] Moralism consists of a tendency to make judgments about others' perceived morality as expressed in institutional life through scholarly activities, scholarly production, and scholarly worth. Moralism typically disregards the principle of due process, wherein people possess a right to fair treatment and the suspension of judgment until a hearing predicated on formally established rules of

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[36] National Center for Education Statistics. 2020. *The Condition of Education*. Washington, DC: Department of Education.

[37] Allan Bloom. 1987. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster; Donald Alexander Downs. 1999. *Cornell '69: Liberalism and the Crisis of the American University*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Jonathan Zimmerman. 2020. *Amateur Hour: A History of College Teaching in America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

[38] Hunter. 1991. *Culture Wars.*

[39] Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning. 2016. "Campus Culture Wars and the Sociology of Morality." *Comparative Sociology* 15: 147–78; Laurent Dubreuil. September, 2020. "Nonconforming: Against the Erosion of Academic Freedom by Identity Politics." *Harper's Magazine*; Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt. 2018. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. New York: Penguin.

[40] Frank Furedi. 2017. *What's Happened to the University: A Sociological Explanation of Its Infantalisation.* London and New York, NY: Routledge.

engagement. In its enactment, moralism resists universalistic criteria by which to assess contributions of speech and writing and instead relies heavily on the particularistic, that is, the personal characteristics of an individual to judge that person's behavior. Evaluation is therefore based on whether one thinks the speaker or writer is a good or bad person.

What is the empirical evidence of moralism's ascent in higher education? We list examples below:

- Moralism is central to "trigger warnings" and endemic in "safe spaces" and "free speech zones" on campus which announce: "careful, utterances might hurt you if unregulated."[41] While such warnings, zones, and spaces directly affect free speech, they condition thought, values, and expectations in a campus community that cross over into academic freedom as sought to be practiced by faculty members.[42]
- Moralism is manifest in the numerous disinvitations of campus speakers whose views on past subjects offend groups of students and/or faculty members. Silencing speech in academic venues in these instances takes the form of "deplatforming."[43] At this writing, most recent illustrations include Charles Murray at Middlebury College, Ann Coulter at the University of California, Berkeley, Alice Goffman at Pomona College, and Laura Kipnis at Northwestern University, among others.
- Moralism is on fulsome display in the experience of the sociologist Patricia Adler in teaching a course in her area of expertise, where students, fellow faculty members, and administrators rushed to judgment about pedagogy on what some take to be controversial subjects.[44]
- Moralism is found in banning texts such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* because it is alleged to contain misogynist portrayals of human behavior, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* because it is believed to contain "racism, colonialism, religious persecution, violence, suicide, and more," and Homer's *The Iliad* which is alleged to contain discomfiting violence.[45]
- Moralism, if only by definition, forms the basis of advocacy and "social justice" rhetoric in teaching. Such rhetoric announces to students a preferential ideology, potentially associated with favoritism in classroom discussion and in the assessment of student work, which precludes consideration of dissent. Advocacy and social justice rhetoric in the classroom may be defended by some faculty members as within the purview of their academic freedom, but this constitutes a misunderstanding of academic freedom.[46]

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41 Keith E. Whittington. 2018. *Speak Freely: Why Universities Must Defend Free Speech*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

42 Tom Slater, ed. 2016. *Unsafe Space: The Crisis of Free Speech on Campus*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

43 See Ted Gup. May 12, 2017. "Free Speech, but Not for All?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*: B3–B4; Howard Gillman and Erwin Chemerinsky. November 3, 2017. "Does Disruption Violate Free Speech?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*: A31.

44 Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler. 2021. "Administrative Interference and Overreach: The 'Adler Controversy' and the 21st Century University." In *Challenges to Academic Freedom,* ed. Joseph C. Hermanowicz, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 25–45.

45 Colleen Flaherty. April 14, 2014. "Trigger Unhappy." *Inside HigherEd*. Retrieved August 25, 2021; Alison Flood. May 19, 2014. "U.S. Students Request 'Trigger Warnings' on Literature." *The Guardian*. Retrieved August 25, 2021.

46 Stanley Fish. 2008. *Save The World On Your Own Time*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Stanley Fish. March 31, 2017. "Free Speech is not an Academic Value." *Chronicle of Higher Education*: Section B, B10–B11; Joan W. Scott. 2017. "On Free Speech and Academic Freedom." *Journal of Academic Freedom* 8: 1–10.

- Moralism is key to proposals for faculty member boards to vet colleagues' work, past and present, for traces of racism.[47]
- Moralism has extended the meaning of retraction. Retraction usually consists of withdrawal of published work because of mistakes or malfeasance (such as plagiarism or falsification of data). In efforts to protect themselves from condemnation by affiliation with their authors' failure to voice accepted ideological precepts, editors are susceptible to issuing retractions of contracts as well as newly published work.[48] Editors are arguably under pressure in a shrinking academic book market to have scholarly works cater to specific political tastes, and from conviction and fear, they appear to be basing decisions not always on analytical grounds but on perceived acceptability. Editors serve as gatekeepers, and the decisions they arrive at involve vetting, a portion of which is "soft" or "discretionary," in order to uphold, as they claim, "the standards of the presses." It is into this slippage that moralism through ideological purity tests has made an entry.
- Moralism is pervasive in deliberations about faculty appointment, tenure, and promotion to the point it precludes honest evaluation of academic work.[49] A climate exits wherein critique of academic records is constrained out of fear of being accused of racist or sexist or of being a "negative," "difficult," or "unpleasant" colleague whose nonconformity disrupts "the peace of the department."
- Moralism undergirds new vetting procedures for hiring faculty members wherein institutions require candidates to submit statements that explain efforts they have allegedly undertaken on behalf of "diversity, equity, and inclusion." In the 1950s the University of California (UC) introduced a loyalty oath that required employees to swear they were not a member of the Communist Party. Now, on at least eight of the UC campuses and at other institutions, applicants for faculty positions must profess their commitment to particular social goals—a political litmus test.[50]
- Moralism forms a basis of abusing university policies to falsely report and attempt to punish those whose points of view or academic voting behavior are deemed by those offended as worthy of official sanction. Offices of Equal Employment Opportunity and similar offices of diversity and inclusion are sometimes invoked, including Title IX regulations.[51]
- Moralism is central to faculty and student shunning behavior that is directed toward faculty members (and students) who elect not to sign petitions on behalf of "social justice" causes, many of which concern divisive social problems at a given time in society at large. People who refrain from signing petitions may do so for any variety

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47 E.g., Brett Tomlinson. July 13, 2020. "Faculty Propose an Anti-Racism Agenda." *Princeton Alumni Weekly*. Retrieved August 25, 2021.

48 E.g., Josh Blackman. May 5, 2021. "Random House Cancels Historian's Book Contract for Not Writing About Black Historians." The Volokh Conspiracy. link to this article.

49 Joseph C. Hermanowicz. 2021. "Honest Evaluation in the Academy." *Minerva* 59: 311–29.

50 Michael Price. 2020. "'Diversity Statements' Divide Mathematicians." *Science* 367(6475): 239; Abigail Thompson. 2019. "The University's New Loyalty Oath." *Wall Street Journal*, December 19.

51 American Association of University Professors. 2015. "The History, Uses, and Abuses of Title IX." In *AAUP Policy Documents and Reports,* 11th ed., Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 69–99; Stephen Turner. 2021. "The End of Clear Lines: Academic Freedom and Administrative Law." In *Challenges to Academic Freedom,* ed. Joseph C. Hermanowicz, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 49–79.

> of reasons (even when they may agree personally with a given cause), including a belief that it is incompatible with their academic role.[52]

Central to moralists is *control of language*. Moralists compose a "campus language police" whose goal is a verbal purification on behalf of a new etiquette. As the examples above illustrate, moralists ironically seek to deny speech rights of others while operating with a professed right to utter their own declarations. In a vernacular, the illogic goes: "I'm outraged by your insensitivity to my feelings"; "because I'm offended, you should be censored/punished." Academic freedom to inquire is confused with a particular political stance. Moralism clouds dispassion in addressing and assessing intellectual problems, including the self-demonstrating one that moralism presents, for then one is "outside" a realm of accepted expression.

Moralism is, furthermore, associated with what has been termed "identity politics." In general, identity politics encompass "groups of people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity [who] . . . promote their own specific interests or concerns without regard to the interests or concerns of any larger . . . group."[53] The term is believed to have been introduced in the late-1970s, and to have proceeded as a social cause in the decades bordering the turn into the twenty-first century. Identity politics advocate the ideological agendas of specified groups. The advocacy aims to engender greater power for such groups.

Particularly in the early twenty-first century, identity politics are tied to "social justice," which, while possessing various meanings, we may infer involves a correction of past wrongs against specific groups in society. Patai and Koertge contend that social justice, fitted to a politics of identity, has emerged as one of U.S. higher education's primary aims.[54] As such, political goals of academic institutions compete with educational ones.

Identity politics are predicated on a heightened subjectivity, because wrongs committed toward a group themselves form the basis of feeling and political expression. The rise of identity politics and social justice activism in academic institutions is based in control of language, which promotes the interests of specific groups and suppresses debate and dissent.[55] Monitoring others' speech and self-monitoring become normalized, if also pathological, conditions of academic life.

Moralism as measure of a political correctness can be successful because it operates as its own measure of morality. Situating oneself as arbiter of what is morally correct constitutes its own defense; critics can be cast as morally inferior without due consideration of the ideas presented. Calls for "logic, dispassion, and due process" can be tagged as "elitist" constructs—morally unjust—defended by people who are interested in maintaining control over the discourse called "logic, dispassion, and due process."[56] Tautological rebuff operates to shut down discussion and debate. *This is a perversion of virtue*.

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[52] Kalven Committee. 1967. "Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action." *University of Chicago Record* 1(1); Woodward Report. 1974. "Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at Yale." Retrieved August 25, 2021.

[53] Orlando Patterson. 2006. "Being and Blackness: A Review of *We Who Are Dark* by Tommie Shelby and *Creating Black Americans* by Nell Irvin Painter. *New York Review of Books*, January 8.

[54] Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge. 2003. *Professing Feminism*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books.

[55] Furedi. 2017. *What's Happened to the University*.

[56] cf. Jennifer Schuessler. 2020. "An Open Letter on Free Expression Draws a Counterblast." *The New York Times*, July 10, p. A17.

Attendant Behavioral Patterns

Several behavioral patterns accompany the moralism that envelopes U.S. higher education presently. One is *priggishness*, a claim to purity and right thinking in which one feels comfortable in what one already knows, or thinks one knows, and shuts out ideas because one is convinced that what one already knows is true. Priggishness appeals to conformity. Some speech and writing will offend, but censoring it by vilifying its authors is not consistent with established precepts of inquiry on which higher learning relies.

Shaming is also evident in answer/response exchanges. It weaponizes reaction to intellectual ideas, however controversial, and shuts down dialogue and debate. Like moralism, shaming is rendered more likely by massification wherein there are more players lacking shared agreement of the terms of discourse, or contesting them, in an academic setting. And while standardization makes possible a heightened moral authority, an arguable monopoly of such authority—the university has overtaken the church to occupy this position—invites abuse of that authority.

Humiliation has become a goal in answer/exchange situations dealing particularly with volatile ideas. (Shaming and humiliation are not to be confused with caustic disagreement, or *invective*, addressed in part two). Social media facilitates attempts at humiliation, which include individuals "campaigning for support"[57] and embracing "vindictive protectiveness," the notion that one must be shielded from discomfort and those interfering with that goal must be punished.[58] The result can take the form of "criminalization of the accused."[59] In moralism, social exclusion makes people feel they are bad. For the hardy, this may embolden. For others, threat of humiliation likely induces fear.

The popularization of shaming may hinder people's willingness to question prevalent convention, yet to "kick against the pricks" is consistent with, indeed necessary to, a scholarly role.[60] Thus, another observable behavioral pattern consequent to moralism is *pusillanimity*, a shriveling of courage to stand up to moralism. Even the act of discussing, especially in critical ways, such topics as race and gender in classrooms or in faculty meetings, can be perceived as dangerous. By constraining response, moralism compromises academic freedom. The result is censorship by others and censorship imposed on oneself.

Finally, moralism has a penchant for creating all-encompassing categories whereby perceived infractions, large and small, against assumed codes are subsumed under one censorious label. Deliberate clumping of non sequiturs for the purpose of controlling discourse specifically within academic settings erodes the ability of all parties, perhaps especially students, to learn how to discern differences among and between gradations in arguments. For moralists, there is the right and the wrong side. Populations grouped within the latter tend to be fitted into one undifferentiated category (e.g., "racist," "misogynistic," "ableist"), and there is an unbridgeable gap lying between them and those who are "morally enlightened."

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[57] Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning. 2014. "Microaggression and Moral Cultures." *Comparative Sociology* 13: 692–726.

[58] Campbell and Manning. 2016. Campus Culture Wars and the Sociology of Morality. *Comparative Sociology* 15: 147–78.

[59] Laura Kipnis. 2017. *Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes to Campus*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

[60] Shils. 1983. The Academic Ethic.

Institutional Responsibility and Response

We meet with a major paradox: the more a higher education system expands and standardizes, even for beneficent causes, the more at risk it is of destabilizing its foundation—rational exchange. In a climate of moralism, intellectual inquisitiveness matters less than moral purity.

That some universities have gone to the length of crafting and endorsing a statement that seeks to reaffirm principles of academic freedom is its own evidence of forces prevailing against it. The University of Chicago's "Statement of Principles" is a case in point, which seeks to teach what some might have simply assumed:

> For members of the University community, as for the University itself, the proper response to ideas they find offensive, unwarranted or dangerous is not interference, obstruction, or suppression. It is, instead, to engage in robust counter-speech that challenges the merits of those ideas and exposes them for what they are. To this end, the University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.[61]

A statement sent by a dean of students to incoming freshmen at the same institution is also noteworthy for its attempt to teach what might not be known:

> Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called "trigger warnings," we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual "safe spaces" where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.[62]

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) has concluded about one-third of colleges and universities surveyed maintain speech codes "that clearly and substantially restrict freedom of speech," and that over half of these institutions had formal speech codes "vaguely worded in a way that could too easily be used to suppress protected speech, and are unconstitutional at public universities"[63] This strongly suggests that institutions themselves—in the ways they have responded to aggrieved parties and their causes—are part of the problem by having institutionalized a moralism that works against freedom of exchange. By way of Meyer et al., it is pathological behavior made possible by monopolistic largesse.

Reprise

Moral authority and moralism are seemingly at odds: the right (i.e., "correct") on the one hand, the righteous on the other. According to arguments set forth by Meyer et al., moral authority arises centrally from Weberian-like rationalization. It is based in an achieved supremacy of reason, logic, and science. By contrast, moralism is centered on emotion. It is rooted not in the universalistic application of evaluative criteria, but

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[61] University of Chicago. 2015. *Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

[62] John Ellison. August, 2016. *Letter to the Class of 2020*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Office of the Dean of Students.

[63] Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. 2019. "Spotlight on Speech Codes 2018: The State of Free Speech on Our Nation's Campuses." link to this article. Retrieved January 14, 2019.

rather in the particularistic while also compromising rational principles of due process and organized skepticism.[64] How can we have the modern university—a purported beacon of rationality—also exist as a bastion of bad ideas and errant behavior? We have identified several reasons why moral authority exists alongside moralism.

Indeed, the former makes possible the latter. Massification weakens social control within the university. It thereby also erodes the idea of citizenship and terms on which people engage in exchange and disagreement. In principle and in reality, massification is pluralizing: it is a source of diverse and divergent goals.

Because it is pluralizing, massification, as we have explained, makes greater connection to and demands upon the state. Accordingly, universities become loci of change. That is, universities become *socially embedded*. They are called upon to sort out society's problems. Standardization strengthens their moral mandate to do so.

This helps to explain moralism's timing of appearance in the university's life course. As argued, while Frank and Meyer locate the beginning of mass education in the eighteenth century,[65] massification along with standardization began to mature after World War Two. It is important to stress that the effects of massification and standardization are interlinked. They achieve a potency in operating together. Standardization of the university cannot exert a breadth of force without the widespread incorporation of actors. By the same token, massification of higher education achieves greater power when combined with globally normalized structures. While standardization and massification begin to settle and mature in earnest following World War Two, the full strength of these processes is not achieved overnight. It is by the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first that they are strongly institutionalized as decisive forces shaping the form and authority of the modern university around the world.

For this reason, the university becomes especially "actionable" in conjunction with the wider society in the current epoch. Societal disturbances and social movements, such as those involving race and gender, activate the university as moral agent to weigh-in, not only with expertise, but with judgments and proclamations about the "right way to live" inside universities and well outside their borders. Moral authority is exercised, but this historically located positioning also disposes the university and its actors to moralism. It is for the present-day university a tenuous and fraught position. Ironically, it places the future of the university—vested as it is with a power never before realized—in question.

The university has achieved a monopoly of power and practice not unlike the premodern church. In so many words, it tells people what to think. In all monopolies of practice—like the full-fledged professions in their time—there is abuse. We entrust lawyers, doctors, and indeed priests for our proper care. It is foolhardy to believe they always carry out their duties well; so, too, with the university and its actors. Rationality, reason, logic, and due process succumb to expedient and emotive issuances. While moral authority is normative, we need not assert it is even empirically modal. The work of law, medicine, ministry, and education is riddled with litigation—moral authority run amok. Moral authority is an ideal. Ideals possess commanding attention; the behavior of "moral actors," however, is always problematic.

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[64] Merton. [1942] 1973. "The Normative Structure of Science".
[65] Frank and Meyer. 2020. *The University and the Global Knowledge Society*.

Part II: Understanding the Present by Way of the Past

A Western historical event that may serve as counterpart to the developments seen in higher education is the Catholic church's regulation of correct belief in the early medieval era (ca. 400–600 CE), when it began to gain adherents in large numbers, experiencing its own kind of massification and standardization. That Meyer et al. see the isomorphic university as a modern surrogate to the church when the latter came to own the monopoly on explaining the human relationship with the divine invites comparison between the two institutions. There is much that can be said about the homogeneity and reach of texts, practices, and administrative hierarchies that defined the church at this time. What we stress is that along with moral authority came moralism, and the church used similar behavioral tactics then, which are employed at universities today, to expose perceived threats and silence inimical ideas as well as the people who voiced them. The comparison is particularly apt because the church's tactics at this time were overwhelmingly behavioral and rhetorical (as opposed to physically coercive), with an outpouring of religious treatises, classification of and guidebooks to heresy, and persuasion from pulpits.

Behavioral Tactics

We identify seven points of similarity between the church's attitude toward those thought to espouse incorrect beliefs and the moral-based critiques of ideas coming out of institutions of higher education. First is the assumption that if an idea is deemed wrong, it can actually infect and harm the larger public, and that is why it must be vigorously purged and silenced. Second, aside from the notion that thoughts require censoring, their authors have to be likewise denounced, disciplined, and, if necessary, exiled from the community (excommunication). The church sought to expel malefactors, and this action protected others from influence and contagion that could spread from ideas or from the people who proposed them.[66] Third, the church was most interested in identifying those within whose beliefs were faulty. Christian writers have a standard trio of those requiring correction—heretics, pagans, and Jews—but the first was considered the most dangerous,[67] and the effort dedicated to identifying and rooting out deviant Christian belief is attested by the number of heresy catalogues that were written at this time.[68] The church was committed to purging itself. Fourth, church criticism lacked humor. Salvation and damnation were serious matters, and when Christian authors issued condemnations, even from clerics who were well-trained in the art of traditional invective, their brutality was to underscore the danger at hand.

Fifth, the church's position vis-à-vis heresy was static, meaning that while church writers were consumed with articulating the lines between correct and incorrect beliefs, for those who had crossed the line into defined heretical territory, little attention was henceforth paid to the gravity of their offense relative to other heretical ideas, and they were often lumped together through fabricated accusations.[69] Numerous and various kinds of Christians were declared heretical over the centuries, but once relegated to that

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[66] E.g., Mar Marcos. 2013. "Anti-Pelagian Legislation in Context." In *Lex et Religio* (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 135), 317–344. Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, pp. 323, 34.

[67] Brent Shaw. 2011. *Sacred Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 300–1.

[68] Averil Cameron. 2003. "How to Read Heresiology." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33(3): 471–92.

[69] Ibid., p. 477.

category, little differentiation was made among them because all those convicted of having separated from the church were now outside the church and therefore disqualified from salvation. It is much the same, we have argued, in current discourse in academia, where in broad-brush fashion moralist labels render homogenous entire spectra of speech, thought, and expression.

Sixth, Christianity is a text-centered religion, and while scripture always retained its privileged position, martyrdom accounts were also highly prized and read aloud during services. The suffering of Jesus as seen in the gospels and consequent physical suffering of early believers meant that the foundational discourse of Christianity was about persecution, suffering, injustice, and death at the hands of a hegemonic polity, which for early Christians was the Roman empire. Because Christianity's identity centered on future triumph over unjust suffering projected into the next world, Christianity on this side of the final judgment had somehow to keep suffering at its center, even after the persecutions stopped, and then after Christianity became the sole religion of the imperial court, and then even when it was the majority religion of the West in the sixth century, CE.

Early Christianity's narrative is about unjust exclusion, condemnation, and bodily suffering. In present-day higher education, exclusion and suffering have likewise emerged as a core narrative. It is true that Christians were subjected to arrest, torture, and execution. There is a persistence of discrimination, lack of opportunity, racism, and gender inequality in higher education. The growth of universities, the emergence of new fields, the critique of old paradigms, and the willingness, if slow, of universities to change have sought to offer relief and remedy to endemic social problems. However one may assess the progress made by institutions in vanquishing racism and inequality in higher education, we point out that, similar to a religion predicated on exclusion that suddenly finds itself a central player in the game, moralist academic discourse faces a nettlesome strategic problem now and in the future: *in order to maintain its position, the injustice and suffering can never end.* To acknowledge any progress runs counter to the interests of moralism; therefore, developing new behavioral strategies to underscore ongoing suffering is key to the continuation of moralism and its strength. The success in presenting the hardship of individuals through, for example, "intersectionality"—the conjoining of multiple harms and grievances on one body—is, in fact, not new. It bears a striking resemblance to the ways in which the early medieval church fathers promoted the view that Christians must continue to count themselves as martyrs after imperial patronage and largesse had replaced persecution.

Seventh, where Trow attributed the source of serious problems in higher education to growth, so it was with the early church. Christianity's growth into a popular religion by the end of the fourth century and the dominant one by the sixth entailed two key consequences. One, it was not exclusive like before and membership was therefore no longer exceptional. The occasion of the first brought about the second: as Christians began to look a lot like everyone else, some adherents began searching for ways to distinguish themselves as better and more disciplined believers who demonstrated their "specialness" through purity.[70]

Moral exclusivity is an effective mantle to wear in the current push for differentiation in an increasingly populous landscape where higher education is more accessible,

[70] Peter Brown. 1988. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, pp. 341–86; Susanna Elm. 1994. *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

increasingly the norm, and, in several ways, more standardized. In a realm where ideas are supposed to face empirical, factual, and rigorous scrutiny, moral purity tests can short-circuit other avenues of inquiry and become the fastest and easiest route to dominance.

Distinctiveness of the Contemporary Moralism

Books and ideas have often been blamed for compromising social well-being. Subjecting human creative works to moral scrutiny and censorship is as old as Western philosophical discourse. Is there anything new about the contention that criteria for evaluating writing, speech, and behavior in the academy are becoming increasingly moral? We identify this as unprecedented terrain for higher education, although comparison with the early medieval Catholic church demonstrates that the phenomenon described is itself not unique. Present-day attacks on academic freedom come from the perceived moral failure of ideas or stances, but the culpability identified in them is conflated with those defending them. Individuals and groups are deemed morally culpable, requiring condemnation, penance, and reform. Not adopting specific moralizing positions renders people fundamentally flawed because they do not understand how the world is and the ways it must be remedied. The idea and its creator both merit excoriation.

McCarthyism has served as a paradigmatic example when people think about threats to academic freedom in the U.S. in particular, but the present circumstances are different. People accused of communist sympathies were labeled with terms such as "godless," but the danger they were thought to pose was more political than moral—a fifth column serving foreign interests, an enemy of the democratic way of life.[71]

Schrecker's seminal volume on McCarthyism and the universities draws a key distinction between sources of threat and inaction. It is true that significant portions of faculty were complacent in the face of charges levied against colleagues, but only a very small fraction of faculty in this period, it is believed, supported efforts to dismiss academics with communist sympathies.[72] Faculty timidity in the face of threat to the foundational principles under which they conduct their work nonetheless bears significant costs:

> The protagonists of the academic freedom battles of the 1940s and 1950s almost uniformly reserve their bitterest condemnation for those of their colleagues who failed to support them, those colleagues whose "speed of flight" . . . "was hotter than their love of liberty." Congressional committees, boards of trustees, academic administrators all behaved as they were expected to behave. They were the enemy . . . It was the behavior of their fellow academics, especially the self-professed liberals among them, that really rankled. In most cases, it was not so much what these people did that upset the blacklisted professors as it was what they did not do. They did not organize; they did not protest; they did not do anything that reversed the tide of dismissals."[73]

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71 Albert Fried. 1997. *McCarthyism: the Great American Red Scare: A Documentary History*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Jonathan Michaels. 2017. *McCarthyism: The Realities, Delusions, and Politics behind the 1950s Red Scare*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 183–230.

72 Ellen Schrecker. 1986. *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, especially pp. 310–14.

73 Ibid., p. 308.

It is important to underscore that harassment and action against faculty under McCarthyism came most frequently from *outside* the academy. By contrast, the present work identifies institutional communities as the ones behaving in ways that transgress academic freedom. The attacks come with increased frequency from the *inside*. The institution is betraying itself.

What is evident now should also be differentiated from invective, which has a well-documented history in Western politics and education. The number and variety of insults traded among scholars since scholarship began are legion.[74] *Ad hominem* attacks are colorful, startling, and often humorous for everyone except their intended targets. Humor is key. Invective has always been personal and it was often morally charged; that is, the accusations need not be germane to the scholarship itself but could focus instead on the personal characteristics of authors. Common insults took in the realm of "liar," "thief," or "sexual incontinent." These are moral terms and derisive, but their intention is to elicit laughter. It may be a cruel kind of laughter, but invective always has laughter at its core.

The goal in current criticism is different and the stakes are higher. Criticisms constitute invitations to public shaming, and the tone has no mirth to it. Previously, an individual's peccadilloes, and it did not matter if they were true or not, reflected solely upon the person indulging in them. The focus on individual weakness rather than general wrongdoing created space for humor. As for the contemporary moral critique, it is not supposed to be humorous. Accusations of harboring sympathy for those who advocate intolerance, oppression, and violence have wider implications because they affect and threaten everyone, not just the lives of the "morally right" people who claim they defend good values. The gravity of the offense renders the "guilty" a danger to society, as opposed to those subjected to scholarly invective in the past who, while objects of critique, were understood as fundamentally harmless persons.

Conclusions

Because massification offers greater access and opportunity to people to participate in higher education and benefit from rewards it confers, massification itself becomes infused with moral implication. Standardization of higher education further fuels its power. In the present account, institutions of higher education have become church-like. Anything that a society cloaks in potent moral beliefs is challenging for its members to criticize, even when something such as massification and fulsome curricula are said to work on behalf of liberal ideals and to take place in institutions that have, in their time, championed the principles of academic freedom.

Not all students, faculty members, and administrators demonstrate behavior patterns discussed herein, and thus it is inaccurate to assert that all new players by way of massification reject or lack understanding of institutional terms of discourse. Rather, ours has been a probabilistic generalization: as massification and standardization intensify, contests in terms of discourse become more likely on the one hand and more emotionally laden on the other.

The argument presented in this article suggests that moralism most likely resides in those national contexts of higher education that have standardized in the course of

[74] E.g., David Rutherford. 2005. *Early Renaissance Invective and the Controversies of Antonio da Rho*. Phoenix, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies.

forming part of the "global knowledge society." This would encompass higher education in North America, Western, Central, and increasingly Eastern Europe, many parts of Asia, and parts of the Middle East. By the same token, the argument suggests that moralism is least likely in those national contexts whose higher education institutions have yet to fully standardize and remain, for now, disattenuated from the global knowledge society. At present, this would include institutions in several parts of Africa, in some parts of Asia, and throughout most of Latin America.

Put differently, where higher education becomes most isomorphic, threats to academic freedom will originate with greater frequency from within institutions of higher education. Unbridled moral authority of universities is associated with unchecked moralism within them. By contrast, where higher education is less standardized, and thus less possessing of moral authority, threats to academic freedom will, on balance, originate principally from outside institutions.[75]

While moralism portends righteousness, there is, ultimately, no "salvation." Those who espouse a moralism can never exhaust injustice and suffering on which the rhetoric depends. It is an empty cause invested with ample feeling. To the extent that moralism possesses power, moralism is a power that exacts censorship, canceling, silencing, inhibiting, restraining. Moralism calls forth more irony still: for all its cloaking in virtue—martyrs doing good on behalf of us all—its practices facilitate a community's self-destruction. As the global university has arguably arrived at the apex in its moral authority, it has simultaneously established conditions for its own wrecking.

Moralists in higher education merely help to ensure higher education's obsolescence. If institutions of higher education seek to advance knowledge on behalf of an authentically higher learning, they can carry out their functions on the basis of rational thought and exchange. If deterioration of the terms of exchange has, as we have argued, imperiled academic freedom, the way toward its protection is found in higher education's own take on reformation, and that is a return to education's primary mission and greatest purposive endeavor: to educate. For whatever may be taught to and among people in institutions of higher education, the terms of exchange are the most preeminently crucial. Everything else is dependent on them.

Appendix

As set forth in AAUP's famous "Statement of Principles," academic freedom specifies:

1. Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results.
2. Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject.
3. College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations . . . they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution[76]

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[75] cf. Evan Schofer, Julia C. Lerch, and John W. Meyer. 2022. "Illiberal Reactions to Higher Education." *Minerva* 60: 517.

[76] American Association of University Professors. 2015. "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments." In *AAUP Policy Documents and Reports,* 11th ed., Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 13–19. This document, crafted in 1940, is a

Academic freedom, as promulgated by the AAUP, extends to the governance of institutions in which one is a faculty member:

> Scholars in a discipline are acquainted with the discipline from within; their views on what students should learn in it, and on which faculty members should be appointed and promoted, are therefore more likely to produce better teaching and research in the discipline than are the views of trustees or administrators . . . experienced faculty committees—whether constituted to address curricular, personnel, or other matters—must be free to bring to bear on the issues at hand not merely their own disciplinary competencies, but also their first-hand understanding of what constitutes good teaching and research generally, and of the climate in which those endeavors can best be conducted.[77]

National mores render uneven the stakes in assaults on academic freedom. Unlike many higher education systems of Europe, for example, academic freedom in the U.S. is not clearly established in law or federal legislation; it has no substantial presence in either. Professors have highly ambiguous legal recourse for alleged violations of their academic freedom. Rather than codified in law, academic freedom in the U.S. "floats in the law."[78] To the extent that U.S. courts have reached decisions about academic freedom, they have done so customarily via other grounds, such as tax law, contract law, and public employee law.[79]

While the AAUP was founded to promote and protect academic freedom, the policies it advocates are ultimately advisory. Even U.S. colleges and universities themselves have but nebulous and inconsistent bodies and procedures for handling cases involving violations of academic freedom. Consequently, threats to academic freedom are problematic and potentially highly consequential. They can directly compromise, and indeed alter, the academic profession, institutions of higher education, and the conditions under which science and scholarship advance.

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revised and elaborated version of the original *Declaration of Principles*, developed in 1915 (American Association of University Professors. 2015. "1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure." In *AAUP Policy Documents and Reports, 11th edition*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 3–12).

77 American Association of University Professors. 2015. "On the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom." In *American Association of University Professors: Policy Documents and Reports*, 11th ed., Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 123–24.

78 Peter Byrne. 1989. Academic Freedom: A 'Special Concern of the First Amendment.' *Yale Law Journal* 99: 251.

79 Stanley Fish. 2014. *Versions of Academic Freedom*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.