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The Origins and Impact of Neo-Marxist Ideology and Cancel Culture on the Academy

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ABSTRACT

Such is the destructive impact of neo-Marxist inspired critical theory and its recent offspring cancel culture that tertiary institutions no longer embody a commitment to objectivity, wisdom and truth exemplified by a liberal education within the Western tradition. Cultural-left critics argue Western civilisation is riven with inequality and injustice and that the academic disciplines, instead of having any inherent meaning or worth, are simply social constructs designed to enforce the hegemony of the capitalist ruling class. Studying literature no longer involves an appreciation of the moral and aesthetic qualities of those literary works that have stood the test of time and history no longer involves a chronological narrative based on the evolution and development of Western civilisation. While cultural-left ideology has become the new orthodoxy as a result of the left's long march through the institutions there are signs of a counter movement gradually emerging. Indicators include the campaign to defend academic freedom and freedom of speech, establishment of professional organisation like the Heterodox Academy and prominent academics entering the public square and arguing the case for objectivity, impartiality and truth.

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I INTRODUCTION

WB Yeats in his poem *The Second Coming* writes ‘the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity’. While written soon after the First World War and the 1916 Easter Uprising in Ireland the same can be said for the times we are now living in. Such is the dominance of neo-Marxist ideology, cancel culture and the global movement to decolonise the curriculum that the very institutions, beliefs and cultural norms that underpin Western civilisation and explain its longevity and success are consistently condemned and vilified. At the same time those in the best position within the academy to defend what is most valuable and worth holding on to are either complicit or lack the courage to speak out.

II DECOLONISING THE TERTIARY CURRICULUM

For those who would ‘decolonize’ our curricula, then, the curriculum is that which power and privilege have decided should be taught because it is in the interests of the powerful and privileged to teach it. These decisions are usually believed not to be intentional but implicit, accepted by the hegemon as justifiable, right, and natural. To summarize this view, when it comes to ‘decolonizing the curriculum,’ the curriculum is an ideological project devised by the powerful in society – meaning mostly straight, white, Western men with a ‘Eurocentric’ bent on things like science, reason, and rationality, among other proven epistemological and pedagogical frameworks.¹

One of the most recent manifestations of neo-Marxist inspired critical

¹ James Lindsay, ‘Decolonising the Curriculum’ (2020) 33 *Academic Questions* 448, 450.

theory involves attempts to decolonise the tertiary curriculum. In the United Kingdom, America, Europe and Australia academics are being pressured to decolonise the curriculum on the basis, according to Dr Omid Tofighian at the University of Sydney, that the traditional curriculum is guilty of enforcing European supremacism and what he describes as ‘whiteness’. Whiteness is defined as a curriculum that enforces ‘different forms of domination and marginalisation — such as racism, sexism, classism, historical injustice and prejudice based on religion’.²

When rejecting the idea of hosting a centre for the study of Western civilisation funded by the Ramsay Centre 100 academics at the same university argue in a similar vein. In an open letter the statement is made that any centre funded by Ramsay would be guilty of offering ‘a narrow, masculinist, Anglocentric view of “the West”’.³ Such is the pervasive nature of the movement to decolonise the curriculum that even science is not immune. In the United Kingdom academics at the University of Sheffield condemn Western science as ‘inherently white, since the discipline developed from the European scientific Enlightenment... science is both a fundamental contributor to European imperialism and major beneficiary of its injustices’.⁴

Students at the University of London are also intent on radical reshaping the curriculum by erasing whiteness, defined as ‘an ideology which says people racialised as white are morally and intellectually superior

² Omid Tofighian, ‘To Tackle Extremism in Schools We Must Challenge the White Curriculum’, *The Conversation* (Web Article, 5 October 2015).

³ Jordan Baker. “‘We do not consent’”: Sydney Uni academics divided over new Ramsay proposal’, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Web Article, 22 September 2019).

⁴ Frane Babarovic et al, ‘Applying a decolonial framework to teaching and research in ecology and evolution’ (Web Page, October 2020) [1.1]

to people categorised and racialised in other ways. It underpinned the development of European science, modernity and Enlightenment thinking'.⁵ Instead of seeing anything beneficial or worthwhile in the works of Denis Diderot, Adam Smith, David Hume or Immanuel Kant such thinkers are condemned as promoting 'the knowledge and moral standpoint of wealthy, white, cisgendered, able-bodied men'.⁶

The global movement to decolonise the curriculum is simply the most recent manifestation of neo-Marxist inspired critical theory associated with the cultural-left's long march through universities and the dominance of a rainbow alliance of theories ranging from deconstructionism and postmodernism to radical gender, sexuality, feminist and postcolonial theories. While often in disagreement, what all hold in common is the belief there is nothing inherently worthwhile about the search for wisdom and truth associated with a liberal education as knowledge is a social construct enforcing the power and hegemony of the ruling class. Concepts like rationality and reason are condemned as Eurocentric and exploitive and TS Eliot's belief a university education should involve 'the preservation of learning, for the pursuit of truth, and in so far as men are capable of it, the attainment of wisdom'⁷ long since forgotten.

III THE IMPACT OF THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AND THE

⁵ 'Why is my curriculum white?' collective, '8 Reasons the Curriculum is White' (Web Article, 23 March 2015).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ TS Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (Faber and Faber, 1948) 123.

RISE OF CRITICAL THEORY

In detailing the origins of the campaign to decolonise the curriculum it is important to note the impact of the Frankfurt School established in Germany during the late 1920s. Such is the emancipatory and liberating nature of the Frankfurt School that the Italian political philosopher Augusto Del Noce writes:

Their revolutionary stance is a radical affirmation of the transition ‘from the reign of necessity to the reign of freedom’, understood in the strongest sense. Thus, the disappearance of authority must be viewed as the end point of progressive thought, which, in fact, presents itself as a process of liberation from authority, theological or human, transcendent or empirical (where the theological authority continues to be viewed as a reflection of human authority).⁸

Central to the Frankfurt School is the belief classical Marxism is insufficient in furthering the cause of the working class and that the focus of the revolution should shift from economic considerations to what is now known as the culture wars. Closely associated with the Frankfurt school is the emergence of critical theory, defined as an emancipatory and liberating ideology dedicated to radically reshaping Western capitalist society in its image. The Australian academic Wanda Skowronska details the rationale underpinning critical theory as follows:

Critical theory did not aim to tear down the economic base of western society as, with the force of history, it was inevitably going to collapse anyway. It aimed rather at tearing down the

⁸ Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) 218.

cultural superstructure which supposedly reflected the powerful controllers of the economic system and this would enable the collapse of western civilisation.⁹

In order to overthrow capitalism and to bring about the socialist utopia those championing critical theory argue that, instead of taking to the streets and storming the barricades, a more effective strategy is to infiltrate and take control of those institutions, including universities and schools, that are complicit in enforcing what the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci describes as cultural hegemony. Roger Kiska, in detailing the origins of the cultural-left's long march through the institutions, describes cultural hegemony as a situation where 'the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, used cultural institutions to maintain power. They use ideology, rather than violence or economic force, to propagate their own values by creating the capitalist *zeitgeist*'.¹⁰

Louis Althusser's concept of the ideological state apparatus argues the same case. While capitalism maintains dominance by employing violence equally, if not more effective, is the way citizens are conditioned to believe all is well even though they are exploited and oppressed.¹¹ As argued by the Australian Education Union, a commitment to meritocracy where students are ranked in terms of performance based on academic studies disguises the reality that such a system favours the sons and daughters of the ruling elites.¹² Women

⁹ Wanda Skowronska, '1960s Psychologists: Beguiling Ideologues and Smiling Assassins' in Thomas V Gurlay and Daniel Matthys (eds), *1968: Culture and Counterculture* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020) 144.

¹⁰ Roger Kiska, 'Antonio Gramsci's long march through history' (2019) 29(3) *Religion & Liberty* 7, 7.

¹¹ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (Web Article, 3 November 2021).

¹² Australian Education Union, *Australian Education Union Policy Curriculum* (as adopted at the 1993 AEU Annual Conference).

who are happily married and who define themselves as wives and mothers are equally deluded as, whether they know it or not, they are the unconscious victims of a patriarchal society riven with structural sexism and heteronormativity.¹³

IV THE '60S AND '70S CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THEORY

As noted by Roger Kimball,¹⁴ as result of the '60s and '70s cultural revolution epitomised by the music festival Woodstock, the hippy movement, Vietnam moratoriums and a youth drug culture critical theory morphed into a series of cultural-left ideologies and movements ranging from postmodernism to radical gender and sexuality theories. According to Kimball, 'after fantasies of overt political revolution failed, many student radicals urged their followers to undertake the long march through the institutions'.¹⁵ He notes the influence of Antonio Gramsci plus the German student radical Rudi Dutschke when explaining the emergence of the phrase based on the strategy of overthrowing capitalism by infiltrating and taking control of the institutions central to the continued existence of Western societies. As noted by Allan Bloom¹⁶ the impact of the counter cultural, youth movement on American campuses was especially significant represented by sit-ins, demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and antipathy towards a liberal/arts curriculum. A time when student radicals at Stanford University demonstrated chanting 'hey-hey, ho-

¹³ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (University of Illinois Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Roger Kimball, *The Long March* (Encounter Books, 2000) 3-35.

¹⁵ Ibid 14.

¹⁶ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (Simon and Shuster, 1987).

ho, Western Civ has got to go!'.¹⁷

At the same time the counter-culture movement erupted across the Western world, universities, experienced an epistemological revolution caused by the emergence of postmodernism and deconstructionism associated with a number of European, neo-Marxist academics including Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. The impact of such theories cannot be overestimated, as together they had the effect of questioning and undermining once accepted absolutes about the nature of language and knowledge and how best to evaluate truth claims and achieve a more credible and realistic understanding of human nature and the world in which we exist and struggle to find meaning. Richard Tarnas describes postmodernism as the belief:

[T]hat human knowledge is subjectively determined by a multitude of factors; that objective essences, or things-in-themselves, are neither accessible nor positible... The critical search for truth is constrained to be tolerant of ambiguity and pluralism, and its outcome will necessarily be knowledge that is relative and fallible rather than absolute or certain.¹⁸

Whether the argument that words have no agreed meaning as they involve an endless play of signifiers, how we relate to and understand the world is both subjective and relative, or the argument that knowledge is a social construct employed to subjugate and oppress the “other”, the reality is what constitutes a university education has been radically reshaped. Foucault’s work has been especially influential leading, to Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay to write: ‘Postmodernism is

¹⁷ Robert Curry, ‘Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho, Western Civ Has Got to Go’, *Intellectual Takeout* (Web Article, 11 June 2019).

¹⁸ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (Random House, 2011) 395-396.

characterized politically by its intense focus on power as the guiding and structuring force of society, a focus which is co-dependent on the denial of objective knowledge'.¹⁹

Such has been the impact of critical theory and cultural-left ideology on the academy that universities across the West have long since abandoned any commitment to a liberal education within the tradition of Thomas Aquinas, Cardinal Newman and TS Eliot that can be traced to medieval England and Europe and the early Roman and Greek philosophers and sophists. A liberal education, in the words of the Australian academic Brian Crittenden, centred on 'a systematic and sustained introduction to those public forms of meaning in which the standards of human excellence in the intellectual, moral and aesthetic domains are expressed and critically investigated'.²⁰

The way literature and a study of English have been radically redefined as a result of the cultural-left's long march illustrates how dominant neo-Marxist inspired critical theory has become. Studying literature no longer involves a study of the moral and aesthetic importance of those works that have stood the test of time and that have something insightful and profound to say about human nature and what DH Lawrence terms 'the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment'.²¹ Instead, what are now defined as texts, including graffiti, SMS messaging, popular magazines, and posters, are deconstructed in terms of victimhood and identity politics. One example relates to the decision by the University of Leicester to replace teaching medieval

¹⁹ Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Critical Theories* (Pitchstone Publishing, 2020).

²⁰ Brian Crittenden, *Cultural Pluralism and Common Curriculum* (Melbourne University Press, 1982) 88.

²¹ DH Lawrence, 'Morality and the Novel' in *Selected Literary Criticism* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1956) 108-113.

literary works including *The Canterbury Tales*, *Beowulf* and *Le Morte D'Arthur* with what is described as 'a chronological literary history, a selection of modules on race, ethnicity, sexuality and diversity, a decolonised curriculum, and new employability modules'.²² Even great literary works like Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Hamlet*, when they are included, are analysed and critiqued in terms of the new trinity involving gender, ethnicity and class.

The Australian Association for the Teaching of English ('AATE') is a strong advocate of cultural-left theory. In books endorsed by the AATE, including Ian Reid's *The Making of Literature*²³ and Jack Thomson's *Reconstructing Literature Teaching*,²⁴ teachers are told they must replace the idea of teaching the literary canon with radically new approaches represented by postmodernism, deconstructionism and gender and postcolonial theories. As argued by Anne Cranny-Francis:

It is essential that this focus on 'feelings' be deconstructed and exposed not only for its essentially repressive and conservatizing nature – these feelings are valued when aroused by readings which construct or enact dominant discourses (bourgeois, patriarchal, ethnocentric) – but also for its potentially devastating effect on those whose background (class, ethnicity, gender) does not promote the inculcation of these 'feelings'.²⁵

The AATE, in addition to advocating a neo-Marxist inspired approach

²² Craig Simpson, 'Chaucer to be scrapped as university decolonises', *The Telegraph* (Web Article, 20 January 2021).

²³ Ian Reid, *The Making of Literature* (AATE, 1984).

²⁴ Jack Thompson, *Reconstructing Literature Teaching* (Melbourne/Vic: AATE, 1992).

²⁵ Anne Cranny-Francis, 'The Value of Genre' (1999) 99 *English in Australia* 27, 44.

to literature, also champions an approach to teaching English based on the concept of critical literacy. Drawing largely on the writings of the Brazilian Marxist Paulo Freire and books including *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*²⁶ and *Education: The Practice of Freedom*²⁷ the argument is put that learning to read and write, similar to critical theory, must be a liberating and emancipatory experience that leads to overthrowing an elitist, capitalist society. Central to Freire is the argument that learning a language is intensely political and that traditional approaches to learning breed passivity instead of empowering individuals to take personal responsibility to act and to change the world. Freire argues 'Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centred on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete reality, could never develop critical consciousness'.²⁸

The impact of neo-Marxist inspired critical theory and cultural-left ideology has also had a profound impact on history as a subject both within schools and universities. In the Australian context, as detailed by Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark in *The History Wars*, the emphasis is no longer on a chronological view of history focusing on the evolution of Australia's development as a nation within the context of Western civilisation. Partly reflecting the cultural revolution of the late 60s and early 70s, Macintyre and Clark argue centre-left academics adopted an approach described as 'history from below'; a situation where the emphasis shifted 'from those who exercised power to those who resisted it'.²⁹ As a result, the authors argue history as a

²⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Penguin Books, 1972).

²⁷ Paulo Freire, *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1974).

²⁸ Ibid 37.

²⁹ Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne University Press, 2003) 41.

discipline shifted from the ‘exclusiveness of traditional approaches’³⁰ to include long ignored and forgotten victims including women, gays, Aborigines and various ethnic and racial groups.

Evidence proving the effectiveness of the cultural-left’s long march through the universities can be found in a number of surveys of Australian tertiary institutions carried out by the Melbourne-based *Institute of Public Affairs*. In a 2021 *Parliamentary Research Brief* involving 10 of the major universities the authors conclude ‘[t]he humanities as they are taught in Australian universities have rejected the intellectual and cultural heritage of Western Civilisation’.³¹ After reviewing 1,181 humanities subjects the authors write ‘the three of the most common themes are in order: (1) Identity Politics (572 subjects), (2) Critical Race Theory (380 Subjects) and (3) Gender (306 subjects)’.³²

The results of the 2021 IPA survey are mirrored by an earlier research showing how Australian history is taught in our universities. The 2014 study involved reviewing 739 history subjects offered by 24 tertiary institutions and concludes: ‘Undergraduate history degrees in Australia fail to teach fundamental aspects of Australia’s history and how Australian liberal democracy came to be’.³³ Instead of encountering a substantial and chronological narrative dealing with Australia’s founding and evolution as a Western, liberal democracy, students experience a range of ‘more specialised, disconnected, thematically

³⁰ Ibid 173.

³¹ Institute for Public Affairs, *The Humanities Dehumanised: How The Humanities Are Taught in Australia’s Universities in 2021* (Parliamentary Research Brief, 16 January 2021).

³² Ibid.

³³ Chris Berg, ‘The End of History in Australian Universities’, *Institute of Public Affairs* (Web Article, 1 August 2015).

based subjects on narrow issues such as imperialism, film studies, and ethnic and gender perspectives'.³⁴

Such is the pervasive nature of political correctness and cultural-left ideology across Australian universities that a number of academics including Pierre Ryckmans,³⁵ John Carroll,³⁶ Merv Bendle³⁷ and Jennifer Oriel³⁸ all argue the academy no longer champions a liberal education based on Matthew Arnold's idea of the 'the best which has been thought and said in the world'.³⁹ Instead, as argued by Oriel:

The free world stands on the shoulders of giants, but university leaders have so diminished freedom that the miseducated are leading the uneducated into a realm of darkness. The highest purpose of the university, to cultivate the flourishing of high culture and bequeath its bounty to future generations, is all but lost. Academics who benefitted from classical education watched universities transformed from sites of higher learning into revolutionary colleges during the late 1960s. Politics replaced the pursuit of truth, beauty and harmony as the *raison d'être* of higher education. Today, the university is a hollow man stripped of purpose and devoid of substance.⁴⁰

Further evidence of the success of the cultural-left's long march through the academy is the percentage of university academics defined as left-

³⁴ Ibid 7.

³⁵ Pierre Ryckmans, 'The View from the Bridge: Aspects of Culture', *The 1996 Boyer Lectures*. (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1996) ch 1..

³⁶ John Carroll, 'How I became a political conservative', *Quadrant Online* (Web Article, 9 May 2015).

³⁷ Merv Bendle, 'The Suicide of the West', *Quadrant Online* (Web Article, 17 October 2016).

³⁸ Jennifer Oriel, 'Universities' in Kevin Donnelly (ed), *Cancel Culture and the Left's Long March* (Wilkinson Publishing, 2021).

³⁹ Matthew Arnold, *Culture & Anarchy* (Cambridge University Press, 1960) 6.

⁴⁰ Oriel (n 38) 51.

of-centre as opposed to being conservatively minded. In relation to American campuses the authors of a study published on the *Heterodox Academy* blog site investigating the political persuasions of academics, students and administrators concludes ‘The data for three campus constituencies unequivocally show that liberals⁴¹ are considerably overrepresented on university and college campuses’.⁴² As argued by Kimball (the author of *Tenured Radicals*) such has been the success of the Cultural-left’s long march that ‘senior professors (are) safely ensconced at Yale and Stanford, at Princeton and Harvard, Duke, the University of California, and other premier institutions, where they chair departments, sit on promotion and tenure committees, and busy themselves developing and implementing radical curricular changes for their own and other institutions’.⁴³

A British study titled ‘Lackademia Why Do Academics Lean Left?’ and undertaken by the *Adam Smith Institute* reaches a similar conclusion about the prevalence of left-of-centre ideology when it concludes ‘[i]ndividuals with left-wing and liberal views are overrepresented in British academia. Those with right-wing and conservative views are correspondingly underrepresented’.⁴⁴ Of interest is that one of the indicators employed to identify political allegiance used by the British study relates to the voting habits of academics. Drawing on a study by the sociologist AH Halsey the authors note that in the 2015 election

⁴¹ Within the American context, ‘liberals’ refer to those identifying with left-of-centre politics.

⁴² Sam Abrams and Amna Khalid, ‘Are Colleges and Universities Too Liberal? What the Research Says about the Political Composition of Campuses and Campus Climate’, *Heterodox: The Blog* (Blog Post, 21 October 2020).

⁴³ Roger Kimball, ‘Tenured Radicals: a postscript’ (1991) 9(5) *The New Criterion*.

⁴⁴ Noah Carl, ‘Lackademia Why Do Academics Lean Left?’, *The Adam Smith Institute* (Briefing Paper, 2 March 2017) 1, 16.

out of the academics surveyed 11 voted conservative, 46 Labour, 9 Liberal Democrat/Liberal Social Democratic Party, 22 voted Greens and 12 Other. The *Adam Smith Institute* paper also notes in relation to the 2015 national election while 50% of the public voted for right wing or conservative parties the figure for those academics was less than 12%.⁴⁵

V NEO-MARXIST INSPIRED CRITICAL THEORY AND CANCEL CULTURE – A CRITIQUE

The dangers and flaws inherent in neo-Marxist inspired political correctness and cancel culture are manifest. While there is no doubt Western civilisation is far from perfect and guilty of a range of sins including imperialism and slavery, the subjugation of women and other vulnerable groups including LGBTIQ+ people, and the worst excesses of capitalism especially during the industrial revolution, the reality is all civilisations are guilty of crimes against humanity. Often ignored by cultural-left activists, for example, is the Islamic slave trade centred on the Mediterranean between the 16th and 18th centuries and the way women were and still are oppressed in many tribal societies. The unique strength and benefit of Western civilisation is that over time it has been capable of rectifying inequalities and the sins of the past. As argued by Arthur M Schlesinger Jr, '[t]he crimes committed by the West have produced their own antidotes. They have produced great movements to end slavery, to raise the status of women, to abolish torture, to combat racism, to defend freedom of inquiry and expression, to advance personal liberty and human rights'.⁴⁶ It should

⁴⁵ Ibid 4.

⁴⁶ Arthur M Schlesinger Jr, *The Disuniting of America* (WW Norton, 1992) 127.

not surprise according to the *The Human Freedom Index* Western societies dominate the top 20 places measuring freedom in terms of: legal protection, security and safety, religion, freedom of association, expression and movement.⁴⁷

If civilisations are measured by scientific, technological and medical innovations and advances then it is clear the West also achieves a very high ranking. Inventions like the steam engine, railways, the mechanised printing press, the internal combustion engine, jet aircraft, and silicon chips and computers are all products of Western skill and ingenuity. Medical advances such as understanding how infections and diseases are spread, the importance of hygiene, antibiotics like penicillin, open heart surgery, and impregnating human embryos outside the womb demonstrate a superiority not matched by other civilisations. Central to the West's progress is the scientific method based on empiricism, rationality and reason that has allowed it to evolve from what Karl Popper describes as a 'tribal or closed society' to an 'open society'—a society aiming at 'humaneness and reasonableness, at equality and freedom' by setting free 'the critical powers of man'.⁴⁸ Epochal events like the Enlightenment that stress the importance of objectivity and truth clearly differentiate Western civilisation from less civilised ones where superstition, prejudice and witchcraft prevail. As argued by Larry Siedentop in *Inventing the Individual*,⁴⁹ Western civilisation is also unique given the vital importance of Judeo-Christianity in championing a form of liberalism based on the belief, as we are all made in the image of God, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is

⁴⁷ Cato Institute and Fraser Institute, *The Human Freedom Index* (Report, 18 August 2015).

⁴⁸ K Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Routledge, 2011) xxxv.

⁴⁹ Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Penguin Books, 2015).

neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.⁵⁰ Understandably, the *American Declaration of Independence* describes the 'unalienable rights' of life, liberty and the pursuits of happiness as 'endowed by their creator'. Also significant is that the Preamble to the *Australian Constitution* includes the words 'Humbly relying on the blessing of almighty God'.

When noting the rise of political correctness during the '80s and '90s the American nongendered feminist Camille Paglia argues what began as a justifiable campaign for increased liberty and freedom has morphed into an existential danger to free speech and academic freedom. Paglia writes the media and universities 'are currently patrolled by well-meaning but ruthless thought police, as dogmatic in their views as agents of the Spanish Inquisition. We are plunged once again into an ethical chaos where intolerance masquerades as tolerance and where individual liberty is crushed by the tyranny of the group'.⁵¹ Denial of academic freedom and restricting free and open debate represent one of the most dangerous aspects of the cultural-left's long march. Whether pressuring the historian Geoffrey Blainey to leave the University of Melbourne for questioning the rate of Asian immigration, no-platforming speakers like the feminist Germaine Greer for questioning transgenderism, or sacking academics like James Cook University's Peter Ridd for questioning the impact of man-made global warming on the Great Barrier Reef, academic freedom has been lost. Such obvious cases of intolerance are in addition to cultural-left academics dominating research grants, peer reviewed publications, and ongoing tenured positions.

⁵⁰ Galatians 3:28.

⁵¹ Camille Paglia, *Free Woman Free Men – Sex, Gender, Feminism* (Pantheon Books, 2017) ix.

If a liberal view of education embraces what TS Eliot describes as the pursuit of wisdom and truth based on rationality, reason and the belief it is possible to more closely approximate the truth of things, then theories like postmodernism and poststructuralism advocate the opposite. Activists argue knowledge is a social construct based on power relationships, that how we define ourselves and relate to the world is relative and subjective and that words can have no agreed meaning as they constitute an endless play of signifiers. Such is the restrictive and dogmatic nature of radical theory and political correctness that Roger Scruton compares today's universities with the dystopian world of George Orwell's 1984. Scruton writes such is the destructive nature of political correctness that it has led to:

The humourless and relentless political policing of language, so as to prevent heretical thoughts from arising, the violence done to traditional categories of thought and natural ways of describing things, the obliteration of memory and assiduous policing of the past – all these things, so disturbingly described in *Nineteen Eighty Four*, are now routinely to be observed on university campuses on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵²

The denial of academic freedom and the imposition of cultural-left group think and language control strikes at the very heart of what universities should be committed to and dedicated to uphold. Even more concerning is the fact that if rationality and reason are no longer viable, as they are deemed to be hegemonic constructs imposed by capitalist elites and Western imperialism, then the only alternative is epistemological suicide and violence. As argued by Dinesh D'Souza:

Although most au courant disciples think of themselves as

⁵² Roger Scruton, *Conservatism* (Profile Books, 2017) 122.

progressive activists, or at least on the progressive side of history, their philosophy releases relativist and nihilist forces that culminate in coercive ideologies. This is the paradox of the relativist authoritarian. Anarchy, whether social or intellectual, has a tendency to lead to tyranny, as Tocqueville observed long ago.⁵³

VI CONCLUSION – THE WAY AHEAD

While it is clear critical theory and its various off shoots including postmodernism and postcolonial theory have become the new orthodoxy, it is important to note there are some academics and institutions willing to join the battle of ideas and argue the case for a more balanced and impartial view of education and the role of universities. In America the *Heterodox Academy* formed in 2015 and with approximately 1,400 members is committed to promoting ‘open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in institutions of higher learning’.⁵⁴ In Australia the establishment of centres funded by the late Paul Ramsay⁵⁵ dedicated to the study of Western civilisation at the Australian Catholic University, the University of Queensland and Wollongong University also suggests not all academics are averse to a liberal education. While not universities, the Institute of Public Affairs and the Perth-based Mannkal Economic Education Foundation are also committed to promoting academic freedom and open debate within the Western tradition. In England the Adam Smith Institute serves a similar purpose by offering a critique of cultural-left ideology and political correctness.

⁵³ Dinesh D’Souza, *Illiberal Education* (Vintage Books, 1992) 190.

⁵⁴ The Heterodox Academy’s website is <https://heterodoxacademy.org/>.

⁵⁵ Details about the Ramsay bequest and the programs funded by the Ramsay Centre can be found at <https://www.ramsaycentre.org/>.

Such are the concerns about academic freedom and the impact of cultural-left group think that the Australian government initiated an inquiry chaired by the Hon Robert French to investigate the issue. As a result of the 2019 inquiry universities are expected to adopt a code to ensure a 'culture of free speech and academic freedom is strongly embedded in institutions across the Australian higher education sector'.⁵⁶ While not directly affecting what is taught, the code does present a safeguard against academics being punished for not conforming to the prevailing politically correct ethos. Also positive is an open letter published on the Harper's magazine website by some 153 authors and academics criticising what is described as 'an intolerance of opposing views, a vogue for public shaming and ostracism, and the tendency to dissolve complex policy issues in a blinding moral certainty.'⁵⁷

Across the Anglosphere the presence of leading conservative academics and public intellectuals including Douglas Murray and the late Roger Scruton in England, Canada's Jordan Peterson and in America Dinesh D'Souza along with Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay prove that not all academics have forsaken robust and balanced intellectual research and debate. In Australia the sinologist Pierre Ryckmans and more lately the University of Sydney's Salvatore Babones also are involved in the battle of ideas based on the need for diversity and contestation. The emerging digital technologies are also a positive sign proven by the popularity of *YouTube* videos by Jordan Peterson and Australia's ex-Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson. Both engage hundreds

⁵⁶ See details about the French inquiry at <https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-reviews-and-consultations/independent-review-adoption-model-code-freedom-speech-and-academic-freedom>.

⁵⁷ 'A Letter on Justice and Open Debate', *Harper's Magazine* (Web Page, 7 July 2020).

Wokesheivism: Critical Theories and the Tyrant Left

of thousands of viewers from around the globe enlightening them about contemporary issues including the need for academic freedom, intellectual honesty and the strengths and weaknesses of Western civilisation.