

## THE VALUE OF IDEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AMONG UNIVERSITY FACULTY

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*Abstract: Conservatives in the United States have grown increasingly critical of universities and their faculty, convinced that professors are ideologues from the political left. Universities, for their part, have increasingly adopted a mantra of diversity and inclusivity, but have shown little interest in diversifying the political and ideological profile of their faculties. This essay argues that the lack of political diversity among American university faculty hampers the ability of universities to fulfill their core mission of advancing and disseminating knowledge. The argument is advanced through a series of four questions: Is it true that university faculty are not ideologically diverse? Why might it be true? Does it matter? How might it be fixed.*

KEY WORDS: higher education, ideological diversity, academic freedom, campus free speech, intellectual freedom, professors, liberalism, conservatism

Modern universities do many things, but at their core they are truth-seeking institutions. Their central mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge. They do that in a wide variety of ways, from the production of scholarship to its distribution in conferences, academic journals, and university presses to teaching in the classroom. Researchers test the boundaries of human knowledge and seek to push those boundaries outward. Scholars consolidate, synthesize, interpret, archive, and circulate what we have learned. Universities pass on that knowledge to scholars, students, and the general public. Universities, at their best, are places where people are willing to hold up ideas to careful scrutiny and revise those ideas when errors are discovered, reject those ideas when they are discovered to be false, and build on those ideas when they are discovered to be true.

If universities are to perform that function, they need to be able to gather together a diverse range of scholars and students, united by their willingness to question orthodoxies and pursue the truth. Immanuel Kant thought the motto of enlightenment should be *sapere aude* because to move out of the state of ignorance and self-deception required the courage to seek out knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Surely courage is not sufficient, but Kant was on to something in thinking that the willingness to press forward in pursuit of the truth required a certain daring. It is easy to take things for granted, to fall into the habit of reaffirming what those around us already think. It takes, among other things, some degree of courage to be willing to break from the crowd, challenge received orthodoxies, and express doubts about the firmly held convictions of others.

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in *Kant: Political Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. H. S. Reiss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54.

It is surely easier to raise doubts about widely held orthodoxies if you already hold those doubts yourself. Those who have firm conviction in their existing beliefs and find that those beliefs are widespread among those around them have less reason to raise questions about those beliefs. Such beliefs seem not only comfortable but true. If one were inclined to be skeptical of some ideas, there are plenty of targets for skeptical inquiry before turning to ideas about which everyone already seems fairly confident.

Universities make it harder rather than easier to fulfill their core function of advancing knowledge if they nurture orthodoxies and exclude those who might be skeptical of those orthodoxies. Intellectual homogeneity too easily gives rise to intellectual complacency. Intellectual diversity can foster productive dissension. Universities should seek to draw within the ranks of their faculty scholars who will raise questions and express doubts—scholars who will, as the Apple computer ads once encouraged us to do, think different.

Universities should seek to develop an ideologically diverse faculty, and it is a problem if faculties are instead ideologically homogeneous. This essay will explore that claim through several questions. First, is it true that university faculty are not currently ideologically diverse? Second, why might it be true that universities tend toward homogeneity rather than diversity? Third, does it matter if universities are not ideologically diverse? Finally, what should we do about the ideological composition of university faculty? I should note that I restrict myself here to universities in the United States. Though the conceptual issues are universal, the empirical question of how diverse university faculty might be is a more particular one and I will not attempt to canvass the situation across the globe. In the United States at least, university faculty are falling short on this issue, and universities are worse off as a consequence.

### I. IS IT TRUE?

No point worrying over nothing. If universities are already ideologically diverse, or at least ideologically diverse enough, then there is no reason for concern and no particular reason to explore the question of how valuable ideological diversity might be. There are some who would claim that ideological diversity is not currently an issue on American campuses. Some of those who are unconcerned are unconcerned because they do not value ideological diversity. "Of course, there are no conservatives in the ranks of university faculty. Conservatives are not very bright, and therefore are not well-suited to be scholars." Some of those who are unconcerned are unconcerned because they think university faculty are already ideologically diverse. "There are already lots of conservatives on the university faculty, somewhere. Probably over on the other side of campus."

This latter claim is not very credible. Those denials ring hollow given the everyday experience on university campuses. Those denials ring hollow given that those who raise such claims point to no real evidence, or even compelling anecdote, to support them. Those denials ring hollow given that they must often hinge on rather dubious understandings of what would constitute ideological diversity. One wonders how often the denials are even made in good faith. Even so, it is worth considering the evidence.

The evidence on the political diversity of the American professoriate is imperfect, but it seems quite adequate to conclude that it is not very diverse and rapidly becoming less so. We now have a substantial amount of data gathered at different times, using different measures, across different institutions that sheds some light on the political composition of the faculty at universities in the United States, and it all points in a consistent direction.

There is more to be learned to be sure. The evidence that we have does not cover the range of institutions and the range of disciplines that we might like. There is some real slippage in how political and ideological orientations map on to one another. There are some narrow questions that we are not yet well positioned to answer about the ideological composition of university faculty, but we probably have adequate evidence to answer the big picture question of whether university faculty are particularly ideologically diverse. The answer is no.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, social scientists have been studying the political proclivities of university professors. As Dwight Eisenhower was coasting to a landslide victory in 1956, professors were overwhelmingly voting for Adlai Stevenson.<sup>2</sup> Early studies routinely found that professors were disproportionately likely to support left-wing third parties and major-party candidates, to favor the Democratic Party, and to adopt left-wing positions on specific issues, such as the Vietnam War.<sup>3</sup> Across the twentieth century, the voting behavior and partisan political preferences of the professoriate was to the left of that of other occupational groups and of other college educated Americans.<sup>4</sup> There was some interesting variation in the political orientation of academics found in the surveys of the 1960s. It was possible to find some Republican-leaning professors, if one focused on the teaching-oriented faculty at less prestigious institutions and if one focused on such fields as agricultural

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence C. Howard, "The Academic and the Ballot," *School and Society* 86 (1958): 416.

<sup>3</sup> Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Wagner Thielens, Jr., *The Academic Mind* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958); Lawrence C. Howard, "The Academic and the Ballot," *School and Society* 86 (1958): 415; Henry A. Turner, Charles G. McClintock, and Charles B. Spaulding, "The Political Party Affiliation of American Political Scientists," *Western Political Quarterly* 16 (1963): 650; Charles G. McClintock, Charles G. Spaulding, and Henry A. Turner, "Political Orientations of Academically Affiliated Psychologists," *American Psychologist* 20, no. 3 (1965): 211; David J. Armor, Joseph B. Giacinta, R. Gordon McIntosh, and Diana E. H. Rusell, "Professors' Attitudes toward the Vietnam War," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 31 (1967): 159.

<sup>4</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., "The Myth of the 'Conservative' Professor: A Reply to Michael Faia," *Sociology of Education* 47 (1974): 203.

sciences, mining, and engineering.<sup>5</sup> But the humanities and social sciences, not to mention law, education, and the natural sciences, leaned heavily to the left.<sup>6</sup> In one major study in the 1960s, only a tenth of surveyed social scientists characterized themselves as conservative, though a little over a third of business school faculty did so.<sup>7</sup>

Subsequent research has suggested that American academics have only become more uniformly left-leaning in the decades since the Vietnam era.<sup>8</sup> Bill Clinton could only muster a bare plurality of the vote of the general electorate, but he ran away with the vote of the professoriate. George W. Bush won a close race for reelection, but he had a terrible showing in votes cast by professors. The political orientation of professors can be measured in various ways, including by reported voting behavior, voter registration, campaign donations, ideological and partisan self-identification, and policy views. All these measures tend to tell a similar story, one in which conservatives and Republicans are relatively rare in academia. Although it would be difficult for the social sciences and humanities to become much more uniformly left-leaning than they already were as early as the 1960s, it appears that they have and that the faculty elsewhere in the university have tended to move to the left as well in recent decades. Engineering and business schools, where Republican-voting professors could once be found in significant numbers, now appear to tilt heavily to the political left, though still not to the same degree as the social sciences and humanities. Where lower-prestige, teaching-oriented institutions once housed a significant proportion of the conservatives who worked in academia, they now appear to be much more similar to other colleges and universities in the political orientation of their faculty (conservative professors are still a sizable minority, rather than a tiny minority, at non-Catholic religious institutions, however). The percentage of faculty claiming to be “radical” in their political views seems to have grown, and they occupy a particularly high percentage of the faculty teaching at liberal arts colleges. Professors, like everyone else, are more inclined to characterize themselves

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Eizen and Gary Maranell, “The Political Party Affiliation of College Professors,” *Social Forces* 47 (1968): 145; Seymour Martin Lipset and Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., “The Divided Professoriate,” *Change* 3 (1971): 54; Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., and Seymour Martin Lipset, “Politics of Academic Natural Scientists and Engineers,” *Science* 176 (1972): 1091.

<sup>6</sup> Keith W. Pritchard, Sing-Nan Fen, and Thomas H. Buxton, “The Political Leanings of College Teachers of Education in Eight Selected Universities and Colleges,” *Western Political Quarterly* 24 (1971): 549; Seymour Martin Lipset and Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., “The Politics of American Sociologists,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1972): 67; Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., and Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Politics of American Political Scientists,” *Political Science and Politics* 4 (1971): 135.

<sup>7</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., “And What Professors Think,” *Psychology Today* (November 1970): 50.

<sup>8</sup> Walter B. Roettger and Hugh Winebrenner, “The Voting Behavior of American Political Scientists: The 1980 Presidential Election,” *Western Political Quarterly* 36 (1983): 134; Richard F. Hamilton and Lowell L. Hargens, “The Politics of the Professors: Self-Identifications, 1969–1984,” *Social Forces* 71 (1993): 603.

as political independents and ideological moderates than they once were, but, like everyone else, such self-identification does not seem to translate into different voting behavior or substantive policy views.<sup>9</sup> Sociologists who see themselves as middle-of-the-road independents are, by all objective measures, left-leaning Democrats.<sup>10</sup>

Politically speaking, professors do not look like America. One study estimated that the ideological gap between professors and non-professors is substantially larger than the ideological gap between blacks and whites, men and women, the rich and the poor. Professors are perhaps the most liberal occupational group in the country.<sup>11</sup> That is not to say that professors are universally liberal, that they embrace liberal positions on all issues, or that they are all Marxists, but the distribution of political opinion reflected in the faculty lounge is far to the left of the distribution to be found anywhere else in the United States. William F. Buckley liked to joke that he would rather be governed by the first 2000 people in the Boston phonebook than by the 2000 people on the faculty of Harvard University.<sup>12</sup> The joke, in part, made a populist point, but it was also a reasonable assessment of the political landscape and of which group would produce a median voter closer to Buckley's own conservative ideal point. Paul Wellstone, the former senator for Minnesota, liked to say that he represented the "Democratic wing of the Democratic Party."<sup>13</sup> As a former political science professor from Carleton College, he could have said that he represented the American professoriate and had conveyed the same message.

<sup>9</sup> In the United States at least, partisanship and ideological commitment are often seen as bad and to be avoided, and thus many would prefer to characterize themselves as independent-minded and centrist, even when their actual behavior and commitments would align them with some distinct political or ideological camp.

<sup>10</sup> Neil Gross, *Why Are Professors Liberal and Why Do Conservatives Care?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Daniel B. Klein and Charlotta Stern, "Professors and Their Politics: The Policy Views of Social Scientists," *Critical Review* 17 (2005): 257; Christopher F. Cardiff and Daniel B. Klein, "Faculty Partisan Affiliations in All Disciplines: A Voter-Registration Study," *Critical Review* 17 (2005): 237; Stanley Rothman, S. Robert Lichter, and Neil Nevitte, "Politics and Professional Advancement Among College Faculty," *The Forum* 3 (2005); John F. Zipp and Rudy Fenwick, "Is the Academy a Liberal Hegemony?: The Political Orientations and Educational Values of Professors," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 70 (2006): 304; Stanley Rothman, April Kelly-Woessner, and Matthew Woessner, *The Still Divided Academy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011); Mitchell Lambert, Anthony J. Quain, and Daniel B. Klein, "Faculty Voter Registration in Economics, History, Journalism, Law, and Psychology," *Econ Journal Watch* 13 (2016): 422; Samuel J. Abrams, "Professors Moved Left Since the 1990s, Rest of the Country Did Not," *Heterodox Academy* (January 9, 2016); James Lindgren, "Measuring Diversity: Law Faculties in 1997 and 2012," *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 39 (2016): 89; John O. McGinnis, Matthew A. Schwartz, and Benjamin Tisdell, "The Patterns and Implications of Political Contributions by Elite Law School Faculty," *Georgetown Law Journal* 93 (2005): 1167; Adam Bonica, Adam S. Chilton, Kyle Rozema, and Maya Sen, "The Legal Academy's Ideological Uniformity," *Journal of Legal Studies* 47 (2018): 1.

<sup>11</sup> Neil Gross and Ethan Fosse, "Why Are Professors Liberal?" *Theory and Society* 41 (2012): 145.

<sup>12</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., *Let Us Talk of Many Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 425.

<sup>13</sup> "Paul Wellstone," *Nation* (October 31, 2002).

## II. WHY IS IT TRUE?

Getting an accurate description of the political proclivities of American professors has been difficult enough, but it is even more challenging to determine why academia leans so far to the left. The possible explanations are myriad, with some explanations being less troubling than others for how universities operate. It seems likely that there is no single explanation for why conservatives might not occupy much space in modern universities. It seems plausible that there are multiple forces pushing in the same direction and tending to reinforce one another.

One obvious and frequently cited possibility is that conservatives are just not capable of doing the kind of intellectual work that academics do. To be blunt, as one philosophy professor was in response to evidence that conservatives are underrepresented in academia: “Lefties are overrepresented in academia because on average, we’re just f-ing smarter.” Or as the chair of one philosophy department noted in response to evidence that there were few Republican professors at his own university, “If ... stupid people are generally conservative, then there are lots of conservatives we will never hire.” After all, conservatives cannot be hired by top-tier research universities because, according to a group of political scientists, conservatives do not believe in “one of the fundamental tenets undergirding such institutions: the scientific method.” They are, in the words of a Germanic language professor, congenitally incapable of a “willingness to be critical of yourself and to learn from experience,” traits that are posited to be essential to an academic career.<sup>14</sup> Universities must, as one legal theorist put it, reject “ignorance and superstition,” “hatred and deception,” and “truth-deniers,” and so they must reject conservatives.<sup>15</sup> Conservatism, one math professor explains, “is so shot through with anti-intellectuals that we should not be surprised that intellectuals generally want nothing to do with it.”<sup>16</sup> The dean of Yale College had to walk back his initial explanation for why conservative students felt uncomfortable on campus, “There’s no margin anymore for saying something stupid.”<sup>17</sup> The evidence to support this hypothesis is rather thin.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ernest O. Melby, “Proving the Critics’ Case,” *Inside Higher Ed* (August 26, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Leslie Green, “Why It is Hard to be a Campus Conservative,” *Semper Viridis* (September 18, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Jason Rosenhouse, “Why Are So Many College Professors Politically Liberal?” *ScienceBlogs* (December 29, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Rachel Triesman and David Yaffe-Bellany, “Election 2016: Conservative Views Considered Unwelcome at Yale,” *Yale Daily News* (October 27, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Noah Carl, “Verbal Intelligence is Correlated with Socially and Economically Liberal Beliefs,” *Intelligence* 44 (2014): 142; Markus Kemmelmeier, “Is There a Relationship Between Political Orientation and Cognitive Ability? A Test of Three Hypotheses in Two Studies,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 45 (2008): 767; Edward Dutton and Richard Lynn, “Intelligence and Religious and Political Differences Among Members of the U.S. Academic Elite,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 10 (2014): 1; Gerhard Meisenberg, “Verbal Ability as a Predictor of Political Preferences in the United States, 1974–2012,” *Intelligence* 50 (2015): 135;

A related but perhaps less snide possibility is that conservatives are less inclined to the kind of intellectual work that academics do.<sup>19</sup> The sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld thought the “academic mind” was intrinsically a liberal mind. Scholarly work required a “kind of imagination” that was not “consonant with the intellectual mood of the conservative,” who could not “entertain unorthodox ideas as to how a modern society can best function.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Seymour Martin Lipset thought academics were an example of “creative intellectuals,” who tended to take an adversarial attitude toward dominant culture and resisted authority.<sup>21</sup> Lipset thought this tension between professors and good social order was long-standing. When instructing his secretary of state to obstruct the efforts of a group of French scientists from visiting the United States, President John Adams observed, “We have too many French philosophers already, and I really begin to think, or rather to suspect, that learned academies, not under the immediate inspections and control of government, have disorganized the world, and are incompatible with social order.”<sup>22</sup> Or as Woodrow Wilson thought, there is a “perennial misunderstanding between the men who write and the men who act,” for the former were in love with abstractions and ideals and the latter were pragmatic and appreciated the value of compromise.<sup>23</sup>

Conservatives might also be self-selecting into other kinds of career tracks because they find academic work less rewarding, or perhaps simply less remunerative. A Berkeley linguist posited that liberals, “unlike conservatives ... believe in working for the public good and social justice, as well as knowledge and art for their own sake” and so are naturally drawn into an academic career.<sup>24</sup> There is certainly evidence that career sorting starts early. Students with more conservative political proclivities often choose more professionally minded fields of study. Business and engineering students are, on average, more politically conservative than students majoring in the social sciences and humanities. Moreover, undergraduates who begin to think about pursuing advanced academic study and a Ph.D. are more likely to be on the political left.<sup>25</sup>

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Noah Carl, “Can Intelligence Explain the Overrepresentation of Liberals and Leftists in American Academia?” *Intelligence* 53 (2015): 181.

<sup>19</sup> Lucian Gideon Conway, et al., “Are Conservatives Really More Simple-Minded than Liberals? The Domain Specificity of Complex Thinking,” *Political Psychology* 37 (2016): 777.

<sup>20</sup> Lazarsfeld and Thielens, *The Academic Mind*, 149, 162.

<sup>21</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Richard B. Dobson, “The Intellectual as Critic and Rebel: With Special Reference to the United States and the Soviet Union,” *Daedalus* 101 (1972): 137.

<sup>22</sup> John Adams, “To Thomas Pickering, September 16, 1798,” in *The Works of John Adams*, vol. 8, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1853), 596.

<sup>23</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “Leaders of Men,” in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 6, ed. Arthur S. Link (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 647.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart Taylor, Jr. and K. C. Johnson, *Until Proven Innocent* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2008), 399.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Woessner and April Kelly-Woessner, “Left Pipeline: Why Conservatives Don’t Get Doctorates,” in *The Politically Correct University*, ed. Robert Maranto, Richard E. Redding, and Frederick M. Hess (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2009); Gross, “Why Are Professors Liberal and Why Do Conservatives Care?” 104–140; Shari P. Hodgkinson and J. Michael Innes, “The

A less attractive version of the self-selection hypothesis is that conservative undergraduates perceive academia as a hostile environment and so do not even bother to consider it as a career option. Students who are politically liberal self-select into the humanities and the social sciences.<sup>26</sup> Conservative students who are most actively interested in social issues tend to avoid the social science majors that focus on those issues.<sup>27</sup> As one prominent study observed,

a young person invested politically would come to think of an academic career as being on the menu of occupations from which she or he might choose—or not—based on perceptions of the political tilt of academic work. Since academia is liberal not just in fact but also in people's stereotypes about it—no matter how limited their knowledge of the realities of academic life may be—young, academically talented leftists and progressives are apt to view an academic career as congruent with their self-concepts, whereas they might not feel that way about a corporate job. Conservatives should tend to feel the opposite.<sup>28</sup>

Undergraduate students, in fact, perceive the average college professor as not only on the political left but also “radical” in their views, and from their very arrival on a college campus liberal students are far more likely than conservative students to express an interest in an academic career.<sup>29</sup> Smart conservative undergraduates are likely to understand that an academic career is not for them, and they make other plans.

Conservatives might perceive academia to be a hostile and unwelcoming environment. Conservative graduate students might leave without pursuing an academic career, and conservative faculty might find other professional options. There is precious little data on conservatives who begin the academic career track and what might happen to them, and so there is no data to assess whether conservatives leave academia at an unusually high

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Attitudinal Influences of Career Orientation in 1st-Year University Students: Environmental Attitudes as a Function of Degree Choice,” *Journal of Environmental Education* 32 (2001): 37; Hastie Brianne, “Cold Hearts and Bleeding Hearts: Disciplinary Differences in University Students’ Sociopolitical Orientations,” *Journal of Social Psychology* 147 (2007): 211; Ethan Fosse, Jeremy Freese, and Neil Gross, “Political Liberalism and Graduate School Attendance: A Longitudinal Analysis,” in *Professors and Their Politics*, ed. Neil Gross and Solon Simmons (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Stephen R. Porter and Paul D. Umbach, “College Major Choice: An Analysis of Person-Environment Fit,” *Research in Higher Education* 47 (2006): 429; Marcus Elchardus and Bram Spruyt, “The Culture of Academic Disciplines and the Sociopolitical Attitudes of Students: A Test of Selection and Socialization Effects,” *Social Science Quarterly* 90 (2009): 446.

<sup>27</sup> Amy J. Binder and Kate Wood, *Becoming Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Gross, “Why Are Professors Liberal and Why Do Conservatives Care?” 113.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

rate or what might push them out. Conservatives appear to be occupying a shrinking share of the faculty ranks, but how and why exactly they are leaving academia is not clear. Despite the political reputation of professors, conservative undergraduates do not necessarily dislike their overall college experience and at least some conservative professors are reasonably satisfied with their choice of careers.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps those who choose to wade into those waters, mostly decide to stay.<sup>31</sup>

The most disturbing possibility is that conservatives are actively discriminated against by liberal faculty and excluded from the academic enterprise when conservatives seek to enter graduate school, seek an academic job, or win promotion. There is some evidence that this occurs, though it seems unlikely that this is the main driver of the politically lopsided composition of the American professoriate. There is indirect evidence of hiring and promotion bias in academia in that conservative scholars seem to be systematically underplaced relative to their scholarly achievement. In law schools, conservative members of the faculty are clustered in fields of research that are less explicitly political and are most underrepresented in fields such as constitutional law, where political views are both visible and relevant. Conservatives (and particularly religious conservatives) report both specific instances of bias and hostility in academia and a generalized fear of revealing that they are ideologically out-of-step with their colleagues; and even liberal academics perceive academia to be a hostile environment for conservatives.<sup>32</sup> In anonymous surveys, a disconcertingly large number of professors have expressed a willingness to actively discriminate against any identifiable conservatives in peer review, graduate admissions, and faculty hiring. One study found, for example, that a third of social psychologists admitted that they would be unwilling to hire a known conservative to the faculty, and nearly half thought that their colleagues would be unwilling to hire such a person.<sup>33</sup> Subsequent work suggests that those

<sup>30</sup> Woessner and Kelly-Woessner, "Left Pipeline"; Stanley Rothman, April Kelly-Woessner, and Matthew Woessner, *The Still Divided Academy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011); Jon A. Shields and Joshua M. Dunn Sr., *Passing on the Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). But see Gross, "Why Are Professors Liberal and Why Do Conservatives Care?" 346 n. 30.

<sup>31</sup> There is also some intriguing data suggesting that conservative academics who find themselves in disciplines that dramatically skew to the left will over time change their own political affiliation to better match that of their colleagues, though conservatives in less skewed disciplines do not. John Paul Wright, Ryan T. Motz, and Timothy S. Nixon, "Political Disparities in the Academy: It's More Than Self-Selection," *Academic Questions* 32 (2019): 402.

<sup>32</sup> George Yancey, *Compromising Scholarship* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011); Stanley S. Rothman, Robert Lichter, and Neil Nevitte, "Politics and Professional Advancement among College Faculty," *The Forum* 3 (2005); Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter, "The Vanishing Conservative—Is There a Glass Ceiling?" in *The Politically Correct University*, ed. Robert Maranto, Richard Redding, and Frederick Hess (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2009); James Cleith Phillips, "Political Diversity and the Legal Academy: Three Empirical Studies," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Yoel Inbar and Joris Lammers, "Political Diversity in Social and Personality Psychology," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7 (2012): 496.

findings are not limited to psychology, and that conservative scholars might have a similar willingness to discriminate against liberals.<sup>34</sup>

On the whole, there does not appear to be a robust pipeline of conservatives desperate to get into academia, which makes it all the more challenging to alter the current composition of the professoriate. If there were, it is not clear that they would be welcomed. Like many other aspects of American life, academia appears to be subject to partisan sorting, with liberals opting in and conservatives opting out. The sorting might begin rather early, as soon as students first arrive on a college campus, with conservative students avoiding those parts of the university that they find particularly inhospitable and making plans to leave the university environment as soon as possible. University faculty are likely to remain uniformly and overwhelmingly on the political left, as they have been for quite some time.

### III. DOES IT MATTER?

The ideological tilt of university faculty would be of merely academic interest if there were no serious consequences to the lack of political diversity. If farmers, surgeons, truck drivers, accountants, and soldiers tend to affiliate with the Republican Party, we might think that has interesting implications for politics and policymaking but not much of an implication for how farmers and surgeons do their jobs. It would be useful information for a political consultant to know, but not particularly valuable to the farmer or the surgeon. Perhaps academia works the same way, and the political proclivities of professors should only be of interest to the pundits and agitators.

There are certainly many who believe that even if there is limited political diversity in academia, it does not matter. The law professor Cass Sunstein recently published a brief essay decrying the ideological homogeneity of the professoriate.<sup>35</sup> I was struck that in the days after its publication my political science Twitter feed was filled with posts making essentially the same point: we do science in political science and, thus, the political identity of the scholar is completely irrelevant to anything that we do professionally. It is, of course, impossible to imagine that my colleagues would have tweeted anything of the sort if someone had written an opinion piece about the problem of too many male professors or too many white professors. In that context, no one could have sought shelter under the claim that the personal identity of the professor was professionally irrelevant. While there are additional societal considerations that give weight to the need for socio-demographic inclusion in the faculty ranks, it is widely accepted that such

<sup>34</sup> Nathan Honeycutt and Laura Freberg, "The Liberal and Conservative Experience across Academic Disciplines: An Extension of Inbar and Lammers," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 8 (2017): 115.

<sup>35</sup> Cass R. Sunstein, "The Problem with All Those Liberal Professors," *Bloomberg Opinion* (September 17, 2018).

factors have intellectual consequences for academia as well. It would be odd indeed if we committed ourselves to the view that the racial identity of professors mattered for their intellectual outlook, but that their political ideology did not.

But there are some important popular claims about why the political imbalance of academia might matter that should be set aside. Sunstein points to political science as one of the fields where a political imbalance among the professors might “make a difference,” though he does not explain why or how it might make a difference in political science and would not in chemistry or physics. If one imagines that political science mostly consists of chatting with students about current events and engaging in political punditry, then it is indeed obvious why an ideological imbalance in the political science department might matter. Sunstein presumably does not think that is what political scientists do, but there are plenty of people out in the world who do seem to have that impression. When proposing to gut National Science Foundation funding to the social sciences, the office of Republican Senator Tom Coburn released a statement declaring that “political science would be better left to pundits and voters,” and that CNN, Fox News, and “a seemingly endless number of political commentators on the Internet” serve the same function as the American National Election Studies of public opinion managed by the University of Michigan and Stanford University.<sup>36</sup> Political pundits often seem to imagine that political scientists are in the same business that they are, and can thus be reasonably countered or dismissed with a suitably strongly worded assertion of political preferences backed by “factlike recollections.”<sup>37</sup> That is, of course, when political scientists are not being accused of being “discredited elites,” arid obfuscators, and purveyors of “fundamentalist pseudoscience.”<sup>38</sup> This fantasy version of political science does not bear much relationship to the real thing. If the partisan imbalance in political sciences matters, it is not because political science departments are the bullpen for minor-league political punditry and they are not adequately stocked with the next Sebastian Gorka or Ben Shapiro.

There is a more general view of the social sciences and the humanities that has spawned an entire cottage industry of commentary on the political right, and that has fed a great deal of political distrust of academia. William F. Buckley came to prominence in the McCarthy era with a book criticizing the faculty of Yale University as being insufficiently committed to God and country.<sup>39</sup> Dinesh D’Souza did much the same with his first book on the

<sup>36</sup> David Glenn, “Senator Proposes an End to Federal Support for Political Science,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 7, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Ezra Klein, “Area Pundit Angry at Political Science for Proving Him Wrong,” *Vox* (September 17, 2014); Jonathan Chait, “Have Nerds Betrayed the Left?” *New York Magazine* (September 15, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Jeff Hauser, “The Do-Nothing Discipline,” *The Baffler* 38 (March 2018).

<sup>39</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., *God and Man at Yale* (Washington, DC: Regnery Press, 1951).

“politics of race and sex on campus.”<sup>40</sup> The trickle of conservative critiques of academia soon became a torrent, with books from figures ranging from Charlie Sykes to Roger Kimball to David Horowitz to Ben Shapiro to Scott Greer.<sup>41</sup> Right-wing campus watchdog groups ranging from the respectable to the disreputable, in alliance with media figures willing to amplify their message, churn out a constant stream of exposés of campus scandals, real or imagined.

The overwhelming theme of this outpouring of work is that universities are sites of aggressive left-wing indoctrination of students. It portrays universities as having sacrificed a serious engagement with matters of weighty intellectual concern in order to cater to political activists and pursue a political agenda of propagating dogma. If scholarship and classrooms have primarily become vehicles for conveying a partisan sermon, then it obviously matters what the distribution of political views on campus looks like. Unfortunately, some professors have leaned into this narrative. They understand their own role as one of advancing a mission that enhances social justice and offers a countervailing force against both the social ills of the United States and the power that conservatives wield in government, commerce and the media. Some fraction of professors do blur the line between their activism and their scholarly endeavors and do not necessarily understand that there is a significant line between them. Such professors provide fodder for a network of right-wing activists who spin those examples into a broader narrative about the nature of modern university life, and when faculty and student activists do not provide enough material to work with critics are not shy about hyping more dubious instances of normal academic activity into something sordid.

One of my recent favorites in this latter genre is the revelation of Erik Olin Wright’s eighty-page syllabus for a graduate sociology class in Marxist theory. For this, the former president of the American Sociological Association was designated as teaching “the most wasteful class” in the University of Wisconsin system and raked over the coals by numerous conservative news sites.<sup>42</sup> When Wright died a few months later, his passing earned a lengthy obituary in the *New York Times*, among other publications. On the one hand, Wright was a social activist who understood his teaching and research as contributing to the creation of a more just world, the kind of academic enterprise of which conservatives are skeptical. On the other hand, he was a serious scholar who had spent a career grappling with the most fundamental issues in the discipline of sociology and the Western

<sup>40</sup> Dinesh D’Souza, *Illiberal Education* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

<sup>41</sup> Charlie J. Sykes, *Profscam* (Washington, DC: Regnery Press, 1988); Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); David Horowitz, *Indoctrination U* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007); Ben Shapiro, *Brainwashed* (Nashville, TN: Thomas West, 2010); Scott Greer, *No Campus for White Men* (Washington, DC: WND Books, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> Eric Owens, “Marxist Wisconsin Professor Rakes in \$170,000 per year Teaching about Inequality and Oppression,” *The Daily Caller* (June 13, 2017).

intellectual tradition, the kind of academic enterprise conservatives say they want. The inability, or unwillingness, to distinguish between serious scholarship and polemical posturing undercuts the ability of conservative critics of academia to mount a credible case or paint an accurate portrait of what happens on college campuses. It is, however, useful in stoking the outrage machine. In the current climate, stories of supposed misbehavior by individual professors frequently become the basis for organized campaigns of harassment.<sup>43</sup>

There is no doubt that some professors behave in unprofessional ways and that some scholarly work is of dubious quality. It is fair enough to criticize such campus follies when they occur, and universities themselves could do a better job of setting boundaries. There is little reason to think, however, that such episodes are characteristic of university life. If we do not think that professors should use their captive audience in the classroom as an opportunity for delivering political polemics, then we should focus our attention on how best to minimize such abuses. There is no intrinsic reason, however, to think that such incidents are made more prevalent by dint of the political composition of the professorial ranks (though it might well mean that there will be many more instances of left-wing professors behaving badly than there will be of right-wing professors behaving badly given the composition of the pool of potential miscreants).

There is no necessary connection between universities stocked with liberals and universities dedicated to indoctrination. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that universities are stocked with liberals, and relatively little evidence that universities are dedicated to indoctrination. Those who have tried to systematically analyze the worst of the conservative fears about what happens in college classrooms have not found much empirical support for them.<sup>44</sup> Students do perceive their professors to be liberal, but they do not generally conclude that they are being graded unfairly or that their courses are being driven by an ideological agenda.<sup>45</sup> There are undoubtedly outliers, but the persistent confounding of the differences between indoctrination and propaganda, on the one hand, and serious efforts to educate and grapple with difficult subjects, on the other hand, gives little faith in the discernment and sincerity of the self-appointed campus watchdogs. The effort to generate watch lists of “anti-American”

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Anya Kamenetz, “Professors Are Targets in Online Culture Wars; Some Fight Back,” NPR (April 4, 2018).

<sup>44</sup> John K. Wilson, *The Myth of Political Correctness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> April Kelly-Woessner and Matthew Woessner, “My Professor Is a Partisan Hack: How Perception of a Professor’s Political Views Affect Student Course Evaluations,” *Political Science and Politics* 39 (2006): 495; Robert Maranto and Matthew Woessner, “Why Conservative Fears of Campus Indoctrination are Overblown,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 31, 2017); Mack D. Mariani and Gordon J. Hewitt, “Indoctrination U? Faculty Ideology and Changes in Student Political Orientation,” *Political Science and Politics* 41 (2008): 773; Markus Kemmelmeier, Cherry Danielson, and Jay Basten, “What’s in a Grade? Academic Success and Political Orientation,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 31 (2005): 1386.

professors has produced more evidence of disinformation and anti-intellectualism than academic misconduct.<sup>46</sup> If there is a problem with the professoriate leaning overwhelmingly to the left, indoctrination of students is not it.

The key question is whether there is any reason to think that lack of political diversity would have any negative effect on the intellectual and educational enterprise that is at the heart of the mission of a university. I think that there is. Indeed, there are several. We might worry in part that intellectual homogeneity, including ideological homogeneity, in the academy will hamper its truth-seeking function. In a homogeneous intellectual environment, scholars are less able to efficiently and robustly identify and correct intellectual errors.

The case should probably begin with the general principle that intellectual diversity is beneficial for the search for the truth, and then consider whether the specific case of ideological or political diversity has any similar value in the academic context. It is not the case that diversity of any sort is necessarily beneficial to the scholarly enterprise, and so we should not simply assume that political viewpoint diversity is of the type that might prove beneficial.

Broadly speaking, intellectual diversity is useful for the truth-seeking enterprise for the reasons that John Stuart Mill identified in his defense of freedom of thought and tolerance for dissent. Mill observed that the pursuit of the truth should not be understood as a solitary exercise. There may well be great individual thinkers, but our ability to seriously consider ideas is inevitably affected by our surroundings. Mill worried particularly about the dangers of conformism. He was concerned that it would be especially difficult to think seriously about new ideas if one were surrounded by people who thought much alike and by a culture that stifled new ideas. Surrounded by orthodoxy, it is difficult to be heterodox. Difficult not only because it requires courage, as Kant pointed out, but also because it is simply difficult to think carefully about the quality of ideas if everyone thinks alike.

Mill thought we would be at our intellectual best if we could surround ourselves with people with whom we disagreed. We should refrain from silencing the dissenter because it robs us of our ability to hear the dissenting opinion and think it through. "If the opinion is right, [the people] are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perceptions and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error."<sup>47</sup> People are

<sup>46</sup> Peter Dreier, "The Professor Watchlist Gets an F for Accuracy," *The American Prospect* (December 9, 2016); Katherine Knott, "What It's Like to Be Named to a Watch List of 'Anti-American' Professors," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 23, 2016); Colleen Flaherty, "Being Watched," *Inside Higher Ed* (November 22, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19.

“happily situated” if they can “sometimes hear their opinions disputed,” for only then are they likely to be challenged when they get something wrong and pushed to explain when they get something right.<sup>48</sup> We should have little confidence in what we think we know unless we know that our knowledge can stand up to skeptical inquiry.

If even the Newtonian philosophy were not permitted to be questioned, mankind could not feel as complete assurance of its truth as they now do. The beliefs which we have most warrant for, have no safeguard to rest on, but a standing invitation to the whole world to prove them unfounded. If the challenge is not accepted, or is accepted and the attempt fails, we are far enough from certainty still; but we have done the best that the existing state of human reason admits of; we have neglected nothing that could give the truth a chance of reaching us: if the lists are kept open, we may hope that if there be a better truth, it will be found when the human mind is capable of receiving it; and in the meantime we may rely on having attained such approach to truth, as is possible in our own day. This is the amount of certainty attainable by a fallible being, and this is the sole way of attaining it.<sup>49</sup>

It is only when we have the “mental freedom” to question received wisdom that we are able to make intellectual progress.<sup>50</sup> It is only when someone is willing to ask whether the emperor’s new clothes are any good that we are able to face the matter squarely and develop a reasoned response.

Mill’s approach to the pursuit of knowledge does not sit completely comfortably with the structure of the modern university. His focus is on all of civil society, with its debating societies and newspapers and governmental authorities. Mill’s emphasis is on complete openness and tolerance of even the lone dissenter who stood against “all mankind but one.”<sup>51</sup> There is certainly a rationale for adopting such an approach when thinking about government regulation of speech, and it can serve as a valuable admonition to a free society that wants to sustain a civic space that respects individual autonomy. It is probably not the optimal approach for thinking about how disciplinary knowledge is organized in a modern university setting.

Academic disciplines are organized to advance knowledge through specialization, distinctive approaches to scholarly investigation and truth testing, and the filtering out of flawed ideas. Mill recommended that

only through diversity of opinion is there, in the existing state of human intellect, a chance of fair play to all in the existing state of human intellect. When there are persons to be found, who form an exception

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

to the apparent unanimity of the world on any subject, even if the world is in the right, it is always probable that dissentients have something worth hearing to say for themselves, and that truth would lose something by their silence.<sup>52</sup>

In making that specific point, Mill had some particular kinds of disputes in mind—debates over democracy versus aristocracy, property versus equality, sociality versus individuality, and “all the other standing antagonisms of practical life.”<sup>53</sup> More expansively, he suggested that mathematics alone was a realm in which “there is nothing at all to be said on the wrong side of the question.” On every other subject “on which difference of opinion is possible,” then the best course of action is to let the competing arguments play themselves out.<sup>54</sup>

Universities do not work on quite that basis. Academic disciplines assume that some ideas do, in fact, belong in the dustbin of history and so should not demand scarce time and resources. It is not necessary for every biology department to include a cryptozoologist, every astronomy department to include a follower of the Ptolemaic system, every geology department to include an advocate of Symmes’ theory of concentric spheres, every anthropology department a phrenologist, every history department a Holocaust denier, every psychology department a Freudian, every economics department a Marxist, every political science department a monarchist. Indeed, we might even suggest that, say, no astronomy department should have a member of the faculty who denies the heliocentric model of the solar system (though we might not want to take such an unyielding view of, for example, the Marxist economist). If a student in introductory physics were to interrupt a lecture in order to ask the professor to explain why the class should not revolve around the existence of Aristotle’s five basic elements, it is not unreasonable for the professor to dismiss the notion as not worth taking up class time and move on. So where does that leave the Millian emphasis on the importance of the diversity of ideas and the need to hear from the lone dissenter, even if all of mankind lines up against him? Where is your heterodox academy now?

There is both a local and a global answer to that question. At a local level, choices have to be made about how to make the best use of scarce resources to advance the truth. A given university cannot have a representative of all possible specialties, theoretical perspectives, and belief systems on its faculty. Some entirely plausible and meritorious fields of study and approaches to knowledge will have to be left out. A department might well choose to specialize and bring together scholars who share much in common, and exclude their many critics on the belief that such a like-minded

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

and cohesive community might make greater progress in exploring their set of favored ideas in such an environment. Moreover, a faculty might judge a particular line of inquiry to be a dead-end and not worth further investment, even though such a decision will reduce the diversity of perspectives at the university and insulate mainstream views from some of their possible critics. The local scholarly community will seek to optimize, not maximize, diversity of opinion.

At the global level, the issue is a more difficult one. The scholarly community as a whole excludes the advocates of some ideas, and not merely out of a concern for husbanding scarce resources. Ideas are excluded because they are thought to be wrong, and reputable scholars do not bother to engage with them, and reputable scholarly outlets do not bother to give them a platform. Critically, however, scholarly disciplines privilege ways of knowing, not a collection of particular facts. As a consequence, they are never entirely closed off from even radical dissent. They must necessarily be permeable to new arguments, new evidence, new analysis that might seek to recuperate even long abandoned ideas. Disciplines become dogmatic to the extent that they are closed to such reassessments. They credential scholars on the basis of their mastery of what the discipline currently has to offer, but they hold open the possibility of revision, or even revolution. In that sense, they are always open to the Millian dissenter, the gadfly who can address a discipline on its own terms but who is worth hearing out. In time, such dissenters may or may not be successful in persuading others of the cogency of their views, and so they may or may not gain status in the field, attract followers, command space in the most respected scholarly outlets. Academic disciplines might well continue to pursue false leads and neglect to harken to those who have a better hold on the truth, but Mill recognized this possibility as well. As fallible beings, and fallible collections of beings, we may remain mired in error even if the truth was under our noses all along. But we will still have a chance to recognize it so long as “the lists are kept open,” and we accept that all that we think we know can only provisionally be held as true. Ideas that we think are bad get discarded into the dustbin of history, but a truth-seeking scholarly discipline must always entertain the possibility that those ideas might be dug back out, dusted off, and demonstrated to have some merit after all. The charlatans who peddle pseudoscience are dismissed as cranks precisely because they are unable or unwilling to grapple with received ideas using accepted ways of knowing. But even if the disciplinary walls are impermeable to those who reject not merely the disciplinary truths but the disciplinary path to truth, the gates of the university campus itself might still be open as reform-minded scholars carve out new disciplines with their own preferred ways of knowing.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> It is a different problem to consider whether the campus gates should remain open to those who operate entirely outside the context of disciplinary knowledge-seeking—that is, whether

If universities should sustain this diversity of opinion within the context of academic disciplines, does political diversity add any particular value? Political viewpoints are not the most immediate viewpoints of interest for most scholarly purposes. When Mill observes that we should want to hear a range of views on such “standing antagonisms of practical life” as the relative virtues of democracy and aristocracy, political perspectives are going to be immediately and unavoidably relevant. And if we artificially exclude some political points of view from the discussion, our collective deliberations will be the worst for it and we will be less able to make progress toward the truth of the matter. When he pointed out that “even the Newtonian philosophy” should be open to question, it is presumably of less concern that partisans of both aristocracy and democracy be adequately consulted. If we wished to know whether presidential or parliamentary systems of government are more prone to collapse into dictatorships, the particular perspectives of democrats and aristocrats might be orthogonal to our most enlightening form of inquiry.

At the very least, we should not expect diversity of political viewpoints to always be relevant to the intellectual and educational enterprise in a university. But that is not to say that they are never relevant. We might reasonably expect that they have the least relevance for how we pursue questions about the natural world and how it works. The chemistry, physics and biology departments might (largely) proceed about their business in the same way whether they include faculty of a diverse range of political viewpoints or not. Political perspectives might be increasingly relevant for those who study the social world and how it operates, however. And these perspectives seem unavoidably relevant to those fields of study that are most normative, that are most concerned with interpreting the human experience and understanding human culture, that most closely touch on Mill’s “standing antagonisms of practical life.”<sup>56</sup> Political viewpoint diversity might matter differently and to a different degree in the chemistry department, the political science department, and the law school, but it might matter nonetheless.

Political viewpoint diversity will sometimes matter to the scholarly endeavor itself. Diversity of thought feeds creative thinking and skeptical inquiry. Strands of inquiry and research questions may be ignored simply because they are not salient to those currently within the scholarly community. It is a now familiar point that women and underrepresented minorities have put research questions on the table, even in primarily empirical fields, that had otherwise been neglected because they were thought unimportant or uninteresting or obvious to an earlier generation of researchers. The value

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universities should robustly protect campus free speech as well as academic freedom. I will bracket that issue here, though I think universities should offer protection to both. Keith E. Whittington, *Speak Freely* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>56</sup> See also, Bas van der Vossen, “In Defense of the Ivory Tower: Why Philosophers Should Stay Out of Politics,” *Philosophical Psychology* 28 (2015): 1045.

of a fresh perspective is not necessarily a result of the way pursuing a question is particularly normative but because the research agenda itself is normatively laden. It might be entirely true that a conservative and a liberal in a particular field of study would construct analytical models, code data, and test hypotheses in the same way, but they might well ask different questions and so deploy the common tools of the trade in different ways.

Researchers might also be overly credulous of findings that fit neatly within their existing political perspective. Accepted truths will be tested more rigorously if they are met with skepticism rather than credulity. The quality of our pursuit of the truth will turn not only on the ability of our research community but also on its motivations. Flaws and absences are more easily overlooked or passed over if we assume that they do not really matter and the argument seems likely to be right. It is those who are most surprised and puzzled by a conclusion that are prompted to go looking for possible errors in the chain of reasoning that led to the conclusion. For many questions of interest to scholars, political viewpoints would not come into play in affecting how we react to the questions being pursued, the assumptions being made, and the conclusions being reached. But for some questions, political disagreement might well spark greater curiosity and tenacity and help drive research forward. As Mill notes, “the peculiar doctrines are more questioned, and have to be defended against open naysayers.”<sup>57</sup> As scholars, we should want to be exposed to those who will find our doctrines peculiar and will force us to think them through carefully and explain them thoroughly. Insularity of political viewpoints may lead us to understand less about the world and to understand it less well.<sup>58</sup>

Universities should not only be concerned with how well scholars operating within their walls can pursue the truth. They should also be concerned with how effectively they can disseminate the truth to the outside world and improve society’s overall understanding of the world. A politically lopsided professoriate is unlikely to be helpful in those endeavors. Even if political homogeneity does not dramatically hamper the truth-seeking function of universities (a dubious proposition for many areas of academic inquiry), it will inevitably hamper the truth-disseminating function of universities.

Universities are among those institutions that try to marshal and deploy expertise, but to the extent that institutions of expertise are perceived to be

<sup>57</sup> Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, 42.

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., Keith E. Stanovich and Maggie E. Toplak, “The Need for Intellectual Diversity in Psychological Science: Our Own Studies of Actively Open-Minded Thinking as a Case Study,” *Cognition* 187 (2019): 156; Jose L. Duarte, Jarret T. Crawford, Charlotta Stern, Jonathan Haidt, Lee Jussim, and Philip E. Tetlock, “Political Diversity Will Improve Social Psychological Science,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 38 (2015): 1; Lee Jussim, Jarret T. Crawford, Stephanie M. Anglin, and Sean T. Stevens, “Ideological Bias in Social Psychological Research,” in *Social Psychology and Politics*, ed. Joseph P. Forgas, Klaus Fiedler, and William D. Crano (New York: Psychology Press, 2015); Mark Horowitz, Anthony Haynor, and Kenneth Kickham, “Sociology’s Sacred Victims and the Politics of Knowledge: Moral Foundations Theory and Disciplinary Controversies,” *American Sociologist* 49 (2018): 459; Chris C. Martin, “How Ideology Has Hindered Sociological Insight,” *American Sociologist* 47 (2016): 115.

politicized, they are distrusted by the very nonexperts that they are seeking to inform. It is hard enough to convince political and societal leaders or the general public of truths that run against their own perceived interests. It is all the more difficult to do so when the messenger is perceived as partisan. Even if scholars were confident in the quality of their own work, the outside world, from politicians to students, may be much less confident if they recognize that scholars are all of a same political stripe and often see their own role as activists and not just as neutral scholars. If scholars want the ability to credibly convey bad news to those beyond campus, they need to demonstrate that they do not have their own ideological axes to grind.

At the same time, scholars should not want the public demand for intellectual work to be underserved by those who operate within the discipline of academic scholarship. If academia turns its back on the subjects and perspectives that members of the broader public crave, they should not be surprised if the gap is filled by popularizers, ideologues, and charlatans. Universities will be stronger and more useful if they can draw more intellectual activity into their orbit rather than effectively cutting much of it loose. Universities and scholars are competitors in the marketplace of ideas; they are not monopolists. Universities might think they have a good product to offer, a set of truth-seeking practices that will generate reliable knowledge that will ultimately benefit society. If they cannot convince others of the trustworthiness, efficacy, and relevance of those practices and institutions, however, society will turn elsewhere to satisfy its desire for knowledge. Society will ultimately suffer if those alternative sources of knowledge are not as good at generating the truth as universities. Universities need not only to be good at truth-seeking but also to be trusted to engage in good-faith truth-seeking. A politically homogeneous academy will struggle to win and retain that necessary trust.

Universities do not simply exist to conduct research. Teaching and mentoring of students is an integral part of the enterprise, and we are likely to do that less well if we truncate the range of political viewpoints represented in the academy. Good teachers should be able to present a range of views on even divisive topics with competence and fairness, but not every teacher is as good at that as we might prefer and even good teachers have blinders. Teachers are likely to be able to think about views close to their own more creatively, robustly, and sympathetically than those that are more distant. Moreover, as Mill recognized, we are likely to get the best and most ardently defended version of a given idea from those who sincerely believe it.<sup>59</sup> Students will better see the clash of orthodoxies play out and be better positioned to understand and assess them if their teachers are not all reading from the same book.

Universities should also worry that they are not serving their students as well as they could be if the faculty who are available to mentor those

<sup>59</sup> Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, 37.

students stand across a difficult to bridge divide. Some students will find themselves put off by an inability to connect with any members of the faculty on political issues. Others will withdraw from the potential guidance of adults or seek that guidance elsewhere. To the extent that the professors at a university seem to present an impenetrable liberal phalanx, some conservative students will be left to their own devices and will seek succor from YouTube personalities and political activists. For better or for worse, left-wing student activists often find plenty of support from members of the faculty who share their ideals and are happy to help guide them. Right-wing students are less likely to find such connections and are likely to view the faculty more antagonistically. College students do not always heed the advice of their elders, but the inclination of many conservative student groups to indulge their more adolescent instincts is only reinforced by having few role models on campus.

Finally, it would be a mistake to overlook the lost talent that an academy that is seen as closed to conservatives suffers. There is, of course, generally a surplus of students with advanced degrees who aspire to fill the professorial ranks. Perhaps there is no great harm if some promising students choose to do something else instead, and the faculty ranks are likely to be replenished even if conservative students largely turn away. But the creative work of academia is often advanced by skilled individuals with distinctive ideas and particular insights. There may well be plenty of talented scholars available if we only draw from a fraction of the potential talent pool, but we are likely to lose unique insights and innovative contributions simply as the result of leaving some of that potential untapped. If researchers and teachers were strictly interchangeable, then a shallow pool of talent is just as good as a deep well so long as the numbers are adequate. But researchers and teachers are not strictly interchangeable, and something is likely lost if conservatives as a group overwhelmingly select out of pursuing an academic career.

#### IV. WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

If university faculty lean heavily to the left, and if that lack of political diversity has consequences for how well universities fulfill their core mission of advancing and disseminating knowledge, what should be done about it? There are no straightforward answers, and at best any ameliorative measures should be incremental and modest.

One proposed solution that seems to be attracting more attention on the right is to simply give up on universities as they currently exist as beyond redemption. For some, this might mean subjecting universities to extensive outside control and reducing the governing influence of the left-leaning faculty and administrators. For others, it might mean tearing down or neglecting legacy institutions by starving them of funds. For still others, it might simply mean withdrawing from existing universities and creating

alternative institutions that are more friendly, or at least less hostile, to conservative viewpoints.

If universities are perceived to be a partisan force in American society and politics, it would not be surprising if their partisan opponents treated them as such. This has been a long-standing worry about an academy staffed predominately by faculty drawn from one end of the political spectrum. The anarchist philosopher Robert Paul Wolff expressed this concern in the 1960s in a way that is still resonant,

the politicization of the university invites ... the ever-present threat of pressure, censorship, and witch-hunting by conservative forces in society at large. The universities at present are sanctuaries for social critics who would find it very hard to gain a living elsewhere in society... . Where else are anarchists, socialists, and followers of other unpopular persuasions accorded titles, honors, and the absolute security of academic tenure? Let the university once declare that it is a political actor, and its faculty will be investigated, its charter revoked, and its tax-exempt status forthwith removed.<sup>60</sup>

The steady drumbeat of conservative criticisms of academia since the 1990s has had its own impact, with Republican public opinion turning sharply against American higher education as an institution. Since not all of those criticisms are made in good faith or are well done, it is not clear how responsive the political climate might be to the actual facts on the ground within universities. Nonetheless, it would be in the interest of universities to try to inoculate themselves against such criticisms to the extent that they can.

Even from the perspective of conservatives who are critical of universities and their faculty, it is not at all evident that such radical steps as defunding existing universities or politically intervening in academic affairs are sensible. Universities continue to provide benefits both to students and to society, despite the biases that conservatives perceive. While radical attacks on universities might help alleviate some particular complaints conservatives have about some aspects of the university, they would also damage other parts of the university that even conservatives recognize as making valuable contributions to the advancement of human knowledge.

Far more productive than attempting to tear existing institutions down is to build up new ones. Conservative investment in academia can, in ways that are consistent with academic freedom, enhance scholarly endeavors that conservatives find more attractive. The instinct to tear down academic programs runs its own risk of hampering freedom of thought and the disciplined pursuit of truth. Creating new opportunities to pursue scholarly agendas that are more salient to conservatives compensates for some of the

<sup>60</sup> Robert Paul Wolff, *The Ideal of the University* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 75.

blind spots in a left-leaning academy and adds to viewpoint diversity within the university, without undermining the benefits of critical engagement by scholars of diverging points of view. If conservatives are unhappy with the activities of a gender studies department or a civil rights legal clinic, the response that is consistent with preserving intellectual spaces within a truth-seeking institution is not to excise such programs but to supplement them. It is hardly consistent with a call for greater viewpoint diversity to pursue an agenda of simply uprooting scholars on the political left. Universities will have to be open to such initiatives, however. Universities have a strong need to insist on the autonomy of its scholars and the production of scholarship, but that does not mean that universities should shut their gates to those who are willing to support and encourage a more diverse body of scholars.<sup>61</sup> Securing scholarly quality and independence does not require closing the academy to those who seek to nurture fresh perspectives and research agendas.

Some have called for a kind of affirmative action for political viewpoint diversity to address imbalances in the current faculty ranks. In a strong form, such an initiative would be subject to many of the same objections that conservatives raise about other forms of affirmative action. Moreover, a rigid imposition of hiring quotas or the like would quickly run into the reality that there are few conservatives in the academic pipeline. The broader challenge here, as with other underrepresented groups in the academy, is attracting potential scholars to pursue this career path. Weak forms of affirmative action that focus on better outreach to conservative students with scholarly potential or efforts to overcome the real and perceived hostile environment for conservatives in academia might be effective in the long run and are at least consistent with the intellectual freedom and intellectual goals of universities.

Intellectual homogeneity might be stifling, but political homogeneity is often toxic. Universities must recognize and address those expressions of toxicity so as to make universities and academic careers a more attractive option for a wide range of students. Actually creating a more diverse environment is often the most helpful remedy to insular cultures, but in the meantime universities need to identify and ameliorate the obstacles that discourage more conservative students from thinking that universities can be welcoming and hospitable work environments. Demonstrating that there is space for thoughtful conservatives to exist and thrive in a university environment will encourage others to consider taking that path as well.

<sup>61</sup> The UnKoch My Campus movement, however, shows how challenging even such positive projects can be. A left-leaning academia is inclined to resist efforts to foster more conservative teaching and scholarship even when such initiatives do not impinge on scholarship or teaching of existing faculty. Universities have an obligation to take care that donors of all sorts do not interfere with the autonomy of scholars on campus, but they also have an obligation not to impose ideological litmus tests on the sources or purposes of funds made available to a campus.

University leaders who emphasize the importance and value of intellectual diversity on college campuses can send a helpful message not only to the members of their own campus community but also to the broader world about the nature of the university mission. Centers and programs on campus that provide a visible focus of intellectual activity for conservative students and scholars and for scholarly topics and themes of interest to the political right can break down stereotypes and encourage greater dialogue and communication. Conservatives might still not flock to academic careers in large numbers, but the academy should at least take steps to emphasize that they would not be unwelcome if they did.

There are those who are in denial about the reality and consequences of the political imbalance of the American professoriate. There are those who have given up on universities as institutions that have been captured by political activists and that have abandoned their historical mission of advancing knowledge. Both camps have been working with an unrealistic picture of the modern university, and both are tempted to act in ways that are inimical to the long-term health of universities as vibrant intellectual communities. The lack of ideological diversity within the university faculty is palpable, and it seems likely that universities are hampered by that absence in their ability to rigorously pursue the truth. The problem is long-standing, and that alone is reason to be somewhat pessimistic about the prospects for dramatic change. Nonetheless, modest steps to improve the situation seem realistic. It might not be easy to persuade skeptics that universities have not been thoroughly politicized, but universities should at least make an effort to make such perceptions inaccurate.

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