

Intellectual Stormtroopers Force Suspension of Scottish Academic for Not Criticizing David Hume

by Theodore Dalrymple



A senior academic at Edinburgh University, Neil Thin, Ph.D., who teaches social anthropology, has been suspended by the university from what are called “student-facing activities,” formerly known as teaching, because it is alleged by some of his students that he has voiced and broadcast over the social media opinions that are racist, sexist, and so on. (One is tempted to add, “Blah, blah, blah,” so familiar and formulaic have such accusations become).

Among his vicious utterances was his opposition to the renaming of a building in Edinburgh that was once named for David Hume, probably Scotland’s greatest philosopher, and one

of its greatest writers.

Hume, who was opposed to slavery, once wrote something *en passant* which students, more than a quarter of a millennium later, find offensive to their indubitably correct scale of values (the first indubitably correct scale of values in the whole of human history), that offensive something written *en passant* being more than enough to cancel out or vitiate all Hume's other achievements, including that of having awoken Immanuel Kant from his "dogmatic slumbers."

A groupuscule at the university called BlackED, which describes itself as "an anti-racist organisation founded to uplift and support black students at University," principally (it seems) by stoking their sense of grievance and downplaying the fact, and preventing the realisation, that they are attending an elite institution, posted the following lovely sentiment of its own: "What these tweets [those of Dr Thin] have shown us is that there is [sic] a good number of ignorant staff members that need anti-racist, sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic, and ableist training."

What this shows us (to adapt slightly the words of the post) is that there is a good number of ignorant students that attend an elite university and that need remedial basic education.

This is not their fault, of course, because they have been badly-served by the educational system in which they were raised; but their self-righteousness, which youth is always inclined to mistake for idealism, is a character fault, and a most unattractive one at that.

The Maoist implications of the post are perfectly clear. People like Dr Thin should be sent to re-education camp, there to be harangued and humiliated into political virtue—the only kind of virtue, of course, that there is.

Given the extreme cravenness and pusillanimity of the

authorities, who seem unable to muster even the little the courage necessary to oppose these adolescent and not very intelligent little Zhdanovs and Rosenbergs of anti-racism, such camps are a distinct possibility in the near future.

Already, training in "diversity" in many professions has been made compulsory, especially humiliating because the trainers are always less intelligent and educated than those they are called upon to train.

What is perhaps most significant about this post (which is so typical that it might now be called conventional) is the reversal of authority that it implies.

Students come to university not to learn but to teach. They arrive already knowing all that they need to know, and therefore a spirit of inquiry is not so much a sign of intelligence but of a heretical betrayal of moral certainties. Tolerance, as Herbert Marcuse taught us, is the highest form of intolerance.

This reversal of authority is encountered not just in universities but in modern everyday life. As a child, I ate what was placed before me. If I turned my nose up at it, I went hungry: or perhaps I should say, I would have gone hungry, since fortunately I was by nature a child of catholic tastes when it came to food.

If something was edible, I was prepared to eat it. But I see many mothers these days asking their young children solicitously what they would like to eat, to which the answer is always something unhealthy.

The child having become the authority over his own diet, it is he who decides, both as to content and quantity. This reversal of authority over diet conduces to obesity.

Concomitantly with the reversal of authority, there has occurred (not without human agency, of course) a

transvaluation of values. By the end of my career, young doctors and nurses were being taught to address their patients by their given names, or even by diminutives of their given names, as being more friendly and relaxed than Mr. or Mrs.: and this was irrespective of the age or background of the patients, some of whom were so old-fashioned that they did not call even their husbands or wives by their first name. (Incidentally, this was always a sign of a successful marriage, a mixture of love and respect.)

But in the prison next door to my hospital, it was decreed by the same kind of people who managed the hospital that prisoners should always be addressed as Mr., no matter how they behaved. In other words, a blameless, respectable old lady could be infantilised and humiliated by the unwanted and undignified familiarity that the use of her first name would have seemed to her, but a prisoner's dignity had to be maintained at all times.

Evil, be thou my good! A burglar is worthier of our respect than an old lady! (Just to make myself clear: I am completely opposed to the gratuitous humiliation of prisoners, whose situation is *ipso facto* humiliating enough without the sadistic piling on of further humiliation. What I am pointing to, rather, is the reversal of values implied by the recent changes in the ways of addressing prisoners and patients.)

Even if the university finds in the case of Thin that he has done nothing wrong and therefore reinstates him, BlackED and others such political entrepreneurs and intellectual stormtroopers will have scored a signal victory, for of course the whole episode has been extremely painful for Thin.

An example has been made of him that others will be anxious to avoid, irrespective of the outcome. Fear and timidity will therefore have increased and the possibility of open discussion decreased.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that we have raised up a generation of totalitarians, but the fault must be with us. We did not pay attention, and now we are paying the price.

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