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Academic Freedom, Intellectual Diversity, and the Place of Politics in Geography

Reecia Orzeck

Abstract: This paper examines the conservative critique of higher education in the USA. I argue, first, that the right's call for greater "intellectual diversity" in American higher education should be understood as an attack on the professional self-regulation and disciplinary autonomy that are central to academic freedom in this country. Second, I suggest that the right's politicization of politics in the academy brings to light the importance of our developing a vision of the university that accounts for rather than disavows the political nature of the work we do.

Keywords: academic freedom, intellectual diversity, higher education, pedagogy, disciplines, inter-disciplinarity

Introduction

The USA is now home to several conservative groups whose focus is higher education. Among them are the National Association of Scholars (NAS), founded in 1987; the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), founded in 1995; the David Horowitz Freedom Center (formerly the Center for the Study of Popular Culture), founded in 1988; and its offshoot, Students for Academic Freedom, founded in 2003. Whatever the differences between these organizations, a common tripartite argument can be distilled from their published reports and from the public statements of their representatives. First, the American academy, it is suggested, is occupied by a liberal-to-radical professoriate, many members of which are unscrupulous when it comes to keeping their political views out of the classroom. Evidence of this is furnished by data about faculty members' political affiliations, by syllabi that are said to exhibit ideological bias, and by student reports of bias and/or harassment by their teachers. Second, it is argued that, as it currently exists, the university cannot fulfill its social mission of properly shaping citizens and leaders. According to the authors of one ACTA (2006:36) report:

> Today's students are tomorrow's leaders. Or so we say. But too many of them are not receiving a sound education. Our democratic republic relies on an educated and thoughtful citizenry. But students do not learn to think for themselves when their professors tell them what to think. They are exploited by professors who claim to be teaching them but who are in reality promoting their own agendas. The partisan, politically narrow culture that defines so much of academe is depriving an entire generation of the kind of education it deserves. Today's college students are not being prepared for leadership—or even for full, engaged citizenship.

Finally, these organizations propose—with varying degrees of directness—greater "intellectual diversity" as the corrective that will allow universities to fulfill their currently neglected mandate.

While geographers have brought their analytical powers to bear on the recent and ongoing neoliberalization of North American and European universities (see, *inter alia*, Castree 2000, 2006a; Castree and Sparke 2000 and the special issue for which their paper serves as an introduction; Castree et al 2006; Demeritt 2000; Dowling 2008; Mitchell 1999; Paasi 2005), we have had little to say about conservative critiques of, and remedies for, higher education.[1] The purpose of this paper is to expand the discipline's understanding of the challenges facing universities by considering the threat that the right's critique of higher education and its call for intellectual diversity represent in the US context. While the call for intellectual diversity may seem a fringe phenomenon, understanding exactly how intellectual diversity threatens academic freedom is key to defending this freedom from attacks springing from other quarters as well. Moreover, attention to the right's discourse about higher education, in particular its politicization of the place of politics in the academy, can help us in our efforts to develop the "vision of what the function of the university should properly be" for which Noel Castree has recently called (2006a:1191).

As I hope to make clear below, the danger of intellectual diversity is not that it will lead to greater numbers of conservative scholars in the academy, but that it lays the ground for a redistribution of institutional power over academic matters away from scholars and teachers, and towards other groups both within and beyond the university. It does this, I argue, by challenging disciplinary autonomy—the right and ability of faculty members to self-regulate within their disciplines.[2] Because radical scholars have tended to be disdainful of disciplines and of the disciplinary structure of the academy more generally, I begin this paper by discussing both the role that the promise of professional self-regulation plays in the contract of academic freedom and the role that disciplines play in that self-regulation. I then engage in a close reading of the Academic Bill of Rights, the most important vehicle of the concept of intellectual diversity to date, as well as related writings by its author, David Horowitz. I argue that despite the Bill's innocuous appearance, it represents a threat to academic freedom insofar as it helps to make a case for the relocation of decision-making powers over substantive intellectual and pedagogical matters away from disciplines and the faculty persons therein. I conclude this section by noting that although the conservative groups spearheading the calls for intellectual diversity may seem marginal, they share both their interest in wresting power away from academics and at least one strategy for doing so with those interested in restructuring the university along more competitive neoliberal lines. In the final section of this paper, I step back from the particular challenge posed by the call for intellectual diversity and consider what lessons the conservative critique of higher education might contain for the discipline's development of a vision of the university that will help us to defend it from its critics. I argue that, while the neoliberal right's calls to deepen the instrumentalization of the university may tempt us to insist that the university is, and should continue to be, a site where knowledge is pursued for its own sake, the conservative right's politicization of politics in the academy makes

clear the importance of our developing a vision of the university that accounts for rather than disavows the political nature of the work we do.

Academic Freedom and the Disciplines

As noted above, geographers have been keen to chart the impact of neoliberalism on institutions of higher education. Among the questions that have concerned us are whether and how changing work conditions have affected radical geographers. Some scholars have suggested that radical scholars are faring no differently than their peers in the neoliberalizing university. We may smart more than others at the quickening pace of knowledge commodification, and at the particular corporations that are the beneficiaries of our labour (Bauder and Engel-Di Mauro 2008; Chatterton and Featherstone 2006; Kitchin 2007; Pickerill 2008; see also Chatterton and Maxey 2009 and the special issue of ACME for which that paper is an introduction), but our experience as workers in a leaner and increasingly assessment-oriented university is identical to that of our colleagues: we are expected to secure extramural funding for research, to do a lot of it, and to publish our results in what are deemed the highest caliber journals (Castree 2006a; D. Mitchell 2008b; Sidaway 2000). By contrast, other scholars have drawn attention to how heightened research and teaching expectations deal a blow to radical geography by decreasing the time that is available for extra-academic work, and by dampening the incentives for publishing in open-access or otherwise accessible outlets (203 Collective 2008; Askins 2008; Fuller and Askins 2007; K. Mitchell 2008; Pickerill 2008).

We have been slower to consider whether and how changing work conditions have resulted in changes to the knowledge that radical geographers are producing (though see Castree 2006a; Castree et al 2006; Paasi 2005). It is not hard to imagine that this has been the case, however. The rise of contingent employment in the academy means that many more academics are without the job security that allows them to choose research projects and design course syllabi freely. Precariously employed and pre-tenure scholars may find themselves engaging in self-censorship to avoid falling foul of the colleagues, chairs and administrators charged with renewing contracts and issuing promotions. The heightened pressure to secure extramural funding may similarly lead to the shifting of personal research goals so that they better align with the research interests of state and private funding agencies. And the growing importance of publishing in indexed "international" journals (Paasi 2005) may see scholars limiting themselves to research questions whose answers might find a home in such journals. For all that these examples represent the potential effects of new work conditions, however, they remind us that academic freedom has never been absolute. It is a liberal freedom: while we may be formally free to pursue the research we choose, the specters of having no funding for our research and no outlets for our findings, along with the threats of contract non-renewal, non-reappointment, and non-promotion, make academic freedom an essentially circumscribed freedom and make scholars more pliable than we might like to admit.

It should be obvious to anyone working in the academy that academic freedom is limited and our research agendas directed in another way as well: through peer review. As Louis Menand puts it, "[t]he doctoral student and the assistant

professor are free to write what they choose, but what they write had better accord with their senior colleagues' idea of what counts as acceptable scholarship in the field" (1996:9). With good reason, many scholars have critiqued the fields and disciplines within which "what counts as acceptable scholarship" is adjudicated. Far from representing thematic divisions found in the real world, disciplines represent intellectual niches that must be secured and defended in a competitive academic economy (Buck-Morss 2009; Harvey 1974, 1984; Schoenberger 2001), a condition to which our periodic debates about disciplinary relevance attest (Harvey 1974; Harman 2005; Heyman 2006; Kitchin and Sidaway 2006). Disciplines impede lateral knowledge sharing, they cannot accommodate sharp departures from intellectual precedents, and they are rendered coherent as much through exclusion as through inclusion, a fact that led to the creation of interdisciplinary fields like Women's Studies and African American Studies in the 1960s and 1970s.

But if disciplines are disabling, they are also—at least in the USA—enabling: they are among the conditions of possibility of our doing the work we do without direct interference by non-academics either within (administrators, trustees) or beyond (parents, politicians) the university. Attuned as we are to the ways in which the disciplinary structure of the academy impedes radical knowledge production, we may have forgotten the central role that disciplines—as containers within which academics self-regulate—play in the social contract that is academic freedom. In the balance of this section, I revisit this contract as it was originally set out by the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) 1915 "Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure" (hereafter, 1915 Declaration), still the most significant non-legal defense of academic freedom in the USA, along with the updated version of it that appeared in 1940 (which the Association of American Geographers endorsed in 1963). Three aspects of the 1915 Declaration merit our attention here: its insistence on the non-accountability of professors to their immediate employers; its discussion of the university's social function; and its promise of professional self-regulation.[3]

Though not without precedents on which to draw, the authors of the 1915 Declaration had to justify something unusual in this document: the non-accountability of professors to those charged with running the universities in which they were employed. At a time when this was not taken-for-granted, as it is today—at a time when university professors in the United States were retained and could be fired at the will of those who employed them[4]—the authors of the 1915 Declaration had to explain why faculty members did not stand in the same position vis à vis their managers as, say, workers in a sausage factory (Smith 2000). They did this by likening the professor–trustee relationship to that between federal judges and the executive who appoints them. I quote the relevant passage in full:

> The [members of university faculties] are the appointees, but not in any proper sense the employees, of the [university trustees]. For, once appointed, the scholar has professional functions to perform in which the appointing authorities have neither competency nor moral right to intervene. The responsibility of the university teacher is primarily to the public itself, and to the judgment of his own profession ... So far as the university teacher's independence of thought and utterance is concerned—though not in other regards—the relationship of professor to trustees may be compared to that between

> judges of the federal courts and the executive who appoints them. University teachers should be understood to be, with respect to the conclusions reached and expressed by them, no more subject to the control of the trustees, than are judges subject to the control of the president, with respect to their decisions; while of course, for the same reason, trustees are no more to be held responsible for, or to be presumed to agree with, the opinions or utterances of professors, than the president can be assumed to approve of all the legal reasonings of the courts (AAUP 1915:295).

Unlike production in a sausage factory, then, the integrity of the chief product of higher education depends, according to the authors of this document, on the (qualified) independence of its producers.

While the statement above rejects the professoriate's accountability to university trustees and administrators, it affirms the academy's responsibility to "the public itself", elsewhere "society", and "the community at large" (295 and 296, respectively). In fact, the authors of the 1915 Declaration argue that the academy cannot properly serve this public with non-academics dictating the terms of research and teaching. This is because "the peculiar and necessary service" (295) that scholars render the public is dependent upon the ability of the university to be a home for socially unfashionable ideas. As the authors of the 1915 Declaration write:

> [The university] should be an intellectual experiment station where new ideas may germinate and where their fruit, though still distasteful to the community as a whole, may be allowed to ripen until finally, perchance, it may become a part of the accepted intellectual food of the nation or of the world. Not less is it a distinctive duty of the university to be the conservator of all genuine elements of value in the past thought and life of mankind which are not in the fashion of the moment (297).[5]

By being such an "experiment station", the university can exercise what the authors refer to as a "conservative influence" on society, helping to "make public opinion more self-critical and more circumspect", "[checking] the more hasty and unconsidered impulses of popular feeling", and "[training] democracy to the habit of looking before and after" (297). But, the authors insist, universities are hindered in their execution of these functions when academic freedom is encroached upon. This is so because, while the public may heed the counsels of scholars "if it believes those counsels to be the disinterested expression of the scientific temper and of unbiased inquiry", it is less likely to heed them "if it has reason to believe that they are the expression of the interests, or the timidities, of the limited portion of the community which is in a position to endow institutions of learning, or is most likely to be represented upon their boards of trustees" (297–298).

In the years since 1915, academic freedom has become an increasingly accepted and entrenched aspect of US intellectual and public culture. It has been endorsed in various legal decisions—beginning with *Sweezy v New Hampshire*, in which the Supreme Court upheld the famous political-economist's refusal to divulge to the New Hampshire Attorney General the contents of a lecture delivered at the University of New Hampshire—and it has benefited as well from an ambiguous association with First Amendment rights.[6] More than one scholar of academic freedom, however, has lamented the blurring of the line between the rights of academic freedom and the rights associated with the First Amendment (Haskell 1996; Menand 1996;

Post 2006). Although this association has helped bring academic freedom into popular consciousness as something of fundamental importance, the cost has been an erosion of our understanding of academic freedom as a set of professional rather than individual rights. As Robert Post (2006:64) explains, if academic freedom were an individual right, it would protect individual faculty "from the constraints of institutional regulation, whether that regulation is imposed by the state, university presidents, or *faculty peers*" (my emphasis). "In point of fact", he goes on, "academic freedom in the United States does not function in this way":

> It may be asserted in particular cases by individual faculty, but it does not protect interests that are defined by reference to the perspectives and horizons of individual professors. Rights of academic freedom are instead designed to facilitate the professional self-regulation of the professoriat, so that academic freedom safeguards interests that are constituted by the perspective and horizon of the corporate body of the faculty. The function of academic freedom is not to liberate individual professors from all forms of institutional regulation, but to ensure that faculty within the universities are free to engage in the professionally competent forms of inquiry and teaching that are necessary for the realization of the social purposes of the university.

Far from being a right that allows professors to do what they please, academic freedom, as imagined by the authors of the 1915 Declaration, was a contract wherein it was promised that professors would regulate themselves in exchange for being free from outside interference. This is made clear in the conclusion of the Declaration, where the authors insist that what they are asserting is "not the absolute freedom of utterance of the *individual scholar*, but the absolute freedom of thought, of inquiry, of discussion and of teaching, of the *academic profession*" (300, my emphasis). Moreover, they suggest that the existence of the new professional association of university professors be taken as a pledge that "the profession" will both "guard those liberties without which it cannot rightly render its distinctive and indispensable service to society" and "seek to maintain such standards of professional character, and of scientific integrity and competency, as shall make it a fit instrument for that service" (300). The profession, in other words, will defend itself from outside efforts to direct and police its work, while policing that work itself.

The profession's self-regulation takes place in multiple spaces and at multiple scales. Certainly, the importance of the university as a site of professional self-regulation cannot be overstated. But while there are many groups in the university that participate in setting and policing the aforementioned standards of professionalism, integrity and competency (research development offices, promotion and tenure committees, curriculum committees, administrators, etc), most of them are dependent in their work on the prior judgments of a scholar's disciplinary peers: the departmental colleagues who assess the disciplinary appropriateness of a course, for example, or—more to the point—the scholarly peers through whose scrutiny research results must first pass if they are ever to become the publications that university provosts are so fond of counting. Because of the importance of disciplines to self-regulation, they should be seen—at least within the existing academic set-up—as part of the infrastructure of academic freedom. If we fail to see them in this way, we may fail to appreciate what is at stake in challenges

to disciplinary power coming, this time, not from below and within the university, as was the case several decades ago, but from above and beyond it.

Intellectual Diversity and Academic Self-regulation

For Stanley Fish, intellectual diversity is a "trojan horse" (2004) because it smuggles politics into an academy that should be free of it. I want to suggest in this section that intellectual diversity, specifically as it appears in the Academic Bill of Rights (hereafter, the Bill), is a trojan horse because it carries within it the potential to undermine a social institution—academic freedom—of which it appears respectful. I begin by drawing attention to some of the features that both contribute to the innocuous appearance of the Bill and create the conditions for an erosion of disciplinary autonomy.

First, while the Academic Bill of Rights follows the tripartite structure of the right-wing critique of the academy discussed above, the first "step" in this argument—the charge that the academy is biased *toward the left*—is formally absent. This absence bolsters the Bill's neutral appearance while also rendering it portable: sponsors of the Bill can furnish their own, local, examples of bias. Thus, for example, at the College of DuPage, where a version of the Academic Bill of Rights was passed in April 2009 (and rescinded a month later), the trustees responsible for the introduction of Bill of Rights language into the university's policy manual justified doing so in part by referring to incorrect conduct on the part of College of DuPage professors.[7]

A second feature contributing to the Academic Bill of Rights' innocuous appearance is the generous use of terms that we associate with progressive perspectives on the contemporary academy (as we see in the very term "intellectual diversity"). The Bill lists the following, for example, as the values that are "the cornerstones of American society": "pluralism, diversity, opportunity, critical intelligence, openness and fairness". Far from being mere window-dressings, however, these words—here and elsewhere—set up subsequent calls for the intellectual diversification of the university. The Bill's description of the university's mission, for example, mentions "the teaching and general development of students to help them become creative individuals and productive citizens of a *pluralistic* democracy. . ." (my emphasis). This reference to pluralism, which adorns an otherwise conventional description of the university's mission, shores up the later suggestions that hiring in the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts be conducted "with a view toward fostering a *plurality* of methodologies and perspectives" (article 1, my emphasis), and that the "[s]election of speakers, allocation of funds for speakers programs and other student activities . . . promote intellectual *pluralism*" (article 6, my emphasis).

Third, the Bill cultivates the erroneous impression that intellectual diversity is as old as, and is indeed bound up with, academic freedom. The Bill's second paragraph states that:

> Academic freedom and intellectual diversity are values indispensable to the American university. From its first formulation in the *General Report of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure* of the American Association of University Professors, the concept of academic freedom has been premised on the idea that human knowledge is a

> never-ending pursuit of the truth, that there is no humanly accessible truth that is not in principle open to challenge, and that no party or intellectual faction has a monopoly on wisdom. Therefore, academic freedom is most likely to thrive in an environment of intellectual diversity that protects and fosters independence of thought and speech.

Intellectual diversity is invoked in this paragraph in ways that intimate AAUP agreement if not authorship. In fact, intellectual diversity is not mentioned—in letter or in spirit—in either of the AAUP's major early reports on academic freedom (1915, 1940).

Fourth and fifth, while the Academic Bill of Rights claims to uphold academic freedom, it both misrepresents the basis of the AAUP's endorsement of academic freedom and re-interprets this freedom as an individual, not a professional freedom (exploiting the aforementioned tendency of Americans to think of academic freedom as a kind of First Amendment right). It misrepresents the basis of the AAUP's endorsement of academic freedom by suggesting that the concept of academic freedom was, "[f]rom its first formulation", "premised on the idea that human knowledge is a never-ending pursuit of the truth". This is incorrect. The authors of the 1915 document, in stressing the importance of academic freedom in the political and social sciences, note that "[n]o person of intelligence believes that all of our political problems have been solved, or that the final stage of social evolution has been reached" (296). Elsewhere, they write that:

> In natural science all that we have learned but serves to make us realize more deeply how much more remains to be discovered. In social science in its largest sense . . . we have learned only an adumbration of the laws which govern these vastly complex phenomena. Finally, in the spirit life, and in the interpretation of the general meaning and ends of human existence and its relation to the universe, we are still far from a comprehension of the final truths, and from a universal agreement among all sincere and earnest men (295).

Far from suggesting that human knowledge is a "never-ending pursuit of truth", the authors suggest that more-than-provisional conclusions—"final truths"—*can* be reached, despite having not yet been. Like the references to pluralism discussed above, the characterization of human knowledge as a never-ending pursuit in which "no party or intellectual faction has a monopoly on wisdom" prepares the reader for the normative statements that follow. For example, article 4 of the Bill states that "[c]urricula and reading lists in the humanities and social sciences should reflect the uncertainty and unsettled character of all human knowledge".

The Bill's interpretation of academic freedom as an individual rather than a professional freedom is not immediately apparent. It begins to surface when we contrast the Bill's protections for individual faculty members—"No faculty shall be hired or fired or denied promotion or tenure on the basis of his or her political or religious beliefs" (article 1); "No faculty member will be excluded from tenure, search and hiring committees on the basis of their political or religious beliefs" (article 2)—with its disregard for disciplinary jurisdiction over substantive teaching and research matters. Thus, for example, professors are instructed to expose students "to the spectrum of significant scholarly viewpoints on the subjects examined in their courses" (article 5); and disciplines are directed to "welcome a diversity of

approaches to unsettled questions" (article 4) and to hire faculty "with a view toward fostering a plurality of methodologies and perspectives" (article 1). These instructions may seem innocuous enough, but a close look at some of Horowitz's other writings suggests that they should be interpreted as attempts not only to diversify the academy, but to demote the place of disciplinary knowledge vis à vis other sources of knowledge, and to weaken disciplinary authority over pedagogical and research-related matters. Horowitz's response to the AAUP's 2007 report, "Freedom in the Classroom" is especially telling. We examine this short report, in which the role of disciplines in professional self-regulation is made plain, before turning to Horowitz's response.

The authors of "Freedom in the Classroom" identify and respond to the right's four principal critiques of the contemporary academy, two of which interest us here: the charge that "instructors 'indoctrinate' rather than educate" and the charge that instructors fail to present "conflicting views on contentious subjects, thereby depriving students of educationally essential 'diversity' or 'balance'".[8] Citing AAUP founder, John Dewey, the authors of the 2007 report insist that indoctrination can be said to have occurred when "'ideas or opinions which have not been tested' that is, which have not been accepted as true within a discipline" are promulgated as true. By contrast, the authors state that it is not indoctrination "for professors to expect students to comprehend ideas and apply knowledge that is accepted within a relevant discipline". As an example, the authors insist that it is not indoctrination for professors of biology to "require students to understand principles of evolution", for professors of logic to "insist that students accept the logical validity of the syllogism", or for professors of astronomy to "insist that students accept the proposition that the earth orbits around the sun".

Similarly, the authors of the report insist that a "coherent idea of balance" is one that is rooted in an understanding of "how particular ideas are embedded in specific disciplines". The insistence on "balance", understood outside of the context of disciplinary knowledge, by contrast, is "fatally ambiguous". According to the authors, a valid charge of imbalance would be one that argues that an instructor "fails to cover material that, under the pertinent standards of a discipline, is essential"—ie those "facts, theories, and models, particularly in the sciences, that are so intrinsically intertwined with the current state of a discipline that it would be unprofessional to slight or ignore them". As examples, they note that "[o]ne cannot now teach biology without reference to evolution; one cannot teach physical geology without reference to plate tectonics; one cannot teach particle physics without reference to quantum theory". But, there is, the authors note, "a large universe of facts, theories, and models that are arguably relevant to a subject of instruction but that need not be taught". Moreover, the idea that "an instructor should impartially engage all potentially relevant points of view" is "chimerical" since "[t]here is always a potentially infinite number of competing perspectives that can arguably be deemed relevant to an instructor's subject or perspective, whatever that subject or perspective might be".

Horowitz rejects the report's assertion that charges of indoctrination and balance can only be meaningfully assessed within the context of disciplinary knowledge. In his book, *One-Party Classroom*, he insists that professors stand guilty of indoctrination

if they teach as fact something that is accepted as such within their discipline but which is not accepted as such within "the spectrum of scholarly or intellectually responsible opinion" (Horowitz and Laksin 2009:281).[9] He thus criticizes Women's Studies, for example, for treating "the controversial claim that gender is 'socially constructed' as though it were an established fact" (285). As he puts it, "[t]o force students to accept as true a doctrine that is contested by the findings of modern biology, neuroscience, and evolutionary psychology is precisely what is meant by indoctrination" (285). Instead, he argues, faculty members should provide students with "materials that would allow them to draw their own conclusions about contested"—not just between scholars within the discipline—"positions" (281). Horowitz seems to be proposing that, rather than teach students the debates of the discipline in which they are trained, professors should offer students a survey of available positions on the issues that fall within their discipline's thematic jurisdiction, with the positions taken by scholars in the field just a few among the many presented.

Horowitz justifies this demotion of academic knowledge in part by implying that professors do not deserve the autonomy they have been granted. Not only do professors abuse their authority by *forcing* students to accept particular doctrines as true (2009:285), but according to Horowitz, it is also through coercion that particular ideas achieve dominance within disciplines. Horowitz interprets the AAUP's statement that "[i]t is not indoctrination for professors to expect students to comprehend ideas and apply knowledge that is accepted within a relevant discipline" as follows:

> The [2007 AAUP] report states that it is not necessary for liberal arts professors to observe the principles of acknowledging that a discourse is contested *if they can enforce a consensus among their departmental peers* (2009:282, emphasis in original).

Elsewhere Horowitz states that, according to the AAUP's 2007 report, "political control of a discipline is the sole basis for establishing 'truth'" (284). Believing this, one might be persuaded that faculty members in these disciplines should not be trusted with the last word on what takes place in the classroom or what belongs on the syllabus. And indeed, Horowitz saves some of his blame for the non-academics who have thus far respected faculty and disciplinary autonomy. While "thousands of university courses have become forums for professors to advance their own extremist agendas", Horowitz writes, the "culprits" are not only the professors "who use their classrooms to recruit and train political activists". "Just as guilty", Horowitz continues, "are the department chairs, school administrators, university presidents, and regents and trustees who allow the indoctrination to continue even though it is at odds with the educational mission" (288).

The danger of intellectual diversity, it should now be clear, is not that it will create more space in the social sciences and the humanities for conservative scholars. The danger is that it lays the ground for a redistribution of institutional power over substantive teaching and research questions away from faculty members in their disciplines. While faculty members must follow the rules set down by administrators and trustees about a great many things, and while the precise extent and nature of disciplinary autonomy differs across the range of institutions of higher education in

the USA, academic freedom has ensured that the external regulation of intellectual and pedagogical matters slows considerably as the borders of our disciplines—within which we self-regulate—are approached. As idle advice, intellectual diversity is not worrying, but as a protocol mandated by state legislatures or university boards of trustees, it could significantly upset the contract set out in the AAUP's 1915 Declaration, and rob us of a freedom that, while limited, is integral to the qualified independence that academics in the USA enjoy.

Before concluding this section, I want to point out that although the right-wing groups spearheading the call for intellectual diversity may seem marginal, if we consider wresting institutional power away from faculty persons to be among their goals, they are in fact in good company. Those who would see the university restructured so that its capacities are oriented toward remedying the country's lagging competitiveness also see the intellectual independence of teachers and researchers as an obstacle requiring removal. In a recent *New York Times* op-ed, for example, Mark Taylor (2009) presents his readers with six suggestions that will allow higher education in the USA to "thrive in the 21st century". His sixth recommendation is the imposition of mandatory retirement and the abolishment of tenure. But the first two suggestions, which call for the abolition of the disciplinary structure of the academy, should be regarded with no less concern. Taylor's first suggestion is that graduate and undergraduate university curricula be restructured: the existing "division-of-labor model of separate departments", he writes, "is obsolete and must be replaced with a curriculum structured like a web or complex adaptive network". "Responsible teaching and scholarship", he goes on, "must become cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural". Following from this, Taylor's second suggestion is that universities "[a]bolish permanent departments, even for undergraduate education, and create problem-focused programs"—he suggests "Mind, Body, Law, Information, Networks, Language, Space, Time, Media, Money, Life and Water"—that can be evaluated every seven years and either "abolished, continued or significantly changed".

While many of us would agree with Taylor's point that "[t]here can be no adequate understanding of the most important issues we face when disciplines are cloistered from one another and operate on their own premises", and while many of us appreciate the merits of interdisciplinary research centers and initiatives, we should see these recommendations as part of a broader strategy of weakening the intellectual independence of faculty persons. In her response to Taylor's article, Morgan Adamson (2010) notes that interdisciplinary endeavours, once so radical, have been seized upon by university administrators as tools for reconfiguring universities along more flexible and accountable lines. Interdisciplinary initiatives, she argues, allow universities to "bypass the traditional disciplines" and channel resources, including private money, into "research areas both controlled and determined by the central administration". Taylor states plainly that faculty self-regulation is a chief "obstacle to change",[10] and so it is no stretch to assume that his interest in "problem-focused programs" is also an interest in dissolving, along with "permanent departments", the powers contained therein.

Needless to say, neither the erosion of disciplinary autonomy that the Academic Bill of Rights portends nor the wholesale replacement of existing university

departments that Taylor recommends can be solutions to the problems associated with academic disciplines if we hope to avoid a situation in which our academic work is dictated and judged by those other than our peers. In the wrong hands, the erosion of disciplinary autonomy could mean the erosion the self-regulation through which we purchase our intellectual and pedagogical independence. This does not mean we must defend disciplines and disciplinarity at all costs; it means we have to be watchful of the potential bedfellows whose disdain for disciplines is borne of a desire, not to radicalize the university, but to neutralize its progressive potential and deepen its instrumentalization.

The Place of Politics in Geography

It is in the context of the neoliberal right's assault on higher education on both sides of the Atlantic that Noel Castree has called on geographers to develop "a vision of what the function of universities should properly be" (2006a:1191; see also D. Mitchell 2008b). As he notes, "few of us possess a thought-through conception of what universities should actually do or what they stand for, *despite* spending our working lives in these institutions" (1191, emphasis in original). A "*positive thesis* about the university's function" has the potential to "galvanise and motivate those of us who are nervous about the drift of Western higher education" (1190, emphasis in original). Beyond that, it can also ensure that we are prepared for our critics—able not only to defend ourselves against specific accusations, but to critique and provide an alternative to the vision of the university out of which those accusations spring. Taking Castree's call seriously, in this part of the paper I want to consider how the conservative critique of higher education can help us in fashioning our vision of what the university should be. I argue that, while the neoliberal calls to further the instrumentalization of the university may tempt us to defend our academic independence by characterizing the university as a space where knowledge is pursued for its own sake, the conservative critique reveals the unacceptable cost of succumbing to that temptation, and clarifies the importance of our developing a vision of the academy that accounts for and affirms the political nature of the work we do.

For Taylor and many others, the university must become more directly accountable to prioritized public needs. This is a difficult argument to counter. Recall that the authors of the 1915 Declaration did so not by arguing that the university had no responsibility to the public, but by insisting that external intervention in the work of academic professionals would deprive the public of what only a university of free scholars could provide: knowledge *not* in lock-step with public opinion. For the public to be guaranteed this gift, professional scholars would have to be, "in the formation and promulgation of their opinions", subject to no motive "other than their own scientific conscience and a desire for the respect of their fellow experts" (294). The counsels of these scholars would have to be understood to be "the disinterested expression of the scientific temper and of unbiased inquiry" (297–298).

Castree (2006a) makes a similar case in his discussion of the social function of the university. Like the authors of the 1915 Declaration, Castree suggests that it is

the university's independence that allows it to be a thing of value to the public. Speaking specifically of "geographical knowledges" (1191), he writes that these:

> can offer fresh and often highly critical perspectives on what passes for common sense in the wider world. For instance, though feminism and antiracism hardly originated in universities, since the 1960s these institutions have nurtured and propelled forward both bodies of thought and practice despite a backlash against them in certain sections of Western society.

To protect the university's ability to brush against the social grain in this way, we must, Castree writes, avoid "a situation where the grounds of academic freedom are undermined, that is: a situation in which certain actual or potential lines of intellectual inquiry cannot be pursued because of the real or imagined 'needs' of constituencies outside the university" (1191). As part of an effort to protect the university, Castree suggests that we resurrect the idea of the university as an "'institution resolutely devoted to the pursuit of inquiry *as such*'" (2006a:1190, emphasis in original, quoting Fuller 2000:113). While acknowledging that this idea has often been "honoured in the breach" as corporations and the state channel research funding towards those working on particular problems, Castree is swayed by the fact that this idea posits the university "as a republic of knowledge where justified technical, cognitive, moral, and aesthetic claims about the world are, in principle, *tolerated regardless of their content*" (1190, emphasis in original). "In such an institution", he writes, "a formal separation between the provenance and the uses of knowledge" guarantees that "knowledge is not beholden to special interests but is genuinely public" (1190–1191); potentially serving "*many* interests simultaneously without being subservient *to any one of them*" (1191, emphasis in original).

There is much that is appealing in this vision of the academy: it affirms our professional usefulness and binds this usefulness to our intellectual independence, bolstering the case for academic freedom. It also popularizes a more modest, and more realistic, view of knowledge production than that associated with more instrumentalist approaches to the academy: we do not always know when, how, or for whom our research will be relevant (see Staeheli and Mitchell 2005). We protect academic freedom for the same reason we conserve the rainforest: because we don't yet know which of the thousand flowers blooming we are going to need. Rather than dictate to academics what problems we should investigate, and what solutions we should propose, interested parties should leave to academics the business of research and teaching, confident of eventual benefits to society.

Appealing though this vision of the academy is, it should not be accepted as is by radical geographers. This is so because, at least as it is formulated above, the outcome of social benefits is tied to the input of "unbiased inquiry" (AAUP 1915:298) or "inquiry *as such*" (Castree 2006a:1190, quoting Fuller 2000:113, emphasis in original). These are not identical formulations, of course: whereas the former explicitly disavows the political nature of academic work,[11] the latter leaves the question of politics aside. But radical geographers should not seek to defend the qualified intellectual independence that we enjoy by avoiding the question of politics in the academy any more than we should seek to defend this independence by arguing that our work is apolitical. There are at least four reasons for this.

First, whether it is argued outright or just implied, the suggestion that we are guided in our work by nothing other than our "own scientific conscience" and the desire to win the approval of our similarly science-minded peers (AAUP 1915:294) stands at odds with the aims and claims of radical geography. Irrespective of whether we see ourselves as those who "can have revolution now" or those who "have to wait" (Gibson-Graham 1996), radical geographers are perfectly open about our desire to produce knowledge that will benefit particular groups, and that will hasten progressive social change. To the extent that we debate these goals at all, we debate how best to achieve them (see, *inter alia*, 203 Collective 2008; Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010; Blomley 1994; Chatterton 2006; Chatterton and Maxey 2009 and the special issue for which this serves as an introduction; Fuller and Kitchin 2004; Heyman 2007; Heynen 2006; D. Mitchell 2008a; Tickell 1995). We can hardly claim to be apolitical before the public while being so forthcoming about our politics amongst ourselves.

Second, disclaiming the political nature of our work may well deepen the isolation of scholars who do not have this option. It should come as no surprise that, while Horowitz criticizes scholars in many disciplines, when he identifies whole fields as "overtly political" or as having a "leftwing agenda" it is not Philosophy to which he points but Women's Studies, African-American Studies, Queer Studies, Labor Studies and Peace Studies (Horowitz 2007a:63; 2007b:77). As scholars working in a "traditional" discipline, radical geographers are often below the right's radar (Wright 2008). We can accept the invisibility afforded us by the popular assumption that geography is not political or we can admit our politics and potentially lessen the vulnerability of radical colleagues in other disciplines.

Third, we know what the right is talking about when it claims that the academy houses a left-leaning professoriate, even if the studies saying so are flawed. Our *best* response to this charge cannot be to insist that bias in hiring is rare (Fish 2008:144), and to critique the right's research methods and analyses (Bérubé 2006; Fienberg 2002; Lee 2006; Plissner 2002; Zipp and Fenwick 2006). Important though it is to say these things, to the extent that we deny or skirt rather than explain what the public is being led to see when it looks at the social sciences and the humanities, we cede the opportunity to explain the academy's "bias" to the right.

Finally, to the extent that we modify our vision of the university and our account of our work within it so that these are defensible within the existing discourse about higher education, we cast as the problem in need of a solution the radicalness of our vision rather than the conservativeness of the existing discourse. Worse than how this strategy may mangle our vision is how untouched it leaves the discourse. By contrast, constructing and defending a vision of the university that can accommodate political scholarship offers us the opportunity to popularize a radical perspective on the goals and methods of knowledge production and of education. While geographers challenge conventional understandings of these things in our capacity as teachers and in participatory work with research subjects and community members (on teaching, see Heyman 2004, 2010; on research, see, *inter alia*, Cope 2008; Fuller and Askins 2010; Heyman 2007, 2010; Kesby 2000, 2007; Pain 2004), the conflict over the place of politics in higher education may allow us to do so with the wider public, expanding the mandate of "public geography" so that it includes not

only the dissemination of our analyses of current events (Castree 2006b; Fuller 2008; Murphy 2006; Murphy et al 2005; Ward 2006), but sharing of the epistemologies and ontologies out of which those analyses emerge.

Conclusion

My interest in this paper has been to broaden the discipline's understanding of the threats facing universities today by considering the challenge posed by the conservative right in the USA. I have argued, first, that the right's call for intellectual diversity threatens academic freedom by threatening disciplinary authority over teaching and research. The path towards the erosion of academic freedom that leads through the disciplines merits our attention both because it is a strategy that has attracted the attention of more than one group of critics of higher education, and because, radical scholars having little affection for disciplines, it is a path whose entrance is spectacularly unguarded. Second, I have tried to think through how the conservative right's critique of higher education might inform how we think and talk about the university and our work within it. As a discipline, geographers are very aware of the battle for the university that is taking place on the neoliberal front. An understanding of the challenge that is emerging on the conservative front can ensure that we do not unwittingly employ strategies in fighting one enemy that render us more vulnerable to another.

I have taken the importance of academic freedom for granted in this paper. It is possible, however, that a radical vision of the university ought not to include academic freedom as we have known it. Perhaps this freedom is not worth the limitations that come with professional self-regulation, that come with disciplines. Perhaps the crisis of the university should be met, not with efforts to maintain professional privileges, but with a willingness to risk, in order to bring about something new and better, the privileges that bind us to a compromised status quo. The Edu-factory collective, a group of scholars, students, workers and activists who have been at the forefront of envisioning a radical reclamation of the university, espouse such a forward-looking posture. Seeing their project as on the frontier between "the rubble of the past and exodus", "the crisis of the university and the organization of the common" (10), the collective is decidedly un-nostalgic about the past:

> The state university is in ruins, the mass university is in ruins, and the university as a privileged place of national culture ... is in ruins. We're not suffering from nostalgia. Quite the contrary, we vindicate the university's destruction (2009:1).

Crisis, they write, "also offers great possibility" (14), including the possibility of creating a global autonomous university devoted to self-education and living knowledge. This process, however, requires both "impeding the conservation of the existent" and "the force of transformation" (14).

I remain unconvinced that, in the present context, we can afford not to fight for the preservation of old gains, but it is clear that strategy, like the visions for whose realization we are strategizing, should be considered up for debate. I want to conclude by suggesting one strategy that seems to me equally necessary

for defending old gains as it is for ensuring that a truly radical reorganization of knowledge production is a project that is intelligible and appealing to those outside the academy as well as those within it: transforming the discourse within which public discussions of scholarship and education take place. In the spirit of Castree's call for geographers to "undertake the endless, mundane work of speaking against the drip-drip of outside initiatives that erode academic freedom" (2006a:1192), and in agreement with his assertion—following Said (2002)—that, in the work of public intellectuals, "[l]ots of small contributions matter as much as a few big ones" (2006b:408), I want to conclude by suggesting three interventions that geographers might make when we find ourselves defending or representing academic work before the public. These interventions will not strike any *Antipode* readers as novel: they are all well worn critiques of bourgeois ideology. The persistence of the bourgeois assumptions they are meant to counter attests to their continued relevance.

First, geographers must challenge the notion that academic labour consists of truth discovery rather than knowledge production. The professional scholar has been described as a truth-seeker by everyone from John Dewey (1976 [1902]), to Max Weber (1946 [1919]), to the AAUP in both 1915 and 1940, to David Horowitz and Stanley Fish (2008) today. Insofar as this characterization implies a pre-political purity to knowledge that the "political" among us taint, it reproduces the impression that apolitical scholarship exists. Of course, academics must be truthful when we go about our work but the *discovery* of truth is not our central goal. As E.H. Carr put it half a century ago, praising a historian for his accuracy was like "praising an architect for using well-seasoned timber or properly mixed concrete in his building". While accuracy—or honesty—is a "necessary condition" of the historian's work, it is not "his essential function" (1964 [1961]:10–11). The social scientist's task, like that of the historian, is something other than the simple excavation of facts. If we are to produce knowledge, we must select and arrange facts—never capriciously or dishonestly, it scarcely merits adding—so that they shed light on a matter of interest or concern to ourselves, our professional peers, and often, our research subjects. How certain questions become worthy of academic inquiry, however, is not a question we can answer without a more capacious understanding of "politics" than the one that seems to be publically available.

A second intervention, then, is for geographers to challenge the narrow understanding of "politics" with which so much of the discourse about higher education is imbued. For commentators like Stanley Fish (2008), keeping politics out of the classroom is a simple matter of professional scruples, of refraining from "advocating", "urging", "recommending" or "promoting" partisan "views" or "agendas" in the classroom.[12] This voluntarist notion of politics ignores the extent to which academic research is, in its entirety, an unavoidably political endeavour—the extent to which what topics we investigate, what questions we ask, and what count as valid answers are all shaped by the concerns and biases of the time and place in which we work; by the prevailing conditions of knowledge production in that time and place; by the state of our disciplines; and by our subject positions. As James Blaut noted over 30 years ago, referring to the difference between mainstream and radical geography, "the distinction is not between a mainstream tradition which

is scientific and a dissenting tradition which is political, or ideological" but between "two traditions which conform to different interests but are equally scientific and equally ideological" (1979:159). It is not, then, merely individual rogue scholars who are political, but also the "literature of the field" that Fish (2008:19) insists we must master and disseminate as part of doing our job properly, ie *apolitically*.

Finally, and most ambitiously, radical geographers must challenge the notion that it is the "political" among us who work in the particular interest while "non-political" academics work in the general interest. As David Noble (1977; see also Lewontin 1997) demonstrated several decades ago, there is nothing inevitable or natural about corporate scientists and engineers receiving their training in publically funded universities. The public takes this for granted today, in the same way that we can assume it takes for granted the fact that the scientific and technological research conducted in universities is research conducted in the general interest. But radical geographers see things otherwise. Insofar as the fruits of knowledge production—technical, scientific, social scientific, or humanist—serve to improve the geopolitical or economic place of particular groups within an uneven capitalist world system, they are the result of work done in the particular, not the general interest. Even when the national "public" benefits from such knowledge, it does not benefit evenly, and this public's benefit does not always leave other national publics better off. While radical geographers try to produce knowledge that we hope will be helpful to particular (often marginalized) groups, the ultimate goal for many of us—both those of us who produce research oriented toward the needs of particular groups and those of us engaged in more apparently general research—is the transformation of the world on *everyone*'s behalf: from a place where knowledge is an accumulation strategy for the few into one where both the means and fruits of knowledge production are, finally, truly public.

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Endnotes

[1] For a helpful discussion of the difference between neoliberals and neoconservatives, see Glassman 2005. In this paper I use the term "conservative" rather than neoconservative in order to capture the full range of groups and actors who critique the US academy for its left-wing bias.

[2] In the balance of the paper, the term "discipline" refers to academic fields as well.

[3] The authors of this Declaration acknowledge that academic freedom is a property of both teachers and students, but note that "the freedom which is the subject of this report is that of the teacher" (AAUP 1915:292). Similarly, my concern in this paper is the academic freedom of professors and not that of students, nor of institutions.

[4] It was a series of faculty dismissals in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century that prompted the founding of the AAUP in 1915 and led to the writing of the 1915 Declaration.

[5] Anticipating the Frankfurt School by several decades, the authors of the 1915 Declaration warn of "the tyranny of public opinion" in democracies: "It almost seems as if the danger of despotism cannot be wholly averted under any form of government. In a political autocracy there is no effective public opinion, and all are subject to the tyranny of the ruler; in a democracy there is political freedom, but there is likely to be a tyranny of public opinion" (AAUP 1915:297).

[6] It is beyond the scope of this paper to trace in detail the many competing professional and legal interpretations of academic freedom. That said, it should be stated that in this paper I affirm "the professional notion of academic freedom as existing apart from, and regardless of, any given mechanism for recognition of a legal right to academic freedom" (AAUP 2009:67). For helpful discussions of the dissonance and overlaps between evolving professional and legal interpretations of academic freedom, see AAUP (2009), which discusses the ramifications of *Garcetti v Ceballos*, and Levinson (2007), which discusses the relationship between academic freedom and First Amendment protections.

[7] One trustee stated: "We've had some anecdotal evidence from students about faculty at DuPage providing lower scores [for ideological reasons] and even in some written reports for classes where professors made comments about sources being 'right-wing' rather than rejecting them for scholarly reasons, mainly in the social sciences where sources tend to be more subjective" (quoted in Dogan 2009). According to Glenn Hansen, Chair of the College of DuPage Faculty Association, however, the trustees "struggled to bring forward any examples of bias" (personal communication, 12 February 2010).

[8] The remaining two charges addressed by the 2007 Report are that "instructors are intolerant of students' religious, political, or socioeconomic views, thereby creating a hostile atmosphere inimical to learning" and that "instructors persistently interject material, especially of a political or ideological character, irrelevant to the subject of instruction" (AAUP 2007).

[9] Although the book is authored by Horowitz and Jacob Laksin, the final chapter, from which I am quoting in this and the next paragraph, is credited to Horowitz alone.

[10] The relevant passage reads: "The other obstacle to change is that colleges and universities are self-regulating or, in academic parlance, governed by peer review. While trustees and administrations theoretically have some oversight responsibility, in practice, departments operate independently. To complicate matters further, once a faculty member has been granted tenure he is functionally autonomous. Many academics who cry out for the regulation of financial markets vehemently oppose it in their own departments."

[11] See Fish (2008) for a recent version of the argument that there is no place for politics in the academy.

[12] All terms are from Fish (2008), though in some cases I have altered a verb's tense for purposes of symmetry.

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