

The Professoriate and the Truth

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The obvious...and the true has got to be defended.
 Truisms are true, hold on to that! The solid world
 exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is
 wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth's center.
 ...If that is granted, all else follows.

George Orwell, 1984

I welcome the opportunity to write about my view of the direction of higher education in North America, but what I will say, I am afraid, is likely to be very unpopular. So I preface my essay with some remarks to provide a background for what follows.

I begin with a familiar quotation. The author speaks about, the appropriate region of human liberty. It comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness, demanding liberty of conscience in the most comprehensive sense, liberty of thought and feeling, absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological...[as well as] the liberty of expressing and publishing opinions....Secondly...liberty of tastes and pursuits, of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character, of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow, without impediment from our fellow creatures, so long as it does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong. Thirdly, from this liberty...follows the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals; freedom to unite for any purpose not involving harm to others....The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it. Each is a proper guardian of his own health, whether bodily or mental and spiritual. Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest....We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavoring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still.

These inspiring words come from John Stuart Mill's justly celebrated *On Liberty*.

I now ask you to consider the stifling of opinions on our campuses. When did you last hear of anyone defending fundamentalist Christianity or the superiority of Western civilization? Who has been allowed to express the opinion on our campuses that homosexuality is a perversion, that there exist racial differences in intelligence, that women's place is in the home, that the Holocaust is a fiction, or that America is a force for the good in a corrupt world?

You may say that such opinions are justly stifled because their expression harms others. But if you thought that, you would be well-advised to think again. For if by harm you mean, narrowly, serious injury, such as murder, torture, or battery, then neither the opinions nor their expression harms others. And if by harm you mean, broadly, injury to the interest of the people affected, then you would have to be opposed to all laws and regulations which prohibit people from doing what they want or place burden on them that they do not wish to bear. You would, then, be committed to the absurdity of having to oppose laws about taxation, social security, immigration, and health care, since they injure the interests of those who are forced to pay for them. The truth of the matter is that the opinions stifled on our campuses run

counter to a prevailing orthodoxy that abuses its power and prevents the expression of opinions it opposes.

This coercive stifling of opinion permeates daily life, not just our campuses. It is very hard to think of an area of life that is free of the exhortation of intrusive moralizing. We are told what food is right or wrong to eat; how we should treat our pets; what clothing to wear; how we should spend our after-tax income; how precisely we should phrase invitations for sex; what kind of bags we should carry our groceries in; when and where we are permitted to pray or smoke; what jokes we are allowed to tell; who should pick the fruit we buy at the supermarket; how we should invest our money; what chemicals we should use in our gardens; by what method of transportation we should go to work; how we should sort our garbage; what we ought to think about cross dressing, sex change operations, teenage sex, and pot smoking; we are forbidden to inquire after the age, marital status, drug use, or alcoholism of job applicants; we are liable to be accused of sexual abuse if we spank our children or hug our neighbor's; our 19 and 20-year olds are permitted to fight our wars, but they are not permitted to buy a beer; we are not supposed to say that people are crippled, stupid, mentally defective, fat, or ignorant; and we must not use words like "mankind," "statesman," or "He" when referring to God.

What makes this coercive moralizing even worse is the hypocritical double-talk by which it is presented. For the stifling of opinions is said to be required by toleration. Its defenders advocate toleration of discrimination in favor of minorities and women (but not against them); of obscenity that offends religious believers and patriots (but not African-Americans and Jews); of unions' spending large sums in support of political causes (but not corporations' doing the same); of pot smoking (but not cigarette smoking); of abortion (but not capital punishment); of the public lies of Clinton (but not of Nixon); of hate speech against fundamentalists (but not homosexuals); of sex education in elementary schools (but not prayer); of jobs open only to union members (but not private clubs open only to males); of lies about American imperialism (but not the Holocaust); of sacrilegious of language (but not of language that uses "he" to refer to all human beings); of scientific research into just about anything (except racial differences in intelligence); and so on and on. We are awash in this ocean of hypocrisy, lies, and falsifications. And that is the background against which I have written the lecture about the professoriate and the truth that you are about to hear.

The professional obligation of professors is to teach their subjects and expand their fund of truths to the best of their knowledge. That is their job and their justification for receiving the benefits they enjoy. But many of them — especially in the social sciences and the humanities — have come to subordinate teaching and research to a political ideal. Their supposed justification is that the ideal is now more important than teaching and research, and this entitles them to violate their professional obligation if it conflicts with their political ideal. The ideal in question happens to be that of the liberal left. It calls for an egalitarian society without hierarchies and authorities that perpetuate significant differences in wealth, status, power, and life prospects. My concern, however, is not with the nature of the ideal,

but with the serious consequences of subordinating teaching and research to any political ideal. Higher education is now deeply compromised because the chief preoccupation of many professors is with making universities and colleges, and through them society as a whole, conform more and more closely to their political ideal. This damages higher education regardless of the nature of the political ideal to which the pursuit of the truth is subordinated.

Professors who become self-appointed political activists know that their society funds higher education in the expectation that they will teach the truth and expand its scope. In order to assure that the money supporting their activities will continue to flow, they present a false picture of what they are doing. But they manipulate the truth in good conscience because they feel justified by the ideal they in fact pursue and have no compunction about falsification when it serves their political purpose. I shall argue in what follows that this is an accurate description of the prevailing state of affairs and a major cause of the deplorable state of North American higher education.

There are, of course, great differences among professors in how much of their activities are or should be devoted to teaching and how much to research. It is clear, however, that the primary obligation of professors includes both, although there is legitimate variation in the appropriate ratio between them. But the fact remains that professors fail in their obligation if they do not teach what research indicates there is most reason to believe to be true. Professors also have the secondary obligation to take part in the administration of their institution. This involves allocating resources, designing curriculum, hiring, tenuring, promoting, and terminating faculty members, setting academic standards, as well as coordinating, planning, scheduling, and resolving conflicts; tasks that must be done in any complex organization. Although administration is important, it remains a secondary obligation because it is only a means — albeit necessary — to teaching and research.

The justification for the funding universities and colleges receive is that they make an indispensable contribution to the well-being of their society. For coping with the multitude of problems that beset society requires policies, policies are likely to succeed if they are based on the truth, and universities and colleges are supposed to be guardians of the beliefs that a society has most reason to recognize as true. If institutions of higher education do through teaching and research what they are meant to do, they deserve support and respect; if they do not, they deserve the opposite. North American higher education is in danger of losing that support and respect because many professors have abandoned their obligation and use universities and colleges as tools for the political transformation of our society.

One stratagem they employ to achieve this end is to acquire control of administration and institute policies detrimental to the pursuit of truth. This hijacking of administration has been amazingly easy because professors who are still dedicated to teaching and research tend to regard administration as a nuisance that interferes with what they rightly regard as more important. Political activists, being dedicated to politics, not to teaching and research, have ready access, therefore, to the power to make policies, which they use then to further their political ideal. The

following are some examples that must be familiar to anyone acquainted with how universities and colleges currently function.

Consider, to begin with, the way new professors are recruited. The current procedure is to establish a search committee, advertise the available position, evaluate the credentials of the applicants, interview the more promising ones, rank them, and then offer the position to the highest ranked one. The crux of the matter is the ranking. It would be natural to expect the committee to have arrived at a teaching-to-research ratio that represents their institution's desideratum and then rank the candidates on the basis of how closely they are thought to approximate it. This, however, is not what happens.

It has become mandatory that in ranking the candidates search committees assign heavy weight to their race, ethnic origin, and gender. This practice is referred to by the obfuscating euphemism of "affirmative action," but it is more forthright to call it preferential treatment, since that is what it is. Its justification is controversial, and this is not the place for a detailed evaluation of the arguments. But it is the place to draw attention to an unavoidable consequence of preferential treatment that significantly contributes to the subordination of truth to a political ideal: less qualified teachers and researchers are favored over better qualified ones.

There can be no doubt that this is an unavoidable consequence of preferential treatment because if it were not, if members of the preferred groups would tend to receive high ranking without preferential treatment, there would be no need to treat them preferentially. The policy is designed precisely to help some candidates get positions they would not get without preferential treatment because they are not as well qualified as other candidates. It is crucial to bear in mind that the intent of the policy is not to guarantee the impartial evaluation of the candidates' qualifications, or to protect candidates from the possible prejudices of the search committee. The intent is to discriminate in favor of some candidates on the basis of race, ethnic origin, or gender. It is a sign of the times that it needs to be added that there is no reason to suppose that race, ethnic origin, and gender have any bearing on how well candidates may do as researchers or teachers. The result of preferential treatment is a sustained and systematic lowering of the level of teaching and research and thereby undermining the fundamental value of higher education: the pursuit and communication of truth. Preferential treatment is not an aberration to which some few universities and colleges have succumbed. It is the standard practice of the vast majority of them. Through it institutions of higher education have made the violation of their basic obligation official policy. This, of course, calls into question the justification for the funding they receive.

Matters, however, are even worse. It would be one thing to declare forthrightly that universities and colleges no longer regard the upholding of truth through teaching and research as their basic obligation. It may, then, be said that henceforth institutions of higher education are to be in the vanguard of the transformation of society to reflect a political ideal. But not only is this not said, it is denied with hypocritical indignation. For defenders of preferential treatment realize that if they told the truth about the political ideal they are aiming at, they would have to justify

it to politicians who allocate resources for teaching and research, not for political activism; to parents who pay for students' expenses on the assumption that they will get an education rather than be conscripted as foot soldiers into the army of political activists; to those professors who continue to uphold the truth and refuse to subordinate it to political considerations; and to citizens who do not wish to pay taxes to finance self-appointed activists bent on changing their society. Their justification would have to reveal what qualification entitles professors of literature, sociology, or anthropology, for instance, to take advantage of their students' willingness to learn and harangue them with a political view about how society should be transformed. It is because no convincing justification could be given that instead of telling the truth, these professors spread falsehoods.

They do not say that universities and colleges are right to discriminate in favor of people who have been discriminated against in the past, and that this is more important than upholding the truth. They say that preferential treatment is in the service of the truth because teaching and research are improved by new voices and new approaches; that what is in the jargon "underrepresented groups" enrich education by providing new perspectives; that "diversity" is good and the achievements of "dead white European males" are suspect. But they cannot possibly believe what they say. They say that they seek new voices, approaches, and perspectives, that they are interested in underrepresented groups, but they want diversity only if it conforms to their political ideal. Whoever heard of the preferential treatment of a fundamentalist Protestant, a conservative Catholic, an anti-feminist, an opponent of homosexuality, a believer in the superiority of Western civilization, a libertarian, or someone who wants to conduct research into genetic racial differences? What advocate of diversity or multiculturalism would want to treat preferentially defenders of such enduring traditions as the Indian caste system, bull fighting, or the Muslim attitude to women? The much vaunted openness of these professors is nothing but propaganda that enables them to discriminate in favor of groups whose members they expect to be their political allies and against groups whose members might disagree with their political ideal.

It goes without saying that any institution should be open to challenge, research and teaching should be receptive to promising new possibilities, and it is wrong to exclude people from university and college positions on the basis of characteristics irrelevant to teaching and research. What preferential treatment aims at, however, is not these desirable goals, but the inclusion of people on the basis of characteristics irrelevant to teaching and research, the undermining of truth for political purposes, and damaging the one institution in North American life whose traditional and indispensable contribution to the well-being of society used to be upholding the truth. This destructive policy moreover is presented and supported by falsehoods intended to obscure the fact that it aims to transform universities and colleges into political tools by replacing better with worse qualified teachers and researchers.

The administrative units of most universities and colleges are departments, and it is through them that the truth is usually subverted. One of the ways this is done is through indoctrination with the view that truth is a cultural artifact that has no

relation to objective facts, and merely reflects beliefs individuals have been conditioned to hold. Truth is said to be a product of how the world is seen, not how it is. This is relativism, which is virtually the official doctrine in departments of sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, and, under the name of deconstruction, in many departments of literature and languages as well.

The implication of relativism is that the truth cannot be subverted because it does not exist. What exists are beliefs people hold, express, and act on, but, since all beliefs are cultural artifacts, ultimately one is as good as any other. If there are no objective grounds on which beliefs could be criticized or justified, then all beliefs have an equal claim to recognition and respect. Any attempt to show that some cultures, individuals, values, practices, or institutions are better than others is a coercive and arbitrary authoritarianism that fails to respect the integrity of other systems and ways of life. This is why “Western civ” must go, why there should be no canon, why teaching the classics is a form of oppression, why science is a plot by men to impose patriarchy on women, and why professors have as much to learn from students as students from professors. This is politics with a vengeance because it attacks the very possibility of legitimately regarding any authority or belief as better than anything else.

Suppose for the moment that relativism is right: all beliefs are cultural artifacts and they do not conform to objective facts; they merely reflect how a culture views the world, not how the world is. Two consequences follow, each devastating for relativists. First, if what relativists claim holds for all beliefs, then it holds for relativism as well. It too is a cultural artifact and it does not conform to objective facts. Relativism, then, tells us nothing about the truth; it tells us merely what relativists have been culturally conditioned to believe about the truth. People who believe that relativism is false because some beliefs do conform to objective facts are also culturally conditioned. In that case, however, there is no more reason to be a relativist than to be an anti-relativist, since neither is a matter of reason at all. Both depend on the cultural conditioning to which people have been subject. It would, then, be just as wrong for relativists to try to impose their views on defenders of “Western civ,” the canon, the classics, the objectivity of science, and the authority of teachers over students as relativists say it is wrong for anti-relativists to impose their views. If relativists attempt to defend their position by claiming that it is not culturally conditioned but actually true, then they cannot consistently maintain their central claim that the truth does not exist. It must exist if they have found it.

The second consequence that follows if relativism were the right view of beliefs is that universities and colleges teach *our* beliefs: the beliefs arrived at in the course of the long history of *our* culture, using *our* methods of inquiry, criticism, and justification. Even if all this were culturally conditioned, it would nevertheless be *ours*. Higher education is important because it teaches students about the great achievements of *our* way of life, *our* culture. That is what universities and colleges are meant to do, and that is their justification and the basis of their claim for support. By accepting an appointment at a university or college professors commit themselves to teaching and research as they are understood in *our* culture. It is on the basis

of *that* commitment that professors are paid their salaries, enjoy their benefits, and are entitled to teach students. If relativists act consistently with what they claim to believe, they must dishonor that commitment. They must deny that our beliefs are really true, that our methods of inquiry are really effective, and that what we value is worth valuing. If consistent, relativists must systematically violate the commitment they have made as a condition of being a professor. They, then, enjoy their salaries and benefits and teach their students fraudulently. Some of them are guilty of just that.

Most relativists, however, are not consistent. Their actions are at odds with what they claim to believe because no sane person could seriously hold the pernicious and absurd beliefs to which relativists are committed. This is shown every time relativists consult a physician, not a faith healer; call a plumber to unclog a sink, not a magician; want rapists prosecuted, not held up as role-models; and send their children to school, not to a shopping mall. But this does not stop many professors from using relativism to further their political ideal. For they appeal to it to justify using the classroom as a political forum, making political speeches instead of teaching, belittling the great achievements of the past, and hypocritically claiming that they are merely doing knowingly what the vast majority of humanity is doing in ignorance. The net effect is the betrayal of truth, the gross violation of professional obligations, the corruption of students, and the subversion of higher education. All of which is made even more egregious by the knowing cynicism with which it is usually done.

I am not claiming that political activists must be relativists and relativists must be political activists. I am claiming that there is a natural affinity between the two views as they are currently held in the North American system of higher education. If all beliefs are cultural artifacts, then all beliefs have an equal objective status, namely, none. And then all authorities and hierarchies, all judgments of better or worse, more or less reasonable are unmasked as coercive and arbitrary attempts to deny equal respect to all opinions by ranking some lower or less reasonable than others. Inequalities of wealth, status, power, and life prospects reflect unjustifiable hierarchies, and they ought to be abolished. Since universities and colleges perpetuate these hierarchies, they must be radically transformed. And the way to do that is to subordinate what is regarded as the truth in those corrupt and unjust establishments to this fine political idea. So say — perniciously and absurdly — those relativists who are also political activists.

A further example of ruinous policies is the importance attributed to the judgments of undergraduates. Many of them are not old enough to buy a beer legally, have great difficulty composing a coherent essay, and often have only the haziest notion of politics, history, or geography. They are, nevertheless, thought to be qualified to sit on committees that design curriculum, judge the credentials of professors, and all of them are invited to evaluate their teachers. Let us begin with these evaluations by students.

Most institutions require professors to distribute to their students questionnaires at the end of a semester. Students fill them out anonymously, the results are

quantified, and they provide a basis for the comparison and ranking of professors. The data thus obtained constitute part of the basis on which decisions about tenure, salary increase, and promotion are made. The problem with this practice is that students very often base their evaluations on how much they happen to like a particular professor or subject. But their likes or dislikes have only the most tenuous connection with how well they are taught, how much they learn, and how much they ought to learn. Students tend to evaluate favorably classes in which they get high grades. Low grades tend to result in disgruntled students who dislike the classes in which they have not done well, so they evaluate them unfavorably. This is secret from no one in universities and colleges, and certainly not from the professors who are being evaluated. The temptation to give high grades is thus considerable. It is much more pleasant to teach contented rather than disgruntled students. Better student evaluations make tenure, salary increase, and promotion more likely. And the grading system is merit-based, and thus inegalitarian, which is enough to predispose many professors against it. Not surprisingly, succumbing to the temptation is widespread. This has corrupting consequences.

The grades students receive become unreliable indicators of their performance. Doing well is severed from intelligence and hard work. Students see this, it makes them cynical, saps their motivation, and, since learning is often hard, it makes them flock to what are known as “gut courses,” that is, courses in which they can count on getting high grades without much effort. Most universities and colleges have gut courses, and it is common knowledge among professors and students which those courses are. Professors who give high grades tend to be popular, have high enrollment in their classes, acquire a reputation for good teaching, and thus set the institutional norm. Those who maintain standards have fewer students, worse evaluations, and they are, therefore, penalized for their integrity when it comes to tenure, salary increase, or promotion. The results are the grade inflation that everybody notices and complains about, worthless degrees, the discouragement of conscientiousness both in professors and students, the encouragement of its opposite, and a lowering of academic standards.

Although it is well known that the student evaluation of teaching is unreliable, the consequences of this fact are not faced and administrative policies are unaffected by it. There is, on the one hand, official satisfaction because students are being consulted and there are quantifiable data that can be used to make unjust decisions appear to have objective basis. There is also, on the other hand, widespread and spreading cynicism infecting both professors and students. The consequence is a systematic failure of universities and colleges to teach students what there is most reason to regard as true.

When these very same students sit on committees that deliberate about matters that students are rarely in a position to understand, weigh alternatives whose significance and long-range consequences require familiarity with the institution and its history that students unavoidably lack, then their judgments are even more unreliable than in the evaluation of their teachers. Professors have authority and students do not because professors tend to have and students tend to lack the

knowledge and experience required for making reasonable judgments about complex issues in higher education.

These reasons against relying on the judgment of students seem so obvious as to raise the question of how they could be overlooked by defenders of this ruinous practice. The answer is that politics blinds them. They suppose that universities and colleges are small-scale societies whose members are professors, administrators, maintenance workers, and students. In the larger society democracy prevails, everybody has a vote, and the same should be true of the smaller academic society. Not to rely on the judgment of students is thus to disenfranchise them, to violate the basic democratic principle that everybody should have the right to vote. Behind this view lies the dangerous mistake of supposing that what is true of society at large must also be true of the smaller societies that form parts of the larger one.

No reasonable person can suppose that hospitals, the armed forces, law courts, or construction companies should be democratic. It would be absurd for hospital orderlies to vote on what treatments patients should have; for privates in the army to vote on strategy; for criminals to vote on the requirements of the law; or for truck drivers to vote on the accuracy of architectural calculations. These smaller societies neither are nor are meant to be democratic. They are hierarchical, and the position of individuals in these hierarchies is, or ought to be, based on their knowledge and experience. The more they have, the higher their position in the hierarchy ought to be. The justification of these hierarchical systems is that the successful performance of the relevant activities depends on it. The same is true of universities and colleges. They are meant for teaching and research. These are activities that can be successfully performed only by those who have the requisite knowledge and experience. Students do not have either, and that is why they cannot make reasonable judgments about complex issues in academic life.

This, of course, does not mean that students have no rights. They certainly have them, but they are rights to proper instruction, not to deciding what and how they should be taught, who should teach them, or how the institution should be organized. Nor does it mean that students may not have legitimate grievances against professors who are unfair, unprepared, fail to meet classes, careless in evaluating their students' work, and so forth. There usually are and there ought to be proper avenues for complaint. Legitimate complaints should count in evaluating the performance of professors. But there is no way of judging the reliability of anonymous opinions students express hastily and consider superficially, if at all, during the few minutes spent on completing a questionnaire in the last class at the end of a semester. The process encourages irresponsibility. The increasingly heavy weight given to data obtained through this process in awarding retention, tenure, promotion, and salary increase is based on the misguided beliefs that quantifiable data can replace judgments of quality and that the position of students in institutions of higher education is like the position of citizens in a democracy. Democracy is the least imperfect political system we have found, the least bad we have for governing large societies. But it should be kept in its proper place. The dangerous mistake of politically motivated professors is to insist on democracy in the wrong place and

thereby threaten the transmission of the truth from one generation to the next on which the welfare of society depends.

In the foregoing I hope to have given convincing reasons for thinking that the policies of preferential treatment, relativism, and reliance on the judgment of students undermine teaching and research, and violate the professional obligation of professors to uphold the truth. I hope to have made it clear that these ruinous policies exist in a symbiotic relation with political activism because they reciprocally reinforce one another. To these three policies that corrupt the truth many others could easily be added.

Universities and colleges routinely set aside a certain percentage of places for unqualified minority students who would otherwise fall below the standards required for admission. This has the immediate consequences of excluding better qualified students and reducing what can reasonably be expected of students in general. The consequence one step removed is that the standard of teaching is lowered for political reasons. Since the policy is followed year in year out, the decline in the quality of students and teaching has been made into a steadily worsening trend. Qualified students are shortchanged, unqualified students struggle, and future generations suffer. Politics thus corrupts teaching.

Academic freedom is routinely used to protect the advocacy of communism, terrorism, homosexuality, the overthrow of the government, the denigration of Western civilization, the celebration of America's enemies, the castration of rapists, and so forth. But academic freedom is not extended to the advocacy of Protestant fundamentalism, male dominance, innate racial differences, anti-semitism, condemnation of homosexuality, or the superiority of Western civilization. The limits of academic freedom are thus set to favor causes political activists regard as being within the limits of toleration and to prohibit the advocacy of causes they find objectionable. This, of course, is nothing but censorship designed to forbid the public questioning of beliefs political activists find congenial. It is also an insult to the truth because the censorship is exercised by those who rely on academic freedom to protect their own advocacy of political causes they favor.

When various groups achieve sufficient political clout, they often demonstrate it by forcing the establishment of a new academic department and an instantly invented putative field of study. This is what African-Americans, women, and gays and lesbians, among others, have done. These new departments and fields, however, are not centers of teaching and research, but political action groups aiming at the indoctrination of students with the ideology and grievances of the group. It is a great rarity to find professors in these departments who oppose preferential treatment, have doubts about feminism, or regard homosexuality as a misfortune. The students and professors in departments with a well-established field of study represent a cross-section of the general population, but the overwhelming majority of students and professors in these new and politically motivated departments are members of the very group they claim to be studying. Even a cursory look at many of the courses they offer, the grades they award, and the so-called research they do shows that they have abandoned even the pretence of objectivity. Their interest is not in the pursuit

of truth, but in the political transformation of society. There are, of course, honorable exceptions, but they are exceptions, not what happens typically. Sympathy for African-Americans, women, and gays and lesbians on account of past discrimination should not, however, lead to allowing ideological indoctrination to pose as higher education.

In closing I want to emphasize some of the features shared by the policies against which I have been inveighing. They are, to begin with, not responses to outside pressures on universities and colleges, but home-grown policies cultivated by professors themselves for political reasons. They are made possible only by the support of a sizable number of professors. They and their policies undermine the truth, not in a few exceptional cases, but routinely: they are standard. It is not an exaggeration, therefore, to speak of them as corrupting higher education.

Professors tend to be intelligent and analytical, consequently it is most unlikely that the deplorable state of higher education I have been describing would be news to them. Defenders of these policies, of course, see themselves as reforming, not as corrupting, higher education. They may concede privately in a moment of candor that teaching and research might be temporarily weakened by their policies, but they will think that this is amply justified by the corresponding gains in realizing their political ideal. They are thus imbued with a moral purpose in weakening the institution that is their professional obligation to strengthen. They are in the wonderful position of feeling self-righteous about violating their obligation and regarding their opponents as morally reprehensible on account of their refusal to follow suit.

Nevertheless, the case for subordinating the truth to their political ideal is not stated forthrightly because it would be impolitic. The true nature of the case tends to be kept for initiates, waverers, and the recruitment of new allies. The reason for this is that the public in general and the politicians who hold the purse strings rightly expect professors to provide the services for which they are paid and not to substitute political activism for teaching and research. Defenders of these corrupting policies see correctly that the public acknowledgment of the truth would defeat their attempts to use universities and colleges as tools for their political purposes, so they manipulate the truth. They say that the policies that weaken teaching and research actually strengthen them. And they employ much ingenuity in making their false claims plausible — an expenditure of time and energy, incidentally, which, if it were devoted to teaching and research, would be a step toward improvement.

Professors are not alone in manipulating the truth for political purposes. Politicians, business executives, generals, and diplomats may have to obfuscate, and sometimes even tell outright lies, as a means to discharging their professional obligations. Playing fast and loose with the truth is always regrettable, but it may be an unfortunate necessity, the lesser of two evils, for these people. It is, however, otherwise for professors. In their private lives they are not obliged to be more truthful than others. But they are obliged to discharge faithfully their professional obligation and that involves upholding the truth through teaching and research. Their policies and their defense of them, however, weaken teaching and research, and that is why

professors violate their professional obligation when they manipulate the truth for political purposes.

In arguing as I have done, I have said nothing for or against the political ideal that motivates the liberal left. The arguments I have given do not assume that the ideal is flawed, although I think it is. What I have claimed is that it is a dangerous mistake to corrupt higher education in order to approximate this — or any other — political ideal. Higher education is the process of increasing the fund of truths and transmitting it from one generation to the next. These activities are possible only if professors concentrate on their professional obligation of teaching and research; have and are recognized to have substantially more knowledge and experience in some subject-matter than their students; accept and use responsibly their authority in order to maintain standards; and universities and colleges reflect this authority by their hierarchical structure. Higher education can be effective, therefore, only if it safeguards these conditions. The failure to do so damages both the truth and society. A society that fails to recognize and respect people whose knowledge and experience are essential to coping with its problems is destroying itself. And that is what — knowingly or not — politically motivated professors have been doing to North American society by corrupting higher education.

The sad picture I have painted of North American higher education naturally prompts the question of what can be done about it. The answer is that professors should fulfill their professional obligation; uphold the truth through teaching and research; adopt policies that strengthen, and resist those that weaken, teaching and research. If political convictions compel some professors to work for social transformation, they should do so after they have fulfilled their professional obligation. If they cannot do that, they should resign their position and become political activists. But they should not take the money for doing their job, falsely claim to be doing it, while undermining the conditions in which the job can be done by others.