

This is a paper copy of an email, two similar versions of which I sent to over 1,000 unique email addresses around UBC, mostly to working professors, as part of a personal campaign to spread what I consider an extremely important document ("*Why Universities Must Choose One Telos: Truth or Social Justice*" by Dr. Jonathan Haidt (NYU)). What follows here is an introduction and a copy of this document. Since some emails were rejected, I think due to spam filters, I have decided to follow up with a more limited letters campaign to some of the departments I consider most critical. If this looks familiar, you have seen it before. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Franz Kurtzke

Philosophy, 4th year

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July 19, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Franz Kurtzke. I am a 4th year Philosophy undergraduate student at UBC. I go through a lot of my life feeling afraid of many things, and I have decided to face some of my fears and grow as a person. One of my deep fears after several years at UBC is aggressive campus activist students. I arrived as a left-winger and have been intimidated into the political centre. For the record, I am also afraid of aggressive activist type professors and staff members. I am also afraid of public censure and humiliation (that's just human though?). Plus, I am really passionate about learning how to resolve the campus culture wars generally, and I believe I am close to a breakthrough after months and months of research. (I have become obsessed in a nerdy way with this as a philosophical problem).

Now I have realized that I can address my fears and my passions at the same time, by sharing with you this document by Dr. Jonathan Haidt (NYU) from the website of Heterodox Academy. I have currently tried to find online the contact information of people who teach courses especially in the social sciences, because my research suggests these trends are currently increasing there, as well as statistics, math and philosophy, as I believe these departments value the traditional search for true in a way that makes this document relevant for them. (My apologies if you don't teach; my error!) I would like to encourage anyone who teaches at UBC to consider this document and visit heterodoxacademy.org to learn more.

If you are in support of what you see, and are in a position like me where you can afford to be brave (I am an undergrad, and I am increasingly discovering the freedom this affords me), I would encourage anyone

else (especially tenured professors) to do whatever they can, including contacting the administration as I have done repeatedly, if you feel this may help. After months and months of research, I believe the number one thing we can do to move UBC in the right direction is to encourage UBC to endorse the “Chicago Principles”. I am just an undergrad, and I’m pretty ignorant, but I have a basic belief that the ability to have open, critical dialogue without fear is the foundation of

the ability to become less ignorant, and so I am absolutely confident of the value in what I am doing here.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_principles

I am fairly certain that some people will dislike me for the ideas expressed in this document, and after watching certain incidents in the media I have little confidence that anyone will come to my aid if I am ever besieged, but I am willing to stand behind these ideas as a free man, and I don’t want to be afraid anymore. If you would have me drink hemlock, I would like to warn you now: I find the stuff delicious!

Sincerely,

Franz Kurtzke

Philosophy, 4th year

<https://heterodoxacademy.org/2016/10/21/one-telos-truth-or-social-justice/>

Why Universities Must Choose One Telos: Truth or Social Justice

by [Jonathan Haidt](#) | Oct 21, 2016 | [Benefits of heterodoxy](#), [education](#), [Students](#), [video](#) | [90 comments](#)

Aristotle often evaluated a thing with respect to its “telos” – its purpose, end, or goal. The telos of a knife is to cut. The telos of a physician is health or healing. What is the telos of university?

The most obvious answer is “truth” – the word appears on so many university crests. But increasingly, many of America’s top universities are embracing social justice as their telos, or as a second and equal telos. But can any institution or profession have two teloses (or *teloi*)? What happens if they conflict?

As a social psychologist who studies morality, I have watched these two teloses come into conflict increasingly often during my 30 years in the academy. The conflicts seemed manageable in the 1990s. But the intensity of conflict has grown since then, at the same time as the [political diversity of the professoriate was plummeting](#), and at the same time as [American cross-partisan hostility was rising](#). I believe the conflict reached its boiling point in the fall of 2015 when student [protesters at 80 universities demanded](#) that their universities make much greater and more explicit commitments to social justice, often including mandatory courses and training for everyone in social justice perspectives and content.

Now that many university presidents have agreed to implement many of the demands, I believe that the conflict between truth and social justice is likely to become unmanageable. Universities will have to choose, and be explicit about their choice, so that potential students and faculty recruits can make an informed choice. Universities that try to honor both will face increasing incoherence and internal conflict.

[Please note: I am not saying that an individual student cannot pursue both goals. In the talk below I urge students to embrace truth as the only way that they can pursue activism that will effectively enhance social justice. But an institution such as a university must have one and only one highest and inviolable good. I am also not denying that many students encounter indignities, insults, and systemic obstacles because of their race, gender, or sexual identity. They do, and I favor some sort of norm setting or preparation for diversity for incoming students and faculty. But as I have argued elsewhere, many of the most common demands the protesters have made are likely to backfire and make experiences of marginalization more frequent and painful, not less. Why? Because they are not based on evidence of effectiveness; the demands are not constrained by an absolute commitment to truth.]

As I watched events unfold on campus over the past year, I began formulating an account of what has been happening, told from the perspective of moral and social psychology. I was invited to give several talks on campus this fall, and I took those invitations as opportunities to tell the story to current college students, at Wellesley, at SUNY New Paltz, and at Duke. By the time of the Duke talk I think I got the story worked out well enough to send it out into the world, in the hope that it will be shown on many college campuses. It's long (66 minutes). But it is as short as I can make it. There are many pieces to the puzzle, and I had to present each one in order.

Here is the talk. An outline and additional materials are below the talk.

[Available on website]

OUTLINE OF THE TALK

Introduction:

I begin with two quotations:

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." —Karl Marx, 1845

"He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion..." —John Stuart Mill, 1859

Marx is the patron saint of what I'll call "Social Justice U," which is oriented around changing the world in part by overthrowing power structures and privilege. It sees political diversity as an obstacle to action. Mill is the patron saint of what I'll call "Truth U," which sees truth as a process in which flawed individuals challenge each other's biased and incomplete reasoning. In the process, all become smarter. Truth U dies when it becomes intellectually uniform or politically orthodox.

1. Telos

Each profession or field has a telos. Fields interact constructively when members of one field use their skills to help members of another field achieve their telos. Example: Amazon, Google, and Apple are businesses that I love because they help me achieve my telos (finding truth) as a scholar. But fields can also interact destructively when they inject their telos into other fields. Example: Business infects medicine when doctors become businesspeople who view patients as opportunities for profit. I will argue

that social justice sometimes injects its telos of achieving racial equality (and other kinds) into other professions, and when it does, those professionals betray their telos.

2. Motivated Reasoning

A consistent finding about human reasoning: If we WANT to believe X, we ask ourselves: "Can-I-Believe-It?" But when we DON'T want to believe a proposition, we ask: "Must-I-Believe-It?" This holds for scholars too, with these results:

- Scholarship undertaken to support a political agenda almost always "succeeds."
- A scholar rarely believes she was biased
- Motivated scholarship often propagates pleasing falsehoods that cannot be removed from circulation, even after they are debunked.
- Damage is contained if we can count on "institutionalized disconfirmation" – the certainty that other scholars, who do not share our motives, will do us the favor of trying to disconfirm our claims.

But we can't count on "institutionalized disconfirmation" anymore because there are hardly any more conservatives or libertarians in the humanities and social sciences (with the exception of economics, which has merely a 3-to-1 left-right ratio). This is why Heterodox Academy was founded—to call for the kind of diversity that would most improve the quality of scholarship (at least, if you embrace Mill rather than Marx).

3. Sacredness

Humanity evolved for tribal conflict. Along the way we evolved a neat trick: Our ability to forge a team by circling around sacred objects & principles. In the academy we traditionally circled around truth (at least in the 20th century, and not perfectly). But in the 21st century we increasingly circle around a few victim groups. We want to protect them and help them and wipe out prejudice against them. We want to change the world with our scholarship. This is an admirable goal, but this new secular form of "worship" of victims has intersected with other sociological trends to give rise to a "culture of victimhood" on many campuses, particularly those that are the most egalitarian and politically uniform. Victimhood culture breeds "moral dependency" in the very students it is trying to help – students learn to appeal to 3rd parties (administrators) to resolve their conflicts rather than learning to handle conflicts on their own.

4. Anti-Fragility

"What doesn't kill me makes me stronger." Nietzsche was right, and Nasim Taleb's book "Antifragile" explains why. Kids need thousands of hours of unsupervised play and thousands of conflicts and challenges that they resolve without adult help, in order to become independently functioning adults. But because of changes in American childrearing that began in the 1980s, and especially because of the helicopter parenting that took off in the 1990s for middle class and wealthy kids, they no longer get those experiences.

Instead they are enmeshed in a "safety culture" that begins when they are young and that is now carried all the way through college. Books and words and visiting speakers are seen as "dangerous" and even as forms of "violence." Trigger warnings and safe spaces are necessary to protect fragile young people from danger and violence. But such a culture is incompatible with political diversity, since many conservative ideas and speakers are labeled as threatening and banned from campus and the curriculum. Students who question the dominant political ethos are worn down by hostile reactions in the classroom. This is one of

the core reasons why universities must choose one telos. Any institution that embraces safety culture cannot have the kind of viewpoint diversity that Mill advocated as essential in the search for truth.

5. Blasphemy

At Truth U, there is no such thing as blasphemy. Bad ideas get refuted, not punished. But at SJU, there are many blasphemy laws – there are ideas, theories, facts, and authors that one cannot use. This makes it difficult to do good social science about politically valenced topics. Social science is hard enough as it is, with big complicated problems resulting from many interacting causal forces. But at SJU, many of the most powerful explanatory tools are simply banned.

6. Correlation

All social scientists know that correlation does not imply causation. But what if there is a correlation between a demographic category (e.g., race or gender) and a real world outcome (e.g., employment in tech companies, or on the faculty of STEM departments)? At SJU, they teach you to infer causality: systemic racism or sexism. I show an example in which this teaching leads to demonstrably erroneous conclusions. At Truth U, in contrast, they teach you that “disparate outcomes do not imply disparate treatment.” (Disparate outcomes are an invitation to look closely for disparate treatment, which is sometimes the cause of the disparity, sometimes not).

7. Justice

There seem to be two major kinds of justice that activists are seeking: finding and eradicating *disparate treatment* (which is always a good thing to do, and which never conflicts with truth), and finding and eradicating *disparate outcomes*, without regard for disparate inputs or third variables. It is this latter part which causes all of the problems, all of the conflicts with truth. In the real world, there are many disparities of inputs, but anyone who mentions such disparities on campus is guilty of blasphemy and must be punished. I work through an example of how the attempt to eliminate outcome disparities can force people to disregard both truth and justice. This is no way to run a university.

8. Schism

Given the arguments made in sections 1-7, I think it is clear that no university can have Truth and Social Justice as dual teloses. Each university must pick one. I show that Brown University has staked out the leadership position for SJU, and the University of Chicago has staked out the leadership position for Truth U. (This has been confirmed by their rankings in the new [Heterodox Academy Guide to Colleges](#).)

I close by urging students on every campus in America to raise the question among themselves: which way do we want our university to go? I offer a specific tool to raise the question: the [Heterodox University Initiative](#). If students on every campus would propose these three specific resolutions to their student government, perhaps as the basis of a campus-wide referendum, then students could make their choice known to the faculty and administration. The students would send a clear signal as to whether they want more or less viewpoint diversity on campus. At very least, a campus-wide discussion of Marx versus Mill would be a constructive conversation to have.

Opinions expressed are those of the author(s). Publication does not imply endorsement by Heterodox Academy or any of its members. We welcome your comments below. Feel free to challenge and disagree, but please try to model the sort of respectful and constructive criticism that makes viewpoint diversity most valuable. Comments that include obscenity or aggression are likely to be deleted.

Talking about being a free man, even if you dislike me now, can we at least agree on Joni Mitchell being awesome? Thank you for reading. Have a great weekend.

Sincerely,

Franz Kurtzke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQj6h8KpkiQ>

Free Man In Paris - Joni Mitchell

www.youtube.com



To Whom It May Concern:

August 17, 2017

It's been some time since I sent 1,000 emails around UBC and hand delivered 500 paper packets, with the document "Why Universities Must Choose One Telos: Truth or Social Justice" by Dr. Jonathan Haidt (NYU). The responses have been incredible, and I've had a really exciting summer. Now I'd like to end the summer by providing you with some of the most interesting and useful resources I've found during my adventure.

Franz Kurtzke, UBC Philosophy, 4th year

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ESSENTIAL READING AND VIEWING:

- Heterodox Academy: **"Why Universities Must Choose One Telos: Truth or Social Justice" by Dr. Jonathan Haidt (NYU)**
<https://heterodoxacademy.org/2016/10/21/one-telos-truth-or-social-justice/>
- YouTube: **"Safe Spaces – Sam Harris and Jonathan Haidt on the Disturbing Trend of Vindictive Protectiveness"**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K92rOslyLBs>

COMPLEMENTARY VIEWING:

- YouTube: **"Where Do SJWs Come From?"** with Dr. Jordan Peterson (University of Toronto) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_fBYROA7Hk
- YouTube: **"Professor Jordan Peterson Swarmed by Narcissistic SJW Ideologues after UofT Rally"**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-nvNAcvUPE>
- Heterodox Academy: **"The Google Memo: What Does the Research Say About Gender Differences?"**
<https://heterodoxacademy.org/2017/08/10/the-google-memo-what-does-the-research-say-about-gender-differences/>

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

- 1) If you see a 'Truth or Social Justice' type issue at UBC, tell the administration:
President Santa J. Ono: presidents.office@ubc.ca
Dr. Neil Guppy, Senior Advisor to the Provosts, Academic Freedom: neil.guppy@ubc.ca
- 2) Visit Heterodox Academy at heterodoxacademy.org, and consider applying for Academic Membership, joining some UBC professors who are already members.
<https://heterodoxacademy.org/join/>
- 3) Do whatever you personally can to encourage UBC to endorse the Chicago Principles.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_principles

THANK YOU! ENJOY THE REST OF YOUR SUMMER!