

## CHAPTER 2

# Academic Freedom as Freedom of Complex Association

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### INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I aim to not only restate but also redescribe the core of academic freedom as a practice and a value (and it is both). I do not aim at normative novelty, but I do think that the redescription can shed new light on a variety of current disputes. The core traditional value of academic freedom is under serious threat around the world, and the responses to that threat are sometimes muddled by confusion about both what the value is and how it is justified; in the essay's final section, I will try to resolve some of those confusions.

### ACADEMIC FREEDOM IS NOT FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Academic freedom resembles, but is importantly distinct from, liberal democratic freedom of speech and freedom of expression, and we should begin by distinguishing the former from the latter. To take the simplest, and yet a powerful and important, example of the difference to begin with: freedom of speech includes in general the freedom to lie. I say "in general" advisedly;

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there are limits ranging from prohibitions on commercial fraud to restrictions on defamation to, in some jurisdictions, restrictions on denying particular historical facts such as the existence of the Holocaust. But the exceptions are narrow and pretty well defined. Liberal democracies have struggled in recent years to understand how to manage rising tides of deliberate misinformation on topics ranging from public health to election integrity precisely because a general respect for free speech *does* include the freedom to lie, and because our reasons for distrusting states as adjudicators of speech very much do include a distrust of how impartially, reliably, or fairly they would judge truth. And so, to choose a few examples, an astrologist who lies about the relationship between humanity and the stars, a celebrity or politician who employs a ghostwriter and then lies about the authorship of the resulting book, and an online commentator who lies about sources for quotations and factual claims, are all protected by freedom of speech.

Matters are quite otherwise on campus. Employing a ghostwriter and passing the work off as one's own is an expellable offense for students and a fireable offense for even tenured professors. The same is true for misrepresentations of what was found in an experiment, an archive, or a text, or indeed misrepresentations about whether the experiment ever happened, or the archive was ever consulted. In an astronomy classroom, neither an instructor who begins to teach astrology nor a student who submits a paper relying on horoscopes as a research method will find any protection in academic freedom.

There is thus a close connection between universities and the pursuit of truth that is not replicated in the broader social sphere. There is a limited analogy to be drawn here between the professional ethics of a university and the professional ethics of the practice of law, between the university and a courtroom. Liberal democratic freedom of speech protects neither the perjurer who lies under oath nor the lawyer who puts a witness on the stand knowing that they intend to commit perjury; those actions do too much damage to the truth-seeking character of the legal enterprise.

I think there is promise in analogies between university norms and the ethical codes of the other learned professions, a point to which I will return. But this analogy in particular runs out quickly; we don't characterize the courtroom as being constituted *by a special kind of freedom*. The university, like the courtroom, restricts many activities that harm the truth-seeking

enterprise and yet *is* constituted by a special kind of freedom. So, if academic freedom is not simple freedom of speech, what is it?

#### ACADEMIC FREEDOM IS AN ASSOCIATIONAL FREEDOM

Academic freedom is not, in the first instance, an individual right at all. It is, rather, an associational right, more like the corporate *libertas ecclesiae* of medieval disputes between the Catholic Church and political rulers than like the modern Protestant-style freedom of individual conscience that is protected in many constitutional democracies. It is the freedom of the scholarly association to engage in the core functions of discovering, teaching, and preserving knowledge—the functions, paradigmatically, of the laboratory, the classroom, and the library—according to scholarly disciplines, norms, and practices, without external rules of dogma or ideology. The conclusions of research and inquiry must be reached according to the scholarly rules that govern that kind of research and inquiry; they must not be dictated in advance. No particular conclusion—Christian orthodoxy or scientific racism or Lamarckianism or Bolshevism or McCarthyist anti-Communism or astrology or what have you—is ruled out *ab initio*. But those conclusions must be generated from within the association, through scholarly inquiry; they must not be externally imposed.

Similarly, teaching must proceed according to internal scholarly standards, not externally imposed orthodoxies. While I will for the most part omit further discussion of libraries, the principles are similar in kind; the acquisition and preservation of accumulated knowledge proceeds according to a kind of scholarly evaluation of importance, not according to agreement with particular doctrines.

There are four distinctive things to note about this associational freedom.

The first is that is in large part a jurisdictional claim. As *libertas ecclesiae* was the liberty *of the church*, so is academic freedom the liberty *of* the university or other scholarly association. When an external actor—in the modern world, most typically a state—dictates the content of research or teaching, academic freedom simply *is* violated, regardless of the particular content at issue. It doesn't matter whether the state purports to protect intellectual freedom or diversity against on-campus orthodoxy and hegemony. It doesn't even matter whether the view the state promotes is true and the idea that

has become campus orthodoxy is false. The practice of academic freedom may be justified by—overall, in the long term—*serving* the promotion of truth and informed debate. But that is not the same as allowing recourse to “truth” or “debate” as excuses for external interference. Research and teaching lie within the academic jurisdiction of the university, as theology and the occupancy of ministerial roles lie within the jurisdiction of the church. This much is definitional; it is not a *justification* for academic freedom so defined. But it is worth stating explicitly at a time when off-campus actors sometimes do claim that their interference in research and teaching *promotes* academic freedom, indeed protecting it against universities themselves.<sup>2</sup>

The second is that academic freedom necessarily makes constant reference to the scholarly norms internal to the scholarly association. For a shorthand we might call those norms something like “truth-seeking,” but that is only a shorthand. In order to stress the particular character of the truth-seeking enterprise, we might say something like “scientific method,” but that is misleading with respect not only to the medieval university that nonetheless had academic freedom,<sup>3</sup> but also with respect to, for example, humanistic disciplines whose search for truth might be better understood as interpretive. We can see the practice of academic freedom in place across changes in time and changes in discipline as to *what counts* as the internal scholarly norms. We can ask of a medieval faculty of theology or a modern department of biology whether it was or is protected by academic freedom, despite the tremendous difference in intellectual content as to what is being protected.

The third, which follows, is that since universities are constitutively pluralistic in their intellectual approaches—even in their earliest years, the mode of inquiry in a faculty of theology was not just like that in a faculty of law—academic freedom will necessarily be a *nested* associational freedom. It encompasses not only the liberty of the university against (most typically) the state and (sometimes) nonstate actors ranging from churches to donors, but also the self-governing freedom of each internal scholarly association, each faculty or school or disciplinary department. I have elsewhere discussed

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2 An Act Respecting Academic Freedom in the University Sector, 2022, vol. 21, [www2.publications-duquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=5&file=2022C21A.PDF](http://www2.publications-duquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=5&file=2022C21A.PDF); United States, Executive Order 13864: Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities, 2019.

3 Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 [1895]).

a general category of *complex associations*, associations that are rightful bearers of freedom of association but that generate internal ecosystems of further association.<sup>4</sup> The university is a complex association par excellence. Indeed, this is built into the language itself. A *universitas* is an encompassing association, in some relevant sense a *universal* association.<sup>5</sup> A *collegium*, a college made up of colleagues, is a smaller, thicker, and more particular association that simultaneously partakes in the broader community of the *universitas*. These concepts from civil law did not only refer to academic institutions: a medieval city might be a *universitas*, and the trade and mercantile guilds within it, *collegia*. But it is to academic institutions that these generic legal categories stuck as names. The university is a universal association encompassing the collegial colleges—and faculties and departments and centers and institutes—within it.

The fourth is that, notwithstanding the corporate and associational character of academic freedom, it will often be individual scholars—researchers, teachers, students—whose academic freedom is violated and who must try to vindicate the right. In the simplest case, if the state mandates one conclusion or prohibits another in teaching or in scholarly inquiry, it will often be an individual teacher or researcher whose work is impaired. It is the individual researcher who might be prohibited from publishing results or conducting experiments, who might be disciplined or denied renewed employment or fired. It is the individual teacher who will be punished for assigning prohibited material. This is true and real, and yet does not change the associational character of the right—because academic freedom is *not* impaired when those same consequences fall on the individual teacher or researcher for violation of the relevant scholarly norms. Being fired for research fraud, being denied renewed employment for switching one’s research and teaching entirely away from the scholarly unit’s area, being prevented from publishing results by peer reviewers who judge the research to fail the scholarly stan-

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4 Jacob T. Levy, *Rationalism, Pluralism, and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

5 While this is an extension by analogy, not part of the etymology, it’s also worth thinking about *universities* rather than only *a university* as universal. From the medieval origins of the European university onward, it has been an important feature of universities that they recognized each other as peer institutions, for example, by treating each other’s degrees as valid, not requiring separate examination before recognizing a graduate of another university as qualified to teach (*jus ubique docendi*). The norms of academic freedom have themselves, imperfectly but genuinely, become part of what is now a global system of mutual recognition.

dards of evidence and argument: none of these are violations of academic freedom. When the individual suffers adverse consequences (a) from the scholarly community or association (b) for scholarly reasons, this is the *exercise* of scholarly self-government, not the violation of it.

Both (a) and (b) are required, which is why academic freedom is not *completely* a collective jurisdictional right. A university or department may not mandate the results of inquiry any more than a state may. The self-governing scholarly association sets what Michael Oakeshott described as the *adverbial conditions* of scholarly activities.<sup>6</sup> In order to reach a conclusion, you must use these evidentiary standards, these rules of logic and evidence, these tests of validity. The self-governing association that instead mandates a dogma does violate the academic freedom of the individual scholar—whether that be the researcher pursuing original inquiry, the teacher whose syllabus is forcibly truncated, or the student whose paper is penalized for reaching a disfavored conclusion. However, the freedom that is violated is not the open-ended individual freedom of speech or expression. It is the freedom relative to the scholarly association, the freedom to be judged within the scholarly enterprise *only* according to the internally appropriate adverbial rules of scholarly inquiry, argument, and conduct. It is the freedom of members of the scholarly association—researchers, teachers, students—to be free to pursue that association’s scholarly mission according to its scholarly rules, and to be immune from being judged as scholars according to nonscholarly norms such as conformity to an orthodoxy. In an important sense the individual who presents a claim of having their academic freedom violated is seeking to vindicate the relevant *self-governing scholarly community’s* norms against outsiders, or else is standing on those norms against even the community’s own local authorities.

To put it another way, the university’s jurisdictional autonomy over research and teaching is far-reaching against outside actors but is strictly limited to its own members. In the university’s assessment of them—the grades and honors a student receives, the evaluation of an instructor’s teaching, the assessment of research, the assignment of benefits or penalties for academic employees—it must limit itself to the quality of inquiry, *not* to the

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6 Michael Oakeshott, “The Rule of Law,” in *On History and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999 [1983]).

orthodoxy of the conclusion reached. Neither may it corrupt those evaluations with consideration of nonscholarly matters such as the person's religious or political views. The associational autonomy of the communities of inquiry is justified by their being *communities of inquiry*, however great the interdisciplinary or intermethodological differences might be about what "inquiry" means. And, as always, jurisdictional rules precede consideration of the substantive merits of a particular case. The state lacks jurisdiction over the conclusions of research. So does the university; so does the disciplinary department! The student, instructor, or researcher who has followed the locally appropriate rules of inquiry and argument may not be subject to institutional disadvantage because of the unpopular conclusion they reached.

It is not always or only individuals whose academic freedom is *prima facie* violated in this way. When right-wing governments from Hungary to Florida prohibit whole disciplines or scholarly methodologies—gender studies, critical race theory—then the attack on the relevant scholarly community itself sits right on the surface. In extreme cases, a whole department or faculty might be shuttered, or a whole university driven out of the country. My point is not to deny this, but rather to emphasize that even in the very common case when an individual scholar is the *prima facie* victim of a violation, it is still a violation of a *corporate and associational* freedom.

So: academic freedom is mostly jurisdictional, but it includes a substantive commitment to each scholarly association's local rules of scholarly inquiry. It is institutionally committed to truth-seeking, but the rejection of dogmatism means that in no particular case may the truth or falseness of a conclusion be appealed to as a reason to override it. It is corporate and associational but frequently looks like an individual freedom, and sometimes even an individual freedom against the scholarly association itself. And it is the peculiar associational freedom of a *complex* association, a freedom whose subject is not only the university as a whole but also—indeed, much of the time, *primarily*—the constituent associations within it. I think that this is a description of the norms and practices; it is not intended to be reformist or novel. But when it is spelled out explicitly we see that the norms and practices are somewhat complicated, and we can see the kinds of errors people fall into when they pick out just one or another piece of the whole.

## QUESTIONS OF APPLICATION

The arguments developed so far yield some results that are *prima facie* surprising, though they are consonant with the actual practices of academic freedom. To highlight the counterintuitiveness of the results, I will first juxtapose two kinds of cases that have often been in the news in recent years.

1. When a controversial speaker from outside the university tries to speak on campus and is met with protests, the speaker's academic freedom is not violated—even if the speaker is a scholarly expert rather than a professional provocateur, and even if the speech in question is actually disrupted or prevented.
2. When a member of the university, including a student or a non-tenure-track, nonunionized, contingently employed instructor, speaks *off* campus, including on highly controversial matters outside their scholarly expertise, including on social media or to intellectually disreputable media, they *are* still protected by academic freedom.

It's perfectly reasonable to find this surprising. An interrupted scholarly lecture seems to be squarely within the core of a university's concern. An uninformed and inflammatory tweet that incites public outrage does not. And yet these are the conclusions demanded by the arguments presented here.

Academic freedom is associational; the nonmember visiting speaker is not a member of the association. In disputes about visiting speakers, everything turns on the questions of whether they are invited and hosted, and if so, by whom. From the perspective of the association, the finest scholar in the world is nothing but a trespasser if they arrive on campus uninvited and help themselves to a lectern and a microphone. This is stylized, of course; different universities have different norms about the openness of their campus as property and as space. At a university whose campus space is generally open to the public, general free speech rights might well come into play if an off-campus speaker (or, say, pamphleteer) is prevented from offering their views on campus grounds. But that right is not, as we have seen, academic freedom.

Academic freedom is indeed at stake when an off-campus speaker is invited and hosted by a unit of the university, by one of the various nested

associations whether a student club or an academic department. However, the academic freedom at issue *is that of the sponsoring organization*. It is the associational freedom of the club or department. The speakers themselves are not members of the academic community at issue, and they are, at worst, guests who have been treated impolitely.

This distinction matters, I think, in two ways. One is that it helps us to stop making the speakers themselves the stars of the show. This is helpful insofar as there is now a kind of professional circuit of provocateurs whose traveling road show depends precisely on their ability to antagonize student protestors into protesting them. Universities have been unwitting and unwilling partners in the creation of this circuit. They provide both the stage and the foils of the show, allowing the starring martyrs to “cancel culture” to rise to greater and greater celebrity. It is the general *openness* to visiting speakers in vast numbers—being invited and hosted by the whole array of university associations—that makes possible the media narrative of universities as being ideological cloisters hostile to free debate. No one ever gets “canceled” when they try to present controversial ideas to a condominium association or a bowling league or a community theater group, because neither of those associations has any general practice of hosting speakers at all. Churches might occasionally do so, but everyone expects that a speaker at a church will be speaking within the boundaries of the church’s own mission. The practice of having visiting speakers at universities, while decidedly secondary to the core research and teaching activities of university members, is a very common adjunct to those activities, because it is very common for the university’s associations to want to host them for the benefit of students and the broader community, as because of the intellectual benefits of scholarly exchange. This is all valuable, but it has made universities vulnerable to this kind of hostile parasitism of people building their celebrity by trying to speak at universities and getting protested. It’s hard to know how to extricate universities from this unhappy trend, but at a minimum, those within the academy should refrain from contributing to it. And that means decentering the visiting speaker in our debates.

But the distinction also matters in focusing attention where it belongs: on the academic freedom of the organization or institution that invited the speaker in the first place. Protesting an invited speaker is a normal part of on-campus debate and disagreement. But actually preventing their speech is an

attack *on other members of the academic community*, on the club or department that invited them. And while those of us who care about the academic community should not want to contribute to the celebrity martyrdom of outsiders taking advantage of that community, we also should not minimize the wrong done to the other scholars in such an attack. Focusing normative attention on the speaker has also been an easy way to excuse disruptions: the speaker's own objectionable speech or conduct elsewhere, their status as being hateful or deceptive, becomes all the argument one needs to shut them down. But the protestors' fellow scholars are the people whose academic freedom is actually being infringed, and the sins of the speaker are a distraction from that fact.

Here, by the way, is where I would return to the analogy of professional ethics that I mentioned at the beginning of the essay. In this set of disputes, those who disrupt an event like this sometimes help themselves to the language of civil disobedience. Perhaps they commit a formal wrong in preventing someone they consider a spreader of hateful lies from speaking (so this line of argument runs). But they do so conscientiously in the pursuit of justice or truth, just as civil disobedients might commit trespass or violate traffic regulations or parade restrictions when they use the force of their assembled bodies to prevent or protest injustice in the democratic public sphere. That is an analogy that appeals to a politically heroic ideal.

But if we think of the university, not like a democratic state but as a space constituted by a professional ethic, and if we think of respecting our colleagues' (including students') academic freedom as a core piece of that ethic, things look rather different. Lawyers are often involved in cases that excite their genuine commitment to justice. And yet "my client's cause is truly, importantly just" is no excuse at all for withholding documents that are due in discovery, for suborning perjury or bribing a witness or threatening a juror. Nor is "my client's cause is truly unjust" an excuse for violating attorney-client privilege. So too for the priest violating the sanctity of confession, or the doctor violating the rules of informed consent. The conscience of the professional is no excuse at all for violating the rules that constitute their office, and the lawyer facing disbarment is rightly regarded very differently from the civil disobedient. To disrupt a lecture or research presentation, or for that matter to disrupt a classroom or laboratory, seems to me of that kind. A visiting speaker might be a very bad scholar indeed; some of the

celebrity provocateurs on the lecture circuit certainly are. But to violate the academic freedom of our colleagues whose department, center, student association, and so on invited them is a violation of the shared scholarly enterprise itself.

I would, in general, distinguish speakers who were invited by a unit of the university—from a student club to a department or research institute—to share their *ideas* from categories of prominent guests given a speaking platform as a deliberate honor for them as *persons*. The important cases of the latter are recipients of honorary degrees and speakers at university graduation and convocation ceremonies. (These are often but not always the same.) The space for a reasonable, collegial protest of such honorees is wider than it is for visiting speakers hosted by peers exercising their associational academic freedom. It is not just that there is no right to an honorary degree; to that extent, they resemble ordinary outside speakers, who also do not have a right to be there. It is that honoring is different from hearing out; and that the captive audience of graduating students awaiting their degrees is different from the voluntary audience of an ordinary speaker. This does not mean that actually disrupting a graduation event is respectful; it surely disrespects one's fellow students. But it does mean that protesting before the fact the decision to honor someone one regards as dishonorable is thoroughly appropriate. Here, too, popular discourse about campus life gets things backward. There is an annual public commentary on how shameful it is for university students to object to this or that graduation speaker or honorary degree recipient because it shows that they do not appreciate freedom of speech and open debate. But the famous speakers at issue usually do not lack opportunities to express themselves. The protests object to the honor, to which the (usually very familiar) expressed ideas are secondary; and to the decidedly non-debate-like experience of being a captive audience at the moment when the students' degrees should be the center of attention.

Now consider the speech of the member of the university association, outside their area of academic expertise. This is the category of expression that is referred to in the American Association of University Professors principles as "extramural utterances," and it's the source of constant confusion in public debate. The confusion is understandable at first glance. When the professor of engineering writes an uninformed post on social media about race and IQ, when the graduate student in Chinese history makes an inflam-

matory comment about the Israel–Palestine dispute on cable news, when the adjunct instructor in psychology engages in vaccine misinformation or promotes conspiracy theories about sex trafficking, maybe that is protected by freedom of speech, but what does it have to do with scholarship? If academic freedom is the practice of a truth-seeking community that prioritizes the expert use of the tools of inquiry appropriate to each field of study, why should talking through one’s hat outside the classroom or the laboratory be protected?

The answer lies in academic freedom’s status as jurisdictional, and in remembering what it *means* to be protected by it. Extramural expression is outside the evaluation of the scholar as a scholar (as always, meaning either students or academic staff) and, accordingly, fundamentally outside the jurisdiction of the academic association. The examples listed above left unstated what the scholar in question was to be protected *from*; the answer is, adverse *academic* consequences. The student may not be failed in a class or expelled from a degree program or denied an academic award. The member of the academic staff may not be denied tenure or have it revoked, or be denied a sabbatical or pay raise to which they would be entitled on academic merit. This, it should be emphasized, is not some marginal fact about academic freedom, some problem that arose recently in the era of social media and cable news. It was central to the articulation of the value in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when politicians, donors, and other powerful actors tried to demand that university professors be fired or not hired because they were, for example, communists or atheists. The eventual practice of academic freedom rightly developed a two-pronged response. If they reached communist or atheist conclusions as part of their research within their area of expertise (political economy or political philosophy or metaphysics), then that was a protected scholarly outcome. And if their communism or atheism lay outside their scholarly work, then it was irrelevant to it.

Insofar as academic freedom involves a rejection of dogmatism and enforced orthodoxy about conclusions, it is in general best for universities to refrain even from expressing disagreement with the controversial extramural speech of one of their academic members, though they frequently do so in the panicked heat of the moment. Overwhelmingly often, the best practice would be for the institution to say nothing more than this in its corporate voice:

As is true for all members of our scholarly community in their public commentary and social media engagement, this scholar's comments solely represent his or her own views. As is true for all members of our scholarly community, this scholar's ability to express those views is protected both by freedom of speech and in a different way by principles of academic freedom, which forbid the university from acting to punish academic staff or students for the content of their extramural expressed opinions. The university as an institution does not normally take positions on matters of social and political controversy, in order to best protect the freedom of its members to pursue inquiry that supports or opposes such positions. Accordingly, the university does not normally comment, whether in support or in opposition, on the expressed opinions of its professors or students.

And on the principle that those in positions of power should not create the perception appearance that they are threatening to misuse it, at least those university officials in a direct line of authority above the scholar—the student's professors and advisors; the professor's chair or dean, the university's provost or president—should not say much more than that in their *individual* capacity, either. There are plausible exceptions to these norms, but these are the right baseline norms, and they are too often forgotten.

#### CONCLUSION: SAFE SPACES

I conclude with one final counterintuitive implication of understanding academic freedom as the nested freedom of a complex association. One popular off-campus indictment of university students is that they are afraid to confront debate and disagreement, and wish to be coddled inside a so-called safe space. This line of criticism, too, is almost completely backward; the freedom of a complex association to a substantial degree just *is* the existence of a nested community of safe spaces.

The basic unit of academic freedom is a community of inquiry, most paradigmatically a disciplinary department but it can be anything from a student club to a multidisciplinary research institute. Within *any one* of those, scholars have the ability to work together, exploring ideas and knowledge within parameters that are, locally and for the moment, taken for granted.

*Building* knowledge together requires building on a shared body of (locally and for the moment) agreed-upon understandings and findings, and using (locally and for the moment) accepted methods of inquiry, standards of evidence, and kinds of argument. On a complex university campus, physicists—whether in a laboratory or in a classroom—don’t have to *constantly* reply to a philosopher challenging their knowledge of epistemology. Neither do the political scientists find their work interrupted by the physicist telling them that it is not a *real* science, or the historians by the economist complaining that their work lacks microfoundations, or the literary humanists by the social scientist complaining that their scholarship is too subjective to be replicable. There are, to be sure, interdisciplinary moments when those challenges are explored and debated. But those are the exceptions to a baseline rule that each intellectual community is free to go about its business, studying according to methods, tools, and agreed-upon prior knowledge that is taken for granted. (This will be familiar to readers of Kuhn as the practice of “normal science.”)

*Mutatis mutandis* the same is true for everything from an interdisciplinary center to a student club. An interdisciplinary center for gender studies does not spend all day, every day replying to the campus conservative who repetitively insists that feminism is the real sexism in modern society. A student Christian fellowship gets on with the shared exploration of a shared faith, not subject to endless interruption from the argumentative atheist. And so on, and so on. Likewise, within each of these associations, the status of the scholars as rightful members of the scholarly community is taken for granted. Literature professors do not have to convince economists or physicists that they are real scholars who should be allowed on campus. Students from marginalized communities, meeting in their affinity groups, likewise do not have to respond to constant challenges to the legitimacy of their presence.

When some of those communities meet and blend, that does not change the basic pattern; it establishes a new locally appropriate set of subjects, questions, methods, and so on. None of the university spaces ever becomes a Hyde Park soapbox; each is always a safe space for those who want to engage in locally appropriate exploration, examination, or study. Indeed, I think this is much of *why* universities cultivate and subsidize their internal ecosystems of student clubs and associations. The university as a complex association is

founded on an appreciation of a plurality of communities of inquiry, each pursuing their own *internal* studies, discussions, and debates; and it makes sense that the younger scholarly members of the community would self-organize in ways that mirror the self-organization of disciplines, centers, faculties, and so on. And when they do, they seek safe spaces, where new questions can be asked and debated, building on shared assumptions and secure in the knowledge that their status as members of the scholarly community isn't one of the topics locally up for debate.

The implication is counterintuitive in different ways for different readers. To the on-campus reader sympathetic to protected associations and safe spaces, it brings an unwelcome limitation; my safe space ends where your associational freedom begins. The appeal to shared assumptions is always local and provisional, and the university *as a whole* cannot mirror the safety of the association without turning those assumptions into dogma. There is no right to intrude into *other* parts of the university—other departments, other clubs' events—and to insist that one's own locally shared assumptions and conversational boundaries be recognized and enforced in them.

But to the unsympathetic off-campus critic, the implication is even more surprising and even more unwelcome. The students seeking their safe spaces are not acting contrary to the spirit of academic freedom. They are carrying it on, and carrying it out.