

Challenges of Academic Freedom

In one of the interviews with Professor David Horowitz, at Columbia University, about his book *The Professors*, Horowitz said: “In my Contemporary Civilization course at Columbia we did read both Marx and his critics – e.g., Bakunin and Hayek. So I was indeed challenged, but in an appropriately academic fashion. Unfortunately, it took me twenty years to benefit from the lesson.” One might well ask if twenty years are needed to benefit from studying a certain point of view, or ideology, or a system of thought, and its critics! What kind of benefit would one get from studying the two opposite faces of the same issue, the same coin?

I guess this is the kind of challenge that faces us nowadays, whether at the national, or the regional, or the international level. How far are we ready to deal with one of the intellectual problems from all its perspectives, from all the different points of view that surrounded it? To what extent are we ready to accept other ideas on the issue that we think we own the right and proper position concerning it? How can we reach a certain truth if we do not accept to analyze it academically, and this analysis requires comparing and evaluating all the different, and perhaps contradictory, related factors?

I am raising these concerns because they apply not only within a university campus but, more seriously, within the community and within the nation. It is our academic responsibility to train our students how to face the challenges of academic freedom and make it a part of their research activities to consider and study and evaluate the other point of view, the other position, if we are seeking the truth and nothing but the truth. Part of academic freedom is to care about the other situation, the other circumstances, the even unexpected other ideas, and perhaps ideologies. Only then shall we be practicing, in some sense, what we call freedom of pure knowledge.

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