



Written by [James Heiser](#) on March 19, 2019

“Springtime for Snowflakes” by Dr. Rectenwald Provides an Insider’s Look at the SJW Movement

“At the moment postmodern theory lay dying in the academy, it bore a child, namely, ‘social justice.’ As mothers are the root of all evil in horror films, so postmodern theory would be in waking nightmares.” Thus begins Dr. Michael Rectenwald, professor of Liberal Studies at New York University, in his recently published memoir [Springtime for Snowflakes — Social Justice and Its Postmodern Parentage](#).



Rectenwald combines aspects of personal and academic memoir with the development of the intellectual movements within postmodern literary theory that led to the horrors of “Political Correctness” and the canons of the Social Justice Warrior creed. It is a personal story that tracks his own hostile encounters with co-workers and student activists, and the firestorm which was generated by his Twitter posts under the handle @antipcnypuf.

Rectenwald’s book is far from the first to examine the origins of the phenomenon of the Social Justice Warrior. However, in contrast to books such as Vox Day’s *SJWs Always Lie*, Rectenwald’s intellectual critique of the Social Justice movement comes from within the ranks of the intellectual Left. The author’s criticisms of Political Correctness and the SJW movement are all the more effective because of his academic career in those circles.

As one twitter troll put it: “You’re anti-P.C.? You must be a rightwing nut-job.” “But as I [the author] explained in numerous interviews and essays, I was not a Trump supporter; I was never a right-winger, or an alt-right-winger; I was never a conservative of any variety. Hell, I wasn’t even a classical John Stuart Mill liberal.”

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Rectenwald continued, “In fact, for several years, I had identified as a left or libertarian communist.... I became a well-respected Marxist thinker and essayist. I had flirted with a Trotskyist sect, and later became affiliated with a loosely organized left or libertarian communist group.”

After “banishment ... from the NYU Liberal Studies community,” Rectenwald seems hard-pressed even to define his current philosophical standpoint in conventional terms:

Despite the harsh treatment doled out to me by the social justice left and the warm reception I received from the right, I did not become a right-winger, or a conservative. But after the social-justice-infiltrated left showed me its gnarly fangs and drove me out, I could no longer identify as a leftist. Yet I also refused the libertarian label, even though the denotation of the term addressed many of my concerns.

Springtime for Snowflakes is roughly equal parts personal memoir, intellectual critique of the origins and present state of the Social Justice movement, and a printed compendium of Rectenwald’s tweets and Facebook posts that placed him at the center of academic controversy.



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Rectenwald's chapters on the intellectual origins and tactics of Political Correctness and the Social Justice movement are often quite insightful. His efforts to demonstrate the link between the SJWs and literary criticism are reminiscent of similar links between so-called higher criticism and political leftism in theological circles. In Rectenwald's words:

Postmodern theory may be properly understood as the "missing link" between the older Marxist left and the contemporary social justice left. Yet many mutations have occurred within leftist political ideology in the evolution from Marxism to social justice. In order to understand the contemporary social justice left, then, I have examined postmodern theory in some depth.

Rectenwald's summary of the tactics of the Social Justice Warriors is familiar to anyone who has had to contend with them:

The social and linguistic constructivist claims of social justice ideologues amount to a form of philosophical and social idealism that is enforced with a moral absolutism. Once beliefs are unconstrained by the object world and people can believe anything they like with impunity, the possibility for assuming a pretense of infallibility becomes almost irresistible, especially when the requisite power is available to support such idealism. In fact, given its willy-nilly determination of truth and reality on the basis of beliefs alone, philosophical and social idealism necessarily becomes dogmatic, authoritarian, anti-rational, and effectively religious. Since it sanctions no push-back from the object world and regards it with indifference or disdain, it necessarily encounters push-back from the object world and must double-down. Because it usually contains so much nonsense, the social and philosophical idealism of the social justice creed must be established by force, or the threat of force.

For Rectenwald, contending with the Social Justice movement requires an understanding that it is a set of religious dogmas:

Recognizing that our institutions of education have adopted a religious creed should go a long way in removing social justice from its parapet and installing a new, higher-order creed in its place. I will call this new higher-order creed "post-secularism."... Successful reformation must allow social justice ideology to remain in existence while it is removed from its current position as policy-maker, arbiter of expression and inquiry, and censor.

However, despite the author's advocacy for such efforts to integrate SJWs into the ranks of the emotionally stable, intellectually honest, and morally sound, the task may prove beyond the confines of the possible. What seems more likely is that the rule of the French Revolution will continue to hold true in the words of Pierre Victorien Vergniaud (who perished under the blade of the guillotine in 1793): "The revolution, like Saturn, devours its children."

Springtime for Snowflakes – Social Justice and Its Postmodern Parentage, by Michael Rectenwald, Nashville: New English Review Press, 2018, 174 pages, paperback.



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