



## Intellectual Corruption in the Age of Adolescence

A while ago I wrote an article that generated quite a discussion. With this I was well pleased. Yet, I must confess, my pleasantness over the response with which this issue was met was qualified by a frustration mixed with regret over the fact that ours is a time when this would be considered an issue at all. Particularly disconcerting were the remarks made by one respondent, a self-avowed “liberal” who also claims to be a college professor of many years. While some of his comments were not devoid of insight, the thrust of his reasoning left me disheartened, for in spite of his age and vocation as an educator in the liberal arts and humanities, the anti-intellectualism and, thus, raw emotion on display in his engagement with a race-based issue — typifying, as it did, the reaction to racially-oriented questions that we have long since come to expect from his ideological and professional brethren — is further confirmation that ours is indeed an age notable for its conspicuous absence of genuinely mature thought, i.e. thought that is at once sober, daring, and rigorous.



Such tough-mindedness is a commodity that is all too rare these days. Most contemporary thought, whether it manifests itself among the left or among the conventional right, is, for the better part of it, juvenile. And that the reduction of Western civilization to a one-dimensional caricature of Oppression incarnate and the concomitant dominance of the idiom of “[racism](#),” “[sexism](#),” “[classism](#),” “[homophobia](#),” “[xenophobia](#),” “[speciesism](#),” “[ageism](#),” and the like appropriated to describe it are the characteristics of the preponderance of literature that is scholarly no less than that which is popular demonstrates beyond a doubt that the *zeitgeist* is one of adolescence.

In the Age of Adolescence, the *ad hominem* argument — since [Aristotle](#) recognized as logically fallacious — has become the staple of contemporary discourse, particularly discourse over matters of race, gender, class, and sexual morality. Conversation — once treated as an art — has become a virtually extinct species as argument has given way to name-calling, the analysis of conclusions to the imputation to one’s opponents of nefarious motives, the pursuit of coherence and clarity to political activism. Those who know better — or who we think should know better — prefer to construe reality in rigidly dichotomous terms, a realm of angels, populated by themselves, and one of demons, inhabited by their adversaries. Hence, the conventional rightist’s notion that his leftist counterpart is a “[moral relativist](#)” is a fiction of the first order.



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on June 15, 2011

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The problem with the leftist's thought isn't that it is relativistic; the problem is that it is a specimen of the most invidious *absolutism*. "Mainstream" or "movement conservatives," to say nothing of neoconservatives, tend toward absolutism as well, but few among their number would deny this. The leftist, however, has acquired for himself a reputation for being a "nuanced" thinker, a reputation owing in no small measure to his endless castigations of his right-wing nemeses for their "simplistic" judgments. However, this reputation is thoroughly undeserved. It is the antithesis of nuance, the height of being simplistic to, say, unequivocally condemn raw statistical economic inequalities as the offspring of nothing other than "savage capitalism;" American-led wars as "militarism" or "imperialism;" opponents of "affirmative action," abortion, "gay marriage," illegal immigration, and "the Ground Zero" mosque as "racist," "sexist," "homophobic," "xenophobic," and "[Islamophobic](#)," respectively.

As I have already said, there are many on the right who are not above resorting to this anti-intellectualism. Conventional "conservatives" not infrequently lend credibility to the left by either denying the charges of "bigotry" and "hatred" that the latter makes against them or by hurling them back: in either case, FOX News "conservatives" and the like reinforce our culture's soft headedness by implying both that such epithets are meaningful *and* that they are germane to intelligent discourse.

Accusing a fan of MSNBC of being a "[FOX hater](#)," as [Bill O'Reilly](#) is prone to do, aside from being infantile, is also question-begging, and for at least two reasons: (1) criticism, even harsh and ostensibly unfair criticism, doesn't necessarily reflect "hatred"; (2) the objections that a person makes against FOX, however ridiculous or inordinate they may be, are more likely than not to be *the causes* of one's "hatred," not *the effects*. And what can be said of "FOX hatred" is equally true of "racism" and the rest of the litany of our adolescent culture's sins.

The vapidness, excessive self-indulgence, immaturity, hypersensitivity, and transparent moral exhibitionism that commentators on both left and right decry about our "celebrity" driven culture they themselves tend to display within venues — like academia and news media — that are supposed to be devoted to the promotion of the free exchange of ideas.

This is a most lamentable state of affairs, but it is to be expected in the Age of Adolescence.



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