

Academic Governance: The Trustee's Warrant

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Power to trustees! Slogan for our time or archaic embarrassment? Necessary corrective or invitation to ignorance? In our hyper-bureaucratized business-model universities, do we really need one more level of meddling?

Of course, today's trustees aren't quite ciphers. They have the central role in choosing university presidents, and often provide valued advice on management of the institutional fisc (when not pouring wealth into it themselves). But according to the now accepted gospel of "shared governance," when it comes to the heart of academic practice, curriculum, and scholarship, theirs, despite theoretic power, is mainly a task of self-denial. In all but the most extravagant cases—headline makers when they arise—the admonition is defer, defer, always defer, to those who know better.

It wasn't always so. Until the twentieth century's dawn—and well beyond at some colleges and universities—trustees saw themselves as the stewards of institutional mission, which generally included a broad range of creedal and cultural commitments. In so serving, they had little compunction about minding the opinions, faith, and morals of both faculty and students, with miscreants occasionally sent packing. As the self-defined representatives of legitimate public and/or communal interests in shaping the intellect and character of the young, trustees felt entitled, when the stakes were sufficiently high, to override the views of academic professionals.

But academic professionalism finally got its way to an extent unparalleled in any other sphere. Whereas government and business professionals, no matter how recondite their expertise, routinely submit to the oversight of

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managerial generalists—themselves at the beck of corporate boards or elected officials—professors in their capacities as teachers and inquirers need only worry about the opinions of their peers or, for funded research, grantors. When it comes to what is taught, how it's taught, and who teaches it, let alone what is researched and published, trustees are supernumeraries in the academic scheme.

What neutered them? Think scissors, one sheer the blade of science, the other that of apathy.

Science. Not all professors wear lab coats, but from the arrival of the Germanic university ideal on our shores to the advent of full-throated postmodernism nearly all have wrapped themselves in one symbolically. “Nothing here but the scientific search for the facts, ma’am, only the facts,” and where facts are the sole objective, untutored laity must step aside. This advisement contains more than a kernel of truth, and in some fields, mainly the natural sciences and their auxiliaries, the results of lay forbearance in the pursuit of “facts” have been prolific for the good. But in others, where the reign of fact is far less perfected—whether colored by impassioned opinion or compromised by feeble or infant method—the outcome has been rather dubious: quite often the ascendancy of a one-sided viewpoint on readily contestable questions. Yet toward these fields as well, trustees, in awe of palpable accomplishments elsewhere, have taken admonitions on behalf of benign neglect utterly to heart.

Apathy. Trustees lack the personal stake in university governance that elected officials and corporate board members have in the discharge of their responsibilities. Legislators, elected executives, and those immediately responsible to them, must be wary of voters and interests, lest they be weighed in the political balance and found wanting. Corporate directors, apart from generally owning a stake in the enterprises they guide, are vulnerable to investor insurgencies and the unfriendly notice attending asset nose dives (to say nothing of Sarbanes Oxley). None of this affects trustees, who are, instead, assiduously wined, dined, and otherwise stroked in the cause of preserving their equanimity about university management. Even if trustees felt more confident in their ability to see through faculty pretense, they don't have much incentive to challenge it.

Perhaps apathy could be overcome if trusteeship still embodied a clear sense of public purpose. Trustees of the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries had such purposes ready made, either because of strong religious convictions or because the deference accorded successful businessmen and professionals naturally conferred a sense of moral and intellectual authority. When the self-made man was king, his writ reached across campus.

This state of affairs is unlikely to be restored. The university has become too complex, with the quotient of genuine faculty knowledge grown far beyond the point where trustee instinct can prudently supplant it on any specific matter. Nor does business success any longer entail reflexive deference: quite often the reverse. As a result, the pendulum has swung very far, and the university's mindset is increasingly defined by an elite disdain for the common sense of the surrounding society that trustees represent. This has not only undermined education by prejudicing any open-minded consideration of common sense's merit, but it is also gradually turning the educational process into an integrated, self-conscious assault on America's received ideals and institutions (variously referred to, depending on one's political and historical sensibility, as "democratic capitalism," "bourgeois liberalism," or "commercial republicanism").

This is an immensely destructive tendency—illiberal not only in its purposes, but in its educational methods—which trustees, still formally sovereign within the university's hierarchy, can and should move to halt. But they will not be able to do so unless several conditions have been met. The pretensions and biases of scholarly scientism must, in the fields where these are most rampant, be made clear to them. They must be given a greater personal stake in the achievement of healthy academic outcomes. And they must regain a belief in the legitimacy of their own exercise of intellectual power, which can only come from the conviction that they are collectively equipped to bring unique and helpful insights to academic decision making. Attaining each of these objectives could easily be made the subject of extended reflection. The last, however, more than the others, might profit from a brief excursion into political theory.

The case for a trustee role in shaping academic policy is much the same as the case for the accountability of formal institutions in any sphere. All institutions, whatever genuine public services they provide, can readily develop conflicting internal interests that need to be checked through some system of external accountability via market processes, representative oversight, or frequently both. The potential for such conflicts of interest are certainly present in the academy, distorting curriculum policy in matters large

and small, ranging from faculty course loads to the emphasis given to general versus specialized education. Do faculty members work hard enough at teaching or regard it as a distraction? Do they give sufficient attention to teaching students basic material or concentrate on the narrower focus of their research? If these kinds of questions are excluded from lay oversight, we opt for obliviousness to public interest that would never be permitted in other sectors.

But what about more sensitive cases pertaining to the content of the curriculum—not only its competent transmission and breadth, but also its intellectual quality? More specifically, is the hyperventilating tone of so much of current scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, its dogmatic, “politically committed,” one-sided character something with which trustees can legitimately be concerned?

To make a case in the affirmative, more than potentials for conflicts of interest need be invoked. All well and good, perhaps, on grounds of minimal due diligence, that laymen should prevent teachers from sloughing off, or from continuing to neglect subjects generally acknowledged as central, but if trustee influence extends to how truth claim rivalries get settled, trustees must have their own claim to truth. Do they? To what degree? And if they do, how should trustees exercise that influence? The answers to these questions will determine whether trustees have a legitimate role to play in resolving some of the most urgent questions of contemporary academic life. So let me provide a preliminary outline of why, relative to the professoriate, trustees do indeed possess such a claim, why it has significant reach, and why, though they should exercise it with discretion, they should also exercise it confidently.

A core element of some influential strands of liberal and conservative thought (think Burke and Hayek, among others) is a belief in the inevitably diffuse character of social knowledge. In these views, the complexity of human social organization and human interaction far exceeds the ability of any individual to grasp it in useful detail. Nonetheless, knowledge of social detail does exist at a collective level, and can be usefully retrieved when means are available to aggregate the fractionalized understandings of scattered individuals. The trick is to divide decision making into sufficiently small parcels so that fractionated knowledge can be matched with correspondingly fractionated decisional authority. A similar diffusion of knowledge and learning is also thought to occur across time when, via innumerable trials and errors, cultures evolve practices that, when embodied

in convention, can be usefully drawn upon by individuals unaware of their ultimate whys and wherefores.

For classic liberals, the latitudinal and longitudinal dimensions of these processes receive greatest play when the voluntary association of individuals is given freest scope through an untrammelled marketplace, though conservatives would add that it also requires tradition to be accorded substantial respect. (They part company on whether or not major traditions in danger of losing support should be shored up by state authority.) In theory, this type of disaggregated voluntarism, whether pure or limited through tradition, produces socially desirable outcomes without master plans or planners. Were they to exist, these master planners would inevitably find their planning efforts, however well intentioned, frustrated by the overwhelming intricacy and fluidity of the social order.

Classic liberalism is unusual among political philosophies in its loose prefiguration of outcomes, more or less limited to a continuation of the free choice system and the rights and adjudication processes on which it believes this depends. Conservatism cares more about outcomes, but validates them by reference to the past instead of systematic assessment. Other philosophies are more robustly evaluative, though differing widely with respect to the standards they employ to evaluate; certain ones favoring measures of equality (or equality *tout court*), others various kinds of hierarchy. But in the sense of having preferred comprehensive outcomes, they are visionary in a way classic liberalism and tradition-bound conservatism are not.

Both academics and academically-informed laity give at least lip service to the idea that the university functions best as a marketplace for ideas, where all parties seek the truth in a spirit of open-mindedness. Despite this, within the academy it is frequently the visionary posture, the all-embracing, most-putatively-explaining and most-consequently-moralizing viewpoint that has the most passionate appeal. Visions, after all, whether delivered from lectern or pulpit, constitute the intellectual's most enduring stock in trade. Thus, while the academy takes care to speak the language of liberalism to outsiders, from the inside its reality can be quite different. Its most passionately held conceptions commonly generate tensions between the ideal of pluralism and the need to defend sanctities. And when these get out of hand, liberalism can succumb to dogma.

In the intellectual universe, highest glory has generally been accorded those who paint compellingly on the broadest possible canvass. Science's

Olympians—Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, Einstein—did just that, radically redrawing humanity's self-portrait. But the hunger for, acclaim of, and desire to produce and interpret visionary masterpieces—great systems that purport to pool and chart oceans of knowledge—antedates science's ability to verify them with anything like genuine rigor, and can continue quite nicely in its absence. Without over worry about positivist ground rules, philosophers, theologians, social analysts and commentators, poets and mystics, to say nothing of *littérateurs*, have long competed for system-building honors, absorbing much of the world's intellectual energy in the process. And however unlikely to produce the dispositive results of physics, theirs has hardly been fruitless work. Even the most nonoperational of theories (perhaps, most of all, precisely these kinds) have audiences to win—often very considerable ones—whose members seek certitude, consolation, self-esteem, or ideological justification, and are willing to turn their appreciation for visions providing these satisfactions into psychological, status, and financial rewards for those who craft and disseminate them.

In earlier centuries, universities, policed against flagrant heresy, generally shopped visions of an orthodox line. Insurgent vision craft and sale tended to occur, to the extent it could at all, outside. But as higher education expanded, and modern concepts of academic freedom gained sway, an increasing number of academics felt safe in opting for dissidence—with real consequence for politics outside. Within the academy, among the many satisfied “merely” to ferret out the facts or devise narrow-gage explanations, others seized chances to frame or expound writ-large illuminations that could stoke grievance, find acolytes, provide a sense of enlarged personal significance, and generate professional support from like-minded allies. A political business, those faculty inclined toward it were better equipped by temperament and skill to drive academic policy and shape academic climates than their more scholarly and closeted colleagues. Noisy, organized, and persistent, it is these visionary activists, the champions of the grand systems of race, class, and gender, who currently call most of the shots on the academic policies that matter to them most. And they rarely take well to criticism.

To be sure, visions have their legitimate place in academic life—the search for patterns on scales small and grand being a naturally human, and particularly intellectual, inclination. In organizing meaning, visions provide existence some fortifying purpose, as well as a collective centering, arguably

necessary if social cohesion is to be preserved. And however deficient visions may be in capturing the full complexity of the social and cosmic weave, the more successful ones, of which the world's great and time-tested religions are the leading examples, incorporate much insight and wisdom. Even the body of liberal theory, despite its forswearing to dictate specifics, rests on the perception, at least in skeletal form, of a visionary pattern. For better or worse, there is no way for intellectual life, or life as a whole, to do without visions, systems, and their attendant schemes. Their exorcism from inquiring minds would leave academe and the world in an existential void.

Unfortunately, visions and systems have the knack of fostering intolerance, often in direct proportion to their inspirational potency. And the larger their claims, the greater the discomfort that can arise from their close and skeptical scrutiny. The natural and applied sciences have the means to sort out truth claims, given time and effort, with the residuum a growing corpus of powerful, confident understandings. But this is much less the case in the realms of humane learning, even with all the attempts that have been made to employ the tools of natural science problem-solving. Despite the best of wills, human phenomena remain too complexly intractable to yield—at least in the present state of the art—anything better than varying degrees of ambiguity in research results. The fact that amidst all this ambiguity a great deal is at stake for professorial careers (to say nothing of external political and social causes), renders our universities and colleges susceptible to the temptation of quashing intellectual challenges by authoritarian means—what is now called “political correctness.” Current systems of scholarly self-governance, ironically justified on academic freedom grounds, make such suppression easier than it would otherwise prove, as strictly majoritarian decision-making procedures, insulated from most external mediation, permit dominant coalitions to squelch dissident minorities in a manner the authors of the Federalist Papers would have found unsurprising.

One might appeal to trustees to provide forms of mediation now lacking. Their formal sovereignty over the university certainly gives them the legal legs to try. Yet those stanchions have been undermined by a forbidding mass of contrary convention. As laity, with generally no background in academic practice other than having once themselves been students, interventions by trustees in the intellectual processes of the university are presumed to be of the blinkered, ham-fisted sort—cures worse than any

possible disease. Still, if we reexamine the case in light of what decades of growing political correctness should have taught us, trustee interventions, within limits, may have strong justifications on which to stand. Let's attempt to set them out.

Trustees inhabit a world in which intellectual disputes have far less emotional salience than they do for faculty. Even interdenominational differences, about which secularized academicians care little, have in contemporary America surprisingly little social edge. In this sense, nonacademic America may be the most fully realized embodiment of a pragmatic civil ethos as has ever existed on this planet—a consummation for which at least some of the Founders would have non-devoutly wished. While sharp elbows may sometimes be at a premium in commercial life and a dearth of ascriptive communities lead to much solitary bowling, ordinary Americans, through the fluidity of their intermingling—whether in pursuit of profit or love—rarely part company over ideology or, for that matter, garden-variety politics. Their hiring decisions, workplace camaraderie, church membership, selection of doctors, dentists, and lawyers, business patronage, in-law relations, friendships, and sometimes even marriage choices have typically proceeded with blissful unconcern about the theoretic allegiances and cultural partisanship so professionally crucial to many academics. Non-academics, to be sure, may have some strong opinions, and enthusiasts are present in their midst, but unlike academics the circumstances of their lives rarely require or even permit the excommunication of unbelievers.

The reigning ideologies of contemporary American academe, feminism, postmodernism, the latter-day epigones of Marxism, queer theory, etc., etc., are largely hot house plants, the devising of full-time intellectuals in close communion with one another. By contrast, the ideology of liberalism was to a substantial extent the product of thinkers with at least one foot, and quite often two, planted squarely in the world of practical endeavor. The formative theorists of the American polity—Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Marshall, Calhoun, and Webster—were all thoughtful men of action, immersed in business, agricultural, and legal as well political pursuits. None were dreamers or closeted utopians. The earlier British developers of liberal theory and their followers at least through the mid-nineteenth century were also frequently men of affairs as much as thought: John Locke, the protégé of Shaftsbury and author of a colonial charter; parliamentarians like John Trenchard, Richard Cobden (also a manufacturer), John Bright, even John

Stuart Mill, M.P., and East India official. Yes, Adam Smith was a professor, and Jeremy Bentham a lawyer who never practiced, but overall the early champions of the rights of civil society were deeply engaged within it.

Trustees are mainly worldlings as well. To be sure, not many qualify as liberal theorists, systematic cogitation on social and political questions not being their wont. In addition, to the extent that over the last thirty years today's trustees have been exposed to the opining of professors, their occasional ruminations derive discernible color from the current multiculturalist-communalist academic ascendancy. Still, attitudinal surveys show a range of opinion among the laity far more extended toward the "conservative" end of the spectrum (which in America generally means traditionally liberal) than is true for scholars. Thus, whatever the potential within the chambers of academic power for serious debate over the larger merits of a planned versus a spontaneous order, it is more likely to arise between trustees and the professoriate than anywhere else. Abstract debate over philosophic systems is, of course, not part of the trustee job description, so, as things stand, this potential isn't likely to be realized. But if trustees could be brought to see themselves as the natural custodians of a viewpoint helpful in remedying a systemic academic pathology, they might find ways to realize it in the address of more practical intellectual problems.

Even if most trustees aren't given to deep reflection about how American society should be organized, they are nonetheless its creatures. And since American society is the evolved product of a liberal dispensation, with institutions and practices largely shaped by the liberal generosity of "live and let live," they are likely to possess habits of mind similarly generous. That is to say, they are accustomed to seeing intellectual differences, like other differences among people who have daily problems to solve, as things to be managed, rather than fought over to the death. The possibilities of coexistence among such differences will generally seem more realistic and desirable to them than it will to many academics, because in their own sphere that kind of coexistence is the norm.

We would, undoubtedly, not want this disposition to rule the academic roost entirely, since universities, as knowledge-seeking establishments, need to winnow the true from the false. A press toward dispositive solutions is thus a rightful professorial contribution to academic governance. But this press can be, as it too often has been, pushed toward the premature closure of legitimate dispute by those seeking dogmatic safety for uncertain opinion.

Against this evil, trustees are well situated by inclination—by sensibility if one prefers—to apply an intellectual corrective, again, provided that they see themselves as being charged and able to do so. Put another way, in trustees, the pragmatic spirit of the liberal American order can counterbalance the scholar's sometimes excessive thirst for perfected truth. This is their "intellectual claim" to a role in shaping academic policy. (A similar case could be made for greater donor assertiveness as well.)

Fittingly, the trustee claim to represent the virtues of liberal pragmatism is itself pragmatic, rooted in American historical contingency. Its validity derives from the present nature of American society, might lose its force in others, or in our own, should it substantially change. Trustee assertiveness is also not an across-the-board intellectual remedy, since on some matters and occasions it could carry prejudices as likely to confound as promote the due exercise of academic freedom. And even with this caveat, it requires trustees to school themselves sufficiently in the intellectual issues assertiveness must encounter, lest open-minded amateurism be too ignorant to represent a net plus. Such schooling will require a higher level of job motivation than is now the case; to say nothing of improved procedures for trustee selection, training, and advisement. But if the pragmatic rationale for trustee assertiveness can be recognized and accepted, the institutional reforms needed to overcome the remaining obstacles could be attempted.

How then might trustee assertiveness make itself appropriately felt?

There are occasions, even now, when trustees are drawn into nasty intellectual showdowns. Ideologically driven tenure battles, for instance, can force them to act as final arbiters. Such fights are frequently reflections of problems within the faculty that more salutary intellectual climates and institutional arrangements might have avoided. When trustees are required to resolve them, the outcome almost inevitably diminishes their standing in the eyes of one or another group of campus stakeholders. Intelligent trustee assertiveness, directed at improving climate as a matter of broad policy instead of passively waiting the fallout of personal grievance, might prevent some of these bloodlettings.

Two contrasting principles should guide the academic stewardship of trustees. The first is to avoid as much as is possible involvement in judgments about intellectual specifics such as individual personnel decisions, course content, and the structure of particular programs—questions so specialized that expertise weighs far more heavily than temperateness, tolerance, and

generalized liberality. The second is to maintain an active interest in all matters pertaining to overall intellectual climate, especially the degree to which core principles of rational discourse—objectivity, disengagement, meritocracy, civility, and pluralism—are honored and institutionalized. Here trustee fair-mindedness, ideological coolness, and intellectual distance, can help keep schoolman passions from running discourse off reason's rails.

Perhaps an analogy lies in the contrast of findings of law and fact in the courtroom, divided, in most cases, between judges and juries. Like judges, trustees should see themselves as having a responsibility to ensure that the rules of sound intellectual discourse are recognized, that the academic cultures of the institutions they supervise are "lawful" in the ways they preserve the free and effective exercise of reason. This, of course, is a matter of faculty responsibility as well, but since the nature of these rules, in many essentials, tracks the operating principles of a liberal social order, laymen who take their fiduciary functions seriously should be able to understand them well enough to backstop overall compliance. By contrast, application of rules to individual cases, which depend on the evaluation of specific sets of academic facts, should be very largely the purview of faculty.

Let's be a bit more precise about these types of rules.

Objectivity. Rigorous intellectual endeavor, embodied in science first and foremost, but in all good scholarship to the extent it can be, demands that evidence and logic trump opposing claims of faith, feeling, or authority. Indeed, academic freedom has no point absent objectivity, since it is only the comparatively strenuous exercise of this virtue that justifies scholars in telling laymen to step back. As already noted, objectivity is easier to sustain in some academic fields than in others. In the natural sciences, where the phenomena studied can usually be broken down into precisely defined, experimentally isolatable variables, the decisive resolution of competing hypotheses is possible. This allows rival investigators to replicate each other's work, and makes departure from good practice readily detectable. In other fields, especially the realms of humane learning, including the social sciences, opacity is more typical. The phenomena studied are more complex, the questions asked more detailed, and the methods employed either less rigorous or less powerful. Even with the best intentions, expert opinion often boils down to little more than informed judgment, and sometimes not even that. In such an environment, scholarly rivals with reputations at risk face

temptations to desert objectivity for other means of settling disputes—often by asserting some form of dogmatic or institutional authority.

Objectivity is hardly an arcane concept. It is a common demand on all who cope with the competitive exigencies of a liberal order. Winning and losing in systems of relatively free competition requires getting things right—laboring under illusions doesn't serve the bottom line. Although few trustees will come to their posts having studied the history of science, as successful businesspeople and professionals most will understand the importance of attacking challenging problems with due diligence. They can thus recognize the importance of scholarly objectivity and, with little at stake in academic turf fights, blow the whistle when the verities of feeling, faith, and power get resurrected in new forms. It should be particularly easy for them to do this when intellectual authoritarianism rises to, or near, the status of a disciplinary credo. Areas of study influenced by constructivism and identity scholarship, like women's studies and ethnic studies, together with spheres of cultural studies, "science studies," and anthropology, have experienced this kind of intellectual devolution. Their practitioners dismiss objectivity as a hegemonic charade in the service of power and privilege or claim that one's truth is dependent social status, race, or sex. The real world, and real worldlings, know better, and should feel entitled to set such epistemological perverseness aright.

Disengagement. Smirks about ivory towers notwithstanding, laity can readily appreciate the importance of academic disengagement. It is, after all, nothing more than a reaffirmation of the principle of avoiding conflicts of interest. Observation will always be far from perfect. Financial disclosure and blind trust requirements for politicians, and Hatch Act restrictions for civil servants, reflect the principle's application in government. A welter of internal auditing and managerial safeguards, recently reinforced by Sarbanes Oxley, constitute the counterpart in the corporate sector.

Academics avoid conflicts of interest, among other ways, by steering clear of political involvements where the emphasis will necessarily be on winning, not clarifying. Politicos are expected to spin the truth to serve their vested interests: scholars—ideally—should be ready to name it irrespective of consequence. Scholars do, of course, possess all the rights of the citizen to enter politics. Whether this is particularly wise when their fields have political relevance is perhaps another matter. Early AAUP statements certainly took great pains to stress the need for academic prudence and reserve in politics. Academic programming that openly proclaims a

commitment to political advocacy and/or activism, as is frequently the case in social work education, women's studies, and teacher education, clearly crosses an important line, and, if unimpeded, bids others to follow. Extracurricular education of a coercive, indoctrinating bent is another booming industry on America's campuses deeply nested in residence life programs and "taught" by individuals bereft of serious academic credentials. None of this has a place in a non-partisan academy. Trustees are more than equipped by their participation in a free political and economic order to discern such offenses and cry foul.

Meritocracy. In pursuing knowledge, "knowledge-competence" is the touchstone of resource allocation, whether the resource is students, faculty, or the curriculum. From an academic standpoint, this is meritocracy defined. With respect to students, meritocracy bases admissions and retention on competence for acquiring and utilizing knowledge; with respect to faculty hiring and promotion, competence in transmitting and discovering knowledge; and in matters pertaining to curriculum, the extent to which a proposed element incorporates the knowledge students most need to absorb. These are not easy determinations to make, and may in some situations have to be subordinated to prudential concerns. But faculty primacy in making them depends entirely on their assumed expertise and dedication to evaluating the relevant truth claims, as does academic freedom across-the-board.

The principle of meritocracy is not confined to academe. It is systemically embedded in the order of liberalism, taking varying shapes to suit varying needs. Getting it right in the marketplace means finding the best people to do the job at hand. The boss's son may take a shortcut from mailroom to executive suite, but unless he's carrying some inherited acumen, profits will drop. CEOs of major firms rarely survive sustained falls in baseline indicators. Around the world, meritocratic bureaucracies and militaries are understood to be signatures of effectiveness and modernity. The desirability of meritocracy in general, and its centrality to academe in particular, should thus be a matter of second nature for most American trustees. And given their wide experience in the ways of the world, its occasional subversion by institutional insiders should neither startle nor be beyond detection.

Quota-driven admissions and hiring systems are not meritocratic in any genuine academic sense. Despite recent judicial meanderings, this is a fact that should be transparent to trustees. Consequently, trustees need not take faculty (or administrative) support for quotas to be determinative on

academic freedom grounds. As to their defense as matters of equity, the more traditional liberalism of trustees is apt to be a better guide to policy than are faculty and administrative enthusiasms. The juxtaposition of lay and faculty roles in the defense of academic meritocracy ranks as one of the strangest ironies of contemporary academic history. Faculty, whose professional privileges and intellectual projects rise or fall on merit, have been willing to sacrifice it to the politics of diversity. The laity, on the other hand, has consistently refused to do so—at least whenever the proposition is put to them in state referenda or opinion polls. The clash of insider and outsider culture could hardly be more evident, or painfully telling. If the American university is to survive its current peril with intellectual integrity intact, salvation will probably owe more to classic lay liberalism than any academic sensibilities.

Civility. There is certainly a good deal of rough and tumble in an open society, and the vulgarity of much popular taste sits poorly with minding manners and refinement. Still, interpersonal relations in a society of presumed social equals, as well as of achievement-based mobility, undermines the hauteur and cringing associated with the reciprocations of caste. In the marketplace especially, everyone is entitled to a certain minimal respect, a level of personal affirmation that supersedes other distinctions. The customer, after all, is always right, and to be addressed with at least a chilly politeness, however unhappy and complaining he or she may be.

The muting of personalized conflict within institutional settings is also a standard liberal political practice, as in legislatures where puffy honorifics like “the gentleman from...” or “the honorable member” attempt to divert rhetorical assaults from persons to policy, with deviations open to sanction. The same is true in the courtroom. Obviously there are many, many lapses amidst these mollifications, but a truly open society cannot endure without them. A greenhorn fresh from Ellis Island quickly became for storekeepers and ward healers alike a Mr. O’Brien, Mr. Rossetti, or Mr. Cohen, and ceased doffing his cap to bigwigs. By contrast, down south, where caste remained king, native sons were forced to bear with appellations like “boy” or “uncle” as well as clear the sidewalk when their “betters” sought swagger room.

While the academy has space for earned deference, civility is also one of its paramount values in its relation to objectivity. Civility helps preserve

objectivity by quelling passion. If you concede that your interlocutor is both a gentleman and scholar, he's more likely to sit still for your evisceration of his logic. Trustees, familiar with ordinary workplace courtesies, should be able to see civility's even greater importance to the life of the mind.

Civility should not be confused with what both inside the academy and out is now commonly referred to as "sensitivity": the disinclination to give any sort of offense. In the battle of ideas intellectual reputations inevitably suffer. The charge of "insensitivity" has become a ubiquitous *ad hominem*, rebounding against arguments with a force proportionate to their power, the first refuge of privileged unreason. The line to be drawn is between assaults on arguments and assaults on motives and character. Indeed, a willingness to receive and respond to rational criticism in its own terms is as much a part of what academic civility means as a refusal to hurl mud.

While mudfests will occasionally break out even among Mr. Chipses, the conflation of scholarship and politics has made them far more likely. The discovery by academic activists of "institutional racism" and "institutional sexism," concepts that divorce the original sins from any overt action or even consciousness has become a particularly potent enabler. Traditional defenses of merit, for example, can now be impugned simply because merit produces differential outcomes among groups. Discussions of possible group differences are extremely perilous. Witness the expulsion of Larry Summers from both Harvard and polite academic society for simply hypothesizing gender disparities in high-end science aptitude.

The question is how to enforce civility without suppressing expression, since even concepts like institutional racism have their right to an intellectual day in court. Perhaps trustees should simply insist upon the prohibition of direct accusations, essentially borrowing the ban on pejoratives found in parliaments and, *de facto*, most office suites. But bans are easily abused. A better remedy might be to attempt to promote a culture of civility through admonition and example: admonition via its topical inclusion in graduate training (which couldn't help but have an immediate influence on senior faculty attitudes), and example, at the very least, through the refusal of administrators to join any insensitivity hues and cries. Trustee initiatives directed toward strengthening the civility content of graduate training are entirely appropriate, and since trustees hire (and fire) university presidents, insisting on good "example" is natural to their office. They only need feel empowered to do so.

Pluralism. The daily experience of a free society is as effective an education in pluralism as one can receive. A walk through city neighborhoods or a ride on the subway; an hour of channel surfing or web-browsing; a market survey reported to a board meeting or in the business section of the morning's journal; churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples in close proximity; the clash of ads for competing products (and lifestyles); the collision of opinions among newspaper columnists present, in their varied ways, pluralism's pulsating flesh and coursing blood. No one can escape it. Liberalism breeds it—the product of individuated choice, competitive ease, multiple synergies, polarizing antipathies, and the bloom of possibility that comes in freedom's train.

For most of us, it has not only become something familiar, but something that we'd find impossible to do without—the monotones of simpler, more ordered states by comparison an unappealing bore. But more than that, most of us can recognize pluralism's profound advantages, making creativity a necessity and, through its swirling mix of disparate ingredients, an inevitability. As creatures of this kaleidoscopic habitation, laity coming to campus will usually carry these appreciations within them.

Once there, however, they may find themselves strangers in a strange land, especially if they care to look closely. Intellectually speaking, our universities have become within the full range of public controversy, what the reach of the visible spectrum is within the full range of electromagnetism, a veritable sliver. This need not be a sign of pathology in every case. In the natural sciences and allied domains, where problems and methods yield conclusive tests and expanding consensus, the confinement of serious viewpoints to a few positions among the many generally means theoretical success—actual progress towards truth. Here the sojourning pluralist has little cause for worry. But in the cloudier realms of humane learning, where the intellectual articles displayed tend, at best, to be little more than considered, knowledgeable opinion, the relative uniformity of academic perspective should set off alarms. There are alternate thought-worlds in these realms that, if not identical in structure, are serious enough in content to provide useful points of reference for academic life. In almost every case, their lively state suggests a pluralistic deficiency on campus. The universe of think tanks is far more diverse, for instance, as is the serious media—whether represented by the columnists of prestige dailies, editorial opinion, or the plenum of quality journals and blogsites. Certainly the old saw about conservatism, in its various shapes and sizes, representing the “stupid party” has—given the

vicissitudes suffered by many leftist nostrums during the twentieth century's twilight—lost its claim on reasonability. Yet one would hardly know this from the intellectual condition of our campuses, where survey after survey of professorial opinion, as well as increasingly avowed institutional commitments to and celebrations of multicultural totems, proclaim the near monopoly of the “progressive outlook.” With pluralism in their bones, America's trustees should find all this very fishy and disturbing.

And they should not have far to look in locating one of the monoculture's primary sources. Academe's governing processes are almost entirely involuted. Institutional decisions on hiring and curriculum are generally made in a majoritarian winner-take-all manner, with dissenting views crowded out. What's more, academic majorities self-perpetuate through cooptation, having no recall to some larger, fluctuating constituency, as do their political equivalents. Heterodoxy's market opportunities—so available in larger public discourse, where entry requirements, especially in an online age, are rather low—thus get damped. Even worse, intellectual coalitions, once a tipping point has been reached, can further entrench themselves by rewriting the rules of play. The real point of “diversity hiring” is precisely this. By recruiting faculty on the grounds of ethnicity and gender, faculty support for the ideologies justifying this sort of ascription is ensured.

Most governing boards are also recruited through cooptation. But trustees know a different sphere, and could make no better contribution to the academy's health than by incorporating more of its manner of business into campus doings. Imposing their own judgments about specific hires and course content is not the way. However misguided the rule of scholarly prejudice, trustees don't have the knowledge base to second-guess. But they can promote an institutional reordering that encourages the intellectual competition that scholars need to be kept honest. Possibilities might include altered decisional systems, replacing majoritarian with proportional voting methods; the sponsorship of formal disputations à la “the more enlightened” Middle Ages; and the introduction of organizational checks and balances embodied in autonomous programs and departments representing alternate schools of thought. Trustees would neither be exceeding their stewardship, nor getting beyond their depth, in taking such steps.

For any of these good works to prosper, trustees must believe. They must believe they know something about the ideals of academic life that springs not from academe, but from the lived experience of freedom—the taproot of

all liberal institutions, academe included. They need not deny that the same lived experience has shaped the sensibility of academics, provided they also bear in mind that (like all institutions) academe generates myopias and refractions blinding inmates to what others can see. Systemic minds, pressured coops, insularity, struggles for status, sweeping visions, irreducible ambiguity can, insensibly and by degrees, produce a false consensus owing less to consensus than social and organizational pressures. As outsiders, conscientious trustees are positioned to detect and remediate such intellectual devolutions.

Trustees have repeatedly been told by their university minders that they are incapable of exercising such a role and should, in consequence, leave academe's intellectual interior untouched. It is trustees, however, who are the true minders. To be sure, in order to assume their rightful role, they must become better studied in the ways of their charges, and more motivated to play their part. But this, in turn, requires a belief that the part is theirs to play and a clear knowledge of the reason why they should play it. For all the argument preceding, that reason isn't hard to state succinctly. Liberal citizenship and a liberal higher education are entwined vines, rooted in a common soil. Each must support the other or both will fall.