



## Trust An Academic To Be So Foolish

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Last month the University of Sydney sacked a lecturer in politics who showed his class a swastika superimposed over the flag of Israel. Last week another University of Sydney academic, English lecturer Nick Riemer, had published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* an article that succeeded in being offensive, insensitive and hypocritical. Riemer managed to display publicly the deep sickness that pervades so many parts of our universities.

Had the author of “After Christchurch universities have a responsibility: abandon Ramsay” been other than a Sydney University academic, it is doubtful the *Herald* would have published. To paraphrase George Orwell, there are some things so foolish that they could have been written only by a member of the intelligentsia.

Riemer argued that in the wake of the Christchurch massacre, the university should not collaborate with the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation because Ramsay sought to teach Western culture as a “coherent whole”. He wrote: “There is a clear analogy between thinking that European books belong together and thinking that European people do too.”

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According to Riemer, teaching Plato, Shakespeare and Virgil in a “single, unified program of study”, as Ramsay would do, “represents a separatist cultural essentialism that, after Christchurch, should be deeply alarming”.

“If society is to escape from the murderous civilisational hatred displayed on Friday in Christchurch — to say nothing of the West’s longstanding, far more deadly military campaigns against the Muslim world — universities simply must stop legitimising this kind of thinking.”

In an effort to bolster his case against it, Riemer transcends the bounds of decency when he claims “Ramsay’s academic supporters should pay attention” to the words of the alleged murderer and they should “reflect seriously on how the Ramsay curriculum validates the world view behind (the) massacre”.

Riemer has the right to freedom of speech and to be deeply offensive. Presumably some people also would add that the price of living in a free society is that taxpayers fund the salaries of people such as Riemer so that he can say what he wants.

But while Riemer is entitled to criticise Western civilisation, he is a hypocrite to then maintain that students at his university not be able to enrol in the Ramsay course. The idea that you should be free to criticise the concept of Western civilisation is one of its essential legacies. However, if - Riemer had his way, no student would ever find this out.

Riemer is proposing that no one should actually study the thing that he is criticising.

The irony is, of course, that Riemer is able to enjoy his academic position, as well as the freedom to criticise Western civilisation, only because of the civilisation that he so despises. He is a direct beneficiary of its ideals.

Riemer’s entire argument is based on the freedoms afforded to us by Western civilisation. Not once does he mention the freedoms that it has given the world. Not once does he mention that the victims at Christchurch were free to worship because they live in a Western society, which is characterised by religious toleration. His intolerance is utterly opposed to the values of a civilisation that has given us the universal values of respect for the individual, equality of men and women under the law, the abolition of slavery and freedom of speech.

Unfortunately, his view is not singular. Rather, the commonly held notion in Western academe is that Western civilisation is responsible for all evils in the world, past, present and future. Any individual who is deemed to be “in favour” of it is now seen as white supremacist. This view is shared by elements of the media.

A few days ago it was announced that the University of Cambridge had withdrawn its offer of a visiting fellowship to Canadian psychologist and best-selling author Jordan Peterson. A spokesman for the university said: “(Cambridge) is an inclusive environment and we expect all our staff and visitors to uphold our principles. There is no place here for anyone who cannot.”



Apparently Cambridge university staff are inclusive of all opinions except those with which they disagree.

Peterson's rejection by Cambridge is a damning indictment on the state of academe in the West, which is full to the brim of self-loathing. It appears that academics are determined to do their utmost to exclude reason, inquiry and philosophical openness from their respective institutions.

In these academic circles, identity politics is pre-eminent. Every subject must be considered through the narrow, limited and unimaginative lens of class, race and gender, otherwise it is deemed valueless. As British writer Brendan O'Neill commented: "To read the killer's alleged manifesto, as currently being covered by CNN, *The New York Times* and others, is to gain a horrible glimpse into the cultural fragmentation and racial paranoia unleashed by the relentless rise of identitarianism."

Western civilisation gave birth to both the concept of the individual and the idea that we all share a common humanity.

One of the best expressions of that common humanity is found in Shylock's speech in *The Merchant of Venice*: "Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?"

Shakespeare is included in the Ramsay Centre's curriculum. It would be a tragedy indeed if, on account of the likes of Riemer, students were to be denied the opportunity to learn how Western civilisation gave us Shakespeare, Plato and Virgil.

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