*Excerpts from*

# The Politics and Philosophy of Political Correctness

## Jung Min Choi and John W. Murphy
### (Praeger, 1992)

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"To be sure, the attack on political correctness (PC) is all about social control. The conservative onslaught is designed to curtail discourse in areas ranging from art to law."
– Jung Min Choi and John W. Murphy, *The Politics and Philosophy of Political Correctness* (Praeger, 1992), p. ix.

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The following excerpts are taken from *The Politics and Philosophy of Political Correctness* by Jung Min Choi, an associate professor of sociology at San Diego State University, and John W. Murphy, a professor of sociology at the University of Miami. Both co-authors are self-described political liberals and unabashed proponents of postmodernism and Political Correctness. In their book, Choi and Murphy describe the historical background and the philosophical basis of Political Correctness, address many of the attacks on PC by conservatives, and present the strongest arguments that leftists can muster in favor of postmodernism and Political Correctness

## Introduction

"PC'ers are chided for undermining democracy, free speech, and civilization, because they argue that the shape of reality is influenced by social factors." [ix]

As Aldous Huxley argued in the 1946 revised Foreward to *Brave New World*, the "new totalitarianism" of conservatives depends not upon Leviathan government but on their arguments from natural law. The new experts are technocrats and scientists who will monopolize power and marginalize the masses. "In the guise of science, power will be exercised." [ix-x]

"What better way is there to create this image of the polity than by using science, logic, and other so-called value-free methods? Claiming that certain policies and practices are scientific, and divorced from politics, gives them a dangerous sense of inviolability. For through the exercise of science, decisions that are possibly discriminatory and repressive may go unchallenged, due to their alleged rational and neutral character.... Still under the influence of the Enlightenment, most persons believe that science and technology are divorced from prejudice and power. Science simply epitomizes reason."

"What PC'ers have done is to raise doubts about the epistemology that supports this outlook. As Michel Foucault writes about science, the 'great stories of continuity' should be rejected."

"Most of the complaints raised by conservatives about PC are based on distortion.... Conservative have suddenly become concerned with threats to truth, objectivity, scientific rigor, and natural law, as a means to reinforce their political platform." [x]

"The public should not be confused by this maneuver. Behind this concern for upholding philosophical principles lurks political motives. Although conservatives may try to direct attention to the nature of truth, their agenda is to discredit particular artists, theories, messages, social movements, and so forth."

The aim of PC'ers "is not to dismantle science but to prevent this or any other mode of knowledge from dominating all others. What they want to expose is the rationale for ideology so that pluralism can flourish. Their intent is to democratize culture to its core. On the other hand, conservatives seem to be guilty of promoting monism, as a consequence of their decision to defend particular absolutes."

"PC'ers are meeting resistance for confronting head-on racism, sexism, and similar social maladies. Indeed, the desired result of PC is openness – the proliferation of discourse." [xi]

"In today's world, such persistence and disrespect for conventional ways are vital to instigating excitement about democracy." PC'ers can "help crack the facade of normalcy that currently appears to be impenetrable and that discourages the activism and idealism necessary for social reform. The last thing conservatives want, however, is to revisit the 1960s or face similar cultural disruption in the 1990s. Therefore, PC has to be undermined. Given the perceived threat posed by political correctness, the cultural significance of the PC debate should not be underestimated."

"...[B]ecause PC'ers acknowledge that reality is invented and say that the social is imaginary, the polity can always be reorganized...."
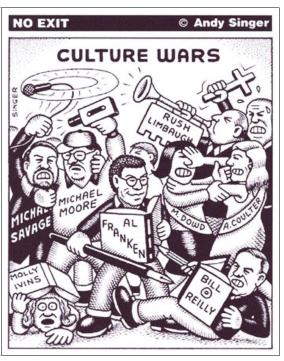
"The stage is thus set for social eruption. All that is needed is a modicum of energy. In this sense, to paraphrase an old Marxist saying, political correctness seems to have ignited the spark that may light a cultural fire.... Hopefully, this book will help political correctness to receive a fair hearing...."

"What political correctness is about... is who will control social life. Will the traditional centers of power be allowed to hide behind the facade of neutrality, or will political discussion expand in such a way that options are not restricted by hierarchy, class antagonisms, racial or sexual discrimination, or other forms of repression? The question is, will democracy finally arrive, or will the current cycle of ineffective reforms continue?" [xii]

"The real danger of PC'ers lies in their reluctance to endorse an alternative system.... In turn, this development could lead to radical democratization, or order without a system. For those who are constantly looking for an angle, which can be used to preserve privilege and promote exploitation, PC is not very attractive."

"...[T]he center that is usually thought to be vital to sustaining power is absent. No wonder that PC has been so scurrilously attacked..." [xiii]



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CULTURE WARS

## Chapter 1: Contours of the PC Debate

[Choi and Murphy reference Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education*, and Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals*:] "In these texts, the imminent downfall of Western culture is analyzed and blamed on the liberal agenda that has been instituted since the 1960s.... Lurking in the background of this critique is the desire to redress the damage conservatives believe was caused by the counterculture reforms of the 1960s." [1]

[In reference to the controversy at Stanford and other universities over the role of Western culture in the core curriculum:] "Students who oppose the current monopoly of Western works in the curriculum have been portrayed in the mainstream media as know-nothings, who are intent on discrediting or overthrowing the West."

[In reference to D'Souza's criticism of the English Department at Duke:] "In short, PC consists of theories and practices that are designed to end injustices based on sex, race, class, and

other social variables....

Accordingly, the debate over PC has been quite stale and predictable, due to the almost total absence of any serious philosophical discussion."

"The aim of this book, therefore is to move the discussion of PC to a new level." [2]

"What is really going on is much more than a squabble over pedagogical or political tactics.... something more subtle, yet profound, is at stake. That is, there is a conflict between competing approaches to philosophy. As a result, very different conceptions of reality – specifically, knowledge and order – are proposed."

"The anti-PC forces advance a realistic conception of knowledge and order which is predicated on the acceptance of certain assumptions. These presuppositions comprise a unique world-view and include... beliefs about dualism, value-freedom, objectivity, and empiricism. The general result is foundationalism, for every aspect of social life is provided with a natural an unassailable identity."

"'Foundationalists,' as described Stanley Fish, 'are possessed by a hope... that our claims can be 'justified on the basis of some objective method of assessing such claims' rather than on the basis of the individual beliefs that have been derived from accidents of education and experience.'"

"The philosophy associated with PC has been identified at different times as deconstruction, post-structuralism, post-Marxism, and postmodernism." [3]

In PC, "reality is not the standard against which judgments are measured. Rather norms, laws, or facts are viewed to be mediated fully by the human presence. Social phenomena, simply put, have an identity that is created through linguistic acts or *praxis*. Reality is thus a human invention or, more accurately, a linguistic habit."

"The position taken in this book is that PC is inclusive rather than exclusive, and counter-hegemonic rather than repressive. In fact, the aim of PC is to open discussion, not to establish inflexible rules for discourse.... the purpose of PC is to foster a critical examination of every facet of social life.... Maybe to a fault, PC'ers advocated what Charles Jencks calls 'radical eclecticism,' whereby conventional boundaries, distinctions, and differentiations are dissolved. In this way, entirely new social *gestalten* can be announced." [4]

"What readers must recognize is that criticizing culture is not the same as abandoning norms. Likewise, reflecting critically on norms does not necessarily lead to chaos. Calling for responsive order, one that is based on human initiative rather than an outmoded hierarchy, has nothing to do with promoting anarchy. These distinctions are not appreciated by conservative critics, because of their adherence to realism. For according to realists, any challenge to reality can only result in disaster – the collapse of civilization."

"Recognizing that social options are not limited to order or disorder requires that an entirely new conception of existence be adopted.... For example, Jean Gebser refers to this condition as a 'world without opposite.' 'To surrender the opposite,' claims Gebser, 'is to gain together-ness: genuine inter-human participation.' This non-dualistic construction of reality is attendant to PC."

[The authors refer to this conception of reality as a "third way" of understanding existence.]

"PC has brought to a head a long-standing rivalry over the control of culture." [5]

"Critics have referred to PC as totalitarian.... [T]his designation is false. Nothing is sacrosanct with respect to PC.... Therefore, old taboos are dismissed and discussion can proceed in directions that were formerly prohibited. [6]

Eric Fromm: "The totalitarian impulse... is predicated on the 'annihilation of the individual self and its utter submission to a higher power.'" [7]

"...[T]he desire to totalize [read: absolutize] knowledge and order is compatible with totalitarianism." [8]

## Chapter 2: The Cultural Battlefield

"Currently, a war is underway in the United States. The battleground is a mostly unlikely place, the nation's colleges and universities. Most notable, English departments and the humanities are under attack.... an offensive has been launched by ruthless, right-wing critics to control literary theory in America.... the attempt is underway to discredit those who do not genuflect before traditional texts, performance or evaluation standards, or cultural practices."

"Gill Seidel... argues that a 'counter-hegemony' movement is underway, that is, counter of liberalism. Simply put, conservatives have come to accept the claim that ideas have political and other social consequences. As Seidel

writes, this 'project is a cultural struggle... to unsettle and displace the dominant ideology which constructed the post-war liberal and social democratic consensus.'" [11]

Paul de Man: "Theories have consequences, and the newer philosophies associated with political correctness have implications that conservatives distrust. What is at stake, suggests de Man, is the nature of reality." [12]

One way conservatives fight the PC war is through the manipulation of "symbolic violence" – e.g., promoting laissez-faire economics, supply-side economics, and "values-free" market mechanisms as if market forces are part of natural law rather than a construct of capitalism. "Skepticism about the market is deemed to be subversive." [15-17]

Although Bloom, D'Souza, Kimball, and other anti-PC'ers rarely support the capitalist free market openly, theirs is a political power-play.

Conservative also wage the culture war on the epistemological level:] "The foes of PC argue that it is pushing today's society to the brink of chaos. They contend that this is because credence is given to relativism...." and "their fear that Hobbes' nightmare will come true. A 'war of all against all' might erupt and consume everything that is pure, good, and true, especially the market'.... What hangs in the balance, as Emile Durkheim says, is the preservation of moral order." [19]

"A host of culprits have been cited for promoting disorder and the decline of civilization. John Dewey, Nietzsche, and Rousseau, along with more modern writers such as... Stanley Fish, are blamed for threatening the foundation of Western society.... Additionally, the 'new scholarship' found in many English, literature, and history departments is cited as the reason for declining interest in the humanities, not to mention the destruction of academic goals and standards. Conservatives seem to think that a 'new gnosticism' has begun to infest soceity and distort reason." [19-20]

Conservatives ask "how can free speech be abused by asking for accountability or criticizing professors for their pedagogical practices?" [20]

The authors cite conservative opposition to affirmative action and multiculturalism and criticize conservative support of "neutral" and "objective" standards.

Bill Bennett's reference to the "accumulated wisdom of our civilization."

Rene Welleck: "Deconstructionist theory is a flight from reality, and from history." [21]

"Most insidious about the opponents of PC is their assumption that formerly American society



"I SAID, IT'S GREAT TO FINALLY BE HOME FROM THE WAR!"

was fair and harmonious." In the "good old days" there was a "consensus" about how society should operate, but in fact there was rampant elitism, racial and sexual discrimination, preferential treatment for the privileged class, and suppression of dissent in academia, etc. "The point is clear, however, that most aspects of social life have always been politicized." [21]

Conservatives fight the culture war by claiming that cultural liberals violate "eternal or universal principles" and "defile sacred norms." "The ability to deflect criticism in this way... requires that the high ground of culture be captured.... However, special access to truth, objectivity, and other key indicators must be guaranteed to particular persons. Apparently, conservatives believe they have been blessed with this insight."

"To be sure, [William] Bennett claims that conservatism is not 'essentially theoretical or ideological.' Conservatives, he would have persons believe, are not political but are only interested in preserving certain norms, values, and beliefs. What he fails to admit is that such activity is at the heart of politics" – although conservatives would deny this connection. [22]

"What conservatives have embarked on is a voyage into what might be called 'metaphysical politics'" based on traditional ways of thinking that need no justification....

"This higher or ultimate reality is able to rationalize all fractures and attempts at innovation." [23]

"Yet the question must be asked, does such a utopia exist where neutrality and disinterestedness sustain order? If not, then the issue of who controls this organism must be raised. What interests, in other words, are served by this claim of neutrality?" [23-24]

"[T]he metaphysics accepted by conservatives is thought to be dubious and has been abandoned by PC'ers. This is a result of the 'incredulity toward metanarratives'... expressed by the supporters of PC. In other words, these new critics reject the abstract philosophical system that is at the heart of conservatism.... According to PC'ers, all abstract systems are politically motivated, or based on acts of will and hence these ideas are not inviolable."

"In general, conservatives believe that humans do not invent knowledge or order. Instead, society and nature comprise a sort of cosmos into which persons are born. William Harbour calls this the conservatives' 'cosmological principle.' The point is that norms are not subject to interpretation and easily changed. This is because, as Russell Kirk says, society represents a 'transcendent order.' In the end, this means that social regulations are considered by conservatives to be beyond dispute." [24]

"...[T]his belief in a reality *sui generis* is considered to be invalid by PC'ers. This 'foundationalist assumption,' according to Stanley Fish, is the product of various choices that have been made. Questions about reality could have been answered in another way, he argues, and an entirely different set of rules could have been accepted as normal. Furthermore, the norms that have come to dominate social life do not necessarily hold this position because they epitomize rationality. Instead, according to Fish, a host of historical circumstances, such as class, gender, and race, contribute to a norm gaining widespread acceptance. This is what Fish means when he suggest that all standards are political. Norms are not metaphysical, as conservatives maintain, but instead reflect various social interests." [24-25]

Abstract metaphysics is abandoned because of the anti-dualistic stance taken by PC'ers. Specifically, those who support PC understand social reality to be related to language use in a unique way. Norms, in short, are mediated by language and [are] hence symbolic. As a result, knowledge and order are never pure but are shaped by the interpretive thrust of language." [25]

## Chapter 3: Conservative Ideology

[Typically, both the opponents and proponents of PC debate the issues publicly in political terms, but philosophy is the key.

The authors discuss what Karl Mannheim called "the general philosophical and emotional complex" (or "a particular philosophy of knowledge and order") that constitutes conservatism."]

Liberals are at a disadvantage in public debates about PC because "liberals are perceived by the public as politicizing every side of social life. The result has been that the motives of liberals are thought to be suspect, while conservatives appear to be genuinely concerned with fairness and justice."

The political agenda of conservatives is "camouflaged" because conservatives try to conceal their agenda "behind a concern for morals and other cultural ideals." [30]

"The American public has been convinced... that conservatives are prudent and pragmatic, while liberals are radicals who show minimal regard for tradition, common sense, or conventional social mores."

Knowledge is mediated by factors that are "socially constituted".... "Simply put, facts are interpretive rather than value-free and objective."

"...All claims, in other words, must be viewed as motivated and reflecting a particular position." [31]

"Americans seem to be tired of politics. All the in-fighting, power plays, and obsequious deals have made many persons apathetic. Considering the depressing state of politics in the United States, who would not want to move policy discussions to a higher plane? In a sense, conservatives have done this because of their apparent apolitical demeanor. But the question must surely be asked, given the ubiquity of interpretation and the lifeworld, can a truly apolitical status ever be achieved? If all knowledge is established on socially constituted assumptions

about truth, facts, and reality, a value-free position is fictional."

"Most important at this juncture is the assumption made by conservatives that a belief in objectivity is justified. The point is, can a description of events be proffered that is not shaped by a person's social class, affiliations, or other cultural factors? There is no doubt that the lure of absolute truth may be quite strong, even to the extent that personal interests are denied or sublimated. The issue that remains is whether a pure picture of reality can ever be achieved."

Conservatives appeal to universal truths that "appear to be in tune with human nature and traditional wisdom," while "liberals will inevitably seem to be divisive."

"Conservatives... have been successful at representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, and outside of time. Conservatives have reified a particular version of social reality and made it appear to be universal." [32]

Conservative appeals to objectivity are bogus because, "like all ideologies," they "have a historical origin and, thus, are contingent." The legitimacy of conservatism, stated simply, is derived from agreement, consent, power, persuasion, or some combination of these elements.... conservatives are not disinterested and do not merely describe the demise of cultural ideals. Their focus on culture is not a value-free but a political undertaking." [33]

Conservatism perpetuates the myth of an "orderly universe" just as it perpetuates the myth of "a neat and polite community." [34]

**Objective Knowledge**

Conservatives seek a reliable epistemological foundation, and are in denial regarding "the ambiguity and uncertainty" of real life.

"Conservatives have adopted a standard practice, at least since the time of Descartes, to ensure the survival of order." They do this by "supplying all citizens with an identical stock of knowledge" – or "universals" – that they insist that everyone master. [34-35]

"Traditionally, conservatives have rejected the idea that reality and interpretation are intertwined... for universals are believed to be transcendent. Accordingly, William Harbour argues that the 'human mind can, through some form of ethical intuition or moral reasoning, come to know certain moral truths about man's natural obligations within the universal order of things.' Through some kind of almost miraculous vision, interpretation can be overcome and direct access gained to pure knowledge.... This conclusion is based on the assumption that adopting an inherently universal viewpoint is possible."

"The general contention of conservatives is that order is derived from the 'truths of the objective moral order.'" This is the "ontological foundation" of conservatism. [35]

D'Souza: PC, in relativizing everything, leads to "interpretive nihilism," and norms become based on little more than crowd psychology.

According to conservatives, what is needed is a renewed respect for facts.

**Disinterested Research**

Conservatives erroneously believe that science can be divorced from ideology.

"Conservatives place a lot of trust in a very traditional but, from the vantage point of PC, outmoded portrayal of science." This is the myth that, using the proper methodology, interpretation can be overcome and "an objective, empirical, and systematic foundation for knowledge can be constructed." [38]

"What needs to be addressed is whether scholarship is ever values-free."

"Conservatives have always believed that humans have the ability to achieve an unadulterated perspective on reality." [39]

In their opposition to rationalism, "conservatives believe the mind should be prevented from contaminating reality." [40]

### Social Norms

Conservatives believe that a society will not survive without a common culture.

William Harbour: "The source of moral and political authority... lies outside of the wills of individual men."

Edmund Burke: "All citizens have obligations that are not a matter of choice." [41]

According to conservatives, norms are "value-free, unbiased, and fair."

Conservatives also imply that "humans are incapable of regulating themselves."

### Critical Legal Studies (CLS)

The operating assumption of Critical Legal Studies is that law is interpretive and favors those with power, so the judicial branch should help equalize the process.

Conservatives criticize this as "judicial activism." "What conservatives... want is an asocial rendition of law" in which "court decisions would be mechanical" based on their assumption that the laws are objective, fair, and impartial.

"But who gets arrested, prosecuted, and jailed, for example, is a matter of discretion, which, in turn, may be influenced by political, economic, and other modes of power." [42]

Conservatives also assume that racism and sexism would abate "if only neutral or 'color blind' standards" were used in admissions, hiring, promotion, etc. – i.e., if "merit-based" guidelines and "uniform standards of justice" were followed.

The authors point out that admissions, hiring and promotions have never been unbiased and fair in society. [43]

What constitutes "great literature"?

D'Souza praises Matthew Arnold for his insight into "the best that has been thought and said."

D'Souza: Samuel Johnson calls for works to be evaluated in terms of a "collective literary judgment" that is the product of "serious minds over generations." [44-45]

This is the idea that art can be evaluated on its own merits, divorced from politics or ideology.

In touting the superiority of Western civilization, conservatives regard it as "the ahistorical point of reference against which all other cultures can be judged."

Furthermore, it is assumed that "a natural hierarchy of values exists."

Conservatives complain that in the absence of objective standards, "culture has been reduced to an internecine rivalry between competing claims".... "Social life is thus balkanized"... and "the melting pot is gone." [46]

"Without assimilation to a common culture, conservatives believe, the preservation of order is extremely difficult, if not impossible." But why should primacy be given to the West, when attempting to ensure the viability of order?" Conservatives answer that because Western civ represents "the highest state of human development, this culture should serve as a model for all persons and societies."

Therefore, to eliminate the "great books" of Western civilization is to miseducate students and leave them culturally illiterate.

E.D. Hirsch: The primary function of literacy is to "make us masters of [a] standard instrument of knowledge and communication." Therefore, "through socialization, persons are expected to acquire a common stock of knowledge... Yet how is this standard of interactional competence supposed to be secured?" [47]

Conservatives demand that students "comply with the strictures imposed by authorities or the images of the polity that are considered to be inviolable."

Conservatives like Hirsch are "searching for a standard that is 'normative for all textual interpretation'" and one that avoids the subjectivism and relativism of a historicist interpretation.

The conservative view of human freedom is conditioned by "an all-encompassing moral system" in which "the individual may be present but is hardly sovereign." [49]

### Culture and Politics

The appeal of conservatives is strong "because most persons have faith in truth, objectivity, and science."

"What the cultural Right has successfully done is to link their political agenda to traditionally accepted epistemological themes" such as

objective truth and absolute standards for morality. "These ideas are thought by most persons to be the cornerstone of justice and order."

## Chapter 4: The Postmodern Alternative

Jean-Francois Lyotard defines postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" [*The Postmodern Condition*, 1984, p. xxiv].

Postmodernism rejects traditional Western philosophy which is based on belief in "the One, the Good, and the True." [55]

PC'ers reject the duality between reality and interpretation. For them, everything is opinion, and "nothing is undefiled by interpretation." [56]

As Wittgenstein taught, "all knowledge is derived from 'language games,'"and "there is nothing outside of language."

"While PC is not synonymous with postmodernism, they are associated because of their respective positions on the interpretive or non-dualistic character of reality.... In each case, language use extends to the core of existence and defies objectification." [57]

According to Lyotard and Wittgenstein, "the influence of language cannot be overcome. Direct access to reality... is impossible because every phenomenon is thoroughly mediated by language use. This is what Jacques Derrida means when he declares that 'nothing exists outside of the text' [*Of Grammatology*, 1976, p. 158]. Nothing avoids the influence of interpretation, and thus reality should be viewed as simply a linguistic invention." [57]

Stanley Fish rejects "the distinction that is often made between descriptive and evaluative statements.... pure or neutral descriptions of events are impossible" and "non-interpretive statements cannot be made." Value-free assessments are impossible, and "description is simultaneously interpretation." According to Fish, "descriptive statements are paradigm-specific." [59]

"According to Fish every object, including a house, is context-specific, and thus statements that are accepted a priori as general are likely to be inaccurate. For as he states, 'linguistic knowledge is contextual rather than abstract, local rather than general, dynamic rather than invariant.'" [59] ["Pragmatism and Literary Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 11(3), 1985, p. 438.]

Postmodernists like Fish contend that language does not reflect reality or convey meaning. For him, "interpretation is united inextricably with reality." [60]

"To paraphrase Jacques Lacan, facts are derived from language rather than reality.... There is no escape from interpretation." [61]

### Truth

"Postmodernists abandon the traditionally held 'correspondence theory' of truth. According to this thesis... a statement is true when it accurately reflects the nature of reality." [61]

According to the correspondence theory of truth, "truth could be distinguished authoritatively from illusion."

"The alleged strength of this theory, however, is also the source of many problems. Most serious is the assumption that truth can be measured with respect to a standard that transcends interpretation." [62]

"All that is available to assess truthfulness is a labyrinth of interpretations with no end in sight to this maze."

Stanley Fish on law: "There is no core to law that 'compels agreement and precludes interpretation.' There are no 'authoritative remarks,' in other words, that are available to settle disputes and provide incontrovertible guidelines for rendering future judicial decisions...."

"Thus Fish writes that truth is local, regional, and always the embodiment of partial perspectives. Rather than universal, truth and all other constraints 'flow from local and historically limited modes of thought and action.' As a result, Fish maintains that there is seldom a single truth but 'many truths that emerge and seem perspicuous when a particular perspective or point of view has been established and is in force. Truth, in short, is a linguistic construction and variable." [63]

"Fish's preference for rhetoric is not to suggest that truth can never be found or that truth can mean anything. Instead, what he is saying is that before truth can be discovered, the assumptions that are accepted by persons about reality must be understood.... consulting an objective standard is no longer sufficient to accomplish this task." [64]

### Facts

"Clearly truth is related to facts...." [64]

"Consistent with the ideal of correspondence, facts are externalized. Facts are transformed into 'quantities of information' and neutralized. By giving facts a quantitative identity the belief is

perpetrated that they are autonomous" and this "process of quantification" is assumed by anti-PCers "to be devoid of interpretation." "Hence... facts come to be viewed as 'things'... and are "treated as purely empirical. In this way, facts are divorced from special interests."

Jean Braudrillard: "The neutral is never neutral." [65]

"Even the most formalized [and 'objective'] methods are not value-free," and the idea of a "pure spectator" is an illusion. "Due to the ubiquity of language, and thus interpretation, facts cannot be treated as simply empirical.... Facts are not autonomous." [67]

"What postmodernists are saying is that facts do not exist in themselves. To be sure, 'facts are only facts within a dimension of assessment,' writes Fish.... Deprived of an existential orientation, facts lack significance." [68]

"While there is no ultimate authority for discerning facts, this does not mean that facticity is a myth. Facts can be justified linguistically and gain widespread recognition. Even when this occurs, however, facts have no more than interpretive and, thus, provisional justification. Such facts can demand recognition but never the respect that is typically accorded to objectivity.

"Nonetheless, the interpretive framework that is operative at a particular time cannot be abridged on the basis of a whim.... Although an interpretive world may ultimately not be real, this context is certainly real for those who are implicated in a particular culture. Those who want to obliterate history, for example, in order to deny the existence of the Holocaust, should not gain solace from this version of facts." [70]

**Social Order**

"Social ontological realists believe that order based on subjectivity is unreliable. For they contend that if morality is to be preserved, society must be based on standards that are not interpretable."

Lyotard calls the social ontological realist model a "unicity," and claims that "the focus of this theory is the maintenance of the system's needs rather than the satisfaction of the desire of individuals or groups." In such a system, society dictates "the parameters of norms." [72]

Institutions, culture, and civilization itself are but temporary products of a "language game," held together by each system's "control center."

Derrida: There is no ultimate center, and "everything, including order, exists at the margin." The message is the "order should be decentered."

"As a result, social reality is not necessarily permanent but exists until further notice," and "at the basis of dialogue is difference (or the independence of parts that is presupposed by persons becoming involved in a joint endeavor. Important to this new rendition of order is that in the absence of dualism, none of these differences is inherently superior to any other. As is the case when fact and truth are understood to be interpretive, the components of dialogue have limited relevance and are equal in stature. On the other hand, each of these differences has the right to demand similar protection from inferiorization" [73-74]

"Postmodern social imagery, accordingly, is designed to preserve difference. In point of fact, Lyotard calls persons terrorists who attempt to invent absolutes and impose these abstractions to undermine pluralism."

Postmodernists undermine the "traditional monolithic vision of order." [74]

According to postmodernists, order comes from communities of people who are "bound together through the recognition of difference." The motif is one of mosaic rather than monolith."

Barbara Hernstein Smith: A community is consists of "multiple identities, multiple principles of identification with other people, and, accordingly, a collage or grab-bag of alliances, beliefs, and motives."

"Like a rhizome, a community has no center or apparent telos, and yet neither is necessarily chaotic. The point is that order can be polyvalent and does not have to be objectified to guarantee its survival. For this reason, PC'ers believe they are entirely justified in stressing the importance of multiculturalism, civil rights, and other means of promoting respect for difference and pluralism.

"As suggested, postmodernists stake out a moral position. Because there is no reality *sui generis* to sustain society, this does not signal the absence of moral principles. Persons are not free to do whatever they please and attack others. Nonetheless, morality cannot be justified by the abstractions that have been used in the past. This is why a less metaphysical moral position is advanced by PC'ers." [75]

**Conclusion**

"The hallmark of postmodernism is anti-dualism."

Lyotard: "Because reality has no ultimate authority, everything that exists can be reinterpreted. There is no final justification, for example, for selecting one set of cultural practices over another. All norms, however, can still be defined and accepted as real. Nonetheless, this prospect strikes fear into the hearts of realists, for reality is based on nothing more than conviction. Still, for postmodernists reality is amusing rather than intimidating; reality is not thoroughly rejected but is given an interpretive cast."

"...this pervasiveness of interpretation does not mean that every conception of society is defunct. Not only is order still possible, but justification exists for preserving pluralism and denouncing repression. This can also be done from within interpretation, without any assistance from metaphysical guidelines. The protection of all cultural practices, in other words, is possible from a postmodern perspective. A postmodern world is not plagued by immorality or amorality, as the critics of PC seem to believe." [76]

## Chapter 5: Skepticism, Nihilism, Amorality, and Anarchy: The Legacy of PC?

PC'ers deny "the possibility of ever reconciling the disparate viewpoints that comprise social life... due to the absence of an all-encompassing foundation. In Hegelian terms, there is no final *Aufhebung* (interpretation or grand synthesis).

"Without a reality *sui generis*, the assimilation of perspectives cannot be accomplished. For what norms are to guide this process. If all norms are mediated by interpretation... the issue arises of whose standards should be followed... Because one interpretation is as good as another, positions proliferate and demand recognition. According to conservatives this is a recipe for chaos, despite their professed advocacy of individual freedom." [81]

Conservatives argue that society must conform to *a priori* standards and "limit options to a fairly narrow range. From the vantage point of PC, this portrayal of how order is maintained is quite restrictive."

Conservatives argue that the truth is not repressive but liberating. "PC'ers on the other hand argue that truth is not a natural condition but, instead, represents a modality of *praxis*.

Therefore, any version of truth that is accorded a universal status is in danger of becoming repressive." But for conservatives truth is absolute "and not natural aligned with any particular social class, political party, or policy agenda."

"Conservatism... does not necessarily offer the last word on preserving knowledge and order. Such a view, in fact, would be quite presumptuous and dogmatic." [82]

"There is no grand organizing principle."

PC'ers operate "from the margin" of mainstream society and thought." This should not be threatening to the majority unless they think that "some ultimate telos or grand purpose is thought to regulate knowledge and order." [83]

**Radical Skepticism**

Deconstruction is a vital component of PC.

According to ancient Greek skepticism, "the search for truth is never-ending."

"So what is wrong with skepticism? Skeptics appear to be flexible, open-minded, and opposed to dogmatism." These are traits that conservatives are supposed to value, but PC'ers "go too far" by jrecting the "metaphysical justification for truth that conservatives insist is necessary: they fail to state that language corresponds exactly to an objective referent.... Skepticism, according to the anti-PC'ers, has come to mean the inability to know anything."

"But whoever said that knowledge is an illusion? This is not the position of those associated with PC. All PC'ers do is reject a metaphysical basis of knowledge; the refuse to admit that knowledge has any ultimate justification. Not searching for a base of knowledge that is beyond the influence of interpretation, however, does not mean that truth does not exists."

Conservatives erroneously believe that "through the exercise of language, a linguistic anchor can be developed to sustain truth."

According to Fish, conservatives erroneously think that truth can be established by "persuasion, that is, in the course of argument and counter-argument on the basis of examples and evidence that are themselves cultural and contextual." [85]

For PC'ers, "reading consists of interpreting an interpretation."

PC'ers do not argue that there is no meaning of a text, but they want to avert "the distortion of texts that results from capricious analysis.... The value of a work... is by no means independent of

authorial design," and "simply because various interpretations of a text are possible, each one is not necessarily equally valid. Nonetheless, a correct interpretation is not objective in the dualistic sense.... But a correct interpretation is truthful because it corresponds to the author's mode of perception." [86]

"Writing is based on an epistemic event that readers should respect, or a correct interpretation will not occur." [86-87]

"PC'ers do not doubt that truth exists, but merely claim that this form of knowledge, along with all other forms, is based on interpretation that is linguistically supported."

"This is not to say that interpretive truth cannot change, possibly without warning." [87]

## Nihilism

"Simply put, PC is not nihilistic. The result of PC is not the destruction of all values or the elimination of standards for judging appropriate interpretations or behavior. On the other hand, however, values are no longer thought to have 'cosmic support.' Like knowledge, values are in the service of praxis rather than the other way around." [89]

Stanley Fish concedes that nihilism is impossible, and that "all preferences are principled." In other words, all actions are conditioned by certain values, and nothing exists without some sort of rationale. [Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally* (Duke Univ. Press, 1989), p. 11.]

Therefore, "life is never wholly absent of value or meaning," and nihilism "is simply a myth."

"Any apparent absence of values... should be understood to represent particular claims rather than a vacuum." [90]

Under PC, "persons are able to defy authority and take control of their lives. As opposed to what conservatives believe, this is a life-affirming activity rather than a nihilistic one." [91]

## Relativism

In their fear of relativism, conservatives desperately search for core values, institutions, and texts, by which they can marginalize dissenters and declare them deviants.

"But PC'ers have foiled this ploy" because "there is no core that is not another perspective; there is no essential element that is not interpreted and treated as vital. As Fish phrases this claim, 'a normal context is just the special context you happen to be in.' A core, in other words, is simply

the position adopted by a particular individual or group." [92]

Conservative reject relativism for 3 reasons: (1)All norms have an equal status; (2)therefore, any choice is valid; and (3)no standard exists for criticizing a belief or an act. As D'Souza say, the result of relativism is that there is no measure of truth or morality, and therefore in any situation "anything goes."

But what PC'ers are trying to avoid is the "insensitivity" that accompanies absolute truth claims. "What they call for... is rigorous truth-telling about the nature of language... and of major texts [even in the Western tradition]. To accomplish this, however, *a priori* conceptions of normativeness must be abandoned."

"Language may not have an ultimate ground, but it is never without an interpretive framework." [93]

PC'ers like Fish are not relativists but relationists. To Fish, "values are regional," and "each region constitutes an interpretive community" that holds certain norms."

Sociologists verified this "long ago" in their studies of "reference groups." Acceptable behaviors are defined (and to some extent enforced) by local communities. These norms are articles of faith, and "navigating through this montage of norms requires interpretive skill, tolerance, and an appreciation of pluralism." [94]

This is one of the great benefits of a "diverse society" such as the US.

"Knowledge that masquerades as absolute, and is thus able to sabotage other options because of this status, should be viewed with suspicion.... Who, in short, can claim to know for certain what is right and wrong?" [95, 96]

All truth and reality is interpretive and local, not universal. "The reference point of critique, accordingly, is not a set of norms that is assumed to be universally esteemed."

"...because each interpretive community has integrity, none has to tolerate inferiorization." [96]

## Anarchy

"PC is believed to elevate idiosyncracy to the pinnacle of political principles" and promoting personal preferences over the civic good. According to conservatives, it is innately self-indulgent, irresponsible, and individualistic. [97]

Paul de Man: A person's actions can never be declared as either good or bad. [*Allegories of*

*Reading* (Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 209.]

D'Souza argues that PC values promote the "balkanization" and "atomization" of society.

"In one respect," [the conservative critique of PC as anarchistic] "may be correct. For as suggested by the term anarchy, there is no single *arche*.... There is no doubt that because society comprises a myriad of regions the principle of a single *arche* is somewhat outmoded. Coming to this conclusion, accordingly, would technically classify PC as anarchistic.

"But the pluralism advanced by PC'ers does not result in the breakdown of society for a key reason. The organization of this mosaic is not accomplished in a dualistic manner. A boundary, for example, is understood both to separate and unite different components of society. Neither regions nor persons are ever isolated, self-contained, or totally independent. 'No self is an island,' writes Lyotard, for 'each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before.' Likewise, Fish adds that the "self does not exist apart from the communal or convention categories of thought that enable its operations." [98-99]

Although human beings are unique, we share a common humanness and individual communities are not isolated. Therefore, according to Fish, the idea of a totally autonomous individual is an abstraction and a fantasy.

Postmodernists assert that "differences are complementary." [99]

People are capable of "rising above their circumstances; they are not trapped within separate regions of sexual, racial, or class identity... a community is not a 'prison-house,' to use Frederic Jameson's imagery."

Communities (or "regions") are "interlocked without the aid of metaphysical reinforcements," and order and morality can be sustained by this patchwork of communities."

Social cooperation is possible because of the "intersubjective character" of order.

Does PC support hedonism? No – however, conservatism makes people frustrated. "Realism is disastrous because its message is that the world need not respond to reforms." [100]

"Morality is traditionally thought to mimic absolute foundations. In terms of PC, however, morality reflects the mosaic of differences that constitute existence. Most important is that what some contemporary writers call the *equilibrio* between differences to be maintained.

Accordingly, this is the moral imperative of PC: Foster and protect the integrity of difference. As Lyotard states, "one must maximize as much as possible the multiplication of small narratives." The interpretive schemes that constitute persons' identities, experiences, cultures, and relationships... should be allowed to flourish. No norm, belief, or viewpoint should be allowed to upset the balance between narratives."

"In this way, morality emerges out of difference and is not introduced from the outside of the nexus of differences. Difference is sufficient to justify a moral position, and thus an absolute is not needed for this purpose. The recognition of difference provides imagery that allows for integration but without the reductionism that accompanies monism. Accordingly, each region should be maintained in its symmetrical relationship withy others; the aim is to ensure a sense of proportion. No region should be allowed to dominate or force another locale out of existence. Maintaining the symmetry of the social mosaic is thus the aim of PC morality.

This system of "dialectical ethic" whereby people are drawn together by "mutually satisfying linguistic bonds" is pure fellowship, or *Koinonia*. [101]

"Persons may invent truth, but this is not done in isolation." [102]

As Marx wrote, "an earthly measure of morality is possible" that is trans-cultural.

"D'Souza and other critics on the Right hold to the dubious notion that PC is amoral and thus incapable of thwarting the growth of totalitarianism. Even if PC were relativistic, however, research undertaken by the members of the Frankfurt School and others suggest that totalitarianism is not sustained by relativism. Indeed, quite the opposite is true. Nazis, for example, believed that everything should be subordinated to an overriding force. Furthermore, due to the absolute character of this power, Nazis felt justified in extinguishing all resistance to this system. Nazis were not guided by relativistic ideas but instead by imagery they considered to be apocalyptic." [102]

Far from being totalitarian in nature, PC subverts all ideologies.

## Chapter 6: The Politics of Culture

Conservatives criticize PC'ers for politicizing everything. The assumption is that universal truths are apolitical and are based on reason.

Of course, PC'ers disbelieve in the concept of absolute truth. All values are manmade and situational and relative, and all laws must have the support of the public.

### Reading and Praxis

The "New Critics" of PC assert that "texts are understood to be mediated fully by interpretation; facts cannot be differentiated from values....

"This is the case for both a writer and a reader. An author's words are not contextless and purely empirical, but rather embody the interpretive assumptions that were operative when a text was written... For both writers and readers, a set of interpretive assumptions is always in force. Texts are thus alive." [113-14]

"...both writing and reading are political acts. Fish understands this to mean that 'there is no knowledge that is not a function of belief.'"

"...meaning is not embedded within a text... Rather, the significance of a work is created by both the reader and author.... The key to recognizing meaning is sensitive interpretation." [114]

"Sensitive interpretation" is achieved by entering the author's world.... "A skilled reader," according to Fish, "is guided by; the reality assumptions accepted as valid by an author.... The overall result is an authentic reading of a text...."

"...persons do not reside in an objective reality, but inhabit a world of common sense. Phenomenologists, for instance, call this the *Lebenswelt*, or lifeworld. [115]

### The Organization of Knowledge

The authors question whether "Western civilization, or any other culture, should be placed at the center of history." [117]

"Western history [should] simply represent one stop on the trek of history."

Education should promote "a sense of pluralism" that has traditionally been absent from Eurocentric education. Such an approach is a challenge to conservative epistemology – "specifically, perhaps universal knowledge does not exist *a priori*." As Stanley Fish comments:

"Does the canon emerge because the works that belong to it match up with some abiding or eternal standard of value, or is the canon as it emerges itself a historical,

political, and social product, something that is fashioned by men and women in the name of certain interests, partisan concerns, and a social and political agenda." [Stanley Fish, "Canon Busting: The Basic Issues," *National Forum* 69(3), 1989, p. 13.]

"What these newer critics want to emphasize... is that no knowledge is autonomous or divorced from human praxis." [118]

"As explained by Alfred Schutz, a particular interpretation of reality is given preference over others and transformed into a 'paramount reality.'"

"Hence viewing some forms of knowledge as inherently particular and other forms as universal is not cogent. ... no position by its very nature is universal."

A core of knowledge can be attained through societal consensus, but this has nothing to do with any inherent superiority or universality *per se*. "Because no work resides outside of time – is timeless, so to speak – each arrangement of knowledge has limited validity." [119]

There is no hierarchy of knowledge – everything is a product of its context. "Believing a work is significant for a specific length of time is different from arguing that it embodies timeless and inherently venerable themes."

"In view of this understanding, Western civilization has no fundamental claim to be the keystone of human development." [120]

### Sympathy and Understanding

PC'ers such as Barbara Hernstein Smith observe that "traditional American theory has been 'magnetized by the goals and ideology of a naive scientism,' and thus 'obsessed by a misplaced quest for 'objectivity.'"

According to Fish, "a text can have an anchor that is linguistic," and that "neither literary nor any other judgments are arbitrary," and there is "no activity that is 'based on no rationality whatsoever'".... People "do not randomly choose their options. Each choice, instead, is accompanied by an elaborate rationale" that 'embodies values and commitments that are not readily abandoned." [121]

The meaning of a text is "articulated in terms of the author's world-view, which holds the key to properly comprehending a text."

Critics like D'Souza point out that rejecting objective values renders all assessments and judgments meaningless. "If all knowledge is interpretive, valid assessments are impossible.

"This conclusion is not necessarily sound. There is no doubt that the idea of standard should be rethought, but they need not be jettisoned altogether" and "standards of judgment are not impossible to find simply because they are no longer assumed to exist *sui generis*. Only now, evaluation criteria must be viewed as political" rather than objective." [122]

"Persons, events, and situations should be viewed in their own terms rather than according to standards that may be believed to be universal but are irrelevant. Evaluations, accordingly, should be guided by *praxis* rather than *techne*; valid evaluations are possible if their focus is the human condition.

"As suggested, undertaking an irrelevant evaluation may be harmful. PC'ers want to point out that even objectivity has social consequences. Making persons or texts conform to foreign standards, even if they are touted to be objective and value-free, may promote insensitivity and improper comparisons.... Adhering religiously to a particular set of standards may promote reliable evaluations, due to improved consistency, but such regularity should not be equated with accuracy. Accord to Smith, accuracy is achieved only when evaluations are guided by questions of relevance. This means that fair evaluations are biased in the right way; fair evaluations begin with correct assumptions."

Evaluation should not be based purely on "abstract rationality" but "consists of dialogue, whereby those who are assessed are engaged in a relevant manner." [123]

"...like a schizophrenic, postmodernists are not impressed by reason.... Even practices that may at first appear to defy reason are not outlawed if their use is consistent with the world-view of a person or community. What could be more political than disregarding reality to achieve methodological sensitivity?"

"Intelligence... is thoroughly a social construct and, thus, a cultural artifact." [124]

In school, tests should be constructed so that all students do well on them. They should "reflect social interests" and allow for "a full range of expression... thereby enabling a student to explain and answer in a variety of ways and seek clarification or assistance whenever necessary... The focus should be the perfection of cultural-free or neutral modes of evaluation" rather than on "middle-class standards." This gives the middle-class too much power "to define culture." As

Stanley Fish asserts, "standards are acquired through socialization."

This does not mean the total abandonment of standards, but instead that "standards of merit... can be negotiated" that eliminate all prejudice based on "class standing, sexism, or racism." [125]

**Order and Democracy**

Is PC totalitarian, and does it stifle dissent?

PC'ers believe in egalitarian democracy and the "elimination of class, sexual, or racial barriers."

"Real democracy exists only when dissent is fostered, differences of opinion are encouraged, the worth of proposals is settled through free and open debate...." [126]

[The authors warn against the tyranny of an elite who try to limit or stifle free expression.] [127]

Social values should be determined by the *vox populi* and are contextual and associated with historical forces. The key, however, "is the creation and maintenance of a proper environment. Indeed, the dialogical process is extremely fragile..." [128]

"There is no doubt that PC'ers are intolerant of racial slurs, epithets, and remarks indicative of bigotry.... the idea that some forms of speech may endanger open discussions should not be viewed as necessarily paradoxical."

"All speech... may not be sanctioned; some speech may be antagonistic to democracy.... For rules of debate usually include provisions about the use of insulting, denigrating, or obscene language." [129]

According to John Stuart Mill, "vituperative language" should not be allowed in open forums.

"What do conservatives want – the right to degrade minorities?" In the sixties conservatives tried to ban the public use of obscenity. [130]

"Nonetheless, the way in which speech codes have been created at many colleges and universities is problematic. That is, a paternalistic approach has been taken to developing and implementing these policies. If a group of administrators, acting like commissars, issues edicts that curtail speech, then minorities are portrayed as helpless and weak.

"The adverse reaction of PC'ers is not simply to unpopular speech, but to language that is inflammatory and harmful. Their protests, however, would not be necessary if America's

institutions of higher education were more democratic." [130-31]

**Conclusion: Politics of Difference**

"Clearly the PC movement is informed by a particular political agenda. But this position is not totalitarian, contrary to the claims of its conservative critics..... The thrust of totalitarianism is constriction and domination, yet just the opposite is the aim of PC....

"What is supported by PC is a 'politics of difference.' Due to the rejection of a reality sui generis, all that exists is a myriad of differences – different knowledge bases, outlooks, identities, customs, and styles of interaction, which can be joined into a loose federation. Accordingly, each difference is sovereign and deserved protection."

"...What is most crucial for this style of governance [i.e., democracy] to succeed is to unite differences." [131]

## Chapter 7: Who Is Totalitarian?

"What conservatives want the public to believe is that they are not advancing a philosophical position. Their claims about social life are intended to be viewed as value-free descriptions. The strategy has been to reinforce their position by linking it to science, truth, disinterested research, and other allegedly neutral or apolitical facets of life. In fact, these watchwords are associated with fairness and justice in most societies."

"What most persons do not appreciate is that the theoretical and practical issues raised by supporters of PC are not considered to be ridiculous in many philosophical circles." The traditional beliefs of conservatives "are not universally accepted as sacrosanct and immune to critique. Moreover, the dogmatism they practice is treated by many philosophers as passe...."

"PC'ers are [often] identified as a threat to rationality, culture, and democracy.... The conservatives' political position is easily concealed, while they are preaching the virtues of objectivity.... Perhaps PC is despicable to conservatives because all interests are presumed to be worthy of serious examination." [138]

"Undoubtedly, the new conservative cultural critics have been deceptive. They talk in ethereal or general terms, but in actuality they have a clear political agenda. Their program is based on values, beliefs and commitments they propose as universal. A particular discussion may be about

the need for a common culture.... Their version of culture is hierarchical and makes clear distinctions that are predicated on value judgments."

Conservatives hide behind code phrases such as "traditional values" or "back to basics" or "original intent," "but the central theme is reminiscent of old-time fundamentalism." But such ideas are undemocratic. [139]

"The moral axiom in democracy is the Golden Rule, which most persons do not consider to be oppressive." [139-40]

What is needed is "a new day" when people "are free to create a new world."

"If anything, the philosophy that underpins PC is too open rather than totalitarian. ... PC... is inclusive and opens avenues of discussion that have been closed because of class, race, gender, epistemology, or other bases for bias." [140]

**Multiculturalism**

[Regarding history:] "Providing students with contrasting portrayals of an event hardly seems revolutionary." [143]

Conservatives support teaching multi-culturalism provided the superiority of the West is upheld. They are critical of non-Western cultures but strangely tolerant of the problems in Western civ.

**Affirmative Action**

Traditionally, white males have been beneficiaries of affirmative action – commonly called the "old-boy network." Before affirmative action, admissions, hiring and promotions were anything but fair and equal.

Conservatives put the total emphases on individuals and ignore the sociological factors that disenfranchise minorities. "Mere declaring the all persons are basically equal or passing anti-discrimination laws is insufficient to ensure fairness.... Instead, breaking the cycle of discrimination requires that *affirmative* steps be taken."

Affirmative action is all the more important because of the subtle nature of discrimination in institutions that "appear to be neutral.... Why is assisting disadvantaged persons to compete more effectively un-American? After all, those who are wealthy have always helped their children in this way."

"Surely an entire society benefits when an increasing number of people are able to improve their talents. But many conservatives respond by

saying that aid to the poor only makes these persons lazy and unwilling to work. This same assessment is not made of rich children., but they are provided with both opportunities and resources." [145]

Affirmative action "is a method of enhancing competition" and leveling the playing field. [146]

**Student Evaluations and Testing**

PC'ers complain that standardized testing is biased based on the variations in the scores for different sociological groups. "The point is that merely treating every student similarly in a test setting does not make an evaluation instrument fair. Much more needs to be done to ensure that true ability is reflected in a test score."

Test do not measure inherent abilities but "exposure to certain information. Those who attend poor schools, through no fault of their own, are given a serious handicap when competing for admission [to higher education].

"Since at least the 1970s, social scientists have been suggesting that these tests are not value-free.... In the case of college admissions tests, ability is equated with mastery of cognitive skills usually associated with a middle class life-style." [146-47]

Stanley Fish (predicably) complains that "evaluations are political."

"In a democratic society... effort is supposed to be the measure of a person's worth rather than factors beyond his or her control." [147]

How can tests be fair in an unjust society?

Testing should be "mediated thoroughly by social conditions...."

"Testing does not occur within a vacuum."

**Common Knowledge**

"Because of the importance placed on pluralism, conservatives argue that a uniform body of knowledge is abandoned by PC'ers. Hence there is no *sensus communis*."

"*A priori* universals are rejected by PC'ers because they are ethereal and disconnected from everyday life.... Further, foisting these abstractions onto persons distorts communication and interaction.... PC is incompatible with a monolithic image of existence." [149-50]

"Rather than an ultimate rationale, norms reflect claims and counter-claims, political motives, and a host of social practices.

Real knowledge is determined through socialization – i.e., it is utilitarian and pragmatic.

"PC'ers work to promote an awareness of how universals are socially manufactured. Recognizing that common knowledge is produced, rather than simply discovered, is central to democracy. Instead of being restricted by facts that are considered to be scientific or objective, debate can proceed in practically any direction. .... In this sense, PC seems to be more compatible with democracy that conservatism, because PC'ers do not identify a specific type of knowledge as undoubtedly valid and the centerpiece of civility." [151]

**Conclusion**

"...[O]pening institutions is the thrust of [the PC] movement."

"How can a society be too democratic?"

PC'ers do not advocate "the pursuit of individual gain at the expense of the common good." [151-52]

"A free society is one in which canons are invented rather than imposed. In democracy, 'canon formation becomes a matter of both rewriting and reinterpreting the past.' An unexamined tradition, however, can easily become a dogmatic, autonomous, and alien force."

The canon should be a product of the democratic process. As Stanley Fish puts it, "a canon is transformed into a body of suggestions."

"Persons can easily fall under the 'tyranny of 'Truth'."

"...eliminating cultural factors that demean persons or create an insensitive environment is important for the survival of democracy."

"While the critics of PC charge that it is totalitarian, they are the ones who adhere to a central tenet of dogmatism."

"Some norms are timeless, while others are not."

"Even so-called timeless categories, norms, rules, or laws would have to be recognized as a human invention."