

Steve McGuire:

Eric, thanks for joining us on the podcast today.

Eric Kaufmann:

Great to be here, Steve. Thanks for having me.

Steve McGuire:

Yeah, it's really great to have you. So, I'd like to talk to you today about some of the work you've been doing on the future of free expression and intellectual diversity on college and university campuses, as well as some of the things that you think we might be able to do to embrace and protect those things. But first, let me just start by asking for your assessment of where we are today in terms of free expression, intellectual diversity on campus.

I'll say, for my own part, I've always thought the university leans liberal, leans left, we can debate the terminology, there's obviously differences there, but generally leaned left of center, but you could function fine, more or less, as a conservative. There's going to be fewer conservatives around. It might be a little harder to get in if you're, say, looking for an academic job or something like that. But, nevertheless, there were possibilities and openings and that sort of thing. And it seems to have gotten quite a bit worse, from my perspective and in my experience, say, since about the time that Donald Trump was elected, maybe a little bit before that, but certainly, especially after that. But you look at data. You don't just look at anecdotes and personal experiences. So, from that perspective, what's your assessment of where we are today maybe relative to where we've been over the last several decades?

Eric Kaufmann:

Well, I think that what we've seen... And there's some interesting data that you mentioned from Dennis Chong, Jack Citrin, Morris Levy out of... well, California political scientists who... We can track some of this data back to the '70s, or we can replicate questions that were asked in earlier periods. And their conclusion from the data really is that there's been a shift from people saying that values are relative to saying there's absolute right or wrong, amongst young university-educated people. It used to be that the highly educated were more likely to say there are different ways of being right or wrong. They were more morally relativist than the population in general, and they're now more morally absolutist. So, that moral absolutism is the real trend, I think, of the emerging Zoomer generation. And I think that's really why we're seeing a lot of the things that we're seeing on campus.

And then, of course, we can then go and look at the data from places like FIRE, where, if you take questions like, "Should somebody who thinks that BLM is a hate group or who thinks that you should never be able to get an abortion or transgenderism is a mental disorder be allowed, be permitted to speak on campus?" it's sort of between two-thirds and 85% opposition now, pretty consistently to that. So that's just kind of giving you a sense of...

And then, there've been other questions, "Should a professor who offends students be reported to the administration?" is 70% of students. Now, of course, there's always a big ideological split. The conservative students are much more pro-free speech than those who are on the left or more liberal. But still, yeah, these numbers are really quite alarming, and I think they reflect that new outlook of this more morally absolutist generation.

Steve McGuire:

Okay, good, yeah. So that's what I was going to ask. Where do you see this coming from? Is this coming from particular ideological views? Are there other social forces at work here? What is leading to this greater sense of moral absolutism?

Eric Kaufmann:

Well, I think there's kind of two ingredients to it. Jean Twenge, if that's how you pronounce it, and Jonathan Haidt and others would tend to put a lot of emphasis on social media leading to more anxiety and depression, leading to more of a victimhood mentality which shapes people's outlook. So they are primarily focused on the harms of speech, rather than on freedom.

Now, I think that's part of the cocktail. But I put more emphasis on longer-running ideological development. So I would argue, for example, that political correctness and speech codes, which began... Well, the first speech code's Stanford, 1974, but certainly by the late '80s, we're getting a lot of these speech codes. And that's reflecting a kind of philosophy that says that emotional safety and emotional harm claims on behalf of totemic minority groups are more important than freedom of expression. And so I think this is actually an ideology, which actually goes back to the late '60s too, by the way. You could see these claims being pressed even in the late '60s. And it metastasizes, and then you get more acolytes who then have more students who hire their own. So I think there's a certain snowballing effect, and that influences, eventually, avant-garde culture, influences youth culture.

So I think it's a combination, actually, of these longer-term ideological developments with this fragility, which is linked, perhaps, to social media, perhaps to some of the kind of narcissism that's pointed out in the psychology literature. But through that cocktail, I think that's what breeds this outlook. I should say, however, that if we were to take a question like, "Should James Damore have been fired by Google?" or any question that would tap into that cancel culture orientation, where you are on a five-point left-to-right or liberal-to-conservative scale is the strongest predictor of where you're going to land on that question, followed by age. And so, actually, the ideology is a bit more important than the age. And so, I don't think this is principally just about generational dynamics. I think it's very ideological as well.

Steve McGuire:

Interesting. Now, you mentioned some of those questions in the FIRE survey about should so-and-so be allowed... should a guest speaker be allowed to say X on campus. And I remember looking at some of those questions, and you'll know the data better than me, but some of them, they were asking about statements that most people would characterize as progressive or left-wing, and then there would be others that would be more sort of right-wing statements. And so, you say like, "Oh, if somebody wanted to argue that BLM is a hate group," you see sort of off the charts, "No, they shouldn't be allowed to say that." And if you break it down by left and right, people on the left really say you shouldn't be able to say that.

Now, if you look at a question like, "Should somebody be allowed to come on campus and argue that the police should be defunded?" or I forget exactly which the question is that they ask, maybe abolish the police or something like that, and you break it down left and right, you'll see that the numbers among conservatives who say that person shouldn't be allowed to say that will go up a bit.

Eric Kaufmann:

Oh yeah. Yeah.

Steve McGuire:

It's maybe still not quite as high as the progressives on the issues that they don't like, but nevertheless, that does seem to suggest that while it may be ideological, as you're suggesting, that it also maybe is some of these other factors, where you see that even conservative students in this case, when asked about views that they don't like, some of them will say, "Yeah, you shouldn't be able to say that on campus."

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah, you're absolutely right. So if it's a view that you're opposed to, you're going to be more likely to cancel. And you're correct that it goes both ways. However, there is an asymmetry. I mean, this is something that seems to be showing up in the data more and more, particularly since 2016 in elite spaces, is this kind of asymmetry. A similar question, "Would you know date a supporter from the other party?" And you'll get a certain proportion of conservatives who wouldn't date a liberal or a Democrat or a Sanders supporter, but it's typically about half or less as large as the share who wouldn't date a Trump supporter or wouldn't date a Republican, et cetera. So I do think there...

And similarly, studies of the faculty, the recent FIRE study, which I was kind of involved in, you can see that attitudes towards right-wing voters amongst left-wing academics are far more negative than the reverse. And so, what I would say is, yes, it's going both ways, but I think it's much stronger left to right than right to left.

Steve McGuire:

Right, right. So yeah, you mentioned the FIRE faculty survey, and I know you did some work analyzing that. And one thing that people wonder about too in terms of censoriousness on campus and that sort of thing is, where is this primarily coming from in terms of the groups on campus? Some people will say the real problem are the administrators, and if the faculty could just reassert their autonomy and control over governance of the universities, this would solve the problem. Other people will look at that and say, "Have you seen the political breakdown of faculty? Have you seen some of these surveys?" But then, in your analysis, you note too that, well, the faculty don't seem to be nearly as bad as some of the students do when FIRE and other groups survey the students. So, what's your view on that as far as you're able to tell, given the various surveys that are out there between administrators, faculty, staff, students? Who are the real culprits here in terms of violating free expression on campus or not being willing to embrace intellectual diversity?

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah. I mean, it's actually quite complex. So, for example, if we just take academics, I mean, they are more tolerant than students in terms of not wanting to cancel people and supporting freedom of expression. But it depends a lot on the question. So if you take a question like, "What is more important? Do you favor political correctness because it protects minority groups, or do you oppose it because it restricts free speech?" A sample of academics in Britain, it was about... In the social sciences, it was about 75% support for political correctness because it protects minorities, versus 20% opposing it because it restricts free speech. And in the general public, it was slight majority against political correctness. So that's one example of where the academics are way off towards the sort of... you might think of it as an anti-free speech position.

But then you'll take another question such as someone does research showing, for example, I'm trying to think, that intact families are better than single-parent families or the British Empire was a great thing, did more good than harm, or even something like more minorities and women in an organization will reduce the performance of the organization. Should this person be essentially fired or encouraged to leave their job? You get relatively low support, maybe 10, 20% at the most amongst academics. So on other questions they're very pro-free speech, but on some questions, they're anti.

The ones where they tend to be, I would argue, restrictive on free speech tend to be these questions that sound like a very good thing from a social justice point of view. So, for example, "Do you support diversity statements, or do you think that they're a political litmus test?" elite university social scientists, it's two to one in favor of diversity statements. Or, "Do you support, essentially, race and gender quotas mandatory on reading lists?" 45 to 33, something like that support.

You then say, "Well, what if somebody doesn't want to abide by these things? They don't want to decolonize their reading list. What should happen to them?" They won't say the person should be fired, but a majority will say there should at least be social pressure on them, they should be made to take diversity training, things which are actually quite authoritarian, but they're not thinking of that when they read the question. And so I think that a lot of them would support policies that carry authoritarian, illiberal implications, even if they wouldn't support cancel culture directly.

Steve McGuire:

Okay. And that probably, in some ways, goes back to the moral absolutism that you were talking about earlier, that there's certain views or moral or political commitments that they have adopted and strongly believe in, and those just maybe outrank freedom of expression or academic freedom in some way in their minds when they're asked about those two things as being in competition with one another.

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah. I think that academics are more strongly academic freedom than the students or the public, and they're also more strongly pro-social justice than the public. So it comes down to how these two things rank order in a given question and what's made salient as to where they're going to fall down on these questions. So, I think, actually, both are important to them, and in fact, on a lot of these questions, even on a question such as, "Should a professor be forced out for researching and finding that more women and minorities in an organization, worse performance?" most of them will come in on a don't know, unsure, rather than saying, "No, we should stand up for this person's free speech." So a lot of them will come in the middle. They won't say cancel the person, but they also won't say, "I would oppose cancellation." They're in that middle band. And I think that's sort of saying, telling us that there's this very strong cross-pressuring of values going on amongst a lot of faculty.

Steve McGuire:

Interesting. So Eric, you live and work in the UK. You're Canadian. I also grew up in Canada.

Eric Kaufmann:

Oh. Okay.

Steve McGuire:

Yeah, you were in Vancouver. I grew up just outside of Edmonton, so not that far away. But I think we're seeing similar trends in the UK and in Canada compared to what we see in the United States. But you follow all three countries much more closely than I do. Is that your assessment, or is any one of these countries maybe doing a little bit better as far as free speech or academic freedom is concerned, or are they all kind of going down the same path?

Eric Kaufmann:

Going down the same hole, yeah. No, I think it's very similar. I think Britain is maybe slightly behind the curve, in a good way, but only slightly. So I think that the rate of no-platforming, certainly the extent... There isn't as much bureaucratic administration, bureaucracies to push DEI. I mean, it's happening. It is definitely happening, but it seems a little bit less aggressive than in the US case. Canada seems to me to be pretty identical to the United States in terms of the level of penetration of this.

The other thing I'd say is, I mean, Canada I think is in the worst position, because there's no counterbalancing. There's no counterweights. Whereas in the UK, the government has been conservative for 13 years. They've done nothing for all but two of those years, but in the last few... sorry, the last three years, they have actually been making the right noises and also legislating in a way that I think has been very positive for at least the free speech side of the equation, not doing anything really on the viewpoint diversity side. But certainly, protecting academic freedom, I think that's much more robust now, especially with the new bill that has just become law very recently, which I'm happy to talk about.

Whereas my impression of Canada certainly is that despite bills, which are very abstract, at universities to have these University of Chicago-style principle statements, it hasn't translated into anything on the ground. It's still pretty censorious. And then, in the US I think there are a lot of different things happening, depending on whether you're in a red or blue state. Also, some very encouraging civil society organizations like yourselves, like FIRE, and so on, that I think are doing excellent work.

Steve McGuire:

Okay, interesting. It is interesting that this does seem to be happening across these various countries, at least somewhat at the same rate or at the same time. So, I want to talk to you about some of the stuff that you've written recently about the future of free expression, which I'm in the business of trying to protect free expression, promote it, promote intellectual diversity, and I read a recent piece by you that essentially says the cause has already been lost, at least for the next generation. That's obviously quite disconcerting, but very interesting. And again, you point to significant data. And, if I understand correctly, your suggestion is that the next generation of professors are already sort of ideologically demographically set, that they have fairly censorious views relative to even this current generation that's sort of on its way to retirement and that you see, at least in the short term, that the professoriate, in particular, I think, will become less friendly towards free expression, intellectual diversity. Is that right?

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah, that is right. And just based on the surveys of a number of different methodologies that I've used across Britain, Canada and the US, we see the same pattern, that young academics are about twice as censorious, so twice as likely to endorse a firing campaign as older professors, and that's controlling for a whole host of factors, including gender, including ideology. So, old leftists are just a... They're a lot more tolerant than young leftists.

That's a pattern, by the way, we see in the general population as well. So, academics are just mirroring patterns that we see outside academia. There's nothing really that special about academia. It's just that the patterns that we're seeing are... The number one variable is where you are ideologically. The second thing is your age. And there's also a bit of an interaction between being young and being left-wing. So the young left is especially censorious compared to the old left, and that's who's coming into academia. I mean, even older academics are overwhelmingly on the left, so it's not as though the young academics are more left-wing than the old, but a young leftist is just more illiberal than an old leftist.

So I just think even though we can have editorials from Harpers and the New York Times and all this encouraging stuff and, yes, that some universities are undertaking the right policies, but if you look at the generational turnover, the cohort effects are just, in a way, pushing towards a structurally more intolerant environment. So I just don't see how these things get better, even though I do think, yes, the last year has been a lot more encouraging than 2020 to 2021. But I'm just not sure how this is going to last when you've got these new cohorts which are going to become the median voter, the median academic.

Steve McGuire:

Yeah, so there's this old saying that if you're not a liberal when you're young, you have no heart, if you're not a conservative when you're old, you have no brain. And I think some people might hope that as the current generation gets a bit older, they start doing things like having families, buying a house, that sort of thing, that some moderation, at least, if not conservatism, might start to develop. But in your article, you said we shouldn't expect that, that they're basically set. So you don't think that through reason and persuasion, or even just the natural effects of getting older, that we have a hope of convincing this upcoming generation that they should embrace academic freedom and free speech as paramount values for their academic institutions?

Eric Kaufmann:

Well, I don't want to say no hope, but I've tried some experiments too where we get people to read a paragraph that's pro-free-speech and then one that's pro-emotional-safety. And you can see that people in high school, the 18-to-20-plus people at the undergraduate level, at least in the UK, you can shift their views 10 to 15 points either direction, so there's malleability, I'd say, up until... more so in high school than in university, but even in maybe amongst undergraduates, but not amongst anyone who's postgrad. And so, I think people who are in the system, younger academics, graduate students, I don't think their views can be shifted.

And also, I think getting a home, settling down, I don't think those things actually will affect it either, because if those were important, we would expect to see, let's say, under-30s or under-40s who have a home, who have a higher income, who are married, et cetera, to be significantly less illiberal on these things than those who aren't, and none of the data supports that. So I just think this is much more... Or it's pretty orthogonal to the material markers. And if you take the Citrin and Chong paper, which looks at time series going back to the '70s, you can see that even in 2000, questions about free speech, 18-year-olds in 2000 were just a lot more tolerant than 18-year-olds in 2016, for example.

So it's not the age, it's the set of beliefs that are imprinted in the generation as they come to political maturity, and I'm convinced they're going to carry those with them as they enter the workforce. That's kind of behind some of the employee activism that you see in corporations, for example, even in law firms, unwillingness to take certain cases. I think this is just a manifestation of these generational changes. And I just don't see those views... I think it's going to take something else to change those

views, some kind of a shock, but, barring that, I don't think achieving markers of adulthood is going to do it.

Steve McGuire:

Now you mentioned... Yeah, that's right. You're seeing this filter into various other professions and areas of activity in society. And you mentioned that, in some ways, academia's not that different than other parts of society. But I thought that faculty, relative to, say, like American public opinion, tended to lean towards the left. Is that correct? So, you're seeing this filter into these various parts of American society, but at the same time, there is a sort of disconnect between overall, statistically, how academics view the world, versus how the broader American public views the world.

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah, I mean, what I mean... I think if you take someone who identifies as far left who is not an academic and someone who identifies as far left who is an academic, the far left academic is actually more liberal, I mean, in the classical liberal sense, on speech issues than the far left non-academic. But, of course, in the general population, it's more like 50/50, as opposed to, certainly, in the social sciences and humanities, academics are something like 12, 13, 14 to 1 left to right. So clearly, because they're so much more left-wing, they're going to be a lot less liberal on speech issues. But, apples for apples, like left-wing academic, left-wing non-academic, the left-wing non-academic is probably more intolerant than the left-wing academic.

Steve McGuire:

Okay. And I think a traditional sort of sense of the political breakdown of the campus or how some of these things take place in terms of, say, cancellations of guest speakers, even in recent years is, you would look at the self-reported political breakdown of faculty, and you'd see that, I don't know, there'd be 10 or 15% who would identify as left or far left, and then you'd have a big chunk still that identified as liberal. And I think, if you go back several decades, you would find that an overwhelming majority of faculty would probably identify as liberal in a more sort of, okay, left-leaning, but more sort of moderate centrist-ish sense. And then you'd have some people on the far left, like, I don't know, actual socialists or something like that, Marxist professors, and then you'd have some people on the right as well who would identify as conservative.

But fast forward to, say, the last five, 10 years. You see these cancellations of guest speakers, or faculty members, or what have you. And the dynamics seem to be that there'd be a very vocal minority of students and faculty who are signing petitions, in their administrator's ears trying to push to get something done, and then there would be, still, this large group of faculty in the middle who sort of lean left, are sort of progressive, but they're not really left-wing activists like this other minority group. And so, the dynamic at play here really is that there's a vocal minority that wants to get something done, and then there's a large group that might be somewhat sympathetic to some of those views, but aren't really activists in that sense, but they don't really stand up for somebody either. They don't stand up for free expression.

So, is that still the case? Do you still see that as being the case in the future, or do you think that, more and more, even this middle group is just starting to, if not evaporate, that they're shrinking, and so it's going to be more of a kind of polarized faculty, with more people on the left and not so much this moderate center that maybe people thought was persuadable in the past?

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah. I mean, I think that I would sort of see it more as a shift to the left amongst the professoriate. If we take faculty as a whole from the HERI surveys, it's gone from about one and a half to one left to right in the mid-'60s to about six to one left to right, or five to six to one. And the same thing's happened in Britain, where we've got data as well. The center and right have both declined, and the left has increased. So, it has definitely shifted to the left.

And when you shift to the left, I think John Ellis, in his book, the Breakdown of Higher Education, when you get more of a monoculture, the incentives change. So the incentives go towards exemplifying the values of the entire community, which means fundamentalism. And Cass Sunstein, in his book on conformity, has talked about this as well on judicial panels. So yeah, the incentives are going to change the more monocultural you get. I think that's a part of the story.

Now, if you look at public opinion on these cancel culture issues amongst the professoriate, it is, yes, there's that 10% who are really all-in on canceling, maybe 20% if we push it, depending on the question. But then you've got that middle band of cross-pressured between their liberal values and their social justice values, and that's a sort of 40 to 50% band. Now, if those people were foursquare in favor of free speech, I think we would have a different dynamic. But because of their progressive sympathies, I think they see some of the positives in these social justice movements, and they're willing to kind of say, "Well, their heart's in the right place."

So they're actually genuinely conflicted. I don't think it's the case that they hate these values, but they're too scared. I mean, yes, that's part of it, but I think the bigger part of it is that they are conflicted. And so, I think that's an important part of what's occurring. And if they were really genuinely against it, then I think ultimately, enough of them would speak up, and it would go. So, I mean, looking ahead, I don't see this internal resistance growing, despite the Steven Pinker Harvard Academic Freedom people and the Academic Freedom Alliance and all these very useful support networks. I just don't think people are going to speak up. And part of that is just the everyday peer pressure, who's going to sit with you in the lunch hall, who's going to hire you, promote you, publish you. And it's such a collegial profession that you have to sort of stay on the good side of where the center of public opinion is.

Steve McGuire:

Right. Yeah, no, that's a really good point. Having been an academic for years myself, it is, in a lot of ways, just like any other profession, where you go to the office, and there's a birthday cake because it's somebody's birthday, and you want to be able to go in there and be able to stand next to a couple of people and have a conversation while eating a piece of cake. And that's hard to do if, every day, you're in their faces explaining why you think their ideas are terrible and that sort of thing.

Eric Kaufmann:

Well, exactly, yeah. And that was Sunstein's point, that the more social an organization is, the less dissent, the more conformity, and so, because it's a collegial profession, you're just going to get more conformity than, let's say, in journalism, where maybe people are off writing their own thing, and there's less of that.

Steve McGuire:

Right, right. Yeah, maybe there's interesting ways to rethink what the model ought to be if you want your scholars to be more like Socrates, where they're willing to upset people unto death, if it comes to



that. One last thing I want to ask you about before moving into this debate about how we approach these issues is in terms of the sort of liberal or left-leaning nature of the professoriate, if you have any further thoughts on why that is? And I'm thinking in particular, some people will argue that education makes people more liberal, or it makes them more progressive.

I think another way of looking at that might be that people who have certain psychological traits might be attracted to certain kinds of professions like the academy, or they might be attracted to certain kinds of institutions, or there might just be ongoing cultural transmission, where there are liberal or left-leaning professors who then teach others who think that way, or teach them to think that way, and then they become professors. But do you have any thoughts on this idea that, well, the reason that universities are on the left side of the spectrum is because that's what happens the more educated you become?

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah. I mean, yes I do. So, what do we know? I guess, a couple things. One is, going through university itself doesn't change your attitudes much. So there's been a lot of research on that. University itself, and especially what you learn, doesn't make much difference. However, what you learn in secondary school does seem to matter quite a bit for these attitudes. This is based on some recent survey work I've done with 18 to 20-year-olds. So I do think a lot of this is happening... The attitude shifting is happening in the K-12 space.

Now, the other thing I'd say is, if we look... Certain groups, like freshmen who are female, the HERI surveys are showing that group has moved left by about something like 14 points since about 2004. So there has been a shift among certain groups. Younger women have moved to the left, definitely, over time. I would say there's also some evidence to suggest that people with advanced degrees, particularly PhDs... It seems like, at least in Britain, PhDs who've stayed in academia are just way more left-wing on these cultural issues than PhDs who've gone off into industry and into private sector. There seems to be something about the campus environment that at least seems to keep you on the left, in a way.

But then there's also... So I think there has been this cultural shift in the elite modern culture that affects young people. It affects highly educated people who stay on campus. I also think, however, political discrimination and hostile environment effects are playing a role. So, for example, roughly 40% of American academics that I surveyed wouldn't hire a known Trump supporter for a job in Britain. It's like a third wouldn't hire a known Brexit supporter for a job. And other surveys have found discrimination from 20 to 50% against right-leaning papers, grant applications. So there's no question that there is political discrimination.

And also, when asked, "Is your department a hostile environment?" It's like 70% of conservatives are saying yes, 35% of centrists, and only kind of 10% or 15% of left. So there's no question there's... The environment is seen as hostile. That keeps people away. There's active discrimination. That keeps people away. And then, there is just this general evolution in what it means to be on the left. And so, I think these new ideas are also playing a part.

Steve McGuire:

Okay, good, yeah. And so, that does, then, lead into the question of how we address these issues. And as I was kind of saying earlier, there are people who will argue that restoring faculty governance is a big step. And I think in some cases, there's certainly merit. If you've been following at all what's been going on at Stanford over the last four or five months, at least a lot of the problems that have made the

headlines, there seem to be problems that have stemmed from bureaucrats, from staff members who are developing projects that then butt up against free expression or academic freedom on campus.

But the kind of things that you're talking about, the data that you're looking at, suggests that, as you said earlier, relying on the faculty to step up and change course on these issues might be foolish as well. Now, this is controversial territory. Certainly among the academic freedom community here in the United States, there's a lot of tension, especially with some of the bills that are being put into law in places like Florida, Texas. There's one right now that's being considered in Ohio, and there's differences between these bills, and there are some things in them that people might be willing to support, and then there's other things that a lot of people don't want to support.

But as you kind of alluded to, I think there's just this more general sort of abstract debate about how do we protect academic freedom, and is it something that institutions should do on their own internally, or do we need external actors, and not just external actors like ACTA or FIRE or AFA to step in and try to help out, but government as well, right? And we end up in this, to some people, seemingly paradoxical place, where we would argue that we actually need government to protect our free speech. And you certainly seem to fall on that side. So, in your view, why is it necessary that government become involved in protecting free expression on campus?

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah, I definitely do take that view. I'm of the view that almost nothing is really going to change systematically without external government intervention in this. You can look at, for example, speech codes, which have been unconstitutional, been in place since the late 1980s. I think Donald Downs and John Ellis both talk about that in their books. You will occasionally get an enlightened president and a group of active faculty members, and the stars will align, and you might get a pro-free academic freedom regime for a while, which I think was true at the University of Wisconsin for a little while, and then it collapsed. I think that's... It's just not going to happen.

Why is that the case? I think even without the DEI bureaucrats, in Britain and in Canada, you don't have as much money to spend on bureaucrats, it's not being driven by them, it's driven by, essentially, EDI committees, which are staffed by true believers that are faculty, with, perhaps, student input. It comes to a meeting. I've been in these faculty meetings. If somebody proposes decolonizing the curriculum, and you oppose it, only in the case of myself, I'm already an outsider pariah who's kind of come out of the closet, but if you're not that, if you're just a regular faculty member who wants to get along and don't want to be radioactive, of course you're just going to wave it through.

So, it's just impossible, really, given the mores, the norms, to actually oppose this stuff internally. And I think having high-sounding Chicago-style principle statements is also not going to do it, unless those are proactively enforced. So, yeah, I don't think universities can reform. And I think the UK situation was one where, despite repeated warnings from government, and this has been a conservative government for sort of 14 years here, they kept mentioning about this whenever there were these outbreaks of no-platforming and targeting of professors, nothing, of course, changes, because it can't change, really, I don't think, internally.

And so now, we've got legislation, and now that the legislation is in, lo and behold, things change. And in fact, the only way the universities might reform internally is if they are scared of what's going to come at them from outside. They're scared of what DeSantis and those sorts of people are going to do. They want to get their own house in order just to avoid that fate. But the bottom line is, nothing would've changed without this challenge from the outside.

Now, we can get into which measures are more useful. I should also say, by the way, there's two separate questions. One is academic freedom in terms of being free from institutional punishment, and the second is academic freedom in terms of being free from political discrimination and self-censorship. I think those are both separate issues. They contribute to a chilling climate of loss of free speech. I'm afraid that the political discrimination, self-censorship thing is probably the larger part of the equation and cannot be addressed even with your University of Chicago-style policies. But I still think it's worth pursuing those institutional policies, just to take the punishment angle out of the equation.

Steve McGuire:

Okay, yeah. Yeah, it seems like the discrimination part of it, that might require more cultural change and a kind of embrace of intellectual and viewpoint diversity, not just even, at least tolerated, but probably embraced, and that would require a large change in the way a lot of academics think, or at least the way they vote on committees, hiring committees and that sort of thing.

But yeah. Okay. So, talking about the situation in the UK, so this new law has recently been passed, an academic freedom bill, and now you're going to have, or you have now, an academic freedom czar, which I've seen people joking about the idea of having a freedom czar is a little odd, perhaps, given what people think of when they hear the word czar historically. But nevertheless, there's an academic freedom czar. It sounds like people like yourself are happy with the person that they've chosen as the inaugural holder of this office. But could you tell us a little bit about what this person will do, what sort of power does this office have, and why you think this is a positive development that could have an impact, or already is, in your view?

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah. Well, I mean, just very quickly, by the way, on protecting freedom, if you look historically, there's a kind of Hobbesian type of liberalism, where the threats are private violence and private censorship. So I think we're in that type of a situation, which is why, actually, government putting pressure on institutions that are doing the private censoring is actually liberty-enhancing. Whereas in other situations, like in Turkey or Russia, it's the government, so you need that traditional anti-government liberalism. So I just think we're in a different situation now, which is why government, oddly, is the best guarantor of freedom in this instance. And I'd say, the UK legislation, what it does is it empowers this office to issue fines for university, to issue guidance on best practice, for example, in terms of documents that universities have to protect and to promote free speech, so they have a duty to do that. And faculty or students who feel that their academic freedom rights have been violated can take up a civil case in the courts.

So between these methods, what it is, is it offers a kind of proactive, almost real-time ability to check abuses of power by universities. And incidentally, no-platforming is also coming under the rubric. So, student unions, which didn't use to be covered by academic freedom duties, have now been brought in under the umbrella of academic freedom. So, what's happened very recently with a gender-critical feminist called Kathleen Stock and Oxford University, where the university was obligated to essentially tell the student union that it could not essentially no-platform Kathleen Stock, or put pressure, even, to disaffiliate with the body that was giving Stock a platform. I mean, none of that would've happened, I think, without this legislation.

So I think in terms of no-platforming, carping at professors, this is really going to provide pretty rock solid protection. Also, academics are going to be allowed to appeal to an ombudsman around their universities for redress. And so, all of these mechanisms give the power, really, to the individual student

or academic against their university. And I think that's very much a model which I think could be followed in other jurisdictions. But the one thing I would say is, it's not going to address viewpoint diversity, and it's not going to address political discrimination either.

Steve McGuire:

Okay, good, yeah. And I know that some of the bills that are being introduced in the United States do sort of go down this road of having a sort of private course of action for redress and that sort of thing under them. It's interesting. So, in the United States, obviously, as you know, there are public institutions, and there are private institutions, and so, especially at the public institutions, the First Amendment comes into play, which does kind of go back, then, to that model of protecting the people against the government and the public university itself being included as an extension of the government. Private universities, on the other hand, there might be certain things you can do in terms of when they accept funding for certain kinds of things. The government could theoretically attach maybe certain conditions to that, and certainly, most of them will have some kind of academic freedom or free expression statement. And so, you can try to seek redress under contract law and that sort of thing.

But, in most ways, private universities and colleges are fortresses. It seems like if you're going to get them to change, it has to be internal or through some kind of public PR campaign where they realize like, "Okay, we have to change, because people are really upset." I think maybe... I can't, obviously, get in their heads and understand what they're thinking, but in the case of Stanford, they've taken some steps recently. But I think they had a really bad four or five months where they were in the news repeatedly for academic freedom problems. And they probably thought, "We need to..." Maybe they had thought, "For the sake of our institution and our campus community, we need to do some things." I hope so. But they probably also were thinking, "That was really bad PR. We should probably respond in some way."

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah, I mean, think the media's huge in this, and a lot of positive stuff has occurred because of media scrutiny. So that's going to have to continue to occur. But, I mean, there are probably things that federal governments can do in terms of grant money, in terms of conditionality of student loan funding. I'm not sure of the constitutional ins and outs of it. So that's one thing that can happen.

But of course, trustees, trying to get trustees to put pressure on is important. I mean, I would just mention, by the way, on public university, so this problem of viewpoint diversity and political discrimination, I think these are two areas that I think the US legislation in the red states, and, I mean, I disagree with some of it, but some of them do stipulate these universities have to set up these kind of civics centers that promote, essentially, a different point of view and give them tenure lines and a certain amount of funding. I think that's a positive development, because, really, if you take this self-censorship and peer pressure, political discrimination seriously, you do need to create institutions that are not majority dominated by the progressive outlook, in order to allow for viewpoint diversity to exist. So I think that's something that I think maybe the UK government has been looking at, but I think the US is kind of in the lead on that.

The other thing is, the University of North Carolina trustees adopting the Calvin Report, and that's a kind of political non-discrimination saying the university shouldn't take political positions. I mean, I do think adding politics and ideology to a set of protected characteristics, if you're going to be doing equity and diversity, you should be taking account also of, for example, discriminating openly, as occurs now,

politically should be verboten. And that's something I think could be included in some of this legislation as well.

Steve McGuire:

Right, yeah. And, yeah, getting rid of those diversity statements, that's something they've also done at UNC. Yeah, the creation of these centers, another thing I like about those is, you're just adding something. You're not taking something away. So there will be criticisms from faculty on grounds of shared governance, perhaps, or something like that, maybe the academic freedom of the institution. But if it's the board of trustees, that's harder to argue, because it's the board of trustees doing it, and they're part of the institution. But it seems like you're adding people. You're adding a new center. And you're not directly violating any other individual faculty members' academic freedom. You're not taking something away from them.

So looking at some of those red state bills, so you mentioned a few things. What about, say, removing administrative DEI offices? I mean, these seem to be... While certainly there are good reasons to be concerned about social justice issues related to things like race and gender, the overall effect or the long-term effect of these offices seems to be that they do tend to bump up against academic freedom and free speech. And it seems like you could argue that removing those isn't really a violation of academic freedom, because these are administrative offices. They're not academic programs. Although I think there are concerns in these bills that, the way they're written, there's a good possibility that some of the actions that are taken as a result of them could bleed into the classroom, or other people or faculty members' research.

Eric Kaufmann:

Yeah, I mean, I think that the measures that are just targeting DEI administrators, I mean, I'm not a constitutional lawyer, I can't see what the problem would be on those, and I think those are generally positive. Where I would be opposed is, for example, saying that you can't teach critical race theory or divisive concepts. I mean, I think that's a violation of academic freedom. But I think simply curtailing institutional autonomy... I don't see institutional autonomy as sacrosanct, for example, at public institutions. Public institutions should not be allowed... Universities should not be allowed to censor students in the name of institutional autonomy. So I don't have any problem with governments getting targeting DEI.

Now, you could perhaps say, well, another approach might be to say, which I kind of think might be interesting, is to say, "Okay, well you can do DEI, but anything you do on race and gender, you got to match on politics and ideology. So if you want to monitor that, if you want to positively discriminate in favor of groups that are underrepresented, anything you do on the one, you've got to do on the other, and it's got to be equal."

Now, I think universities would rather kind of collapse the DEI than actually try and do affirmative action for conservatives. But, in any case, I just think it would be an interesting experiment to see if some universities would say, "Well, actually, yeah, we would rather continue with DEI, and we're going to bring in a share of conservative academics to try to increase the share of conservative students to match whatever demographic we're trying to match with." Just another approach. Or you could try and get rid of the DEI. My worry is that, I think getting rid of the DEI bodies is as a positive step, but on the other hand, you haven't really addressed the viewpoint diversity problem, and there's also the risk that this will continue to happen in a subterranean way. [inaudible]. But I think you're right that it definitely does bump up against academic freedom when you've got DEI as the driver of policy.

Steve McGuire:

Right. Okay. All right, two final questions for you. So the first is, why does it matter? In your view, why does it matter that we continue to work to protect free expression and try to achieve better intellectual diversity at universities and colleges?

Eric Kaufmann:

Well, because I think universities are key to the entire elite high culture, and if universities are able to make a stand for the importance of freedom of expression, even when its intention with what I would call cultural socialism, this idea of social justice, if they are able to sort of say, "Well, you can do social justice, but it's got to be subordinated to the imperative of freedom of expression," that could really have very important knock-on effects on the broader culture and direction of society, because if we lose this battle, ultimately, and these values are spilling off campus into other organizations and eventually, freedom of speech just falls down the hierarchy as something that can be more or less thrown under the bus when it collides with anyone's emotional safety, quote, unquote, then it's going to be a very different society from the one that's existed for quite some time. So I think it's kind of a civilizational imperative, as well, as, of course, all the other things, such as pursuit of truth in research and reason and all of these Enlightenment traditions as well. So yeah, I just think it's an extremely important endeavor.

Steve McGuire:

Okay, great. Now, as far as what the future looks like, as we've talked about, it seems like your prediction would be quite dour, at least for the next generation. I don't know if you've gamed this out multiple generations for now. I know you've done work on how the religious will inherit the earth and that sort of thing. But let me ask you this as a way of closing. If you were to give your sort of most optimistic account of why we should continue to push to try and protect free expression, intellectual diversity on campuses and that we could have a positive impact, what would the argument be, from your perspective, that this could actually work out well in the end?

Eric Kaufmann:

Well, I think that you could begin, perhaps, to change the socialization of young people, particularly insofar as university influences teacher training in schools influences media and other parts of the meaning-making apparatus of society. So what really needs to ultimately happen is for those classical liberal values to take hold in younger generations. Now, it is worth saying that there's a big gender split amongst young people that is much larger than in older generations. And so, it's really younger females where we see a lot of the opposition, much stronger opposition. Now, how that's going to play out in the future is unclear, but I just generally think the aim really has to be to change culture.

Now you can look at something like Cass Sunstein talks about seatbelt and smoking laws. You start out with something that's legal and political, and it eventually becomes a norm. It's not impossible to think that if the legal and political battles are won on free speech, then that might, like anti-smoking or seatbelt use, bed down as a norm. And in fact, there've been studies as well that have shown that students in school who are taught about the First Amendment, taught about the law, are more supportive of free speech. Again, that's something that has to happen in the curriculum, but all of these things are, to some degree, downstream of the university. So I think, yeah, there's all to play for, and I do think that the positive scenario is that we're able to get these new norms bedded in and turn the ship around, I guess, and conserve those free speech values. So, that's the hope.

Steve McGuire:

Okay, great. Well, let's hope that something like that is the future we end up seeing. Eric, thanks for joining us on Higher Ed Now today.

Eric Kaufmann:

Thanks, Steve. Thanks. It's been a pleasure.