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Mind Games Survival Course Manual



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Political Correctness and Postmodernism

Don Closson

In recent years an orthodoxy of thought and words known as *political correctness* has established itself on college campuses throughout the land. Although many administrators and professors deny its existence, others see this orthodoxy strangling the marketplace of ideas that has made Western civilization's institutions of higher learning the envy of the world. For the Christian, this new orthodoxy creates a hostile environment for learning, due to its primary assumption that those societies most affected by Judeo-Christian thought are to blame for most of the world's problem.

I. Political correctness defined

- A. At its core, political correctness is a rejection of Western civilization. It not only rejects the Judeo-Christian tradition and its notion of revealed truth, but it also rejects its trust in science as an objective, detached, truthfinding endeavor.

During the decade of the '80s American higher education came under intense self-examination, withering internal and external criticism. In reality, this educational crisis has been the outward layer of a much deeper crisis--**a general crisis in Western civilization.**{1}

2. What is being rejected is the hope that truth exists. Not just that we might have difficulty discerning truth, but that it is not there to be discerned. According to professor Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, former president of the Modern Language Association, "There is no knowledge, no standard, no choice that is objective." {2 } Modern scholars have decided that the written text has no meaning until the reader gives it meaning. Even more, the process by which the individual interprets, or gives meaning to, a text, is arbitrary. The original intent or meaning the author had when writing the material is inconsequential.

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. {3}

The implications go beyond the field of literature. It is truth itself which the *au courant* critics spurn, or more precisely, by reducing all truth to the level of opinion they spurn the legitimacy of any distinctions between truth and error. Yet what is the goal of liberal education if not the pursuit of truth?
{4}

3. The source of this pessimism is found in recent literary criticism. Terms describing this new trend in criticism are *postmodern*, *deconstructionist*, and the *New Hermeneutic*. Paul de Mann, Jacques Derrida, and Hans-Georg Gadamer are some of the key thinkers in this new tradition of interpretation.
4. One result of this line of thinking is that higher education has shifted the spotlight from the original works of literature to the critic. In the words of Stanley Fish, professor at Duke University,

No longer is the critic the humble servant of texts whose glories exist independently of anything he might do; it is what he does, within the constraints embedded in the literary institution, that brings texts into being and makes them available for analysis and appreciation. {5}

2. How have Postmodern ideas affected the way we think?

A. *Truth does not exist.*

1. Language cannot be objective.
2. No meta-narrative. No one set of answers or stories answer life's big questions.
3. Truth is a social construct.

2. *There are no absolutes.*

1. There is no neutral standard.
2. There are many readings or interpretations of reality.

3. *We are products of our culture.*

1. We are wholly shaped by cultural forces.
2. American individualism is itself a social construct of middle-class values of independence and self-evaluation.
3. There is no purely individual act of expression.

4. *All human communication (including reason) is an attempt to manipulate and dominate others.*

5. ***Every act of interpretation reflects the symbols and norms of one or more social groups. Self/group interest is the origin of all thought.***
 6. ***The West has systematically oppressed and marginalized people on the basis of gender, race, and class.***
 1. Groups must empower themselves to assert their own values and take their place with other planetary species.
 2. Authenticity and fulfillment come from submerging the self into a larger group, releasing one's natural impulses such as honest emotions and sexuality, cultivating subjectivity, and developing a radical openness to existence by refusing to impose order on one's life.
 7. ***All cultural expressions are political.*** All of education is already politicized; the question is whose power is expressed and sustained by the various institutions. The effect of abandoning truth has been to throw up for grabs the moral issues of our society. {6 }
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