

Slippery beasts

Why academic freedom and media freedom are so difficult to protect

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It is easy to confuse academic freedom with freedom of speech, but it is illuminating to consider the responsibilities that frame academic freedom and thus distinguish it from the less constrained freedoms to speak that characterise our roles as citizens of democratic societies. In particular, scholars and scientists are subject to standards of rigour and integrity. While academics sometimes fail to live up to these standards, we consider a difficulty that arises even when they do. This is a collective action failure that arises because of the incentives that motivate choices of topics and approaches by scholars and scientists and it results in overconcentration of academic effort. Diversity within the academy is a potential antidote to this difficulty. We explore these issues from within our different professional perspectives and note some analogies between the situation of academics on the one hand and journalists on the other.

Keywords: Negative freedom, positive freedom, tragedy of the commons, groupthink, diversity

Periodically, the academy, and its friends and critics, pause to consider the idea of academic freedom. This is often connected with events outside the academy, as in the 1950s when 'loyalty oaths' were sometimes imposed on academics in the United States, or after 9/11, when security concerns were leveraged to permit oversight of 'sensitive' scholarly and scientific enquiries. Thirty years ago, from the very place where we write, a series of 'managerial' changes to the governance of Australian universities (the so-called 'Dawkins Reforms') prompted the *Bulletin of the Australian Society of Legal Philosophy* to devote a special issue to discussing 'Academic Freedom Today' (Moens, 1991).

So-called political correctness (in the form of things like 'de-platforming', 'speech codes', 'cancel culture', and 'safe spaces') has recently provoked heated debate, while the Commonwealth government was so concerned about these matters that in 2018 the Minister for Education commissioned former High Court Chief Justice Robert French AC to set up an inquiry. (And a subsequent 2020 inquiry into the results of the inquiry, led by Professor Sally Walker AM.) Justice French's findings yielded, among other things, a model code for universities, some of which have adopted it, with or without modifications.

On this topic we believe something already asserted by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), which said in its submission to a 2008 Parliamentary review, 'The dialogue about protecting academic freedom needs to move beyond old debates about political correctness [already old thirteen years ago!] to the real threats that incursions on academic freedom can have for our universities and for our society more broadly' (2008, p. 8). We aim to show how to move the debate beyond these hackneyed questions, though not, perhaps, in the direction that the NTEU had in mind in that earlier intervention.

Public airing of this topic frequently suggests that there is nothing more to the concept of academic freedom than the idea of freedom of speech (within a particular community), where this is read as a *negative liberty*, in the sense that Isaiah Berlin (1969) first proposed in 1958. Berlin thought of 'negative liberty' as an absence of enforced institutional constraints such as laws and regulations that explicitly limit certain behaviours. In this case it refers to the ability for people to say what they please, within broadly described legal limits. However, some notable discussants have been careful to distinguish academic freedom from such a libertarian conception of freedom of speech. Professor Carolyn Evans,

Vice-Chancellor of Griffith University, recently cautioned (2020): 'We need to be careful ... that we do not let absolute ideas of freedom of speech undermine the core purposes of the university'. French noted (2019, p. 116, emphasis added) that academic freedom confers a 'qualified freedom of speech' and that that was only 'one of its elements'. We are with Evans and French on this issue. While there are issues about the proper domain of freedom of speech *on campus*, this is not what has usually been meant by academic freedom; free speech is not what *we* mean by academic freedom; and it is not a matter that we will discuss, except, perhaps, glancingly. Indeed, we will offer an account of academic freedom according to which scholars and scientists are free to explore and express ideas *within* the limits set by the stringent standards of rigour and objectivity to which they are subject.

French's reference to 'qualified freedom of speech' as only 'one of [the] elements' of academic freedom is our starting point. What are the *other* elements of academic freedom that lie just outside our line-of-sight, and what does consideration of this whole notion – the complex ideal, with multiple elements – enable us to understand about the threats to it? To answer this question, we need to consider the *telos* of academic freedom. Why is that freedom valuable to us, not just as members of the academic community, but as citizens of a democratic society?

One familiar kind of reason for academic freedom is an instrumental one. If we have academic freedom (whatever that might turn out to encompass), then knowledge will grow and, with that growth, the human condition will be bettered in various ways. This is not restricted to those kinds of improvements brought to us by scientific and technological advances, but encompasses, just as surely (if sometimes more obscurely), advances in humanistic and social scientific understandings of our situation.

It is already apparent that academic freedom couldn't possibly deliver this if all it amounted to was the liberty of scientists and scholars to think, say or do whatever they wanted, without qualification ... a radically libertarian conception of academic freedom. As Evans charmingly put it (2020), 'Just as academic freedom strongly protects the articulation of unpopular views, it also places more demands on participants than a discussion in the campus bar.'

As is commonly acknowledged in discussions of academic freedom, but alas rarely properly emphasised, academic freedom (NTEU, 2008, p. 3, quoting the Global Colloquium of University Presidents) is 'subject to the norms and standards of scholarly inquiry' and (Evans, 2020) should be exercised 'in the spirit of a responsible and honest search for knowledge'; its conduct and products (Bickel, 1975, p. 127) 'must be judged by professional criteria', being (American Association of University Professors [AAUP] 1915), in quaintly archaic diction, 'conclusions gained by scholarly method and held

in a scholarly spirit – the fruits of competent and patient and sincere inquiry ... set forth with dignity, courtesy and temperance of language'.

These are (some of) the elements that need to be added to the idea on unencumbered freedom of scholarly discussion if we are to understand what is at stake with academic freedom. Crudely, these are the requirements of *academic integrity*, about which the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) has issued a Guidance Note that provides a good summary of conventional wisdom – often hard won from scandalous failures in the past – about the fundamentals of (specifically) research integrity. As they put it (TEQSA, 2019, p. 3-4):

Good practice includes:

- intellectual honesty in proposing, performing, and reporting research
- accuracy in representing contributions to research proposals and reports
- fairness in peer review
- collegiality in scientific interactions, including communications and sharing of resources
- transparency in conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest
- protection of human subjects in the conduct of research
- humane care of animals in the conduct of research, and
- adherence to the mutual responsibilities between investigators and research.

Breaches of research integrity include:

- plagiarism
- falsifying or fabricating data
- deliberately omitting data to obtain a desired result
- using data from other researchers without due acknowledgement
- representing observations as genuine when they are not, and
- misleading attributions of authorship.

Berlin would regard these ideas about good practice and the avoidance of breaches as limits to negative freedoms. These clearly articulated norms and rules define the space in which an individual is able to operate. These formal requirements of the academy are often missed in debates about what can and can't be said, but when they are added to the libertarian ideal of academic freedom (in a narrow, permissive sense), they together give us an ideal of academic freedom that is distinctive.

Taking these ideas into account – and some of them of course have analogues in relation to university-level teaching – we can say, roughly, that academic freedom amounts to the freedom of academics to pursue their enquiries and propagate the results of those enquiries in accordance with good practice and avoiding breaches of scholarly or scientific integrity. And here we can begin to see more clearly how academic

freedom, understood in this expanded sense, contributes to the realisation of its own *telos*. Honesty, accuracy, fairness, avoidance of fabrication and the like ... all these are necessary conditions for the growth of knowledge through *disciplined* enquiry.

These principles find echoes in another institution that also regards itself as a truth-making enterprise. While journalism has always been accused of imperfectly applying its own standards, its *telos* is strikingly similar to the academy's. Both journalists and academics consider their value to be underpinned by a commitment to a set of rigorous professional practices and standards that valorise their roles in developing and circulating useful and reliable knowledge. In cultural terms, journalism and the academy are worlds apart. Journalists tend to mock academics, especially *journalism* academics (Anonymous, 2015), and few academics would consider journalists to be in the same league when it comes to rigorous research and analysis. But while journalists would choke on the purple prose of the 1915 AAUP statement, those phrases, invoking the ideals of 'honest search', 'sincere inquiry', and 'temperance of language', might well have come from an antiquarian journalism textbook.

It has to be acknowledged that these professional self-understandings and institutional devices are the consequence of long and complex historical processes, some of which are influentially documented by Habermas (1989). They are imperfectly embodied in actual practice, and they are increasingly under pressure as 'legacy' practices from newer cultural forms. We are not 'essentialising' the academy or the profession of journalism, but we are taking a stand to defend some hard-won institutional forms.

In essence, both professions idealise a search for 'truth'; an attempt to brush away distracting 'noise', to uncover an important reality. Both require rigorous scepticism – a willingness to question and challenge established orthodoxies – and the courage to ask deep, and often deeply uncomfortable questions about why things are as they are, and how they could be improved. That is why the challenges to one should resonate powerfully with the other. The battles that journalists have fought in defence of press freedom are only marginally removed from those the academy continues to struggle with over academic freedom. And both professions will, if genuinely pursuing the truth, need to do so with an integrity that itself puts limits on a purely libertarian approach to professional freedom.

If academic freedom is driven by its *telos*, the same is true of press freedom. Its underlying purpose is to enable the media to act as a watchdog over the powerful, to interrogate disputes, circulate ideas and facilitate public debate and understanding. That *telos* helps inform and describe its shape. A press without freedom is little more than a propaganda machine, pushing particular ideologies and narratives that serve the interests of

those who seek to control it. (The American newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst famously once remarked (JPROF, 2019), 'news is something somebody doesn't want printed; all else is advertising.') Journalism must be allowed the freedom to investigate almost all corners of society and government, with the fairly narrow exception of those that hold sensitive private, commercial or security information. It should be allowed to interrogate the complete range of political views, to allow the best of them to win in free and open debate.

Consider perhaps the most eloquent defence of press freedom ever written, from John Stuart Mill (1998, ch. 2), who argued in 1859:

The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.

There is barely a coat of paint between Mill's argument, and Evans' (quoted above), that 'academic freedom strongly protects the articulation of unpopular views'. But just as Evans goes on to point out that academic freedom is not unqualified, the same is true of press freedom. With the power of the press, comes great responsibility, and while not every journalist or editor has honoured that responsibility with complete integrity, those higher standards of editorial independence, a bias towards transparency over secrecy, fidelity to the facts, and professional scepticism should all still apply.

And, as already mentioned, these standards, whether of the academy or of journalism are, crucially, superintended by a variety of institutional offices and processes. So, for example, research ethics committees oversee conflicts of interests and the welfare of subjects (whether they be human or other animals), while gatekeepers work hard for academic publishers and funding agencies to ensure fairness in the peer review processes. There are comparable offices and processes in the work of journalists – the ombudsman, the Australian Press Council, the desk editor, sub-editors, managing editor, and the like. Journalists' codes of conduct establish much the same ethical framework as is articulated in the TEQSA Guidance Note (2019). The Australian Press Council's (2014) 'General Principles' for example, cover 'accuracy and clarity', 'fairness and balance', 'privacy and avoidance of harm', and 'integrity and transparency'. The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance's Journalist Code of Ethics (2018) crucially mentions correction of errors, honesty, avoidance of conflict of interests and avoidance of plagiarism. See also the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (2019) Principles and Standards. It is these institutional parallels, as well as (partially) shared *teloi*, that warrant our guiding principle that

looking at journalistic practice can illuminate issues about academic freedom (and vice versa).

Notwithstanding this institutional apparatus, we still from time to time witness scandalous failures of academic or journalistic integrity. There are infamous examples of made-up evidence in support of a news story or a research outcome, accompanied by retraction, discipline of the offending professional, and soul-searching about the guiding policies and the effectiveness of their implementation. For some recent journalistic scandals, see ThoughtCo. (2019) and for some scientific scandals, see Fanelli (2009).

These failures of integrity are, of course, abuses of the freedoms granted to journalists and/or scholars and scientists and they take a form that is itself easily and dramatically narrated, involving as they do individual miscreants and the failure of other individuals, holding gatekeeping offices, to detect (in time to stop) their misbehaviour. Indeed, they are the stuff of documentaries (e.g. *The Crisis of Science* 2019) or dramatisations (e.g. *Absence of Malice* 1981), so readily do they fit into the contemporary mythos.

The canons of academic and journalistic integrity provide a framework of constraints on the liberty of individuals to do as they please ... they represent constraints on freedom in Berlin's negative sense. We accept them because they are understood as means to the ends, the *teloi*, that define the relevant professions. The pursuit of truth requires a commitment to integrity. And it is the application of this commitment that distinguishes the freedom that the scholar or journalist expresses through their work, from the free-wheeling discussion in the pub (or Evans' campus bar), just as the constraint on harm to others (as in Mill's *Liberty*) distinguishes freedom in a civilised society from absolute negative freedom ... i.e., the freedom from *all* institutional constraints that amounts to anarchy.

Of course, within the constraints of academic or journalistic integrity, the widest possible freedom of enquiry and expression is also instrumental to the realisation of the *teloi* of these practices. While they depend on restraint – the commitment to 'objectivity', for example – they also depend on examination of the full variety of ideas and points of view. While there is *objectivity*, in some sense, there should be no institutionally enforced *orthodoxy* in the practice of scholarship or journalism. We are rightly sceptical, for example, of news media or academic organisations that demand conformity to a 'party line'; they may think they already *have* the truth, but experience has taught us to be wary of such claims. (More on this point below.)

All this is pretty straightforward. On the account so far sketched, we have academic or journalistic freedom when individual practitioners are free from overbearing institutional constraints to 'follow the story where it takes them', so long as they are guided by their professional standards and ethics.

But we are worried about something that can happen in both professions, even when individuals act with integrity and even though they may experience themselves as being authors of their own destinies, and so 'free' in Berlin's (1969: Part II) 'positive' sense.

In many cases, failures of journalism and scholarship don't involve bad people acting, self-interestedly, in ways that cheat the system and violate professional integrity. They may involve self-interest, but self-interest in terms that are defined, indeed, precisely *by* 'the system' and internalised by the individual. The failures we want to add to the kinds that people already know about aren't individual, so much as 'collective action failures', of the kind familiar, perhaps, in the 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin, 1968). And, tragically, they don't typically erupt into scandals, though their effects can be more damaging to the public good than more easily dramatised failures of personal integrity.

The tragedy of the commons involves three key ideas: (1) the institutionally recognised freedom of individuals (their negative liberty) to do as they like with a common resource; (2) their own individual estimations of where their personal interests lie; and (3) the degradation of the common resource that results as a joint effect from freedoms exercised in pursuit of (narrowly construed) self-interest. Hardin described an unregulated environment in which each farmer may graze their cattle on the commons *ab libitum*. Every individual farmer sees that it is in their self-interest to do so, whatever the other farmers do. But when all act in their individual interests, even when each can plainly see the collective consequence, the commons is overgrazed and tragically loses its value to each. No-one has behaved without integrity, but the consequences of their individually sensible (and permitted) activities, are bad for the individual *and* for the collective.

What has this got to do with the freedom of individual scholars and scientists to pursue their own research interests or, indeed, with the freedom of individual journalists to follow the story as they understand it?

Consider the situation of the individual scholar or scientist, at liberty, because of their (negative) academic freedom, to research whatever topic they consider it best to engage with, and hoping to express themselves, to author themselves, through their choices. How can they choose? Well, with some topics, they *are* and with other topics they *are not* going ...

- to be easily recognised as 'one of the gang';
- to benefit directly from the work of others;
- to have ready access to publication and grants opportunities;
- to be sought out as a collaborator;
- to have the quality of their work easily and reliably assessed by their peers.

Where these characteristics are present, the individual scholar or scientist has strong career-related incentives to seek them out and to make their selection of research topic

and method on that basis. So, as scientists or scholars consider what topic to research, it is predictable (and indeed observable, empirically) that most will choose a topic that affords these career-enhancing opportunities. But if most do choose these highly salient options, then there is every prospect that there will be, as was long ago observed (Chubin and Connolly 1982, p. 294), an 'unproductive over-concentration on some few problems, while high-potential areas go underdeveloped.' There will, in other words, be 'over-grazing' of the knowledge commons in some areas at the same time that other areas of enquiry are neglected. And the logic is the same as in the environmental case. Each individual, acting within a domain of personal freedom, and expressing themselves as the author of their own professional narrative, is nevertheless steered, by compelling incentives that are built into their situation, to behave in a way that produces, as a resultant from the combined decisions of many such individuals, a collective action failure. If there had been a different, more diverse distribution of research activity across the various topics of potential enquiry, then more knowledge, contributing to more human betterment, could have been produced. (See also D'Agostino, 2019.)

So, while issues of academic integrity – not cheating the system – are important and already well-known limits to academic freedom in a simplistic libertarian sense, we need to add another, less widely noted element in understanding what (responsible) academic freedom in fact *requires*. For there are systemic effects involving common incentives (in Berlin's terms, limits to positive freedom rather than negative freedom), that can also limit the ability of free academic enquiry to deliver on the *telos* of that activity.

If that is true in the academy, it is no less real for journalism.

Take the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York. Those shocking acts of mass murder made it all but impossible for US reporters to see their country as anything other than a victim, and the attackers as anything less than villainous. This is more than simple self-censorship. The incentives to adopt this narrative – to be recognised as 'one of the gang', to have publication opportunities – were so powerful in the aftermath of the attacks that this interpretation of events became a deeply embedded world view that catastrophically disrupted the ability of many journalists to ask difficult questions and challenge the government's narrative. The phrase, 'the War on Terror' became so resonant in the collective psyche, that it became impossible to see the US response in anything other than military terms. Think how different the world would have been if the US had

described 9/11 as a heinous crime that needed to be dealt with by the criminal justice system, rather than an act of war that demanded an armed invasion. In Berlin's terms, the structural forces that drove journalists – and indeed most of the West – to see the attacks on the World Trade Center in military terms severely limited journalists' *positive freedom* to see alternatives or to even challenge the orthodox view. In terms of 'fitting in' and 'getting recognition', all the incentives were aligned with this interpretation of the situation.

In 2003, in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan, the US Government claimed it had evidence that proved Iraq had 'weapons of mass destruction'. The then-US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, famously addressed the United Nations to insist that Iraq was a threat to world peace and that invasion was necessary. In a stinging piece for CNN to mark the invasion's tenth anniversary, journalist Howard Kurtz wrote (2013), 'Major news organisations

aided and abetted the Bush administration's march to war on what turned out to be faulty premises. All too often, scepticism was checked at the door, and shaky claims of top officials and unnamed sources were trumpeted as fact.' Kurtz found more than 140 front-page stories published from August 2002 until the war

began on March 19 the following year that focused heavily on the US administration's rhetoric against Iraq: 'Cheney says Iraqi strike is justified', for example, and 'Bush tells United Nations it must stand up to Hussein or US will'. Kurtz called it (2013), 'the media's greatest failure in modern times.' Kurtz was perhaps being too hard on his colleagues. He implied it was a failure of professional integrity, rather than powerful structural and social forces that simply made it too difficult (or too uncomfortable) to see the war in any other terms. Like the tragedy of the commons, this groupthink wasn't so much a failure of individual integrity as it was an expression of the incentives in play, given a strong cultural bias towards interpreting the relevant events in a particular way. While the Iraq war is a dramatic example, a terrorist attack isn't the only thing capable of restricting Berlin's positive freedoms by putting on blinkers or channelling an individual's approach to self-authorship.

There is, perhaps, one *disanalogy* between the academic and journalistic professions. Both have constraints on freedom of practice that are related to the *teloi* of the enterprises, and both exhibit systemic failures because of the influence of professional incentives for recognition and participation. But journalism, though perhaps not the academy, also encourages institutional conformity; the organisations that hire

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journalists often have an established and enforced corporate 'brand' or guiding (and enforced) ideological orientation.

But even those organisations that claim to have no particular ideological position, are still vulnerable internal political cultures that in turn shape their world views. For example, Chris Kenny, a conservative columnist for Sky News and *The Australian*, often derides the ABC for 'groupthink' that he argues drives the national broadcaster to take socially liberal approaches to a whole range of issues, though he often singles out climate change (Kenny, 2018; 2020). The American sociologist William H. Whyte Jr described 'groupthink' thus (1952): 'We are not talking about mere instinctive conformity – it is, after all, a perennial failing of mankind. What we are talking about is a rationalised conformity – an open, articulate philosophy which holds that group values are not only expedient but right and good as well.'

In Kenny's conception, the ABC's *groupthink* has pushed the broadcaster and its staff to hire left-wing journalists from a narrow band of Australian society and has thus entrenched a narrow small-liberal culture that is incapable of understanding why a significant proportion of Australian voters continues to support coal mining. He declared (Kenny, 2020) on Sky News that 'the taxpayer funded ABC opinion leaders suffer from ideological groupthink and avoid inconvenient facts', especially when it comes to climate change.

It is easy to dismiss Kenny and his colleagues at News Corp for being guilty of exactly the same problem he accuses the ABC of. Either by accident or design, News Corp appears to have adopted a conservative ideological position, developing its own right-of-centre cultural world view. For example, the website *mediabiasfactcheck.com* rates *The Australian* as 'centre right', Sky News and *The Daily Telegraph* as 'right'. Walkley Award-winning journalist Tony Koch wrote in *The Guardian*, 9 May 2019, 'For 30 years I worked for News Corp papers. Now all I see is shameful bias'. But in the heart of the contradiction lies the legitimacy of the argument. The social and political structures of the institutions charged with freely developing our knowledge and understanding, of challenging the status quo, and asking difficult questions, are encumbered by an institutionalised way of seeing and interpreting the world, which is only reinforced by the set of professional incentives, also in play in the academy, that tend to promote 'follow-the-leader' rather than 'be-the-leader' behaviour by individual agents. Just as those institutional wheel ruts drive academics to plough certain fields of research and ignore others, so journalists are also pushed into particular ways of seeing that shape and direct the questions they ask, and the stories they tell. This is often a matter of corporate policy for media companies, but the influence of culture on an academic's world view can be just as powerful as a journalist's. The 'Foucault phenomenon' of the 1980s and 1990s is a striking example, especially in the humanities and social

sciences. Once Foucault's work was canonised, it became an 'attractor' for academic work on a variety of topics. Showing some facility in deploying Foucauldian ideas became a *sine qua non* for those needing to appear up to date. Of course, the mechanism was not the top-down one of corporate policy and its enforcement within a specific institutional context. (On this see D'Agostino, 2019.)

Of course, it's no easy matter to suggest a way *around* this particular difficulty, but the idea of *diversity* holds the key.

In media, there has been a long debate about the need for diversity in newsrooms. The theory will be familiar. If homogeneous communities tend to develop homogeneous thinking, it follows that introducing people from different social, religious, ethnic or gendered groups is likely to keep the *institution's* mind open, if not each individual's. But while diversity in this sense undoubtedly has value, given the way institutional incentives for recognition and 'fitting in' work, there is no guarantee that a person from an African background will magically see the world in a way that is radically different from a European or Asian, particularly if they all grew up in the same schools, played football together, and shared university lectures.

Culture is key; and not just the culture of those who get hired. (See Sunstein, 2003.) Corporate culture can be as stubborn a thing to shift as an individual's, and every employee is as involved in the culture as any other. All are vulnerable to the same structural and social pressures. Bosses tend to hire people who think like them because we are drawn to those who reflect our own values and world views. We like working with people who support our opinions; not those who challenge them. (This is the central finding of 'social comparison theory' in psychology (Suls & Wheeler, 2000) and it is a *very* robust effect.) And anyone who doubts the power of a self-reinforcing culture to head off in dangerously narrow-minded tangents needs only to look at the way one particular unit of the Australian Special Air Service seems to have convinced itself that war crimes were okay.

In the academy, the idea of 'tenure', of 'jobs for life' in effect, was touted as an antidote to the risks of venturing into unpopular or unfashionable territory. Without the risk of losing their job, a researcher is theoretically free to explore those territories without restraint. But tenure has turned out to be relatively weak, up against the power of cultural incentives to maintain conformity.

There are some areas, largely in the humanities and social sciences, where, because of ideological engagements, there is a diversity of realms in which recognition might be sought and hence, a potential structural solution to what is, after all, a structural problem. If many scholars are likely to respond to incentive signals and to want recognition for their work, then to secure diversity and sceptical challenges to taken-for-granted thinking, it will help, indeed help a great deal, if there

are different 'schools' of thought to which one might belong. The individual scholar gets to be recognised within their favoured school, but, because the schools are different and often indeed opposed, each will keep the other honest so long as they engage with one another.

Much the same principle animates ideas about diversity of media ownership. Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd recently launched a petition calling for a Royal Commission to investigate the impact of Australia's highly concentrated media ownership. It was driven at least in part by his concern about the way Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation narrows and distorts public debate in Australia. At least according to one landmark study (Noam, 2016), Australia ranks third in the world for the degree of concentration, (behind China and Egypt), and that was in 2016, *before* the Nine Network bought the Fairfax papers in 2019. It would be fine if News Corp's 'right-wing' tilt cancelled out the ABC's 'left-wing' world-view, but true media freedom requires more than simply weighing one bias against another. It requires an aggressive approach to protecting diversity of ownership across the media landscape and, within those organisations, deliberate mechanisms to encourage dissident thinking, and, within the general public, a commitment to actively sampling the diversity before forming the judgments that will engage them in the voting booth or in other political action.

On this account, then, academic and journalistic freedom are in the service of something ... the pursuit of the truth. And while each is subject to those limits on positive freedom that are inherent in any system of social incentives, the pursuit of truth may still be possible if there is diversity in the approaches that are taken to finding it. That is a matter of our institutional arrangements, not of our individual integrity.

Academic freedom, journalistic freedom ... these are not something for the individual; they are something *for* the society, in the service of the society. But they are real only if the social arrangements are in place that enable both integrity at the individual level and diversity at the collective level. Only in that way can they put honestly arrived at but always only partial perspectives on the truth into contact with one another in a productive way. This is the social precondition for the 'rigorous scepticism' that is expected of both individual academics and journalists. It is too much to expect each individual to step outside their own culturally defined world views though. We need, at a minimum, the diversity that Rudd is calling for in the Australian media landscape, but also an aggressive approach to encouraging and rewarding dissidents and contrarians. But even that is not enough. We also need the civility among divergent parties – the 'dignity, courtesy and temperance of language' mentioned earlier – that will enable these parties to engage with one another in honest debate, rather than hurling barbs at one another across the Twittersphere or, even worse, simply retreating to their social-

media echo chambers and ignoring one another. Anything less is not true freedom, whether it is journalistic or academic.

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