

Viewpoint: Academic Freedom is Now Being Betrayed by Academics

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The ultimate purpose of a university is, without fear or favour, to pursue the truth, and in furtherance of that ideal I try, as an historian, to go wherever the evidence leads me. That some folks – even some academic colleagues – may not feel comfortable with the end results is of absolutely no consequence. I've always been supported by the institutions at which I've worked and by the colleagues with whom I work. But it's now becoming clear to me that this world and these norms are under attack, and – scarcely less worrying – that they are being betrayed from within.

Consider the following two stories that emerged earlier this month (October 2017):

1. A psychotherapist master's student at Bath Spa University, Mr James Caspian, has been told he cannot study cases of people who have opted to have their gender-reassignment surgery reversed because such research was "potentially 'politically incorrect'."
2. Almost half of the editorial board of the prestigious journal *Third World Quarterly* [published by Taylor & Francis] has resigned following publication of an article in that journal, that reportedly pointed out some of the positive aspects of colonialism; the list of these resignations includes six UK-based academics.

Of course, the above summaries do no more than rough justice to the issues involved. But on digging down into the detail, the truths are even more alarming than the summaries might suggest.

In the Bath Spa case, the institution has apparently **banned research** not because it believes that the subject-matter was 'politically incorrect,' but merely because, in its view, the research had the 'potential' to be so. What's more, in imposing the ban, it has sought to further justify its action by opining that the research could give rise to social-media comment that 'may be detrimental to the reputation of the university'.

This is a shortened version of an article that first appeared in the Spectator in October 2017
<https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/10/academic-freedom-is-now-being-betrayed-by-academics/>

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