

Far-Left Academic Crazies Strike Again: The Strange Case Of Rebecca Tuvel And Hypatia

[*Author's Note*: a somewhat different version of this material is available on my [Lost Generation Philosopher blog](#).]

Academics and academia-watchers were recently treated to the latest three-ring circus, and if this one doesn't make some key players in today's pseudo-intellectual games look like certifiable head cases, nothing will. The matter would be the stuff of comedy, were these people not teaching impressionable students, many of whom are going massively into debt to get an education at their institutions.

I refer to what might be called the Tuvel-*Hypatia* affair.

This is what happened: a young woman named Rebecca Tuvel, a recent philosophy Ph.D., untenured at Rhodes College (a small liberal arts school in Memphis, Tenn.), submitted an article entitled "In Defense of Transracialism" to a journal called *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* (the name is for a 4th century woman scholar in ancient Greece and Egypt who was murdered as a pagan during a religious-political feud). For over 30 years now *Hypatia* has been one of the leading, or perhaps just the loudest, mouthpieces for radical academic feminism in the humanities. If a newly minted Ph.D. publishes an article there, she has instant credibility (among her peers, at least).

Tuvel's article was accepted for publication and appeared in the most recent (March 2017) issue. I haven't read it and have no plans to do so (I have far better uses for my limited

time). I am assuming the account to be found [here](#) is reliable.

If so, the article relies on a standard philosophical method: arguing from analogy. Because two items have certain features in common, they can be compared in at least one more interesting respect. In this case, I gather Tuvel was arguing that “transgendering,” or whatever we want to call the presently-obsessive focus on sex change, is sufficiently comparable to “transracialism,” the changing of one’s race, that the public case against someone such as Rachel Dolezal who, though born white, spent years posing as being black, fails. If we accept the former (as does Tuvel), we are compelled to accept the legitimacy of the latter. Tuvel does not appear to have actually asserted that Rachel Dolezal was “transracial.” Her argument was hypothetical. This, too, is in line with most thought experiments in academic philosophy. Thus for all I know, despite its ridiculous subject matter, the article is competently argued. It is also a given in philosophy that the validity or strength of someone’s argument is a matter of form, not content. It is possible, that is, to construct a structurally valid argument concluding that the moon is made of green cheese.

What happened next was that within weeks of the article’s appearing, an “[open letter](#)” condemning the article began to circulate online, soliciting and receiving signatures (since discontinued). It was unclear who had initially authored the letter, which did not sketch, or examine, or attempt to evaluate, Tuvel’s argument. Instead it demanded that the article be retracted as having “caused ... harm ...” whatever this means, as there was no evidence presented that harm had been done, or an attempt to analyze the concept of *harm* being used, as you’d find in serious philosophy. It went to denounce the hapless author for supposed sins such as “deadnaming.” Are you sitting down? “Deadnaming” – which I’d never heard of before prior to this fiasco – is using the former name of a “transgendered” person, e.g., using the name “Bruce Jenner”

alongside that of “Caitlyn Jenner.” Well, gasp!

Anyway, this was just one of the articles methodological heresies. I won't bore or torture readers with an account of the others. I will only note that *Hypatia's* editorial board instantly caved Putting their collective tails between their legs, the journal's board issued a pathetic [statement](#) on its public Facebook page which stands as an exhibition of how American academia has gone off the deep end into utter absurdity. They retracted the article, despite the obvious fact that the only “harm” done had been to its hapless author who had been too naïve not to realize that any straight (may I presume?) white woman writing on any of these topics is walking into a minefield.

Apparently, among the signees of the “open letter” were two people on Tuvel's dissertation committee. What's said to be true in Washington, D.C., is definitely true in academia: if you want a friend, get a dog. Also made clear by this case is how easily the academic hard-left will turn on its own with a burn-the-heretic mentality reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition.

At least one observer, fairly prominent in academic philosophy and with legal training, [sees the possibility of a defamation lawsuit](#). Suffice it to say, the “open letter” took academic-left self-righteous arrogance to levels I've not before seen, demanding that *Hypatia* revise its refereeing procedures and publishing policies to ensure that an article like this one never again gets through its process and reaches print – based on who has the exclusive right to publish on such subjects to avoid this impossibly vague notion of “harm”!

What should we take away from episodes like this?

First, it is worth noting that incidences of bullying and career-threatening personal attack are more common in academia than anyone who has spent no time in its groves realizes (yes,

I did over 15 years of time there)? I could name several white males whose names have been tarnished, their careers ruined, by possibly bogus sexual misconduct allegations and in some cases much less (it can be as little as a post on a private blog that expresses a politically incorrect opinion that gets picked up and circulated in social media).

Let's make the question more basic: *how on Earth did fields like philosophy get in this kind of mess?*

The answer to this goes back just over 45 years. They got in this mess through academia's mindless acceptance of affirmative action, which started us down this troubled road, having expanded until it has literally overwhelmed the humanities! Initially aimed to increase the number of black professors (at which it has failed miserably), it expanded immediately to include women (read: feminists), and has more recently expanded still further to include sexual minorities including those almost never seen, much less publicly celebrated, before our present sordid era.

As the saying goes, policies that redistribute wealth and jobs from Peter to Paul can always count on the support of Paul—and Paula! And they will generate more Pauls, Paulas, and Paul-to-Paula “transing” (or whatever we're supposed to call it)!

Around 1970, the “argument” had emerged (it was always more an exercise in propagandizing and bullying, at which the left has always excelled) that minorities and women are “underrepresented” in academia, and that all departments should make efforts not just at outreach but to establish specific goals and timetables for hiring more women and minorities – for after all, “diversity is our strength,” is it not?

The legal impetus began with the Supreme Court's disastrous *Griggs v. Duke Power* decision in 1971. This decision changed the meaning of *discrimination* from an action taken by

individuals to a lack of politically acceptable outcomes. Affirmative action, the meaning of which was also ambiguous from the get-go, changed from that of well-intentioned outreach based on calls for an end to racial and sexual discrimination to an insistence on bureaucratically measurable results as a test of “nondiscrimination.” Bureaucratic realignment because the goal; the gold standard become proportional representation. Hence the creation of the category of the “underrepresented group” in all official policy recommendations relevant to student admissions, faculty hiring, and promotions.

I described this process in some detail, along with its assumptions and its effects on occupations ranging from the construction industry to academia, in my book *Civil Wrongs: What Went Wrong With Affirmative Action* (1994), a work not once discussed or argued with but instead blacklisted in academia. I learned in 1996 from a sociology professor at Bowling Green State University that the book had been placed on an actual “index of banned books” there – an “index” of how medieval academia had become even then! And yes, I was (figuratively speaking) lynched a handful of times, although we did not have social media in those days.

I’d committed one of the ultimate heresies, providing a political dissection of the rise of the “new scholarship”: so-called “critical theory” which borrowed freely from French philosophy (e.g., Foucault, Derrida, etc.), radical feminism, critical race theory, and rising homosexuality which at the time was barely on the radar but growing rapidly. Without affirmative action and the perceived need to protect it from intellectual criticism, very little of this stuff would even exist! The “new scholarship” method was political correctness, rooted in Frankfurt School educated Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse’s “Repressive Tolerance”: allowing the same free speech standards for “nonrepressed” as for “repressed” groups maintains systemic repression!

In other words: free speech for me but not for thee!

What began decades ago, in a then-obscure philosophical essay, bears fruit today in the threats of violence against conservative speakers on campuses!

By the end of the 1980s affirmative action had clearly evolved into race and gender preferences never called for in original civil rights legislation, and the idea had become to protect preferences both from legitimate criticism (in many cases from scholars far better situated than I was), while cowardly Republican politicians such as the first George Bush caved and signed a Civil Rights Act of 1991. That law reversed court decisions such as *Croson* (1989), upheld by the Supreme Court, which were threatening to drain the affirmative action swamp.

I opined further in my book that the particular attacks on such notions as rationality and objectivity coming from “new scholarship” quarters, though originating independently, had been pulled into and used by this effort: a rational and objective approach to race and gender in American public education policy did not yield results the activists wanted. There was no reason whatsoever why nondiscrimination should yield proportional representation of all ethnicities and both genders. Nowhere in the world did such a state of affairs exist. Experience seemed to show that efforts to force it into existence were counterproductive. Government policies designed to benefit some groups at the expense of others always caused trouble, and this was not just true in the U.S., it was true all over the world (Thomas Sowell did some of the definitive detective work on this). Such policies benefitted those in the “preferred” groups situated politically to take advantage of them, and they quickly incurred resentment of those in nonpreferred “untouchable” groups.

Rather than check their premises the “new scholars” grew still more radical. Anything based on logical reasoning had to go. *Logic*, they said, is a white, male, Euro-centric,

heterosexual, social construct. Today they'd add "cisgendered," the present decade's chief contribution to the growing list of bizarre neologisms.

As Thomas Hobbes says somewhere, "When reason goeth against a man, a man goeth against reason." A woman, too. Or any other gender you like!

In fact, any possibility of rational discussion of such subjects in academia was dead in the water by the turn of the millennium. Feelings reigned supreme! And they got increasingly unpredictable: I am sure Rebecca Tuvel never dreamed this kind of fracas would erupt over her attempt to add something new to the conversation, trendy and sordid though the conversation is.

So where does this end?

A fake concept, that of *marginalization* applied to anyone seen as "underrepresented," is out of control in academia. As a friend of mine put it (I am paraphrasing): "2017 might be the year humanities faculty finally wake up and realize that a certain percentage of their number is certifiably bat****-insane!"

I argued to anyone who would listen over a quarter of a century ago that unless affirmative action for women and minorities was curtailed, with hiring based on accomplishment and perceived promise, we would have increasing numbers of groups claiming the mantles of marginalization and victimhood, and these group would get progressively more extreme.

Everything I predicted back then has happened!

Now I'll say that unless the trans-crazies and their backers are called out for their particular brand of insanity, the situation will get worse – unless, of course, a rapid shift towards exclusive online learning or an economic collapse forces the bulk of these institutions to close.

Barring that, if nothing changes, then what's next? Defenses of pedophilia, with pedophiles the next "marginalized group"? Will we then see unhinged outpourings of scorn and rage against "pedophobia"?

Will it then be necrophilia? Cannibalism?

Only college and university administrations, with the backing of boards of trustees and endowment committees, can stop this long-term trend. They will have to stand together, show some backbone (for a change!), refuse to sign off on the hiring of any more far-left crazies pursuing "research" on trans-whatever, and then agree to weather the public hate blasts likely to ensue from outraged left-wing faculty, well-placed off-campus political groups, celebrities, etc.

This will be ten times harder today than it would have been a quarter century ago because of how far the madness has progressed. Back then one might be lynched on talk radio. Today opponents of these trends might have to deal with threats; they might even be risking flash-mob type violence, easily orchestrated via social media. Removing the existing crazies is probably not an option unless said crazies do something criminal (I wouldn't put this past them, but doubt the mere suppression of academic freedom qualifies). But no one can *force* a really determined administration to permit the hiring of more and progressively crazier leftists in the name of bogus concepts of victimization and marginalization.

CREDITS:

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