

# Social Justice is 'Fake Scholarship,' Oxford Philosopher Says

Sir Roger Vernon Scruton, an English philosopher and writer who specializes in political philosophy and aesthetics, said social justice is changing the very nature of scholarship—and not for the better.

“The academy has been invaded by a new form of study,” says Scruton, [a senior research fellow at Oxford University](#), in a recently published Youtube video. “It used to be the case at universities you were teaching a recognized subject with a recognized curriculum and you were carrying out research or scholarship in the humanities which was open-minded, guided by the pursuit of truth, and not dismayed particularly if it came to surprising or unorthodox conclusions.”

Scruton, a former editor of *The Salisbury Review* and author of more than 50 books, said political conformity is now a virtual requirement in many humanities subjects. He used women studies programs as one example (noting his assertion would be controversial, particularly in America).

“It’s very difficult to imagine you’d succeed in that subject if you didn’t have, at the outset or certainly at the conclusion, feminist opinions,” Scruton says. “It’s a subject constructed around an ideology.”

Scruton said the ideology might be grounded in truth, but it’s impossible to know because one cannot freely question its premises. Conformity to the orthodoxy takes precedence over the intellectual method, he said, something which is occurring more and more at universities. Scholarship is no longer a tool to seek truth but *a means*.

“The growth of the fake scholarship industry enables people to claim authority for nonsense,” Scruton said. “It makes conformity to orthodoxy the only thing that you have. If the scholarship is nonsense, what is there? Only the conclusions.”

NYU professor Jonathan Haidt [made a similar point](#) last year. Haidt and Scruton have very different politics, but they’ve reached similar conclusions about the state of the modern university: political ideology is trumping the pursuit of truth.

If the scholars are right, the consequences could be severe. History has shown that the politicization of university systems is often a precursor to social unrest and political upheaval, with perhaps Weimar-era Germany as the most conspicuous example.

“The tragedy of modern Germany is an object-lesson in the dangers of allowing academic life to become politicized and professors to proclaim their “commitment,” the British historian Paul Johnson wrote in the best-selling *book Modern Times*. “Whether the bias is to the Left or the Right the results are equally disastrous for in either case the wells of truth are poisoned.”

In 2016, NYU professor Jonathan Haidt said universities would soon have to choose between Truth and Social Justice. In Haidt’s words, they’d have to choose ‘one telos.’

A telos (from the Greek τέλος for “end”, “purpose”, or “goal”) is the ultimate end for a given thing. The term derives from the word “teleology,” the study of purposiveness.

The telos of an apple is to be eaten. The telos of a knife is to cut something. For centuries, the telos of universities was Truth, or at least the pursuit of it. In recent years, a new telos has emerged: social justice.

Few would disagree that the emergence of social justice as a second telos has profoundly changed academia. The point of contention is whether said change is positive or negative.

Perhaps a larger question is this: can they coexist? Haidt suggests they cannot.

*“As a social psychologist who studies morality, I have watched these two teloses come into conflict increasingly often during my 30 years in the academy. The conflicts seemed manageable in the 1990s. But the intensity of conflict has grown since then, at the same time as the [political diversity of the professoriate was plummeting](#), and at the same time as [American cross-partisan hostility was rising](#). I believe the conflict reached its boiling point in the fall of 2015 when student [protesters at 80 universities demanded](#) that their universities make much greater and more explicit commitments to social justice, often including mandatory courses and training for everyone in social justice perspectives and content.”*