

The Wrong Pieces on the Chessboard

Inspired by a few recent posts, several friends have asked me if I've finally "woken up" to the great political threat of wokism. In particular, they're hoping that I'm ready to at least back the American right as the clear lesser of two evils.

I fear my response is: It's complicated.

From a global point of view, I continue to see the American left and right as moral approximates. No doubt one is even worse than the other, but they're both so vicious that I see little reason to precisely weigh their sins. While I disagree with the left on a larger number of issues, the American right is not merely wrong but sadistic on the single most important policy issue on Earth: immigration. If your idea of freedom is gleefully denying the vast majority of humanity the rights to live and work where they please, I am not on your side. No way, no how, nothing doing.

From a personal point of view, however, the American left has become quite bad for me. Why? Because as a university professor, the left surrounds me. As my colleague Dan Klein has conclusively documented, academia isn't merely overwhelmingly leftist; outposts of dissent from left-wing orthodoxy are rapidly vanishing. (And don't believe the nonsense that the median academic is "moderate." A Bernie Sanders supporter could easily fancy himself a "moderate" when a quarter of his colleagues are self-identified "Marxists.")

Even tenure at a public university no longer fully insulates me and my friends from thinly-veiled indoctrination and censorship. I worry that in a decade or two there will be virtually no new positions left in academia for my students, friends, and family.

Would the Right do the same if they had the chance? Plausibly, though the Right has done precious little to defund higher education to cut their foes in academia down to size. The key left-right difference, though, is this: Unlike the left, the right doesn't have the right pieces on the chessboard to harm me personally. I could go out of my way to antagonize and insult the right, free of fear, because with few exceptions they're not my administrators, not my colleagues, not my students, and not my customers. In contrast, when I write about the Orwellian left, friends privately warn me to shut up. And these friends have a point: Tenure doesn't enforce itself.

How worried am I that my tenure will be revoked for political reasons - or any reasons? I'd still assign it no more than 2% for my career. Yet I'd assign a 40% chance that GMU will severely mistreat me for dissent before I die.

I say "die," not "retire," because thanks to tenure, I'm on the academic chessboard for life.