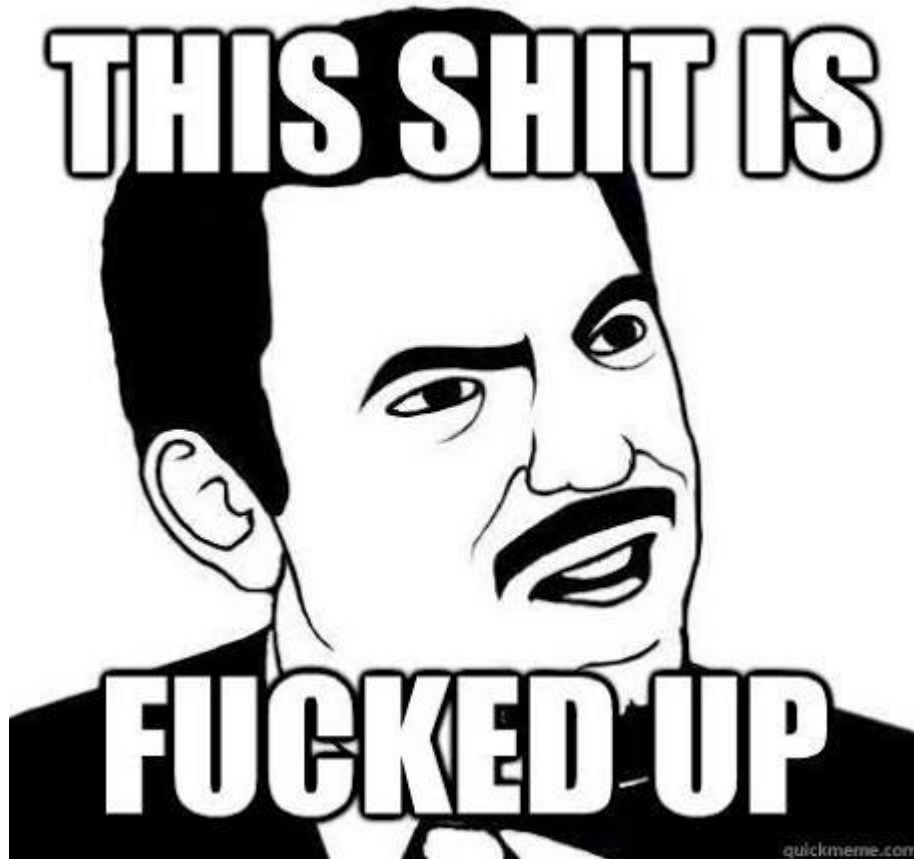


# Report on the Fucked Up State of Scholarship in the Humanities and the Humanistic Social “Sciences”

*By EJ Spode, Chair*



(Quickmeme, 2026)

## PREFACE

This report is addressed to university chancellors, presidents, regents, vice-presidents, provosts, deans, PR officers, and, the most holy of all, development office people, who are concerned about the direction of academic scholarship in the humanities and the social sciences and who are concerned that, within their purview as very important administrators, they have to go out and raise money from rich people every fucking day even while these losers in the humanities are seeking to undermine the very system that makes wealthy donors possible. Think about it! These humanists are making academic administration just about the worst job ever.

The charge to the committee, submitted in August 2025 and formulated by Daniel D. Dudimeier, Chancellor of the Dade County College of Musical Knowledge, and Andrew Bruno Mars, Chancellor of Warbucks University, reads as follows:

As chancellors and presidents working to restore our job security and donations, we are concerned about the dramatic erosion of support for the humanities and humanistic social sciences amongst donors, wealthy parents, and Trump administration government officials, as well as by the steady drumbeat of complaints about the deterioration of scholarly standards within several podcasts. We shit you not: the complaints have been VARIOUS in nature.

Here is the problem: SEVERAL scientists have alleged over the years that there is widespread misunderstanding and misuse of natural science in the work of prominent humanists. Complainants include Ptolemy, Newton, Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, and Giordano Bruno (who got what he had coming, but that's just our opinion).

More recently, many DIFFERENT VOICES (spooky!) have suggested that humanistic disciplines have allowed background ideological values to distort the pursuit of knowledge in those fields. These voices include those of Marx, Foucault, Derrida... wait, sorry, we mixed up our notes there. File those guys away as bad guys.

To help assure us that there is a problem here, and to help us see what a complete shitshow it really is, we charge a commission of super-duper tweedy and yet eminent scholars from one or two of these disciplines to examine the state of scholarly work in absolutely every other discipline and to evaluate whether these allegations are justified. We are concerned that, without such an examination, the well-documented erosion of donations from the Epstein Class will continue unabated.

Chancellors Dudimeier and Mars presented the charge to EJ Spode, who assembled the following crack team of elite scholars to work as a totally independent group to address the issues raised in the charge: Somerset Maugham, Edmund Burke Junior, Joseph de Maistre, and Thomas Carlyle. Fortuitously, at the time the committee was assembled, all were living in the New York/New Jersey area. What are the chances?

## 1. Introduction

We presume that our readers recognize the value of the humanistic disciplines and their central place in the modern research university. Or at least we hope they do, because we have no fucking idea and we aren't going to talk about that.

What we do know, or think we know, is that the humanities and the social sciences take as their subject matter human culture and society, in the past, present and future. We thus boldly take a stand against the scourge of presentist humanists like A.N. Prior, who rejected the existence of the future and the past.

Our report is prompted by the widespread sense that, despite their value and their promise for shareholder value, the humanistic disciplines are underperforming assets. It is, of course, widely recognized that undergraduate enrollments in these disciplines have plummeted (especially in war zones and refugee camps) and that there have been numerous complaints about the widely uncirculated and carefully unread humanities course syllabi.

However, our committee has not focused on these issues: these issues which, as we said, PROMPTED THE REPORT. Fuck falling enrollment. Who wants a bunch of students and papers to grade? We are on to more important stuff. To wit: Our concern has rather been the really fucking dreadful quality of academic scholarship in this domain. And we have all kinds of ideas about that!

Scholarship on matters of human concern has been a source of controversy from the start—witness the trial of Socrates for corrupting the youth of Athens. In recent years, however, the complaint has assumed a more specific form, namely, that the traditional goal of coming to understand the human world through careful scholarship has been subordinated to, or even displaced by, a “political” goal: the aim of realizing a conception of social justice. We hope we made it clear that this stands in marked contrast to pre-hemlock Socrates, who we swear did not have a political bone in his body. It similarly stands in contrast to that great chronicler of Socrates, the apolitical Professor Plato, who never let the political touch his work, or HIS student Aristotle, who never wrote a word of politics. Not one of them had a political axe to grind (except for the part about how democracy was a bust).

But we digress. Because the humanities today have somehow found the political to be relevant, we face the inevitable consequences: tendentious, biased, feeble academic agitprop and jargon-laden fluffer-nutter gobbledygook. So help us, it is a miseffectual

whyacinthinous riot of blots and blurs and bars and balls and hoops and wriggles and juxtaposed jottings linked by spurts of speed: And it looks like it!

This report, again ignoring our original charge, aims to assess the state of scholarship in the humanities and the humanistic social sciences through the lens of this complaint that we basically just made up, and the first thing to say is that we reject the complaint as it stands. We must first fashion it into a more apt, strawmanny form.

As we will emphasize (not now, but maybe later), there is serious scholarship in every field in which we work, and at their best (i.e. when we are doing it), the humanities and the social sciences are as rigorous and as fruitful as they have ever been: Fruitful we tell you! The humanities in our hands can be a veritable orchard of intellectual apples, oranges, peaches, and plums. Maybe even figs and mangos! Taken as a whole, however, our review of the disciplines paints a mixed and far less fruity picture. Every field we have oh so carefully studied shows some signs of the pathologies invented above: a deterioration in scholarly standards fueled by the substitution of political criteria for properly scholarly criteria in the assessment of research and a more general repudiation of long-standing ideals of rigor and objectivity. In some fields (e.g., philosophy) the problems are largely confined to the people that work on the stuff we don't work on. So, if you were looking to downsize your philosophy department, we are just telling you we are the good guys, ok?

## **2. *An Apologia***

We start from a conviction—as practitioners of one or two of these disciplines—that the humanities and the humanistic social sciences are an essential strand in the life of the modern university. You might question whether an education in the humanities provides an essential part of the preparation for a free life. After all, you might think that what you most urgently need is to be found in the nomothetic social and natural sciences. Yes! We caught you! You were all sitting there thinking, “You know, what I really need can't be found in the humanities but in the nomothetic sciences.” Who wouldn't be thinking that? But we are here to tell you that you are just dead wrong, you little nomothetic freaks.

Consider this: Maybe psychology and neuroscience can tell you what it takes for a normal person to achieve satisfaction; economics and political science help you think about what the effects of various public policies will be; physics and chemistry and biology tell us how the world works, if that floats your boat. But WHO is going to help you decide what satisfactions are really worth pursuing? Which outcomes are worth aiming for? What is worth wanting? Spoiler alert: WE ARE!

Anyway, this section was an *apologia*, so here we go. We submit to you the following:

**The humanistic disciplines, and the academy within which they sit, deserve the support of people across the wide range of reasonable disagreement about politics and policy. They deserve it because they do not take it as their aim to support any particular political position.**

Yeah, you heard us, we really said that: If the humanities remain apolitical, they deserve the support of the people. So you'd better start supporting us because we assure you: we definitely don't aim to support any particular political position.

You might be wondering, sneaky little nomotheticians that you are, isn't being apolitical sort of political in its own way, since, you know, you are sort of supporting the *status quo* by being apolitical, right? And well, sure, if you want to split hairs like that, but you are missing the point, which is that you can do that political stuff if you want, it's just that it isn't SCHOLARSHIP. And you know, what else could possibly matter? Certainly not undergrad enrollments or the future of civilization as we know it.

### **3. The Problem!**

Our report does not attempt to trace the roots of the present-day critique of the academy to its antecedents. That would be history. Nor does it attempt to engage in detail with contemporary critics of the humanistic academy and its defenders, a sprawling discussion that we don't have time to read. Anyway, much of that discussion is focused on undergraduate teaching and its social consequences, a topic we frankly don't give a shit about. Our focus is rather the quality of scholarship: the research produced by professors employed by colleges and universities and published (for the most part) in academic journals and scholarly monographs. And we are here to tell you that so much of it is just a great big steaming pile of dog crap!

But what makes it so crappy? Is it because these scholars are, you know, not very good, or too busy teaching 4-4 teaching loads and grading zillions of stupid exams? No! What makes their work shitty is that it is directed by some political purpose. Because what else could possibly explain shitty scholarship? Certainly not insane and inhuman workloads or the fact that academia, like most of the world, is full of idiots.

Now you might wonder how we know this, and well, it is because we have read terabytes of this shitty scholarship, and it has become clear to us that there can be only one possible source for all that shitty scholarship. There must be something political running in the background. We promise you that it can ruin even the best work!

But let's be clear on what we are NOT saying:

- a. We are NOT saying the problem is that academics in the humanities are a bunch of red diaper baby, left-wing commie transgendered freaks, although of course they are.
- b. We are NOT saying the problem is that academics in the humanities are Black Bloc, Molotov Cocktail-throwing borderline terrorists, although of course they sort of are.
- c. We are NOT saying the problem is that academics in the humanities have abandoned all interest in the canon and only give a shit about the writings of differently abled transgendered persons of color, although this is certainly true.
- d. We are NOT saying the problem is that academics in the humanities are sitting around peeing on original copies of Milton and torching libraries, although they would do it if we let them.

Noooo, we are saying that they got political and their work went to shit and what did you expect to happen anyway?

#### **4. The Source of This Problem**

In our advanced research, which, we remind you, involved reading terabytes of shitty scholarship with bottles of Visine close at hand, we have identified THREE MAIN FORMS of politicized distortion in recent humanistic scholarship. Here we go:

- a. On the first track, scholarly claims are constrained by the requirement that they cohere with an antecedently accepted political goal.

Goals? Fuck goals. None of us traffic in those.

- b. On the second track, the scholarly goal of understanding the world is displaced by, or supplemented with, the aim of telling stories that serve a pragmatic political purpose.

Purpose? That sounds a lot like goals. Fuck purpose!

- c. On the third track, the idea that there are genuine facts about the world or about what the evidence supports independently of our political commitments is rejected.

Haha yeah, we just made that one up.

## 5. Underdetermination, Postmodernism and Relativism, Oh My!

Under the hood of all this politically fueled academic flimflamery are three key ideas: underdetermination, postmodernism, and relativism. Underdetermination is bad, postmodernism is worse, and relativism is sort of what comes out in the wash (it doesn't *sound* very good). Anyway, "underdetermination" denotes the idea that epistemic reasons are not enough to believe something. You need extra stuff to really believe something. OK, so now you are asking, what is an epistemic reason to believe something? Well, we are glad you asked because "an epistemic reason is a reason that bears on the truth or probability of the claim." So, guess what: an underdetermined claim is false by definition! (Or at best, it's accidentally truthy.) Impressed? You should be. Reasoning like that got us all named chairs!

Now it's bad enough that underdetermination is false by our entirely fair, sensible, and not at all made-up definition, but that brings us to postmodernism, which challenges the very idea of a distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic reasons. What sort of intellectual apostasy could possibly suggest such a thing? Apparently, some people think there are norms involved in knowledge acquisition. Whereas we all know that true scholars just happen to know shit.

People, please don't sleep on this threat to civilization as we know it! These dangerous ideas have had uptake with top people, including prominent feminist philosopher Kathleen Lennon, writing in a top journal! I suppose we could mention Protagoras and Gorgias and Montaigne, etc., etc., but they didn't write in top feminist journals, so they aren't really going to scare the hell out of anyone. Plus, they sort of are in the canon, so we can't really piss on them. You know how it is, some relativists gotta get grandfathered in! I guess we are just lucky that all those relativists in the canon didn't

destroy Western civilization and wreck our undergrad enrollments and our latest fundraising drives. Kathleen Lennon, though, could be a threat.

## 6. Not Giving a Shit is the Soul of the University

Let us, in conclusion, step back and consider the larger stakes of the afflictions in the humanities and humanistic social sciences. Part of the *raison d'être* of a university is that it should exclusively engage in not giving a shit about anything political.

As we have already noted, there are those in academia who would question the wisdom of not giving a shit. Some even recoil at the possibility of not giving a shit. But as we have argued persuasively, these doubts are the product of philosophical confusion; there is, in fact, no good reason to question either the coherence or the value of not giving a shit, however difficult not giving a shit may be for some people.

It is largely for these reasons that we regard all the really bad and totally awful, politically motivated research as such a serious problem. Such research strikes at the very heart and soul of what a university should be for. To wit: not giving a shit. Sadly, there is nothing that university chancellors, presidents, vice presidents, provosts, and deans can do to fix this.

Thank you for asking us to address this urgent problem. You can pay us using either Zelle or Venmo.

Sincerely,

EJ Spode (committee chair)

Somerset Maugham  
Edmund Burke Junior  
Joseph de Maistre  
Thomas Carlyle

## REFERENCE

(Quickmeme, 2026). "This Shit is Fucked Up—Seriously Are You Serious?" *Quickmeme*. Available online at URL = <<http://www.quickmeme.com/meme/35j3ns>>.