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## The Curious Case of the Double Dissident

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### 14.1. INTRODUCTION

Taboos are not just about politics, morality, and religion. Even empirical statements can be taboo. Defend them publicly, and you will be personally attacked and called names. Worse, it is enough just to say *in a private setting* that you are *not sure that a taboo statement is false*, and you can still be vilified. A good example is the case of then Harvard law student Stephanie Grace, who in 2010 wrote the following in an email to a few of her friends:

I just hate leaving things where I feel I misstated my position. I absolutely do not rule out the possibility that African Americans are, on average, genetically predisposed to be less intelligent . . .

I think it is bad science to disagree with a conclusion in your heart, and then try (unsuccessfully, so far at least) to find data that will confirm what you want to be true . . .

Please don't pull a Larry Summers on me.<sup>1</sup>

Predictably, someone did pull a Larry Summers on her by publicizing her *private* email. A pandemonium ensued. Martha Minow, dean of the Harvard Law School, wrote in a public letter, with no justification, that Grace “suggested that black people are genetically inferior to white people” (see the link in note 1). It is quite clear that Grace did not do that. She did not commit herself to either side in the debate about the origins of racial differences in IQ.

Philosopher Brian Leiter claimed on his widely read law blog that Grace (a law student who was about to go on the job market) was “all-too-willing . . . to

entertain the most vicious racist stereotypes as possibilities,” and he also raised the question of whether the beleaguered student was, as he put it, “a right-wing racist and neanderthal.”<sup>2</sup>

Although Grace in the end apologized under tremendous pressure, she actually did nothing wrong. What she said was entirely reasonable—namely, given the lack of sufficient evidence about causes of group differences in IQ, she was simply not in the position to rule out the possibility that genes were involved in the explanation. Yet this whole situation showed that you can violate a taboo not only by defending the “offensive” empirical hypothesis but also by merely admitting (in private!) that you don’t have compelling reasons to dismiss it. Therefore, if you want to avoid being attacked, you are apparently left with only two choices: either a loud rejection of the taboo hypothesis or silence. Agnosticism is not an option.

I have written about this and other controversial issues myself, and I was also occasionally labeled a fascist, sexist, racist, homophobe, etc. Some (nicer) people said they didn’t understand how someone whom they didn’t see as a bad person could end up holding such reprehensible opinions. Indeed, how?

This essay tries to answer that question, obviously from a biased personal perspective. It is only one story, but, if convincing, it could perhaps illustrate how views that many come to regard as offensive can actually be the product of a long and arduous process of back-and-forth deliberation, rather than *a priori* prejudice.

First, I have to clear up a possible problem with the word “dissident” in the title. Christopher Hitchens said that the word *dissident* “can’t be self-conferred because it is really a title of honor that has to be won or earned.”<sup>3</sup> He is wrong. The meaning of *dissident*, according to most dictionaries, seems to be purely descriptive, for it refers simply to “a person who opposes official policy” (Oxford), or a person “disagreeing especially with an established religious or political system, organization, or belief” (Merriam-Webster).<sup>4</sup> There is nothing in itself honorific about “opposing official policy” or “disagreeing with an established system or belief.” Obviously, official policy and established belief may be reasonable, while opposition could be misconceived. Moreover, I knew some dissidents in communist Yugoslavia who were, in terms of their politics, creepier than most politicians from the ruling party. One of those dissidents was later convicted of war crimes (and some others probably should have been as well).

For better or worse, I was myself something of a political dissident during much of my academic career. There were two phases, with different contexts but also with some interesting similarities. The first phase extended throughout the 1980s when I published a dozen articles against the official Marxist ideology in Yugoslavia. The second period of my dissidence began after I moved abroad and wound up publicly defending “wrong” views on some politically controversial topics—“wrong” in the sense that my views went against the opinion that was (and still is) dominant in the academic community in the West.

## 14.2. THE EASTERN FRONT

Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean was the head of a World War II British mission that was sent to Yugoslavia in 1943 to evaluate whether Yugoslav partisans under Tito's leadership should receive British military support. Maclean met Churchill in Cairo and reported favorably about the partisans' war effort. But he was also worried and warned Churchill that "Tito and the other leaders of the Movement were openly and avowedly Communist and that the system which they would establish would inevitably be on Soviet lines."<sup>5</sup> This gave rise to the following brief exchange:

"Do you intend," [Churchill] asked, "to make Yugoslavia your home after the war?"

"No, Sir," I replied.

"Neither do I," he said. "And, that being so, the less you and I worry about the form of Government they set up, the better. That is for them to decide."<sup>6</sup>

Well, I didn't intend to make Yugoslavia my home either, but a few years after the war my poor soul was, without my consent, put into a body of a baby boy who was born in that country (which, indeed, as Maclean had anticipated, soon became a one-party communist state and stayed that way for around half a century). Although Churchill said, "That is for them to decide," surely he must have been aware that "they" would hardly have an opportunity to decide anything important for a very long time.

In elementary school I was told about the greatness of President Tito, and I dutifully believed it. But the first seed of doubt was planted when I was eleven or twelve, and my brother and I received as a gift a wonderful children's encyclopedia in English. And there, in volume five of that *Golden Book Encyclopedia* (on page 418), we were amazed to see that Tito was listed under the entry "Dictators," together with Hitler and Stalin! Our Tito, a dictator? No way. We asked our father for an explanation, and his answer only increased our puzzlement. Although he was at the time a member of the Yugoslav Communist Party and moreover had fought on the side of the partisans during the war, he said detachedly, "Well, this is how many people in the West do see Tito." The fact that he didn't immediately and resolutely dismiss or condemn the description of Tito as a dictator made a huge impression on us. Our confusion was not resolved, but a mental note was made: there's more to all this than meets the eye.

Soon I started to wonder about other things. Why were there elections in Yugoslavia at all, given that there was only one political party? And why was there only one party? I once raised that second question in front of my parents' friends and one of them tried to get rid of me by giving the following answer: "You have to understand that virtually all people in Yugoslavia believe in communism. That's why there can be no other parties." I thought I had a killer counterargument against this explanation, so I pushed on: "All right, but even if all people believe in communism,

why wouldn't we call the existing party Communist Party A and then create another communist party—say, Communist Party B—with a slightly different program? That way people could have a choice between two communist parties and elections would make sense." I was very satisfied with my response and expected that others would find it impressive as well. But my adult "opponent" retorted without batting an eye: "This wouldn't work, kid. You see, if besides the existing communist party (Communist Party A) a new option were introduced, your Communist Party B, what would happen is that everyone would instantly switch to this new party—and then we would again be left with only one party!" We all laughed because this man, himself a party member, clearly implied that everyone was unhappy with the existing communist party and that even all its current members would find any other party immediately preferable.

At the end of high school I fell in love with philosophy, and this is what I wanted to study at university. But not too much Marxism, please! I was already immensely bored with Marxist explanations that some of our school teachers gave for all kinds of phenomena, from history to economics, law and politics. It's not, of course, that at the time I could have given better alternative accounts of all these things. I couldn't. It's just that I found the proposed Marxist explanations insipid, repetitive, intellectually unexciting, and tiresome. This was not my cup of (not infrequently Russian) tea.

After collecting information about the department of philosophy at the University of Zagreb (my hometown at the time), I concluded, foolishly as it turned out, that studying philosophy there would involve a tolerably low dose of Marxism. The first year was OK mainly because it was dominated by non-ideologically driven content like ancient philosophy and logic, although even in these subjects there were some warning signs (e.g., one of the readings for the introductory logic course was Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*).

After the first year, the presence of Marxism increased. Most of my philosophy professors belonged to the so-called Praxis group, which started in 1964 with the founding of the Croatian (and heavily Marxist) philosophical journal *Praxis*. They presented their own work as being among the most important contributions to contemporary philosophy. Strangely enough, they managed to convince a lot of students. And while in our classes there was never any mention of the main critics of Marxism such as Böhm-Bawerk, Aron, Popper, Hayek, or von Mises, it was ensured that a ridiculous amount of Marxist literature was published in Croatian or Serbian translation, and many of these titles were assigned as required or recommended readings to students. Special praise was constantly showered on the philosophers Ernst Bloch and György Lukács despite the fact that they had both been hardline Stalinists during much of their careers. Mainly thanks to the campaigning of the Praxis group, Bloch and Lukács, of all people, were awarded honorary doctorates from the University of Zagreb in 1969.

Soon after graduation I was hired by my department to teach various topics in Anglo-American philosophy, an area of philosophy that was until then seriously neglected in course offerings. It took a lot of time to prepare for classes because I had

learned almost nothing about that area during my studies. But rather than complain, I was extremely happy that I got a teaching position at a university, my dream job.

Being disillusioned with the Yugoslav political system, I didn't have any interest in politics at that time. My plan was to isolate myself in the ivory tower (hopefully until retirement), focus completely on my research and teaching about esoteric philosophical issues, not allowing myself to be bothered too much by what was happening in the drab socialist world around me. But the plan quickly went off the rails.

Before long, new laws about education were introduced, according to which teachers were obligated to "adopt a Marxist approach in explaining natural and social phenomena." Also, a new mandatory subject, "Basics of Marxism," was introduced for all students in high schools and universities. My department was in charge of training a huge number of high school teachers to teach the new subject, and several of my department colleagues started teaching it at our university and elsewhere. The expansion of Marxism became suffocating. Since my own department obviously became a vehicle of the intensified ideological indoctrination, I decided I could no longer stay silent.

At the very beginning of the 1980s I published two articles in which I criticized the introductory course on Marxism being mandatory and exposed the utter absurdity of legally forcing teachers to adopt a Marxist point of view. Paraphrasing Clausewitz's well-known statement about war and politics, I described Marxism with such heavy-handed government support as "a continuation of philosophy by other means." I was surprised that no one had raised these criticisms before because they were low-hanging fruit. The arguments to be made were so simple, obvious, and compelling (or at any rate they should have been) that they were practically writing themselves. Pure common sense.<sup>7</sup> And not much courage was needed, either. For although the communist regime in Yugoslavia was a bit erratic, it didn't seem very likely that a philosopher would land in serious trouble just because he complained about the silly new arrangement according to which any teacher defending a non-Marxist approach *to any issue* would be breaking a law and would consequently have to be punished.

Once I made these pretty obvious points against the government's "Marxism protection program," it was hard not to continue further. Now I wanted to go beyond the claim that Marxism should not be privileged, and argue that it is actually bad philosophy. This is what I tried to do in detail in a long article that was published in a Belgrade philosophical journal in 1984.

Did those in power find the anti-Marxist article published in a philosophy journal a huge cause for alarm? Hardly. Nevertheless, there was some grumbling. I found out in April 2021 that in the top-secret files of the Yugoslav state security from the 1980s I was listed among "internal enemies" of the regime. And back in 1983 in a leaked communist party report about "ideological deviations" I could read that I was advocating "the most reactionary philosophy in the world." Cool! A few months later, in a long interview published in *Borba*, the official newspaper of the Yugoslav Communist Party, a leading agitprop official (also known as "KGB," because these

letters corresponded to his slightly modified initials) attacked several intellectuals by name (including me) and complained that no one had told this “trash” (as he called us) what it needed to hear—namely, “You, scum, we have had enough of your nonsense!” This was followed by a threat: “It seems that with the waning of revolutionary enthusiasm these rats have crept out of their holes, but now we are waiting for the plague to beat them to death.” Fortunately, when in a few years the plague (i.e., the Yugoslav wars) did indeed arrive, we the “rats” survived because KGB’s comrades were no longer in power in Croatia.

Upon publication, my essay on Marxism was read by Ljubo Sirc, a Slovenian free-market economist and classical liberal who was teaching at the University of Glasgow. Since I devoted a lot of space to the criticism of Marx’s economic views (the labor theory of value and the theory of surplus value), Sirc found the essay interesting and offered to publish it in an English translation as a booklet in a new series of which he was the editor (Friedrich Hayek was a member of the advisory board). The first book that appeared in the series, in 1984, was *Market or Plan?* by Milton Friedman. Clearly, this was an offer only a fool could refuse.

The booklet, consisting of my essay and a short commentary by Italian economist Domenico Settembrini, came out at the beginning of 1985.<sup>8</sup> There was also a book launch in London, which I attended. *The Times* of London published a nice article by Roger Scruton in which he praised the book and said, among other things, “Recently a Yugoslav philosophy journal carried a devastating critique of Marxism, and the author, Neven Sesardić of Zagreb University, *has yet to be arrested.*”<sup>9</sup>

Scruton apparently thought that I would soon be arrested, which didn’t happen, nor did I expect it to happen. It didn’t seem to me that at that time in Yugoslavia merely publishing an anti-Marxist philosophical treatise would be a jailable offense. Yet there were somewhat aggravating circumstances in my case. First, several political refugees from different parts of Yugoslavia showed up at my book launch in London—mainly Serbs and Croats with irreconcilable political differences and yet all of them united in their lasting hate of Tito’s communist regime. I talked to leaders of some of these organizations and socialized with some of them afterwards. The Yugoslav secret police were not only following closely the activities of these “enemies” but also in the business of assassinating some of them in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. An especially gruesome murder was the liquidation of Stjepan Đureković, a completely nonviolent Croatian dissident, which happened in Munich less than two years before my visit to London.

Second, Sirc had been sentenced to death in a show trial in Slovenia in 1947, avowedly as a spy and foreign agent, but the real reason was that he joined the short-lived parliamentary opposition to the communists after the war. (One of the ironies of his condemnation was that he had actually fought on the side of Tito’s partisans.) Anyway, his death sentence was commuted to a twenty-year prison sentence, and after having served seven years (much of it in solitary confinement), Sirc escaped to Italy and eventually ended up in the United Kingdom. So, having an anti-communist book published abroad by an émigré, a convicted “enemy of the people,” and

still a very persistent and outspoken opponent of the Yugoslav regime, could have exacerbated my situation somewhat. Or at least it seemed so. But in fact upon my return home, I was never asked to explain anything about this affair.

My next project was to show that the Yugoslav Praxis philosophy was hugely overrated. The Praxis philosophers fancied themselves as political dissidents and, in Marx's famous phrase, "ruthless critics of everything existing." In reality, however, their ideas deviated very little from the official ideology of the Yugoslav Communist Party. The conflict between them and the political establishment was like a quarrel within a family. The massive support and sympathy they received from their academic colleagues abroad was largely based on the mistaken belief that the Praxis philosophers were genuine democrats and opponents of every repression. But domestically (and hidden from their foreign sympathizers by a language barrier) they uncritically supported Yugoslav socialism as well as the political program of the ruling party. They vehemently denied that they had ever advocated the idea of a multiparty system in Yugoslavia, which was clearly the only road to democratization.<sup>10</sup>

I also pointed out in the mid-1980s that despite presenting themselves as uncompromising opponents of any nationalism, some actions of the Praxis philosophers showed distinct signs of *Serbian* nationalism. A few years later, my diagnosis was infamously confirmed when, during the Yugoslav wars, three leading members of the Praxis group took up top positions in the highly nationalist Serbian movement under Milošević and Karadžić, both of them soon to be indicted for war crimes. (Milošević died in the Hague before he could be convicted.) This finally opened the eyes of most Praxis fans in the West, many of whom took this as a reason to break off all relations with their former Yugoslav comrades.

I would like to believe that the criticisms of Marxism I published during the 1980s made an impact and changed some (or maybe many?) people's minds. And, indeed, at the end of that decade people in Croatia did abandon Marxism in droves. But I am afraid I cannot take much credit for this, if any. In essence, the massive change of heart was brought about mostly by political events (the breakdown of communism), rather than being a trickle-down effect of philosophical arguments. Even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when at dusk the owl of Minerva started flapping its wings more energetically, it didn't appear that its noise attracted a lot of attention.

### 14.3. THE WESTERN FRONT

In 1989, I went to Germany as a postdoc and stayed there around three years on two research fellowships. After a brief return to Croatia in 1992–1994 I again moved abroad and spent the remaining two decades of my academic career teaching at universities in the United States, Japan, England, and Hong Kong.

I had to work harder than before to build up my resumé and stay competitive in a tough international job market in philosophy. Yet at the beginning I was not sure which topics I should focus on. After initial enthusiasm about physicalism (the topic

of my dissertation), I noticed that most issues discussed in my field (the philosophy of science) left me cold. What was wrong with me?

Maybe nothing, I concluded with relief after having learned—through an unexpected channel—that when a newly appointed editor-in-chief of a top philosophy of science journal talked to “folks” about what they’d like to see in the journal, many replied that it would be great if the journal could be made more interesting. Wow, philosophers of science were saying that they found the content of one of their flagship journals not sufficiently interesting, and possibly even boring!

Hence this was not just my problem. To explain my quandary, though, let me first quote from a short article from 1998 in which David Papineau, the editor-in-chief of the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, nicely described the dilemma about choosing a research topic and how philosophers could increase the chances of their papers being accepted for publication:

I now know that the best way to get published is to adopt a *narrow focus*, and make some *specific point* within a body of widely agreed assumptions. Of course, the point must not only be correct, but also of *some* significance. Still, the natural *threshold is not high*. As long as those working in the relevant area will benefit from the point, it is difficult to argue against publication. By contrast, more ambitious pieces, which seek to present some new perspective, or *undermine some larger orthodoxy*, are less likely to be accepted.<sup>11</sup>

Although this advice made a lot of sense, it did not resonate with me. I hope this will not sound arrogant, but my idea of the “love of wisdom” did not include adopting a narrow research focus and aiming for results with a low threshold of significance. On the contrary, I did dream of challenging some larger orthodoxy;<sup>12</sup> and I thought it would be great if I could find arguments against an orthodoxy that is about a problem with real-world implications, rather than a view about an abstruse issue in pure philosophy.

Wasn’t this dream unrealistic? I certainly wondered about that myself. Yet I kept looking and eventually I found out that there were indeed challengeable orthodoxies, and that, moreover, they were hidden in plain sight.

Consider the following questions:

1. Should the institution of marriage be open only to heterosexual couples?
2. Is racial profiling sometimes justified?
3. Is the gender imbalance in philosophy and STEM disciplines the result of processes that do *not* include systematic discrimination against women?
4. Is the black–white gap in IQ partly caused by genetic differences?

Currently it is orthodoxy in philosophy, as well as in many other academic disciplines, to answer all of these questions with “No.” It is not just that the huge majority answers each of these questions in the negative. Rather, the affirmative answer is met not only with (cognitive) disagreement but often also with that famous “incredulous stare” coupled with moral condemnation. Therefore, if one agrees with the answer



“Yes” in any of these cases, one will often have a reason to keep silent or sometimes even find it prudent to say aloud “No.” Why risk being called a racist, sexist, or homophobe? After all, these labels do have serious consequences.

Now if there is this kind of political pressure in academia not to defend certain views, then these views will get defended less often. Consequently, it is to be expected that some good arguments for these views will remain underdeveloped, unpublished, or even undiscovered. The opposite will happen with the “encouraged” views. Even bad arguments for the orthodoxy will be tolerated or treated leniently, as they would indicate that their authors at least had their hearts (though not necessarily their brains) in the right place.

As a result of such a situation, the probability will rise of there being some as-yet unknown good arguments for “Yes” waiting to be brought to light. For, under the circumstances, there wouldn’t be much competition among scholars to explore or defend these arguments, let alone publish them. Therefore, this would present a good opportunity for not-too-timid researchers to try and make a significant scholarly contribution. As E. O. Wilson once said, “When you walk on the edge of a volcano, there are few others competing with you, and you have great chances for important discoveries.”<sup>13</sup>

It happens that, with respect to each of these four questions, I have myself either defended in print the “Yes” answer or argued that this answer didn’t receive a fair hearing and that it is much more plausible than most people in academia have thought. However, I didn’t adopt this view in a calculating manner (i.e., hoping that in this way I would be more likely to stumble on a good new argument). My choice of these topics was determined by curiosity and my strong aversion to any sort of ideologically imposed orthodoxy, which I acquired during my fights on “the Eastern Front” (described in section two). Besides my own aversion, I think that, due to my previous experience, it may also have been easier for me to detect the influence of ideology on scholarly debates. Not that this was very difficult to do, of course; it’s just that I was probably more attuned to this phenomenon and was less likely to miss it.

I started detecting an influence of political ideology on discussions in the philosophy of science in the mid-1980s when I first read the debate between Arthur Jensen and Richard Lewontin about race, IQ, and heritability. I couldn’t immediately make up my mind about who was right. However, I noticed something odd about that discussion: while Lewontin was claiming that Jensen’s defense of hereditarianism was motivated by his (allegedly reprehensible) political views, it was actually Lewontin, rather than Jensen, who was often inserting his own politics into discussions about purely empirical issues. I was intrigued.

After studying the debate in more depth, I came to the conclusion that Lewontin’s main criticisms of Jensen were flimsy and unconvincing. Moreover, it seemed to me that the weaknesses of Lewontin’s arguments were not so difficult to recognize. Yet philosophers of science at the time virtually all sided with Lewontin. Many of the leading figures in the field fell under his influence when they were invited to spend time in his lab at Harvard. Tellingly, a prominent philosopher of science told me that

he decided to decline Lewontin's invitation to Harvard because he was afraid that otherwise he might also be impacted by this "guru effect" and that, like his other colleagues, he would be unable to preserve his full independence of mind.

The pro-Lewontin bias in the philosophy of science was expressed in various ways. A striking illustration is how I ran into unexpected troubles (twice) because I had cited the following negative comment about Lewontin from a letter that Ernst Mayr, one of the leading evolutionary biologists of the twentieth century, sent to Cambridge geneticist A. W. F. Edwards in 2003:

Thank you for your letter of 20 Aug [2003] and your reprint about Lewontin's trickery. I had already some years ago called attention to Lewontin's misleading claims. I suggest Lewontin's book *The Triple Helix*. The unwary reader will not discover how totally biased his presentation is. All evidence opposed to his claims is simply omitted! And if you present the truth you are denounced as a Nazi or Fascist!<sup>14</sup>

By the time of my communication with Edwards, Mayr had already passed away.

In one case the editor removed this citation from my submission (which had already been accepted for publication), arguing that it was just an unnecessary repetition of the point already made earlier. I disagreed strongly because I thought that quoting such strong negative words from someone like Mayr might jolt at least some philosophers of science out of their uncritical admiration for their biologist hero. I tried to explain to the editor that, contrary to what he was saying, "given both Mayr's stature and also his strong presence in the philosophy of biology discussions, at the very least his opinion about Lewontin would surely be of great historical interest to most readers." To no avail.

In the case of another publication of mine, an editor again insisted on taking out the Mayr citation, this time arguing that keeping it in my text would cross the limit of what "we consider can safely be put forward as a published contribution to the debate." I was puzzled and asked why including it would make the whole thing "unsafe" to publish, but didn't receive an answer. Mayr was censored again.

During the 2000s I put out a few papers and a book<sup>15</sup> in which I explained why I rejected "the received view" in philosophy of science about the nature–nurture issue. The fact that these writings were accepted for publication in good venues was, I thought, a sign that my arguments had some merit. Particularly because hereditarianism (which I defended) was, and unfortunately still is, often automatically associated with racism and is dismissed.

Arguably, I had a lot of luck too. For example, the editor of the series in which my book was published was a very easygoing, humorous, and atypically nonpolitical guy. His duty as the editor after the extensive peer review (seven referee reports on the initial draft of my manuscript) was to check for possible problems in the final version of my submission. But when I met him at a philosophy of science conference in 2002 he told me that, when I submitted the final draft, he didn't intend to interfere with anything in the text as long as I didn't write something like "XY has a small dick" (XY being one of the philosophers I criticized). And I didn't.

Unorthodox positions on sensitive issues do not always remain undefended in philosophy just because of the fear of backlash. Rather, some philosophers may be quite willing to advocate these views but they decide not to simply because they have good reasons to believe that such articles, even when well-argued, might be practically impossible to publish.

A case in point: in the 2000s I thought that there was a clear need for some opposition to the complete dominance of social constructivism in the philosophical literature about race. Yet the orthodoxy had hardened so much that it seemed that such an article had little chance of passing peer review (particularly if it would also touch upon the most controversial question of whether some observed psychological differences between races might be partly due to genetic differences). In a 2008 *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (SEP) entry about race,<sup>16</sup> it was suggested that “the biological conception of race is philosophically and scientifically dead.” With such an authoritative source declaring the debate more or less closed, the prospect of bringing back to life what was widely regarded as a (doubly) dead hypothesis (which was also often associated with racism) looked rather gloomy.

Yet, when I received a personal invitation to submit an article for possible publication in *The Monist’s* issue about race, I accepted it because I knew that the editors were aware of my heterodox opinion on race and I supposed that they were OK with it. But my submission was soon rejected (with only a generic explanation) and I was left with an article in which I invested a lot of effort and that was, to all appearances, unpublishable. The unexpected happened, though, and the next submission—to a more prominent journal—was successful. (Incidentally, this turned out to be my most cited article.)

Another case involves my paper on racial profiling. I had been thinking about writing on that issue for a long time, but particularly at the peak of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, when I thought that bringing clarity to this topic was of paramount importance. However, the support for BLM among my philosopher colleagues was so great that I concluded that trying to publish something critical of this movement in a good philosophy journal would very probably be a waste of time. Therefore, the project did not really get off the ground.

Things changed in September of 2016 when I received an email from philosopher Guillaume Attia, who invited me to write an essay about BLM for his online philosophical journal *The Critique*,<sup>17</sup> which had been launched in 2014. In a short span of time the journal had managed to attract several good contributors and a fair amount of interest among readers. I was still afraid that my submission would be rejected in the end for purely ideological reasons. Was Attia (who was black) really ready to publish something that was bound to invite the ire of BLM as well as its many impassioned supporters in academia? I had to ask him directly, which I did:

I worry that I might invest a lot of time and effort in preparing an essay, only to learn in the end that the editors were expecting something quite different or that they did not like the particular approach to the topic. Is there anything that you could add to your very useful instructions that could make that kind of misunderstanding less likely?

To which Attia promptly responded as follows:

Not to worry. I give a lot of liberty to my writers to write what they want to write about without coercion or pressure to change the topic entirely . . . I am also a firm defender of my writers' freedom of expression. I am not afraid to publish ideas that are deemed "controversial" or "offensive," so I am not one to commission an article then reject it upon submission because the stuff that has been written is sacrilege for one ideological position or another.

Wow. He earned my considerable respect with this attitude. Since I really couldn't get stronger reassurance, I immediately started working on the paper and in several months submitted it. But there was no response from Attia, except a short message to the effect that he was recovering from an illness and that he would reply soon. But he never did. No new articles have appeared in *The Critique* since February 2017. Everything stopped. I am afraid that Attia may have died or something terrible happened. I do hope I am wrong.

But what was I supposed to do with the wretched article? As far as I could see, a single realistic option remained. Among good philosophy journals, to my knowledge, only one has been systematically open to accepting politically controversial articles: the Israeli journal *Philosophia*. I submitted the paper there, and thankfully after a short time it was accepted for publication, practically as it was. *Mazel tov!*

For a long time, the greatest taboo in academia has been questions about racial differences in psychology. But of late the topic of sex differences has been quickly catching up. Some of these issues are addressed in an article about women in philosophy that my then colleague Rafael De Clercq and I wrote together.<sup>18</sup> Around that time our discipline had become obsessed with the sense of guilt springing from the belief that women are systematically treated unfairly in philosophy and that something urgently needs to be done about this. It is, of course, well known that the proportion of women in philosophy has been constantly and substantially below 50 percent. Philosophers started with that fact and jumped to the conclusion that the underrepresentation of women was the result of discrimination. Hastily and without much reflection, various measures were proposed and implemented in order to fight the alleged discrimination: changing hiring procedures, sensitivity training, the SEP urging its writers to make an effort to cite more female authors, an inordinate amount of attention devoted to feminism (e.g., in the SEP), formation of climate committees, and so forth. It was as if a doctor had started treating someone without first ascertaining that the person needed medical attention.

Three pieces of evidence offered in support of the discrimination hypothesis were (1) the low percentage of women in philosophy, (2) the implicit association test (IAT), and (3) so-called "stereotype threat." Rafael and I argued not only that points 1–3 did not support a conclusion of discrimination but also that there was further evidence to the contrary that was usually ignored. The low percentage of women in our field was a mere statistical fact that could be the result of different causal scenarios, with discrimination being only one of the several possibilities.

Therefore, the widely accepted inference that female underrepresentation is in itself an indication of discrimination was blatantly fallacious. We also tried to show that the arguments relying on IAT and stereotype threat were seriously flawed because the studies of these two phenomena were known to be riddled with so many methodological problems that they could not be used as evidence in support of the discrimination hypothesis.

All in all, there was something surreal about this excessive concern for merely possible (but unproved) bias against women in philosophy. Since virtually everyone in the discipline strongly condemned the supposedly massive anti-woman bias, the question arose as to who these numerous “sexists” and “bigots” could be. A widely accepted answer has been that there is implicit bias in philosophy. According to this view, even those who *sincerely* condemn discrimination actually discriminate unconsciously. So, many were happy to demonstrate their concern for the plight of women in philosophy by accepting their own responsibility for the situation, even though there was actually no good evidence for that. It was virtue signaling with a vengeance!

After completing our paper and not receiving strong objections from a number of colleagues (including some who disagreed with our central claim), we were ready to stick our necks out in public. As far as we knew, no one before us, except Andrew Irvine,<sup>19</sup> had publicly criticized the discrimination hypothesis in the philosophy context.

Things did not start well. We received two desk rejections, and one of them was especially discouraging. It was from a philosophy journal with a conservative editor-in-chief, which we had hoped would make it a more hospitable environment for a submission that challenged leftist pieties. Additionally, the editor’s way of explaining the rejection was particularly disappointing. Almost two months after our submission, he wrote in a personal email, “We tend not to publish papers which might not be of interest to the wider philosophical community.” This explanation did not make much sense to us. At the time, it was hard to think of an issue of more interest to the philosophical community than the question of women’s underrepresentation in philosophy. Everybody was talking about it! Hence, we could not rule out the possibility that the real reason for rejection was that even conservative philosophers were uneasy about publishing that kind of paper.

Concluding that the chances of placing our article in a philosophy journal were probably much lower than we had initially thought, we submitted it to *Academic Questions*, a journal published by the National Association of Scholars (NAS), which is widely perceived as a conservative organization. It was accepted.<sup>20</sup> It is possible that the choice of publication venue may have dampened the impact of our article because the fact that it did not appear in a regular academic journal likely made it look partisan and perhaps even biased. There was considerable irony here. For it was precisely because of the bias in mainstream philosophy that we were forced to cast our net more widely in the attempt to find a home for our paper, but then after our article finally saw the light of day it may have been regarded as biased just because it was not published in any of the mainstream journals (to which we stopped submitting because we saw *them* as biased). It was a Catch-22.

In 2007, I published an article in Croatian<sup>21</sup> in which I tried to show that the victory of gay marriage was won either by ignoring the strongest arguments against it or by addressing them in their strawman version. Two reactions to that article show how high the emotions run in this debate. A few months after publication, I unexpectedly received the following email from a very distinguished philosopher whose work I respect a lot but with whom I have seldom been in contact:

Neven, I have to say that my heart sank when I saw the title of the piece on your website in which you criticize arguments that defend gay marriage. Of course I couldn't find out what your arguments are, since the paper is in Croatian. But still, I'm worried . . . Since I think that gay marriage would make our society better, I wish you hadn't devoted your considerable talents to debunking the arguments that are out there.

I was very surprised that my article alarmed this philosopher so much, especially given that, on his own admission, he didn't know at all what my arguments were. Furthermore, from the article's abstract (in English) it was quite clear that I didn't even argue against gay marriage but only tried to show that the opposition to it was dismissed without properly addressing the main reasons for resisting it. Finally, his belief that "gay marriage would make our society better" was hardly dispositive, since obviously many people disagreed with that judgment.

A few years later, I received a very different email from a scholar who said he had found my article "quite stimulating" after he had created a rough but, to some extent, usable English translation with the help of Google Translate. He had a Harvard PhD and ended his message (from his Harvard email address!) thusly:

I would appreciate it if you would keep to yourself my admiration of your work. I am sure that you understand this regrettable necessity (at least until I get tenure!).

Regrettable, indeed, but also understandable. This was not the only case wherein someone I didn't know approached me to express support but asked me to keep it confidential.

Some ten years ago I started thinking about writing an article that would catalogue examples of famous analytic philosophers supporting communist totalitarianism and other extreme leftist ideas. I soon discovered that there were many more such examples than I had originally thought. The final result of my research was not an article but a book of more than 250 pages,<sup>22</sup> despite the fact that there remained a lot of material that had to be left out.

Concerning the public reactions of philosophers to that book, it seems that "it fell still-born from the press" (to use Hume's famous words). Why is that? One obvious possibility is that the book was not particularly good or interesting. Another explanation has been suggested by a very distinguished philosopher (himself a leftist, and possibly not of a very moderate variety), who read the manuscript before publication and correctly predicted that it would have little philosophical impact:

In the face of the undoubted truth that a huge majority of the “professional” philosophical community is antecedently left-wing, so to speak, [it] will shout down anybody who questions their orthodoxy. But given that undoubted truth, I wonder who you are writing it for. *It is inevitable that nearly all philosophers will shout it down without thinking,* and not many non-philosophers are going to be that interested. [emphasis added]

There was one minor victory, though. In the book I criticized the principal editor of the SEP, Edward Zalta, who in his article about Frege had written the following:

Unfortunately, his last years saw him become politically conservative and right-wing. His diary for a brief period in 1924 show[s] sympathies for fascism and anti-Semitism.

I argued that the use of the word “unfortunately,” which here implied condemning someone merely because he became politically conservative and right wing, was clearly very biased politically. Surely, I continued, it is hard to imagine that an SEP article about a famous philosopher could contain a similar sentence but with the following left-right inversion: “Unfortunately, X’s last years saw him become politically progressive and left-wing.”

Three months after the publication of my book, Zalta’s article was quietly revised and it now reads:

Unfortunately, [Frege’s] last years saw him become **more than just** politically conservative and right-wing—his diary for a brief period in 1924 show[s] sympathies for fascism and anti-Semitism.” [The words in bold were added in the version of March 2017, and two separate sentences from the previous version were now collapsed into one.]<sup>23</sup>

#### 14.4. CONCLUSION

What was the main difference between my battles on two different fronts? On the Eastern front, the fight was against a system that was ultimately protected by an undemocratic government and its instruments of oppression. On the brighter side of this struggle, a dissident occasionally earned some respect even from some members of the Communist Party, who were aware that their power was devoid of any political legitimacy. Besides, a number of colleagues at the university, outside of ideologically more rigid departments like philosophy and sociology, found ways to express their support or appreciation, and show that they were on the side of heterodoxy. And this was very rewarding.

On the Western front, by contrast, it is precisely within the ivory tower, among one’s own colleagues, that—when opposing an opinion close to the heart of the majority—one will frequently “feel the gradient of collective alarm and disapproval like a deepening chill as one approaches the forbidden area,” as Linda Gottfredson memorably put it.<sup>24</sup> This kind of strong disapprobation will be more or less inevitable,

and it will often be followed by personal attacks and character assassination. Or, to put it in Seussian terms, you as a dissenter will not necessarily be accused of being as awful as the small-hearted and unreformed Grinch, but you will definitely be seen as someone who rudely disrupts the harmony and contentedness of the liberal Whoville. How can you solve this problem? I recommend retirement.<sup>25</sup>

## NOTES

1. "Full Text of Stephanie Grace's Email," Boston.com, April 30, 2010, [archive.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/04/30/042010\\_original\\_email\\_harvard\\_law](http://archive.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/04/30/042010_original_email_harvard_law).
2. Leiter, Brian, "The Racist Email by the Harvard 3L," *Brian Leiter's Law School Reports*, May 1, 2010, <https://leiterlawschool.typepad.com/leiter/2010/05/the-racist-email-by-the-harvard-3l.html>.
3. Hitchens, Christopher, *Hitch 22: A Memoir* (New York: Twelve, 2010), 334.
4. "Dissident," *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dissident> (accessed 19 December 2019); "Dissident," *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 417.
5. Maclean, Fitzroy, *Eastern Approaches* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949), 402.
6. *Ibid.*, 402–3.
7. Nevertheless, the first of these articles, which was published in a philosophy journal, was barely accepted for publication, with only a one-vote majority. (There was a fear that it could create problems for the journal.)
8. Sesardić, Neven, and Domenico Settembrini, *Marxian Utopia?* (London: CRCE, 1985).
9. Scruton, Roger, "A Magnet That Just Pulls the Wool," *The Times*, February 16, 1985. Emphasis added.
10. As Albert Camus nicely put it, "The first thing to define totalitarian society, whether of the Right or of the Left, is the single party . . . This is why the only society capable of evolution and liberalization, the only one that deserves both our critical and our active support is the society that involves a plurality of parties as a part of its structure." Camus, Albert. *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 161.
11. Papineau, David, "Editorial," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 49(4) (1998), iii. Emphasis added.
12. Papineau obviously had in mind a philosophical orthodoxy that did not have roots in political ideology. And so did I, for at the time when I left Croatia I was not aware of how heavily philosophers suffered from leftist political bias.
13. Quoted in Segerstråle, Ullica, *Defenders of the Truth: The Battle for Science in the Socio-biology Debate and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 302.
14. Unpublished letter, courtesy of A. W. F. Edwards.
15. Sesardić, Neven, *Making Sense of Heritability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
16. James, Michael, "Race," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta. May 28, 2008. <http://web.archive.org/web/20100712121700/https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/race>.
17. See <http://www.thecritique.com>.
18. Sesardić, Neven, and Rafael De Clercq, "Women in Philosophy: Problems with the Discrimination Hypothesis," *National Association of Scholars*, 2014, [www.nas.org/articles/women\\_in\\_philosophy\\_problems\\_with\\_the\\_discrimination\\_hypothesis](http://www.nas.org/articles/women_in_philosophy_problems_with_the_discrimination_hypothesis).



19. Irvine, Andrew D, "Jack and Jill and Employment Equity," *Dialogue* 35(2) (1996): 255–92.
20. Sesardić, Neven, and Rafael De Clercq, "Women in Philosophy: Problems with the Discrimination Hypothesis," *National Association of Scholars*, 2014, [www.nas.org/articles/women\\_in\\_philosophy\\_problems\\_with\\_the\\_discrimination\\_hypothesis](http://www.nas.org/articles/women_in_philosophy_problems_with_the_discrimination_hypothesis).
21. Sesardić, Neven. "Gay Marriage: The Victory of Political Correctness and Bad Arguments," *Prolegomena* 6(1) (2007): 5–28. The English version is accessible here: <https://philpapers.org/archive/SESHMT.pdf>.
22. Sesardić, N., *When Reason Goes on Holiday* (New York: Encounter Books, 2016).
23. Zalta, E. N., "Gottlob Frege," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1995/2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/frege/>.
24. Gottfredson, Linda S., "Egalitarian Fiction and Collective Fraud," *Society* 31(3) (1994), 56.
25. I would like to thank Tomislav Bracanović, Nathan Cofnas, Rafael De Clercq, Zvezdana Dukić, Lena Sesardić, Matej Sušnik, Omri Tal, Jared Warren, and two editors of this book (T. Allan Hillman and Tully Borland) for their very useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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