**A Culture War in Classics?**

February 16, 2021

To the Editor:

The so-called cultural war in classics seems to have evolved into a false dilemma, at least according to [Dan-el Padilla Peralta’s](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/02/magazine/classics-greece-rome-whiteness.html) and Johanna Hanink’s understanding of their profession (“[If Classics Doesn’t Change, Let It Burn](https://www.chronicle.com/article/if-classics-doesnt-change-let-it-burn), *The Chronicle Review,* February 11): Either one accepts the views of those who have glorified and romanticized about Roman and Greek classical culture or one accepts the views of those who are ready to “burn down” the classical tradition. Between the two extremes there is plenty of room and issues to be explored from serious, critical, and contestable points of view.

There is nothing special about the classics that is not applicable to other fields such as history, philosophy, or even scientific fields. Serious and nondogmatic scholars in any field must have courage and integrity to explore and, when necessary, question any belief. When doing so, they need to provide substantive narratives and explanations supported by sound arguments and compelling evidence to defend their interpretations rather than offering new sacred beliefs that are presumably “beyond good and evil” in lieu of the ones they are challenging.

Once we accept that no belief is sacred, including the one that I just stated, we can engage in meaningful conversations about how to view our inherited classical traditions, what beliefs do not pass muster in the light of sound evidence, what is worthwhile preserving and/or what needs to be reinterpreted to correct past mistakes. The issue is not about “burning down” anything, as Peralta Padilla’s and Hanink’s seem to suggest, but rather about unmasking and weeding out pernicious false beliefs which have been and are still present in any field.

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