What Kind of Freedom Is Academic Freedom?

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ABSTRACT This essay argues for a definition of academic freedom that does not confuse it with what is considered to be a human right—the individual right to free speech. This is a freedom granted in principle by the state to scholars (usually within educational institutions: schools, colleges, and universities) because their critical activity has been considered vital to the public good and because it is a self-regulated activity committed to processes of relentless questioning that require disciplined forms of reading and reasoning. Neoliberal practices have undermined the basis for this classic definition of academic freedom. The essay explores the alternatives to state-ensured academic freedom that have emerged both within and outside the university, focusing particular attention on Turkey's Solidarity Academies. It concludes by insisting that the critical function of producing knowledge for the common good must be protected by nonstate actors if the state has broken the covenant upon which academic freedom once rested.

KEYWORDS academic freedom, neoliberalism, critical thinking, university, state, Solidarity Academies

> Challenge is as essential to knowledge as to life.
> —*The Open Universities in South Africa*, 1957

The original version of this essay was written for a conference in Ankara, Turkey, called "Academic Freedom as a Human Right." I was ambivalent about the title of the conference for several reasons. First, as will become evident in what follows, I do not think that academic freedom can be considered a human right. Second, I am critical of human rights talk for the reasons others have articulated: its focus on violence against individuals and groups ignores or underplays the structural inequalities that enable that violence; its appeal to states to rectify "crimes against humanity" committed by other states has often led to violent interventions that are

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colonial in nature; its assumption that state power carries sole responsibility for human rights undercuts the importance of other kinds of collective political action to redress inequalities of power. Wendy Brown puts it well:

> We must take account of that which rights discourse does not avow about itself. It is a politics and it organizes political space, often with the aim of monopolizing it. It also stands as a critique of dissonant political projects, converges neatly with the requisites of liberal imperialism and global free trade, and legitimates both as well. If the global problem today is defined as terrible human suffering consequent to limited individual rights against abusive state powers, then human rights may be the best tactic against this problem. But if it is diagnosed as the relatively unchecked globalization of capital, postcolonial political deformations, and superpower imperialism combining to disenfranchise peoples in many parts of the first, second, and third worlds from the prospects of self-governance to a degree historically unparalleled in modernity, other kinds of political projects, including other international justice projects, may offer a more appropriate and far-reaching remedy for injustice defined as suffering and as systematic disenfranchisement.[1]

Despite my reservations, I agreed to give the talk because I realized that in this instance, as Brown suggests, the appeal to human rights was a "tactic" meant to draw international attention to the abusive powers of the authoritarian Erdoğan regime in Turkey. I wanted to respect that tactical invocation of the term, even as I was critical of it. So I engaged the conference organizers' concern with "human rights" in order to redefine its relationship to academic freedom.

In this essay, I argue for a definition of academic freedom that does not confuse it with what is considered to be a human right—the individual right to free speech. Academic freedom is, historically, a specific freedom that refers to the collective rights of those engaged in the dangerous pursuit of knowledge production—dangerous because it challenges established authority, whether of the sciences or the state. This is a freedom granted in principle by the state to scholars (usually within educational institutions: schools, colleges, and universities) because their dangerous activity has nonetheless been considered vital to the public good and because it is a self-regulated activity committed to processes of relentless questioning that require disciplined forms of reading and reasoning. While I understand wanting to claim academic freedom as a human right—it is, arguably, a necessary pragmatic choice in the current moment—I will end this essay by trying to explain why I prefer not to take that path. Instead I will suggest that academic freedom is not a human right; that while we may want to reverse the relationship and argue that human rights depend on academic freedom, we can do so only if we redefine human

rights in terms of collective well-being, something better referred to as the common or public good—with the state no longer the sole representative of the public.

The Classic Definition of Academic Freedom

The classic definition of academic freedom must be recognized as aspirational. Like the principles of liberty and equality, it was defined at particular historical moments, but it has had a use beyond those contexts precisely because of its abstract articulation. As an abstraction, a principle or ideal is a tool that can be used to justify many different kinds of challenges to power. Long after the declarations of rights at the moments of the French or American Revolutions (when slavery and women's disenfranchisement were left in place), the ideals that they set forth have been invoked beyond the contexts in which they were announced. The extent of their use has far exceeded their Western Enlightenment origins; demands for liberty and equality have resounded across the globe. Similarly, academic freedom, the original claim of scholars in European and American institutions characterized by all kinds of exclusions, has inspired protest against those exclusions across a range of national and international contexts.

The abstract concept of academic freedom is not tainted by the discriminatory and exclusionary practices that prevailed at the time of its appearance, nor has it been limited in its political uses to academic institutions within Europe and the United States. To be sure, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American and European universities were not open spaces, either demographically or politically. The exclusion of women, Jews, African Americans, and other minorities made them privileged enclaves of social, political, and intellectual orthodoxies. Yet, even in this early period, the protection of academic freedom was invoked (not always successfully) by dissidents of various kinds. At later periods, it has served to justify the inclusion, beyond monopolies of white male privilege, of "different" faculty and students, and it has been called upon to protect those who have made dramatic changes in the curriculum to eventually include the study of gender, sexuality, race, and colonialism. An aspirational ideal has a certain moral force that elevates it above politics; it is an important political tool even when it cannot achieve all the critical ends it aims to serve.[2]

The classic definition of academic freedom refers to the license granted to scholars to pursue research and teaching without external interference from the likes of politicians, philanthropists, and administrators. It applies as well to students' right to an education. The definition extends to the university within whose walls research and teaching take place. The university is, historically, the location of the collective activity of thinking together, a space of its own (a commons, we might say) within civil society. Academic freedom is a *collective right*, referring not

to individuals, but to us as members of particular groups (researchers, teachers, students) located within the space of the university.

The collective activity of knowledge production has long been understood to require autonomy from the very forces it serves. For this reason, the autonomy of the university in modern times has been granted by the state, or wrested from it. In democracies, the recognition of academic autonomy has been understood to be in the state's interest. Without the "continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone truth can be found," the knowledge required for progress and prosperity would not be available.[3] The freedom to teach and to learn was understood to contribute to the public good (by which was meant not just material goods, but practices like justice), which it was the state's job to ensure. In this vision of it, the state was conceived to be what Massimiliano Tomba calls "the tip of the arrow" of historical progress.[4]

To achieve that progress required accepting the fact that academics had not only the right, but the duty, to question the status quo, whether in the hard sciences, the social sciences, or the humanities. Theirs was, by definition, a critical function. Edward Said described intellectual discourse as "the freedom to be critical: criticism *is* intellectual life and, while the academic precinct contains a great deal in it, its spirit is intellectual and critical and neither reverential nor patriotic."[5]

This critical function created a necessary tension in the relationship between two aspects of the democratic state's interest: on the one hand, the defense of the authority upon which its power rested and, on the other, its need for knowledge to advance the public good. This internal tension was displaced onto a conflict between the state's power and the autonomy of faculty, students, and the university. In this version of it, it is in the state's interest to secure its power; in the university's interest to raise questions that—in the name of science and social and economic improvement, as well as of the realization of principles of constitutional or human rights—directly or indirectly challenge aspects of that power. Writing early in the last century, the American philosopher John Dewey noted that critical thinking posed a threat to various forms of authority because it appeared hostile to "habits and modes of life to which the people have accustomed themselves . . . and with which the worth of life is bound up." He thought it was especially the social sciences whose academic freedom needed to be recognized. Unlike the mathematical and physical sciences, which, he noted, "have secured their independence through a certain abstractness, a certain remoteness from matters of social concern, political economy, sociology, historical interpretation, [and] psychology . . . deal face-to-face with problems of life, not problems of technical theory. Hence the right and duty of academic freedom are even greater here than elsewhere."[6] Dewey is here saying that academic freedom is meant for those who have the courage to say what is not deemed acceptable by the powers that be, that it is meant for those

who take the risk of defying orthodoxy by interrogating the foundational premises of the status quo—whether of particular disciplines, "common sense," or the state.

Academic freedom was the concept developed to mediate the tension between existing authority (not just the state's authority) and dangerous challenges to it. It was not an unrestrained right of free speech, but a right based on the acceptance of "the rules of some sort of 'truth procedure,'" as the legal scholar Adam Sitze puts it. "There is a difference," he writes, between "the pursuit of truth, on the one hand, and the unfettered exchange of opinions, on the other." "On these terms," he adds, "free inquiry in academia is predicated on voluntarily assumed forms of *unfreedom* that are unique to the academy."[7] Of course, all freedom assumes limits. We do not have the freedom to shout fire (when there is none) in a crowded theater. What Sitze refers to here are the particular responsibilities that pertain to knowledge production, the discipline we accept when thinking together, the system of shared obligation that we could say defines the university as a commons—a site of collective practice. Sitze understands this "unfreedom" as a specific (academic) form of self-restraint:

> Study turns one into a student, which is to say, someone whose desire is structured by the voluntary assumption of limits on the sayable and the thinkable, limits that entail distinctions of true and false. These self-restraints on speech are not antithetical to the need for new knowledge—they are the precondition for that discovery, especially for those discoveries that require challenges to or alterations of those limits.[8]

The structuring of desire is also how Gayatri Spivak describes education in the humanities. It is, she writes, "a persistent attempt at an uncoercive rearrangement of desires, through teaching reading."[9] For Spivak, teaching has a necessary ethical component, one that develops our ability (our desire) to know how to "listen to the other" without constructing it as an object—that is, without fitting it into some preordained category of identity.

This same structuring of desire takes place in what Ellen Rooney calls a "semi-private room," a place where impersonal intimacy "creates an opening for the as-yet-unthought. This is the precondition, the disciplinary ground, for any 'pedagogy' whatsoever and, I would submit, for critical discourse itself."[10] The success of this pedagogy requires an "insistence on limits," by which Rooney means operating according to principles of exclusion that bar those who are not open to interrogating their familiar terrain. "Without this practice of limits, the enabling transformation that is essential to any classroom praxis (a college lecture, a graduate school protocol, a seminar) would be unthinkable."[11] It should be noted here that Rooney is not talking about exclusions based on race, gender, or sexuality; quite the contrary, it is those who "are not open to interrogating their familiar terrain," that is,

those who refuse to think critically (who hold their particular orthodoxies to be uncontestable) who are necessarily excluded, who, in effect, exclude themselves.

The semiprivate room, as Rooney theorizes it, is a protected space for questioning and so for critical thinking. The private has to do with its recognized autonomy, the public with its accessibility and its ultimate impact. The two cannot be disentangled. Rooney insists on "the formal specificity" of the teaching relationship, "without which there can be no critique, indeed, without which discourse has no purchase, no reality effect, and becomes essentially uncritical—no matter how ironically worldly or luridly referential it is; no matter what its *content* may be."[12] Limited, directed, ethically constrained desire is what drives the open-ended dimension that is knowledge production; this—in theory—is the collective system of shared responsibility upon which the classic right of academic freedom depends.

The Rise of the Neoliberal University

Over the course of the last thirty or so years, the critical function of scholars and teachers has been called into question with the advent of the neoliberal university. This is not to say that the university of an earlier period was exempt from internal and external pressures—political, market, ideological—that sought to constrain and contain critical thinking. It is just to note that in the more recent period, there has been a dramatic intensification of those pressures, an explicit redefinition of the function of a university education that instrumentalizes knowledge and individualizes the conception of the public good. This necessarily calls into question the classic definition—the bargain between the state and the academy—upon which academic freedom was thought to rest.

Whether as a cumulative process unevenly realized in the United States and the United Kingdom, as the outline of a new European system set forth in the Bologna Process, or as an indirect influence, neoliberalism has radically transformed the purposes and practices of higher education and, with them, the relationship between the university and the state. Already in 1996, Bill Readings described a "university in ruins."[13] Readings concedes, as I have already noted, that the university was never an all-inclusive operation; it was long a privileged, elite enclave; its faculties and teaching systematically excluded minority representation; it was always a site of conflict about who and what should be taught and by whom; and it often bowed to state regulation. Without idealizing its past, then, Readings argues that it has nonetheless changed for the worse. If its idealized image as a place of free inquiry was always that—an idealization—at least critics could demand the realization of those ideals, and their demands were often successful in pluralizing the faculty and "diversifying" the curriculum. That has become increasingly difficult as the university moves toward a definition of itself as a corporate entity, devoted to vocational training rather than to critical thinking. In the new business

model of the university, students are seen as paying customers whose comfort must be assured, while accounting for the bottom line has replaced the notion of ethical accountability that once guided pedagogy (at least in the humanities and social sciences). Disappearing—even as an aspiration—is the notion that critical questioning, albeit dangerous, advances something understood as the public good. In its place is a depiction of education as the transmission of useful information and training to advance individual opportunity in the market. In addition, in neoliberal thinking, the state's role in assuring the public good has declined, giving way to the market as the ultimate arbiter of the public interest. Here it is useful to cite Brown again: "The saturation of higher education by market rationality has converted higher education from a social and public good to a personal investment in individual futures, futures construed mainly in terms of earning capacity."[14] The loss of the notion of education as a public good breaks what Matthew Finkin and Robert Post call the "covenant" between the academy and the state (representing the public) and with it the need for academic freedom to mediate their relationship.[15]

As I have already noted, there has always been an elusive, because aspirational, quality to academic freedom. South African literary scholar John Higgins refers to a "startling paradox" because "reference to it is usually motivated by its absence." "Academic freedom," he writes, "rarely if ever names, refers to or describes an existing state of things, rather it is always a normative ideal, called up precisely at moments when it is lacking or appears to be under threat."[16] However aspirational, the force of academic freedom nonetheless rested on the practical idea that there was something so risky and yet so necessary in the academic mission that it had to be protected—protected at once by and from the state. When the critical dimension is removed from that pursuit, when social value becomes either the maximization of individual human capital or the unquestioned enhancement of the state's authority, to what places and practices does academic freedom refer?

Before I try to answer that question, I want to look at the different ways in which the neoliberal instrumentalization of knowledge and the devaluation of critical thinking have taken place. To overstate the contrast, I think this instrumentalization has taken two different forms. One, in so-called democracies, replaces something like the collective pursuit of truth in the public interest with the exchange of individual opinion as a self-affirming exercise; the other, in authoritarian nations, conflates reason with reason of state, reducing the interest of the state to its economic prowess and the maintenance of its power.

First, consider democracies where the principle of free speech has become a way of undermining the truth-seeking role of the academy. "There is no such thing as society," quipped Margaret Thatcher as she set out to dismantle the remains of Britain's welfare state and its system of higher education. In the new system, the

university has become "a marketplace of ideas," where the value of an opinion is measured by its ability to attract buyers.[17] The result, in the United Kingdom as elsewhere, has been the institutionalization of assessments of excellence, success, and failure—quantitative metrics in place of qualitative appraisals of the truth-seeking process. Some of these metrics are aimed at assuring "customer" satisfaction, by relying on student evaluations of the service they are buying. Chris Lorenz remarks on the effects of this:

> Because this view represents education as a free and equal exchange between equally positioned buyers and sellers, the hierarchical relationship between teachers and those being taught disappears, and this suggests that the purchasers of education have a right to get what they paid for. To make matters worse, because the customer is always right in the market, students in the education market are always right.[18]

The point is *not* that students should have no voice in what passes for knowledge production but that teaching is no longer understood as the cultivation of the desire to transcend the already known; it is now about finding the best (the most comfortable) deal in the academic marketplace.

In the United States, freedom of speech (a right guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution) has become the rallying cry of the right on campus and in the classroom. "Under the First Amendment," a court ruled in 1974, "there is no such thing as a false idea."[19] When, as is often the case in popular discourse, free speech is made synonymous with academic freedom, we are in the brave new world of alternative facts. The vice president of the College Republicans at the University of Tennessee urged the passage of a bill to protect student free speech from professorial interference this way: "Students are often intimidated by the academic elite in the classroom. Tennessee is a conservative state, we will not allow out of touch professors with no real-world experience to intimidate eighteen-year-olds."[20] This can mean that a biology teacher has to accept the validity of a student's belief in creationism, or that a professor of history cannot overrule a student's defense of slavery as a humane system of labor, or that human-caused climate change is a matter of dispute. The detrimental effects of the conflation of free speech and academic freedom are also evident on the left. In these cases, students looking to confirm their political views have refused to engage in the kind of scholarly exploration needed (I would argue) to sustain those views, for example, appealing only to individual experience to denounce racism and sexism instead of pursuing analyses of structures of power and their operations—thereby substituting the policing of language for sustained critical engagement. Another way of seeing all this is to say that Ellen Rooney's "semiprivate room" has been invaded by interlopers intent on closing down the creation of desire for the "as-yet-unthought." The semiprivate room

is no longer the space that refuses the sharp distinction between the public and the private; it has become instead a purely public space, narrowly politicized, in which individuals tenaciously cling to their beliefs against any challenge to them.

If the right to individual opinion has been substituted for critical thinking in some parts of the world, in authoritarian regimes the situation is different. In those countries—Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Brazil, Russia—rulers have equated the public good with their own survival, directly intervening to determine what can and cannot be thought, spoken, or taught.

In these instances, the state no longer places any value on the critical production of new knowledge because that activity calls into question the policies of those in power. Or, if new knowledge is required for establishing the nation's place in the global economy, only those technical fields (usually science and engineering) are promoted. The autonomy of the university and the cultural authority of its members has to be either co-opted or destroyed. There is no question of even gesturing to free speech or the marketplace of ideas; instead, deviation from the official party line is defined as subversion or treason, a malignancy that has to be forcefully excised. In Hungary, the Central European University, long a thorn in Viktor Orbán's side for its teaching about the liberal rule of law, was exiled to Austria, while gender studies was banned from the Hungarian public university curriculum as a foreign ideology.

In Turkey, the signers of the 2016 Peace Petition were charged with "terrorist organization propaganda." Their declaration of opposition to Erdoğan's war on the Kurds ("We will not be a party to this crime") was taken to exceed their professorial obligations. "This declaration cannot be associated with academic freedom," a government spokesperson stated, "the security of citizens is the primary responsibility of the state."[21] This narrow construal of academic responsibility denied the right of what in the United States we call extramural expression (the professor's right as a citizen to express political beliefs outside her area of scholarly expertise), and, beyond that, the ethical and intellectual authority of university professors to comment on public affairs (in this case, state violence)—an ethical and intellectual authority that extends beyond the classroom to questions of the public good and is traditionally granted to them as knowledge producers. Denying this authority meant effectively the takeover of the university by the state, the end of its autonomy, and the replacement of those designated subversive by more compliant, state-approved scholars, deans, and rectors.

Many of the petition signers (there were several thousand of them) were subjected to police raids at home; they were arrested; they lost their jobs and their passports; some were assigned coded identification numbers to mark them as traitors; and many were barred from future employment in their professions. Even when the Constitutional Court ruled that the petition did not warrant a legal procedure

and the trials were dropped, the various other punishments constituted a form of social death.[22] This amounted not just to a denial of academic freedom but to a violation of their individual human rights.

I could cite more examples, but the point should be clear. In these instances, it is futile to appeal to academic freedom as a principle that the state will respect, because the state no longer fulfills its responsibility to "society," that is, to the public good. "Nationalism in the university," wrote Said (reflecting on developments in postcolonial Middle Eastern universities), "has come to represent not freedom but accommodation, not brilliance and daring but caution and fear, not the advancement of knowledge but self-preservation." He went on to warn that "to make the practice of intellectual discourse dependent on conformity to a predetermined political ideology is to nullify intellect altogether."[23]

Whither the Production of Critical Knowledge?

It's now time to return to the question I posed earlier: when the critical dimension is removed from the pursuit of knowledge in its conventional institutional setting, when social value becomes either the maximization of individual human capital or the unquestioned enhancement of the state's authority, what happens to academic freedom? When the market is considered the ultimate arbiter of the public good, what place is there for the independent production of knowledge? With these developments, to what practices and institutions does academic freedom now refer? If the university is "in ruins," how and where is disciplined knowledge produced and recognized?

I want to look first at the question of the practices of critical knowledge production and, in the next section, take up the question of where, other than to the state, appeals for the protection of academic freedom can be made.

There is a long history of securing alternative sites for knowledge production in the face of political attempts to silence critical thought, among them the "open universities" in South Africa (Cape Town, Rhodes, Natal, and Witwatersrand) that refused to implement apartheid's policies of racial separation. Stuart Hall's Open University in the United Kingdom echoed this naming; his became an institutionalized alternative to the existing standardized system. There were short-lived experiments such as the Freedom Schools of the US civil rights movement in the 1960s and the teach-ins in US universities, beginning in 1965, that sought to deploy academic knowledge to fuel protests against the war in Vietnam. There was, also, the Seminar at Sofia University in Bulgaria in the 1980s, which arose as an alternative to the censorship exercised by the Communist regime.

I want to spend a bit of time on the Seminar as analyzed by one of its participants, the Bulgarian philosopher and poet Miglena Nikolchina. She describes it as a place of dialogue only, since government "censorship controlled publishing but

not speaking." The effort began in philosophy classrooms at the university and then spilled over into private apartments (which perhaps become versions of Rooney's semiprivate room). Initially "focused on a single problem or author . . . and strictly professional, . . . the situation quickly changed . . . marked by the broadening of both the thematic and the disciplinary framework of the seminar."[24] The Seminar disregarded not only the party hierarchies that were deemed more and more unacceptable but also the academic ones—yet the process was "strictly professional." "Some of the participants had academic positions, others did not; selected students took part in the seminar on an equal basis."[25] It's worth reading Nikolchina's full account for its capture of the explosive, erotically charged creativity the Seminar engendered and for the thrill of "watching" its members pour into the streets as the Zhivkov regime imploded—a literal reminder of the political efficacy of critical knowledge production.

But it's also worth reading for the way Nikolchina uses Michel Foucault's 1986 essay "Of Other Spaces" to theorize the Seminar as a "heterotopia." She adapts his discussion of "other spaces" within societies (cemeteries, fair grounds, bedrooms, prisons, brothels, colonies) to think about the Seminar as another of those sites that had the "curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect."[26] The Seminar existed in critical relation to the university, a mirror to its operations.

That, it seems to me, is an apt characterization not only of the Seminar but also of Turkey's Solidarity Academies. These academies have been established within Turkey and in Germany by those refusing to accept the social death imposed by the Erdoğan regime. Their call to support critical practice outside of established universities under the aegis of academic freedom has been answered by private donors, unions, and other community-based organizations—that is, by representatives of the very public that their knowledge serves. Esar Erdem and Kamuran Akın describe the Solidarity Academies as "experiments in the reterritorialization of academia." "Reterritorialization . . . signifies the desire to transform academic space through emancipatory collective practices, imaginaries, and institutional structures; in other words to put in place concrete alternatives that go beyond reform of the current university system."[27] This is especially urgent when the state takes over the university system, redefining it as an extension of its own power. In that case, Max Haiven concludes, "The important factor about these struggles is not merely their victories or failures, but the way they keep alive and fight for the ideal of what the university *could* be."[28]

It is the "*could* be" in that statement that is the point. The effort is not preservationist or nostalgic: returning the university to its idealized past. Instead, the aim is to produce an educational institution—in relation to, but apart from, existing

university structures—with a mission dedicated to producing critical knowledge for the public good, conceived of as an ethical commitment to securing justice apart from the juridical limits of the state. Here is the self-definition offered by the Solidarity academics:

> Who Are We? We are the academics who have taken their share in the neoliberal authoritarianization process in Turkey, and who have been dismissed from their positions in the universities for standing against oppression, war, violence and injustice. Aims? We aim to relate academic knowledge production to the prioritization of peace, nonviolence and justice in the sociopolitical sphere. We aim to continue such knowledge production processes in the non-university spheres. We aim to maintain our relation with the dare-to knowledge that requires courage in producing and sharing knowledge, prioritizing peace vis-a-vis the authoritarian structures. In so doing we aim to produce and share knowledge with reference to equality, freedom, and solidarity that are excluded from the university sites.[29]

At once a part of *and* apart from the university, the Solidarity Academies offer an embodied alternative to the "ruins" of the institutions they have inhabited and from which they have been excluded. They reterritorialize the university's mission in an alternative commons for the continued activity of knowledge production. The notion of the commons is central here; it is not about commonality or consensus but about thinking together—the commons as a system of shared obligation, a set of collective practices based on articulated rights, duties, and obligations. It is a site of conflict and contention—a terrain or territory, at once political and ethical—of democratic process. The choice of the name Solidarity for the academies underscores this process. They are not places committed to unity; rather, *solidarity* signifies different viewpoints and constituencies organized around a shared goal of critical knowledge production. Academic freedom protects the exercise of that process as it pertains to what Readings called "a commitment to Thought."[30]

Readings capitalizes "Thought" to detach it from any set content; it is instead the incessant questioning, the open-ended search that characterizes the pedagogical relationship. *It is, in other words, synonymous with critical thinking*, with the "uncoercive rearrangement of desire" that Spivak, Rooney, and Sitze refer to. Readings puts it this way: "Thought does not function as an answer but as a *question*."[31] This questioning (like desire, a mobile, restless activity), he says, might take the form of "a certain rhythm of disciplinary attachment and detachment" in "short-term collaborative projects of teaching and research in which disciplinary structures would be forced to answer to the name of Thought, to imagine what kinds of thinking they make possible, what kinds of thinking they exclude."[32] (I take the

1619 Project to rewrite American history with attention to the "original sin" of slavery to be not just the provision of more content but a replacement for what has for so long counted as our national history. The Turkish academics' attempts to address the Armenian and Kurdish questions—in their research and in their political declarations—seem to me another example of this kind of ethically driven critical thinking.)

Critical thinking is not arrived at easily; it has to be taught. Although Readings reconceived the teacher/student relationship and imagined it outside of conventional university structures, he did not call for its abolition. "Radical pedagogy does not replace the teacher with the student."[33] The redirection of desire, in other words, has to be taught. "Students force teachers to rethink their ideas (although almost never in the exact way suggested by the students). Teachers make students rethink their ideas—the pedagogic relationship . . . compels an obligation to the existence of otherness."[34] The recognition of otherness forces new kinds of questions; people think "beside each other," rather than in unison. This is the attempt Spivak theorizes as ethical rather than epistemological—not to reduce the other to an object of classifiable knowledge but instead to "listen to the other as if it were a self, neither to punish nor to acquit."[35]

Readings goes on to characterize thinking together as a process that "belongs to dialogism rather than dialogue."[36] A similar emphasis can be found in Deyan Deyanov's description of the Seminar as a space "where different interpretational strategies, genres, and individual styles . . . meet. We insist on this because we believe that the thinking of polyphony that opens dialogic fields for both the provocative explorations and the voices that counter them, is the condition that makes a new critical publicity possible."[37]

Polyphony is integral to the process of critical thinking. The Seminar, and the Solidarity Academies, don't simply enact the university in a different space; their dialogic practices expose the ways in which traditional processes of critical questioning have been deformed into a dictation of answers. Their existence calls into question the "common" aspect of what counts as common sense. This is a "common" that assumes a certain universality, a necessary agreement about the good and the true, an agreement that forecloses the relentless questioning of critical thought. This universal commonality rests on the dissolution of differences; by contrast, polyphony or dialogism rests on the impossibility of doing away with difference. The one is a curtailment of politics; the other is the basis of any democratic political practice and of the alternative pedagogies practiced in the Solidarity Academies. It is these dialogic processes of knowledge production that constitute an exercise of academic freedom: not only for their ethical commitments but for the disciplined direction of desire that is a necessary aspect of their pedagogy.

The dialogic new academies are not places where anything goes, nor are they insisting on an uninterrogated "truth." They are committed to some form of academic responsibility: "Our concern is to maintain our connection with knowledge outside university structures . . . while carrying on with our connection with knowledge, we aim at producing and sharing knowledge with reference to the principles of equality, freedom and solidarity, which have been ostracized and excluded from the institutional sphere."[38] This teaching requires the kind of "unfreedom" that Sitze referred to as "self-restraints on speech [that] are not *antithetical* to the need for discovery—for new knowledge . . . They are the precondition for that discovery."[39] Knowledge production, in other words, with or without official state certification, inside or outside the university, has limits and preconditions; they are those that warrant the protections of academic freedom.

Exactly how those limits are established outside a university setting remains an open question; in the examples I've cited they refer to disciplinary practices carried over in modified ways from the academy. But what will happen when adherence to some form of disciplined knowledge production no longer refers to long-established practices? How will the next generation of Solidarity Academy "graduates" carry on according to the "unfreedom" required for critical knowledge production? I don't have an answer to that question, but it seems to me to follow from the emphasis placed on the "uncoercive rearrangement of desire" that those I have been citing insist upon.

Academic Freedom and the Public Good

Academic freedom ideally inhabits those spaces dedicated to the common practice of critical thinking. This thinking is not, however, an end in itself; it is instead an ethical practice devoted to enhancing or promoting the public good—a good that is less and less (if it ever has been) fulfilled by the state. It is important to qualify this point. In democratic states, there is still the possibility of appeal to older traditions within universities, to insist that the state adhere to its function of securing the public good. Though this is less and less the case in the neoliberal regime, it is still more possible than in the authoritarian states that no longer recognize themselves as in the service of anything but the ruler in power. Still, I think it is useful (given the neoliberal transformations in process everywhere) to think academic freedom apart from its protection by the state.

If, as I have been suggesting, the state can no longer be relied upon to represent the public good, nor can it be expected to honor the "covenant" upon which academic freedom rested, what purchase does an appeal to academic freedom have? Where will its protection come from? I think there have been tentative answers to those questions, efforts that Brown referred to as "other kinds of political projects, including other international justice projects," that do not rely on the authority

of the state (or the market) for their implementation.[40] Some of these have been based within university settings; others have carried their pedagogic activities to new locations that nonetheless appeal to academic practices and that invoke academic freedom to legitimize what they do. In these instances, academic freedom looks to a general public (rather than to the state as the incarnation of the public), or at least to those who understand themselves to be members of a collective entity (a public) whose rights have yet to be realized. Academic freedom remains a call for the protection of critical thinking, of the critical production of knowledge—a production of knowledge that is now meant to serve those whom the state and the market have abandoned.

Although in its classic definition academic freedom was tied to the state's role in ensuring the public good, we can remove the state from the equation and still insist that academic freedom is the freedom granted to a specialized activity (Rooney's semiprivate room) that produces knowledge for the public good. Now it is some constituted, self-representing public that seeks to secure that good. Aslı Odman writes of the "the petition crisis" that it "has . . . made it [clear] that academics cannot be in the service of the state, but must rather produce scholarship that generates social resources in the service of and in conversation with the public."[41] That conversation with the public is an instrument of democratic politics in the sense that it relentlessly questions established norms and relations of power, including what counts as a social or public good. It takes the good to be that which refutes Thatcher's insistence that "there is no such thing as society." *Academic freedom is something that can be guaranteed by public support of the institutions where critical knowledge production is continuing its mission and by challenging those forces (including the state) that would prevent it from taking place*. It is in that sense that, as Homa Hoodfar argues, academic freedom is "a transnational right"; it doesn't depend on any state to guarantee it.[42] It draws its support instead from our understanding that critical thinking is a communal activity (even when we imagine we are thinking alone). We have a collective commitment (as society, not just as academics) to protect those who have the courage to stand up for what they believe in, risking their safety and comfort as they challenge powerful interests. We all have a stake in protesting censorship wherever it occurs because, even if indirectly, it impinges on our own ability to think—after all, we cannot think without each other's thoughts.

I prefer to link the critical production of knowledge to a notion of the public good—a good embodied in the "other kinds of political projects, including other international justice projects" that Brown refers to, rather than to claim it as a human right.[43] I can see the appeal of designating academic freedom as a human right because of the rhetorical power that human rights talk has gained all over the world. These days, the only way, it seems, to get attention to issues that transcend the sovereign power of the state (while appealing nonetheless to state power) is

to invoke human rights. And, of course, the treatment of the Turkish peace petitioners *was* a clear violation of their human rights (to free speech, due process, jobs, travel, and so on). But I still worry, because to call something a human right means it belongs to each of us as members of the human species; it takes rights to be part of a shared (individual) human essence (the right to "bare life" being the prime example). It takes our common being to refer to our sameness rather than to our differences. You don't have to do anything to be entitled to human rights; you just have to be human. In some ways, I guess, the right to education (to the processes of knowledge production enshrined in the academy) could be counted as a human right. But I think that is somehow to individualize and generalize the collective activity of knowledge production, to minimize its distinctiveness and its specificity—and so to deny the importance of the specific ethical and procedural responsibilities upon which it depends. Deeming academic freedom a human right risks reducing it to the free speech right we all share, removing the obligations to critical thinking upon which the guarantee of academic freedom rests and leaving in place (in the neoliberal age) the role of the state as the guarantor of that freedom. It opens us to the ways in which the right now uses freedom of speech to silence critical thinking; it threatens to become another governing principle of the neoliberal marketplace of ideas.

To defend academic freedom in the name of the public or social good restores the importance of society, of the polyphony of life lived together. Human rights pertain to us as individuals; academic freedom is about the health and well-being of our collective social existence. To answer the question posed by the title of this essay, "What kind of freedom is academic freedom?," I can now reply that academic freedom is a freedom peculiar to critical knowledge production. It requires the adherence of thinkers to ethically driven processes of relentless questioning that entail exceptional forms of responsibility. Sitze puts it nicely:

> "Academic unfreedom" here would be a name for the ways in which the responsibility to pursue truth turns out to be insatiable and interminable, producing forms of fidelity that are so excessive that they ultimately are incompletable by any single moral being, instead requiring communities and continuities between the living and the dead for their preservation and transmission, necessitating forms of governance that fit uneasily, when they fit at all, with the familiar forms of modern liberal politics and economics.[44]

Academic freedom is not a universal freedom; it is instead a freedom granted in the name of society to those engaged in the relentless questioning operations of critical thinking. It refers precisely to those processes that bring a polyphony of voices into the conversation and, in that way, contribute to the political well-being upon

which the exercise of human rights depends. Academic freedom is not a universal human right; it is the freedom granted to those who take responsibility for assuring the public good by issuing the dangerous challenges that—in the words of my epigraph—are "as essential to knowledge as to life."[45]

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Notes

1. Brown, "'Most We Can Hope For,'" 461.
2. I give a number of examples in the essays collected in Scott, *Knowledge, Power, and Academic Freedom*.
3. See Knutson, "Sifting and Winnowing."
4. Tomba, *Insurgent Universality*, 3.
5. Said, "Identity, Authority, and Freedom," 223.
6. Dewey, "Academic Freedom," 62–63.
7. Sitze, "Academic Unfreedom," 598–99.
8. Sitze, "Academic Unfreedom," 597–98.
9. Spivak, "Terror," 81.
10. Rooney, "Semiprivate Room," 339.
11. Rooney, "Semiprivate Room," 338.
12. Rooney, "Semiprivate Room," 339.
13. Readings, *University in Ruins*.
14. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 181.
15. Finkin and Post, *For the Common Good*.
16. Higgins, "Abstract Human Right or Material Practice?"
17. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, chap. 6, "Educating Human Capital."
18. Lorenz, "If You're So Smart."
19. Quoted in Sitze, "Academic Unfreedom," 595.
20. Quoted in Wilson, "Tennessee Legislature's."
21. Baser, Akgonul, and Ozturk, "'Academics for Peace' in Turkey," 286.
22. True to Dewey's prediction, the signers were overwhelmingly in the fields of the humanities and social sciences. Women constituted some 56 percent of the group. Many of the signers were in precarious contingent positions, some were graduate students, and many had positions in provincial universities. See Odman, "Solidarity Academies."
23. Said, "Identity, Authority, and Freedom," 219, 220.
24. Nikolchina, "Seminar," 363.

25. Nikolchina, "Seminar," 371.
26. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.
27. Erdem and Akin, "Emergent Repertoires," 7.
28. Quoted in Ozinanir, "Where Do the Solidarity Academies Stand?," 106.
29. Antalya Dayanışma Akademisi, "Biz Kimiz? / Who Are We?"
30. Readings, *University in Ruins*, 175.
31. Readings, *University in Ruins*, 160.
32. Readings, *University in Ruins*, 176.
33. Readings, *University in Ruins*, 163.
34. Readings, *University in Ruins*, 189.
35. Spivak, "Terror," 83.
36. Readings, *University in Ruins*, 192.
37. Quoted in Nikolchina, "Seminar," 368.
38. Ozinanir, "Where Do the Solidarity Academies Stand?," 105.
39. Sitze, "Academic Unfreedom," 598.
40. Brown, "'Most We Can Hope For,'" 461.
41. Odman, "Solidarity Academies."
42. Hoodfar, "Academic Freedom as a Transnational Right."
43. Brown, "'Most We Can Hope For,'" 461.
44. Sitze, "Academic Unfreedom," 589.
45. Conference of Representatives of the University of Cape Town and the University of Witwatersrand, *Open Universities in South Africa*.

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