Thought Reform and Education: A View from the University of Pennsylvania

Professor Alan C. Kors
Interviewed by Carol Iannone

Academic Freedom

Iannone: I know that you've publicly characterized aspects of life at the University of Pennsylvania as similar to those at the University of Peking. What led you to make such a statement and what was the result?

Kors: Almost as a symbolic protest, I ran for the University of Pennsylvania Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility to oppose trends and views that seemed to me quite totalitarian in their implications for academic freedom. I thought I would get very few votes, but that I'd at least bear witness to a different view of academic freedom. So I wrote a statement in which I said that I thought the university was, in fact, moving rapidly toward being a University of Peking, and that it was trying to engage in the wholesale thought-reform of its faculty and students.

To my utter surprise, I was elected. It was the last thing I had expected. I thought that the great majority of faculty on my campus were either supporters of, or willing to acquiesce in, the totalitarian, new-age Leninist approach towards benighted students and benighted faculty in need of consciousness-raising. I discovered that a majority of the faculty who came out and voted endorsed my views, and not those of the ideological warriors.

Iannone: Could you give an example of the sorts of practices you are refer-

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Editors's Note: From time to time, *Academic Questions*, under the heading *Voces Academicae*, will publish interviews with teachers and scholars whose experiences and reflections provide a telling commentary on the nature of contemporary university life.

ring to when you liken the University of Pennsylvania to the University of Peking?

Kors: The University of Pennsylvania has as one of its modes of adjudication of conflict the sentencing of people to thought-reform, called racial or sexual or homophobic "awareness seminars." Rather than define behavioral norms, deviation from which leads to specific behavioral punishments, the university increasingly is defining attitudinal crimes, and dealing with these by an American equivalent of thought-reform, which subjects people to left-wing experimental social work designed to cleanse your soul by getting rid of your classist, sexist, racist, imperialist, and homophobic attitudes.

One of the cases we had at the University of Pennsylvania concerned a lecturer in business law who already had a reputation for being acerbic and abrasive with students. But many students loved him; he was a "character." He asked his class to explain the terms of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth Amendments, and found, to his horror, that none of them could do so. So he turned to a group of black students, and said to them, "You're the descendants of ex-slaves, surely you should know what's said in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments." This was treated as an act of racism without precedent at the university. The man was sentenced, as a condition for renewing his appointment, to undergo a series of sessions in "sensitivity training." He accepted the sentence. They waited a year and renewed his appointment.

Iannone: The sensitivity training is conducted by social workers?

Kors: That's right. Conducted by social workers, and people from or close to the so-called Women's Center, and the so-called affirmative action offices.

This can happen to students too. I think that lesbian and gay students have exactly the same rights and protections as all other students. But, let us say, for example, that a group of students, seeing some lesbian and gay students putting up signs for a lesbian or gay dance, should say or shout something derogatory to them. We would now have a case, not of bad manners, but of what is known on campus as "harassment." Back in the old days, behavioral infractions of established standards might lead a student to be called before the dean of students who would read him the Riot Act and say, "show some decency, or you'll be tossed out." Now, for expressing the "wrong" kind of sentiments, they sentence students to homophobia workshops.

Now I stood up at a faculty meeting and said that if this university wants to spell out definitions of behavioral abuses and crimes, it should. And if it wishes to attach penalties to certain of those, that seems proper, too. The community has a right to set up certain standards, but they have to be behavioral. You don't go after people's souls. This is not the business of a university administration. People may think homosexuality is a perfectly acceptable norm, or they may think it is a sin to be punished by eternal damnation. That is not a university's

business. It is not a university's business to seek to reform the souls of its faculty and students.

Kors: And at that point, a professor from the School of Social Work stood up, and said, "We have another name for what Dr. Kors means by thought-reform. We have another name for what he calls 'reeducation at the University of Peking.' That name is very simple—education. We're talking about educating the students." So, in the name of "education" students and faculty members acquiesce in subjecting their colleagues to consciousness-raising by the most ideological sectors of the campus. The University of Pennsylvania just recently worked out a sexual and racial harassment policy, most of which I find vague beyond belief, and much of which I find an assault on freedom of speech rather than an attempt to protect people from having unacceptable behavior visited upon them. One component of this policy is that the university needs to undertake, within the dormitories, the education of its students about racism, sexism, and homophobia. On paper it looks as if this will just be an educational policy to get the word out on official harassment policy and on what to do if you think that someone is asking for sexual favors in return for a higher grade. But what the administration has done, in fact, is turn this education of the students over to ideologically-conscious groups with ideological and political agendas, namely the "Women's Center" and the Office of Affirmative Action.

Iannone: And these become the moral arbiters of the campus?

Kors: Correct. These are people who have been granted, in effect, to use a term they like, the "privileged ideological position" on campus. Now the notion that the Penn Women's Center speaks for Penn Women is absurd, since it obviously doesn't speak for more than a very small minority of a diverse, individuated female population. Also, it clearly in no way speaks for Catholic women; it doesn't speak for evangelical Protestant women; it doesn't speak for Orthodox Jewish women; it doesn't speak for Republican women; it doesn't even speak for moderate women at Penn. It ends up speaking for at most, and with the benefit of every doubt, about fifteen or twenty percent of the female population. I almost never meet a female student who doesn't tell me she is an antifeminist as "feminist" is now defined, or lacks contempt for the sort of people who seem to have secured the title of "Spokeswoman for Penn's Women's Community." But the university's administration has an easy way of buying off certain pressure groups, and it consists of giving those in possession of privileged ideologies the responsibility for reeducating students and faculty with improper attitudes. As a result, you really have the foundations of a University of Peking in Philadelphia.

The Sixties

Iannone: The movement toward that imposition of a new orthodoxy has its roots in the tide of student protest that swept across the campuses in the 1960s.

I know you think that had the administrations at that time possessed a strategic understanding of what was really going on among the students, a lot of the troubles we are now facing could have been circumvented. If the administrations had said, "Now wait a minute, we only have a few real crazies here, most of these students are well-meaning, but they don't know how to voice their discontent," they would have been able to head off, you think, the terrible . . . irrationality?

Kors: I think that's true. I also think students are very struck by intensity of belief and by genuine conviction, and they weren't finding it in their elders, while, on the whole, they were finding it in the angriest of their peers. I found, for example, that when I upped the intensity and passion of my responses to issues of rights and responsibilities, they were rapt. And even if they didn't agree with me, they were open to hearing me out. And my sense is that what they encountered from most faculty and from most universities was capitulation. It's like letting a small child think that he or she can manipulate a household. Once they get that power . . .

Iannone: And there was a legitimate grievance, you thought? You believed that the counterculture was testing for some kind of authenticity?

Kors: I thought their politics were self-indulgent and off the wall. But I did believe there were legitimate questionings of the roles expected of them, and particularly of the hypocrisy of the universities that claimed to care passionately about teaching and the communication of knowledge, but were careerist in terms of actual administrative and faculty roles.

Iannone: So you don't buy the Bloom view, then, that things were better before the upheavals?

Kors: No. No I don't. I think that things were significantly better with respect to the intellectual standards of the faculty. We've seen an absolute degradation of the professoriate, to the extent that it has largely marginalized itself in American society. Very few people could or should take seriously much of what's happening in literary criticism, history, sociology, and political science . . .

Iannone: As opposed to the time when people like Lionel Trilling were writing?

Kors: Let's just say that there's been an absolute degradation of the faculty. And for me, one of the ironies is how the cynical Left faculty on campuses, who participated most enthusiastically in tearing down the *in loco parentis* functions of the university, most of which should have been torn down . . .

Iannone: Oh yes?

Kors: . . . having come to perceive the present student generation as too conservative, now are in the process of reconstructing them so fraternities and drinking, for example, are becoming banned activities, though they never cared earlier about pot, coke, or other drugs. And they wish to create agencies of socialization at Penn that exert more control than universities ever tried to

exert over their students in dormitories. And this is the same segment of the faculty that raced to tear down all standards and all distributional and sequential requirements, that said, in effect, that undergraduates are not simply as mature as faculty, but should be copartners in the establishment of curriculum—which was absurd.

Iannone: You do think there was an *in loco parentis* structure that was illegitimate?

Kors: Yes.

Iannone: Manifesting itself in what, for example?

Kors: Manifesting itself in the overpolicing of student lives, in the overprotection of women.

Iannone: And the students were right to want greater freedom?

Kors: They were absolutely right to want greater freedom. In effect, I think a large number of students wanted their university to be their landlords and not their mothers and fathers. I think there was a lot that was legitimate in that.

Iannone: But not entirely, after all, since students aren't fully adult yet. Don't you think a university is correct to exert some rules and some power?

Kors: I think it is appropriate to enforce rules of civilized behavior, without going too far beyond the laws of the society. In fact, I think the problem now is a left-wing and feminist effort to administer their way to power by imposing standards that go far beyond those in ordinary law, controlling even the sorts of insults, the sorts of banter and the sorts of conversations in which students may engage.

Students

Iannone: I know you feel that today's student has changed for the better. You feel that today's student is more humane, more open, kinder in many ways than the student of the pre-1960s. So you feel that the 1960s had a good effect?

Kors: I think there was a stretch of years, not so many as most people think, when the high schools and the grade schools abandoned attempts to teach self-control, significantly weakening academic discipline. Consequently, one had this bubble of students who thought that anything they said with passion was well said, and who had very little understanding of intellectual rigor. But I always found that these students were open to correction, and you could get them to laugh at the gaps in their high school education. And if you had convictions yourself, they sat up and paid attention. I was once manhandled for trying to teach during a sit-in but wound up passionately discussing the issue with about a hundred students. In effect, their grade schools and their high schools, the general culture, and the university itself were all saying to them, "We want you to be critical. We want you to be creative." Of course, there never had been a "golden age" in which commitment on the part of students to rigorous analysis was commonplace. My sense is that all through the 1930s,

1940s, 1950s, early 1960s, and I suspect before, at institutions that were often finishing schools for the children of the rich—Princeton, my alma mater, for example, or Yale, or Dartmouth—you had a ten percent subculture of wonderful intellectual and cultural intensity, in which people demanded real clarity from one another and would call each other up at 2:00 a.m. because they had read a haunting or provocative passage in a book; a subculture with people who would doggedly pursue an argument, asking repeatedly, "What do you mean by that?" and "Define your terms," and seriously challenging each other's views. That subculture disappeared in the 1960s, and I think it is still gone.

But we weren't talking about the whole American college population with that ten percent. We were really talking about a very small subculture within it. And I think undergraduate culture homogenized in the late sixties and early seventies. There was, among the off-the-wall political tendencies, an egalitarianism run wild, which led people who *could* distinguish themselves by the clarity of their thoughts *to avoid* trying to do so. So that remarkable remnant of ten percent vanished. And that's a loss. But the remaining ninety percent at institutions like the University of Pennsylvania seem to me far better now than anything that existed in the fifties or sixties. They're more open-minded, more democratic, and I even think more likely to regard the university as a place where education occurs, rather than as a place where you simply make useful connections and learn your social posture. The real degradation has occurred within the faculty.

Faculty

Iannone: Okay. Let's get to that. Were there many others like you at Penn who stood by traditional principles and didn't give an inch?

Kors: It was interesting, for example, that when some of us in the early 1970s founded a college house as a special educational residence, everyone assumed that the five or six faculty involved were on the Left because we wanted to live with undergraduates and create a cultural and intellectual dormitory. What shocked *us*, as well as the undergraduates, was that almost all of us, far from being on the Left, were politically conservative.

Iannone: Didn't you find it somewhat sad that the students often failed to sense how many of the left-wing professors who purported to have their best interests at heart, really didn't care that much about them, and wouldn't have put themselves in the position that you did?

Kors: Yes. Or didn't even read student papers from beginning to end! As with many of the movements since the sixties, people are much more gratified by rhetoric than by substance. For example, there are large numbers of men who can talk a wonderful feminist rhetoric, but have utter contempt for women, or for whom feminist language is nothing but a tactic with little relevance to the way they live their lives. In the same way there are a lot of

professors who are very ideologically seductive, and students are easily ideologically seduced.

Iannone: That's one of the lasting, unfortunate legacies—rhetoric still outweighs substance, to a great degree.

Kors: Yes, but I do find that my students *now* are much more moderate, critical, and conservative, and *much* more skeptical of the Left faculty. This is one of the great ironies of the present university scene. Where the faculty of the sixties gratefully followed the students, the Left faculty of today wishes to use the university to radicalize its students. The faculty is like Lenin looking at the working class, seeing a kind of natural trade unionism, and making a determination to bring revolutionary enlightenment from the outside, since the students are not spontaneously left-wing anymore.

Iannone: Was there something about their own longings or a desire for power, which led the faculty and administration to accept the demands of the radical students?

Kors: Yes. It seems to me that one of the things American society does, and properly so, is to fragment its brightest into competing elites, rather than allow them to solidify into a ruling caste. Thus, we have a corporate elite that is loathed by a media elite, both of which are loathed in turn by a government elite, and which then loathe it back. In addition, of course, you have an academic elite. The academic elite is made up of people who are extremely bright, who manipulated the system to their own reward and advantage through grade school, high school and college and, as a result, had enormously high status and high esteem in the eyes of their own families and others. While not necessarily burning with any love of teaching and research, many felt a need to stay in the same world that always had told them they were so good, and had given them high status. But when they finally got into the academic world they discovered that, absent any great passionate love for teaching and research, they were not particularly well-rewarded, certainly not when compared to all of these people they'd outperformed in school. So, I think they have a natural propensity to be critical of the reward structure of American society, and whatever they take to underlie it. Now, if they're sustained by having made a choice that substantively embodied their loves, their passions, their curiosities—it's no problem. Indeed, it's a great joy. You earn less money, but you get to do the things you really love in the world.

Iannone: And there are some like that?

Kors: There are many like that. But there are also large numbers who suddenly find themselves in a relatively low "status" within American society.

Iannone: Would you say this was one of the motivations behind the upheaval, that the faculty saw a chance to have power that they couldn't have had before, saw a chance to have status and to diminish the image of these other elites in the eyes of students?

Kors: Absolutely . . . and in the eyes of society.

Iannone: Of course, they say exactly the opposite: that they scorned material possessions and social status.

Kors: Yes, but don't believe that! And there was also a second factor. There was another very substantial group of faculty who did not believe in the teachings that were being advanced on the Left, but who lost all courage to stand up and face people who seemed to have this primal passion.

Iannone: The students?

Kors: Students, and increasingly their own colleagues on the Left.

Iannone: So, you're saying that there were some on the Left who really did have a primal passion?

Kors: I think there were some who had a primal altruistic passion, though I suspect there were remarkably few. Then there was this very large group that was intellectually very skeptical of the claims being made on the Left, but who were quite literally bullied by the intensity of other people's convictions. The liberals on American college campuses were the key group and they absolutely caved in. All they wanted to do was to buy peace, to buy calm, or to assuage their own guilt. And they were always afraid of not "seeming" pluralistic. Thus, they went along, pushed by the strongest winds out of lack of character, lack of backbone, lack of conviction, and lack of ethics. I personally can recall discussions of "compensatory" affirmative action appointments when many faculty said they felt guilty. So I told them they should resign their positions and reapply in an open competition against blacks and women, rather than say, "I got *my* job as a result of discrimination against blacks and women, so some 25 year-old who's never committed an act of positive discrimination in his life and certainly never benefited from one, is going to pay the penalty for my having gotten my job." But while they never behave at cost to *themselves*, according to this logic of guilt, it nonetheless informs all their attitudes and makes it impossible for them to show any gumption. *Now*, when these same people look back on their dismantling of requirements, on their acceptance of students on sensitive committees, they are appalled. In twenty years, they will look back at what they are doing or allowing to be done *now*, and be equally appalled.

In addition, a lot of bright, competent, achieving people who, in the past, would have gone into the academic world, were turned off by the nature of the universities in the late sixties and chose other careers. All of this was exacerbated by the fact that universities themselves unintentionally made decisions that allowed the disparity between academic salaries and corporate salaries to grow even larger, almost insuring that university careers would only appeal to and reinforce people with certain kinds of social resentments.

Scholarship

Iannone: What happened to scholarship as a result of this? Standards were so easily given up. Was it because the devotion to scholarship was very weak, built on sand, and unable to stand up to the test?

Kors: In part, yes. When people found themselves dealing with the "new" intuitive scholarship, which they themselves often found absurd or at least obscure, they lacked the courage to monitor, question, or criticize it. At first the universities adopted the strategy of trying to marginalize the academic extremes—ideological black studies and women's studies programs, but this gave legitimacy to fields of inquiry whose intentions were essentially ideological, parochial and political. Gradually the university learned that you couldn't keep the genie in the bottle; that people in these programs often had joint appointments and were members of traditional academic departments as well. Whenever the issue came up, the people who wanted to talk about necessary "role models" for students of differing backgrounds, or openness to the "new" scholarship, or breaking traditional monopolies of intellectual power, found almost no one of conviction on the other side willing to stand up to them. And these politicized groups were among the best organized constituencies on campus, often cutting across administrative lines, faculty lines, student lines. Moreover, they were willing to do what people, what campus liberals, centrists, and conservatives almost never have been willing to do—play political hardball—litigate, protest, sit-in, demonstrate, organize students.

A few years ago the American Historical Association passed a nuclear freeze resolution. I resigned my membership since I don't feel the association may decide on historical, let alone political, issues by majority vote, much less speak on behalf of the history profession to the American public. I believed, however, that I still should be able to participate in their substantive conventions. When I started letting people know my position, the discovery that most surprised me was that the great majority of my colleagues never even knew that such a resolution had been passed. This suggests to me that many of those uncomfortable with such behavior are also those whose desire for a simple, quiet life shields them from a real awareness of what's happening. I don't think we have any idea yet of what would happen if the people opposed to these new ideological trends in the academic world actually organized a resistance.

The Quality of Education

Iannone: What kind of education is a student getting in the classroom? Is it also politicized or ideologized? It doesn't sound as if they're getting their money's worth.

Kors: I don't sit in on courses at my college. But hearing my students talk about other courses, it seems obvious to me that the goal I set for myself—to teach an academic discipline and not to proselytize students towards my own political or ideological views—is not a restraint that most left-wing Penn faculty impose upon themselves. They see themselves as the moral, political, and ideological saviors of their benighted students, who come to them having absorbed what such professors see as the horrid, warped values of their par-

ents, and of American society at large. For them, education means disabusing students of such "warped" values and views, rather than inviting them to a critical understanding or a rethinking of problems formally presented.

Iannone: It used to be said that you could get a good education almost anywhere. Enough of the basics were being taught, and you could cover that which was most important. Is this still true?

Kors: I think in history and the social sciences, it is increasingly difficult to get a good education. For many academics personal ideology has become the test of both objectivity and common sense. If you even question that the history of women has been a history of socialized oppression, or that the history of American society in general has been a history of repressing the legitimate demands of diverse minorities and other groups, you're deemed to be an off-the-wall, naive pseudo-historian or pseudo-scientist. That is why current academic history isn't being read by the American public: they know better. We are the first generation of historians who don't have a significant nonprofessional readership.

Iannone: That's a new phenomenon?

Kors: I think it is.

Iannone: So you can't trust, even after sending your child to one of the best schools and paying a high tuition and so on, that he would come out with a really good, well-rounded education?

Kors: Not only can't you trust it, you can almost count on it not to happen, unless you have students who already are highly selective, and can recognize when someone is appealing to their minds, or when someone is preaching from a pulpit.

The University Today

Iannone: What is it like to be on the faculty of one of the great universities? They used to be, wouldn't you say, great centers of learning, of honest, rational inquiry?

Kors: One shouldn't idealize the American university's past. That's a danger. Princeton, for example, was an astonishingly philistine place when I attended it in the early sixties. There was a callousness and self-indulgence bordering on cruelty. What happened on American campuses fed the grievances of the Left, often for just cause. Alfred Cobban once said that there's nothing worse than to have a persecution complex when you're actually being persecuted.

On the other hand, I think that college faculties now are witnessing the bureaucratization of their universities, in which the institutions are increasingly administered by a burned-out, self-appointed administrative cadre. The old model, which at least was everyone's ideal, and supposed that you dragged academics devoted to teaching and research into administrative posts, is definitely dead.

What you get today are administrators who wish to make a career of administration, and to whom education is secondary. For them it is administration that is primary. And because they're often people who are burned out, they're people with little will to resist the passions of the left-wing faculty. They're also people who often are using their current administrative position as a steppingstone to a higher administrative position, and the easiest way to jeopardize their administrative career-advancement would be to have something blow up on their watch. The result is that the current generation of administrators want, *more than anything else*, to avoid crises and to appease those elements of the faculty who might create the great scandal of their tenure, which is to say, the Left, the highly ideological feminists, and the highly ideological black studies faculty.

Iannone: It's a kind of tyranny.

Kors: Yes, but one cause of that tyranny is the fact that we no longer have true academic governments in the university, but this bureaucratic model instead.

Iannone: And when did this come about?

Kors: I think it happened in response to what was perceived as the great financial crunch of the early seventies in which universities felt that they needed not great classicists, scientists, or literary scholars as administrators, but great managers who could raise money and make tough-minded decisions about finances. But what happened, in effect, is that these people developed a separate career of college administration. They don't grow as faculty in one university and rise to the administrative level, which was more in line with the old model. Rather, they leave the world of faculty for that of administration early in their careers and then move around among universities, as part of an interchangeable cadre. And at all costs they must avoid the perception that they can't administer, which is likely to take hold if their administration is plagued by crisis.

Iannone: Do you think it is now possible for faculty to fill the gap opened by the abandonment of academic values on the part of this self-serving cadre?

Kors: I think they still can. They have to stand up, morally and intellectually, to their students, particularly to certain elements of their students, and simply show that there are people of deep convictions and deep passions who do not share what is being presented as the consensus of thinking people. And they also have to stand up to a politicized Left faculty, the most politicized elements of which *never stop doing politics*. And, obviously, as part of all this they have to stand up to their administrations, which are likely to be only too eager to buy temporary peace on campus by setting up programs and norms that will haunt us for decades and decades to come. They have to give an administration a sense that it will face as many problems from the more moderate faculty, if it is shunted aside, as the administration will from the ideological, politicized faculty. On the other hand, the moderate faculty should not deny the possibility

that there may be interesting critical perspectives among those in the ideological and political camps, which may have their proper place on campus. We want to be pluralistic, while at the same time defending standards of rigor, of reasoned discourse, and of evidence. I think the potentially moderating faculty is very confused about where to draw the line between pluralism and the abandonment of standards. And that seems to me often to be *the* final, desperate issue.

Iannone: So in your ideal university there would be courses in feminism, black studies, and so on?

Kors: Well, it seems to me that what one should oppose in scholarship and presentation is neither the motivation nor the concrete politics nor the ideology of those involved in an academic movement, but the quality of work it produces. So, if there are interesting Marxist, black radical and radical feminist perspectives involving reasoned, intelligent discourse, which accept the need to relate the propositions one is making about the nature of the world to specific evidence, and engage in fair and open discourse, these points of view, and the individuals who argue them, have every right to be on a university campus, and indeed, will make it a livelier place. But wherever the quality of the work produced by individuals is sloppy, self-indulgent, uncritical, unanalytic, and devoid of evidence intelligently induced on behalf of its propositions, then it's no argument for pluralism to say that it belongs. It's just an argument for sloppy scholarship. So I think that one thing that concerned faculty ought *not* to do, is to focus on the fact that there are ideologies on campus of which they disapprove. If those ideologies are embodied in rigorous scholarship and lively debate—the more the merrier. What one needs to object to is the wretched lowering of intellectual standards, is work in which evidence involves no logical relationship to propositions, or in which there is no need for evidence because you can perceive "truth" deductively on the basis of your ideological axioms about the ultimate causes of things. That, it seems to me, is where the focus has to be. Who, after all, ever said that a university can be filled only with ideologies you like?

Iannone: Ideology is not by itself a bad word?

Kors: Ideology is not by itself a bad word. If we now can coexist with differences of theological assumptions of the kind that gave rise to purges in the seventeenth century, then we certainly can coexist with all sorts of political and ideological persuasions as well. We can learn to live with each other as long as we insist that our colleagues' work be reasoned and analytically rigorous. It seems to me that to deny this is to send out the wrong message about what's wrong with American universities. What should make things illegitimate, in terms of the university, is departure from the world of reasoned discourse, rigorous arguments, rigorous analysis, and the intelligent relationship of data to theory.

Iannone: So feminism could be okay, but once you start hearing code phrases

like, "You can't apply your standards to us, your standards are white male," then you know you're in trouble.

Kors: Right, and then you know that someone is not asking for pluralism of belief, but for a diversity of opinion on whether or not one has to argue intelligently, critically, and induce evidence on behalf of issues that depend on empirical data rather than on intuition and ideological presuppositions.

Iannone: Would you agree that feminism might be the worst offender here, because it's advancing at times what seems to be a whole system of analysis that is "feminine," nonrational, nonlinear, and so on?

Kors: Yes I do, but, again, both tactically and substantively, one shouldn't identify the target as feminism. If there are truly people who believe that the lives and experiences of women have been neglected in certain fields of study, they have a strong case. And if there are people who call themselves feminists because they think there are ways in which some fundamental relationships between men and women could be humanely and morally altered in society, that seems to me just fine.

Iannone: You agree with it, or you think it's a legitimate position?

Kors: I think it's a legitimate position. One might agree or disagree with aspects of what's being said, but, in any case, one should certainly be open-minded to the arguments.

Iannone: Okay. You're saying that we play by the rules. But there are people who don't.

Kors: *We*, it seems to me, usually do play by the rules. *We* hire bright people with whom we profoundly disagree, and we vote for the promotions of bright people with whom we profoundly disagree.

Iannone: You could see yourself voting for a feminist to get tenure for example?

Kors: Absolutely, indeed, without fail, *if the work were good.* Even if I thought that person would be a pernicious political influence on campus, if the scholarship were good, I would vote for him or her. My sense is that the people on the Left don't do the same. They apply a double standard, so that the people who are attempting to be open-minded are in a losing game. But the trick isn't to take up the practice of rejecting good work and bright people because you disagree with them politically and ideologically; the real trick is to expose the people who are playing by the double standard. To be sure, exposing them internally in the university often does no good. It may only earn them the *applause* of those elements on campus who think that the mission of a university is to rid its students of benighted attitudes. Then, I think these people have to be exposed in a broader forum.

Iannone: What might be the avenues of exposure?

Kors: The American public and American parents need to know what is happening at the universities. When people who think the way I do are sent out by universities to talk to prospective students, or when we're invited to

parents' weekends to mingle with the parents of our students, perhaps on those occasions one should not simply hoist the institutional flag, but should talk frankly about what's happened in many departments in the university.

Iannone: Could you say more about the double standard?

Kors: If you have people who are not playing by the rules, they have an advantage in replicating themselves within their departments. I think that a conservative historian of only the most eminent stature could be hired by my department, though it would be much easier for someone who is identified as a person on the Left or for a feminist to be hired. And I think that is also true of hundreds and hundreds of other departments across the country. I have had members of history departments elsewhere say to me point blank, "My department would never hire a conservative." And these were not conservatives complaining. These were people on the Left boasting.

But again, I am ever surprised to discover that a large number of people in departments and disciplines aren't even aware that this is going on. If you have one set of people who play politics, who caucus, who manipulate, and who know what they're doing and want to do it, and you have another set of people who simply *react* to other people's agendas and are not quite sure of how those agendas are being set, then the first group is going to win every time. And I don't think we yet know what would happen if, in addition to standing up within our own institutions, we made the broader public aware of how many areas of the social sciences and the humanities have become intellectually marginalized, and of how much better educated their children would be from reading things Left, Right and Center produced by think tanks rather than from studying the social sciences at a university. In addition to that, I don't think we as yet know what would be the effect of attempting to mobilize faculty against the ideological perversion and politicization of their universities. But I think we've now reached a point where such people have to be aware that the institutions that attracted them are being dramatically transformed in negative ways by these developments in administration and scholarship.

Iannone: You believe universities are growing increasingly marginal as centers of learning and intellectual pursuits?

Kors: Excepting the natural and applied sciences, yes. In the social sciences, and in many of the humanities, the most interesting things are occurring outside the university. In some ways it reminds me of the relationship of the universities to the physical sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There was an ideological commitment to a certain Aristotelian scholasticism in the seventeenth century that forced the new experimental scientists to find homes outside of the universities. As a result, the most interesting science in the seventeenth century was not done at the University of Paris or at Oxford, but in the Royal Society or the Academy of Sciences in France, or in diverse private societies throughout western Germany, northern Italy, and,

indeed, France and England. And I think that's the case now in the social sciences. What happens in the American Sociological Association is trivial. But what's coming out of certain think tanks and certain foundations and certain institutes is very exciting and much more central to the real debates about the problems of American society.

Iannone: Isn't there reason for hope in the thought that principles, standards, truth, the search for truth, anyway, must eventually prevail within the universities?

Kors: That's not enough. There's no mechanism by which those standards get translated into judgments that alter the nature of the institution. Even if the dialectical materialists in Moscow were wrong about molecular biology in the 1950s, so long as Lysenko had institutional power, and only Lysenkoists were being hired, the ideology could sustain itself. The key is whether or not it loses administrative support, which only sometimes coincides with intellectual results.

Iannone: You don't believe in intellectual collapse from within then? There has to be some undercuttting of the institutional position?

Kors: Well, I believe in collapse from within movements that are primarily committed to their work, to the intellectual life. That is to say, a dead-end movement in American academic biochemistry will reveal itself to be a dead-end movement because there remains in that discipline no political or psychic commitment to this or that school of thought. But insofar as the goal of the movement is the psychic satisfaction of trashing tradition or the psychic satisfaction of gaining power, then there is no reason why a movement should ever collapse from within, provided it satisfies those impulses.