

The Irony of the Diversity Idol: Damore Contra Bogost

by Christopher DeGroot (November 2017)

FAIL

For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure. And therefore a man must know how to estimate a sour face. The by-standers look askance on him in the public street or in the friend's parlour. If this aversation had its origin in contempt and resistance like his own, he might well go home with a sad countenance; but the sour faces of the multitude, like their sweet faces, have no deep cause, but are put on and off as the wind blows and a newspaper directs.

—Emerson

In a year characterized by gross misunderstandings in the media, the worst, perhaps, have been those concerning James Damore. The benign author of the well-meaning memo, [Google's Ideological Echo Chamber](#), has been so widely misrepresented that one can readily perceive the kernel of truth in Baudelaire's apothegm: "The world only goes round by

misunderstanding.” A talented software engineer, Damore was fired from Google for the progressive crime of independent thought, the powerful corporation perfectly illustrating the West’s suicidal path: the subordination of truth to affect, principle crushed by cowardice and fear. The incident is rich with dark instruction, revealing the essentially delusional character of the Leftist mind, not to mention the appalling incompetence of the mainstream media. It is therefore worth considering the matter at some length; as this strange, dismal year nears its end, perhaps some may learn a lesson from it.

Ian Bogost, in a predictably sensational August 6 article in the *Atlantic*, “[A Googler’s Would-Be Manifesto Reveals Tech’s Rotten Core](#),” described America’s latest outbreak of comedic righteous indignation:

It seemed to dash hopes that much progress has been made in unraveling the systemic conditions that produce and perpetuate inequity in the technology industry. That includes increasing the distribution of women and minorities in technical jobs, equalizing pay, breaking the glass ceiling, and improving the quality of life in workplaces that sometimes resemble frat houses more than businesses.

This is sheer nonsense. Bogost clearly does not understand the memo. Consider its first paragraph.

I value diversity and inclusion, am not denying that sexism exists, and don’t endorse using stereotypes. When addressing the gap in representation in the population, we need to look at population level differences in distributions. If we can’t have an honest discussion about this, then we can never truly solve the problem. Psychological safety is built on mutual respect and

acceptance, but unfortunately our culture of shaming and misrepresentation is disrespectful and unaccepting of anyone outside its echo chamber. Despite what the public response seems to have been, I've gotten many personal messages from fellow Googlers expressing their gratitude for bringing up these very important issues which they agree with but would never have the courage to say or defend because of our shaming culture and the possibility of being fired. This needs to change.

Surely no *unbiased* reader can fail to find Damore's words eminently reasonable. The man is no enemy of diversity and inclusion, nor does he say sexism is not a real problem. There is nothing here or elsewhere in the memo to suggest he is not fair-minded. Indeed, if you read Damore, you will see—so long, again, as you are not biased—that as people go, he is exceptionally fair in his perceptions and reasoning, though it is well to remember Emerson's maxim: "To be great is to be misunderstood." Damore is concerned to give some nuance to understanding the issues since, after all, it is not *prima facie* evident that men and women are utterly the same in their abilities and interests; so that, where a corporation does not have gender parity, sexism is present by definition.

The crucial phrase is "differences in distribution." Though feminists, progressives and Leftists generally are anxious to deny it, men and women are not mere blank slates on which the "unequal" environment imprints its awful ink; we should not assume as a matter of course that something is awry if the workplace reflects—as it inevitably must—those [gender differences](#) we all seem to notice the moment we leave it.

Neuroscientist Debra W. Soh, writing at [Quillette](#), observes that

within the field of neuroscience, sex differences between women and men—when it comes to brain structure and function and associated differences in personality and occupational preferences—are understood to be true, because the evidence for them (thousands of studies) is strong. This is not information that’s considered controversial or up for debate; if you tried to argue otherwise, or for purely social influences, you’d be laughed at.

Sex researchers recognize that these differences are not inherently supportive of sexism or stratifying opportunities based on sex. It is only because a group of individuals have chosen to interpret them that way, and to subsequently deny the science around them, that we have to have this conversation at a public level. Some of these ideas have been published in neuroscientific journals—despite having faulty study methodology—because they’ve been deemed socially pleasing and “progressive.” As a result, there’s so much misinformation out there now that people genuinely don’t know what to believe.

Among serious scholars, gender differences, like the reality of gender itself, are a given. Nor are these differences in themselves good or bad: their value is a matter of individual judgment. Still, Leftist academics want to utilize science to advance their “progressive” agenda; hence all the “faulty study methodology” and “misinformation,” so influential that “people genuinely don’t know what to believe.”

Steven Pinker himself—he of the very solid liberal credentials—has published much rigorous work on natural gender differences. Here he is on [YouTube](#), giving a talk which might be used to support James Damore’s case.

Note, what is so revealing, that Pinker takes care to appease the dogmatic academic crowd via the usual trite and simplistic reduction of nearly all human history to patriarchal oppression, lest, like Ibsen's Dr. Stockmann, he be thought an enemy of the people. It can't be that man simply found himself in a harsh world in which his superior brute strength was an immense advantage. It can't be that a severe division of labor was for most of history inevitable for the sexes. Like the Jews, man has always been behind the scenes, conspiring to oppress everyone. Well, at least Pinker was prudent. After all, those aggressive, broad-shouldered feminists have been known to body slam many an hysterically logical speaker.

It is well-established that while the sexes, on average, are of roughly equal intelligence, men preponderate [the extremes](#): there are more male dunces and geniuses both. Google employees, on the whole, surely do have exceptionally high IQs, especially engineers like Damore. That men should dominate Google—as they do so many other things at the highest level—reflects Nature itself and is consistent with a massive amount of empirical findings. It is also consistent with the traditional stereotype that women simply are not as logical as men. Of course, today most people, in their unconscious status idolatry, a stand-in for modernity's dead God, will be offended by that last sentence, as if women *as such* were inferior to men because of that particular difference, and as if women had no superior abilities of their own. (Everybody knows that women far surpass men in psychological acuity, for example.) Anyway, the psychologist Lee Jusim has done [excellent work](#)—though typically, much suppressed—on the overwhelming accuracy of stereotypes. If you want to see a very humorous example of the truth of stereotypes, look up the exceedingly emotional reactions of the many female Google employees who stayed home from work on August 7, triggered into melancholy by Damore's truthful words. Tragically, the feminist quilting bee degenerated into a wild intersectional

tizzy, the rotund blue and pink-haired ladies of various races and gender identities squabbling over whose cat should be the first to peck at Damore's soon-to-be-flayed carcass.

Bogost tells us that

these reactions to the screed are sound, but they risk missing a larger problem: The kind of computing systems that get made and used by people outside the industry, and with serious consequences, are a direct byproduct of the gross machismo of computing writ large. More women and minorities are needed in computing because the world would be better for their contributions—and because it might be much worse without them.

Damore's balanced and temperate memo is a "screed," according to Bogost. "The gross machismo of computing writ large": this sort of phrase, obviously biased, like the term "screed," is precisely what Camille Paglia has in mind when she fittingly refers to male academics and intellectuals as eunuchs. Here we have the standard anti-male attitude, now *de rigueur* in self-abasing academia and its grotesque child the media. Indeed, this misandry, along with hating your own culture and nation, embodies for our pathetic Left the very zenith of intellectual and moral sophistication. Bogost, with his characteristic lack of argument, asserts that the reactions of "rage and dismay" are "sound." But we must not overlook the greater evil, he cants on: that hyper-rational, super-competitive work culture at Google which, like the creation of Western Civilization itself, is, alas, so distinctly male.

Bogost believes "more women and minorities are needed in computing because the world would be better for their contributions—and because it might be much worse without

them.” Having taken it for granted that a workplace whose primary interest—*per impossible* today—is performing its actual tasks is so much “toxic masculinity,” Bogost now offers us a typical empty Leftist sentimentalism: not just Google, but indeed the world itself would be “better for their contributions—and because it might be much worse without them.” Yet here, as throughout the article, Bogost in his gushing enthusiasm gives no substantive support for his claim. Diversity is a kind of magic formula, far beyond justification. Like King Midas in the Greek myth, wherever there is ample diversity all turns to gold. “Imagine all the people . . . ” etc., etc.

When I read this sort of thing, this *strange idolatry of an idea*, the psychologist in me tends to become curious about the writer himself: Who is he, and why would his mind work like this, I wonder. I wanted to know more about Bogost, so I googled the anti-Google. Coming to his [faculty profile](#) at Georgia Tech, I read that “Dr. Ian Bogost is Ivan Allen College Distinguished Chair in Media Studies and Professor of Interactive Computing. He also holds an appointment in the Scheller College of Business.” A bizarre time it is when a person has such worldly distinction, and so much influence over the young, even though he seems unlikely to pass an undergraduate course in Introduction to Logic. Bogost is no different from a person who, upon seeing that the Academy Awards winners number more men than women, or whites than blacks, immediately complains of discrimination. Or again, he is like the many people who assume that, since there are disparate arrest statistics for the races, the police are discriminatory *ipso facto*: because it is quite taboo to consider, being *insufficiently sentimental*, that blacks commit more crimes than whites (although, curiously, that whites commit more crimes than Asians is uncontroversial). In all such cases, superficial perception more than suffices in order for a man like Bogost to wax resentful, his *a priori* desire,

as it were. Note here the following passage from the *Atlantic* article:

Given the context, it's reasonable to sneer at the anonymous Googler's simple grievances against workplace diversity. Supposedly natural differences between men and women make them suited for different kinds of work, he argues. Failure to accept this condition casts the result as inequality, he contends, and then as oppression. Seeking to correct for it amounts to discrimination. Rejecting these premises constitutes bias, or stymies open discourse. The Googler does not reject the idea of increasing diversity in some way. However, he laments what he considers discriminatory practices instituted to accomplish those goals, among them hiring methods designed to increase the diversity of candidate pools and training or mentoring efforts meant to better support underrepresented groups.

Efforts like these are necessary in the first place because diversity working in technical fields. Those numbers are roughly on par with the tech sector as a whole, where about a quarter of workers are women.

Notice how Bogost again misrepresents Damore. The latter's "when addressing the gap in representation in the population, we need to look at population level differences in distributions," becomes the former's "supposedly natural differences between men and women make them suited for different kinds of work, he argues." It is almost as if James Damore is Archie Bunker. "Get me a beer, Edith!" Damore, like many people today, is concerned that hiring quotas are not indeed fair, but rather the opposite, since they imply that competence is determined not by ability, but by race and gender. What meritocracy, what fairness in that? From a logical point of view, it is undeniably unfair. Nor is it

clear why Google, with respect to its ostensible purpose, which is to profit through the production of goods and services, should be obliged to answer to the equality of outcome agenda, which, as always, is merely assumed to be just. What is more, that agenda, for Google as for other corporations, costs a great deal of money, time and resources, and all for what? So that a—dare I say, *womanly?*—man like Bogost may *feel* good. Indeed, is this not plainly a matter of *sheer affect*?

In *National Review*, Kevin Williamson [relates](#) that Google is

endlessly criticized for having a work force that is disproportionately male and Asian or white. About 70 percent of Google's staff, and about 80 percent of its technical employees, are male. There are many other characteristics they share as well: They disproportionately didn't major in English or gender theory, and they disproportionately knocked the stuffing out of the math section of the SAT. The Justice Department naturally is suing Google for this. The reality is that the talents and drive needed to work at a firm such as Google are distributed in a way that is neither random or even nor organized with an eye toward pleasing the diversity police—and that reality must, as a political matter, be denied.

Such is the arrogance of Ian Bogost that that reality is denied *with a sneer*. "It is reasonable to sneer," says Professor Bogost, and sneering is something Leftist academics do quite often, I can tell you as someone who, like Bogost, has a graduate degree in Literature. "Efforts like these are necessary in the first place," Bogost claims, "because diversity is so bad in the technology industry to begin with." Now this assertion, which might be called redistributive

diversity, merely repeats the original fallacy that we have already examined. And it is a most pernicious fallacy, a source of endless resentment and division. Before we consider that fallacy again, let's hear Bogost once more:

I was chatting about the memo with my Georgia Tech colleague Charles Isbell, who is the executive associate dean of the College of Computing and the only black tenure-track faculty member among more than 80 in this top 10-ranking program.

"Nothing about why black and Hispanic men aren't software engineers?" he asked me after reading the letter, paraphrasing another black computer scientist, Duke's Jeffrey R.N. Forbes. "Did I glaze over that bit?" Isbell knows that Google's meager distribution of women far outshines its terrible racial diversity. Only 2 percent of all U.S. Googlers are black.

Again, the unargued-for premise here, as with almost all Leftist writing on sexism, affirmative action, and issues of discrimination generally, is that a corporation's makeup *must* have racial and gender parity; if it does not, there is discrimination, we are to conclude. Blacks are a little over 13% of the US population, but only 2% of Google employees. Now at this point serious inquiry is needed to determine whether there is discrimination; so far, we know only that discrimination may or may not be present. Shall we assume, in like superficial manner, that whites are discriminated against because they constitute only about 23% of the NBA, though they are 63% of the US population? Again, rigorous context-specific inquiry is necessary here. Otherwise we are wasting our time and probably causing nothing but trouble.

Certainly it is not because of a concern for “social justice” that men like Bogost and Isbell are so anxious that there should be the “right amount” of women and minorities in prestigious companies such as Google. If this were really about such a moral good, they would be perpetually calling for more women and minorities in the hard, unenviable blue collar jobs that are the thankless heart and soul of the vast material edifice of civilization. Indeed, it is revealing that it is only about those positions that most people find highly desirable and which are widely esteemed that the social justice warriors cry foul. For what is driving them, deep down, is human nature’s difficult [need](#) for esteem. Difficult because, although necessary, being innate and essential to well-being, it more often than not takes a perverse form, usually some idolatry or other. Now in our time, when so many people are without good families, satisfying relationships, and true culture, status envy is like a disease which almost everybody wants to catch: and how angry people become when they miss out on the world’s pageant of regard! Alas, there are very few people who have both the judgment and character to happily do without the recognition of insecure fools. Most of us are like monkeys swinging vainly from branch to branch, the highest hope being that others shall notice our skill at wasting our lives. “I’ve worked long and hard, now pat me on the head, won’t you?” says one proud monkey to another. “For I not only made a lot of money. I also succeeded at never seriously contemplating the world or even my very self.”

To be clear, none of what I have written is meant to imply that discrimination does not exist at Google or elsewhere. The point is that writing like Bogost’s, regardless of his intentions, is deeply irresponsible, serving only to make an already vexed nation all the more so. He continues:

What is this letter, after all, but a displaced Reddit

post? Certain but non-evidential. Feigning structure, but meandering. Long and tedious, with inept prose and dead manner. This false confidence underwrites all the claims the memo contains, from its facile defense of jingoism as political conservatism to its easy dismissal of anyone not predetermined to be of use.

One wonders whether Bogost read the same memo as the rest of us. It seems plain that, as most Leftists now do, he has projected his paranoia and resentment into a context, like a touchy woman who feels that a man's casual and innocent compliment "you look pretty" is so very creepy. Many people, moreover, are now like children, their inner poverty intolerably burdensome. Just as a child needs tantrums to divert himself, so they need to be involved in some sort of controversy, the wild emotional engagement being preferable to the absoluteness dullness of their consciousness. It seems to be so with Bogost, a paltry man who, by spreading confusion and enmity, seeks to appear significant.

"Feminism has made great progress in freeing women from the female gender role," says Damore, "but men are still very much tied to the male gender role. If we, as a society, allow men to be more 'feminine,' then the gender gap will shrink, although probably because men will leave tech and leadership for traditionally feminine roles." Is this a man who wants to force us into traditional gender roles? No! It is rather Bogost who has written "a screed." Compare his words with Damore's.

At Google, we talk so much about unconscious bias as it applies to race and gender, but we rarely discuss our moral biases. Political orientation is actually a result of deep moral preferences and thus biases. Considering that the overwhelming majority of the social sciences, media, and

Google lean left, we should critically examine these prejudices.

Clearly Damore, who understands, what has never been news, and what much research supports, that our politics ultimately derives from our conception of human nature, and from what we ourselves are (for all politics is finally a vast reflection of human psychology), is calling for greater disinterestedness. Without sufficient disinterestedness, efforts to achieve fairness are bound to be limited. "Certain but non-evidential," claims Bogost. Writing in [Quillette](#), evolutionary psychologist Geoffrey Miller says that "almost all of the Google memo's empirical claims are scientifically accurate. Moreover, they are stated quite carefully and dispassionately. Its key claims about sex differences are especially well-supported by large volumes of research across species, cultures, and history." And in a devastating passage that would surely send Bogost running for a safe space, Miller demonstrates "a paradox at the heart of the 'equality and diversity' dogma that dominates American corporate life. The memo didn't address this paradox directly, but . . . it's implicit in the author's critique of Google's diversity programs." Here it is worth quoting Miller at length. "This dogma relies on two core assumptions," he says:

- The human sexes and races have exactly the same minds, with precisely identical distributions of traits, aptitudes, interests, and motivations; therefore, any inequalities of outcome in hiring and promotion must be due to systemic sexism and racism;
- The human sexes and races have such radically different minds, backgrounds, perspectives, and insights, that companies must increase their demographic diversity in order to be competitive; any lack of demographic diversity must be due to short-sighted management that favors groupthink.

The obvious problem is that these two core assumptions are diametrically opposed.

If different groups have minds that are precisely equivalent in every respect, then those minds are functionally interchangeable, and diversity would be irrelevant to corporate competitiveness. For example, take sex differences. The usual rationale for gender diversity in corporate teams is that a balanced, 50/50 sex ratio will keep a team from being dominated by either masculine or feminine styles of thinking, feeling, and communicating. Each sex will counter-balance the other's quirks. (That makes sense to me, by the way, and is one reason why evolutionary psychologists often value gender diversity in research teams.) But if there are no sex differences in these psychological quirks, counter-balancing would be irrelevant. A 100% female team would function exactly the same as a 50/50 team, which would function the same as a 100% male team. If men are no different from women, then the sex ratio in a team doesn't matter at any rational business level, and there is no reason to promote gender diversity as a competitive advantage.

Likewise, if the races are no different from each other, then the racial mix of a company can't rationally matter to the company's bottom line. The only reasons to value diversity would be at the levels of legal compliance with government regulations, public relations virtue-signalling, and deontological morality – not practical effectiveness. Legal, PR, and moral reasons can be good reasons for companies to do things. But corporate diversity was never justified to shareholders as a way to avoid lawsuits, PR blowback, or moral shame; it was justified as a competitive business necessity.

So, if the sexes and races don't differ at all, and if psychological interchangeability is true, then there's no practical business case for diversity.

On the other hand, if demographic diversity gives a company any competitive advantages, it must be because there are important sex differences and race differences in how human minds work and interact. For example, psychological variety must promote better decision-making within teams, projects, and divisions. Yet if minds differ across sexes and races enough to justify diversity as an instrumental business goal, then they must differ enough in some specific skills, interests, and motivations that hiring and promotion will sometimes produce unequal outcomes in some company roles. In other words, if demographic diversity yields any competitive advantages due to psychological differences between groups, then demographic equality of outcome cannot be achieved in all jobs and all levels within a company. At least, not without discriminatory practices such as affirmative action or demographic quotas.

So, psychological interchangeability makes diversity meaningless. But psychological differences make equal outcomes impossible. Equality or diversity. You can't have both.

Weirdly, the same people who advocate for equality of outcome in every aspect of corporate life, also tend to advocate for diversity in every aspect of corporate life. They don't even see the fundamentally irreconcilable assumptions behind this 'equality and diversity' dogma.

In short, the Diversity Idol is confused and inherently self-defeating. It also reeks of hypocrisy. Again, where are all

the calls for more women in bricklaying and coal mining, fields in which they are quite scarce? Also, why shouldn't we have equality of outcome in the military? How much longer shall men have the unjust privilege, as they have for all history, of dying for the state in such larger numbers? Where, indeed, is the feminist gratitude for the countless men who have laid down their lives for women over the centuries? One notices that most feminists, like so many nagging wives, seem to do little besides complain. Are they aware that it is only the ultimate sacrifice of other people, and mostly men, who make their exceedingly contemptible lives possible?

Aaron Neill, in his excellent essay "[Why It's Time To Stop Worrying About First World 'Gender Gaps,'](#)" helps us to understand that what many perceive as injustice in the workplace, is in fact a sign of real progress and freedom, of women being free to be themselves, which is to say, different from men.

Some may argue that patriarchal social factors encourage women into stereotypically feminine fields (childcare, nursing etc.), and discourage them from pursuing STEM related careers. However, if one were to make the case that societal factors determine choices made by men and women, you would expect that in more egalitarian countries, the sexes would make similar career choices, and thus, gender gaps would recede. However, studying sex differences across 55 different cultures, [Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, & Allik](#), came to the opposite conclusion (emphasis added):

With improved national wealth and equality of the sexes, it seems differences between men and women in personality traits do not diminish. On the contrary, the differences become conspicuously larger.

They also made this statement remarking on their own extensive research (emphasis added):

In this study, a collection of eight different gender equality indicators provided a comprehensive set of measures that assess disparity between male and female roles in society. *In every case, significant findings suggest that greater nation-level gender equality leads to psychological dissimilarity in men's and women's personality traits.*

Gender gaps do not decrease in egalitarian countries. Rather, they increase. According to the authors, this is because as "society becomes more prosperous and more egalitarian, *innate dispositional differences between men and women have more space to develop and the gap that exists between men and women in their personality traits becomes wider*" (emphasis added).

In other words, when people are free to pursue their interests, they naturally reflect men and women's innate differences. Is it so scandalous that, as Damore says, women are just not as interested in things and abstract systems as men are? If people are to be free, surely we must leave them alone; we mustn't *coerce* them into being like others, for there is no freedom in that. Besides, may it not be the truth, as people used to take for granted, that it is through their very differences that men and women *complement* one another? Is that state not balance, harmony and health? The American feminist strives to be the same as man, and her cultural influence is immense. Man responds, if he has any sense, by eschewing feminists, with whom romance must feel like punishment.

In our status-obsessed society, there are constant gripes about how women are “excluded” from exercising power in the workplace. Meanwhile, nobody says anything about the enormous psycho-biological power women possess simply by virtue of being women. This power, of course, is essentially determined by a woman’s attractiveness, which is closely associated with youth and good health. No surprise, then, that women all over the world are forever trying to appear as attractive as possible, to the cost of billions every year. Such power, though inevitably prevalent in the workplace, far transcends it: it is a law of Nature itself, and indeed one of the strongest. After all, much of the intense male status struggle amounts to being able to obtain a desirable woman.

Today we see many attractive young women spending much time posting photos of themselves on social media. How many wish to be a star! Hence that increasingly common phenomenon the duck face, which some might take for a kind of strange medical affliction: “Pucker up,” thinks the young beauty in her vanity; “everybody’s watching!” Like women on the many dating websites and apps, these social media darlings find that they can hardly keep up with all the male attention—surely an intoxicating pleasure, although doubtless often corrupting. No matter their intentions, and whether they are aware of it or not, such women are extremely powerful. The notion that a woman like Emily Ratajkowski is “oppressed” because of her “objectification” is absurd beyond description. Hers is a most willful objection; there is massive power in it; and even if the stunner was not affluent through her modeling and other endeavors, she would still not have to work: men would get in line to provide for her, now as ever. On the other hand, take away Bill Gates’ billions, and how many women would even give that unattractive, uncharming fellow the time of day?

Let’s examine another passage from “Google’s Ideological Echo

Chamber”:

Neither side is 100% correct and *both* viewpoints are necessary for a functioning society or, in this case, company. A company *too far to the right* may be slow to react, overly hierarchical, and untrusting of others. In contrast, a company *too far to the left* will constantly be changing (deprecating much loved services), *over* diversify its interests (ignoring or being ashamed of its core business), and *overly* trust its employees and competitors [my italics].

Here, as elsewhere in the memo, one looks in vain for “a facile defense of jingoism as political conservatism,” nor do we see an “easy dismissal of anyone not predetermined to be of use.” Reading Bogost on Damore, I am reminded of a passage from George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*: “Sometimes when I listen to these people talking, and still more when I read their books, I get the impression . . . [of] a kind of exciting heresy-hunt—a leaping to and fro of frenzied witch-doctors to the beat of tom-toms and the tune of ‘Fee fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of a right-wing deviationist!’” Unlike Bogost’s, Damore’s mind is distinctly balanced. The truth, *contra* Bogost, is that Damore is a man of courage and principle. He needn’t have written the memo. He had nothing to gain from it personally; rather, everything to lose. He knew very well that he could lose his lucrative job—which is just what happened—for arguing that the diversity issue might be made more fair, especially with respect to women, some of whom, as he says in the memo, might, in certain instances, be encouraged to work in ways better suited to their nature, as opposed to feeling compelled to adopt the workstyle that the ninny Bogost calls “machismo writ large.”

So far, we have found nothing to justify Ian Bogost’s

boogieman portrait of James Damore. One wonders, indeed, how the editors of the *Atlantic* could allow so reckless and wretched a work to be published. Did they not read Damore's memo and compare it to Bogost's illiterate interpretation? About incompetent editors A.E. Housman once wrote: "This method answers the purpose for which it was devised: it saves lazy editors from working and stupid editors from thinking. But somebody has to pay the price, and that somebody is the author." It is so with Bogost and his editors. Like him, the editors were lazy or stupid, or lazy *and* stupid, and now they all appear foolish.

Par for the course for one with a Ph.D. in Literature these days, Bogost is committed to misreading other writers in order to advance his political agenda. This vulgar approach to the life of the mind, especially deleterious in a university teacher, was memorably described by the great literary critic Marjorie Perloff in her [essay](#) *Literary Literacy* (1997):

If we judge by the scholarly articles and books English professors are currently publishing, the theory-of-the-day (and this inevitably has a trickle-down effect in the undergraduate classroom) is a form of cultural unmasking and exposure we might call 'Gotcha!' 'Gotcha,' the professor demonstrates, 'you thought Emily Dickinson was a brilliant feminist poet, but you know what? She was motivated by class interests as can be seen in her lack of concern for factory women!' Or gotcha!—the first edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, long thought to be a subversive masterpiece, was purposely priced out of the reach of the common reader—a case of collusion, if ever there was one, between author, bookseller, and capitalist investor. Again, the main interest of *Heart of Darkness*—gotcha!—is that it exposes Joseph Conrad as the imperialist and colonialist he really was! As for that so-called avant-gardist Gertrude

Stein—gotcha!—did you know that in old age she was ready to collaborate with the proto-Nazi Pétain government?

“Gotcha,” says Professor Bogost, feeling no need to make a disinterested argument. After all, he has authority over his students, and like him his colleagues, from the *Atlantic* down to Georgia Tech, are ignorant blockheads. Canters à la Bogost are all for opening up the Western Canon, and there’s a strong connection between the surfeit of [Foulcrow](#) avec [Jude Butter](#) and the dumbing down of our media and cultural and political institutions generally. How much of our day’s tedious and reductive social science would have been prevented if more people had studied High Literature! How much better informed would our journalists and politicians be! Alas that our universities elected to get rid of the Great Books Standard, replacing it with petty resentment and the similarly envious imitation of the hard sciences, now “speaking truth to power,” now all “seriousness, detachment, and objectivity,” in a farce that millions somehow manage to take seriously. Intellectuals like Bogost have tiresomely generic minds; always trying to work up “a dialogue,” their scholarship always at “the intersection” of some thing or other. Everything about them is unfailingly predictable. To read one of them is to read them all, and if they had any mercy in their bones they’d kill themselves.

“Soon, the fall term will commence at Georgia Tech,” Bogost writes. “I will take to the lectern in the introductory course to our bachelor of science degree in computational media. The program also hopes to make headway against the diversity struggle.” The diversity struggle! An eternal commitment, to be sure. Again, we may well deplore Bogost’s effect on his students, except insofar as his unwitting self-parody may help lighten them up. For instance, turning back to his [faculty profile](#) at Georgia Tech, we read: “Bogost’s videogames [he has

designed them] about social and political issues cover topics as varied as airport security, consumer debt, disaffected workers, the petroleum industry, suburban errands, pandemic flu, and tort reform.”

An artist-hero! Behold, students; it is the [Last Man!](#)

“Get ready, social-justice-warriors-in-training,” he announces. “This semester we are going to play video games, designed by me, which will show you how to be woke!”

“Like, Ian is so cool,” remarks young Brittany to Jennifer, putting down her pink, tiger-striped iPhone for three seconds.

“I know, right? And doesn’t he look like David Foster Wallace with that long hair? Hee-hee.”

In politics, the wonderfully ironic effect of persons like Bogost is to drive the nation more to the right and back toward the center. Any number of liberals can easily see this. Thus Steven Pinker tweeted a little while back: “Google drives a big sector of tech into the arms of Trump: fires employee who wrote memo about women in tech jobs.”

Cant on, cant on, Doctor Bogost;
cant on, cant on; it’s all in vain:
the Deplorables are not deceived,
but shall elect Donald Trump again.

Like the academy that “educated” him, Bogost’s writing prompts one to believe that God may well have passed the Last Judgment, if William Blake was right that the Last Judgment is an “overwhelming of Bad Art & Science.” Thus Bogost, so

burdened in his valley of deluded vision:

Reader, I want so desperately to leave you with an alternative. A better option, a new strategy. One that would anticipate and defang the inevitable maws crying, "Well, what's your solution, then?" But facile answers spun off-the-cuff by white men in power—aren't these the things that brought trouble in the first place?

Maybe there is an answer, then, after all: Just to shut up for a minute. To stop, and to listen, and even to step out of the way.

At last Ian Bogost, this white man in power, having conveyed the self-loathing that is evidently so natural and easy for him, has some reasonable advice, and as usual these days, it is the expert who should pay heed. Yes, Bogost, by this point in your essay one does "so desperately" want you to "shut up for a minute," or better still, "to listen, and even to step out of the way." But wait, we find that Bogost, as ever, is confused, for it is only after he has made his incoherent hatchet job that he wishes to have done, in order that everybody save a white male may guide the perplexed. Bogost is like a gambler who, having squandered his life savings in a night's indulgence, thereupon presumes to instruct all other gamblers on the folly and evil of gambling. Bogost is an utterly incompetent writer and moralist, yet in these unhappy times he might perhaps make common cause with the Christian televangelists: thus, between their hypocrisy and his, the Diversity Idol, now canting in tongues, would become sublimely inclusive.

[Wikipedia](#) tells us that Bogost is a philosopher. According to his [website](#), he provides "a bold new metaphysics that explores

how all things—from atoms to green chiles, cotton to computers—interact with, perceive, and experience one another.” Ah, superbly inclusive, and one has no doubt that his “things” all get along splendidly, because

in *Alien Phenomenology, or What It’s Like to Be a Thing*, Ian Bogost develops an object-oriented ontology that puts things at the center of being; a philosophy in which nothing exists any more or less than anything else; in which humans are elements, but not the sole or even primary elements, of philosophical interest.

Thomas Nagel, an exquisite mind, would not be honored by the allusion to his seminal article [“What Is it Like to Be a Bat,”](#) for in Ian Bogost’s mind “nothing [truthful] exists any more or less than anything else,” since nothing truthful exists at all. Indeed, Bogost’s mind is one in which “experience . . . withdraws from human comprehension and only becomes accessible through a speculative philosophy based on metaphor,” that is to say, on *delusion*. For Bogost thinks

humanity has sat at the center of philosophical thinking for too long. The recent advent of environmental philosophy and posthuman studies has widened our scope of inquiry to include ecosystems, animals, and artificial intelligence. Yet the vast majority of the stuff in our universe, and even in our lives, remains beyond serious philosophical concern.

Providing a new approach for understanding the experience of things as things. [sic] Bogost also calls on philosophers to rethink their craft. Drawing on his own experiences as a videogame designer, Bogost encourages professional thinkers to become makers as well, engineers

who construct things as much as they think and write about them.

This hilarious confusion is a perfect example of why most people should leave philosophy alone. Nagel argues that subjective experience is ineffable and irreducible by definition. Therefore, in order to know what it is like to be a bat, I'd have to be a bat myself. That Bogost could get from this severe epistemic position to a work in which he claims to offer "a new approach for understanding the experience of things as things" (as if things even had experiences, to say nothing of the *utterly unique and inexplicable character of all experience*, according to Nagel) shows what an amateur he is in philosophy and what a fraud in general. And perhaps not even Jorie Graham, academia's poet-sophist par excellence, could be interested in poeticizing on the phenomenology of cotton.

Seeing what he does with what he takes to be philosophy, it is no surprise that Ian Bogost made such a strawman of James Damore. Bogost would seem to be incapable of coherent criticism of Dr. Seuss. "Johnson was by no means of opinion," wrote James Boswell in *The Life of Samuel Johnson*,

that every man of a learned profession should consider it as incumbent upon him, or as necessary to his credit, to appear as an author. When in the ardour of ambition of literary fame, I regretted to him one day that an eminent Judge had nothing of it, and therefore would leave no perpetual monument of himself to posterity, "Alas, Sir (said Johnson), what a mass of confusion we should have, if every Bishop, and every Judge, every Lawyer, Physician and Divine, were to write books.

Bogost confirms the truth of Dr. Johnson's fear. Not enough intellectuals are content with modest cultural roles such as educating the young. All too many want to be "stars." And hence it happens that a man like Bogost makes an ass of himself. (Perhaps he will one day write a spiritual autobiography, or phenomenological confession: *How Bogost Became a Buttocks*.) And hence, too, that "mass of confusion," that academic herd philosophy called cultural studies and critical theory. Notice the most significant word in the passage from Bogost's website, the very revealing "professional." Bogost is not a thinker, but a *professional* thinker. That is to say, like the Greek sophists, he has lies for sale. Can you afford them? I should say that even if you are rich, the price is still too great.

For what sort of a man is it who believes "humanity has sat at the center of philosophical thinking for too long," who wants us to "become makers" of a world in which every thing, "from atoms to green chiles, cotton to computers," is of equal interest, where interest entails a judgment that a thing is valuable; that is, as valuable as anything else, but, therefore, without any value since if every thing has the same value as everything else, nothing has value at all, value being intelligible only by comparison. The answer is a man whose postmodern nature is its own burden, a man who is deep in error and misery, but who, instead of trying to clarify his unhappy muddle, takes refuge in fantastic delusion, thereby only reinforcing his malaise—for which he yet wants to be compensated! For recall, he is a "professional."

Yet how self-defeating is Bogost's postmodernism. If the woman I love does not matter to me more than the fellow across the street, then the relationship is stripped of its special value. And this, as it were, is the essence of a mind like Bogost's. Fundamentally afraid of life itself, the

postmodernist shirks from the hard work of severe evaluation and judgment. In this he is like a man who, upon being told that he must climb a mountain in order to obtain a medicine he needs to be in good health, though it is one that only so many can have, declares that doing so is too painful, since thereby others should be deprived. The result is melancholy, sickness and despair, all because he refused to recognize that truth is not determined by mere feeling. One might pity Bogost, who merits pity if anyone does, but the problem is that he intends to infect the rest of us with his disease, which he takes for wisdom and virtue.

And so Bogost projects his illness onto the external world as such, leaving us with his worldview, so dangerously simplistic: Everybody is born a blank slate; therefore, of equal ability. The environment, with its "unequal" ink, imprints itself on us. Accordingly, some of us are disadvantaged. So we need more diversity, affirmative action, redistributive justice, and statism generally. And yet, as we should already know by now in history, this is a naive path to tyranny, because if difference *per se* is considered unjust, then the only solution is to make everyone quite literally the same: for equality, where it is actually coherent, is sameness. Therefore, to effect "social justice," we must all become the same, like a mad God who chooses to bungle His creation. For, so long as I differ from you in some way or other, it will always be possible to make a value judgment—of inferiority or superiority—concerning that difference. And this would be true even if everyone had the same amount of money, even if there were no private property, and so on. The irony of the diversity crowd is that it is diversity itself that troubles them. Only utter sameness can end their plight. But then what will they have to complain about? For in their deep inner malaise, they need an object to vent on; they need something to hate, albeit under the guise of righteousness. Again, they are pitiable, for they know not what they do, and

yet we must stop their influence, because its culmination will be the end of America itself.

Like the envy that is its source, equality of outcome derives from human psychology, from the permanent truth that there's nothing we children of pride detest more than the thought: "That person is *better* than me." So it is also with the related concept of "implicit bias." Here too the driving force is rooted in our dark human nature, in people being unwilling to recognize superior ability—unless, of course, it is their own. For superiority by its very nature induces a burning, violent envy, like a child who wants to destroy his parent's favored sibling. Indeed, from childhood on, man—the esteeming animal—defines himself in terms of competition, rank, hierarchy. No artist or athlete wants to be *equal* to another. Not every man, waxing indignant about inequality, wants the same income as every neighbor. Almost none do, in fact. Like suffering and death, this extreme competitiveness is a law of Nature, from which we merely issue. Try to get rid of it, and see what mediocrity, corruption and degeneration follow. I say, look around you. Perchance you will see Ian Bogost shedding his postmodern tears.

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