

ETHICS vs. MORALITY: POLITICAL ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION

Bulent Temel
Atilim University, Turkey
btemel@post.harvard.edu

Abstract:

This article examines a controversial case in a Turkish university in which an undergraduate student of visual communications design prepared a porn video as his graduation thesis. The project, which was carried out 'to find out the limits of academic freedom,' resulted in the firings of three professors who approved the thesis proposal -but failed the actual thesis- and sparked a heated debate in the country. The case spells a divergence between the distinct perspectives of philosophy and political economics. Philosophical tradition contends that producing knowledge is a function of the separation of ethics and morality, and normative judgments passed on research that observes academic guidelines are detrimental to the process. While the thesis may be controversial from the angle of morality to some observers, it is endorsable from the viewpoint of intellectual freedom. The issue reveals a negative spillover of the practical link between academia and politics in Turkey's higher education system. This peculiar form of political economics in academia begs the question of whether a secular and libertarian state is a prerequisite of human progress.

Keywords: academic freedom, philosophy, political economy, morality, progress

1. INTRODUCTION

An interview that was published in Turkish monthly *Tempo* in the early 2011 sparked a colorful debate on the subjects of academic freedom, moral ethics and human progress. An undergraduate student at Istanbul's Bilgi University has prepared a porn movie as his graduation thesis in the school's program in visual communications design. His motivation was "to do something to show me the limits of academic freedom."¹ The student's thesis advisors turned on a green light to the idea, and a porn movie was shot with six students in the university's studios at Kuştepe. The movie that displayed softcore heterosexual sex scenes ended up taking an F, and compelled the student to prepare a makeup project to graduate. While the case went largely unnoticed for months, an interview the student gave to a monthly magazine brought it into the national attention. The public discourse that followed the interview eventually resulted in the firings of three professors who were associated with the thesis.

The layoffs diversified the public opinion even further. A set of observers criticized the thesis as an inappropriate project that has no place in academia. They argued that the students who prepared such an outrageous project and the academic staff who allowed its preparation were out of line, and their judgments violated the code of scholarly conduct. Punitive reaction of the university's administration was justified as it protected the respectability of the university and the moral nucleus of the society. On the other side, supporters of the thesis argued that academic freedom cannot be restrained with moral concerns if academia is expected to lead progress. The subject thesis is a valuable project as it underscores the importance of this principle regardless of whether or not it expands the body of knowledge in the field of visual communications design. Throughout history, new knowledge was created as a result of the courage and creativity of iconoclastic thinkers who satisfied their curiosity and spoke their minds while turning a blind eye to the public criticisms against their works. Without their fortitude, human civilization could not have advanced, and living conditions could not have improved to reach their levels today. The student's courage and his professors' judgments ought to be applauded while their university's decision must be condemned.

The porn-thesis controversy is an intricate case that warrants a multidisciplinary outlook. The following pages will examine it from the peculiar viewpoints of philosophy and political economics. The history of expressive freedom will be revisited in order to get a sense of its role in human advancement. Additionally, dynamics within the Turkish higher education system will be laid out in an effort to explore the political economics behind the university's decision to go after the three professors.

1.1 Arguments

The President's Office at Bilgi rationalized the university's decision to fire professors on the grounds that the thesis did not contain any scientific, artistic or academic quality, and its preparation and evaluation in a university is inappropriate ethically and professionally. Conservative columnist Fatma K. Barbarosoğlu interprets the thesis as a twisted manifestation of the disturbance of seculars from the re-emergence of conservatism in Turkey. For this clash to be resolved, she argues that conservatives should remain distant to the discourse. Because there is a fierce ideological competition between conservative and liberal segments of the Turkish society, inclusion of the conservatives into the debate would stimulate a new *we-they* perception among the secular people, and distract them from examining the issue from a moral angle. 'I do believe that if the nation's more conservative ranks can place a distance between themselves and this issue,' writes Barbarosoğlu, "those in the 'other neighborhood' will be able to have more successful debates amongst themselves about the meaning of this all. The moment the conservatives enter the debate, people's natural instinct is to 'protect their own ranks', which skews the entire dialogue."²

A media studies professor in İzmir, Oğuz Adanır notes that the fact that the student gave an interview to a magazine about his thesis points to his insincerity all along. He argues that examining academic freedom

¹ Türker, 2011.

² Barbarosoğlu, 2011.

is the business of academicians, not students. 'If,' Adanır says, 'the student turns out to be an academician some day, then he can question the extent of academic freedom.'³ This approach is parallel to that of Murat Belge who teaches literature at Bilgi. Belge finds an undergraduate student's aspiration to explore the limits of freedom in his university inappropriate. He writes that 'a student who is at the thesis phase in his studies is not at a place to examine such things. Writing a graduation thesis means that you are the one being examined. His capacity to graduate would be examined by his professor. [...] If a student wants to see the scope of academic freedom, he can do it in any other field than porn.'⁴

The argument that a student is not at a position to examine the limits of expressive freedom in academia is a product of a condescending and autocratic mind that claims a monopoly on intellect. Scholarship requires welcoming ideas from all minds regardless of their academic titles. An undergraduate student could be perfectly capable of producing ideas that are useful for scientific inquiry. Examining the limits to academic freedom by presenting a porn thesis is an idea in its own right. From Kyoto to Sorbonne, Harvard to ETH Zurich, the finest colleges in the world that expand the frontiers of knowledge consistently utilize undergraduate students in their research as research assistants as well as seminar participants. Just like an academic is free to explore the scope of intellectual liberty in academia, students are free to do the same as this exploration does not necessitate professional credentials. If there has to be a dichotomy between scholars and students, which is a conviction we reject, the scale could tip to the favor of students as their detachment from commercial interests and youth as a factor of original thinking would provide a larger intellectual space to produce unrestricted ideas. Dr. Adanır's supposition that academicians are better positioned to question the conventional wisdom is a product of misguided naiveté that fails to factor in professional risks associated with such behaviors. The very fact that Dr. Adanır and Dr. Belge question the student's qualification rather than the substance of his endeavor demonstrate that holding an academic position comes with its peculiar set of restrictions and priorities. In a concerning breach of scientific methodology, Dr. Belge goes far enough to write that he 'concludes from the discourse on the subject that there is no hypothesis inside the thesis' even though he openly admits he has not read the thesis. From this unsubstantiated speculative inference, he jumps to a comment that the absence of hypothesis demonstrates that the student 'did not understand what thesis writing is about.'⁵

An architecture professor at İstanbul's Kültür University, Hakkı Yırtıcı approaches the discourse from a different angle, and disputes the characterization of the thesis as a porn piece. He contends that the thesis cannot be considered as porn, because it was guided by amateur emotions that do not exist in professional adult film industry. This psychological aspect was evident from the fact that the female student agreed to take part in the movie, but when the first male student backed out in the last minute, she refused to act with the next two prospective male actors, because she did not like them. She agreed to participate only after acquainting with a third student at a café, and felt better about him. Dr. Yırtıcı finds this emotional process of selection as a "stark contrast to a porn movie in which professional actors [...] simply reproduce the lust demanded by consumers of their product."⁶ He supports his case with a comment from Şahin K., a Turkish male porn star who concurred that the video is a homework, not porn.

Yırtıcı notes that the three professors who approved the thesis' proposal deserve acclamation just as the student who endeavored to produce the controversial work. A good scholar has to have the heart and open-mindedness to control his ego in his relationship with his students. He explains that "homework is a form of power struggle between two parties. Deep inside, the student who prepares it is upset at the professor who makes him do it. He wants to stretch the limits, and rebel against the compelling teacher. Professor, on the other hand, wants the homework to remain within the guidelines, because if it doesn't, he feels like his authority is being challenged. [...] A good educator is the one who welcomes this challenge."⁷

³ Türker, 2011.

⁴ Belge, 2011.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Yırtıcı, 2011.

⁷ Ibid.

Positivism is the prevalent intellectual current in the 21st Century scholarship. In contemporary science, the room for a social construct like morality is minimal. The business of university is to acknowledge that sentimentality compromises reliability in research, and avoid making normative judgments on scholarship. Porn-making is a legitimate subject of study in the field of visual arts that is no less relevant than other fields like documentary-making, aerial photography or portraiture. A common declaration by 600 students who accused Bilgi administrators with suppressing the freedom of expression emphasized this point: "Research topics cannot be restricted in academia. The role of an academic advisor is to evaluate the topic with respect to the field of study and guide the student so he produces within academic standards, not to censor his topic. For a video with sexual content to be a 'porn movie', it has to target an audience, be designed to arouse it, and distributed and exhibited for the purpose of making money. On the other hand, a graduation thesis in the field of visual communications design in photography and video is an experimental or critical research on the presentation, aesthetics and techniques in the field of adult movie making. Pornography can be a legitimate subject of analysis in the fields of visual communications design, photography and video just like it has been in other disciplines across the world."⁸

The thesis at Bilgi University cannot be treated as porn as long as it remains within the confines of academics as a sample of a particular way of producing porn movies. Because it was not produced towards commercial purposes, it should have been protected under the principles of freedom of expression in academia. Remarks by the three scholars who lost their jobs in this incident suggest that they perceived the thesis in the same way, and held the same position about it. The scholars wrote "we failed the student because of the conceptual and applicative insufficiency of his thesis, not because of his subject."⁹ This distinction could also be unveiled with an hypothetical exercise that a person obtains a copy of the tape, and sells it in the commercial market for a value. In that case, that person would be in violation of intellectual copyright laws just like a person who published a PhD dissertation as a commercial book without the consent of the author would be. That act would also mark the point when the thesis video turns into "porn," which would incriminate the person who sells it as an illegal (unlicensed) distributor of pornographic materials. However, the end towards which the thesis was prepared, and the way by which it is currently reserved (library reserves) make the thesis an academic product, and its preparer cannot be considered as a commercial producer of porn. If he wants to prevent any misuses of his thesis in the future, he can simply exercise his right to demand his thesis to be removed from the school's library stacks. On a well-known (and controversial) case, this was an option exercised by Alan Greenspan who had New York University remove his PhD dissertation from the stacks of Bobst Library in 1987 when he assumed the role of the Chairman of the US Federal Reserve.¹⁰

The fact that the Bilgi thesis is porn-related shifts the discourse on it to a moral ground from the sphere of intellectual freedoms. It results in the thesis' treatment as an act of social provocation rather than a scholarly investigation. While academia is not detached from society, the very nature of its work (knowledge creation) requires a higher degree of freedom than what is typically granted to the society at large. In both natural sciences that relies on proof, and social sciences that builds on persuasion; dissociation of mind from constraints like morality or self-interest is a prerequisite of dialectic and rhetoric used in these fields, respectively. In order to conduct their research without any fear of persecution, people performing academic work must be legally shielded against non-academic influences just like the diplomats or politicians are with their respective immunities. In a ruling in *Adler v. Board of Education*, the US Supreme Court remarked that: "What happens under [the Feinberg Law] is typical of what happens in a police state. Teachers are under constant surveillance, their pasts are combed for signs of disloyalty, their utterances are watched for clues to dangerous thoughts. A pall is cast over the classrooms. There can be no real academic freedom in that environment. Where suspicion fills the air and holds scholars in line for fear of their jobs, there can be no exercise of the free intellect."¹¹

Liberal columnist Yıldırım Türker remonstrates that the privilege of academic immunity is not appreciated even by many scholars in Turkey. He writes "The most shaming side of this story is how some

⁸ Deliklitaş, 2011.

⁹ Unversitehaber.com.

¹⁰ McTague, 2008.

¹¹ *Adler v Board of Education*.

academicians hid behind the feminist ideology with a pure moralist outlook, and went on to apologize from the conservative world. Meanwhile, the fact that some lazy feminists oppose all kinds of porn with a reasoning that it is an 'exploitation of female body' demonstrates how insulated our intellectual world is. This inertia of thoughts and 'feminist status quo' are being fed by those who memorize that female politicians should be supported no matter what their political stances are. [...] The fact that some people who had been defending democratization of academia, its liberation from YÖK [Turkish Higher Education Council] and unrestrained academic liberty are now taking a prohibitive position on the porn-thesis issue demonstrates how they gave up to this social hypocrisy. This [...] attempt to construct higher education on the mutually restrictive dynamics between [negative] rights and liberty [...] are an engine of conservatization. This is the country of intellectuals who shake their fingers to one another with the motto that 'there is a limit to everything,' and [...] draw the boundaries of freedom without even imagining any freedom."¹²

Porn-thesis controversy embodies a predictable challenge that is linked to commercialization of academics. Bottom line for administrators at a self-sustaining non-profit like Bilgi University is to maintain their school's economic viability by attracting new students and retaining the current ones. Albeit justifiable from a business standpoint, this motivation can be troubling from the academic perspective when it works against the notion of expressive freedom. When a tradeoff emerges between commercial concerns and freedom of speech, the choice would likely be *liberty* for academicians, but *business* for administrators. Mathematician Ali Nesin expressed his position on this clash of priorities at a letter that urged his own administrators at Bilgi to resign: "Whether or not a porn movie can make a graduation thesis can only be discussed academically and ethically. [...] A university cannot be administered with concerns like 'how do the parents react?' or 'what does the society say? I invite those who brag about their 10 year Laureate experience to read Magna Carta with a 1,000 year tradition."¹³

2. PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK

What does *academic freedom* entail? In an earlier conceptualization in 1969, the American Association of University Professors described academic freedom as the "Absence of, or protection from, such restraints or pressures –chiefly in the form of sanctions threatened by the state or church authorities, or by the authorities, faculties or students of colleges and universities, but occasionally by other power groups in society– as are designed to create in the minds of academic scholars [...] fears and anxieties that may inhibit them from studying and investigating whatever they are interested in, and from freely discussing, teaching or publishing."¹⁴ In Kadish's words, academic freedom "signifies the intellectual autonomy of the members of the academic community –freedom of the faculty in research and teaching, freedom of the students in learning, and freedom of both from imposed conceptions of truth."¹⁵ In a seminal ruling in 1957, the U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote "the essentiality of the freedom in the community of American universities is almost self-evident. No one should underestimate the vital role in a democracy that is played by those who guide and train our youth. To impose any strait jacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our nation.[...] Scholarship cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Teachers and students must always feel free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding; otherwise our civilization will stagnate and die."¹⁶ While the US laws are not legally binding in the sovereign state of Turkey, their underlying principles are universally endorsable. The punitive response of the university administrators in the porn-thesis incident desecrated the most fundamental professional right of the professors who were laid off.

Stem-cell research controversy in the United States demonstrates that the place of morality in science, and the limits of scientific inquiry are debates that have not been settled in our time. While conservatives oppose stem-cell research on the grounds that freezing embryos throughout the process is a form of

¹² Türker, 2011.

¹³ Bianet.com.

¹⁴ American Association of University Professors.

¹⁵ Kadish, 1982.

¹⁶ *Sweezy vs. New Hampshire*.

murder, liberals respond that embryos do not constitute “human” biologically or legally, and research that can potentially end some of the worst and deadliest diseases like Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and cancer may be ended out of the findings of stem-cell research. Positions taken on the subject have been widely diverse among the local, state and federal governments, legists and legislators across the U.S. Philosophical underpinning of the detachment of academic thought from outside influences can be traced back to the emergence of three intellectual concepts: The idea of intellectual freedom, which was born in Greece, emerged in France with Renaissance, and ripened with the Enlightenment; the idea of academic autonomy, which arose in European colleges, and the idea of rights granted by the U.S. Bill of Rights. The 15th Century Renaissance was a *rebirth* (*renaissance*) of classical civilization and knowledge, and a reaffirmation of the philosophy of Plato.¹⁷ In his interpretation of the achievements and significance of the ‘age of reason’, 18th Century German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote “Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's intelligence without the guidance of another. Such immaturity is self-caused if it is not caused by lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another.”¹⁸

The porn-thesis showcases a competition between moralist and positivist schools of thought. “Moral” thinking here refers to a thought process that involves nonepistemic phenomena, but not to “values” as used in the common language. While values should and will always be a part of science (for instance, what is called “academic standard” is in fact a set of values in science), the place of non-cognitive phenomena in scholarship is questionable at best. George Howard proposes a definitive distinction between “epistemic” concepts, which are cognizable such as honesty and “non-epistemic” concepts, which are not detectable with cognition such as political ideology.¹⁹ Scientific research is to be built on epistemic concepts in order to earn universal applicability and reliability.

Mutual exclusiveness of morality and positivism derives from the irreconcilable ways of thinking and concluding in these two epistemologies (Figure-1 below). Positivist inquiry is an attempt to satisfy impersonal curiosity to investigate natural or social phenomena in order to make explanatory, testable, accumulative and nomological inferences about them. On the other hand, morality-based thinking produce nonpredictive, non-accumulative, untestable and normative ideas that apply only to relationships between living things. Even though morality can impact human living positively, it cannot aid a scholar in expanding the frontiers of knowledge. As Aristotle noted 2,300 years ago, decisive dissociation of science from morality –if not from values– is congruent with the definitive characteristic of scientific knowledge: “Science is the knowledge of everything that cannot be otherwise.”

Figure 1: Differences between positivist and moralist inquiry²⁰

<u>Moralist Theory</u>	<u>Positivist Theory</u>
Norms →	Facts →
Values → Rightness	Data → Truth
Principles →	Method →
Discourse: Practical	Discourse: Theoretical

3. POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ACADEMICS IN TURKEY

In Turkish higher education system, private colleges are private only in the sense that they are owned by private individuals rather than the state. These schools named *foundation colleges* can only be established by a non-profit organization, which means that their profits cannot be used for any purpose other than their future operations. This system was chosen for the purpose of curbing profit motivations of private entrepreneurs who are believed to be inclined to raise their schools’ prices, if they were allowed to retain profits. The system of non-profit colleges prevents high quality education to turn into a luxury available only for children of the affluent, and jeopardize macroeconomic stability as a high rate of tuition hikes would apply inflationist pressure on the economy. In this structure, government assumes a

¹⁷ Merlan, 1947.

¹⁸ Kant, 1949.

¹⁹ Howard, 1985.

²⁰ Kurtines, Alvarez & Azmitia, 1990.

regulatory, redistributive and sponsoring role in higher education. A government organ (YÖK, short for the “Institute of Higher Education” in Turkish) establishes performance standards for universities, brings forth policies such as a program of rotating employment for junior academicians across the country, and subsidizes universities.

Alongside favorable outcomes, there is a drawback of the idea of centralized management of higher education. Centralized governance translates into the placement of the state in an authoritative position rather than a purely administrative one. College administrators feel pressured to maintain good relations with YÖK in order to receive necessary permissions and funds from the government. This concentrated power structure diminishes operational and intellectual autonomy of universities, and turns them into agents of ideological transformation ruling administrations would like to accomplish. Against this background, Bilgi administrators’ decision to play the guardian of morality in the porn-thesis incident surfaces as a strategic move in a religiously conservative political climate in Turkey today. The fact that Bilgi fired professors not after the thesis was submitted to the university, but after the student publicized the issue with a magazine interview six months later supports the view that Bilgi’s decision was politically-motivated. In its press release, the university announced that “the Office of the President gives the priority to the protection of the reputation of Bilgi University students while welcoming reaction from the academic staff.”²¹

The fashion by which Bilgi University handled this case spells its transformation of “development university” into a “market university,” in which “threats to academic freedom are [...] more economic” than anything else.²² Such a motivation would not only be subordination of scholarship to business and political interests, but also a violation of the Magna Charta Universitatum signed by Bilgi University. Along with 720 other universities in 79 countries, Bilgi University signed the pact that was initiated by the University of Bologna to establish and maintain high academic standards and freedom in the world. Bilgi administrators’ decision to lay off the professors who were involved in the controversial thesis violates the first of the four fundamental principles of the declaration: “The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organized because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the demands of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.”²³

4. CONCLUSION

Opposition to the porn-thesis is mistaken in its attachment of the issue to the concept of negative freedom. Negative freedom refers to the freedom of a person “from” something. The porn-thesis is not promoted publicly in a way that violates the (negative) freedom of people from exposure to it. The thesis was stacked in the university’s library just like all other theses so that it can be utilized in future research. Because universal academic standards require theses to be written documents even in the fields like archeology, anthropology, architecture or photography in which works are often based on visual documents, the video was stacked as an attachment to the actual written thesis at Bilgi. It was neither forcefully shown to anyone who would not want to see it, nor provided in such a way that anyone who is not related to it academically could access it. If Bilgi University’s library is open to public and the university attracts a high traffic due to people who flock in the library to see the video, then the library administrators can decide to provide the video only to researchers who demonstrate their professional attachment to the issue. This, however, would be a purely administrative detail that is irrelevant to the philosophical or political economic analyses of the issue.

If the actor students who took place in the video do not consent to its availability to the general public or even relevant researchers, they can simply exercise their right to demand the thesis to be removed from the library’s stacks any time. Although consenting to participate in the video indicates that no such

²¹ Hurriyetport.

²² Zeleza, 2003.

²³ Magna Charta Universitatum.

opposition occur (at least, at the time of its shooting), this right must be perceived to belong to every person who appears in the video. The right to privacy of the students, however, should not challenge the intellectual property rights of the student who prepared the thesis. If an actor student demands the withdrawal of the video from the stacks, but the thesis student insists to keep it available; then the dispute would need to be settled in court, which is another dimension of the case that has no relevance to the judgments made by professors and administrators that is subject to the present paper.

The student who prepared the controversial thesis demonstrated curiosity to explore the boundaries of academic freedom he had been told to exist. His curiosity is the most primary element in all scientific expedition. Professors who approved his idea but failed his project took on the exact role that true scholars are supposed to take. They welcomed the courageous attempt of exploration, but evaluated the final output according to its compliance with academic standards. The open-mindedness shown by these four people (and to a lesser extent the other four who acted in the video) is not unlike that of Galileo when he claimed that planets revolve around the sun rather than the earth. His supposition, which was fatally contrarian to the popular belief in the intellectual climate of the 17th Century led the way to a paradigm shift in scientific thinking. Thanks to his courage, truth began to be searched by examining phenomena that were not believed to be deity-given. The great value of iconoclastic courage is a response to the convenience and safety of supporting the prevalent mindset in a society. As a French postmodern philosopher once said, “most of the problems we face today stem from us, the Westerners’ reluctance to admit the possibility that there may be other rationalities than ours.” Regardless of whether or not the porn-thesis is favored in the final account by its directors or the public, it has become an accomplishment in the sense that it has revealed and potentially loosened the limits of academic freedom in Turkey with the discourse it created. The fact that the project attracted substantial attention (support or fury) from a wide national audience, and made people to think and argue about the limits of expressive liberties was a positive contribution to the intellectual capital in Turkey. As the history of philosophy tells us, those who provoke thought contributes to knowledge no less than others who advance it. This point has taken the form of concern for conservative columnist Fatma K. Barbarosoğlu who wrote that “the greatest and deepest response to the ‘exaggerated sharing’ of the director who [...] produced the porn-thesis movie as a response to rising conservatism is to remain indifferent to it.”²⁴

Contribution of the Bilgi student to academic freedom in Turkey is analogous to that of Lawrence Summers who caused a major controversy in 2005. During a speech at the prestigious National Bureau of Economics Research (NBER), Summers who was the President of Harvard University at the time argued that one of the reasons why women were outnumbered as scientific leaders was their “innate difference in aptitude” from men. The remarks prompted fury among the intellectuals across the globe. People from different parts of the United States and abroad expressed their angst over Summer’s remarks, and blamed him of sexism and bigotry.²⁵ Summers had to step down from his post about a year later in response to Harvard’s loss of confidence in his suitability as the President. However, over time, interpretations of Summer’s behavior began to pluralize. More and more people began to approach his nerve-wracking comments from a Schumpeterian sense of “creative destruction.” Summer’s comments could have been a case of premeditated provocation for the sole purpose of releasing the topic from the walls of the ivory tower, and earning it national significance by attracting the mass media’s attention. He was an academic hero who sacrificed his own career for the sake of improving a problem in academia, not a sexist bigot whose opinions are incompatible with the 21st Century intellect. For people who had firsthand exposure to Summer’s agitative but also pragmatic personality (like the author of the present paper as a former graduate student of his), this theory sounded as realistic as the initial reaction given to him. Summers later confirmed that he was “trying to provoke discussion.” A fellow Harvard economist Richard Freeman agreed: “A lot of people who absolutely disagreed with him were not irritated. He said again and again, ‘I’m here to provoke you,’ He is very good at stimulating debate, but he cares deeply about increasing diversity in the science and engineering workforces, especially since we have many more women getting Ph.D.’s in science and engineering than ever before.”²⁶

²⁴ Barbarosoğlu, 2011.

²⁵ Bombardieri, 2005.

²⁶ Dillan, 2005.

The porn-thesis conflict is a classic example of an opinion that precedes information. The subject thesis is a thesis about porn that is supplemented by a video, not a porn piece presented under the cover of a thesis. Much like an economics thesis is comprised of a main text that announces its findings, and appendices that present the empirical data that led the researcher to those conclusions, this thesis is made up of a written text supplemented by a related video to support the hypothesis put forth inside the text. A thesis that *includes* sexual scenes is no less admissible as a research project than a thesis *about* sex. To date, seven theses on the topic of porn have been prepared and passed in six Turkish universities, including the Police Academy and Gazi University with conservative leanings in their approach to education.²⁷

For academic inquiry to continue to further human progress, academic works have to be conducted under ethical, but not moral, guidelines. Professional principles such as universal standards of research, teaching and writing must be embraced while a divisive, restrictive and preventive dimension of morality needs to be confined to private life. Discussing an academic matter on the grounds of morality, as Bilgi Administration did, is a disservice to the intellectual mission for which the very institution of university was established. While history provides many occasions in which what is considered scientific knowledge was dismissed as reliable knowledge over time, morality is a worse base than free thought to guide the search for knowledge. Morality is too subjective, relative and vague to even be agreed on at a given time. 19th Century British philosopher John Stuart Mill wrote “If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind. [...] When there are persons to be found, who form an exception to the apparent unanimity of the world on any subject, even if the world is in the right, it is always probable that dissentients have something worth hearing to say for themselves, and that truth would lose something by their silence. [...] Strange that they should imagine that they are not assuming infallibility, when they acknowledge that there should be free discussion on all subjects which can possibly be doubtful, but think that some particular principle or doctrine should be forbidden to be questioned because it is so certain, that is, because they are certain that it is certain.”²⁸

²⁷ Aydemir, 2011.

²⁸ Mill, 1859.

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