

Statement by Keith Burgess-Jackson, J.D., Ph.D.
(Copyright © 2017 by Keith Burgess-Jackson)
(Publishable in Its Entirety or Not at All)
3 December 2017

You may have heard or read some things in recent days that cast me in a bad light. Much of what has been said or written about me is motivated by hatred and, perhaps because of that, bears no relation to the truth; so please hear me out.

I'm 60 years old and happily married (despite political differences that make for interesting household conversations). I've been a professor (of philosophy) since August 1988, all but the first of these 29 years at my present institution. I plan to be here for another 10 years, or even longer, for I love being a professor and (if I may say so) am very good at what I do. Until shortly after the attacks of 11 September 2001, I was a man of the left. Indeed, I was a man of the left for more than half my adult life: from 1974, when I was 17 years old and becoming politically aware, until 2001, when I was 44. That's 27 years, compared to the 16 or so in which I've been a man of the right. (I agree with the philosopher C. D. Broad that "Not to be radical when one is young argues hardness of heart; to remain so when one is old suggests softness of head.")

Everyone, so far as I could tell, loved me (or pretended to) when I was a leftist, but things changed when I became a conservative, especially when (and in part because) I started a weblog ("blog" for short). Long-time friends walked away, sometimes with no explanation; colleagues looked at me suspiciously, perhaps because they could no longer assume that I would laugh at their politically mean-spirited jokes or take kindly to their presumptuousness. The thing that leftists hated most about my "conversion" was that, having *been* one of them, I understood (first-hand) what they believed, what they valued, what their objectives were, and what they were willing to do in pursuit of their objectives. I was a traitor to the leftist cause, and traitors must be dealt with severely, if only as a deterrent to others.

Things became tense when Donald Trump ran for president in 2015. I was one of the first academics, and maybe one of the few individuals at my university, to support Trump, and I continue to do so, proudly and publicly. Only those who read my blog—or talked to someone who read my blog—knew this, of course, for I keep my politics out of my work. I don't post items on my office door (as do some of my colleagues); I don't have a bumper sticker on my car; I don't put political signs in my yard; and I certainly don't talk politics with my colleagues or students. I'm proud to say that there is no bias of any kind in my classroom, and I have never so much as *mentioned* my blog in any course I've

taught. If a student finds my blog on his or her own, that's fine, for I had nothing to do with it. The blog is "out there," so to speak, waiting to be discovered. I post items on everything from politics to sports to music to language to food, and many other topics besides. The blog is my literary outlet. I argue (in the philosophical sense); I explain; I criticize arguments; I muse; I ponder; I think aloud; I laugh at and with others; I rant. I have every right to rant, just as you do, as long as it's done on my own time.

I'm a firm believer in compartmentalization. My personal and political life is distinct from my professional life. I work at home, for example, rather than in my office on campus. I don't use any equipment owned by my university. I have my own computers, my own printers, my own Internet connection, my own supplies, my own bookshelves and cabinets, and my own books. I use my office on campus only to hold office hours. Students occasionally laugh when they visit, because the office contains only a desk, a chair, a file cabinet, a coat rack, an empty bookshelf, a recycling bin, and two chairs for visitors. My blog has nothing to do—repeat, *nothing to do*—with my employer or my employment. Indeed, in the informational section of my blog (entitled "About"), I don't even *mention* my university (by name)! I say, quite clearly, that "The views expressed in this blog are not necessarily shared by others at my university (which is legalese for 'I speak only for myself')." As far as I'm concerned, my blogging is of no more concern to my employer than is my cycling, my guitar playing, my recreational reading, or my movie viewing. If I were a bartender in my spare time, that would be different, for I would presumably be paid for that work, and I'm supposed to be working full time for my university. I make no money from my blog, and never have. In fact, I pay an annual fee of \$300 for the privilege of having it! Blogging is my hobby, plain and simple. It is as walled off from my professional life as an activity could be.

On a related point, I want to assure those who don't know me that my political views never enter the classrooms in which I teach. Please note that I teach all of the hot-button issues: ethics, philosophy of religion, biomedical ethics, philosophy of law, and social and political philosophy. I can count on one hand the number of times during my 29-year career (which doesn't count my five years as a graduate student) when a student has complained of bias. On one of those occasions, a white male student accused me of being biased against white males! At the end of one semester-long Philosophy of Religion course, during which we covered (among other things) the classic arguments for and against the existence of God, I asked the students to write on a piece of paper one of the following words: "theist," "agnostic," "atheist." They were to guess which word describes me. I was delighted to see an equal number of guesses for each of the three choices. In short, I take great pride in my professionalism. I wish every professor did, but I know that some (perhaps many) do not. Academia is, in my opinion, so politicized that norms of professionalism, integrity,

honesty, and civility have lost their meaning. Some professors believe that it is their job to indoctrinate rather than to educate students, though of course they refrain from saying so publicly lest students, parents, or administrators complain. I am embarrassed to have such people in my midst. They should find another line of work.

Fast forward to November 2017. Roy Moore, a former Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, is running for United States senator. He is, among other things, a devout Christian, for which reason he is hated. (It's a sad commentary on our society that people, especially Christians, are hated for their religious faith.) There appears to be a particular antipathy for Moore (and for Trump, I might add) in academia. In fact, this is one of the reasons I am vilified. Leftists tell themselves that the only reason someone would be a conservative is either ignorance (of relevant facts) or stupidity. They find it difficult to make sense of me, for I have five college degrees (a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, a law degree, and a doctoral degree in philosophy from a highly ranked program). They can't plausibly claim that I'm ignorant or stupid, so they resort to what leftists always resort to, namely, personal destruction. (I call it political assassination.)

The most recent attacks on me stem from a one-paragraph post on my blog, written on 11 November 2017. Judge Moore, as I'm sure you're aware, is accused of various improprieties (there is no need to be more specific) with underage women (or girls). He has vigorously denied the allegations and continues his campaign for the United States Senate. I accord him the benefit of the doubt. This doesn't mean that I have formed a belief in his innocence that is based on all relevant facts; it means that *I am going to believe him until I have reason to believe otherwise*. I assume that each of you reading this would expect to be given the same benefit of the doubt upon being accused of a moral transgression or criminal offense. It's an application of the Golden Rule. One reason for according Judge Moore the benefit of the doubt is that I have seen many cases in which, for political reasons, individuals are falsely charged with immoral or illegal conduct. Some of the accused, such as Clarence Thomas, fight back. Thomas famously described the politically driven attacks on him as "a high-tech lynching." Judge Moore is, in my view, the target of a political lynching.

One of the things that struck me in the debate about Judge Moore is the oft-repeated claim that his behavior was inappropriate *merely because of the vast age difference between him and at least one of the girls he is alleged to have shown interest in (or been involved with)*. One of the girls, I have read, was 14 at the time, while Judge Moore was 32. This 18-year age difference may seem large to you, but it seems insignificant to me, since my own grandparents had a 26-year age difference. My maternal grandfather was born on 16 October 1880; my grandmother, whom he married when he was 41 and she was 15, was born on 15 April 1907. Here is my entire blog post from 11 November 2017:

What's the big deal about a 32-year-old man courting [note that I said "courting," not "having sex with," "imposing himself on," or "marrying"] a 14-year-old girl? My maternal grandmother was 15 years old when she married and 16 years old when she conceived her first child. Her husband was 41 and 42. They had 10 children during the next 20 years. This was normal back then. I'm sure it was normal in Alabama 40 years ago as well. The age of consent in Alabama even today is 16 (with parental consent). Someone said the other day that if Bill Clinton had done his harassing and assaulting today, he'd be vilified, even by his fellow travelers on the left. That's how much has changed in the past couple of decades. Even more has changed in the past 40 years. I'm sick to death of people imposing their own moral standards on people of the past, whether it's Thomas Jefferson, Robert E. Lee, George Armstrong Custer, Martin Luther King Jr, or Roy Moore. By the way, Moore has denied the accusation. I'm assuming, for the sake of argument, that he did what he's accused of.

Keep in mind that this is a *blog post*, not a philosophical essay written for publication. One of the despicable things about the news coverage of my post is that the first sentence was quoted without the second—sometimes as the headline. A charitable (dare I say decent?) person might wonder, at the outset, whether the question posed by the first sentence was rhetorical or real. In other words, was I making a *statement* in the *form* of an interrogative, or was I asking a genuine *question* to which I expected an *answer*? People invariably read it as a rhetorical question, as though I were *asserting* that it's no big deal that a 32-year-old man was courting a 14-year-old girl. Worse, they interpreted this to mean that there is nothing morally or legally wrong with such behavior. Worse still, they interpreted it as an *endorsement* of such behavior.

Anyone with even rudimentary reading-comprehension skills would know what I was saying, and why. I was *saying* that an 18-year age gap is nothing as compared to a 26-year age gap. I used my own grandparents as an example, in part because my grandmother wasn't much older than the girl in the Moore case when she (my grandmother) married my grandfather. I can assure you that my grandmother and grandfather loved one another dearly and treated each other well. They produced nine happy, healthy children between 1924 and 1944, the first being conceived *after* their marriage. (Their 10th child died in her first year.) Anyone who suggests that my grandfather was a sexual predator or that my grandmother was a victim is not only mistaken (as a matter of fact) but disgusting (as a matter of morality). Her love for him was unbounded, so much so that she spent her remaining years (after his death in 1958) alone, without remarrying (though she had suitors). She was married for 36 years (from 1922 until 1958) and

widowed for 34 (from 1958 until her death in 1992, at the age of 85).

To claim that I was endorsing Judge Moore's behavior is scurrilous and contemptible. I was poking fun at those who are horrified by vast age differences, pointing out that such differences are not unheard of and using my own family as an example. The first two sentences, read together (as charity requires), are perfectly innocent. It's as though a friend boasted of catching a 10-inch bass. I might reply, "What's the big deal about a 10-inch bass? I caught a 15-inch bass a week ago." This is a good example, by the way, of how words can be twisted (including taken out of context) for partisan political purposes. Instead of interpreting the utterance charitably, so as to make it palatable or plausible, one puts the worst spin on it and then expresses horror or outrage at the result. About all I can be accused of in writing this blog post is not expecting my haters (of which there are, sadly, many, both in and out of academia) to distort my meaning in order to make me look bad. One reason I should have known better is that President Trump is subjected to the same treatment every day—by members of the press as well as by the general public. Every day, almost without fail, Trump's words are distorted to make him seem stupid, ignorant, incompetent, or vicious (or some ungodly combination of the four). The Left positively *hates* it that he doesn't cower before them. He knows their game and fights back. This trait of his, frankly, is one of many that I and others find endearing. We are sick of Republicans, such as George W. Bush, John McCain, and Mitt Romney, refusing to defend themselves from vicious personal and political attacks. I understand why they do it, but it only emboldens their political enemies on the left.

The remainder of my blog post (excluding the final three sentences) consists of factual claims about what is normal in courtship and sexual behavior. You may think that one or more of these factual claims is mistaken, and, if so, you have every right to cite evidence to support your view. What you don't have a right to do (morally speaking) is to interpret my factual claims as moral judgments. Saying that something is normal or acceptable can be taken either as a statement of fact or as a moral judgment. People who already hate me, or are disposed to hate me because they despise my politics, will opt for the interpretation that casts me in the worst light; and this they did. There is nothing that I can do about this. Haters will hate. If the haters think that abusing me will cause me to stifle myself (or worse, to quit my job), they don't know me. My mother didn't raise no mouse, and I ain't no quitter.

Let me make a final comment on the sentence in my blog post in which I condemn the practice, which is distressingly common on the left, of judging historical figures by contemporary norms. Suppose you eat meat and think it is perfectly acceptable (morally) to do so. You know that there are people, including prominent philosophers such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan, who believe otherwise. Singer and Regan not only *believe* it; they *argue*, with the hope of persuading others, that meat-eating is wrong. Suppose you live an upstanding life in

other respects but, long after you are dead, you are accused of being evil because you ate meat. It's not inconceivable that it will one day be thought to be the height of immorality to consume animal flesh, just as it is now thought to be the height of immorality to own slaves (though slavery, shockingly, still exists in various parts of the world). Moralists of the future will comb historical records to find people who ate meat and judge them adversely for it. They may treat these people as probates who have no redeeming qualities.

I submit that this is absurd. Individuals should be judged by the standards that prevail(ed) at the time of their actions. I'm sure you would protest that, while you were *aware* of controversy about the morality of eating meat and even gave it serious consideration, you believed that the balance of reasons supported your diet, i.e., that your behavior was morally defensible. Moralists who condemn not only their contemporaries (whom they have an opportunity to persuade) look downright silly when they condemn the dead, and especially the long dead. It is a form of moral preening, or what is sometimes called "virtue signaling." I realize that Judge Moore is not dead, but the behavior of which he is accused occurred at a particular time and place, perhaps before you were born. Do you know what the standards were, then and there? If not, then you have no business finding fault with (or condemning) his behavior. Do some research. This was the only point I was making in my blog post. When my grandparents met and married, in the first quarter of the 20th Century, it was normal (in the sense of understood and accepted) for mature men to court and marry girls of 14, 15, or 16 years of age.

For the record: At no point, in my blog or anywhere else, have I defended any coercive or forcible (or indeed any *illegal*) behavior by Judge Moore, and if I learned that my grandfather behaved in either of those ways, I would condemn him as well. Some moral standards transcend time and place. In my view, the prohibitions on coercion and force are in this category. (There are, obviously, others.)

I didn't mean for this statement to go on as long as it has. Let me conclude by repeating something that I said on my blog the other day. It's a sad commentary that political discourse in the 21st Century consists largely in:

1. Finding something on the Internet that you feel strongly about;
2. Distorting the author's meaning so as to make the author look stupid, ignorant, or vicious (call this the Principle of Anti-Charity in Interpretation); and
3. Trying to get the author fired (thereby signaling one's virtue and power).

Think long and hard about this. While you may *enjoy* the politics of personal destruction (especially when you can conduct search-and-destroy missions anonymously), that doesn't make it right. You yourself wouldn't want to be treated

this way, and you wouldn't want anyone you care about (family, friends, neighbors, or colleagues, for example) to be treated this way. Show some respect for people whose opinions, beliefs, and values differ from your own. Model this behavior to your children and to anyone else over whom you have influence. I'm not naïve enough to think that our political discourse will change overnight, any more than I think that our attitudes toward nonhuman animals will change overnight, but it can change. Do your part.