

A Rejoinder to Beck, Bellous, and Woodhouse

Elmer J. Thiessen, Medicine Hat College

It would seem that my three responders all agree in the main with the central thrust of my paper. While Beck specifically affirms the "essential soundness" of my position (p. 22), Woodhouse, at one point in his accurate and fair summary of my philosophical argument, briefly states that he finds considerable merit in my epistemological position (p. 31). Bellous explicitly says that she agrees with much of what I have to say (p. 25).

Let me begin by responding to some of the commentators' criticisms which I consider to be more tangential to my central argument. One concern which Bellous and Woodhouse share has to do with the target of my critical analysis. In his main criticism, Woodhouse suggests that my account of academic freedom "almost totally overlooks" the differences between Canadian and American universities (p. 31). Bellous goes even further and asks whether I am "wrestling with scarecrows or real villains" (p. 24).

Here, it needs to be noted first that these criticisms apply to my attempt to contextualize the argument and in no way undermine my *philosophical* argument. Contrary to Bellous and Woodhouse, I would suggest that I am wrestling with "real villains," even in the Canadian context. In my article, I drew attention to one expression of concern about violations of academic freedom at religious colleges made by a Canadian academic society.¹ Many other cases could be cited.² I also simply disagree with Woodhouse that Canadian higher education is as distinctive as he suggests. Further, Canadian statements on academic freedom are, in fact, very close to the influential American statement.³ In both cases, implicit and explicit references are made to *full* academic freedom even though this would seem to contradict qualifications often included in these same statements. For example, the CAUT model clause on academic freedom, makes implicit reference to full academic freedom when talking about the "free exposition" of knowledge, and when it is maintained that faculty shall not be hindered or impeded "in any way" by the university or faculty association from exercising their right as citizens (Goede, 1979, p. 46). And what about Woodhouse's own reference to a Supreme Court of Canada description of academic freedom as "the free and fearless search for knowledge"?⁴ This surely sounds like full freedom!

But all of this is rather beside the point. The fact remains that some (or many) academics in Canada and the United States (it does not really matter how many or where they live) do object to religious colleges and universities because of their supposed lack of full academic freedom such as exists at secular educational institutions. The central purpose of my paper was to provide a *philosophical* answer to that objection.

Woodhouse does make one substantive criticism of a more philosophical nature. He repeatedly suggests that I am intent on Americanizing Canadian universities, or importing an American model of academic freedom to Canada (pp. 32-34). He argues that because I "import an American model of academic freedom which recognizes only private goods," we will see "the demise of publicly-funded universities," where knowledge is regarded as "a public good" (p. 34). Instead, knowledge will become "no more than a private good to be cashed in for profit" (p. 34).