

# Statement of Commitment to Academic Freedom and to Intellectual Merit

*by Daniel Klein*

*The following is the text of the “Statement of Commitment to Academic Freedom and to Intellectual Merit” from the economics faculty at George Mason University. It is followed by the transcript of an interview with one of the Statement’s co-authors, professor Daniel Klein.*

**T**he undersigned members of the GMU Department of Economics express their commitment to academic freedom and to intellectual merit.

American universities have professed allegiance to two ideals. First, the ideal of academic freedom—the right of students and faculty to express any idea in speech or writing, without fear of university punishment, and secure in the knowledge that the university will protect dissenters from threats and violence on campus.

Second, the ideal of intellectual merit—the right and duty of academic departments to hire and promote the most brilliant, creative, and productive faculty in their fields, and admit the most intel-

lectually promising students, without pressures from the administration.

These ideals are the cornerstones of liberal education. They protect faculty and students who hold views unpopular on university campuses. Academic freedom protects existing students and faculty who dissent from current dominant academic opinion and ideology. No matter how unpopular their views, they know the university will protect them. As stated in the University of Chicago Statement on freedom of expression and as quoted in GMU’s “Free Speech at Mason” Statement:

[We must hold a fundamental commitment to] the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed.

Intellectual merit protects prospective students and faculty who speak and write against current dominant viewpoints. No matter how unpopular their views, they know that university ad-

ministration will not obstruct or prejudice their admission, hiring, or promotion.

Recently, both of these ideals have come under attack. Pressure for conformity has intensified and universities have increasingly interfered with departments' personnel decisions. For example, at some universities, one of the more egregious new practices is the requiring of written "diversity" statements by prospective students, staff, or faculty, then used to discriminate among candidates, often by quarters of the university with interests other than those of the department or unit. Such methods recall arrogations of the past, such as The Levering Act of 1950, used against radicals.

We strongly believe the attacks on academic freedom and intellectual merit are deeply mistaken. The classic rationales in favor of these ideals are sound. To protect them, viewpoint diversity must be celebrated and academic departments must maintain their ability to select, hire, and promote students and personnel based on intellectual merit. We insist that the degree of institutional autonomy that the GMU Department of Economics has traditionally enjoyed is vital to the health of viewpoint diversity not only within the university but within the academy writ large.

It is vital that every department in a university enjoys independence, so it can dare to be different and keep viewpoint diversity alive. George Mason University has excelled in supporting viewpoint diversity with a variety of diverse departments, centers and organizations.

Viewpoint diversity at George Mason has benefited the university, the United States, and the wider intellectual world.

Indeed, some of the Department's chief contributions have taught that all forms of authority can exert power to excess, and that guarding against such excess calls for the very ideals affirmed here, respect for dissent and intellectual merit.

We, the undersigned members of the GMU Department of Economics, look forward to continuing our independence to do good economics according to our judgment, guided by the ideals of academic freedom and intellectual merit.

Signed by the following GMU Department of Economics faculty (full-time & emeritus):

1. Jonathan P. Beauchamp
2. James T. Bennett
3. Donald J. Boudreaux
4. Bryan D. Caplan
5. Vincent J. Geloso
6. Timothy Groseclose
7. Robin D. Hanson
8. Garrett Jones
9. Daniel B. Klein
10. Mark Koyama
11. David M. Levy
12. Cesar A. Martinelli
13. John V.C. Nye
14. Thomas C. Rustici
15. Vernon L. Smith
16. Alex T. Tabarrok
17. Karen I. Vaughn
18. Richard E. Wagner
19. Lawrence H. White

## Interview with Daniel Klein and Lee Stitzel

*The following is an edited portion of an interview conducted by Lee Stitzel, host of The Econ Buff podcast, with Prof. Daniel Klein, co-author of the Statement of Commitment to Academic Freedom and to Intellectual Merit.*

**Stitzel:** Hello, and Welcome to the Econ Buff podcast. I'm your host, Lee Stitzel. With me today is Dr. Daniel Klein. Dan is a professor of economics and the JIN Chair at the Mercatus Center, George Mason University . . . Dan, welcome.

**Klein:** Hi Lee, great to be with you.

**Stitzel:** So Dan, our topic today is this statement of commitment to academic freedom and intellectual merit that you co-authored at GMU, and the department at GMU—I guess not all of them, but a great number of them—put their names to. Can you just briefly describe what this is and why you wrote it?

**Klein:** First let me say, I didn't write it, as you say. It was co-authored—Bryan Caplan, Don Boudreaux, and others were significantly involved. And let me say that initially, we thought along the lines of a collective departmental statement. It is a statement issued and posted by the Econ Department as such, but I had qualms about that all along. You know, think about these questions: How do you decide that it is right to issue a statement on behalf of a group when 75 percent support it? Is it 75 of those who vote, or of the entire department? And

how should we define the department? And how exactly do you register such support? If there's a vote, what if people abstain or indicate a position neither support nor opposition? So, for all those reasons, we had qualms about doing it that way all along. It makes more sense to develop a statement and let each individual decide whether to put his or her name to it, and that's what ended up happening.

As for why we wrote the statement, it's to affirm what I'd call traditional liberal values, which are under attack today, as I see it. Leftism dominates the universities and has taken over and become quite aggressive and increasingly illiberal, I would say. And so, we're remonstrating against these sorts of attacks. The statement is an effort, if you will, to correct upward, or to *correct-up*. By "correct-up," I mean that we mere faculty in an ordinary department correct our superiors. That is, our administrative superiors, you know, the people in the university administration. When superiors start going wrong, if they are not corrected by their organizational inferiors, then they may not be corrected at all, and then the whole institution might be run into the ground.

And so, we're facing these problems, and we wanted to make sure that our view and objection, just a voice of dissent, also to give voice to the silent sentiment and thought that's out there among people who are afraid to speak up.

**Stitzel:** I ran across this first on Bryan Caplan's blog. I'll put a link in the

show notes of that so the listeners can find this. One of the things that he focuses on there is that he says he advocated in this process that you were co-authoring with Bryan and Don and others that he really pushed for is the inclusion of intellectual meritocracy. I just want to ask you to talk a little bit about what's the importance of intellectual merit and how it goes along with academic freedom?

**Klein:** Sure. Bryan did advance the word *merit*, but I think we were getting at what that's about as an issue. But he was right to emphasize the word *merit*.

Traditionally, the way universities have worked is scholars are organized in departments by fields, disciplines. And those departments judge of their own personnel affairs. Notions of merit bubble up from their knowledge, in their work as a chemist or a linguist or a lawyer or medical researcher or whatever the department or school is. That's really the whole character of liberal arts institutions.

Administrators have traditionally rubber-stamped the personnel decisions worked out by those subsidiary units of the larger university. It makes little sense for administrators with no knowledge of the field to supervene the decisions of the linguists or the medical researchers or in our case economists.

Catholic Social Doctrine, by the way, calls it the principle of subsidiarity. So, the call here is to preserve subsidiarity, the practice of letting judgments of merit bubble up from below rather than imposing decisions from above. Let me

just say that this principle of subsidiarity may be associated among economists with decentralization, experimentation, independence, differentiation, criticism, heterodoxy, innovation, competition. I would say improvement. Such bottom-up processes offer prospects for the emergence of real leadership and excellence. In political theory, you might associate subsidiarity with federalism, right?

By contrast, top-down structures can be associated with uniformity and in the worst case, a sort of despotism and servility.

**Stitzel:** We have had Alex Salter on the podcast to talk about distributism. So, we've actually had a fair bit of discussion about subsidiarity on the podcast. Listeners that have heard that episode will be familiar with that topic. It's very interesting to see that brought around here and sort of applied, you know, think about that in a political sense and how should we structure, which of course you mentioned, how to structure a political system. You don't think about that in the context of an academy and applying to this intellectual merit idea.

**Klein:** So, the president of the university is a little bit like the Pope, then. You've got this enormous Catholic church and Catholic doctrine that said "Let churches govern their local dioceses and churches and so on."

**Stitzel:** The idea with universities, I think, is a little different in hierarchical structure than you might have in other places. I find as a professor that I have to explain, in our case, we don't have

department heads. We have associate deans in my college, and those are not exactly like bosses.

This is not the way that a corporation might run where you kind of have to answer to every person in the line strictly above you. They have some authority, and they can leverage a certain kind of authority. But as you said before, you know, faculty have a way where we can sort of put some pressure going from the bottom up in a way that's not gonna happen, and I think a lot like corporate structures, in particular.

So, let's turn a little bit to the academic freedom part. Because we've talked about, that idea of intellectual merit to personnel decisions, but academic freedom seems a little broader. And so, I just want you to discuss a little bit what the benefits of academic freedom are and why that's particularly important to universities.

**Klein:** Right. I think that, first of all, people who say that science and scholarship have a kind of ethical bearing or purpose are really quite right, and good science and scholarship ought to be or are oriented toward the common good, if you will, the good of the whole of humankind.

Those are really big questions, however—what constitutes the good and how is it advanced?

And the important thing is that people disagree about the answers to those questions. They disagree quite profoundly and deeply. And so, we need academic freedom to accommodate all of this disagreement, okay? And really,

the genius of what I'd call liberal civilization is that it says: Let us disagree, let us discuss openly these disagreements, and that's our best way to develop better thoughts about the good and what advances the good.

You and I, who are in moral philosophy—as Adam Smith would have called all of the social sciences and the humanities—this is in a sense what we're doing. We're talking about what's good public policy, right? And so, good public policy is about advancing the good of the whole, and allowing academic freedom is our best way to, I think, avoid brutalizing each other in a kind of contest over a ring of power or something or control of the university.

So, liberal civilization affirms basic rules like free speech and other things like honesty, presumption of innocence, basic decency, and so on. And you can think of these as social grammars. They don't answer the big questions. These basic grammars—just as basic grammar does not assure good writing—lousy and uninspiring writing can be perfectly grammatical—but grammar is at least crucial to giving wings to good writing and good answers.

Okay, so we need these grammars to work out our ideas and explore and experiment our discourse, our criticisms of each other, or challenges of each other to answer these big questions. That's a little bit like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. How do we pursue happiness by respecting the life and liberty of each other? Basic grammar.

And I think that if we forsake those liberal values and instead fall in with the current hegemonic leftism of the academy, we get a trouncing of these grammars. That's what I see them doing. We get a kind of despotism within the university, and I would say even within society at large because in the political domain, leftism spells the governmentalization of social affairs. If you think about leftist sentiments and ideas and policy proposals for the most part, it points to the further governmentalization of social affairs. And I think that's bad for humankind. So, free speech, subsidiarity, these other liberal values are just crucial to keep this conversation open and genuine and keep us on an upward path.

**Stitzel:** So, your view here is this idea of intellectual merit towards personnel decisions and your idea of academic freedom in regard to debate. I think when my listeners hear free speech, they're thinking about public discourse. They're thinking about what they might see or hear in media and stuff like that. Is that the kind of thing that you're talking about? Or are you talking about a narrower focus towards the academy?

**Klein:** Well, for the merit issue, again, I'm concerned about pressures from the administration to conduct our personnel decisions certain ways, to put the thumb on the scale, to interfere and pressure the subsidiary units because the subsidiary units are afraid that if they don't follow the clear preferences of the administration, the administration will punish them—will maybe not approve the ap-

pointment or the offer of the appointment, or in any number of ways make trouble for the subsidiary unit. There's a great deal of trouble they can make in many, many ways in just institutional life, day by day. So, there's a great deal of intimidation and bullying going on—also in the messaging from the administration, these different emails they send out to your department or even to the whole university community, pressuring you and putting a chill on people and making it hard to deviate or question or speak out against their leftist views. So, that's what's, in terms of this university setting, the main thing I'm concerned about with the merit issue.

On speech, they also want to intervene in our curricula. They want to promote certain things and they might frown on certain things. They might frown in a kind of indirect way which pressures you away from certain things and punishes you even for not towing the line or for challenging leftist ideas and so forth, for exposing some of the fraudulence and shallowness of some of the slogans that they depend on and throw around so much. So, free speech can be attacked in a lot of many different subtle ways. It can be required training sessions, it can be encouraging students to monitor and challenge and criticize and make a fuss about whatever, and just basic personnel decisions of people not getting promoted. Does that make sense?

**Stitzel:** That's exactly what I was getting at, we see different pressures at universities and different places. Like you

said, there's lots of different ways for this pressure to sort of manifest. But there's even those kinds of discussions even at a relatively conservative university like the one that I'm at, where people are looking at the distribution of genders or races in different departments and colleges. That's where the statement really stood out to me, when we're in a hiring decision at my University. I want the best person that we can get, somebody that's doing interesting and important and creative work. I want somebody that's going to teach their classes well, somebody that is going to be somebody that I want to have as a colleague for a long time. I don't particularly care for diversity other than viewpoint diversity, which is a word that you have in your statement. I think that's how it should be, right? If this is a person that does or doesn't fit certain diversity goals, it should be irrelevant if the work that they're doing is good, important to the field, is high quality stuff. That's kind of what I wanted to get at.

But let me turn the question just a little bit. I'm also very interested in how reduced academic freedom might have consequences for peer-reviewed research, for economic literature, or for scientific literature in general. I think we live in a society where people really understand the importance of referencing research when making arguments and debates. These things affect policy decisions. The kind of stuff should be done in pursuit of truth. Can you comment a little bit on what you think the conse-

quences of reduced academic freedom are in research?

**Klein:** Yeah, sure. And I think they're along the lines that you're suggesting. But just before I go there, let me just also mention another thing in reference to what we were talking about, the issue of merit and pressures is the requirement of these so-called diversity statements, which we condemn in our statement. That's another very plain and obvious pressure that really can screw up and alter the whole job search process. It can affect who wants to apply for the job, and then if you're concerned, you and the department are concerned that the administration is going to consult these so-called diversity statements where people are supposed to express their fealty to leftist slogans. That's a very, very direct intervention in the whole process.

Let's think about the academic journals and so on, and we're seeing the scholarly and academic world increasingly dominated by leftism, if you will. Leftism is very concerned to stick with and shore up leftist political groups and their associated slogans, narratives, selfhoods, and so on. It's almost like the powerful government is this force that's almost sucking academic institutions into its vortex, and they're all part of this larger social phenomenon. The academic institutions are being corrupted by a kind of society-wide politicization of things.

Anyway, I see this strong tendency to depart from the basic norms of scholarship to serve these rather tendentious political ends. Such departures from

scholarly norms can be from careerism, but of course, they also come from this kind of false political orientation. The exploitation of scholarly journals and the rest of academic institutions to advance the interests of one's political tribe really spells the corruption of science and scholarship. Unfortunately, most of the journals and organizations are mired in that sort of leftism nowadays, not all of them but most of them.

**Stitzel:** There's a question that I wanted to ask based on some of what Alex Tabarrok put in his blog when he posted this statement here that I think touches on this point of politicization of research. Whereas I think this ideal that we've been pursuing hopefully as academics and scientists is to seek out the truth, wherever that may lead, as the highest goal. And if you make scholarship serve ends like you're talking about, like political ends in particular, and then you sort of use the career leverage and the different things that we've talked about that universities can do, to where if you can lose your job first for saying the wrong thing, then you're having to pay a really high price potentially in order to pursue the truth.

And universities should insulate scholars from that. I think that's part of their job. You say that very well, obviously, in the Statement. It just occurs to me that there's this downstream effect of that, where you kind of get this knock-on effect. If you allow things like academic freedom to be eroded, and then professors and scholars and research scientists, they have to make choices

between, "Do I pursue the truth or do I say the things that get me to tenure?" . . . You then make it to where the research and the scholarship that does come out, it becomes politically tinted as well, and then we don't know what to trust, right?

Can you look at my research and say he's saying this because he thinks this is where the theories lead and what the empirical work bears out? Or is this because he had to make a choice between feeding his family and writing the paper that he thought he should have written? Do you have any comments on the downstream consequences?

**Klein:** It's a huge damage to society at large, I would even say to our civilization. This corruption is destroying the authority of institutions, organizations, processes—that is science, scholarship, the news, the law, you name it—that we really hope to trust, and used to place more trust in.

But when this political effect becomes more and more pronounced and falsehoods are issued on a larger and larger and more persistent and tenacious scale, we lose trust, and they lose their authority, and we are more out at sea, right? Because we don't know quite whom to turn to. I mean, making sense of the world is very much a matter of consulting different people's interpretations and judgments. And so, there's, if you like, in a healthy civilization, there's a healthy landscape of judgment to refer to and organized around and take into consideration. And you hope that there's a kind of respectfulness and maybe a kind of sense of a central zone of where



the valuable conversation is taking place, and that you hope it's responsible to the larger issues of society.

And when we see our institutions lose authority and us lose faith in them, it's not like there's some immediate alternative that we can all organize and coordinate around, you know? So, it's a very, very serious . . . I think this is how civilizations can fall into very serious decline and decadence. And I'm afraid we might be doing that, actually.

**Stitzel:** There's a really deep thought that you sort of started with there, which is . . . something that I've been thinking about.

It's actually hard to, on virtually any topic, decide for yourself when we have to make decisions. It's actually who to trust, not what is the right answer.

I remember, my oldest, who is eight years old, and my wife and I were making some various medical decisions, just run-of-the-mill kind of stuff, and my wife is actually from the medical profession, she's been a nurse for over ten years, and so she had some things that she was worried about. And so, I was doing some research, and back then I just went to the CDC and I saw what they were saying and just, okay, this is just the gospel truth, more or less. And that's been shaken in the last two or three years. I don't know that I've thrown them out completely. But different institutions, and of course, I think when people hear that, they immediately think governmental institutions, but lots of institutions . . .

And you know, once trust erodes, that's a really hard thing to get back. And I think there is a real risk of what you were talking about where we can start down a path that you can't come back from if you erode all the trust and if everything becomes politically motivated, everything becomes infected by leftism, you just can't operate, and different groups of people can't operate together.

One of my colleagues here, he says economics is principally the study of coordination, right, that's really what it is that we're thinking about and what it is that economists are trying to figure out, and trust and different institutional systems is part of that coordination problem. And I don't think you can disentangle those things.

So, let me turn a little bit, unless you had a comment on that?

**Klein:** No, that's fine.

**Stitzel:** Let me turn a little bit because you and I have kind of been talking about the left and the right, but when Alex [Tabarrok] put this up on his blog, he said that academic freedom and intellectual merit are under attack in the United States from both the left and the right, which I think is just sort of obviously true. But I wanted your comments on that as to how that pertains specifically to the Statement that you and your co-authors, you and your colleagues put together.

**Klein:** Well, the impetus is clearly the problems emanating from the left, which completely dominates the academy. I also think there's a big asymmetry just in the leftist tendency to be illiberal

and to abuse the social grammars. That's not to say that there aren't threats from the right, but I don't think Alex was really suggesting that they were of equal magnitudes. He didn't specify about the magnitude or the relative magnitudes, and I think they obviously are not at all equal.

Let me also just say, by the way, that I don't really believe that the right is a thing. I think what we really have is the left and the non-left. We can get into that if you like, but maybe that's something for another day.

But the threats look, in some ways—when you see stuff like in Florida happening—we're in a trap because once some people started abusing things and seizing a ring of power and abusing power, it's very hard to just say, "Oh, I renounce power," because in a way, you're relinquishing the ring of power to those people, and so you try to wrestle the ring of power back from them to some extent, and so we're in this predicament.

And in fact, if universities were more based entirely on voluntary funding, voluntary participation, I think we would have less of this trouble. I mean, we don't have this trouble so much when it's private sector institutions depending on the payments and contributions and participation of voluntary participants, but when it's highly governmentalized as it is—and you know, I myself work for the Commonwealth of Virginia at a public sector university—then we get into these other mechanisms of possible correction of certain problems and issues of

centralized control and large-scale control, like the ring of power.

I'm just saying that if you want less threats whether from the left or the right, one way to do that, I think, is just to reduce government funding in all its forms for universities.

Also, another thing to keep in mind is that one of the reasons there's as much demand for university education, you know, why people are applying and willing to pay to go to these universities, is because degrees from them as accredited institutions may be required for the occupational paths that people pursue, and that induces a demand to go to those privileged institutions, which then confer you with privileges as a practitioner, whether it's an accountant or an architect or an engineer or a doctor or a lawyer or what have you. And so if you liberalize these requirements for entering different occupations, that too would de-governmentalize the issue to some extent, and I think therefore this would just be less of a big problem for us to fight over, just like in other private affairs, it's like, well, if you don't like the way certain people or friendship groups or churches do things, you just decide not to go there, not to support them, right? Does that help? . . .

**Lee:** So, in your view, because I don't think anybody would disagree with the notion that probably leftism is over-represented in academics, I just kind of want to ask the chicken or the egg question: like, which do you think came first? Because you're proposing here, right, if universities are less dependent on gov-

ernment money, there's no enforcement mechanism for the kind of problems that your Statement is against.

**Klein:** That is? If there was less government funding and involvement, it would be less of a problem, right—what we're concerning ourselves with. I think that's true.

Think about a fully private university, and it decided it wanted to be really lefty. Who would care? Who would complain? I mean, that's their business. It's just like if people want to go start a commune, go ahead.

So, is your question then what comes first, the government funding, or the problem of leftism?

**Stitzel:** Specifically, in academics, right? Is it because academics, is it because it went left, and then they kind of weaponized government funding, or is it from outside the university?

**Klein:** I personally think you have to think about a very, very broad civilizational narrative within which academia's a significant part, but not like the only part.

And I think it really makes sense to go back and look at the whole Arc of Classical liberalism, from the early modern period at least, or even if you like, going back to Christianity, because I do think Christianity made liberalism possible (along the lines that Larry Siedentop argues), but anyway, in the later years, so you've got this rising—first of all, you've got the rise of nation-states, and then there's the liberal arc that says, "Hey, let's make it a liberal nation-state!," and there's quite a bit of success and as-

cendancy to that tendency for a number of reasons.

And then there's a reversal. There's a huge reversal, which I guess really takes place, you could say, in the Anglosphere at the end of the 19th century when the intellectual classes just really abandoned liberalism, and the young were no longer brought up in the way they had been, in believing in liberal intuitions and precepts and ideas.

And then you move into the twentieth century, and you have catastrophe. And so, there's been a big reversal, and the growth of the universities in the United States, at least, comes in that latter period, especially. So, it's a very bad time for these institutions to be expanding in that sense.

I fit it more into the whole larger thing and I take the whole thing as a kind of civilizational challenge and problem. There was chaos in Europe before the nation-state, and then there was a kind of ascendancy of a liberal nation-state in certain parts of the world. But the nation-state creates this centralizing awesome power that becomes very imposing. And then, like that power, started becoming the problem in a really huge way. De Tocqueville warned of this. This is the whole point of his great masterpiece, *Democracy in America*, to warn us that this is happening. He saw it very plainly in France. He sort of anticipated it in the United States, and here we are. He was absolutely right.

**Stitzel:** This brings me excellently along to where I wanted to end this podcast. You know, I saw the Statement

come across all these various blogs I'm reading, and economists whose work that I admire in several dimensions, and it did exactly what Bryan Caplan was saying, one of the reasons, one of the motivations of a statement [was].

It might do nothing, but you're putting that out there for other people in other places like me to see this and say, "Okay, there's somebody out there who's wanting to defend academic freedom and intellectual merit."

So, I just wanted to ask you that question . . . I just wanted to know of any input that you had, what other professors in other places, say a Division 2 school, not a tier one research academy, what are some things that somebody like me might be able to do about this issue?

**Klein:** Well, you're doing it obviously, Lee, and you're voicing your dissent. You're giving a platform to others who voice their dissent. You're exploring the issue. You're justifying your reasons for dissenting. I'm sure you would invite people to debate, right? If somebody wanted to come on, is that fair to say?

**Stitzel:** Absolutely. Yes.

**Klein:** I think that would be exciting. It's a hard thing to make happen, but you're doing it.

In general, do think about collaborating with peers, talking about these problems and issues, and thinking about whether to organize a little something that corrects-up, that is to say, speaks or voices your dissent and directs it to your superiors, organizational superiors, in the hope of correcting them.

Just so that they at least know that people aren't necessarily all buying their bullshit, and that they should expect some resistance.

And then that might inspire others to do likewise, and you discover friends and like-minded people through doing these kinds of activities. That, in itself, is very rewarding.

In some sense, all we can do is discourse. As liberals, that's what we want. We don't want to battle over the ring of power. We don't want to brutalize each other over the ring of power. So, we try to do discourse. We do persuasion. We hope.

**Stitzel:** That's a difficult Catch-22, right, where the problem is the things that we were talking about earlier, the places to put pressure and the funding and the career prep, and then people like us are out here saying, "Don't use that stuff. Don't do that to people." There's a way in which it's, I don't want to say it's baked in for that liberal mindset to lose, but it at least presents a very serious challenge. Do you have any thoughts on how to balance those two things?

**Klein:** Right, so you do have to compromise. I'm not saying everybody should stick their neck out so far. I compromise myself and sometimes feel fearful, for sure.

Let me also just say that it's not totally dark. I mean, there is power to wisdom and truth and virtue. And that power is not all lost, at all. The Force is still out there.

So, don't feel like you're so powerless. Because good reasoning, good interac-

tion, good engagement does have a power of its own, and that's what the whole dynamic, competitive, open process is supposed to be, bringing forth and channeling properly. So, don't despair too much.

**Stitzel:** That's a great thing to hear, and just hopefully other people that are listening hear this and be thinking about those kinds of things.

I want to bring this in for a landing, so I wanted to get your thoughts on one last thing, which would just be, if someone like me, I have a little bit of a platform, and I'm tenured, and so this is a big advantage. And I know Bryan was commenting some on his blog as to why people might not come along with this kind of thing. Now, can you comment just very briefly on individuals, not to lump me in with you, but like you and me that have some security, but a lot of people are going to feel with their careers and their choices, like you feel, a little bit of nervousness about doing this kind of thing? And because of that, I think it's important that people that are safer, people that are in a place to do this kind of thing, we kind of have a little moral responsibility to do that.

**Klein:** I think that's absolutely right. I think all of us have some responsibility to dissent or to voice our dissent, to think for ourselves. But certainly, that forwardness, in doing so, rises in the responsibility calculus as you have more security, absolutely.

So, we should expect more from more senior people, and to some extent, I think that is what we tend to see.

That could also just be cohort effects, of course, but you're young, and there are other young people who are showing this kind of mettle.

**Stitzel:** My guest today has been Dan Klein. Dan, thanks for joining us on the *EconBuff*.

**Klein:** Thank you so much, Lee.

---

**Daniel Klein** is Professor of Economics and JIN Chair at the Mercatus Center, George Mason University. He leads the Smithian Political Economy program in the GMU Economics Department and the chief editor of *Econ Journal Watch*.

---

**Lee Stitzel** is an economist, a professor, and host of *The Econ Buff* podcast.

---