

# PAUL GILMORE

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**The Legacies Review Working Group  
Trinity College Dublin  
Ireland**

Submission, To Whom It May Concern,

There are a number of issues being conflated and confused which must be addressed.

To set events and actions in their proper context it is important to understand their provenance and their purpose. For example, the provenance of the Inishbofin skulls is straightforward, they were stolen, they were not removed with the consent of the local islander descendants. Generally, questions must be asked about how contentious artefacts came to be in their current ownership, for example, it was common for those on grand tour to be able to purchase a sarcophagus containing a mummified body from locals on a roadside. What might have been a tourist piece purchased for a pittance, could have its true worth and significance uncovered by historical research, so, did the grand tour paltry purchase actually preserve it, and lead to the discovering of what might not otherwise have been discovered?

The removal of the Inishbofin skulls had no such local agreement, although, it may have been considered noble and right as a scientific pursuit and perhaps in some cases the end may justify the means – such as the removal of a Celtic cross to a museum, thus denuding its natural landscape to protect it from further erosion and irreparable damage. Have all the scientific examinations of the skulls been completed? Are they simply warehoused now as a past Trinity trophy? Could they be returned with the local islanders agreement and if so would they become an exhibit, or be reinterred in order to return to dust in their proper burial place? There is an aspect of any archaeological excavation which is destructive and disturbing of the past, the past does not give up its secrets easily. Will the lessons be learned that the past needs to teach us if there is not this level of intrusion?

Regarding the Berkeley Library and Bishop George Berkeley, the library was named after him because of his contribution to philosophy. Would there be any integrity in renaming it, perhaps after a graduate or generous benefactor? The library would become the prize in a popularity contest or be sold to the highest bidder! To do so would demand the same value judgement of their life and work as Berkeley has been subjected to. Yet, to do so would not only honour them but invite public scrutiny while ignoring the reality that these actions are discriminatory in suggesting that not only is this person free of the scandal and moral deficiency of Berkeley but also free of the moral deficiencies of every other person, past and present, who might be so honoured. That is a tall order! Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping!

I do not believe it is possible to apologise for the sins of our fathers. Nor should we be expected to. It is possible in some cases to put right their acts of wrongdoing but not to change their mindset or worldview. Any apology for their actions will always ring hollow. Also, I do not believe that we should judge our ancestors according to our own moral compass. We have the luxury of distance and the

perspective of learning lessons from history not afforded to them in their day. History also throws us the odd curveball. By way of example, I refer to two episodes of the BBC television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* The actor Benedict Cumberbatch was put under considerable pressure to apologise for the actions of his slave-owning ancestor. TV Chef Ainsley Harriot discovered the complicated nature of his Jamaican heritage where a direct ancestor was a slave who was impregnated by her white slave owner. Should Mr Harriot also be expected to apologise for the actions of his white slave-owning ancestor? Again, who shall 'scape whipping?!

History is complicated and I do not underestimate the task before you. I simply caution against kneejerk reactions and playing to the woke gallery. We can do nothing to ease the pain of those who were enslaved in the past, but slavery has not gone away, and this is an evil we can end in our own day. What can the university do to change the lives for those who are trafficked today and find themselves enslaved today? In a not-unrelated matter the University of Dublin made the news over a decision not to honour the 14<sup>th</sup> Dali Lama with a degree because of how China, the country which drove him into exile, might react to the honour. What does this decision say about the contemporary moral compass guiding the university today and its fitness to judge the past?

It is easy to rage against those who have had memorials erected to them. The memorials were erected because of the good they have done. We all have a shadow side, and if we are going to judge the likes of Berkeley retrospectively then it is right to ask about the public good we have done and are doing. To airbrush Bishop Berkeley out of the history of Trinity College Dublin is not the answer. Where is justice and integrity if evil is allowed to live on and become the only enduring memorial of anyone, past or present, when the good they have done is often buried with their bones?

I suggest:

1. Each case should be judged on its own merit.
2. Each case should be judged only after establishing its provenance, purpose, and context.
3. In reading each case with twenty-first century eyes history should be given the benefit of the doubt.
4. Injustice should not be replaced with greater or other injustice.
5. 'Woke' and 'politically correct' worldviews are not immune to injustice and wrong decisions.
6. Prevention in the present is always more desirable than a revisionist righting of historic wrongs.

I wish you well in this process.

Yours faithfully,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Paul Gilmore.

**Paul Gilmore MA, MEd, LL.M.**