

cancel culture: An Interdisciplinary Analysis from Mindsets to Social Practices

Jiarui Liu ^{1, a}, Zhihan Su ^{2, b}

¹School of Law and Economics, Wuhan University of Science and Technology, China;

² School of Law and Economics, Wuhan University of Science and Technology, China.

^a ljr15527682239@outlook.com, ^b 821583314@qq.com

Abstract. This paper examines the phenomenon of cancel culture under today's society through an interdisciplinary analysis and explores its relationship with Law of excluded middle. cancel culture is a social phenomenon that refers to the erasure of someone or something from society and public opinion because of words or actions that are contrary to mainstream values or political views. The article first defines the concept and background of cancel culture, then discusses in detail the definition and history of Law of excluded middle, and analyzes its influence on thinking patterns and the connection with cancel culture. Next, the article explores the manifestations of cancel culture in social media and academia. Finally, the article reviews the strengths and weaknesses of cancel culture and proposes policy and practice recommendations to avoid the abuse of the Law of excluded middle in cancel culture.

Keywords: cancel culture, Law of excluded middle.

1. Introduction

In today's society, a culture of cancellation is of growing public concern. It is an attempt to force others to conform to particular values and political views by banning, boycotting, or harshly criticizing what they say or do in social media, business, and academia. However, radical manifestations of cancel culture are often characterized by a law-of-exclusion mindset that reduces issues to an "either/or" dichotomy, leading to confrontation and division.

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the relationship between cancel culture and the Law of excluded middle through an in-depth analysis of the two, and to explore how cancel culture manifests itself in real life. The paper will also assess the pros and cons of cancel culture with a view to making policy and practical recommendations on how to avoid the abuse of Law of excluded middle in cancel culture. In the process, we will focus on the reconstruction of dialogue, inclusion, and pluralism, as well as the promotion of integrative thinking and critical reflection, with a view to providing useful guidance for improving the social climate and promoting constructive dialogue.

2. Definition and Background of cancel culture

Cancel Culture is a socio-cultural phenomenon that originated as a series of social movements in the United States and other Western countries. The phenomenon refers to the process of being "cancelled" by social groups and the media because of the supposedly "inappropriate" statements and actions of a person or business. On social networks, people use the hashtag "cancelled" to express their collective opinions, creating a strong social pressure. With the rapid development of the Internet and social media, the influence of "cancelled culture" has gradually expanded.

Behind the "culture of cancellation" is a broader sociocultural phenomenon that includes "safetyism," "woke culture" and "call-out culture. Culture" and "Call-out Culture". Safetyism emphasizes individual comfort and protection against views that may be uncomfortable or disagreeable; woke culture focuses on social issues such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, but can lead to excessive political correctness; and call-out culture emphasizes its values by blaming and condemning.

In the United States, cancel culture has deep ties to the civil rights movement and multiculturalism of the 1950s and 1960s. The civil rights movement eliminated legal discrimination against blacks and other minorities and contributed to the awakening of multiculturalism and black "race consciousness. The multiculturalists advocated reforming the "Vaasper"-centered American history, emphasizing the plurality of historical experiences, focusing on the study of minorities, and revising the traditional Eurocentric view of history.

To sum up, cancel culture is a phenomenon that originates from social movements and collision of values, and it reflects to some extent the exploration and challenge of individual freedom and social morality in contemporary society.

3. Law of excluded middle and modern cancel culture

3.1 Definition and history of Law of excluded middle

The Law of excluded middle originates from the logical idea of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, which states that for any proposition P, the outcome of the proposition can only be true or false, and there is no third possibility. That is, one must be true and one false between P and not-P. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argues that "there can be no centrality between two contradictory propositions, and any particular predicate must affirm or deny that it belongs to a principal term." That is, one of the contradictory propositions must be true and the other false. In his system of logic, law of excluded middle is regarded as a key principle to ensure clarity of thought.

However, with the development of logic, Law of excluded middle faces new challenges. Brouwer pointed out that "Law of excluded middle generalization from finite things is the reason for its insurmountable limitations". In other words, the law of excluded middle is valid in finite scope, but when it is extended to infinite whole and infinite things, the nature of the problem has changed. The Polish logician Lukasiewicz also noticed that traditional two-valued logic needed to include a third value to deal with unqualified propositions.

In addition, historically, Galileo in "Two New Sciences" (1638) put forward the paradox of "part equals whole", revealing that in the real world, in addition to "either/or", there is also a wide range of "both/and". The paradox of "the part is equal to the whole" was introduced in. In order to break through the limitations of the classical law of excluded middle, since this century, various kinds of multi-valued logic have emerged, featuring the uncertainty of the middle value, making the traditional logic of "excluding the third party" principle invalid.

In modern philosophy and science, the status of law of excluded middle of the row has become more complex. Some philosophers have begun to question the applicability of law of excluded middle, arguing that there is a third possibility or unqualified proposition. This position is called "neutrality" or "non-classical logic". For example, in quantum physics, some particle states are not clear and there are unqualified states, which is called the quantum superposition principle. In this case, law of excluded middle no longer applies.

3.2 The influence of Law of excluded middle on people's thinking patterns

Long ago, Law of excluded middle was considered the core of mathematical proofs. Aristotle, in his work on logical argumentation, *The Thesis*, proposed a method for reasoning about arguments using his logical principles. The law of the excluded middle holds that a thing either has a given property or it does not; there is no intermediate state. Or in other words, intermediate positions are ruled out. A shape is either a circle or it is not. A shape is either a square or it is not. This dualistic way of thinking is beneficial in many situations because it helps us to make clear decisions when faced with complex problems. However, in real life, many things are not either/or, but rather there are gray areas or have multiple properties. The over-application of the law-of-ranking mindset may also lead people to ignore the complexity and diversity of things, hindering the development of innovative and diverse thinking.

Law of excluded middle has had a profound impact on people's thinking and speech. Its existence makes people pay more attention to logic and reasoning, and also makes people more inclined to adopt a dichotomous way of thinking, dividing things into "yes" and "no", "right" and "wrong" extremes. The two extremes of "right" and "wrong". This dichotomous way of thinking simplifies the thinking process to a certain extent, but it may also lead people to ignore the complexities and possibilities in between.

3.3 The connection between the law of excluded middle and modern "cancel culture"

The connection between cancel culture and law of excluded middle is that they can both be influenced by a dualistic way of thinking. Binary thinking is a way of thinking that divides things into two opposites, i.e. something is either A or not A, with no middle ground. The law of excluded middle is still very important in modern logic and mathematics. However, the use of the law of excluded middle in philosophy and culture is often controversial.

In modern cancel culture, Law of excluded middle leads to binary thinking that tends to see only the good or bad side of a person's or organization's behavior. When a person or organization is deemed inappropriate or unethical because of what they say or do, the culture of cancellation tends to ignore other aspects of them and focus only on this point, thus condemning, resisting or "canceling" them. This kind of thinking ignores the fact that people and things are often multifaceted and complex, and can lead to oversimplified conclusions and overly aggressive actions.

The underlying logical connection of the law of excluded middle can also be seen in the influence of its conversational language and communication styles. The dichotomous logic of the law of excluded middle has led to a pervasive cultural paradigm of confrontation and resistance, a way of thinking that often manifests itself in conversations and communication in the form of offensive and abusive language, and intolerance of different viewpoints and positions. At the same time, the law of excluded middle is often used to emphasize an "orthodox" or "correct" viewpoint and to dismiss other views as wrong or invalid, which tends to lead to rigidity and narrow-mindedness and hinders the development of innovative and diverse thinking. At the same time, the extremes of cultural abolition can lead to misunderstandings and distortions of culture and history, simplifying or diminishing the complexity and diversity of culture.

4. How the Law of excluded middle is abused by the "culture of cancellation" in social practice

4.1 In political discussions on social media

Among the political groups of ancient Greece, the Sophists, often tried to entrap others with plausible propositions of the law of excluded middle. In Plato's *Gorgias*, the Sophists persuade a young man to admit that he is either wise or ignorant. When the middle ground of "one can be neither wise nor ignorant" does exist, the sophists do not offer it as an alternative position.

As society and technology have evolved, social media has become a powerful force in contemporary life, paving the way for the rise of a culture of digital participation and social movements. Simply put, cancel culture has entered the realm of digital culture, where any user can be the judge, jury and executioner of any individual on social media. Cancellation is spreading like wildfire on social media and is "uncontrollable". As political discussions permeate people's lives, many of us have encountered the situation many times where the opposing side will intentionally or unintentionally exclude a middle ground when there is indeed a middle ground in an argument. You are either a proponent or an opponent. In fact, these scenarios do not apply to the law of excluded middle. In propositions where the law of excluded middle applies, there is no middle ground. Yet politicians often phrase their arguments as either/or, forcing their opponents to take positions they did not originally support.

4.2 In the academic community

As a cultural offensive, the "deculture" movement is not only on social media, but also in the academic and cultural worlds. Dissenting opinions or expressions on issues of "gender and race" have become the target of the "culture of abolition."

Within the academic community, there are bound to be opinions and perspectives that do not conform to the current political correctness and social trends. However, at the heart of academic freedom and intellectual transmission lies respect for diversity and the accommodation of diverse views and positions. Thus, the culture of abolition has a very negative impact on the academic community. When scholarly opinions published in academic journals are withdrawn based on the sensitivities and objections raised in social media, we need to reflect on what this may represent.

In some cases, some ideas may even be radical, unpopular, or insensitive, but ultimately approved by the editors. To maintain a truly sustainable academic environment, we need to allow diverse voices to be heard. Pressure-induced opinion retractions not only stifle scholarly debate, but also release a message that opinions need to be moderated and standardized for a publishing marketplace increasingly driven by law, political correctness, and commercial and business values rather than academic ones.

What has emerged is an entirely new environment of academia in an environment where academic freedom is restricted. In this academic community, the way people speak, the tone of their voice, and the sensitivity of those who may be affected are more important than the message itself. By carefully selecting the parts of the message that the critic or critics may disagree with, the original message may be drowned out by the noise of the naysayers. In this era of misinformation and activism fostered by a polarized society and mass media, the struggle of scholars to freely express their opinions and defend those opinions in the field of scholarly publishing has never been more intense. Has the politicization or commercialization of academia and the withdrawal of opinions stifled open and healthy academic debate? Does this represent a unique "culture of cancellation" in academia and academic publishing? Questions such as these require deeper reflection and discussion in order to balance academic freedom and political correctness and to avoid the impact of a culture of cancellation on academic freedom. At the same time, scholars need to express their opinions more responsibly, avoiding as much as possible the use of radical, offensive, or discriminatory language, and avoid becoming targets of a culture of abolition.

5. cancel culture:A Victory for the Common people or a Hazard?

The culture of abolition is a highly complex social movement. On the one hand, it is one of the highest expressions of the democratization of discourse. On the other hand, it is also a force for censorship and intolerance of ideas that contradict mainstream acceptable social norms.

5.1 Certain advantages of abolishing the existence of culture

The "culture of cancellation" is a spontaneous popular action that has grown in speed, scope and impact with the widespread availability of social media and smartphones. This action not only focuses on the present, but also reaches back into the past, forcing American public figures and corporations alike to act carefully to avoid the penalty of "cancellation" for being "politically incorrect. By creating a climate of public opinion and deterrence, such actions create an online and social media-based redress mechanism that enhances the voices of minorities and other vulnerable groups.

Proponents of a "culture of cancellation" believe that "cancellation" is a form of "accountability" and an important tool for reshaping social justice. They use the power of public opinion to correct and resist inappropriate speech and behavior, to defend the equal rights of women, minorities and other vulnerable groups, and to pursue pluralism, equality and justice. The fact that their voices have been answered to some extent is a positive aspect of the "culture of cancellation."

5.2 Exploration of hazards

On the other hand, the drawbacks and destructiveness of the "culture of abolition" are also very obvious, and a series of overkill practices of its supporters have intensified the division and polarization of American society, making American society deep into the "culture war".

The culture of abolition has no bottom line. Although it seems to have the mission of overturning the established power order, trying to combat conservative forces in a failed system with the alternative of online trials, it often fails to achieve its original goal, and instead drastically reduces the space for academic discussion, public debate and free expression of opinions, silencing all areas out of fear and narrowing the political spectrum. What the "progressives" have done is to make their mission even more yawning.

Helen Lewis breaks down its effects in detail in *How Capitalism Fuels a Culture of Cancellation*. Analyzed from an economic perspective, companies nod to the progressive movement and are callous to their own employees just to keep their reputations intact by getting the internet users who think they have the power to point and stop looking deeper.

At the same time, for academia, the culture of abolition has brought about a change in the academic climate to some extent. Healthy and free academic debate is one in which there are no predetermined questions of right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. Opinions are personal, and while it may cause anger, controversy, or praise, whether neutral, fringe, or radical, it should be allowed in the context of the "academic" world because it is the nature of academic freedom of speech, which is somewhat different from academic freedom.

6. Policy and Practice Recommendations: How to Avoid the Abuse of the Law of excluded middle in a Culture of Abolition

6.1 Rebuilding a culture of dialogue, inclusion and pluralism

More than 150 prominent cultural figures, including Lorraine and Pinker, have co-signed an open letter in *Harper's Magazine* against the "culture of abolition," stating that the "culture of abolition" has brought The all-too-common "harsh and swift retaliation" will ultimately "undermine the most important cause of our time," namely, "the free exchange of information and ideas.

An excerpt from the letter reads:

While we have come to expect this on the radical right, censoriousness is also spreading more widely in our culture: an intolerance of opposing views, a vogue for public shaming and ostracism, and the tendency to dissolve complex policy issues in a blinding moral certainty. We uphold the value of robust and even caustic counter-speech from all quarters. But it is now all too common to hear calls for swift and severe retribution in response to perceived transgressions of speech and thought.

Meanwhile, Pinker's new book *"Reason: What It Is, Why It Seems Scarce, and Why It Matters"* is undoubtedly an important counterpoint to the "culture of abolition. In this new book, Pinker tries to teach "rationality" to society and calls for rationality to be a part of basic education, thus dismantling the root cause of the "cancel culture".

In the field of scholarly publishing, where freedom of expression allows for freedom of speech as long as other rights are not violated, as social rights evolve, prior ideas or opinions that may not have violated any rights at the time may now be seen as rights violations in the new prism of social rights. A key question then arises: should prior opinions be continually measured by a new or evolving value system? In extreme cases, speech, ideas or thoughts that may have been considered radical last year, but face a realignment of social and legal values, are now at risk of being considered unacceptable or hate speech. In recent years, it has been easiest to associate this freedom with conflicts of opinion related to race and gender. However, not all potentially extreme or radical forms of free speech should be considered "hate speech.

Prejudice and discrimination are the main obstacles that limit dialogue, inclusion and pluralism. To rebuild a culture of dialogue, inclusion and pluralism, we need to eliminate prejudice and discrimination, break the "solidified identity" and "group mentality", and use the wisdom and experience of individuals to determine their positions and opinions, so as to achieve true pluralism.

6.2 Promote integrative thinking and critical thinking

Some people believe there is a better way to call attention to misconduct. Public shaming is not new; it has been around for centuries. Public shaming is not new; it has been around for centuries. History has proven that humans have created many innovative yet horrific ways to shame individuals accused of violating society and the law. The concept of cancel culture is similar to history, but is specifically designed for the hyper-social in the digital age. As such, the pervasiveness of the culture of cancellation is not conducive to public debate; it is a destructive form of criticism. Perhaps it will further develop into a more constructive form of criticism, focusing on actions rather than individuals. As they say, everyone has his or her secrets, and therefore anyone can be affected by the culture of cancellation. Therefore, it is especially important to promote logical thinking and critical thinking.

In his new book, Pinker defines rationality as "the ability to use knowledge to achieve goals". The most important of these is the rules of logic, including "the principles of critical thinking and the normative system of logical, probabilistic and empirical reasoning. In Pinker's view, relying on these rules of logic can help eliminate the obstacles that prevent people from achieving their goals: "the cognitive illusions inherent in human nature, the prejudices, biases, tendencies, phobias that infect members of a particular race, class, sex, gender or civilization.

Pinker acknowledges that while perfect reason is a desire "beyond the reach of mortals," reasoning by the rules of logic can help us "approach the truth collectively in ways that are impossible for individuals," for example, by relying on science as "rational procedure" to invent the cowpox vaccine and completely eradicate smallpox as an "external fact and goal. rational process" of science that invented the cowpox vaccine and completely eradicated smallpox as an "external fact and goal".

The government, as well as social media platforms and news media, should encourage fair, balanced and critical thinking. Instead of reporting only one side of the story, the media should present as many different views and opinions as possible. This will help develop the public's critical thinking skills and allow them to better understand and analyze different viewpoints. At the same time, although the law of excluded middle of the row has wide application in the field of mathematics and formal logic, we need to pay attention to the limitations of the law of excluded middle in real life and debates. The Law of excluded middle is only one approach to logical thinking, while problems in life and debates may be more complex and require more comprehensive consideration and analysis.

References

- [1] Yan Kunru. A dialectical understanding of the law of excluded middle in [J]. Journal of Huaiyin Normal College (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 2004(03):297-301.
- [2] Pei Shan Li. Steven Pinker: "Reason" as a weapon to fight back against "cancel culture"[N]. Economic Observer,2021-12-06(038).DOI:10.28421/n.cnki.njjgc.2021.002542.
- [3] Foreign Philosophy Department, Department of Philosophy, Peking University. Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press 1982. 52.
- [4] Aristotle. Metaphysics [M]. Wu Shoupeng's translation. Beijing: The Commercial Press 1959. 101.
- [5] The Writing Group of General Logic. General logic: a revised version [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House 1986. 226.
- [6] Gui Qiquan. Introduction to contemporary philosophy of mathematics and philosophy of logic [M]. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press 1991. 148.

- [7] The Editorial Committee of the Dictionary of Philosophy - Logic Volume. The Dictionary of Philosophy: Logic Volume [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Dictionary Press 1988. 404.
- [8] Zhao Mei. The current situation of cultural tearing in the United States and its impact--a review of the "culture of abolition" in the United States[J]. People's Forum, 2023(03):93-96.
- [9] Zhou Liquan. Aristotle on the Law of Contradiction and the Law of excluded middle [J]. Philosophical Studies, 1981(11): 55.
- [10] Deng Xiaomang. The origin of logical reasoning from metaphor - the inspiration of Levi Breuer's Primitive Thinking[J]. Journal of Sichuan University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 2022(03):35-47.
- [11] David Acevedo. Tracking Cancel Culture in Higher Education. The National Association of Scholars, February 18 2022.
- [12] Alan Dershowitz. Cancel Culture: The Latest Attack on Free Speech and Due Process. New York: Hot Books. 2020.
- [13] A Letter on Justice and Open Debate. Harper's Magazine. July 7, 2020.
- [14] Jeff Yang. The Problem with 'the Letter'. CNN. July 10, 2020.
- [15] Velasco J C. You are cancelled: virtual collective consciousness and the emergence of cancel culture as ideological purging [J]. Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, 2020, 12(5): 48-68.
- [16] Jonah E. Bromwich. Everyone Is Canceled: It Only Takes One Thing - and Sometimes, Nothing - for Fans to Dump a Celebrity. New York Times. June 28 2018.
- [17] da Silva J A T. How to shape academic freedom in the digital age? Are the retractions of opinionated papers a prelude to "cancel culture " in academia?[J]. Current Research in Behavioral Sciences, 2021, 2: 100035.
- [18] Lewis H. How capitalism drives cancel culture [J]. The Atlantic, 2020, 14.