



Society Against Itself: Political Correctness and Organizational Self-Destruction

By Howard S. Schwartz



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Political correctness involves much more than a restriction of speech. It represents a broad cultural transformation, a shift in the way people understand things and organize their lives; a change in the way meaning is made. The problem addressed in this book is that, for reasons the author explores, some ways of making meaning support the creation and maintenance of organization, while others do not. Organizations are cultural products and rely upon psychological roots that go very deep. The basic premise of this book is that organizations are made up of the rules, common understandings, and obligations that the father represents, and which are given meaning in the Oedipal dynamic. In anti-oedipal psychology, however, they are seen as locuses of deprivation and structures of oppression. Anti-oedipal meaning, then, is geared toward the destruction of organization. This is done in the name of a higher morality, which demands compensatory love for those who have been deprived of love in the past by the father and his organizations, who should be hated and destroyed. The author looks at how anti-oedipal dynamics have played out in various organizational failures to which political correctness has led. These include the Jayson Blair scandal at the *New York Times*, the destruction of employee morale at the Ford Motor Company and the Cincinnati Police Department, the self-destruction of Antioch College, and the forcing out of Larry Summers at Harvard University. He concludes with some reflections on the shift from Oedipal to anti-oedipal meaning that is represented by Princess Diana supplanting Queen Elizabeth as the national symbol of the United Kingdom.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Writing in the phenomenological tradition, Schwartz (organizational behavior, Oakland U.) argues that our society has turned against itself due to political correctness. He seeks to define political correctness and understand how it has grown to have the power to overcome our confidence in ourselves. The framework he uses for his analysis is borrowed from the study of irrational processes and self-destruction in organizations. Most examples used are American, with generalizations made to American society." (*Book News Inc*)

"*Society Against Itself* is an extraordinary and timely book. It is in the great tradition of psychodynamically-based culture criticism from Sigmund Freud to Weston La Barre and M.D. Faber. With passion, thoughtful analysis, and rich case studies, Professor Schwartz refutes the widely-held ideology of political correctness (PC). At the same time, he explores its appeal. He shows that, far from enriching democracy, PC sabotages it. It fosters lockstep thinking and the inability to learn from experience. At the unconscious level, PC marks the overthrow of Oedipality by preoedipality: the triumph of the mother renders the father impotent and irrelevant. This book deserves the widest possible audience, and Professor Schwartz has done the utmost to write it in an accessible language. One need not be a psychoanalyst or psychoanalytically-oriented organizational researcher to be enriched by it. The future of democratic governance and education depends on books like this to nourish it. *Society Against Itself* is certain to provoke controversy – a conversation that our society sorely needs to have." (Howard F. Stein, Ph.D., Professor and Special Assistant to the Chair, Department of Family and Preventive Medicine)

"Building upon careful case studies of self-destructive behavior in several familiar organizations in the U.S. including Harvard University, the Ford Motor Company, the United Church of Christ, Antioch College, the *New York Times*, and the Cincinnati Police Department?Howard Schwartz shows how the anti-Oedipal moral tyranny of political correctness turns organizations against themselves by overvaluing the female and motherly concern for equal love and undervaluing the male and fatherly concern for achievement and rational order. The cumulative effect of Schwartz's incisive analyses of these cases alarms and sickens as the reader watches the slow-motion collapse of these organizations, with erosion of the public confidence and good will on which they depend. Schwartz's argument is powerful, important, and original. His prose is lucid, spirited, and engaging. I strongly recommend this brilliant and lavishly sensible book to all who are interested to know what is really happening to organizations in America today." (Lloyd Sandelands, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology and Professor of Management and Organization)

"Howard Schwartz's latest book will delight some, infuriate others and should scare the living daylights out of any thinking person. For if his analysis is correct, Western civilization is on a path of self-destruction. This will come not out of external factors such as terrorism or environmental degradation, but, as Freud said a propos of all death, for reasons internal to itself. Having lost faith in objectivity and external reality, we have lapsed into a collective hysteria of wishful thinking and fantasy. *Society Against Itself* speaks with the voice of a prophet. It demands to be heard. But can we still bring ourselves to listen to such voices?" (Yiannis Gabriel, Ph.D., author of *Storytelling in Organizations* and Professor of Organizational Theory)

"Howard Schwartz takes us far beyond the commonplace explanations of our economic and organizational crises in this pioneering work, into a deep understanding of the psychological dynamics that underlie our difficulties. In doing so he brings us into contact with profoundly important aspects of our contemporary cultural situation and illuminates many essential contradictions that must be confronted if we are to remain

vital in the 21st century. Schwartz has the courage to question some of our most cherished, taken-for-granted, assumptions. In doing so he offers us an opportunity to grapple with essential issues in a fresh and authentic way.” (James Krantz Ph.D., Former President, International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations; Principal)

About the Author

Howard S. Schwartz grew up in New York City, where he attended the Bronx High School of Science. His bachelor's degree is in philosophy from Antioch College, and he studied philosophy as a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of California, San Diego. His PhD, from Cornell University, is in organizational behaviour. He is a professor of organizational behaviour in the School of Business Administration at Oakland University, and now divides his time between Lake Orion, Michigan and New York City.

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