CANCEL CULTURE AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM: A Perspective from Democratic-Deliberative Education Philosophy

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Abstract: Cancel Culture and Academic Freedom (A Perspective from Democratic-Deliberative Education Philosophy). Cancel culture (or also known as call-out culture) is a social and cultural phenomenon that has been gaining global attention in the recent years. Public figures, company brands or institutions can be ostracized or boycotted only on the basis of disagreeing with the statement or visions of the sympathizers or the ideologues of this so-called cancel culture. This phenomenon has also slowly infiltrated the world of education and some researchers would even argue that cancel culture has its seminal growth beginning from the academe itself. Thus, this article will critically analyze the phenomenon of cancel culture particularly in the realm of education. Anchored in the principle of academic freedom, this article shall put into scrutiny the presence of cancel culture and its presuppositions and ramifications in education. And in order to achieve such telos, as a qualitative study, this article has employed an analytical-critical reflection as its method. In this academic endeavor, then, the researchers shall rely on the perspective of Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy as its benchmark. Based on the analysis of the Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy theory, it was found that Cancel Culture actually does not describe academic freedom and tends to undermine the meaning of academic freedom.

Keywords: Academic Freedom, cancel culture, Democratic-Deliberative
PRELIMINARY

Cancel culture is a phenomenon that is currently growing globally and being discussed in various platforms of communication and in public spheres. There are so many debates or questions that arise from this phenomenon, like: is cancel culture a form of anti-democracy? or in reverse, is cancel culture a true form of collective freedom that our society needs the most today?; and so on.

Alissa Wahid, in a Kompas Opinion entitled You're Canceled!, said that “cancel culture is an aspiration channel for ordinary citizens who feel frustrated and helpless to ask for accountability from public figures or influential entities (business or political) for their attitudes or behavior” (Wahid, 2021). Wahid believes that this cancel culture phenomenon is an open space for the marginalized members of the society to voice out their discontentment in the politico-socio-economic arena. More than that, she adds, cancel culture acts as a "hammer" that pounds away the dishonesty, the silence and the disloyalty of public officials or big brands that run contradictory to the universal values lived by society.

On the other hand, cancel culture seems to be thought of as a terrible specter for democracy. Hugh Breakey of Griffith University (Breakey, 2020) actually sees cancel culture as a phenomenon that turns off the debates or discussions in the public space. According to Breakey, there are several basic principles that must be known about democracy or freedom of argument. First, public discussion in a democratic country is a source of legitimacy for an argument to be accepted or not. In public discussions, different views are listened to inclusively and then a collective decision is taken. When these differences are then forced to "shut up" and disappear, the state thus loses its legitimacy.

Second, the ability to listen to different opinions, without "turning off" other dialogue subjects, will enrich the perspective of the group. Third, "humiliating" the other party through cancel culture can certainly be a "boomerang" for the group itself. That is why Breakey then questioned the quality of democracy built upon the presuppositions of cancel culture.

The question now is: what if cancel culture then sets its foot on the world of education? Is cancel culture the "face" of academic freedom? Or rather, will cancel culture then become a destructive element of academic freedom? We realize that delving critically into the phenomenon of cancel culture in higher education is a
necessity for the democratization of higher education.

As it was mentioned from the onset, the Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy, which is derived from the philosophical concept of the German intellectual Jürgen Habermas, shall serve as the “mirror” in our critical reflection of cancel culture. Habermas' philosophical views on the democratization of higher education and consensus-discourse in classrooms to the basics of argumentation will enable us to examine effectively the nature and workings of cancel culture in the world of education.

This Democratic-Deliberative Educational Philosophy Theory, although rarely discussed or used in many studies or analyzes, has actually started to appear in the research of Tomas Englund (2010) or A. Gutmann & D Thompson (1996). The main reference for this theory is of course Jürgen Habermas's concept of a deliberative-democratic society. However, the writing of Jürgen Habermas (1987) with the title "The Idea of the University: Learning Processes" becomes an additional reference for the design of this theory. In addition, the elaboration of Trio Kurniawan (2018) in his book "Deliberative-Democratic Educational Philosophy" is also a reference for this paper.

Several previous studies on cancel culture have focused more on analyzing social communication, media and psychological perspectives of this phenomenon. There is also little research on Cancel Culture from an educational perspective.

Samantha Haskell (2021), in the thesis she wrote, argues that social media users (twitter) massively work together to boycott figures they think are not in accordance with the shared values agreed by the community. According to Samantha, the massive use of social media to boycott these figures was carried out consistently and strategically so that it could become a collective movement.

Nadine Strossen (2020), a Professor of Law Emerita at New York Law School, criticizes Cancel Culture's actions in higher education. According to him, the attitude that must be built in higher education is freedom of speech, not cancel culture. Nadine uses a sociological approach in this study.

Joseph Ching Velasco (2020) uses the social psychology approach of Neil Alperstein in analyzing the cancel culture phenomenon in the Philippines. In his research, he found that in cases of cancel culture in the Philippines, the people there unite their thoughts and beliefs on social media so that all their actions on social media are a tangible form of their thoughts and beliefs, including in the case of cancel culture. In this “virtual collective consciousness”, people can be judges and
executors according to their will without anyone controlling them.

The research entitled "Cancel Culture and Academic Freedom" is different from previous studies in terms of the perspective used in the article. In this article, the author uses the perspective of Democratic-Deliberative Educational Philosophy in analyzing the phenomenon of cancel culture in education. In addition, this perspective is still new and rarely used in scientific research.

METHOD
Generally, qualitative method shall be utilized in the development of this article with a particular emphasis on descriptive analysis and critical approach. The researchers shall begin this endeavor by conducting literature studies in various local and international journals (such as SAGE Journals, Journal of Curriculum Studies, Journal of Classical Sociology, etc), news outlets both printed and online (for example: Kompas and New York Times), and other source materials (in the last 5 years) relevant to the subject matter of this article. After which, the researcher will then comprehensively elaborate the main phenomenon, i.e. cancel culture and then proceed to the discussion on Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy and eventually conduct an analysis of the theme. In the final section, the researchers will perform a critical reflection on the phenomenon of cancel culture using the perspective of Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Cancel Culture: Definition, History and Practice

According to Meredith D. Clark (2020), cancel culture is “an action to withdraw or cancel support for someone whose actions have offended the community's feelings collectively”. According to Clark, this act of withdrawing support is not simple. Cancel culture is a complex phenomenon where factors like power, time and access to resources are involved. This means that mass mobilization in cancel culture, as one of its important features for example, is carried out in an organized and effective manner in order to achieve its goals.

Cancel culture is a notion that is closely associated with the word call-out culture (mass mobilization culture). One of the most important elements of cancel culture is the effort to mobilize the mass (collective) to cancel support or sympathy for certain individuals, brands or groups for the sake of an interest (Hooks, 2020). In his research on cancel culture on the internet, Hooks found out that this phenomenon is closely related to the
doxing system (the dissemination of personal data without permission) which aims to bring down or harm certain parties. By doxing, the perpetrator tries to gain public sympathy so that doxing targets are judged openly on the internet or even during the normal course of lives.

Historically, it has been quite difficult to pinpoint the exact time the phenomenon of cancel culture first appeared. The tragic story of the death of Julius Caesar (the dictator of Rome) on March 15, 44 B.C. seems to be a reference for cancel culture that happened in the ancient time especially the one that involved a prominent public figure. On that fateful day, the two brothers, Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus, conspired against the renowned leader of Rome and managed to persuade sixty Roman senators to boycott Julius Caesar's leadership. Not only that, they eventually ended the life of Julius Caesar at the Roman senate building.

Cancel culture in fact has been recorded many times in the history of human civilization. One instance is the Montgomery Bus boycott that occurred on December 5, 1955 (Retzlaff, 2020). The motif of this boycott was a political and social campaign against racial segregation of public transport, particularly buses, in Montgomery (USA). Another one which took place at the 1980 Summer Olympics in the USSR where the United States initiated a boycott against the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan.

Cancel culture is becoming more and more common especially after the internet has somehow mastered human social activities. Ligaya Mishan notes that around the year 2001, a popular phrase renrou sousuo appeared in China which literally translates as "forager for human flesh" (Mishan, 2020). This term, upon investigation, turned out to be similar to the meaning of doxing.

The internet was originally used for good or pleasure by young people in China. Throughout its existence in the country, the internet has been abused by its users, for example, through displays of arrogance by public officials, cruel behaviors on the internet and many others. Mishan then explained that these young Chinese published onto the internet data and personal crimes of officials or public figures with the hope that misbehaving members of the society would be ostracized by their communities or groups.

In the past five years, there has been at least several cancel culture movements that have won public sympathy globally, for example the blocking of the former US President Donald Trump's social media accounts during the 2020 American presidential campaign (Pertiwi, 2020), the boycotting of French products after President Emmanuel Macron in 2020 issued a statement offending the Muslims
in Indonesia (Deborah, 2020) and the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) which began in 2013 as a reaction upon the violence and racism committed against the black Americans (McCoy, 2020).

In Indonesia, the cancel culture phenomenon has occurred several times. In 2016, the so-called 212 protesters boycotted Sari Roti after the brand made a remark that it refused to be involved in any political movement, including the 212 Movement. After the Sari Roti boycott, the hashtag #UninstallBukalapak took over Twitter after Bukalapak CEO Achmad Zaky criticized the Research and Development fund policy (R&D) of President Joko Widodo which was thought to be insufficient or small (Sutianto, 2019).

This cancel culture also exists in the virtual world in the form of cyber bullying. As previously mentioned in Ligaya Mishan's research (Mishan, 2020), young people in China initially took out their rants on social media against those misbehaving public officials. Admittedly, this cyber bullying continues even until today, and without exception this culture of bullying also exists among the netizens in Indonesia. In line with the increasing phenomenon of cancel culture on social media in Indonesia, the bullying and abusive behavior of social media users in Indonesia has also increased rapidly. In the 2020 Microsoft (Digital Civility Index) Annual Report, Indonesia is the lowest in Southeast Asia in terms of internet user politeness (Microsoft, 2020). As a reaction to this, expectedly, the comment section of Microsoft's official Instagram account was trolled by enraged Indonesian netizens after this report was published to the effect that Microsoft had to close the comment section of its Instagram account. Or, as asked by Hipolitus K. Kewuel (2019) in his article “Journalism Ethics and Role of Interfaith Harmony Forum in Social Media”, is it possible for civil society organizations to be involved to “regulate” the flow of wild conversations on social media?

**Cancel Culture in Education**

Education also seems unable to escape the horror of this cancel culture. In the government's effort to guarantee academic freedom, cancel culture barges in a paradoxical way. Political Scientist in Harvard Kennedy School, Pippa Noris (2020), critically opposed the phenomenon of cancel culture in an article he wrote. Noris said that in the recent years cancel culture has "taken over" the campus. In many discussions on campus, Noris observed that the cancel culture movement has caused an increase of political tensions among students and faculty members while putting aside the importance of intellectuality in discourses. He realized
that the existence of cancel culture, as stated by other critics, could be a form of silencing the individual freedom.

Nevertheless, on a more positive note, cancel culture was once used as a movement that sparked public attention. In 2009, twenty-six Asian-American students boycotted Philadelphia High School (USA) due to the fact that the school administration had turned a blind eye to the experiences of violence that these students had to suffer from. In 2020, a number of students from the University of Wiraraja Sumenep (Madura) boycotted the campus and burned a graduation cap or toga because of the high cost for graduation in their campus.

A group of Riau University students themselves had boycotted BNPT (Indonesia National Counterterrorism Agency) which held an Anti-Radicalism Seminar in 2007. The students who boycotted this event considered it to be BNPT’s way of brainwashing the university University students (Rodzi, 2018).

The cancel culture phenomenon especially in higher education must be seen as a serious problem because universities or campuses are institutions that guarantee academic freedom. We then ask: is cancel culture itself a form of academic freedom? In the minds of some academics themselves, the phenomenon of cancel culture in the educational sphere is viewed only as a form of superficiality and for some others, however, it is also the most extreme form of criticism.

Nevertheless, is cancel culture always negative, as many critics claim? If we look at its history, cancel culture seems to have experienced a shift in meaning. The movements that initially became an opportunity for marginalized people to voice out their concerns turned out to be a weapon capable of silencing their political opponents. As we have said earlier, cancel culture also targets academic freedom that is an essential element in education. Academic criticism seems no longer have a place because individuals are uncomfortable to argue rationally. The question is: why did cancel culture then experience a shift in meaning? How does the Philosophy of Education critically analyze this phenomenon?

Jürgen Habermas Philosophical Concepts: Discourse and Consensus

Jürgen Habermas is a philosopher from the second generation of the Frankfurt School (after Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse). He is considered as one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century. Through his work, Habermas provides a new perspective in the Frankfurt School to break the theoretical impasse faced by his predecessors (Gorchia, 2015).
Because of his new insights, Jürgen Habermas was greatly favored by the students he tutored at the Frankfurt School. However, at a surprising turn of events, a split with the students he supervised occurred in 1959 after he criticized the students' methods of physical revolution as a way to overthrow the rulers (the capitalists). According to Habermas, the students' actions were very "barbaric". The revolution, for him, was a "false revolution". Habermas, for many of his followers, is not considered a "leftist" (Howard, 2015).

In his perspective, Jürgen Habermas offers a more "humane" approach to fighting for democracy. Students and educational institutions must first be able to carry out democratic thoughts and actions so that they are able to build a democratic environment in their daily lives. At this point, Habermas assumes that all humans use their rationality as a basis for thinking, speaking and acting.

In his book *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Jürgen Habermas believes that true knowledge must be directed at the interests of society (Habermas, 1971). Knowledge is thus a struggle between interests. For Habermas, a democratic society is one that is able to communicate rationally. It is in this rational communication that the intention or interest is conveyed. This action is known as a discourse.

Discourse, for Habermas, is a manifestation of the emancipatory spirit (liberation) from the shackles in the society. In discourse, all human individuals are given the same space and opportunity to express their ideas rationally and equally. The discourse process in society, according to F. Budi Hardiman, is a rationalization process that involves both cognitive-technical and moral-practical abilities (Hardiman, 1993). This rationalization process is then referred to as a communicative act (Habermas, 1984).

The main requirement for a communicative act is language. Knowledge becomes possible through language. The basic principle is as follows (Habermas, 1979): First, say something that is understandable. Second, give something to be understood. Third, make oneself understandable. Fourth, build a common understanding. Hence, for Habermas, without these basic principles, communication will not happen.

The culmination of a communicative action is consensus (agreement). All discourses that occur in society must focus on mutual agreement. In a consensus there is an act of sharing knowledge, mutual trust and being connected to one another.
Democratic-Deliberative Education Philosophy

Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy is a philosophical concept of education that was born from a reflection on the philosophical ideas of Jürgen Habermas. The concept of Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy was first developed by Trio Kurniawan (Kurniawan, 2018). This concept is not entirely new as several minor writings on it have been written in various publications. However, there are very few writings that comprehensively discuss the philosophy of education which originates from Habermas' thought. This Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy is a contribution that seeks to fill this literary gap.

The Democratic-Deliberative Education Philosophy is built on the awareness that education is essentially a shared space where discourse and consensus can be carried out (Subkhan, 2016). In the educational space, the subject is on the same level (essence and rationality). These subjects engage in arguments and exchange of ideas in order to put forward their interests.

As a public space, education requires an environment that is free, emancipatory and open to critical analyses (Kurniawan, 2018). Education that is not based on the above three requirements will certainly not give birth to new knowledge and be responsive to the needs of society. In other words, without these three essential elements, education is merely a "room of dictatorship".

In Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy, the reality of education becomes a sharp discourse material. The essence and vision of education will always be questioned and re-evaluated. The equality of each subject in the discourse makes communication in education a very rational one.

Jürgen Habermas' idea of the importance of critical reasoning that will lead humans to liberation, through a democratic-deliberative system, is only possible through education (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996). A democratic-deliberative system basically presupposes an openness to listen to different ideas and the ability to delegate ideas in the public sphere so that agreement can be reached. This then has an impact on the openness of the educational institution or system to discuss various issues that are important to human civilization (Englund, 2010).

In one of his writings, Tomas Englund states that the character of Habermasian philosophy of education is the hearing of all the different opinions in the classroom (Englund, 2006). The students then exchange their arguments and criticisms with each other in the classroom. At the end of the discussion,
the students strive to find the best formula of all ideas. This best formula then becomes a mutual agreement among them.

Critical Reflections on Cancel Culture in Education

After analyzing the cancel culture phenomenon and discussing the Democratic-Deliberative Education Philosophy, the perennial question that we always ask is: is cancel culture a form of democracy in the academe? In the context of education, is there an element of academic freedom in cancel culture?

In the perspective of Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy, the phenomenon of cancel culture in education does not actually reflect an academic freedom when a discourse and consensus are not exercised and built from it. Boycotting arguments or discussions is an act that violates democratic principles because one or all of the communicating parties opt not to listen to each other attentively and rationally.

Furthermore, cancel culture is also not a form of academic freedom because the issues being discussed are not equally delegated and open to public spaces. Cancel culture denies the opportunity for discussion and argumentation. Even worse, as with the many instances that we have cited, the opposing party who does not stand in agreement with the adherents of cancel culture becomes the victim of negative campaign and open bullying. Such irrational and disrespectful behavior is contrary to the dignity of human beings as autonomous and rational agents.

However still, cancel culture can be considered as part of democratic action as long as it is understood as a strategy of the adherents to get the opposing parties to communicate their sentiments. This exception applies only if the interlocutor insists on closing the discussion room. With the boycott, it is hoped that the interlocutor will be willing to speak and argue freely.

We believe that academic freedom should be an interesting and fun thing to explore. Deliberative-Democratic Education Philosophy believes that in a free and emancipatory academic space, all different of opinions can be listened to and discussed. That is why as we have persistently emphasized, cancel culture becomes a parasite when in the name of freedom of opinion people boycott the arguments of the interlocutors.

In the context of Indonesia, this democratic-deliberative concept of freedom of expression (democracy) can be seen in "musyawarah-mufakat". According to Setyaningsih, et al (2021), "musyawarah-mufakat" is a procedure for determining and deciding a case. This “Indonesia’s Democracy” refers to the
reality of a multicultural society (Prasisko, 2019). In the classroom, this concept is in line with democratic-deliberative education. This concept was also emphasized by Wibowo (2020) in his writing entitled “Merefleksi Demokrasi Pasca Pilpres 2019 Dalam Mewujudkan Kesejahteraan Umum”.

CONCLUSION

Jürgen Habermas always fights for an educational institution—especially in the higher education—that is democratic (Habermas and Blazek, 1987). He believes that the democratization of higher education will give birth to a lot of innovation and creativity. This goal will certainly be achieved if academic freedom, emancipation and critical reasoning are practiced in the daily circumstances of higher education.

Cancel culture, once again as we argue, is a parasite in the exercise of the academic freedom. This culture does not portray humans as communicable and rational subjects. Cancel culture is a flaw in democracy insofar as it closes itself to discourse and consensus. Cancel culture is the new face of dictatorship brought by populism.

As a democratic country, the educational system in Indonesia is of course built in accordance with the politico-socio-cultural system of the Indonesian society and values. The existence of democratic principles in Indonesian educational system, of course, always serve their purpose for the Indonesian nation to be able to generate new innovations and creativity every moment possible. Not only that, dialogue with social and cultural values present in Indonesian society will help to form the unique character of Indonesian education.

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