

Positions of the Department of Philosophy & Moral Sciences on the Appointment of Dr. Nathan Cofnas as Scientific Staff Member

Introduction

This text sets out the positions of the Department of Philosophy & Moral Sciences (LW01) at Ghent University concerning two matters:

- the decision to hire Nathan Cofnas as postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University (sections 1 through 3).
- the negative impact of this appointment on department LW01, the students, and Ghent University as a whole (sections 4 through 6).

For both subjects, it is crucial to provide relevant background information. This leads to the following structure:

1. Background information on the research project and the job opening
2. The scientific qualifications of Nathan Cofnas in relation to the job opening
3. Concerns regarding the procedure that was followed
4. Background information: the views held by Cofnas
5. Organizational impact
6. Moral impact
7. Conclusion

By approving this text in the department council, we aim to clarify for ourselves what our positions and which problems we are experiencing. The text will be submitted to the administration of the faculty and the university.

Following approval, the text will also be published on the department's website. This is in line with the objectives of the text regarding external communication:

- It contains well-documented and clearly structured positions to which all department members can refer when responding to questions and concerns from students, family members, acquaintances, colleagues at other workplaces, and (last but not least) the various news media.
- This text also serves as a correction to several inaccurate perceptions that have arisen in recent months as a result of incorrect reporting and the spread of misinformation.

This text may also be used in support of internal and external reports.

1. Background information on the research project and the job opening.

The research project for which Nathan Cofnas was hired is titled *The Birth Problem of Liberalism* and is funded by the Special Research Fund (BOF) of Ghent University through the Starting Grant awarded to Bouke de Vries. The project description reads as follows:

“Across all Abrahamic religions, it has been found that the more religious people are, the more children they have. However, whereas political demographers such as Eric Kaufman have shown that the growth of religious fundamentalist groups that combine relatively high fertility with relatively high retention rates such as the Haredim, Laestadians, Salafi-Islamists, and Orthodox Calvinists poses (long-term) challenges to liberal democracies, philosophers have not considered what, if anything, states may or should do about this. Are there morally permissible/necessary ways of ensuring that there remain enough liberal-minded people to maintain liberal institutions, assuming, as sociologist Christian Joppke puts it bluntly, that ‘you cannot run a liberal state that is filled up to the ceiling with illiberal people’? This scholarly project is the first to provide an answer to this (understandably) sensitive question.”

Key words are: religious fundamentalism, demography, and liberalism. Bouke de Vries situates the project within the field of ‘social & political philosophy.’

In addition to general information about Ghent University, the job posting also included the following text:

“The Department of Philosophy and Moral Sciences at Ghent University invites candidates to apply for a 55% postdoctoral research position (one year) on the future of liberalism, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Bouke de Vries.

Liberalism — understood as a political doctrine emphasizing individual freedom and equality — is increasingly being challenged, both from the left and the right. This raises urgent questions as to whether liberalism can endure, and if so, in what form, and whether efforts should be made to preserve it.

The selected candidate has an excellent publication record and a strong research interest in liberalism. Having [sic] and willingness to teach in philosophical anthropology is considered an advantage.” (our emphasis, our translation)

This information about the project and the job posting is important because it is sometimes incorrectly claimed or assumed that Nathan Cofnas was hired to conduct research on (the heritability of) intelligence. That is not the case. In the media, considerable attention is rightly paid to his views on intelligence and to the fact that he presents himself as a ‘race realist.’ However, Cofnas himself has never conducted research on intelligence, nor is such research envisaged within the project for which he was hired. If he were to do so, a legal problem would arise: appointing a candidate to a position different from the one described in the job posting constitutes a violation of the principle of equality.

2. The scientific qualifications of Nathan Cofnas in relation to the job opening

We find it very improbable that Nathan Cofnas was the best out of 14 candidates for this job opening. Bouke de Vries repeatedly stated in the press that Nathan Cofnas had published in highly ranked journals and had been affiliated with leading institutions. However, Cofnas's research has also been heavily criticized (2.1). In addition, we observe only very limited expertise regarding the subjects that are central to the project: political philosophy, liberalism, and demography. The formulated requirement in the job posting of a "strong research interest in liberalism" is not borne out by Cofnas's publication record or the rest of his CV (2.2).

2.1 'Letter to the Editor' in *Philosophical Psychology*

In August 2020 the following text appeared in *Philosophical Psychology*: 'More than provocative, less than scientific: A commentary on the editorial decision to publish Cofnas (2020).' This on the occasion of an article from Cofnas published earlier in that journal in the same year. The authors (Larsen et al.) wrote:

"The purpose of our letter is not to invite Cofnas's contribution into a broader dialogue, but to respectfully voice our concerns about the decision to publish the manuscript, which, in our opinion, fails to meet a range of academic quality standards usually expected of academic publications."

"There are, however, several critical problems with Cofnas's piece, which we believe should have either disqualified the manuscript upon submission or been addressed during the review process and resulted in substantial revisions. Here we outline what we see as the most pressing issues."

The statement in this *Letter to the Editor* is strong: the article is so bad that it never should have been published in its current form.

In the same issue, a kind of 'confession of guilt' by one of the editors ("Editor's views") was published. The other editor resigned following the wave of criticism over the decision to publish Cofnas's article. A few relevant excerpts:

"I have taken very seriously the criticisms raised over the last several months against Cofnas's paper and the editorial decision to publish it, including but not restricted to Larsen et al.'s. This has led me to change my views from the ones expressed in the coauthored Editors' Note [waarin de publicatie van het artikel van Cofnas toegelicht en verdedigd werd]. It has also motivated me to work to implement procedural improvements so that, going forward, the journal better handles papers on controversial topics having sensitive moral and socio-political implications."

"Though I did not play a role in the review or acceptance of Cofnas's paper, I regret standing on the side of that editorial decision in the Editors' Note. I do stand by the general commitment to free inquiry we expressed there; however, I now believe that our standard double-blind review process failed to be adequately sensitive to the empirical, moral, and socio-political issues raised in Cofnas's paper. While our Editors' Note flagged some of these controversial aspects of Cofnas's paper, I regret that I failed to see these aspects as areas where the review process did not require enough from the author." (our emphasis)

The editor admits that the peer review as it was carried out has failed.

Journalist Erik Raspoet contacted, for his article on Knack.be (18/3), Rasmus Rosenberg Larsen, philosopher of science specialized in philosophy of psychology at the University of Toronto and first author of the 'letter to the editor':

"I myself am a strong supporter of academic freedom, but not when someone presents speculative racial theories as science without providing even a shred of evidence. In our letter, we deliberately chose not to engage with those claims, because doing so would inadvertently lend them legitimacy. We limited ourselves to condemning the abysmal quality of the work. The argumentation was riddled with false dichotomies, misinterpreted correlations, and straw-man reasoning — a technique to which philosophers are particularly allergic. Even worse was the scientific substantiation. We simply could not

comprehend how Philosophical Psychology, an important journal in our field, had allowed such shoddy work to pass through.” (our emphasis)

The question that posed itself to us after reading this critique, regardless of Cofnas’s publications in high-ranking journals, was: how does the quality of Cofnas’s research relate to the quality of the research of other candidates? Are there also articles from other candidates that exhibit argumentative flaws? Because of the lack of transparency (see further in 3.2) these questions remain unanswered.

2.2 Analysis of Cofnas’s CV and publication list

Cofnas’s CV can be found here: [Philosophy of Biology and Ethics - Nathan Cofnas](#).

His publications are very diverse; it is not that his academic profile aligns closely with the research project, that is situated in political philosophy. Cofnas writes himself:

“I work in the philosophy of biology (very broadly construed) and ethics, and the intersection of these fields. I’m particularly interested in scientific and ethical controversies connected with evolution-informed social science.”

“I aspire to do philosophy that is continuous with science. Most of my work deals with methodological issues at the border between science and philosophy, and about half of my publications are in science journals.”

Cofnas describes his research domains in his CV as follows:

“Philosophy of science (especially biology), moral psychology, values in science, ethics, political theory”

This is a very diverse enumeration. With this, we don’t intend to say that Cofnas does not have any relevant publications. But we do intend to say that the amount seems rather limited. For illustration: we only find in the article ‘A debunking explanation for moral progress’ a clear focus on ‘liberalism’, the central domain of the research project. But even there the central question is very different from the question central in the research project he was hired on. Cofnas discusses ‘liberal values’ only in the context of a meta-ethical discussion about realism versus anti-realism in ethics. We find no further publications taking up political philosophical questions surrounding liberalism. We also don’t find publications about demography, the other thematic pillar of the project.

The question we therefore want to ask here: was there not one candidate that really focust on political philosophy, specifically liberalism? Previous, shown expertise about the specific theme is a relevant criterium that should play an important role in the selection procedure.

The already cited philosopher of science Larsen comments on this matter in Raspoet’s article:

“It is not credible that Cofnas was the most suited candidate. In Canada or the United States, similar vacancies attract hundreds of candidates with almost identical qualifications. Cofnas wouldn’t stand a chance.” (our translation)

Here there were only 14 candidates, but it is not credible that there was none amongst them that, contrary to Cofnas, did meet the requirement “strong research interest in liberalism”.

3. Concerns regarding the procedure that was followed

3.1 The procedure as it was followed

The Ghent University regulations regarding the recruitment of academic staff (WP) state:

“The budget holder is responsible for the final selection. The budget holder determines his or her own working method and ensures an objective assessment and equal treatment of all candidates. The budget holder provides the Personnel and Organization Department with a brief written justification (via the recruitment proposal) regarding the choice of candidate.” (our translation)

According to the applicable delegation decision, the authority to hire is jointly delegated to the budget holder and the HR Director. In some cases, HR may wish to verify certain aspects in more detail and request additional information or justification. This occurred in this hiring process and is part of the standard due diligence within a hiring process.

Despite these additional steps, decisions were made within the applicable regulatory framework by Bouke de Vries as budget holder and the HR Director that we regret, because together they have led to a lack of transparency that is no longer easily remedied (3.2). Impressions created by this lack of transparency are reinforced by the history leading up to the hire (3.3) and by the lack of communication on the part of Bouke de Vries (3.4).

3.2 Lack of transparency

Our substantive concerns (see 2.1 and 2.2) could have been avoided if the HR had had the arguments presented by Bouke de Vries reviewed by external experts with knowledge of philosophy in general (the quality of philosophical argumentation) and political philosophy in particular. Many members of the department do not understand why the final decision was made without involving neutral experts in the field of philosophy. This does not imply that we are proposing this as a general procedure. But exceptional situations call for exceptional measures. It was clear to the parties involved (including HR) that we were dealing with an exceptional situation here (see 3.3 and 4.1).

No external experts were consulted. The department currently has no access to the arguments presented by Bouke de Vries, nor to the application files. The explanation provided by Bouke de Vries in his response in Schamper on April 7 illustrates the problem of verifiability that this leads to:

“Regarding Nathan’s appointment, I considered three criteria: the publication record, the overlap between the candidate’s work and the project, and the letter of motivation.” (our translation)

Since, apart from Bouke de Vries, no one with expertise has seen the applications, it cannot be verified whether Cofnas was the best candidate according to these three criteria or whether Bouke de Vries indeed proceeded in this manner. We also note that research quality (which is distinct from publication output) is not listed as a criterion in the guidelines, even though it is essential for the hiring of a postdoctoral researcher.

Of course, it would have been even better if Bouke de Vries had taken the initiative himself to involve other department members (preferably other ZAP [abbreviation for tenured faculty] members) in the evaluation. This would provide a better guarantee that the following provision of the regulations is met: *“and hereby ensures an objective evaluation and equal treatment of all candidates.”* (our translation)

Due to Bouke de Vries’s decision to handle the recruitment process alone, many department members are not convinced that this provision has been met.

By involving other department members in the hiring process (which he did for previous vacancies within the framework of his ERC project), Bouke de Vries could have prevented much of the criticism and commotion surrounding the appointment. In general, the department favors collegial decision-making in the hiring of academic staff.

3.3 The history leading up to the recruitment

Due to the lack of transparency, a large majority of the department members have the impression—one that is difficult to dispel—that the appointment was a done deal: an ideological choice in which it was already decided in advance (when the job posting was published) who would get the job.

This impression is reinforced by the history leading up to it. On February 5, 2024, Cofnas published a blog post titled *A Guide for the Hereditarian Revolution*, which is discussed further in this text. This quickly made headlines, as evidenced by the article *'Race realist' fellow argues for 'preservation of racial distinctions'* in the online magazine *Varsity* on February 7, 2024.

One week after the publication of this article, during a meeting of the program committee for the philosophy and moral sciences programs (February 14, 2024), Bouke de Vries submitted a funding request to bring Cofnas to Ghent for a lecture for students, funded through Internationalisation@Home. The request is vague, as the topic of the lecture has yet to be determined. It was also unclear in which course the guest lecture should be scheduled. Bouke de Vries indicates that Cofnas's work focuses on the philosophy of biology and evolutionary theory.

Since Bouke de Vries couldn't find any teachers willing to let Cofnas speak in their classes, he decided to invite Cofnas himself to give a guest lecture for the Political Philosophy course, for which Bouke de Vries was a co-teacher. The new application suddenly mentions the topic of liberalism, rather than the philosophy of biology:

"Title: *The Rise of Liberalism*

Abstract: *For several decades after World War II, there was a cross-cultural trend toward left-liberalism. I argue that the worldwide shift to liberalism has been driven largely by an impulse for egalitarianism that traces back to the Pleistocene. However, the current neoliberal order is not a stable equilibrium. I predict a shift away from American-style liberal democracy toward more illiberal systems."*

Because several people criticized the invitation of Cofnas, Bouke de Vries eventually withdrew his application for funding at the committee.

In Cofnas's CV (see link above), however, the lecture is mentioned:

"The Rise of Liberalism," Ghent University (May 17, 2024)."

It is unclear in which context and with what funding this took place.

Regarding the sequence of events outlined above, we have the following concerns:

- It strongly appears that Bouke de Vries wanted to bring Cofnas himself to Ghent, regardless of the topic of the planned lecture.
- The lecture on liberalism is a rare part of Cofnas's CV that aligns with the project and the job opening. It is included there due to an intervention by Bouke de Vries. Cofnas's CV at that time gave no reason to invite him to give a lecture on this topic. A lecture on the philosophy of biology (which, according to both Bouke de Vries and Cofnas himself, is his primary field of research) would have been a much more obvious choice.

3.4 No communication by Bouke de Vries

Even in the unlikely scenario that no one else had actually applied with more robust qualifications than Cofnas, and he was therefore ranked as the most suitable candidate, there was clearly an error in judgment on the part of the supervisor, Bouke de Vries, regarding the subsequent handling of the appointment process. He was fully aware that Cofnas's stigmatizing remarks in Cambridge had led to widespread protest and the termination of collaboration by Emmanuel College. He was also aware that his arrival would cause great concern among colleagues in our department, as several members had previously expressed their dissatisfaction when De Vries wished to invite Cofnas to give a guest lecture (see 3.3). Regardless of Bouke de Vries's personal assessment of the acceptability of Cofnas's offensive blog posts, it was therefore entirely foreseeable that the arrival of this controversial researcher would have a detrimental impact on the atmosphere within the department. Against this background, one would expect a collegial ZAP member to adopt a responsible attitude and contact the department chair, the faculty board, and/or the university administration to inform them of this delicate situation, so that the necessary precautions could be taken (such as seeking legal advice regarding the employment of individuals who may have violated anti-racism legislation and/or the host institution's code of ethics; determining whether this hiring is compatible with safeguarding the well-being within the department and the program, etc.). Bouke de Vries took the exact opposite approach, with all the disastrous consequences that entailed.

3.5 Conclusion

The department notes that there is a lack of transparency that is difficult to remedy, which means that serious doubts about Cofnas's relative strength compared to other candidates will persist. We also believe that Cofnas does not meet the selection criterion of "a strong research interest in liberalism." Furthermore, we regret the lack of communication and collegiality on the part of the budget holder.

4. Background information: the views held by Cofnas

In the second half of this document, we discuss the negative impact of Cofnas's appointment on the LW01 department, the students, and Ghent University as a whole. In this section, we provide information about positions taken by Cofnas that will enable the reader to understand the issues we raise in sections 5 and 6.

First, we would like to draw attention to an important point: the positions we cite below are not part of Cofnas's scholarly work. In what follows, we refer only to non-academic communications (primarily blog posts), not to his publications in academic journals.

4.1 Cofnas's views

A. A Guide for the Hereditarian Revolution

In this blog post, Cofnas makes amongst others the following assertions:

"In a meritocracy, Harvard faculty would be recruited from the best of the best students, which means the number of black professors would approach 0%. Blacks would disappear from almost all high-profile positions outside of sports and entertainment."

"In the light of race differences, certain core liberal values will have to be reexamined. We will probably have to rethink ideals like multiculturalism and a borderless world. Legislators should take into consideration how their policies will influence the racial makeup of society, and what effects this is likely to have."

"There must be some barriers set up between races in order for each one to express its own unique genius. And in the case of group conflict, racial tribalism can sometimes be the key to solving collective-action problems. If whites are attacked qua whites, it makes sense for them to fight back as whites."

Also after becoming affiliated with Ghent University (as a "visiting researcher"), Cofnas continued to advocate for these ideas. Following his appearance on *Terzake*, he posted a link to the blog post on March 17 in a comment on a *Terzake* X post.

B. American Renaissance

In the blog post, Cofnas also argues that: *"American Renaissance [...] is an important center for high-quality discussions of race."* *American Renaissance* is the (online) magazine of the New Century Foundation think tank. During the lecture organized by the KVHV on April 2, 2026, he also defended his reference to *American Renaissance* (AR). In doing so, Cofnas positions himself within a network of like-minded individuals. It is therefore useful to take a moment to consider what is published in AR.

On the *Southern Poverty Law Center's* website, the entry on AR lists the following examples of ideas disseminated by AR:

"In fact, blacks and Hispanics are, compared to whites, far more likely to be poor, illiterate, on welfare, or in jail; they are far more likely to have illegitimate children, be addicted to drugs, or have AIDS. By no definition of international competitiveness can the presence of these populations be anything but a disadvantage." — "'Who Speaks for Us?' (A Word of Introduction to Our Readers)," American Renaissance, 1990

"There is a difference between blacks and whites — analogous to the difference in intelligence — in psychopathic personality considered as a personality trait. ... For psychopathic personality, the mean and distribution are higher among blacks. The effect of this is that there are more black psychopaths and more psychopathic behavior among blacks." — Richard Lynn, American Renaissance, 2002

“Blacks and whites are different. When blacks are left entirely to their own devices, Western civilization — any kind of civilization — disappears.” — Jared Taylor, American Renaissance, 2005

4.2 Lack of scientific basis

It is also important to emphasize at this point that Cofnas made these statements on a personal blog and that they are not the result of, nor were they made within the context of, scientific research. Even though Cofnas himself states on his blog that this is “the scientifically correct position,” experts in the field dispute this claim.

A. ASHG Denounces Attempts to Link Genetics and Racial Supremacy

“The American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) is alarmed to see a societal resurgence of groups rejecting the value of genetic diversity and using discredited or distorted genetic concepts to bolster bogus claims of white supremacy. ASHG denounces this misuse of genetics to feed racist ideologies. In public dialog, our research community should be clear about genetic knowledge related to ancestry and genomic diversity. To that end, ASHG affirms the following:

- *Genetics demonstrates that humans cannot be divided into biologically distinct subcategories. Although there are clear observable correlations between variation in the human genome and how individuals identify by race, the study of human genetics challenges the traditional concept of different races of humans as biologically separate and distinct. This is validated by many decades of research, including recent examples.*
- *Most human genetic variation is distributed as a gradient, so distinct boundaries between population groups cannot be accurately assigned. There is considerable genetic overlap among members of different populations. Such patterns of genome variation are explained by patterns of migration and mixing of different populations throughout human history.² In this way, genetics exposes the concept of “racial purity” as scientifically meaningless.*
- *It follows that there can be no genetics-based support for claiming one group as superior to another. Although a person’s genetics influences their phenotypic characteristics, and self-identified race might be influenced by physical appearance, race itself is a social construct. Any attempt to use genetics to rank populations demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of genetics.”*

B. Other relevant academic articles

‘No support for the hereditarian hypothesis of the Black-White achievement gap using polygenic scores and tests for divergent selection’ (Kevin Bird).

‘Confronting scientific racism in psychology: Lessons from evolutionary biology and genetics’ (Kevin Bird, John Jackson & Andrew Winston).

‘Race, Ethnicity, and the Scarr-Rowe Hypothesis: A Cautionary Example of Fringe Science Entering the Mainstream’ (Evan J. Giangrande & Eric Turkheimer).

‘Genes, Heritability, ‘Race’, and Intelligence: Misapprehensions and Implications’ (Neil Greenspan).

C. Han van der Maas

IQ expert Han van der Maas was also interviewed for Erik Raspoet’s article in Knack (March 18). He is a professor of psychological methodology at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and a world-renowned authority on IQ research.

The article discusses, among other things, van der Maas’s criticism of Charles Murray’s work in a 2023 podcast. Murray was co-author of the controversial book *The Bell Curve* (1994), which argues that IQ differences between races are largely genetically determined. We quote:

“Yet, according to Van der Maas, Murray and co. go way off the rails in several places. The assumption that individual differences manifest themselves almost unchanged in groups is a methodological cardinal sin known as Simpson’s paradox. Van der Maas further criticizes the use of the concept of race, a construct with a shaky biological basis and barely definable contours. And as for those IQ differences between population groups: there are many well-documented environmental factors whose causal link to these differences is established. Poverty, poor education, racism, to name just the most important ones. In contrast, there is no known genetic mechanism to explain these differences. Yet racial scientists attribute a decisive role precisely to genetic factors.” (our translation)

This is highly relevant because Charles Murray is a very important source for Cofnas in his blog posts.

Raspoet’s article continues:

“‘Nathan Cofnas is guilty of the same thing,’ says Van der Maas when we contact him about the crisis at Blandijnberg. ‘He does acknowledge the role of environmental factors, but argues that heredity is more important. He doesn’t provide any evidence, but he assumes that his hypothesis will eventually be proven and immediately draws far-reaching conclusions from it.’ Van der Maas prefers not to use the term pseudoscience. ‘That would be the end of it, because there is a lot of bad science. I also believe that racist claims are certainly worth investigating. But extraordinary claims require exceptionally strong evidence, and I don’t see any of that here. That is very problematic, because these ideas have enormous implications outside of science. Biologically, race is a weak concept, but that doesn’t prevent people from strongly identifying with it.’” (our translation)

5. Organizational impact

The department believes that, from an organizational perspective, there is a negative impact on the department, on the programs it offers, and on Ghent University as a whole. This is discussed here. The moral impact is addressed in Section 6.

5.1 The Department of Philosophy and Moral Sciences

As far as the department itself is concerned, the negative impact on research is particularly significant. This encompasses several aspects:

A. Quantity: significant lessening of the available research time

This manifests itself, among other things, in: responding to concerned students, researchers, colleagues, and the press; holding additional meetings at various administrative levels; the need to voice concerns, provide clarification, or refute falsehoods; and preparing for and/or taking legal action.

In this way, the academic productivity of a well-functioning department is undermined. Anyone who, like Cofnas, wants to drive 'woke' culture out of the university (see further in 5.3.B) will not find this a problem—quite the contrary.

B. Quality: direction of the research in the department

As Freddy Mortier stated in an opinion piece in *De Morgen* (albeit in a less elegant manner than expressed here): we have a choice between remaining silent or engaging in debate. Because of the proximity of researchers with controversial ideas, we are compelled to address them in academic publications and other texts. As a result, we have less time for our own research, which is of a very high quality. We are forced to engage with research of questionable quality that has not previously been part of our core expertise and has already been thoroughly refuted by others

This is the academic version of “flood the zone with shit” (Steve Bannon’s famous statement about the Trump campaign in 2016): spread controversial, unsubstantiated claims that others must respond to. That way, they have less time for the important, high-quality research they actually want to do.

The argument that it is up to colleagues to engage in a scientific debate with Cofnas’s ideological ideas in order to refute his controversial claims is all the more problematic because—as described above in 4.2—many other academics with specific subject-matter expertise have already repeatedly demonstrated that Cofnas’s claims are not consistent with scientific findings. It is a strange notion that it is up to people who do not challenge a scientific consensus to substantiate and publish their position, since this would not involve new scientific insights. On the contrary, it is only natural that someone who wishes to enjoy the protection of an academic’s scientific freedom and does oppose the scientific consensus should also present scientific arguments for this divergent position.

C. The department's appeal to international researchers

A postdoctoral researcher who had been selected for a position on Bouke de Vries’s ERC project has announced that he has withdrawn his candidacy because he does not wish to be part of a research group with Cofnas and/or anyone holding similar views.

More generally, the international spread of the news (see, among others, *Faculty & Students at Ghent Call for Resignation of “Race Science” Philosopher* - Daily Nous) could have a negative impact on the recruitment of high-quality external researchers (by other ZAP members) for positions such as junior

and senior FWO postdoctoral fellowships. There may also be a negative impact on the number of candidates applying for project-based positions.

More specifically, it is unlikely that people belonging to the groups targeted by Cofnas will apply for a job within our department, faculty, or university if they are aware of his presence. This runs counter to efforts to attract underrepresented groups in order to promote diversity, which has been repeatedly shown to enhance the overall quality of research and education. For a university that prides itself on pursuing multiperspectivism, this is particularly painful.

At the same time, it is likely that people who hold racist or other discriminatory views will feel compelled to approach Ghent University, since such views are tolerated at our university.

This, too, will be viewed not as a problem but as an advantage by certain circles seeking to destabilize the department and the university.

5.2 The educational programs of Philosophy and Moral Sciences

As concerns the educational programs:

A. Negatieve impact op het vertrouwen van studenten in de opleiding en de UGent

Out of *Schamper* (student magazine of the UGent):

"We didn't realize that pseudoscience apparently had a place in scientific research. On the contrary, we had always assumed that we could fail or be suspended for citing dubious sources or conducting superficial research.

And yet it seems to be acceptable, supposedly on the basis of academic freedom. We didn't know that research into one's own hands was simply acceptable. As students, we are apparently free to go along with science's worst nightmare: spreading disinformation and labeling it "scientific," regardless of what academics or students have to say. If we choose to deny climate change, the university administration would consider this the most normal thing in the world. Whether it is pseudoscience or serious science makes no difference to the administration.

An open letter to the rector, a petition, media attention, information sessions, and lectures have all contributed to this Herculean task so far. And the fact that these questions and counterarguments are now being brushed aside by the university gives one little confidence in the future of Ghent University. What is our program actually worth anymore? It's a question philosophy students often hear as a joke, but for the first time, we're starting to seriously doubt it." (our translation)

B. Teachers' time allocation

Similar to what was stated in 5.1.A, the time that department members can devote to their teaching responsibilities in all their aspects—including lesson preparation and supervising bachelor's and master's theses—is also decreasing. Admittedly, there are also advantages: Cofnas's articles can be used in classes on fallacies and stigmatizing research.

C. Possible impact on student numbers

We are anxiously awaiting to see whether there will be a negative impact on enrollment figures in our programs in the coming years. At present, there is little evidence that the values of diversity, equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination are actively promoted within our program. Department members have repeatedly heard from parents that, if their son or daughter were to consider studying philosophy in Ghent, they would advise them to do so at another institution—one that actually puts the values it proclaims into practice.

Due to inaccurate media coverage, there are two additional factors that may have a deterrent effect on students. First, the impression was sometimes given that Cofnas would become a professor or instructor at Ghent University. Second, the impression was repeatedly given that the controversy boiled down to whether or not the correlation between background and IQ should be studied, and that there would therefore be little room for “Dare to think” [the University’s slogan] in our department. This conflicts with the importance that many of our students (in both philosophy and moral science) attach to freedom of research and critical thinking—values for which our department was precisely known in the past.

5.3. The university as a whole

A. Responsible use of government money

For a second article on Knack.be (March 24), Erik Raspoet interviewed Swedish researcher Patrik Hermansson, who went undercover among ‘racial scientists.’ Hermansson states:

“With De Vries and Cofnas, Ghent University already has two ‘racial scientists’ on board who can use public funds to spread their ideas. This is very concerning.”

We do indeed find the use of public funds (BOF funds) for Cofnas’s appointment concerning, given all the factors discussed so far. And also because of his political agenda, which is discussed below.

B. Allocation of time at central level

This has had a significant impact on time allocation within Ghent University’s central administration. The rector, vice-rector, and academic administrator of Ghent University have already devoted many hours to this matter. The topic was discussed at a meeting of the Board of Directors. In addition, the press office, the legal department, HR staff, and staff from the research affairs department have also been involved. It would be worthwhile to assess the financial cost of this.

C. Ghent University is promoting the far-right agenda (by discrediting academic research on social injustice)

From an opinion piece by Dirk Jacobs (professor of sociology at ULB) in *De Morgen* (March 14):

“His goal is not to engage in scholarship through the exchange and clash of ideas, but to roll out a far-right agenda. That is stated in black and white in his newsletters. To achieve this, institutions—particularly universities—must be taken over by ‘racial realists.’ I suggest that Rector Petra De Sutter read Cofnas’s piece ‘How to Take Back Academia’ (which the opinion writers have already correctly cited).

In particular, the passages on how to replace policymakers on campuses, remove “woke” academics (from other pieces we learn that this mainly concerns sociology and psychology), and how the political support of the far right is required for this.” (our translation)

This political agenda is clearly evident not only in the text Jacobs cites, but also in another blog post (*Why We Need to Talk about the Right’s Stupidity Problem*, January 20, 2024). See the quotes below.

D. Cofnas is against academic freedom for those who hold different views

In Cofnas’s blog posts, we find numerous passages calling for the expulsion of dissenters from the university rather than engaging in rational dialogue with them.

In the section “What to do” from the blog post *Why We Need to Talk about the Right’s Stupidity Problem*, we read:

"In my article, "How to Take Back Academia," I proposed a three-part plan:

- (1) Promote knowledge of the cause of race differences*
- (2) Change the population of decision makers on campus*
- (3) Leverage political power*

The same plan can be generalized. Promoting knowledge of the genetic cause of race differences destroys the premise of wokism, but this is not enough to attain victory. Our institutions are brimming with delusional—and in many cases mentally ill—true believing Red Guard thugs who were appointed to maintain the ideological status quo. Many of these people will fight to the gates of hell to defend the woke system, and won't accept evidence for hereditarianism no matter what. We need to find legal ways to remove these people from positions of authority: get rid of fake grievance-studies departments at universities; revoke the tenure of pseudoscholars who were hired in job searches that illegally discriminated against whites, Asians, and men; mass fire the woke commissars in the state department; and so on. We have to leverage political power both to change the population of decisions makers and in order to deprive the woke of one of their most powerful weapons, which is civil rights law." (our emphasis)

Cofnas's plan is not to engage in rational dialogue with those who hold different views, but rather to drive them out of universities. Among other things, by curtailing their civil rights.

We see this in a more recent blog post as well (*Beating Woke with Facts and Logic*, October 9, 2025)
"Our institutions are teeming with woke fanatics who will never listen to reason and should be purged. Civil rights law has been a powerful weapon in the hands of wokesters, and we need to snatch it away from them." (our emphasis)

The presence of someone with these views poses a direct threat to the academic freedom of everyone at Ghent University who disagrees with him. They are branded as people who are unreasonably stubborn.

6. Moral impact

Here we describe the moral impact.

6.1 Moral values

The members of the department are being forced to accept into their ranks someone who clearly does not endorse Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

The department believes that it can function effectively and be a pleasant workplace for its members only if all department members regard one another as morally equal. In our view, that is no longer the case.

6.2 The values that UGent seeks to promote

In this section we take the UGent *Policy Framework Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging 2025-2029* as our starting point.

A. Diversity

In this text, we read:

"Diversity refers to the presence of a wide range of backgrounds, perspectives, and characteristics among individuals and groups. This includes, for example, differences in origin, cultural background, gender, sexual orientation, age, language, socioeconomic status, family situation, beliefs, physical and mental abilities, skin color, body type, and other aspects that form part of a person's identity." (our translation)

By hiring someone who actively opposes diversity, Ghent University is undermining its own goals. The hiring of Cofnas as a researcher could lead to *less* 'diversity of social characteristics' because students and staff with certain characteristics may not feel at home in a department, program, faculty, or university. This is not because of the research Cofnas is expected to conduct here, but because of his blog posts and lectures. The views he disseminates there are not based on his own scientific research. Moreover, the most problematic of these views are simply not based on sound research.

In this context, the following quote from the letter to the editor by the chair and vice-chair of StuArt in Humo (March 20) is relevant:

"Moreover, the decision goes beyond the Department of Philosophy & Moral Sciences. The student council received concerned messages from students of history, Japanese studies, and applied linguistics. This shows that the problem is broader than the specific research project and that the appointment sends a dangerous signal. A signal that some students do not belong here and that racial theories are welcome.

The university must urgently consider how this comes across to students from minority groups, who are being targeted by Nathan Cofnas. We should be an academic institution where everyone feels at home and every student feels they can prove themselves—not that they have to prove themselves because prejudices are circulating in the hallways." (our translation)

B. Sense of belonging

In the policy framework, we read as well:

"Sense of belonging [...] refers to the feeling of connection to a group or community, and the belief that one is welcome and accepted." (our translation)

We cannot help but conclude that the 'sense of belonging' is no longer present among a large portion of the department's staff. We do not feel respected.

This also applies to our students:

"The debate surrounding the potential hiring of the notorious "race realist" Nathan Cofnas has left a grim, anxious atmosphere in the Department of Philosophy and Moral Sciences at Ghent University. A discussion in which the student is pushed aside and taken as seriously as a screaming child in a supermarket." (Schamper, 3/18; our translation)

Dirk Jacobs concludes the opinion piece from which we have already quoted as follows:

"Today I am ashamed that Ghent University appears as my alma mater on my resume, and I would like to be proud of it again. Dare to act. There is no place at the university for pseudoscience, racism, sexism, and a far-right political agenda that goes against the very essence of scientific practice."

The university is failing to achieve a goal it sets forth in its code of ethics:

"The institution does not tolerate any form of discrimination or inappropriate behavior, and is committed to promoting a safe and inclusive culture that strives for and promotes equality, values diversity, and maintains a positive study and work environment in which the rights and dignity of all members of the university community are respected" (p. 6).

7. Conclusion

We have noticed that the public debate regarding Cofnas's appointment is framed in terms of broad principles such as 'freedom of speech' and 'academic freedom,' whereas we believe these should be separated.

The crucial question for us is whether Cofnas's appointment at Ghent University was justifiable. Our position is that it was not. We also regret the lack of transparency throughout the hiring process. We believe that Bouke de Vries improperly exercised the autonomy granted to him by Ghent University's regulations.

Our arguments in no way imply a restriction of academic freedom; we have not argued anywhere that certain topics are off-limits to sound scientific research. We do, however, expect the necessary quality control of scientific research, as well as an accounting for positions that violate academic freedom for those with differing views, such as those we find in Cofnas.

Cofnas's appointment clearly has a negative impact on the department, the students, and the university as a whole. The fact that the university administration cannot protect us from this negative impact within the current regulatory framework is a major organizational and moral problem for Ghent University. The main structural obstacles are:

- Compliance with Ghent University's code of ethics prior to employment is not specified in job postings.
- Ghent University's code of ethics is too weak to ensure that staff members adhere to the university's stated values.
- In the recruitment of academic staff, budget holders enjoy autonomy that can be abused in extreme cases, but in all cases reflects an outdated management culture. Because the four-eyes principle is not applied, the risk of violating principles of good governance (principle of due diligence, principle of equality, principle of impartiality) is increased.

8. References

UGent documents

Policy framework Diversityn Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (in Dutch):

<https://www.ugent.be/nl/univgent/missie/diversiteit-en-inclusie/visie-en-beleid/beleidskader-diversiteit-equity-inclusie-en-belonging-2025-2029>.

Ghent University Regulations Concerning the Career and Remuneration of Academic Staff (in Dutch):

<https://codex.ugent.be?regid=REG000126&lang=nl>.

Description BOF starting grant Bouke de Vries:

[Research Explorer – \(BOF/STA/202302/012\) Liberalism’s Fertility Problem](#)

Blog posts by Nathan Cofnas

Why We Need to Talk about the Right’s Stupidity Problem (2/1/2024):

<https://ncofnas.com/p/why-we-need-to-talk-about-the-rights>

A Guide for the Hereditarian Revolution (2/2/2024):

<https://ncofnas.com/p/a-guide-for-the-hereditarian-revolution>

Beating Woke with Facts and Logic (9/10/2025):

<https://ncofnas.com/p/beating-woke-with-facts-and-logic>.

Lectures by Nathan Cofnas

Lecture April 2nd, organized by KVHV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZsKQvaTku4>

Opinion articles & articles in magazines

SPLC over *American Renaissance*: <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/extremist-files/american-renaissance/>.

Varsity, 7/2/2024: <https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/27035>.

De Morgen, 14/3/2026: [Er zijn grenzen aan tolerantie voor extremistische stellingnamen in een open maatschappij](#)

Schamper, 18/3/2026: [Wat is mijn opleiding filosofie nog waard?](#)

Knack, 18/3/2026: [Zet UGent de deur open voor omstreden rassenwetenschapper? ‘Ongeloofwaardig dat Nathan Cofnas meest geschikte kandidaat was’](#)

Daily Nous, 18/3/2026: [Faculty & Students at Ghent Call for Resignation of “Race Science” Philosopher](#).

Humo, 20/3/2026: [Een onderzoeker die rassentheorieën verdedigt, is niet welkom aan de UGent. De studenten zijn teleurgesteld en verontwaardigd](#)

Knack, 24/3/2026: [Patrik Hermansson infiltreerde bij 'rassenwetenschappers': 'Met Cofnas heeft de UGent er nu al twee aan boord'](#).

De Morgen, 25/3/2026: [Ik vind het heel vervelend mij geroepen te voelen om een man als Nathan Cofnas te verdedigen](#).

Academic publications

‘ASHG Denounces Attempts to Link Genetics and Racial Supremacy’

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajhg.2018.10.011>)

Kevin Bird, ‘No support for the hereditarian hypothesis of the Black-White achievement gap using polygenic scores and tests for divergent selection’, in *Am J Phys Anthropol* **175** (2021), pp. 465–476.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.24216>

Kevin Bird, John Jackson & Andrew Winston, ‘Confronting scientific racism in psychology: Lessons from evolutionary biology and genetics’, in *American Psychologist* **79(4)** (2024), pp. 497–508.

- <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001228>
 Nathan Cofnas, 'Debunking explanation for moral progress', in *Philosophical Studies* **177** (2020), pp. 3171-3191. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11098-019-01365-2>
- Evan J. Giangrande and Eric Turkheimer, 'Race, Ethnicity, and the Scarr-Rowe Hypothesis: A Cautionary Example of Fringe Science Entering the Mainstream', in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* **17** (2022), pp. 696–710.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/17456916211017498>.
- Neil Greenspan, 'Genes, Heritability, 'Race', and Intelligence: Misapprehensions and Implications,' in *Genes* **13** (2022), article #346.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/genes13020346>
- Mitchell Herschbach, 'Editor's views', in *Philosophical Psychology* **33** (2020), pp. 899-901.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2020.1805198>
- Rasmus Rosenberg Larsen, Helen De Cruz, Jonathan Kaplan, Agustín Fuentes, Jonathan Marks, Massimo Pigliucci, Mark Alfano, David Livingstone Smith & Lauren Schroeder, 'More than provocative, less than scientific: A commentary on the editorial decision to publish Cofnas (2020)', *Philosophical Psychology* **33** (2020), pp. 893-898.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2020.1805199>
- Cees van Leeuwen Mitchell Herschbach, 'Editors' Note', in *Philosophical Psychology* **33**, pp. 148–150.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2020.1709283>.