

Hugo A. Meynell, “How to Destroy a Don,” the Second Hammerly Memorial Lecture, University of Waterloo, November 5, 2008

Introduction, by Kenneth Westhues

Among researchers of workplace mobbing, it is the best of times, the worst of times. Always the worst, because of the depressing untruth of elimination rituals. Best, because this savagery now has a name and attracts steadily more public attention. Just last Saturday, the *Toronto Star* ran a long article about how to kill someone at the office without going postal. It said the process “usually starts with catty comments and malicious gossip from a boss or co-worker and escalates into a team sport....”

I don’t know how often Hector Hammerly watched the sport during his long career at Simon Fraser University, nor whether he sometimes played on a winning team. I don’t know these things about Hugo Meynell either, during his long career at the University of Calgary.

What I know is that in the mid-1990s, both Hammerly and Meynell were key players in the team sport at their respective universities. Each played the part of the punching bag.

Hammerly never recovered. Before he died in 2006, he assigned part of his modest estate to support research on how and why this most dangerous game is played.

Meynell did recover.

It is uncannily appropriate that Meynell give this Hammerly Memorial Lecture, since even though he and Hammerly did not know each other, they exchanged views in the pages of a magazine in 1997, while the games were on.

In the *Maclean's* issue of April 7, 1997, Hammerly published a hard-hitting short essay entitled, "Rid campuses of officious poohbahs." Therein he described university administrators as "unaccountable mandarins" presiding over "mini-police states" to which the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not apply, and in which zero-tolerance policies instill fear of saying the wrong thing and being hauled before kangaroo harassment courts.

Within two weeks of publication of that essay, the Simon Fraser administration had filed an affidavit that Hammerly was mentally unstable and a threat to public safety, he had then been arrested, jailed overnight, forbidden to contact any SFU employees except his wife, humiliated in the press, and forced into retirement.

Meanwhile in Calgary, a *Maclean's* reader named Hugo Meynell came across Hammerly's essay, and knowing nothing of the aftermath, published a response to Hammerly in the issue of April 28: "Prof. Hector Hammerly's remarks on the state of our universities are depressing indeed. But surely he has made a mistake? I am delighted to reassure the public that at my university, whatever rumors may recently have been circulated by disaffected persons, academic freedom is scrupulously protected. ... It is not too much to say that all of us teachers and researchers regard our administrative superiors as big brothers and sisters. In exemplary institutions like ours, protection by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is superfluous."

The team sport then underway at Calgary lasted longer than the one at Simon Fraser. Not until ten months later, on February 20, 1998, as Meynell was preparing a lecture on St. Anselm for his 11:00 AM class in religious studies, did the knock come on his office door. "I am sorry, Sir," said the head of security, "but I have to escort you off campus."

It is a precious moment in the history not just of our university but of Canadian academic life that I have the honour to introduce to you the eminent theologian, Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, Professor Hugo Meynell.