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**When our fears medicalised, safety culture leads to
a lack of judgement and responsibility, says leading sociologist.**

Student demands for 'safe spaces' in universities are the "functional equivalent" of what right-wing Republicans are looking for when Donald Trump promised to build a wall on the Mexican border, according to leading sociologist Frank Furedi. The Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent was speaking today at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, while promoting his new book *How Fear Works*.

"In the 21st century, safety has become a sacred value," he explained. "Safety has become such a powerful metaphor that we internalise it; it stifles political debate, with the Left and the Right having their own ways of searching for safety.

"People don't realise that, in many respects, the quarantine demanded in universities to insulate students from insecurity and anxiety - their inability to deal with moral challenges - is a functional equivalent of what right-wing Republicans are into when they demand their Wall."

According to Furedi, what we fear has changed from one era to the next. "When I think of my grandparents, their fear was of being unemployed, of not having a pension; when I think of my parents, their fear was basically of a nuclear war between Russia and America. In the 21st century, fear has become totally promiscuous; there is no longer a single fear that unites us."

Not only that, but we increasingly face fears - be they global terrorism, financial collapse, or global warming - without the "traditional tools" of theology or philosophy.

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“Especially since the early 20th century, fear has become an issue that is primarily dealt with by psychology,” Furedi said. “As you medicalise fear, the meaning of fear changes completely. The more we medicalise fear, the less we are able to deal with the threats that confront us, the more incapacitated we become.”

Furedi also told the audience that an emphasis on safety in an uncertain world unfortunately encourages us to outsource decision-making to all kinds of professions, from therapists to life coaches. “One of the main casualties of this - and something we very rarely discuss - is that, if we’re scared of confronting uncertainty, we also become scared of making judgements.

“Tragically, in the Anglo-American world, the second-most important value after safety is non-judgementalism. Unless you make judgements - I think this is right, I think that is wrong - you cannot have a public life.

“Unless I judge you, and you judge me, we can’t take responsibility for each other. In the act of making judgements we’re creating dialogue and discussion. We’re also taking responsibility, and it seems to me that responsibility is becoming institutionalised.

“For me there is a very clear relationship between safety culture, medicalisation and the avoidance of judgement. When you celebrate that non-judgementalism is good, and judging is bad, what we’re doing is a very bad disservice to young people.”

Furedi shared the stage with *Financial Times* editor David Pilling, who argues in his new book, *The Growth Delusion*, that GDP - gross domestic product - is a far-too-arbitrary, unreliable and potentially dangerous way to measure our economy.

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“Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy once said that when people don’t recognise their lives in the official picture, they become very angry. When there’s a gap between what they’re told their lives look like and how they feel their lives are like, nothing is more dangerous to democracy.”

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