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### **Beyond Parochial Bias: Commentary on Winegard et al. (2023)**

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*You throw balls at me?! I throw ball at you!*

– Roberto “Call me Bob, it’s the same” Benigni,  
explaining how he killed a man, in “Down by Law”

Winegard and colleagues present a *tour de force* to show that [a] Liberals are (at least) as biased as Conservatives and that [b] the psycho-social value of Equalitarianism explains a good deal of this. At least the submitted version of their article, on which I was asked to comment, is a tour with much force. At 87 pages of manuscripted text it taxes the reader’s eyesight and patience. May my wish be granted that the published version is shorter beyond a *just noticeable difference*.

As the authors’ list of references shows, the idea that Liberals do not possess the kind of unbiased minds their spokespeople want us to think they do is not entirely new. Some authors of the Winegard group have been among those who have knocked down this house of cards and thank you very much indeed (Ditto et al., 2019). Looking back, one wonders how it ever seemed like a good idea that bias is properly located only to the right of the political center. Yet, this is still a view of considerable impact, thanks to the efforts of the indefatigable John Jost (Jost et al., 2003) *inter alii*. There is a competing narrative, though, in the claim that “Everyone is biased,” a view that predates the “Conservatives are especially biased,” with Trish Devine’s (1989) seminal article being the prototype. On this view, everyone knows they are biased, but only Liberals wish to correct themselves. According to a recent version of this view, however, Liberals are even less aware of their own biases than Conservatives are. The dark matter of social cognition is of the implicit or the “micro,” variety and thus more nefarious (Dupree & Fiske, 2019).

Much of this is not new. Th. W. Adorno and colleagues (1950) did not share Arendt’s (1951) or Orwell’s (1949) insights into the nature of totalitarianism. It fell to later, and psychometrically more schooled, investigators to clean up the mess in conceptualization and assessment

(Altemeyer, 1998; Costello et al., 2022). Stanley Milgram (1974) deserves credit for correcting his own thinking about the geography of the fascist mind; he realized it could be found next door right there in New Haven. Milgram's realization should give pause to those Liberals who think bias has been banned from their community, their suburb, or their academic department.

Of the early pioneers of nonsectarian science, Rokeach's (1956) is remembered, at least among psychologists of my generation. Winegard et al. refer to his work on bilateral dogmatism, which he distinguished from right-wing authoritarianism. They also cite Taylor (1960), whose work is all but forgotten. Now it looks prophetic. According Rokeach and Taylor, individuals with extreme political views are not distinguished by the content of their ideas but by the way in which they form these ideas and hold on to them when the evidence contradicts them. In Bayesian parlance, dogmatists hold core beliefs with extreme priors, that is, they treat these beliefs as if they were axioms (Stanovich, 2021; reviewed by Krueger, 2022a).

People with a commitment to rationalism must justify their strongly held identity-bestowing beliefs, and they cannot do it with references to divine revelation (Pinker, 2021, reviewed in Krueger, 2022b). Still, some bearers of dogmatic belief, or "opinionation" to use Rokeach's paleologism, flirt with appeals to a deity. When I was a first-year university student in what was then West Germany, a gaggle of Marxist groups set the tone of the conversation. One member of such a group very earnestly explained to me that Marx's analysis of society was perfectly accurate, and that this knowledge was inescapable "if one really thinks about it." The deity (Marx) and rationalism (really thinking) were one; no empirical observing or testing was necessary. Another type of justification – what might be called imaginary consequentialism – is a perversion of pragmatism. It asks the audience to imagine what would happen if the proposed axioms were not true. Civilization, it is darkly implied, would come to an end. This sort of thinking smacks of superstition, perhaps even compulsion. It is all too human. The Aztecs believed in the necessity of human sacrifice lest the gods withheld the sunrise, and they appear to have been too fearful to put this idea to the test. But superstitions can be overcome. Modern Mexicans do not feel this way anymore.

A centerpiece of Winegard and colleagues' argument is that Liberals adhere to an axiomatic belief, or value, of Equalitarianism. The authors do not explore where this value originates. This question does not appear relevant to their empirical mission, which is to show that Liberals share this belief and that it biases their response to claims that challenge it. I want to be clear that I consider the label "Liberals" a misnomer. The social category Winegard et al. appear to target are the Progressives. Liberals look to John Stuart Mill; Progressives look to Friedrich Engels. Liberals are individualists; Progressives are collectivists. Hence their idea that intergroup distributional differences in intelligence cannot and ought not exist. When men and women (or other gendered groups) or Blacks and Whites (or other racialized groups) are found to differ in their average intelligence scores, the science must be at fault. Progressives reject specific directional differences, that is, those that are correlated with perceptions of group privilege vs. the state of being oppressed.

The active ingredient in Winegard and colleagues' experimental paradigm is the presentation of vignettes of research reports that describe an intergroup difference of the kind Progressives deplore or of vignettes that describe the reverse difference. If Progressives subscribed to Equalitarianism unequivocally, they should question the credibility of both kinds of report. The data suggest, however, that they are more skeptical of the former type. This might not sit well if

one thought that Equalitarianism was the one defining value of Progressives. If, however, as the data suggest, Progressives are comparatively tolerant of intergroup differences favoring designated victim groups, a second socio-political value appears to affect judgment, namely a value placed on compensatory social justice. It is as if Progressives were saying “We must believe that the oppressed are more intelligent than the oppressors because the oppressors have for so long imposed the opposite idea.” With this, a society’s social beliefs are unbiased, on average.

Winegard and colleagues focus on Equalitarianism, and this value is certainly an important ingredient of the Progressive outlook, if not the only one. Yet, in their statistical treatment, the authors consign their measure of Equalitarianism to the role of a mediator. A mediator is a critical link in a causal chain from an independent variable, or cause, to a dependent variable, or effect. In practice, mediational analyses are performed liberally, often without careful consideration of whether the implied causal model holds (Fiedler, 2017; Fiedler, Schott, & Meiser, 2011). May we say that Liberalism (Progressivism) causes Equalitarianism? This seems doubtful. It rather seems likely that Equalitarianism is one facet of the progressive attitude cluster. Perhaps Equalitarianism is even constitutive of Progressivism such that one is not a Progressive without espousing Equalitarianism. On this view, Progressivism and Equalitarianism make shared as well as unique contributions to the prediction of participants’ responses to the vignettes describing group differences in intelligence, which is what the data appear to show.

Winegard and colleagues invest energy into showing that the differences they find meet the criteria of a psychological bias. Their concern and their goal is to make sure that “a good Bayesian” cannot rationalize their findings (Are there any “bad Bayesians”, and where have all the “good Frequentists” gone?). The assumption they make, and which they project onto the ever-watchful Bayesians, is that respondents’ credibility ratings of the research reports can be modeled as the product of prior belief and the perceived diagnosticity of the presented evidence. Perhaps this is a needlessly complex mental model. Arguably, credibility ratings are statements of preference, where what respondents wish to be true is enmeshed with their evaluation of the evidence as it is. A respondent with Equalitarian commitments might reject a report saying that one group is more intelligent than another simply because they don’t want this to be true. A Progressive might react especially sharply to a report that members of a privileged group are more intelligent than members of underprivileged groups. And this is what the data appear to show.

As I noted above, the originally submitted manuscript is very long. One reason for this is that each round or regression analysis is duplicated by analyses of variance on categorized groups. Categorized data tend to yield the same patterns as uncategorized data, but the p values tend to be a bit higher. There is no information gain, but the graphs look more intuitive. Ironically, the routine of categorizing continuous data replicates the original sin of social thinking, where Progressives and Conservatives think of “the other” as a homogeneous cluster of despicable (Krueger & Grüning, 2024).

One can also question the wisdom of reviewing a suite of eight studies (counting studies 1a and 1b) in order to make the point that Progressives are biased too – especially when this has already been shown. Open science demands that nothing be hidden, but with the advent of archived supplementary materials much can be shelved accessibly (like this review, for example) so that the authors can focus on developing a narrative arc. As it stands, the narrative recalls Roberto Benigni’s intent to get even (see epigraph). When the biases of Conservatives have been demonstrated to the point of nausea, it is well not to forget that all holders of strong and extreme

social beliefs are prone to exhibit self-serving biases. There is a missed opportunity to develop a general theory of bias and accuracy (Jussim, 2012; Krueger & Funder, 2004) that generates testable predictions about the judgments and behaviors of strong believers of any kind (Krueger, 2023).

Finally, one may wonder if respondents' own membership in designated groups of oppressors or victims moderate the findings. The psychology of cross-categorization offers some baseline predictions. The standard finding is that category-driven effects are additive (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). One might expect the judgments of Black Progressives and White Conservatives to be the farthest apart from one another. Whether this is so in the context studied by Winegard and colleagues, we do not know. Moreover, the perceptions of Black Conservatives and White Progressives deserve special attention because members of these groups may find that they hold diverse and conflicting social identities (Hogg, Abrams, & Brewer, 2017). Progressives may suspect Black conservatives of being saddled with a "false consciousness" (Engels, 1893/1968), a self-defeating frame of mind that justifies an oppressive system (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

The reader who has digested Winegard and colleagues' findings may end up wondering what the true state of affairs is. Are oppressors, perhaps qua oppression, smarter than their victims? Or, is it, as Hannah Arendt (1951) speculated when considering the Boers of South Africa, the case that over generations, oppression dulls the mind? The authors do not review the relevant literature (see, for example, Archer, 2019 for a review of sex differences in intelligence) because, I suppose, it does not directly speak to their research interest, and perhaps because the question of [this] truth has a can-of-worms feel to it. I suspect that this question cannot be set aside forever, at least not among Liberals who hold this truth to be self-evident that no empirically tractable question be off-limits for study *a priori*.

In conclusion, I asked myself how I would have responded had I been a participant in the Winegard research [This is my full-disclosure moment, and I might change my mind.]. I think that it is highly unlikely that there are genetically encoded racial or sex differences in general intelligence. I find it more plausible to think that there are small sex differences in certain types of intelligence due to sexual selection. Likewise, I think it might be possible that small, compartmentalized, racial differences exist, but I would not bet money on it.

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