

It's True, We're Biased

These days it's fashionable to chastise people by calling them "biased." The accusation of "bias" is supposed to leave the accused cowering and begging for forgiveness.

We frequently see this accusation hurled about on our social media sites, where we reach up to 10 million individuals weekly.

You see, "bias" has been turned into a dirty word by educational efforts to create the ideal, value-neutral society. Only in a value-neutral society can we have complete tolerance for all, or so the thinking goes. "Bias," as conceived by the drivers behind the effort, goes against tolerance and therefore must be eliminated.

But, as we tell our Facebook fans, everyone really is biased. The reason being is that all individuals have limited resources such as time and money. How they use those resources requires a value judgment, which often reflects a bias towards something and against something else.

The topics the history teacher decides to teach in her limited time requires a value judgment; she must decide which parts of history are more worthy than others to be taught. The story the reporter decides to report upon in his limited column space reflects a value judgment; he must decide which stories are more worthy than others to be reported upon. I could continue, but I think we all understand the point: individuals and institutions have to make choices. Those choices reflect the values, and therefore the biases, of the individual or institution.

And here we must recognize the fullness of such a truth. If all decisions reflect values, then we do not and cannot live in a value-neutral society. Nor can we as individuals live bias-free, value-neutral lifestyles. Nor can governments be

value-neutral as even the most mundane laws and regulations reflect value judgments.

Of course, the great hypocrisy is that the drive to teach children to be tolerant and to embrace a value-neutral society is itself a reflection of values. More troubling than the hypocrisy is the fact that those who are promoting this ideal society are doing a great disservice to their students, and perhaps worse.

By teaching the student to be value-less in order to do away with bias and embrace tolerance, the teacher or parent actually leaves the student empty, lacking the necessary training and understanding needed to make the tough, value-based choices in life. Instead of being prepared for life with a developed hierarchy of values, the student is left with some smattering of knowledge, the vague notion that he should be free of bias by “being nice,” and mainly his passions to steer him through life.

Besides the personal impact to the students taught to “be nice,” what does our self-governing nation look like if “value-neutral” becomes the dominant outlook of the citizenry? What happens when the majority believes that everything not only *should* be value-neutral, but *can*? Much like the individual who is left rudderless, only to be ruled by his passions, will not our civil society and government come to be ruled by mere passions and feelings? There is a grave danger in such a prospect.

Rather than continue down such a road, let us once again be okay with values. We can value tolerance, but nonetheless we need to recognize it as precisely that: a value. We need to admit the truth that both a value-neutral lifestyle and society are impossible. The values held and choices made may be good or bad. But the fact that there is no such thing as a value-neutral society is neither good nor bad— it’s simply an inescapable reality.

Serious challenges to our society are festering just below the surface. To deal with them, we need to equip Americans with more than just the ability to “be nice.” We need to equip them with the tools necessary to make good choices, and help them discern the various values that could be behind those choices. We need to equip them with some idea of what is “good.”

At Intellectual Takeout, we’re here to help make all of that happen by feeding minds, fostering discussion, and inspiring action based on the virtues and principles necessary for the pursuit of happiness. We do it day in and day out, and enjoy every minute of it.

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