

## The influence of prejudice

In “Farewell the Open Mind”, the author, Jeremy Campbell, affirms that “ a form of prejudice, a certain point of view, creates a blindness that blocks a scientist’s mental vision in certain directions, while extending it in other, perhaps more interesting directions”. This point of view seems paradoxical and hard to be understood by most people. They usually think that bias is not good, because it limits their ability to view a situation in its entirety. This is not unlike Confucius’ admonition that people should keep neutral in most circumstance to avoid serious mistakes; this philosophy has prevailed in China for a thousand years. View through Confucius’ lens, Campbell’s perspective is not paradoxical: everything has two sides – good and bad. They are a paradoxical unity. It’s significant to demonstrate that bias helps and limits people simultaneously since bias exists in people’s ordinary life and the scientific field extensively.

Depending on the kinds of prejudice, the advantages and disadvantages of biases fell into three categories. In the first place, holding a certain point of view isn’t because one thinks it is the correct one, but because this bias facilitates ones investigation. This kind of bias happens a lot in scientific research. For example, objects can be divided into two classes, macroscopic object and microscopic object. To the former, scientists use the particles theory to learn its nature and application; to the latter, scientists use the wave theory to study it. A lot of scientific achievements depend on these biases. Actually, bias simplifies the complicated material world, so scientists have more energy to focus on a certain view. However, bias truly obstructs scientists mind to some degree. Because of bias, scientists may not explain some phenomena, and may lead to wrong conclusions if

they ignore other factors. For instance, a scientist can't explain the light-electron effect if he/she only uses the wave theory to study macroscopic objects. Unfortunately, a scientist's bias limits his/her development in science unavoidably.

The same situation happens in the field of law. In America, a person is assumed innocent before he is proved to be guilty. This system is more humanity and reduces the error of punishing actually innocent people. However, at the same time, it increases the opportunity to free guilty people. On the contrary, in china, a person is assumed guilty before he is proved innocent. This view strengthens the government controlling ability and decreases the possibility that a criminal can escape the punishment of the law. But, it may result in sentencing good people. Since it is hard to start the investigation by assuming a person both innocent and guilty at the same time, this kind of prejudice is impossible to be overcome. What we can do is to try people's best to collect evidence as much as possible and make the decision carefully and fairly.

In the second place, bias represents someone's opinion to special things. This kind of bias depends on people's knowledge, experience, etc., and there is no scientific way to judge whether it is right or wrong. In this case, prejudice really helps people to understand their world and to take action based on that. Furthermore, it even extends other's view to the nature. On the other hand, this kind of prejudice really prevents people from understanding the reverse side of a situation. In "Water", the author Edward Abbey used to living in the desert, so he thinks that there is no shortage of water in the desert but rather exactly the right amount. His prejudice in favor of the desert lets him know the desert more clearly and extends his understanding of the philosophy of the nature. First, "A great thirst is a great joy when quenched in time". One can feel the joy

this deeply only when one gets the thing desperately desired and deserts provide the opportunity for people to feel this kind of happiness. Moreover, in spite of the hard conditions, there are still different kinds of life existing in it. By investigating them, one will acquire more knowledge about how to survive in hard environment. However, Edward Abbey ignores the objective situation of the desert and the advantages of wet environment because of his bias. He will not adapt to live in a humid environment, like New Jersey, although the life in wet environment is more convenient than in the desert to most people.

In fact, Edward Abbey's certain view helps him be accustomed to the hard environment mainly. Another example of this kind of bias is the author of "Challenge: An Exploration", Nancy Mairs, who thinks that "physical challenge" is actually "spiritual challenge". She doesn't see how the phrase "Physical challenge" distinguishes her from anyone else who works hard or plays hard. Her problems are not "disabled", but are "what choices we make in the fact of danger, and difficulty, and loss determine the true shape and depth of our being", the same with all people's. Thinking of "spiritual challenge" as the human condition assists Mairs to despise the physical difference, gain courage to overcome the difficult situation and lead her to accomplishment. Certainly, this perspective is unavoidable to block her inner ability to discern something that is really physical challenge. For example, it is very hard for her to run as quickly as most other people no matter how courageous she is. Spirit can't change the difference at this time. Generally, both the above categories of prejudice do no harm to the other persons. However, in the third place, a certain bias may only benefits to a certain kind of people while it not only obstructs these people's mind but also hurts other people. This bias'

influence can be displayed in Ronald Takaki's "A Different Mirror". In this text, the author describes two kinds of biases about America's identity and culture. One kind of bias is that some people define "American" as "white", because they have a sense of the past- "a history that has viewed American as European in ancestry". This point of view clearly helps retain and sustain values held by whites. On the other hand, it helps whites dominate the main society and control other races or ethnic groups in America. On the other hand, it makes them focus on the white culture's origin, like how European's cultures especially English's culture influence America, and what's the difference among them in nowadays, etc. Of course, this perspective also helps American keep the culture and tradition inheriting from European. However, the shortcomings of this kind of bias are significant too. First, it causes people not to be able to recognize the truth that America is a multicultural country. Second, it makes people ignore other cultures' contribution to America. Third, it leads to racial discrimination. The last point is the most serious disadvantage and always a potential crisis existing in American society. It's obviously that the point of view is unfair to the other races and ethnic groups in America since they all work for America. Sometimes, racial discrimination prevents people with different ethnicities from melting in the mainstream society. The other bias in this text is that some people think that American is composed of different races and ethnic groups "African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanos, Irish, Jews, and Indians" equally, and they have the same contribution to the formation of American culture. This perspective makes them feel equal to whites and let them analyze American culture more extensively, from Africa to Asian and from blacks to yellows. But, these people ignore the "inordinate power of English immigrants defining American culture" and fail to

understand the racial discrimination. They may become pessimist to current situation. Of course, considering America as a multicultural country also lower the white leading position. To this kind of bias, there may be more disadvantages than advantages.

Bias is everywhere because people hold disparate views to the world according to their own knowledge developed from different background. Bias is a double-face sword. Our world is more beautiful because of the existence of bias, which extend our mind and let us see the opposite side that we may not perceive. Our world is in trouble if two sides fight each other because they can't see the advantage of the opposite side and the disadvantage of their own opinion. Nothing is perfect. Understanding the philosophy of bias will help us approach the ideal kingdom.