

Welcoming Remarks  
Symposium on Professors and Their Politics  
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Thanks very much to Neil Gross and Louis Menand for organizing this meeting on Professors and Their Politics and to Neil and Solon Simmons for an excellent survey and analysis that serves as our point of departure. Their work may well prove the central reference on professors and politics for the next decade or two. Thanks also to all the other speakers and to all attendees for joining what we should make a lively day. It is a chance unabashedly to talk about ourselves, and few people find a subject more interesting than themselves, except perhaps baseball.

Because our subject is bias, let me begin with a bit of disclosure about the sponsor, the Richard Lounsbery Foundation, and about my own interest.

First, Lounsbery. The Lounsbery Foundation is a small private philanthropic foundation that distributes about \$3-\$4 million per year. Its areas of interest include science education, history of science, roles of science in international diplomacy and conflict resolution, and French-American relations. Some of the largest recipients of Lounsbery funds include

- the American Museum of Natural History in New York, for example, for its exhibitions on DNA and on human origins,
- Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC for the editing and publication of the papers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century scientist Joseph Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian
- The American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia for small grants to enable works of independent scholarship

■ The US National Academy of Sciences Committee on Human Rights

Perhaps our most important grant in recent years was to help enlarge the Wikipedia. Lounsbery was the first foundation to support the Wikipedia, which as you may know was founded with personal wealth earned from Internet Porn.

While the President of Lounsbery, David Abshire, is a former Ambassador to NATO and historian, the rest of the Board consists of 5 academic scientists and one person who was close to the donors, Richard and Vera Lounsbery, who passed away around 1980.

I like to think of Lounsbery grant-making as spanning the political spectrum. Lounsbery has supported The National Center for Science Education (NCSE), which defends the teaching of evolution in public schools and Eugenie Scott, a front-line activist in the creation-evolution controversy. We support preservation of Hawaiian Monk seals, and have promoted the career of French filmmaker Jacques Perrin, whose brilliant film about birds, *Winged Migration*, some of you may have seen. In recent years Lounsbery has been the main US financial supporter of US-Iranian scientific exchange. We supported a terrific simulation game about the Middle East developed by students at Carnegie-Mellon University now available on the web called Peacemaker in which players can assume the roles of either the Israeli or Palestinian leadership.

Lounsbery has also supported work considered conservative, such as books of Peter Huber about environmental risks, and organizations that challenge how scientific evidence is used in the judicial process. One such organization is guided by Harvard physics professor Richard Wilson. We have supported individuals and groups critical of majority or popular positions about climate and about cancer. Lounsbery has funded analysts who support missile defense.

Some grants, of course, as for studies of the history of musical instruments, may have scant political dimension.

Anyway, in my years on the Board I have noticed that to the extent Lounsbery is noticed at all (and it does not seek a public profile), the Foundation is sometimes referred to in academia as conservative. This label brings us to today's conversation.

That Lounsbury might fund *anything* “conservative” appears to suffice to make it conservative in academic eyes. It is almost as if the “liberal” grants the Foundation makes are invisible in the presence of the surprising other.

The difficulty of seeing our own biases led me and other Board members to welcome the interest of Louis Menand and Neil Gross to survey professors about their politics.

Earlier personal experience also contributed. I worked for the first decade of my career for the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, whose committees required their members first to register “conflict of interest” and later, in an increase in sophistication, broader “sources of bias.” The NAS questions tended to focus on bias that might come from remuneration from for-profit enterprises, certainly a source of prejudice meriting vigilance. But most committee members had nothing to say about sources of bias that might come from funding from government agencies or philanthropic foundations, which may have agendas, too. And in general, committee members from universities seemed to act as if Academia had no biases.

Yet to outsiders, academics seem remarkably homogeneous, as may UPS drivers or golf-playing CEOs. And anthropologists like the late Mary Douglas offered theories of cultural bias that fit university faculty as well as African pastoralists.

The purpose of today’s meeting is not to rage about left or right. The purpose is to understand better our own biases, and above all to use our own best academic tools of theory and observation to understand them. Neil and Solon have provided new data, which we must examine. Then, we have the chance to ask *why* things are as they are. Economists might say low salaries favor a liberal professoriate. Historians may prefer to emphasize some kind of lock-in to certain values that occurred long ago. Psychologists may attribute the observed persistent balance to the difficulty of being a minority. Political scientists may turn to power held by ruling cliques. Anthropologists may talk of tribal solidarity and immersion in the testosterone of youth. Sociologists may draw our attention to the systems that distribute status.

Lurking inside almost every head may be the unspeakable belief “We have these biases because professors are smarter than people in other walks of life.” That conviction, or bias, certainly requires discussion. Berkeley social scientist Philip

Tetlock has demonstrated that experts should be modest about the quality of their judgment.

My measures of success for the meeting will be that, first, next time each of us is asked to account for own sources of bias, we have better, deeper answers and, second, that we translate these answers into practices that clarify explicitly the limits of our own knowledge and thereby expand the knowledge to which our institutions have access. Thank you.