

SAGEISM

Discrimination Against Intellectuals (Sages)

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Abstract

Sageism, by definition, is discrimination against the sages (i.e. intellectuals). This essay has two main aims. The first tries to raise readers consciousness, that indeed, sages are discriminated against, and the second is to suggest how this discrimination can be combated.

1. Introduction

For decades, I've largely taken it for granted that most of the content on television is way too dumb for me to tolerate. I had similar feelings when I turned on the radio, finding that most of the radio channels were devoted to "pop" (i.e. popular) music. Well, it wasn't popular to me. I hated that kind of music, even as an 18 year old undergraduate at university. The noise coming from the rock groups who used to play at the weekly dance for the university students seemed to me to be "ephemeral noise" totally lacking any beauty or genius in comparison with what I felt to be "real" music, i.e. classical music. I felt "How could you compare Elvis (a beta-brained "pop" crooner) to Mahler (whose heart rending beauty brings me to tears)?" When I was 12, my father bought a stereo system for the family and started buying classical music LPs (long playing discs) and my love of classical music began to blossom.

When I was 18, I began to think that what was on television was so stupid that it insulted my intelligence, so I watched very little of it. Occasionally, on the government run TV channel (in Melbourne, Australia, where I grew up) BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) science programs caught my attention strongly, but there were very, very few of them. I began to wonder why there was so little "interesting" material on television or radio. Most of it was advertising-infested drivel. It alienated and disgusted me. But it did not occur to me that I might have been discriminated against as a young intellectual, as a young thinker, in favor of the mass of humanity who buys the majority of the products advertised on such media.

At 23, during my first evening in London, having just fled Australia, "the land of philistines" I was overwhelmed to listen to a BBC interview between the most articulate

intelligent journalist I had ever heard in my young mono-cultured life in Australia, and a British cabinet minister (senior politician). “Minister, do you feel embarrassed, when your cabinet colleagues tease you for being religious?” That was in 1971.

In the 1980s, having migrated to Brussels, capital of Europe, to enjoy the intellectual fruits of *several* superior cultures (not just Britain, which I felt to be rather insular minded and conservative, compared to the French and Germans), my French had improved enough (thanks to having a French speaking second wife), that I could begin to profit from what I consider to be the best radio channel on the planet, namely “France Culture.”

During that time, I became increasingly conscious of the aphorism “En France, les intellectuels sont les dieux!” (“In France, the intellectuals are gods!”) The attitudes towards intellectuals in France were obviously very different from what I was used to in Australia, and much later in the US. Even Britain, where I had lived 6 years, was not as supportive of its intellectuals as France. In France, the radio program “France Culture” is aimed at the top 1% of the population in IQ terms. It is the radio channel of the intellectuals and almost unique on the planet. (You can listen to it by for example, using the “app” “tunein” on your iPad, which has links to 1000s of radio channels from all over the world, and tapping on the “Paris” flag on the map of France, and then tapping on “France Culture.”)

I loved this channel. When I listened to it, it made me ask “Why don’t other cultures treat their intellectuals like France?” Why are intellectuals ignored and belittled in so many countries? Intellectuals are the most valuable portion of society. They are the geni, the creators and drivers of society. They invent the ideologies that inspire billions. They devise the transistor, the computer, and write the symphonies that can bring sensitive souls to tears. They are so valuable, they should be nurtured, fostered, and be made to feel they belong to society, not be discriminated against and belittled with labels such as “elitist”, “nerd”, “egg head”, “geek” etc.

Over the years, I began to feel that the intellectuals needed a liberation movement comparable to the US “Civil Rights Movement” of the blacks in the 1960s, the “Feminist Movement” of women in the 1970s and the “Anti-Ageist Movement” of the aged in the 1980s. But I didn’t feel a *burning* desire to fight discrimination against intellectuals, so I put the issue on my mental back burner until recently. Now that I’m ARCing (after retirement careering, in the sense of no longer having a salary, but pursuing a new career) I have returned to the topic and have recently been thinking actively about the many ways in which intellectuals are discriminated against. As a result I decided to write this essay, which aims to make its readers conscious that a “Sages Lib” is just as much needed as similar movements were in previous decades for the blacks, women and the aged.

2. Discrimination against the Sages (Sageism) & How to Combat It

This section lists ways in which sages are discriminated against. It aims to make readers conscious that intellectuals (sages) are indeed discriminated against, and that this discrimination needs to stop. It also contains ideas on how to do this.

Firstly, a bit of discussion about this word “sageism.” Once the idea occurred to me to write an essay on this topic (i.e. discrimination against intellectuals), I became conscious of the need for a good label for a social movement against such discrimination. I have been an ideologist most of my adult life (e.g. I was very active in the “Masculist” (my term by the way, coined in the 1970s, meaning “Mens Lib”) movement in the early 1980s in Europe), so I’m very conscious of the ideological power of good labels. Look at Karl Marx, and the motivational power of his terms “surplus value”, “alienation”, “class warfare”, “proletariat”, “capitalist” etc. So I set about choosing what I hoped would be a good label for “discrimination against intellectuals.” That’s 12 syllables, way too much of a mouthful, so how about “anti-intellectualism.” That’s an improvement, only 9 syllables, but still too long. What word is more or less synonymous with the word intellectual but is much shorter, so I hit on the word “sage” hence “sageism.” I thought that it was a good label - short, and was obvious to everyone what it meant. You don’t have to be told what it means, it is self evident. But, to be more explicit, I define a “sage” in the strict (adult) sense to be someone in the top 1% of IQ, who has a PhD, who has ideas, and writes books about them. Obviously, only a small proportion of the population are sages.

I’m hoping that the ideas in this essay will spread and spread so that society will have a new label that sages can use when they feel discriminated against. They can then point their fingers at sageists and rebuke them with the label “Sageist!” Hopefully, in time, being accused of being sageist will have as much severity as being accused of being racist, or sexist, or ageist.

The word “sage” thus changes its meaning a bit. The traditional meaning has connotations of being “wise, intelligent, thoughtful.” These are positive connotations, flattering to the intellectuals, so by labeling themselves “sages”, intellectuals can do for themselves what the homosexuals did when they started labeling themselves “gays.” The term “gay” has now virtually drowned out the old meaning of “happy and carefree.” Hopefully the term “sage” will go the same way.

How are sages discriminated against and how can it be combated? Let’s start with the schools.

a) Sageist discrimination in schools

IQ and intellectual curiosity are distributed according to the Gaussian “normal” curve, the so-called “Bell curve,” because that’s how the IQ distribution looks. Most people lie in the peak of a Bell curve, in virtually anything that one can measure. Certainly IQ follows a Bell curve. If one defines the average intelligence quotient (IQ) to be 100 points, then two thirds of the population lies within a range of a “standard deviation” (e.g. 15 points) either side of this average value, i.e. between 85 and 115. I label such people “*peakers*”, because they occupy the “peak of the Bell curve. This term “peaker” is not only a neutral term. It could also be used as a term of abuse. Imagine some kid in school (primary or secondary) who is a child intellectual, who is labeled a “geek” or “nerd” Such a child

could then retaliate with the term “Peaker!” with its connotations of “mediocrity”, “not intelligent”, “average Joe” etc. If the sageist is even less intelligent than a peaker, then the young sage could hurl back the label “Sub!” which by definition is someone whose intelligence is less than 85, i.e. lying in the bottom sixth of the population. This label might become more damaging than the usual term “moron” which strictly speaking is used for someone whose IQ lies in the range 50-70, i.e. the dumbest “one in fifty.” But that label is exaggerated and hence has less impact, because most people don’t take it seriously. But when the school yard bully is truly a sub, and when the young sage hits back with the “Sub!” label, its greater accuracy may be far more emotionally damaging and hurtful to the bully. The young sage is thus armed with a new weapon, a new label, for self protection.

Since young sages lie in the top 1% of IQ, they will be in a tiny minority. There might be one sage in a large class. These young sages will probably be bored by the interests of most of their class mates and feel alienated by the passions of the peakers, e.g. “being popular”, “drinking beer”, “playing sports”, and prefer to go off on their own, pursuing their own (intellectual) interests e.g. reading science, programming computers, reading math or poetry books, etc. The peakers may then sense that these young sages don’t like them, and perhaps feel that these young sages look down on them for being peakers (which is probably true.) It is then understandable that a certain mutual hostility may grow between the sages and the peakers (and the subs). Since the peakers (together with the subs) are in the vast majority, outnumbering the sages by 100 to 1, the peakers may feel that they can essentially ignore the feelings and interests of the sages and dismiss them. To peakers, sages are ignorable. They don’t matter. There are so few of them.

But for the sages, to be labeled “egg head”, “geek”, “nerd” etc is just as wounding as for a black to be labeled a “nigger”, “coon”, “darkie” etc. The blacks have successfully fought against such discrimination and labeling, and to such an extent, that most Americans for example, don’t dare use the word “nigger”. A similar story exists for women. Women used to be labeled “chicks”, “broads”, etc but fought against it with the Women’s Lib Movement, so that now sexism on the part of men will only be met with real anger on the part of women. In short, terms like “nigger” and “chick” etc have pretty well dropped out of the English vocabulary. They are seen today as very “uncool.”

Unfortunately, the same is not yet true for sageist labels. What is needed is a “Sages Lib Movement” that can combat them. As a result of being labeled an “egghead”, “geek”, “nerd” etc, these young sages suffer emotional rejection at school and learn to close into themselves to stay sane. They often have few friends, for sheer statistical reasons. They are 1 in 100, so the next brightest in the class may be quite a bit dumber. As a result of their social withdrawal, and not feeling they are understood by the peakers, their social skills are not developed. They associate social interaction with emotional rejection and psychological pain. After a while they give up mixing with the crowd, the peakers, the popular people. They become “nerds” (defined in the dictionary to be “intelligent but single-minded people obsessed with a nonsocial hobby or pursuit, e.g. computer nerds) and “geeks” (defined to be “peculiar or otherwise dislikable people, especially those who are perceived to be *overly* intellectual”). Overly? Says who? Peakers? If your passion is

ideas, or working through beautiful and powerful mathematical proofs or feeling the awe of the size of the universe, or grappling with the tough philosophical questions of human existence, who is to say that such intellectual passion is unacceptable? It is this attitude of the peakers that so alienates the sages.

To the young sages, discovering the power and beauty of science, math, computing, literature, etc is something that should be fostered, encouraged and stimulated, not dismissed in a negative tone as being “too intellectual” for the peaker majority. Sages cant help being sages. Peakers (and subs) cant help being peakers (and subs). Intelligence has one of the highest heritabilities (estimated to lie between 60% and 80%). Therefore one is mostly born a sage just as much as one is born a peaker. Both cant help it. It makes as little sense for a peaker to label a sage a geek, as it is for a sage to label a peaker a peaker. Both need to accept each others abilities and learn to live with each other. That living together might take the practical form of mutual avoidance, but that is better than the current situation where typically, peakers reject and abuse sages and where the sages don't fight back.

To fight back, the sages need labels as well as a new anti-discriminatory consciousness, and that is one of the aims of this essay – to coin labels that the sages can hurl back at the discriminating peakers and to foster an attitude in society that trashing sages is morally unacceptable. In one sense, the sages have the advantage. They may be in a tiny minority, but they are more intelligent, so can use their greater wit, vocabulary, and biting sarcasm, to crush the egos of rejecting peakers. If they do this effectively enough, and with generally accepted labels, then the peakers may learn to fear the sages and stay away from them, or at least stay away from the fear of being labeled “sageists.”

The sages can also help themselves. They can form support groups within schools, by forming “Sages” groups that consist of the brightest members of the school who are invited to join these groups by older members. Since only the top 1 (or 2) percent of the school can become members of such groups, they will have tremendous prestige, so that being a member of the school's “Sages” will give young members a real ego boost. Within such groups, intellectualism will be fostered, strengthened, nurtured, to counter the anti-intellectualism of the peakers. Such pro-intellectualism will have a powerful effect on the psychological well being of the young sages.

At my school in Melbourne, Australia, the heroes were the “jocks”, i.e. the sporty types who were successful in winning sporting events against other schools. The intellectual minority were largely ignored. There was certainly no Sages group, so the handful of intellectuals at the school were simply dismissed, or worse, discriminated against simply because they were intellectuals (sages). I hated this. In my final year at public (high) school, aged 18, I loathed the values of my school and could not wait to leave to get to university, to escape the mindless middle-class-ness of peaker (sport mad, anti intellectual) values. We had “assembly” every morning, which consisted mainly of compulsory religion and announcements of sporting events. I felt utterly alienated and bored by both, so took physics books with me to keep myself amused. When the “prefects” (student authority figures) told me to stop reading, I simply ignored them.

They were peakers in my eyes, jocks, non intellectuals, not my kind of people at all, hence ignorable. The prefects complained to the head master who fortunately for me was a PhD who ignored them instead of expelling me. I suspect he was hoping I would bring some academic glory to the school in the state wide exams, which I did at the end of my final year – I topped the state in 12th grade chemistry.

The following year, I was bitterly disappointed to learn that the level of intellectuality (or rather the lack of it) that I had hoped to escape from at school, followed me to university. It was then that I realized, that a whole culture can be sageist and that the only way to escape from it would be to migrate, which I did once I had my basic degrees. I left the colony of Australia behind and chose to live in a large, old-world culture that had an intellectual upper class with strong intellectual traditions. In England I felt that “my values were valued”, that I did not have to feel alienated any more. I felt I could revel in my intellectual passions and be rewarded for being a sage instead of being punished and being excluded by the peaker majority.

b) Sageist discrimination by the media

The US is different from most countries, in the sense that its media is almost exclusively owned by corporations. Most European countries for example, have a mix of media – commercial and government. The commercial TV channels, for example, make money by advertising. The more popular their programs are, the higher the advertising fees that these commercial TV channels can charge, because the advertisers know that more people are watching and therefore exposed to their ads. But, since these TV programs are “broadcast”, i.e. sent out to a broad public, with the same programs for everyone, the sages are ignored, because they are such a tiny minority. The content of these popular programs is aimed at the intellectual level of the peakers. This alienates, bores and disgusts the sages, who then simply do not watch much US television. They feel that US TV insults their intelligence.

As a result of this, the sages rarely appear on US TV, compared to Europe, so US peakers do not get much in the way of intellectual content. They do not hear for example, sages on TV slapping down middle class mindlessness, as happens with government controlled media in most of the countries of the world. In the old-world cultures with large populations and hence large numbers of sages (e.g. Germany, Britain, France, Italy), there is a strong tradition of upper class intellectuality, that does not take kindly to “middle class mindlessness” that is so prevalent in the US. These old-world, upper class intellectuals delight in slapping down the ignorant stupidities of the peakers, so that European peakers feel brow beaten. They are afraid to speak up with strong opinions for fear of having some professor on TV slap down their arguments with obvious contempt.

In the US, this slapping down is far less prevalent, with the result that by default, the level of middle class mindlessness of Americans is a lot higher than in Europe and in fact in most countries. For example, 80% of Americans are still religious (compared to about 10% in the Scandinavian countries or the UK). Half of American don't believe in evolution, and 40% of them think the world is less than 10,000 years old. The French, for

example, who have a very strong intellectual tradition, and who are the most sophisticated people in Europe, sneer at the vulgarity of Americans. Most European sages consider American middle class mindlessness as one of the major inferiorities of the US. America was a colony and never attracted the colonizer's upper class very much. What would upper class intellectuals do in a colonial wilderness? Work with their hands? It is therefore not surprising, that the British colonies - the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, etc did not develop much in the way of an upper class intellectualism, because they were colonized by (mostly) Britain's lower classes.

So, what can America's sages do to change the neglect of the American media towards them? One obvious answer is for the US to copy what most countries do, i.e. have a *mix* of media types, i.e. commercial and government. In Europe, the UK has the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). France has TF (Television Francaise), Italy has RAI, Germany has Deutsche Welle, Japan has NHK, etc. Most countries look upon the purely commercial approach of US media as uncivilized and inhumane. The US simply ignores the sages and the subs in its media. The BBC for example has programs at all intellectual levels, sub, peaker and sage, all are catered to, and that is only fair. The BBC and other European countries' media feel the moral obligation to cater to all intellectual levels. But in the US, the sages and subs are tossed on the trash heap because they don't have enough ad driven purchasing power, due to their smaller numbers relative to the huge majority of the peakers (the "ad mass").

As the world shrinks, and people travel more (e.g. half a billion people a year travel internationally), the "multis" (multi-cultured people) look down upon the ignorant limitations and inferiorities of the "monos" (mono-cultured people). The multis, by definition, have lived in several cultures and inevitably "culture bash" those customs they see as greatly inferior to others they have experienced in other countries.

American sages who are also multis can organize politically and put moral pressure on the American public and American politicians to create a media that caters to them, i.e. a government controlled and financed media based on the European model. They can get angry that US society ignores sages. They can get militant. They can form organizations at local, state and federal level to push the cause of the sages.

American sages can also help themselves. As they become more multi, they can switch their nationalist self image away from being mono-Americans, to being more "globans" (i.e. global citizens) and use other cultures to help nurture their intellectuality that the US fails to do. For example, they could use the internet to listen to and to watch programs created specifically for sages. The best example I know of, is the French radio program I mentioned above, namely "France Culture" It will not be without some effort however, since the French spoken is highly intellectual, i.e. with complex syntax and with a rich vocabulary. But the effort would be worth it, because the reward is great. American sages, starved of intellectually oriented media, would be able to identify partially with French culture and then become much more conscious how sageist American society is.

France's top newspaper, "Le Monde" ("The World") is another example of how French culture nurtures its sages. The intellectual level of Le Monde is way above that of the New York Times, or the Herald Tribune. France *reveres* its sages. America *ignores* its sages. France is a civilized country. America is not.

Another way to avoid the lack of intellectual content on US media is simply to ignore it by using the new capabilities of the internet. In my own case for example, I hardly watch any television from any country, because I have discovered the enormous intellectual wealth of "Youtube." It is full of documentaries of high quality from around the world, and many university lectures. Increasingly professors are putting their lectures on youtube, so that sages all over the world, so long as they can understand English (and other major languages) can watch them and learn from them. In my own case, I have now started to record PhD level lectures that I give myself in my own living room, in pure math and math physics, using my camcorder, and am putting them on the web for the world's math/physics sages to learn from (if they want.)

The internet has liberated me I feel. I can watch educational documentaries and university lectures to my hearts content, and I do. I no longer feel anywhere near as intellectually alienated as before. I am hugely more educated than even a year ago, thanks to the many high quality videos on the web (mostly on youtube). Unfortunately, in the country where I live, China, the government has blocked access to it, so Chinese people who don't know how to use a proxy server cannot be educated by it. But most of the world can. 90% of people who live outside China, live in democracies, so, provided they make the effort to get fluent in listening to English, they can educate themselves on the internet.

c) *Sageist discrimination by the peakers*

It's just a statistical fact (due to the Bell curve) that peakers (plus subs) outnumber sages by about 100 to 1. Thus in practice, if the peakers simply ignore the needs of the sages, they feel that only about 1% of the population will suffer. This is a common attitude of peakers. They look upon the sages as a tiny minority (like gays or lesbians) and hence ignore their special problems and needs. So, it is the task of the sages themselves to make society conscious of the problems that sages have in today's world. The sages need to organize politically, at national level, and at grass roots level. They need propaganda that they can use to combat sageism. I hope I have made a contribution in this essay towards this end, by having coined such terms as "sageist", "peaker", "sub" "sageism", etc. Sages need to help themselves, by pushing for national media that has a sage component. They need to create sage institutions at grass root levels, e.g. at schools and universities. Most of all though they need to combat the sageism of the peakers.

This can be done in two major ways, namely by using the carrot and the stick. The sages can appeal to the feelings of the peakers by saying such things as "How would you like to be called "geek", "nerd", "egg head", etc, as though they are terms of abuse? How do you like being called "peaker", "dummy", etc as though they are terms of abuse?" "Live and let live!" "People's tastes and abilities differ, so if you don't like the values of the sages, then at least ignore them, rather than abuse them. If you abuse them, the sages, now

armed with a new vernacular and consciousness, may come back at you, with a greater level of ego bruising vitriol than you can muster. After all, they are a lot smarter than you. They are sages.” “Learn to accept the existence of sages. They can’t help being sages, just as you can’t help being peakers. You have the advantage of being in the majority, so don’t use the “tyranny of the majority” to make the lives of sages a misery.”

If you are a peaker and you care about the quality of life in your country as well as its international reputation, then don’t discriminate against your sages. Sages are the most valuable portion of a culture, since it is they who create and drive society. You should support them and honor them. You should certainly not discriminate against them and treat them like outcasts. If your whole culture does that, then in our ever shrinking, “multifying” world, your culture will be increasingly “culture bashed” by more sage-supportive cultures. Sages are people too, and need to feel that they too “belong to the tribe”, but when schools, the media, and (peaker dominated) society discriminates against them, casting them out with hurtful labels like “nerd”, “geek”, “egghead” etc. then you have made the sages very unhappy. You will also deserve the contempt of more intellectual cultures.

To the sages – “Support yourselves. Raise your consciousness of society’s discrimination against you, and hit back. Become militant sages. Make society as aware of the nastiness of sageism as people are today of racism, sexism and ageism. Not too many decades ago, racism, sexism and ageism were rife, but were fought against by political movements of blacks, women, and the aged, to such an extent that today to be labeled racist, sexist, or ageist is truly damning. It is now up to the “Sage Community” to do the same thing with the term “sageist”. Sages need to organize politically. You need to revel in your intellectuality. Learn from the French – “En France, les intellectuels sont les dieux.” Wouldn’t it be nice for you to live in a culture where one’s intellectual values are valued. “Sages of the world unite – its time to nurture your brains!”