**Reasons for Concern: Ideological Homogeneity, Bias, and Discrimination in Philosophy**

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**Abstract**

Members of the field of philosophy have, just as other subjects, ideologies (i.e., political identities). How are different ideologies distributed and perceived in the field? Using the familiar distinction between the political left and right and the methodology previously employed by social psychologists, we surveyed an international sample of 794 philosophers. We found that participants clearly leaned left, while right-leaning individuals and, even more so, moderates were underrepresented. Moreover, across the political spectrum, from very left-leaning individuals and moderates to very right-leaning individuals, philosophers reported experiencing political bias and hostility in the field, occasionally even from those from their *own side* of the political spectrum. Finally, while about half of the participants believed that discrimination against left- or right-leaning individuals in the field is not justified, a significant minority displayed an explicit willingness to discriminate against colleagues with the opposite ideology. Our findings are surprising and highly relevant because a commitment to tolerance and equality is widespread in philosophy, and ideological homogeneity, bias, and discrimination are likely to undermine reliable belief formation in the field.

**Introduction**

“[W]hen I look upon my own discipline, the discipline of philosophy,

I find egregious effects of ideology […].”

(Jason Stanley 2015: xvi)

One of the most salient properties that individuate subjects and groups is their political viewpointor *ideology* (Jost et al. 2009),[[1]](#footnote-1) that is, whether they identify as, for instance, politically liberal, conservative, libertarian, anarchist, etc. Relatedly, determining whether subjects “are engines of change or preservers of the *status quo*”, and so identifying their ideological position, has been found to be one of the “fundamental dimensions on which people spontaneously distinguish social groups” (Koch et al. 2016: 702).

It is a dimension of social identity that is, in the wake of recent dramatic changes in international politics (e.g., Trump’s election, Brexit, the rise of populist parties), becoming increasingly more the target and source of bias and hostility between people (Maher et al. 2018; Iyengar and Massey 2019). Studies found that bias and hostility against ideological opponents is now more pronounced than that tied to, for instance, gender or race (Westwood Iyengar 2015), and people discriminate against their ideological opponents more than against members of religious, linguistic, ethnic or regional out‐groups (Westwood et al. 2018).

Importantly, ideological bias and hostility might leak into academia, including the field of philosophy, and contribute to a decrease in viewpoint diversity, leading to detrimental epistemic outcomes (Duarte et al. 2015; Peters 2018; Jussim et al. 2018). In fact, studies already found that certain ideological groups are not only significantly underrepresented but also faced with overt biases in many disciplines (Haidt 2011; Yancey 2011; Inbar and Lammers 2012; Honeycutt and Freberg 2017).[[2]](#footnote-2)

What do we know about the representation of different political viewpoints and possible ideological biases against them in the discipline of *philosophy*, in particular? While there has been much discussion in philosophy about diversity and bias against various underrepresented groups in the field (Paxton et al. 2012; Botts et al. 2014; Brownstein and Saul 2016), there is no systematic and inclusive study pertaining to the distribution of and possible bias against *ideologies* in the field. As Schwitzgebel and Hassoun (2018) note, “political viewpoint” is one of the most “under-studied dimensions of diversity [in philosophy]”.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This gap in the research is surprising for at least three reasons. First, there are philosophers of different ideological convictions, ranging from the political left to the right, who claim their political viewpoints are underrepresented and subject to “ideological bias” in the field (Haslanger 2008: 216; Saul 2015; Case 2015; Sesardic 2016). The problem of ideological diversity and bias is thus not unheard of in the field. Yet, these claims have never been carefully empirically assessed with, for instance, a large international sample.

Second, philosophers and philosophical institutions often emphasize the “imperative of philosophizing to strive for an open community into which all are welcome,”[[4]](#footnote-4) explicitly condemn discrimination based on political convictions as “unethical”,[[5]](#footnote-5) and define philosophy as “unbridled criticism” (Priest 2006: 207). Since researchers have discovered strong ideological biases, hostility, and discrimination in many disciplines (Yancey 2011; Inbar and Lammers 2012; Honeycutt and Freberg 2017), common statements in philosophy of openness, tolerance, and free criticism beg the question as to whether the field of philosophy is significantly different from other fields (e.g., social psychology) in possibly being less characterized and affected by these *prima facie* problematic ideology-related phenomena.

Finally, ideological diversity is arguably especially important in philosophy. This is because scientific claims can usually be experimentally tested, but philosophicalclaims frequently can’t, or simply aren’t. In, for instance, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of science, or philosophy of religion claims are often value-laden and admit no straightforward empirical check: whether abortion is murder, economic equality just, verificationism tenable, or the theodicy problem disproof of God can’t be settled experimentally. Some philosophical research has been experimentally assessed (Knobe and Nichols 2017), but much is accepted on the basis of intuitions and “subtle appeals to plausibility”, which are particularly susceptible to influences of values and biases (Kornblith 1999: 185). To protect themselves from blind spots and errors in their reasoning, philosophers rely much more than scientists on social criticism. Since a lack of ideological diversity reduces the scope of social criticism, it threatens the reliability of philosophical belief formation. An investigation of the distribution of and possible bias against ideologies in philosophy becomes thus important.

We, a politically diverse team of philosophers and social psychologists, therefore conducted a systematic international survey pertaining to ideological diversity and bias in philosophy. Before turning to the details and results of the survey, we will provide a brief overview of the existing work on the issue.

But first, a final terminological clarification: While the terms ‘bias’, ‘hostility’, and ‘discrimination’ have built-in negative moral connotations related to unfairness, some ideological biases, hostility, or discrimination might be epistemically and/or ethically beneficial. They might possibly be justified. Whether or not that is so needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Our focus here is primarily on exploring the *reality* of ideological biases, hostility, and discrimination in philosophy. We do, however, believe and briefly argue below (section 6) that these phenomena are often epistemically and ethically costly enough to consider counteracting them.

**1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

Studies that provide insights into the distribution of and possible bias against ideologies in philosophy are rare. Moreover, most of the existing ones were conducted with US samples and focus mainly only on liberals and conservatives, or Democrats and Republicans.

1.1 *Data on the distribution of ideologies in philosophy*

There are three different kinds of relevant studies. Rothman and Lichter (2009) report findings from the North American Academic Study Survey (NAASS), noting that among philosophy professors (N=26), 79% self-identified as liberals and 4% as conservatives. Relying instead on public voting records of professors in a number of US states, Schwitzgebel (2008) found that among philosophers (N=375), 87.2% were Democrat, 7.7% Republican, 2.7% Green, 1.3% Independent, 0.8% Libertarian, and 0.3% Peace & Freedom. Similarly, Klein and Stern (2009) report three US voter-registration studies finding a 5:1, 9:1, and 24:1 Democrat to Republican ratio among philosophers. Other relevant data come from Bourget and Chalmers (2014), who sent a survey to 1,972 philosophy faculty members at 99 institutions in Anglophone countries, questioning them about 30 philosophical topics. One was related to politics asking respondents whether they favored egalitarianism, communitarianism, libertarianism, or another position not specified. From 931 respondents, 34.8% favored egalitarianism, 14.3% communitarianism, 9.9% libertarianism, and 41.0% other, unspecified positions. To our knowledge, these three kinds of studies are all that are currently available on the distribution of ideologies in philosophy. Even less is known about the existence and frequency of *ideological* *bias* in the field.

1.2 *Data on ideological bias in philosophy*

Two surveys provide relevant data. Using the liberal/conservative distinction, Honeycutt and Freberg (2017) polled 618 academics from various disciplines, including philosophy, across four Californian universities. They found an overt bias against both conservatives among liberals and against liberals among conservatives in, for instance, the assessment of grant applications, the review of papers, and hiring decisions. Their data analysis does not allow for specific conclusions about the field of philosophy, however. Yancey (2011) conducted a study that does. He surveyed 160 US philosophers on whether being a Democrat or a Republican damages acceptance of job applicants. Using a 7-point scale positively correlated with level of acceptance for each group (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*), he found a mean score of 4.248 for Democrats and a mean score of 3.699 for Republicans (2011: 117, 188). Since scoring below the 4.0 mid-point indicated that applicants were more likely to be rejected than accepted solely on the basis of their ideology, the data suggest the presence of a bias against Republicans in the sample. As far as we know, these two studies provide all of the existing professionally gathered and published quantitative data on ideological bias, discrimination, and hostility in philosophy.

1.3 *Informally gathered data and anecdotes*

Weinberg (2016) used his website *Daily Nous* to ask people working in philosophy “[w]hich ideas are students protected from?” and “[w]hich are faculty fearful to defend?”[[6]](#footnote-6) He reports that from 132 responses, “several of the more popular answers on the list” of “ideas faculty are too scared to defend” were “critiques of feminism, critiques of homosexuality, critiques of race- and gender-based affirmative action, importance of racial differences in IQ and behaviour for social programs, critiques of transgender ‘ideology’”.[[7]](#footnote-7) These ideas are often considered conservative.

There is also anecdotal evidence of ideological bias.[[8]](#footnote-8) Conservative philosophers have reported fear to express their viewpoints in the field (Shield and Dunn 2016: 104, 123), and claimed they are often ridiculed (Sesardic 2016: 200), or told that their “ideas and sentiments are reactionary, prejudiced, sexist or racist” (Scruton 2014: 12). Similarly, left-leaning philosophers too have held that there is, for instance, not only an anti-female but also an “antifeminist bias in philosophy” (Haslanger 2008: 216; see also Saul 2013: 43f, 2015). The matter clearly calls for more research.

**2. THE SURVEY**

To assess the distribution of and possible bias against political viewpoints in philosophy, we surveyed an international sample of philosophers, contacting them per email via the ‘Liverpool List’ aka ‘PHILOS-L’. PHILOS-L is the “largest Philosophy email list in the world with currently 10896 members in over 60 countries”.[[9]](#footnote-9) Given the international and diverse nature of the subjects on the list, the recruitment of our sample called for a particular conceptualization of participants’ political identity.

*2.1 Key concepts*

There are different concepts that might be used to track the ideology of participants in a survey. In related studies, which were directed at subjects in fields other than philosophy, researchers relied on respondents’ self-identification in terms of the liberal vs. conservative distinction (Inbar and Lammers 2012; Honeycutt and Freberg 2017). The liberal vs. conservative distinction has, however, significantly different meanings internationally, and is (just as the Democrat vs. Republican distinction) less familiar in cross-national contexts (Goldfarb 2010; Carl 2015). We thus refrained from using it, and reasoned instead, more generally, that the more units (e.g., people) a comparison involves, and the greater the range of settings in which they are found (e.g., countries), the more abstract are likely to be the concepts employed in the comparison so as to attain interesting generalizations. Political scientists have noted that largely because of this point, the well known political “left-right orientations, and the search for placements along a left-right dimension, have proved such an enduring element in comparative political analysis” (Mair 2009: 207). There is no unanimously accepted definition of the political left vs. right, but the left-right spectrum is internationally widely understood in the way depicted in Figure 1 (Heywood 2015: 119).

 Progressive vs. Traditional

 Communism Socialism Liberalism Conservatism Fascism

Figure 1. Linear left-right spectrum

While it remains a simplification of political reality, the left-right distinction is “ubiquitous [in politics, and in] public opinion surveys all over the world, [and] self-placement on a left–right scale […] consistently proves to be one of the best predictors of a person’s political attitudes and behavior” (Noel and Therien 2008: 10). There is also an overlap internationally when it comes to key components of the meaning of the dichotomy (Bobbio 1996; Lukes 2003). Studies suggest that all “around the world [there is a] recurrent association between the left, egalitarianism and state intervention [to regulate the economy]. By contrast, the right is invariably identified with market liberalization and lesser state intervention [in the economy]” (Rosas and Ferreira 2014: 9; Rockey 2014; Cochrane 2015). Relatedly, a 2018 study focusing on eight countries (Australia, Chile, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, UK, and the US) found that despite the different national histories, the

traditional left-right dimension can still serve to organize citizens’ political knowledge and to account for their political choices. Left and right, in fact, still summarize and mediate the influence that personality features like basic values and core political values may exert on political choices. Likewise, left and right refer to similar patterns of values and principles across political contexts. […] [T]he left/right ideology is […] worthy of careful consideration […] for scholars to address, predict, and compare political preferences across countries. (Caprara and Vecchione 2018: 70, 79)

Since the left-right dichotomy captures meaningful differences that internationally tend to cluster together (ibid), we decided to use self-identification on the left-right spectrum to track political viewpoints. Notice that one might, for instance, be left-leaning on *social issues* in that one favors personal freedom, equality, social justice, etc., but right-leaning on *economic issues* in that one favors economic freedom, accepts economic inequalities, competitive capitalism, etc. (Crawford et al. 2016: 385). The reverse might hold too. To capture these differences, and following other researchers (ibid), we asked participants not only about their overall left-right self-identification but also about how they would see themselves on the left-right spectrum when it comes to social and economic issues.

*2.2 Main questions and hypotheses*

The study was structured around three main questions: (1) How are politically left/right ideologies distributed in philosophy? (2) Is there a bias, hostility, or discrimination against left/right-leaning individuals or viewpoints in the field? (3) If so, do members of the field take this to be justified?

Corresponding to (1)-(3), and partly based on the results of related extant research on the “ideological-conflict hypothesis” (Brandt et al. 2014), which posits that people with different ideologies dislike ideas that conflict with their own and aim to maintain their worldview via motivated information processing against worldview-violating groups, we generated a set of hypotheses (pre-registered prior to data collection). Our main hypotheses[[10]](#footnote-10) were the following four:

(H1) Philosophers are predominantly left leaning.

(H2) The more left-leaning the participant, the less hostility they would report experiencing, and, correspondingly, the more right-leaning the participant, the more hostility they would report experiencing.

(H3) Left- and right-leaning individuals report similar willingness to discriminate against each other.

(H4) There is a significant association between ideology and justification of discrimination against left/right-leaning individuals, such that the more right-leaning participants would consider discrimination against the left to be more justified, and the more left-leaning participants would consider discrimination against the right to be more justified.

**3. METHOD**

One important criticism of previous surveys on political diversity in academia is that they only tracked participants’ responses to one particular ideology without also assessing responses to the opposite one (Skitka 2012).[[11]](#footnote-11) To avoid the problem, we used a survey instrument (adapted from Honeycutt and Freberg (2017)) including questions about hostility and discrimination not only against right-leaning individuals/contents but also against left-leaning individuals/contents (the questions were ‘mirrored’ for ideological opposites). All study materials received prior approval by both the *Social and Societal Ethics Committee* (SMEC) at KU Leuven (Belgium) and the *Institutional Review Board* at Rutgers University (US). The instrument was hosted on a secure *Qualtrics* site. Materials, raw data, and supplementary data and analyses are available online on an OSF platform (see link).[[12]](#footnote-12)

**3.1 Sample**

In May 2018, 1069 participants were recruited from the PHILOS-L server. 275 were excluded using pre-specified data exclusion criteria,[[13]](#footnote-13) resulting in a final sample of 794 participants (562 male, 213 female, 19 other/no response; age range: 18 to 85; average age: 37.1). 691 (87%) were White, 29 multiracial, 24 Asian, 17 Hispanic/Latino(a), 17 Middle-Eastern/North African, 3 Black or African American, and 2 Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. 11 declined to state ethnicity. Most participants resided in Europe (67.13%; Table 1). As for philosophical traditions, 57.7% of the participants worked in analytic philosophy, 27.6% in continental philosophy, and 14.8% indicated “other”. For area of specialization (participants were able to select more than one), 36.9% mentioned “political philosophy”, 35.3% “ethics”, 21.7% “philosophy of science”, 21.4% “history of philosophy”, 20.3% “epistemology”, 18.4% “metaphysics”, 17.5% “philosophy of mind”, 13% “phenomenology”, 7.8% “aesthetics”, 7.7% “philosophy of religion”, 6.9% “logic”, and 16% selected “other”. Finally, 38% identified as graduate student, 28.6% as full/associate/assistant professor, 14.4% as post-doctoral researcher, 6.7% as assistant lecturer/teaching assistant, and 5.2% as undergraduate student. 7% selected “other”.

**3.2 Measures**

We presented participants with different types of questions. The following four were our main ones. (For the complete instrument, see the OSF platform.)[[14]](#footnote-14)

(1) *Questions on the distribution of ideologies*

Respondents were asked to indicate their own and their colleagues’[[15]](#footnote-15) ideology on social/ethical issues, economic issues, and overall, using the familiar politically left vs. right spectrum and 7-point scales (1=*Very left-leaning*, 4=*Moderate*, 7=*Very right-leaning*).

(2) *Questions on ideological hostility*

To assess participants’ own experience of a hostile climate in philosophy due to their ideology, they were asked (1) how hostile is the climate in their field toward their own political beliefs, (2) how often they refrain from expressing their political beliefs to colleagues for fear of negative consequences, and (3) how often they think colleagues would discriminate against them on the basis of their ideology (5-point scales were used; 1=*Not at all hostile*, 3=*Moderately hostile*, 5=*Extremely hostile,* and *1*=*Never*, 3=*Occasionally*, 5=*All the time*). Participants were also asked to speculate about the hostility they believed left/right-leaning *colleagues* might experience due to their ideology. The same questions (and scales) as before were used, but with the context changed from self to others.

We also added one question asking participants as to whether they would be reluctant to defend their own argument if it led to a left-leaning conclusion, and one question as to whether they would be reluctant to do so if the argument led to a right-leaning conclusion. The underlying rationale was that ideological hostility would not only emerge in relation to people but also in relation to counter-ideological *contents*, including arguments, claims, findings etc., and manifest itself in both an aversion to support them and a preference to defend contents consistent with one’s favored ideology (Stevens et al. 2018). A strong reluctance to defend one’s own arguments when they lead to a counter-ideological conclusion also reflects an interesting asymmetric allegiance to an ideology over academic debate and constructive discourse.

(3) *Questions on willingness to discriminate*

Two sets of four questions captured what we here (following others, e.g., Brandt et al. 2014) conceptualize as participants’ *willingness to discriminate* (henceforth WTD) against left/right-leaning individuals in their field. Specifically, we asked participants how often (5-point scale; 1=*Never*, 3=*Occasionally*, 5=*All the time*) they would be “negatively influenced in their decision” on a grant application, or a paper if that application, or paper “seemed to [them] to take a politically left/right-leaning perspective”, how often they would be “reluctant to invite a colleague to symposia who is generally known to be politically left/right-leaning”, and how often they would be “inclined to choose the more right/left-leaning” job candidate of “two equally qualified” applicants in hiring. Since there was no mentioning of the quality of, say, the argumentsupporting the perspective in the grant application or paper, or of the possibly poorer competence of the candidate, the answers to these questions reveal a readiness to discriminate that is based primarily on ideological preference.[[16]](#footnote-16) Using the same questions and scales but with the context changed from self to others, participants were then also asked to report on their *colleagues’* behavior with respect to these four issues.

(4) *Questions on justification*

Finally, participants were asked two justification-related questions (one per ideology): “How justified is discrimination (e.g., in hiring/promotion decisions, grants, or manuscript reviews) against left/right-leaning individuals in your field?” (1=*Not at all justified*, 3=*Neither justified nor unjustified*, 5=*Extremely justified*), and “How often *should* politically left/right-leaning ideas, theories, or critiques be discussed in the areas of philosophy where political viewpoints matter?” (1=*Never*, 3=*Occasionally/sometimes*, 5=*All the time*). The thought was that when participants hold that a left/right-leaning idea/theory/critique should, for instance, never be discussed then they take it to be justified that it is never discussed.

In addition to the specific questions of type (1) to (4), we also left a ‘Free Response’ section at the end of the survey asking participants whether there was anything else they wanted to add, related to what they had seen or personally experienced in their field with regard to their political beliefs. The free comments yielded qualitative data in addition to the quantitative evidence derived from the scales-set answers to questions belonging to (1) to (4). We will introduce the results of the quantitative and the qualitative parts of the survey separately.

**4. RESULTS (Quantitative data)**

4.1 *Distribution of ideological viewpoints and results on (H1)*

As predicted with (H1), participants were primarily left-leaning (*M*=2.69, *SD*=1.49), *t*(793)= -24.77, *p*<.001, 95% CI [-1.42, -1.21] (see Table 2), analytic philosophers identifying as slightly less so (*M*=2.79, SD=1.50) than continental philosophers (*M*=2.47, SD=1.42), *t*(675)= -2.60, *p*=.01, 95% CI [-.56, -.08] (see Table 6, Figure 5). Overall, 74.8% were left-leaning (20.2% ‘very left-leaning’), while 14.2% were right-leaning (1.6% ‘very right-leaning’). Only 11% were moderates (for classification by rank and subfield, see Tables 4 and 5, Figures 3 and 4). On economic (*M*=2.55, *SD*=1.56) and social/ethical issues (*M*=2.77, *SD*=1.61) too, participants clearly leaned left. These results cohere with people’s perception of the field, as participants also indicted that their colleagues are primarily left-leaning (*M*=2.50, *SD*=.86), *t*(788)= -48.99, *p*<.001, 95% CI [-1.56, -1.44]. Additionally, a post-hoc paired-samples t-test (not pre-registered) indicated that participants perceived their colleagues to be more left-leaning than themselves (*Mdiff*=.193, *SD*=1.81), *t*(788)= 2.99, *p*<.001, 95% CI [.07, .32], which is in line with studies finding a “lone moderate effect”, i.e., a tendency in subjects to view themselves as the only moderates in a controversy even within their own ideological group (Keltner and Robinson 1993).

4.2 *Ideological hostility and results on (H2)*

Supporting (H2), a significant correlation was found between ideology and reported personal experience of hostility *r*(794)=.47, *p*<.001 (see Table 3). The more right-leaning the participant, the more hostility they reported personally experiencing from colleagues in their field, and, overall, the more left-leaning the participant, the less hostility they reported personally experiencing. Participants also perceived right-leaning individuals in the field (*M*=2.79, *SD*=.89) to experience more hostility than left-leaning subjects (*M*=1.78, *SD*=.64), *t*(779)= 24.40, *p*<.001, 95% CI [.93, 1.09] *d*=1.30. Looking at it another way, binning participants by ideology (binned: 1-3=left-leaning, 4=moderate, 5-7=right-leaning), a *post-hoc* (not pre-registered) one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences in experiences of hostility by ideology, *F*(2, 793)= 151.09, *p*<.001. *Post-hoc* Bonferroni comparisons indicated that right-leaning participants reported experiencing more hostility than moderate participants (*Mdiff*=.78, *p*<.001) and left-leaning participants (*Mdiff*=1.50, *p*<.001), and that moderate participants reported experiencing more hostility than left-leaning participants (*Mdiff*=.72, *p*<.001).

Turning from hostility toward individuals to ideological aversion against/preference for contents, there was a significant difference between how often participants reported they would be reluctant to defend their own argument if it led to a left-leaning conclusion (*M*=1.94, *SD*=1.02) compared to the scenario in which it led to a right-leaning conclusion (*M*=2.61, *SD*=1.16), *t*(647)= -13.39, *p*<.001, 95% CI [-.78, -.58] *d*= -.61. Overall, participants indicated that they would be more reluctant to defend their argument if it led to a right-leaning conclusion rather than a left-leaning one, and the more left-leaning the participant, the more frequent their reluctance (*r*= -.09, *p*=.023) (Table 3). There was, however, no association between ideology and how often participants would be reluctant to defend their argument if it led to a left-leaning conclusion (*r*=.06, *p*=.126). While these results don’t point toward ideological hostility against *individuals*, they do point toward apparent anathema (comparatively speaking) against certain ideological contents, namely arguments that may lead to right-leaning conclusions, and a greater asymmetric allegiance to ideology in the hypothetical situation presented.

4.3 *WTD and results on (H3)*

As predicted with (H3), significant correlations were found between ideology and the WTD items (i.e., left/right-leaning on paper review, grant review, symposia invitation, hiring; Table 3). The more left-leaning the participant, the more frequently a right-leaning perspective or individual would be viewed negatively in reviewing a grant application (*r*= -.37, *p*<.001), assessing a paper (*r*= -.31, *p*<.001), inviting colleagues to symposia (*r*= -.28, *p*<.001), and making hiring decisions involving two otherwise equally qualified candidates (*r*= -.36, *p*<.001). On the other side, the more right-leaning the participant, the more frequently a left-leaning perspective or individual would be viewed negatively in reviewing a grant application (*r*=.21, *p*<.001), assessing a paper (*r*=.15, *p*<.001), inviting colleagues to symposia (*r*=.08, *p*=.04), and making hiring decisions (*r*=.24, *p*<.001).

Overall, however, the relative frequency of WTD against right-leaning individuals (*M*=2.18, *SD*=.88) was significantly greater than the frequency of WTD against left-leaning individuals (*M*=1.63, *SD*=.56), *t*(732)= 16.11, *p*<.001, 95% CI [.48, .61] *d*=.74. To see this differently, consider the binned percentages (participants who responded “occasionally,” “frequently,” or “all the time”) for the WTD questions, broken out by ideology (binned: 1-3=left-leaning, 4=moderate, 5-7=right-leaning; see Figure 2). 32% of left-leaning participants indicated WTD against right-leaning papers, 42% against right-leaning grants, 38% against potential right-leaning symposia speakers, and 56% against right-leaning job candidates at least occasionally. In contrast, among right-leaning participants, 20% indicated WTD against left-leaning papers, 23% against left-leaning grants, 12% against left-leaning symposia, and 46% against a left-leaning job candidate at least occasionally (Figure 2). Hence, right-leaning individuals displayed WTD against left-leaning subjects/contents less frequently than left-leaning individuals exhibited WTD against right-leaning subjects/contents.

Given the apparent skew in the percentages for WTD by ideology, post-hoc (analyses not pre-registered) we sought to test for left/right differences in frequency of WTD. Four new variables were created for WTD against the opposition (i.e., opposition in the sense of left against the right and right against the left) for the four dimensions (reviewing a grant, assessing a paper, symposia invite, hiring). For ideology for these tests, we used the binned variable for ideology (1-3=left-leaning, 4=moderate, 5-7=right-leaning). For each variable, scores were merged such that, for example, the WTD against the opposition for hiring variable was comprised of the left’s scores for WTD against a right-leaning hire, and the right’s scores for WTD against a left leaning hire. The same was done for the other three variables. After creating the variables, a Hotelling’s Trace analysis was conducted, *T*2=3.63, *F*(4, 663)=601.63, *p*<.001, and indicated that the population means for the four variables were not equal, allowing us, therefore, to proceed with additional analyses. Following, multiple independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare WTD against the opposition for left versus right-leaning participants.

Left leaning participants (*M*=2.35, SD=.98) were more likely than right-leaning participants (*M*=1.99, SD=.80) to view negatively the grant application of someone of the opposing political viewpoint, *t*(668)= 3.62, *p*<.001, 95% CI [.17, .56] *d*= .38. Left leaning participants (*M*=2.14, SD=.98) were also more likely than right-leaning participants (*M*=1.83, SD=.83) to view negatively a paper from someone of the opposing political viewpoint, *t*(669)= 3.04, *p*<.001, 95% CI [.11, .50] *d*= .32. Additionally, left leaning participants (*M*=2.25, SD=1.07) were more likely than right-leaning participants (*M*=1.55, SD=.79) to be less willing to invite colleagues of the opposing political viewpoint to a symposia, *t*(668)= 6.51, *p*<.001, 95% CI [.49, .91] *d*= .68. Last, left leaning participants (*M*=2.67, SD=1.19) were more likely than right-leaning participants (*M*=2.37, SD=1.03) to not be willing to hire someone of the opposing political viewpoint, *t*(668)= 2.45, *p*=.015, 95% CI [.06, .54] *d*= .26. These findings were supported by chi-square analyses (recoding WTD for the four variables into dichotomous variables with <3=not WTD, 3-5=WTD).

Chi square tests of goodness of fit were then conducted to determine whether WTD for left and right-leaning participants was equivalent across the four dimensions (grant, paper, symposia, hiring). Analyses revealed that WTD for left versus right-leaning participants was not equivalent across any of the four dimensions. WTD was not equivalent for grants, *X*2 (1, *N*=670)=33.58, *p*<.001, for papers, *X*2 (1, *N*=671)=103.08, *p*<.001, for symposia, *X*2 (1, *N*=670)=70.93, *p*<.001, or for hiring, *X*2 (1, *N*=670)=4.68, *p*=.031. Thus, the sum of these analyses indicate that left-leaning participants’ WTD against the right is greater than right-leaning participants’ WTD against the left.

Also, there was no statistically significant difference between analytic (*M*=1.64, SD=.57) and continental (*M*=1.61, SD=.52) philosophers for WTD against left-leaning colleagues, *t*(641)= -.50, *p*=.62, 95% CI [-.12, .07]. A statistically significant difference did emerge, however, for WTD against right-leaning colleagues, *t*(638)= 2.89, *p*=.004, 95% CI [.07, .36]. Continental philosophers (*M*=2.32, SD=.92) were willing to discriminate against right-leaning colleagues more frequently than analytic philosophers (*M*=2.10, SD=.85).

Moving from participants’ reports on how they themselves would act to their view on how they thought others would act, we found that the more left-leaning the participant, the more likely they were to believe that a left-leaning perspective/individual would be treated negatively by colleagues in the mentioned contexts (Table 3; grant application *r*= -.26, *p*<.001; paper review *r*= -.27, *p*<.001; symposia invitation *r*= -.31, *p*=.04; hiring decisions *r*= -.27, *p*<.001). And the more right-leaning the participant, the more likely they were to believe that a right-leaning perspective/individual would be viewed negatively by colleagues in these contexts (grant application *r*=.39, *p*<.001; paper review *r*=.36, *p*<.001; symposia invitation *r*=.31, *p*<.001; hiring decisions *r*=.34, *p*<.001). Overall, however, participants reported believing that colleagues would engage in discrimination against right-leaning individuals (*M*=2.74, *SD*=.87) more often than against left-leaning individuals (*M*=1.97, *SD*=.70), *t*(652)= 17.30, *p*<.001, 95% CI [.68, .85] *d*=.97.

4.4 *Justification of discrimination and results on (H4)*

398 participants (50.1%) indicated that discrimination on the basis of ideology (e.g., in hiring/promotion decisions, grants, or manuscript reviews) against right-leaning individuals in the field is not at all justified (scale point 1 on the 1-5 scale). 436 (54.9%) indicated the same with respect to left-leaning individuals. 365 participants (51.34%) indicated that both types of discrimination (against right-leaning individuals, and against left-leaning individuals) are not at all justified. Yet, consistent with prediction (H4), there was a significant association between ideology and justification of discrimination against right-leaning individuals in the field (*r* = -.37, *p*<.001) (see Table 3). The more left-leaning the participant, the more justified they believed discrimination against right-leaning individuals in the field to be. But, against (H4), there was no significant association between ideology and justification of discrimination against left-leaning individuals (*r*=.000, *p*=.991).

Providing further insights into participants’ views on whether the treatment of certain ideological contents is justified, we also found that the more right-leaning the participant, the more frequent the indication that right-leaning ideas, theories, or critiques *should* be discussed more often in the relevant areas (*r*=.13, *p*=.001) (Table 3). But there was no significant association between ideology and opinions on how often left-leaning ideas, theories, or critiques should be discussed (*r*=-.07, *p*=.071). Notice too that while there was, overall, a significant difference between how often participants believed that left-leaning ideas, theories, or critiques should be discussed (when relevant) (*M*=4.02, *SD*=.62) compared to right-leaning ones (*M*=3.91, *SD*=.72), *t*(645)= 5.52, *p*<.001, 95% CI [.08, .16] *d*=.16), the means for both kinds of contents are quite high and near the item scale-point of 4 (i.e., “frequently”). Practically speaking, overall, participants reported that both should be discussed (in the relevant areas) relatively frequently, and the effect size is relatively small.

Before interpreting and elaborating on the data, it will be useful to consider the results from the qualitative section of the survey, i.e., participants’ ‘Free Response’ given at the end of it. They help add nuance and depth to our interpretations of the quantitative findings, as many free responses mention concrete examples of the ideological bias, discrimination, or hostility that the respondents experienced, witnessed, or heard about.

**5. RESULTS (Qualitative data)**

231 participants (29.1% of the sample) left comments on their personal experiences, related to their political viewpoint, in the ‘Free Response’ section. We coded the responses, classifying them into different, non-exclusive categories.[[17]](#footnote-17) Our four main categories were:

1. Underrepresentation of/hostility towards left-leaning individuals/views
2. Hostility from the left against the left
3. Underrepresentation of/hostility towards right-leaning individuals/views
4. Doubts about ideological bias/hostility/discrimination

5.1 *Underrepresentation of/hostility towards left-leaning individuals/views*

28 responses fell into this category.[[18]](#footnote-18) Overall, people who were very left leaning reported significantly more experiences of bias, discrimination, and hostility than liberals or moderately progressives. Here are three relevant responses.

In my experience the discrimination is against those \*critical of liberalism\* from a left-wing/feminist/anti-colonial perspective. Liberal left-wing philosophers don’t have any difficulties – if anything, theirs is the dominant view. But anyone further left will experience a hostile environment (e.g. anarchists, Marxists). (68)[[19]](#footnote-19)

I do not think milquetoast liberal views are marginalized. I think more radical, broadly ‘left,’ communist, feminist, racial liberationist, etc. views are. (95; and see also 98, 137, 152, 172, 175, 218, 223)

I had a grant application rejected in the last few years, and one of the reasons stated was that I am a feminist and a feminist cannot conduct a fair inquiry in the area of the grant application. (37)

Some respondents maintained that ‘neoliberalism’ (67), or the capitalist ‘system’ (51) itself contributes to a political bias against, and an underrepresentation of, radical left-wing views and individuals in academic philosophy. Others suggested that hostility toward (radical) left-leaning views might in fact be internal, or related to certain philosophical traditions:

Analytic philosophy is built on a fairly right wing foundation anyway, of the individual logical man using atomised premises to create an argument. When one deviates from this, the boundaries of the discipline are heavily policed. (79; see also 137)

The antipathy towards ‘continental’ philosophy also sometimes plays out in hostility towards left-wing political critique springing from that tradition. (175)

Interestingly, very left-leaning respondents also occasionally reported that the hostility against their views sometimes comes from *left-leaning* individuals themselves. These comments fell into the next category.

5.2 *Hostility from the left against the left*

One respondent wrote about the marginalization of certain left-leaning views by a “liberal majority” (95), while another added that the “discipline is politically liberal, which means hostile to both conservative and socialist critique” (172). Comments of this kind suggest that left-leaning individuals may be hostile to others on their own ideological side on the basis that they are *too left*.

Adding further complexity to the phenomenon, people that self-identified as moderately left-leaning also sometimes reported they faced hostility for being *not left enough* by those on the far left. In fact, 11 responses mentioned hostility against moderately left-leaning individuals or views from the far end of their own political side. Here are two.

I for one did not feel comfortable voicing pro-Hillary sentiment during the primary, mainly for fear of censure from more left-leaning colleagues. (27)

I said that I am left-leaning and sometimes feel pressure to stay quiet about my beliefs. […] I think this pressure is not coming from right-wing members of the profession, but from left-wing members who might believe that I am not left-wing enough (170, see also 231, 12, 16 99, 107, 52, 111, 115, 209)

Such responses hint at hostility towards moderately left-leaning individuals[[20]](#footnote-20) but perhaps even more so at hostility towards right-leaning subjects. Many other comments did so more explicitly.

5.3 *Underrepresentation of/hostility towards right-leaning individuals/views*

76 responses fell into this category, sometimes containing colorful expressions of experiences of hostility such as, for instance,

If my professional colleagues knew that I am moderately right-wing then half of them would call me a ‘subhuman pig’ and treat me accordingly. The other half would keep silent for fear of being next. (1)

Several respondents also noted

Comments and jokes about those on the right are frequent, and this makes it difficult to gauge the true balance of opinion as any right-leaning individual is likely to remain quiet. (210; see also 60 and 231).

Another respondent wrote,

I have seen large-scale organised walk-outs by students at visiting lectures by senior academics who are known to be politically right-leaning. […] [A] fairly large number of students and academics in philosophy tend to give the least charitable/most extreme interpretation of right-leaning claims made by others in their field. (182)

Many left-leaning respondents were in fact open about their WTD against, for instance, far right-leaning individuals and views, though they tended to suggest a different attitude toward moderately right-leaning ones, and sometimes distinguished between right-leaning views on social as opposed to economic issues:

I would not invite a far right speaker for a conference, but I don’t think this tells us anything about my inclinations to invite people from the center right. (73)

I would loathe to hire a colleague who had views that had classist, racist, sexist, or nationalist implications, due to workplace issues. Economic views seem less directly relevant to the workplace environment. (132; see also 131, 23)

Libertarian ideas about minimum wages and social welfare seem to be more tolerated than conservative arguments that challenge left-leaning views on social or ethical issues. As one respondent noted,

I suspect that men and women are predisposed to have different interests, and that this accounts for the disparities in gender ratios across disciplines/professions. Yet this view is not one I am able to voice openly, e.g. by suggesting that less women are interested in philosophy and that’s why we have so few in the field. I don’t know what reaction people would have if I were to make this view public, but I suspect it ‘hostile’ would be an understatement. (12)

It is worth noting that when right-leaning participants reported experiences of hostility in the free responses, there was no comment to the effect that the hostility was coming from individuals from their own side of the political spectrum (either more radical or more moderate subjects). This was a significant difference compared to free responses by left-leaning subjects, as many very and moderately left-leaning respondents did report experiences of hostility of such a kind.

So far, the responses mentioned acknowledge the presence of ideological bias and hostility in philosophy. Yet, many responses in fact deniedor downplayedtheir existence.

5.4 *Doubts about ideological bias/discrimination/hostility*

34 responses fell into this category. Some claimed that ideological bias and discrimination in philosophy are rare, if not non-existent,

I have seen no evidence of systematic bias on the basis of political affiliation in 15 years of involvement in professional philosophy. (40; see also 180)

My field (at least in Europe) is dominated by left-leaning individuals, such as myself. I don’t think this is the product of discrimination or anything sinister however. (179)

In some responses, a subfield was taken to be free from discrimination because the decision makers lack knowledge of the ideology of the individuals they decide on (29), or ideology is irrelevant for the field (122, 200). And many respondents thought

the quality of arguments matters more than the orientation of political beliefs. I feel that both right-wing and left-wing beliefs are respected in my field as long as they are well-supported. (91; see also 57, 86, 139, 162, 164, 226).

Relatedly, a number of respondents claimed that right-wing ideas in general tend not to survive philosophical scrutiny,

conservative ideas tend to lose in fair competition in the marketplace of ideas. They are given their chance, and are generally shown to be bad. People who accept many of them tend to be bad philosophers. (25; see also 85, 120)

I’d be inclined to negatively review a right-leaning paper for the simple fact that I believe, given the arguments, that the political right get things \*wrong\*. We’re talking about matters of objective truth here. (85; see also 120)

Neither the widespread endorsement of leftist positions nor the widespread rejection of conservative positions is a matter of ideological bias, any more so than there is a bias against Creationist among biologists. (146; see also 7, 103, 126, 128, 146, 149, 151, 203)

While many philosophers claimed right-leaning views are *in general* (i.e., not only the extreme positions) ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’ philosophy, we found no corresponding claim in the free responses with respect to left-leaning views. This was another significant difference in the free responses when left-leaning participants’ comments were compared to those by right-leaning individuals.

**6. GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The qualitative and quantitative data introduced provide intriguing insights into the political dynamics in the field of philosophy. We focus on the key findings pertaining to (H1) through (H4).

Participants in our survey clearly leaned left, and right-leaning participants were a minority. This coheres with and extends related research in other fields that found an underrepresentation of conservative (right-leaning) and majority of liberal (left-leaning) scholars in these fields (Yancey 2011; Inbar and Lammers 2012; Honeycutt and Freberg 2017). While the overall left vs. right distribution we found in the field of philosophy might be expected, the more surprising result is that there were in fact fewer *moderates* (11%) in our sample than right-leaning individuals (14%).

One factor contributing to the imbalance in representation of ideological viewpoints might be an aversion and discrimination against right-leaning and moderate individuals. Our study does not directly show that they do contribute to it. It does, however, provide evidence that ideological hostility and a readiness to discriminate on the basis of political orientation are not only *real* in philosophy but also directed at *various* ideologies, including a moderate stance (moderate participants reported experiencing more hostility than left-leaning participants (*Mdiff*=.72, *p*<.001), but less than right-leaning participants). Our findings thus suggest that *across the political spectrum*, from very left-leaning individuals to very right-leaning individuals, philosophers sometimes experience politically motivated hostility in the field which, in some cases, prevents them from expressing their viewpoints, from being taken seriously, and from contributing to debates. This is striking, because explicit commitments to open-mindedness, diversity, and inclusiveness abound among philosophers and philosophy organizations.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Moreover, the qualitative data combined with the quantitative findings reveal a significant discrepancy between many philosophers’ beliefs that ideological bias and discrimination are either rare or non-existent in the field and many more other philosophers’ reports of having actually experienced or witnessed them first hand. Starting with the political right, the more right-leaning the participant was, the more hostility they reported personally experiencing from colleagues, and the stronger their impression that they and their political ideology would be negatively viewed in judgment- and decision-making in the field. The validity of this subjective impression was partly confirmed by the fact that the more left-leaning the participant was (20.2% were very left-leaning), the more frequent their WTD against right-leaning individuals and contents in judgment- and decision-making. Similarly, while left-leaning participants did not report more experiences of hostility the more left-leaning they were, the more left-leaning the participant was the stronger their impression that they themselves and their ideology would be negatively assessed by colleagues in the mentioned contexts. This subjective impression too was at least partly confirmed by the fact that the more right-leaning the participant was, the more frequent their WTDagainst left-leaning individuals or contents in reviewing practices, conference invitations, and hiring. Quantitative analyses revealed though that in our sample left-leaning individuals’ WTD against the right was greater than right-leaning individuals’ WTD against the left.

Our results provide further evidence for the “ideological-conflict hypothesis” (Brandt et al. 2014) in suggesting that left-leaning individuals and right-leaning individuals are similarly intolerant against groups holding values inconsistent with their own. In fact, the free responses indicated that *within* the left-leaning side of the political spectrum, factions are sometimes hostile against each other (moderately left-leaning vs. very left-leaning individuals and *vice versa*) too. Since moderately left-leaning individuals (e.g., liberals) and very left-leaning individuals share important features (e.g., an emphasis on equality; Arneson 2015; Caprara and Vecchione 2018) that make them, despite their differences, fall on the same left side of the spectrum, we shall call this phenomenon *intra-ideological hostility*. In providing evidence of intra-ideological hostility, our findings offer a new contribution to previous research on the ideological-conflict hypothesis and ideological hostility in academia, because that research has so far only revealed *cross-*ideological (liberals vs. conservatives and *vice versa*) hostility (Brandt et al. 2014; Honeycutt and Freberg 2017). It is an interesting question for future research whether intra-ideological hostility might in fact be stronger than cross-ideological hostility.

Independently of their strength, it is worth noting that hostility and discrimination against, and an underrepresentation of, a particular ideology in philosophy or any other academic discipline need not be problematic. An aversion against creationists in a department of biology or against flat-earthers in a department of geology is hardly objectionable. The same might hold for individuals with certain political viewpoints in philosophy. If so, then one might expect members of the field to take discrimination against some subjects on the basis of their ideology to be justified. We did find that the more left-leaning the participant the more justified they believed discrimination (e.g., in hiring/promotion decisions, grants, or manuscript reviews) against right-leaning individuals on the basis of their ideology in the field to be. But, as noted, about half of the participants indicated that discrimination against either left- or right-leaning individuals in the field is not at all justified. This is noteworthy because many participants on both the left and the right (especially, those situated toward the end of the spectrum) displayed an explicit WTD against individuals with the opposite ideology. They openly acknowledged that they would react negatively to contents and individuals of the opposite ideology on the basis of that ideology alone (see the wording of the WTD-questions in section 3.2).[[22]](#footnote-22)

Of course, even if the majority thought that acting in these ways is not justified, it might still be. We don’t want to commit to any strong view on whether this is the case with respect to individuals or contents of either ideology. We do, however, believe that ideological biases, hostility, and discrimination are often costly enough to take steps to counteract them. There are at least two kinds of costs: *epistemic* and *ethical* ones.

6.1 *Epistemic costs of ideological bias and a lack of ideological diversity in philosophy*

These are negative effects on the reliability of belief formation and knowledge acquisition in the field. A bias against and lack of, say, feminist, moderate, or conservative (right-leaning) scholars in philosophy might be detrimental in this sense in that they reduce the scope of critical questions being asked, which increases researchers’ susceptibility to reasoning errors due to confirmation bias and group polarization, possibly impeding a convergence on truths (Longino 2002; Peters 2018). The problem is particularly pressing in philosophy because philosophical claims are frequently affected by philosophers’ political values, which emphasize some aspects of an issue while obscuring others. And different ideological convictions incline philosophers toward different conclusions in debates on, for instance, equality (Cohen 2006: 416f), immigration (Hidalgo and Freiman 2016), social welfare (Rajczi 2014), abortion (McLachlan 1977), implicit bias (Hermanson 2017), affirmative action (Shield and Dunn 2016: 196f), the heritability of intelligence (Sesardic 2010; Cofnas 2016), cognitive difference research (Kourany 2016), values in science (Hicks 2011) and more. Since claims in these areas of philosophical inquiry are often based on political values and can’t be empirically tested, social criticism is important for philosophers to spot errors in their reasoning (Longino 2002; Peters 2018).

A study by Gampa et al. (2019) suggests that these errors aren’t just possible but likely. Gampa et al. asked liberals and conservatives to evaluate the logical soundness of classically structured logical syllogisms supporting liberal or conservative beliefs, and found that both “liberals and conservatives frequently evaluated the logical structure of entire arguments based on the believability of arguments’ conclusions, leading to predictable patterns of logical errors. As a result, liberals were better at identifying flawed arguments supporting conservative beliefs and conservatives were better at identifying flawed arguments supporting liberal beliefs” (2019: 1). These findings highlight the importance of ideological opponents in value-laden debates, which are common in philosophy, to correct for individuals’ ideological reasoning biases, and possibly harness opposite ideology for epistemic group-level benefits (a ‘Mandevillian’ effect, Peters forthcoming).

A lack or swift dismissal of, for instance, very left-leaning, moderate, or right-leaning minority beliefs in philosophy wouldn’t only weaken reliability of philosophical belief formation. Ideological homogeneity in the field could also lead scholars to overlook meaningful research questions (Haidt 2011) and cause the public to question the credibility of philosophical research (Kornblith 1999; Cofnas et al. 2017).

One might maintain that an aversion and discrimination against right-leaning individuals, in particular, is in fact epistemically warranted because such individuals are less likely to reason correctly (see the ‘Free Response’ data). However, any claim to the effect that right-leaning individuals are *in general* less intelligent and philosophically capable than left-leaning subjects is most likely false due to its broad scope and the diverse distribution of intellectual capacities (Duarte et al. 2015).

6.2 *Ethical costs of ideological bias and a lack of ideological diversity in philosophy*

These are effects related to a violation of what subjects take to be morally valuable such as, for instance, fairness, respect, equality, or social justice. The ideological biases, hostility, and discrimination we found create ethical costs in violating moral principles that many philosophers and philosophical institutions commit themselves to. For example, the Department of Philosophy at New York University emphasizes: “We do not tolerate […] discrimination, and we strongly support efforts to remove barriers to inclusiveness in philosophy as a discipline.”[[23]](#footnote-23) In the same vein, the Department of Philosophy at Rutgers University writes: “Philosophy both requires and fosters norms of civil, inclusive discourse. […] No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Similarly, the “*American Philosophical Association* rejects as unethical all forms of discrimination based on […] political convictions […].”[[25]](#footnote-25)

It may be untenable to hold that ‘all are welcome’, for, as Popper (1945) suggests, if “we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them. […] We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant” (360). But many political philosophers have convincingly argued that it is usually morally and politically wise to ‘tolerate the intolerant’ as long as nobody’s safety is in danger (Rawls 1971; Walzer 1997). And while it isn’t always easy to draw the lines between what is a dangerous ideological utterance and what isn’t, it seems reasonable to assume that most right-leaning and left-leaning philosophers are not putting people’s safety at risk or aiming to silence discussions.

**7. LIMITATIONS**

(1) *Low response rate.* When our survey was sent out via the PHILOS-L list server, the server had 11,388 subscribers. Initial response rate was 9.39%. After data exclusions, the final response rate was 6.97%. This is low[[26]](#footnote-26) and introduces the risk that the people who did not respond display characteristics that are different to those of the people who did, threatening the survey’s generalizability and validity. However, low response rates in online surveys are common, and several studies found in fact no direct correlation between response rate and validity (Visser et al. 1996). Recent evaluations of surveys with response rates ranging from 5% to 54% concluded that studies with a lower response were frequently only marginally less accurate than those with much higher rates (Holbrook et al. 2007). A low response rate doesn’t automatically mean the study results have low validity, especially not when the absolute numbers are high, as in our case (Templeton et al. 1997). Moreover, when respondent characteristics are representative of those of non-respondents, low response rates aren’t problematic at all (Sax et al. 2003). We can’t verify whether respondent characteristics in our sample were representative of the field of philosophy as a whole. But our sample is similar to samples of related studies in that our participants, just as those of these other studies, were mostly male, white, liberal/left, and analytic philosophers[[27]](#footnote-27) (Paxton et al. 2012; Botts et al. 2014; Yancey 2011; Bourget and Chalmers 2014), suggesting that our sample is not unrepresentative of the field. Finally, the generalizability and validity of our results also receives some support from the fact that key trends in our data (e.g., an underrepresentation of right-leaning subjects, hostility against them but also against, e.g., feminists) are not outliers but consistent with the data fromrelated (informal and professional) surveys of the field, and personal reports by philosophers (see Section 1).

(2) *Lack of gradients.* When assessing participants’ WTD against left/right-leaning individualsand viewpoints,we did not provide the three gradients ‘somewhat left/right-leaning’, ‘left/right-leaning’, and ‘very left/right-leaning’, but only used ‘left/right-leaning’. This is a limitation because now the responses don’t allow us to tell whether participants would act differently toward ‘somewhat’ and ‘very left/right-leaning’ individuals, and it might be that some interpreted our questions as referring to ‘very’ left/right-leaning individuals whereas others took them to refer only to ‘somewhat’ left/right-leaning individuals. However, in the relevant place in the survey, we did remind participants that the questions at issue referred to the middle position of each ideology only. Moreover, even if some participants interpreted them as referring to extreme positions when others interpreted them as referring to moderate ones only, our results are still interesting. For in the absence of any ideological bias, each participant should apply the same (extreme or moderate) reading of the gradients to *both* left-leaning and right-leaning individuals alike, treating them both equally negatively/positively. But this is not what we found.

(3) *Ambiguous concepts.* Another criticism of the survey might be that the terms (politically) ‘left’ and ‘right’ are too vague and their meanings differ internationally too much, making the informativeness of the survey results doubtful, because if the origin point of the moderate position varies across individuals or groups, etc., the responses will not be commensurable. We grant that the vagueness of ‘left’ and ‘right’ is a limitation of our survey. But the results remain informative and important, because as we noted earlier (section 2.1), there is a significant overlap in the meaning of the terms internationally (Caprara and Vecchione 2018). This overlap ensures that the results are informative even if not every respondent interprets the intervals we used in exactly the same way. Moreover, while a detailed investigation of the regional differences in ideological leanings and biases, and of philosophers’ views on specific policy issues would be an interesting complement to our study, the phenomenon of ideological diversity is, just as ideology itself, a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is usefully explored by pursuing a variety of methods, including the approach we adopted here that deploys standard practices in political science (i.e., the use of the left/right spectrum).

**8. CONCLUSION**

The survey we conducted suggests that the field of philosophy is largely ideologically homogeneous toward the political left, and both right-leaning individuals and, even more so, moderates are underrepresented. The data we gathered also suggest that *across the political spectrum*, participants sometimes experience political bias and hostility in the field, occasionally coming from their own side of the political spectrum. In fact, a significant minority in the survey exhibited an explicit willingness to discriminate against individuals with the opposite ideology while about half of the participants indicated that discrimination against left- or right-leaning individuals is not justified. These findings add new insights to the social psychological research on ideology in academia and have important implications for philosophers interested in meta-philosophical, ethical, and epistemological questions. For they pertain to the issue as to whether judgment- and decision-making in philosophy is as reliable and morally responsible as it should be. The specific distribution of and bias and hostility against political viewpoints that we found cast doubts on the view that it is, as these ideology-related factors undermine social criticism and are at odds with tolerance and open dialogue. It thus seems to us that the results of the study provide reasons for concern no matter where one stands on the political spectrum.

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**APPENDIX: TABLES AND FIGURES**

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| **Table 1: Geographic region of participants** |
| **Region** | **Count** | **Percent** |
| Europe | 533 | 67.13% |
| North America | 175 | 22.04% |
| Middle East | 22 | 2.77% |
| Australia/New Zealand | 20 | 2.52% |
| South America | 10 | 1.26% |
| East Asia | 9 | 1.13% |
| Africa | 5 | 0.63% |
| No Response | 20 | 2.52% |

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| **Table 2: Political ideology of participants** |
|  | **Overall, count (percent)** | **Social/ethical issues, count (percent)** | **Economic issues, count (percent)** |
| Very left-leaning | 160 (20.2%) | 210 (26.5%) | 170 (21.4%) |
| Left-leaning | 309 (38.9%) | 305 (38.5%) | 289 (36.4%) |
| Somewhat left-leaning | 125 (15.7%) | 105 (13.2%) | 118 (14.9%) |
| Moderate | 87 (11.0%) | 60 (7.6%) | 75 (9.5%) |
| Somewhat right-leaning | 59 (7.4%) | 55 (6.9%) | 69 (8.7%) |
| Right-leaning | 41 (5.2%) | 37 (4.7%) | 53 (6.7%) |
| Very right-leaning | 13 (1.6%) | 21 (2.6%) | 19 (2.4%) |

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| **Table 3: Correlations of political ideology with variables and items, and variable and item means (sds)** |
|  | Political ideology | *M* (sd) |
| Political ideology | — | 2.69 (1.49) |
| Hostility (personal) composite variable | .47\*\*\* | 2.21 (1.02) |
| WTD Right-leaning paper | -.31\*\*\* | 1.99 (.95) |
| WTD Right-leaning grant | -.37\*\*\* | 2.18 (.98) |
| WTD Right-leaning symposia guest | -.28\*\*\* | 2.10 (1.08) |
| WTD Right-leaning hire | -.36\*\*\* | 2.44 (1.20) |
| WTD Left-leaning paper | .15\*\*\* | 1.60 (.73) |
| WTD Left-leaning grant | .21\*\*\* | 1.68 (.73) |
| WTD Left-leaning symposia guest | .08\* | 1.42 (.64) |
| WTD Left-leaning hire | .39\*\*\* | 1.85 (.89) |
| Colleagues WTD Right-leaning paper | .36\*\*\* | 2.62 (.96) |
| Colleagues WTD Right-leaning grant | .39\*\*\* | 2.73 (.94) |
| Colleagues WTD Right-leaning symposia guest | .31\*\*\* | 2.73 (.99) |
| Colleagues WTD Right-leaning hire | .34\*\*\* | 2.89 (.99) |
| Colleagues WTD Left-leaning paper | -.27\*\*\* | 1.95 (.79) |
| Colleagues WTD Left-leaning grant | -.26\*\*\* | 2.01 (.81) |
| Colleagues WTD Left-leaning symposia guest | -.31\*\*\* | 1.88 (.82) |
| Colleagues WTD Left-leaning hire | -.27\*\*\* | 2.08 (.83) |
| Justified discrimination—right-leaning individual | -.37\*\*\* | 1.90 (1.21) |
| Justified discrimination--left-leaning individual | .000 | 1.64 (.95) |
| Fit—right-leaning individual | -.05 | 2.65 (.85) |
| Fit—left-leaning individual | .05 | 3.67 (.81) |
| How often should right-leaning ideas, theories, critiques be discussed | .13\*\* | 3.91 (.72) |
| How often should left-leaning ideas, theories, critiques be discussed | -.07 | 4.02 (.61) |
| Defend right-leaning conclusion to argument | -.09\* | 2.61 (1.16) |
| Defend left-leaning conclusion to argument | .06 | 1.94 (1.02) |
| \* *p*<.05, \*\* *p*<.01, \*\*\* *p*<.001 |

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| **Table 4: Overall political ideology of participants, by rank** |
|   | Full professor | Associate professor | Assistant professor | Assistant lecturer/teaching assistant | Post-doctoral researcher | Graduate student | Undergraduate student | Other |
| Very left-leaning | 15 (21.4%) | 11 (15.9%) | 24 (27.6%) | 16 (30.2%) | 23 (20.2%) | 60 (20%) | 5 (12.2%) | 5 (9.1%) |
| Left-leaning | 24 (34.3%) | 30 (43.5%) | 38 (43.7%) | 22 (41.5%) | 49 (43%) | 121 (40.3%) | 11 (26.8%) | 14 (25.5%) |
| Somewhat left-leaning | 12 (17.1%) | 13 (18.8%) | 5 (5.7%) | 6 (11.3%) | 24 (21.1%) | 44 (14.7%) | 8 (19.5%) | 12 (21.8%) |
| Moderate | 11 (15.7%) | 3 (4.3%) | 9 (10.3%) | 4 (7.5%) | 8 (7%) | 33 (11%) | 7 (17.1%) | 12 (21.8%) |
| Somewhat right-leaning | 4 (5.7%) | 8 (11.6%) | 6 (6.9%) | 2 (3.8%) | 5 (4.4%) | 25 (8.3%) | 4 (9.8%) | 4 (7.3%) |
| Right-leaning | 3 (4.3%) | 4 (5.8%) | 4 (4.6%) | 3 (5.7%) | 5 (4.4%) | 11 (3.7%) | 3 (7.3%) | 6 (10.9%) |
| Very right-leaning | 1 (1.4%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1.1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 6 (2%) | 3 (7.3%) | 2 (3.6%) |

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| **Table 5: Overall political ideology of participants, by subfield** |
|   | Epistemology | Ethics | History of philosophy | Logic | Metaphysics | Philosophy of mind | Philosophy of religion | Philosophy of science | Political philosophy |
| Very left-leaning | 27 (16.8%) | 58 (20.7%) | 36 (21.2%) | 4 (7.3%) | 28 (20%) | 23 (16.5%) | 5 (8.2%) | 31 (18%) | 77 (26.3%) |
| Left-leaning | 65 (40.4%) | 107 (38.2%) | 65 (38.2%) | 14 (25.5%) | 50 (35.7%) | 57 (41%) | 12 (19.7%) | 74 (43%) | 114 (38.9%) |
| Somewhat left-leaning | 27 (16.8%) | 52 (18.6%) | 20 (11.8%) | 11 (20%) | 24 (17.1%) | 20 (14.4%) | 11 (18%) | 32 (18.6%) | 44 (15%) |
| Moderate | 16 (9.9%) | 24 (8.6%) | 26 (15.3%) | 9 (16.4%) | 21 (15%) | 19 (13.7%) | 8 (13.1%) | 16 (9.3%) | 28 (9.6%) |
| Somewhat right-leaning | 13 (8.1%) | 18 (6.4%) | 10 (5.9%) | 8 (14.5%) | 10 (7.1%) | 14 (10.1%) | 10 (16.4%) | 8 (4.7%) | 14 (4.8%) |
| Right-leaning | 10 (6.2%) | 14 (5%) | 11 (6.5%) | 6 (10.9%) | 7 (5%) | 6 (4.3%) | 11 (18%) | 8 (4.7%) | 8 (2.7%) |
| Very right-leaning | 3 (1.9%) | 7 (2.5%) | 2 (1.2%) | 3 (5.5%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (6.6%) | 3 (1.7%) | 8 (2.7%) |

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| **Table 6: Overall political ideology of participants, by field** |
|   | Continental philosophy | Analytic philosophy | Other |
| Very left-leaning | 53 (24.2%) | 74 (16.2%) | 31 (29.2%) |
| Left-leaning | 91 (41.6%) | 189 (41.3%) | 27 (25.5%) |
| Somewhat left-leaning | 33 (15.1%) | 69 (15.1%) | 20 (18.9%) |
| Moderate | 18 (8.2%) | 51 (11.1%) | 18 (17%) |
| Somewhat right-leaning | 10 (4.6%) | 44 (9.6%) | 3 (2.8%) |
| Right-leaning | 12 (5.5%) | 22 (4.8%) | 6 (5.7%) |
|  |  |  |  |
| Very right-leaning | 2 (0.9%) | 9 (2%) | 1 (0.9%) |

Figure 2. Percentage of participants answering 3-5 on “willingness to discriminate” items

Figure 3. Percentages of participants; ideology by rank

Figure 4. Percentage of areas and ideology

Figure 5. Percentage of traditions and ideology

1. While the term ‘ideology’ is often used in an evaluative sense imputing to a system of beliefs some negative characteristic(s), we use it in a non-evaluative way as referring simply to a set of political “beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved” (Erikson and Tedin 2003: 64). This neutral notion is prevalent in social psychology and political science (Jost et al. 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Neither here nor in these studies is it assumed that the underrepresentation at issue is caused solely or mostly by bias. The causal connections are complex: self-selection and other factors might be the main reasons for a group’s underrepresentation. But if there is a bias against a group then it is plausible to assume that it is likely to contribute partlyto that underrepresentation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://blog.apaonline.org/2018/03/26/tell-us-how-to-fix-the-lack-of-diversity-in-philosophy-journals/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See https://philosophy.stanford.edu/about/diversity-and-climate [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.apaonline.org/page/nondiscrimination [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://dailynous.com/2016/08/30/ideas-students-protected-from-faculty-fearful-to-defend/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://dailynous.com/2016/09/06/ideas-faculty-scared-defend-follow/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Student protests against certain invited speakers or lecturers might also suggest some ideological hostility. For an incident involving Peter Singer at the University of Victoria (Canada), see <http://www.martlet.ca/protesters-crash-effective-altruism-debate/>; for an incident involving teaching, see <http://dailynous.com/2017/03/31/university-suspends-philosopher-lesson-abortion/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/philosophy/philos-l/ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Nine hypotheses were pre-registered in total. For all of them and the respective findings, see the OSF platform at: https://osf.io/qd5fy/?view\_only=aced37bbef6b44478c2f744920423187

For space reasons, we focus only on the four main ones here. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. They thus don’t reveal whether respondents would discriminate against that particular ideology more than another one, discriminate against both equally, or discriminate against political viewpoints generally. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. https://osf.io/qd5fy/?view\_only=aced37bbef6b44478c2f744920423187 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Participants were excluded if they didn’t agree to the informed consent or failed to answer 50% or more of the questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. https://osf.io/qd5fy/?view\_only=aced37bbef6b44478c2f744920423187 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Participants were asked about their ‘colleagues in the field’. We didn’t specify the term further. But on a natural reading, it designates individuals with whom one is typically interacting when doing philosophy in academia, that is, one’s departmental co-workers, including faculty members but also fellow students, postdocs, etc. It might not always be easy to average over one’s colleagues’ attitudes, but the terms we used were adapted from previous related survey studies in which they didn’t cause a significant problem. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. An anonymous reviewer notes that the term ‘discrimination’ is ambiguous: it might mean (i) ‘unjust, prejudiced treatment’ and incline toward bias in one direction, or (ii) ‘treatment on the basis of recognized differences’ and incline toward appraisal and valid judgment. While this ambiguity wasn’t marked in the survey, we only used the term ‘discriminate’ in three sets of questions (none of the WTD questions contains the term), namely: (1) “How often do you think colleagues would actively discriminate against you on the basis of your political beliefs?” (2) “How often do you think colleagues actively discriminate against left/right-leaning individuals in your field for their political beliefs?” (3) “How justified is discrimination (e.g., in hiring/promotion decisions, grants, or manuscript reviews) against left/right-leaning individuals in your field?” Given the specification ‘on the basis of/for your political belief’ in (1) and (2), it is clear that an evidentially unsupported judgment and so ‘discrimination’ in the sense of (i) is at issue. In (3), we didn’t include a specification. But again, the context disambiguated the term towards (i). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Two researchers independently classified the responses and afterwards crosschecked their classifications. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Since feminist views and environmental concerns and concerns about animal welfare are usually seen as part of a left-leaning orientation, we included responses related to them in this group. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The numbers in the brackets refer to the list of all responses; see the *Supplementary Data* *PHILOS-L Survey* file available at https://osf.io/qd5fy/?view\_only=aced37bbef6b44478c2f744920423187. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This is in line with the ‘lone moderate effect’ found in other studies (Keltner and Robinson 1993) in which subjects tended to perceive ideological in-group members as much more extreme than themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. We only measured verbal responses and what people say might differ from what they actually end up doing. However, there is a strong correlation between explicit ideological bias expressed verbally and ideological bias tracked by IATs and other behavioral measures (Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Peters 2018: 20f). More generally, it is hard to imagine that participants who happily overtly express WTD would not also actually act in line with what they claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. A reviewer notes that the assumption that we picked up discrimination on the basis of ideological differences in beliefs alone may over-simplify the stakes: for instance, subjects’ radically right-leaning beliefs may lead them to utterances about individuals (e.g., women, members of ethic minorities, etc.) that don’t just express the beliefs but also indirectly addressthe individuals concerned, where this interlocutory dimension of the expressions creates harm the envisaging of which may have driven the discriminatory responses in some of our participants. We agree that this interlocutory dimension of the expression of ideological beliefs is important to acknowledge and to further analyze to arrive at an adequate account of the justificatory basis of the discrimination we tracked. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. http://as.nyu.edu/philosophy/climate.html [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. https://philosophy.rutgers.edu/about-us/discourse [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. https://www.apaonline.org/page/nondiscrimination [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The low response rate might have been due to the fact that the survey was sent out in May and June (2018), which is a time when many faculty are likely to be occupied with end-of-term activities, marking etc. It is also worth noting that many subscribers to PHILOS-L are administrative staff and as such won’t respond to surveys of the kind at issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. While our sample consisted of 43,2% students and 49.7% faculty members, even if most participants had been students, our findings would still have be highly valuable revealing, for instance, insights into the ideological climate for students in the field. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)