# Fearlessly Puncturing the Progressive Worldview
## *by Stephen Kershnar*

*Progressive Myths*, Michael Huemer, independently published, 2024, pp. 277, $25 hardcover, $13 softcover.

In *Progressive Myths*, Michael Huemer attacks lynchpin progressive myths and, in so doing, devastates the worldview they support. The book is colorful, concise, hard-hitting, and highly readable. In short, it is a fun and powerful read. In the book, Huemer goes over six types of myths, including individual, racial, feminist, gender, economic, and science myths. He attacks them with the same plain-spoken and merciless writing style that characterizes his academic writing, Substack column, and podcast appearances.

Huemer defines a progressive myth as an empirical, factual claim which is believed by many progressives, seems to strongly support an element of progressive ideology, and yet is demonstrably false or highly misleading. In showing many—but not all—of the myths to be false, Huemer aims to show that contemporary woke progressivism is a quasi-religious intellectual virus. It is quasi-religious because it responds to the human need for meaning and community, short circuits critical examination of its central claims, and has its own mythology. It is an intellectual virus because it infects the minds of a large portion of Western intellectuals, especially the intellectual elite.

Huemer argues that destroying woke progressivism is important because woke progressivism prevents us from seeing that America is a pretty good country when compared to other real countries, as opposed to ideal countries. This would not be true if—as progressive ideology asserts—America is racist, sexist, homophobic, cruel to the poor, and destroys the environment. Huemer argues that by historical standards, America is extremely desirable, free, and rich. For example, he notes, the median American is in the 92 percentile of world income. He further notes that the desirability of living in the coun-

try explains why 160 million people from around the world want to come to America, more than twice as many as any other country.

In the first part of the book, Huemer considers progressive myths regarding individuals to puncture myths regarding the role of race, the jury system, and the police. In particular, he considers the following cases: Jacob Blake, Michael Brown, Amy Cooper, George Floyd, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Kyle Rittenhouse, and Breonna Taylor. Several of these discussions are eye opening.

Huemer's most surprising discussion is that of Amy Cooper, the "Central Park Karen." In this discussion, he points out that Christian Cooper (bird watcher, no relation to Amy) threatened Cooper because of her unleashed dog, likely scared her, and had a bad history with other dog-owners. Christian told Amy that, "If you're going to do what you want, I'm going to do what I want, but you're not going to like it." After this, he took out dog treats and tried to feed them to her dog. Huemer points out that given the threat and her fear, there is no evidence that Amy acted in a racist manner toward Christian.

As a result of this incident, Huemer notes, Amy Cooper was doxed and received death threats. The police filed criminal charges against her for making a false police report. The charges were later dropped after she completed an "educational" program that focused on racial identity. The New York City Commission on Human Rights investigated

her. Her employer fired her from her high paying job in finance and she had to flee the country. In contrast, Christian Cooper was celebrated in the news and social media.

In the second part of the book, Huemer punctures myths that support the claim that America is a deeply racist society, and that racism is the main cause of black disadvantage. As a way of puncturing these myths, Huemer shows that myths regarding racist police shootings, racist drug laws, and two purportedly scientific bases for racism (implicit bias and stereotype threat) are false.

The most electric chapter in this part of the book is Huemer's discussion of the Implicit Association Test, which is backed by a theory (Implicit Bias Theory) that is influential in academia and widely used in the business world. Huemer points out that the same sort of test results that supposedly show a preference for whites over blacks also show a preference for women over men. In fact, the latter effect is 50 percent stronger. Huemer points out that the test's reliability (test-retest correlation) is so low that statistically, the test is unacceptable. This tells us, Huemer concludes, that it does not measure a stable psychological trait. He further points out that one of the best meta-studies of implicit bias shows that it does not predict discrimination.

Huemer argues that politics and not science explains the continued belief in the test. This is electric because one wonders how so many academics could base beliefs about bias on an unreliable

and invalid test, and one that suggests that society is even more biased against men than blacks.

In part three, Huemer punctures feminist myths. Feminism says that an oppressive patriarchy in modern America oppresses women. The feminist movement tries to liberate women from this oppression. In this part of the book, Huemer discusses myths regarding the gender pay gap, campus rape culture, and whether women lie about rape or sexual assault. Huemer's discussion of lying is fascinating and disturbing.

In part four, Huemer discusses gender and transgenderism. Huemer argues that gender is not a social construct, but instead is a set of psychological traits that evolution designed to go with a certain sex. The traits that are most strongly correlated with sex—Huemer claims—are those that are most important to gender.

In discussing transgenderism, Huemer argues that many transgender people are mistaken about their gender. In addition, he points out that some studies find a high frequency of people initially identifying as transgender later desisting from doing so, although Huemer acknowledges that the estimates vary wildly here. Huemer also discusses the role of autogynephilia. This theory says that some males are sexually aroused by imagining themselves as women, and this motivates them to transition. He notes that the role of this desire in motivating men to transition is also unclear.

Huemer discusses Lisa Littman's findings regarding rapid onset gender dysphoria. Paradigmatic rapid onset gender dysphoria occurs in female teens who had no dysphoric symptoms in childhood. Littman found that this type of trans identification was frequently preceded by friends doing so, an increase in social media use, social anxiety, and a stressful or traumatic event. Huemer notes the similarity between rapid onset gender dysphoria and anorexia. All of this is more suggestive of a social contagion than a person suffering because she believes she is stuck in the wrong body.

In part five, Huemer discusses progressive economic myths. These myths include the claims that the rich do not deserve their wealth, and that society is rigged in favor of the rich. These myths are then used to support policies such as higher taxes, greater regulation, and more wealth redistribution. Huemer punctures these myths by discussing generational wealth, the tax burden, and regulation. In puncturing these myths, Huemer provides strong evidence that most wealth is not due to inheritance, family connections, or luck. He also provides strong evidence that the rich pay far more than their share of taxes.

In part six, Huemer discusses progressive scientific myths. Here he punctures the myth that we should trust what activists and media sources tell us about science. To illustrate this, he discusses climate change (another electric chapter), vaccine safety and efficacy, and

the efficacy of masks protecting wearers against viruses.

On a side note, in discussing these issues, Huemer proceeds in his trademark fearless manner. In fact, this book just begs the left to cancel him. Needless to say, most academics lack anything like Huemer's heroic commitment to truth. Having Huemer teach at the University of Colorado is an inefficient use of his intellectual ability and rock-solid integrity. He should be teaching at Yale or Harvard Law School or some other institution that would allow him to teach more of America's future leaders, for example, future presidents and members of Congress. This is not a criticism of Colorado—which is an excellent school—but merely an honest accounting of where America's leaders come from.

Huemer—an anarchist, atheist, libertarian, and vegetarian—thinks there are plenty of conservative myths, but argues that we should prioritize puncturing progressive myths because they dominate the intellectual elite and cause far more harm than do conservative myths. Huemer argues that progressive myths cause us to stick with failed policies, block the transmission of information important to the public, polarize the public, harm the very minorities they seek to help, and keep racism alive. Worst of all, progressive myths undermine social loyalty and trust. In so doing, Huemer claims, they tear at emotional attitudes that hold society together. The effects of doing so, Huemer claims, are bad enough, but they

also risk catastrophe. Consider, for example, how the Marxists' tearing down of institutions and social roles resulted in oppression, poverty, starvation, and systematic murder. The cost includes tens of millions of deaths as the result of Mao's, Pol Pot's, and Stalin's policies.

One glaring weakness of the book is Huemer's decision not to discuss intelligence. In particular, the book does not discuss the power of IQ scores to predict personal and professional success, racial differences in IQ scores, how malleable these differences are, and whether genetics explains some of the differences. The refusal to discuss intelligence differences and whether they are malleable explains much of the campus attempts to censor discussions of affirmative action, diversity, and racism. A similar thing is true regarding the differences between men's and women's interests (for example, in things or people) and priorities (for example, in jobs or family), which is central to the discussion of the underrepresentation of women in academia, business, law, and medicine. Huemer is well aware that assumptions regarding race, sex, and genetics motivate progressive racial, feminist, and gender myths. He should have faced this issue in his usual hard-hitting manner.

A second weakness of the book is that it fits uneasily with Huemer's brilliant theoretical work. For those of us who have read much of Huemer's outstanding philosophical work, one wonders whether the arguments in this book fit cleanly with this work. For ex-

ample, Huemer argues—persuasively to my mind—that factory farming animals is the worst thing in the world. His reasoning suggests that it is worse than Nazi death camps. One wonders why this consideration does not warrant discussion, if only to say that no distinctly progressive myths support it.

Huemer also argues—again, persuasively to my mind—that how good the world is depends on aggregate well-being. That is, it depends on the product of the number of people and happiness per person. One wonders whether progressive programs that significantly increase poverty, such as progressives' love of outrageously high taxation, regulation, and wealth redistribution—might lead to there being many more people even if the additional people are slightly less happy than a smaller population would be. The success of capitalism and democracy might explain why some wealthy countries—such as Italy, Japan, Spain, and South Korea—have low reproduction rates and in so doing are making the world worse even as they make it freer and happier.

In summary, Michael Huemer's Progressive Myths is an outstanding book by one of the world's most important philosophers. He punctures progressive myths and in so doing devastates one of the main pillars that support the progressive worldview. In so doing, he shows that the views that mainstream media elites and pundits confidently advance are false. The book is clearly written, concise, and—most importantly—fearless. The book's weakness is that it does not fit cleanly with Huemer's brilliant philosophical work. Perhaps, though, this will only bother a philosophy nerd like me.

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