

## CCafé Conversation Contribution

### "Learning How To See"

In October and November 2020, Brian McLaren got together with two other public theologians, Dr. Jaqui Lewis and Father Richard Rohr, for a series of six podcasts to discuss why it is that they so often encountered difficulties in getting their "message" across to their congregations and others. The core of their conversation centered on a list of thirteen biases, as McLaren called them, that he had identified while writing an ebook entitled *Why Don't They Get It?* In the very first episode, Rohr reminded them of a precept from Scholastic Theology (13th century), which he had been made to memorize early in his theological training, which set the stage for the conversation and provided a kind of traditional framing for the type of problem with which they all saw themselves confronted, namely

*quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis [recipitur]*

'Whatever is received, is received according to the manner of the recipient.'

Our own CCafé conversations on Henri Bortoft's book *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way of Science* as well as the follow-up conversation on "Does *Bildung* have a Future?" deal with this theme too. We're also reminded of Mario Betti's book *Twelve Ways of Seeing the World* which was mentioned in the course of the CCafé discussions surrounding Benardo Kastrup's book *The Idea of the World*. In other words, this is a theme that we have been engaging for some time now. Consider this simply another contribution.

McLaren defines *bias* as "a prejudice or pre-critical inclination in favor of or against something; a pattern of distortion in our ability to see." This isn't all that unreasonable, so we can let it stand for the moment. He "succeeded" (in good preacher fashion) in (cleverly) alliterating them all to begin with the letter "C", but don't let that bother you. Here's his list (with his annotations):

1. **Confirmation bias:**  
The human brain welcomes information that confirms what it already thinks and resists information that disturbs or contradicts what it already thinks. That's the first one.
2. **Complexity bias:**  
The human brain prefers a simple lie to a complex truth.
3. **Community bias:**  
The human brain finds it very hard for you to see something your group doesn't want you to see. In other words, we put tribe over truth. This is also known as social confirmation bias.

4. **Complementarity bias:**

If people are nice to you, you'll be open to what they see and have to say. If they aren't nice to you, you won't. We mirror back the attitude we receive from other people, and that makes us open or closed to what they have to say, whether it's true or not.

5. **Contact bias:**

If you lack contact with someone, you won't see what they see.

6. **Conservative/liberal bias:**

Our brains like to see as our party sees, and we flock with those who see as we do.

7. **Consciousness bias:** Our brains see from a location, a person's level of consciousness, or we could say their cognitive maturity makes seeing some things possible and seeing other things impossible.

8. **Competency bias:**

Our brains prefer to think of ourselves as above average. As a result, we are incompetent at knowing how incompetent or competent we really are.

9. **Confidence bias:**

Our brains prefer a confident lie to a hesitant truth. We mistake confidence for competence, and we are all vulnerable to the lies of confident people.

10. **Conspiracy bias:**

When we feel shame, we are especially vulnerable to stories that cast us as victims of an evil conspiracy by some enemy or other. In other words, our brains like stories in which we're either the hero or the victim but never the villain.

11. **Comfort bias:**

Also known as complacency or convenience bias. Our brains welcome data that allows us to relax and be happy, and our brains reject data that requires us to adjust, work, or inconvenience ourselves. We could say the brain is lazy, but it's very fast at being lazy.

12. **Catastrophe bias:**

Also known as normalcy or baseline bias. Our brains are wired to set a baseline of normalcy and assume that what feels normal has always been and will always remain. That means that we minimize threats, and we're vulnerable to disasters, especially disasters that develop slowly.

13. **Cash bias:**

One of the most powerful — our brains are wired to see within the framework of our economy, and we see what helps us make money. It is very hard to see anything that interferes with our way of making a living.

What is interesting about this particular listing that is different from both Betti's and Bortoft's approaches is that these are all more or less general inclinations we humans may have regardless of what conscious or unconscious "worldview" (or *Weltanschauung*) we may have philosophically. Consider this just another impulse into a wider, ongoing conversation.

*Prepared by* Ed Mahood, 2021-07-04

*Based on* the podcast series "Learning How to See" by Brian McLaren, with Jacqui Lewis & Richard Rohr. Available online @ [https://cac.org/podcast/learning-how-to-see/?utm\\_source=monthly%20news&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=podcasts&utm\\_content=june%20monthly%20news](https://cac.org/podcast/learning-how-to-see/?utm_source=monthly%20news&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=podcasts&utm_content=june%20monthly%20news) [last accessed 2021-07-04].