

## Twitter Thread by [Noah Smith](#)



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**"Competitive wokeness", like "virtue signaling" and "preference falsification", seems to be something people on the right say in order to pretend that people on the left don't really believe what they claim to believe.**

"She now finds herself in the uppermost echelons of the culture industries, where woke liberalism is de rigueur and departures from it are stigmatized." [@reihan](#) on Taylor Swift's swing towards politics: <https://t.co/cKW4LoY9IV>

— The Atlantic (@TheAtlantic) [October 11, 2018](#)

Basically we have a whole bunch of ways of saying "You can't possibly believe that!!". Which helps us avoid the terrifying fact that yes, people generally do believe it.

Of course, "believe" doesn't mean what it means in econ class. It means that people get a warm feeling from asserting something, even if they don't know what it means. "God is omnipotent", etc.

A lot of times we believe extreme things, simply because asserting those things all together in a group gives us a warm feeling of having an army on our side.

It's not competitive wokeness. It's COOPERATIVE wokeness.

"Virtue signaling" isn't fake or pretend. It's real.

"Virtue", when it comes right down to it, means membership on a team.

Sometimes, to prove you're on a team, it helps to say something people on the other team could never bring themselves to say.

That doesn't mean people don't believe the things they say when they signal team membership.

They DO believe them.

It's just that the "belief" is the rush of good feeling from knowing that you have a team.

An extremist is just a normal person in extreme circumstances.

And group conflict, be it an army or a gang or a political movement or a Twitter mob, is an extreme situation.

All this is to say, if your mental model of the opposing team is that they're a bunch of fakers trying to show off in front of each other...well, odds are you're wrong.

It's probably something much more honest, much more powerful, and potentially much scarier, than that.

(end)