# Twitter Thread by Dr. Paige Harden



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## The “Should we get rid of the GRE?” conversation and the “Should we pay undergrad RAs $15/hour?” conversation have three things in common that I think are really unfortunate — ■

(For the record, I personally think we should keep the GRE and that the minimum wage should be $15 but I know a lot more about psychometrics than labor economics so I’m more confident about the former opinion)

1- lack of clarity regarding whether a proposed change is seen as a morally good END in itself, versus a MEANS to another end, and if the latter what that end is

1b - for instance, I don’t care whether or not capital punishment deters crime; it’s instrumental purpose is irrelevant to the fact that I think it’s a moral wrong

1c -for the GRE, do you think testing is Bad, regardless of its utility? Or do you think that under representation of some racial groups is Bad? Or do you think the racial wealth gap is Bad? people rarely clarify what ultimate wrong they are trying to right

1d- for minimum wage, do you think a certain wage is a Good as a symbol of the dignity of labor? Do you care about income inequality itself? Do you care about the quality of life for the poorest?

1e- This muddiness about means and ends gets us in trouble because debating whether X is the best way to get to Y will be outraging to people who care about X in and of itself

2 - A widespread failure to take the possibility of unintended consequences seriously. I think this is because it’s easy to empathize with people in the here and now but hard to empathize with people in counterfactual worlds

2b - With the GRE, the number of people who are blank when I ask, “what are you going to use instead, and what evidence that you have that that is fairer?” is astonishing. But the counterfactual has to be considered, and it doesn’t make someone an evil monster to bring that up

2c — more on that here https://t.co/rzSRA8d7G6

> Some musings about graduate admissions, standardized testing, etc while I wait for my coffee.... these are things that seem obvious? but are maybe not obvious?
>
> — Dr. Paige Harden (@kph3k) December 2, 2020

3 - A failure to grapple with the dual roles that faculty play as employers of skilled labor in a highly competitive field vs mentors / advisors to students, and the fact that they have to succeed at the former in order to do the latter

3b - This duality reflects larger duality in “what is higher education for?” To bring about social equality? To advance human knowledge and technology? Yes and yes. And also, in practice, those lofty goals conflict and their locus of conflict is in the individual faculty member

4 - I said three things but I’m going to add a fourth, which is that some of the meanest and loudest voices in these conversations are men from the natural sciences who don’t study humans and quite honestly do not know what they are talking about

(The misogyny and mansplaining of woke white men will be a thread for another day)