Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr, On Ad Hominem
Assertion and Scientific Discourse in the
Study of Sociotropic and Egocentric
Motivations of Political Attitudes and
Behavior: A Rejoinder

Peter Nannestad & Martin Paldam*

In SPS vol. 19, no. 3, 1996 Professor Douglas Hibbs has responded to our
critique in SPS vol. 17, no. 1, 1994 of his book Solidarity or Egoism from
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more than three years of debate. It has not been restricted to the pages of this
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several scientific meetings.

As a matter of principle, we welcome academic debates and exchanges,
even fierce ones. After all, it is disagreement rather than dull indifference or
inattentiveness to the results of other researchers that ferments science and
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that we have benefited from our ongoing discussions with Hibbs. They have
made us go much further in testing and documenting the robustness of our
main results across various designs, operationalizations of key variables,
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of our results not only raises reasonable doubts as to the substantive
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Considering Hibbs' last contribution in the context of our previous
exchanges, we cannot help feeling, however, that the debate has passed the
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sniping," as this activity has so aptly been characterized by Sanders, Marsh & Ward (1990, 88).

In this rejoinder, we therefore restrict ourselves to one final comment. It concerns Hibbs' charge that in our review of his book we argue *ad hominem*. We totally agree with Hibbs that arguments *ad hominem* are inappropriate in scientific discourses. We think that this applies to all participants and to all types of exchange. Hence, we would not want to attack anybody, including Hibbs, in that way.

What we *have* done in our review is to raise the issue of a value bias in Hibbs' book. We have claimed that he argues from a preference for one particular result or interpretation. We have said nothing about why he may hold this preference – that might easily involve assertions *ad hominem*. The book's value bias, we have argued, reveals itself in the usual ways: non-neutral, evaluative terminology, selective use of material, and particular types of argumentation. We provide examples of all this in our review.

Hibbs seems to equate raising the issue of a value bias with making *ad hominem* assertions. We believed it to be a basic methodological tenet in the social sciences, especially in political science, since the days of Weber – or at least of Brecht, Myrdal & Easton – that value biases may be as damaging to the validity of analyses and results as, say, biased statistical estimators. Both types of bias result from some rule of scientific method having been violated. Raising the issue of a possible value bias is hence as scientifically legitimate as raising the issue of a possible estimation bias. Hibbs may disagree with us as to whether there really is a value bias in his book – that is an entirely different matter and does not make raising the issue illegitimate. Discussing a possible value bias is not any more *ad hominem* than discussing a possible estimation bias.

NOTES
1. Hibbs' historical account is so blatantly self-serving that it hardly calls for any detailed comment — one single correction will suffice. Contrary to Hibbs' account the quality of our intended contribution to the joint book project was never an issue in our dealings with the research director of the Rockwool Foundation. The decision not to publish it in the end was due to a conflict over intellectual rights. However, we found other outlets for our work on egotropic and sociotropic voting, including the parts Hibbs focuses on: at present, two pieces have been published, and two more have been accepted for publication, in refereed, international journals.

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