Science can make us uncomfortable. Astronomy proved that the Earth goes around the sun, upending centuries of geocentric theology. Physics tells us that our universe will someday come to an end. DNA sequencing can reveal our true ancestry or genetic predispositions to cancer and Alzheimer's disease, forever changing our life's trajectory.

As unsettling as those discoveries have been for society, some research is so politically controversial that few dare to speak of it in public for fear of running afoul of the PC police. And this fear, argues Nathan Cofnas in the journal *Foundations of Science*, obstructs the self-correcting nature of scientific inquiry.

Mr. Cofnas begins the paper with the story of Socrates, who was executed for "corrupting the youth" of Greece. Forebodingly, he adds, "[T]he philosophy of his prosecutors — that morality-threatening scientific investigation should be prohibited — flourishes even today."

To support his case, Mr. Cofnas focuses on the taboo subject of group differences in intelligence, which he says is suppressed by those who believe that even discussing the topic is "morally wrong or morally dangerous."

Those who embrace such a viewpoint obviously do so with the honorable intention of preventing discrimination. However, the proverbial road to hell is paved with good intentions. Such misguided efforts to maintain perfect equality can hamper the advancement of knowledge. Mr. Cofnas states:
"[W]hen hypotheses are regarded as supporting certain moral values or desirable political goals, scientists often refuse to abandon them in the light of empirical evidence."

Is he right? Absolutely, yes.

Not only do intellectuals refuse to abandon politically correct beliefs in the face of contradictory evidence, but simply questioning them can ruin a person's career. Lawrence Summers' tenure as president of Harvard was cut short because he suggested that there are intellectual differences between men and women. As a result of such punitive pushback, some researchers are afraid to investigate differences between male and female brains, which certainly exist. Without a doubt, this reticence is holding back the field of neuroscience.

A similar chilling effect can be seen in climatology. The only politically correct belief regarding the climate is that humans are 100% responsible for everything bad that happens and that the Four Horsemen are already marching toward Earth. Questioning that apocalyptic and unscientific belief has resulted in multiple researchers being labeled "climate deniers." Climatology would greatly benefit from the more skeptical approach of so-called "lukewarmers," but far too many are ostracized and demonized.

Discussions about the causes of homelessness also fall under the purview of the PC police. The politically correct explanation is that homelessness is the result of poverty. While obviously a factor, often left out of the debate is the fact that, according to the National Coalition for the Homeless, 20% to 25% of homeless people are severely mentally ill, a prevalence that is roughly four times that of the general population. The same group estimates that 38% and 26% of homeless people are dependent on alcohol and drugs, respectively. In fact, NCH states that, "Substance abuse is the single largest cause of homelessness for single adults."

Certainly, many -- perhaps most -- people prefer to ignore reality in favor of feel-good fallacies. Mr. Cofnas believes this phenomenon is rooted in a "deep human impulse to conflate facts and moral values." In other words, (positive) statements that describe the world as it is are often interpreted by people as (normative) statements that prescribe the world as it ought to be.

This fundamental confusion distorts debate and impedes progress. If Mr. Cofnas is correct that this cognitive dissonance is hardwired into us, then that makes the goal of evidence-based policy sadly unattainable.
