

The Trans Movement and the Dictator Lurking Within Us



Not long before the pandemic, the Irish state television, RTE, contacted me to ask whether I was prepared to speak about a different kind of epidemic, that of gender dysphoria and sex-change. I was reluctant to do so because the subject, though undoubtedly socially important and very topical, was not one that interested me particularly. In fact, I tended to avert my mind from it.

The people from the RTE persuaded me that it was my public duty to appear on the programme that they were making. They had found many professors of paediatrics, medicine, psychiatry, and psychology who did not think that the Trans Movement was a force for good, to put it mildly, but none was willing to speak out in public against it. They did not want to ruin their own careers or be the object of mass obloquy: the thirst for martyrdom is not common.

I recognized that my reluctance was tinged with fear (and therefore also with cowardice). It was with trepidation that I agreed, and I was reasonably circumspect in what I said in front of the camera.

If you wanted to understand the sudden increase in the phenomenon, I said, you were better off studying the history of fashion—Chanel, say, or Balenciaga—than anything else.

There were fashions in psychiatric conditions that come and go. Hysterical paralyses of limbs were once very common but are now rare (though they still did occur).

In the 1990s, multiple personalities were fashionable, so much so that the fifth edition of the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual” of the American Psychiatric Association quoted a survey suggesting that multiple personality affected up to 1.5 per cent of the population—a figure I found intrinsically absurd. As the Duke of Wellington said to the man who approached him and said “Mr Jones, I believe?”, “If you can believe *that* you can believe anything.”

The point is that patterns of behavior to which psychiatric labels are fixed wax and wane over time. I expected that the present craze would eventually evaporate—though it would probably be replaced by another.

I have no idea whether or not my contribution was used (I have sometimes given lengthy interviews only to find that they were not broadcast, or cut to ten seconds), but the most important or significant question about the whole episode, however, was not whether I was right or wrong in my characterization and prognosis of the Trans Movement, but the state of fear that the RTE people had described, which led to them scraping the barrel to find someone, in this case me, to say something even mildly critical of the movement. What they described, in effect, was the development of a totalitarian atmosphere in intellectual life.

Of course, we should not exaggerate. We do not yet fear the midnight knock on the door, and no one (as far as I know) has been killed for expressing unorthodox ideas on this subject.

People nevertheless fear for their careers and even their livelihoods. Followers of movements like the Trans Movement have no hesitation in calling for the dismissal of people who attract their wrath by disagreeing publicly with them. So-called *transphobia* is not irrational fear of people who want to change their sex, but fear of retribution by the movement that makes such people their cause (who may not be the same people).

Trans-sexualism is not the only subject on which it is now dangerous for one's career or livelihood to express ideas that dissent from the current "progressive" moral orthodoxy. This explains the view of the journalist, Douglas Murray, that only those with no institutional affiliation, private or public, who are able independently to earn their livings, can now speak their minds on many subjects.

There are several asymmetrical wars currently going on in the intellectual sphere. On the one side are guerrilla monomaniacs with a cause, for whom the subject of their monomania is all-important, and the promotion of which is the meaning of their lives; on the other, normal people for whom that particular subject is merely one thing among many others.

In this situation, the monomaniacs have the advantage of fanaticism. Like Batista's army in Cuba, normal people melt away in the face of fanatical attack, because they do not care enough, or are not prescient enough, to defend their position—though they may later come to regret not having done so.

What is particularly alarming about the totalitarian temper that is developing in western society is that it does not originate from the government but is a genuine expression of

the thirst for power of a portion of the population, that part of it—the intelligentsia—that seemingly would have most to lose if the drive to totalitarianism were successful.

Individuals may have discovered to their cost that even merely intellectual revolutions tend to devour their young, today's radicals often becoming tomorrow's reactionaries hated in the eyes of a new generation of radicals that is ever on the lookout for new worlds to destroy, but young radicals never think that they will grow old: they always think that theirs is the last word in truth and justice.

Tolerance—a word that in the mouth of such radicals comes to mean the forced or coerced approval of what was formerly transgressive—is not natural to mankind. It is far more natural to want to suppress what one finds disgusting or does not want to hear. Our instinct is to turn away from views that are not our own, from evidence that might undermine our most cherished opinions, and even to dislike those who cite such evidence.

In other words, tolerance is an intellectual and moral achievement, an act of self-control rather than the expression of an instinct. No doubt some people by temperament find such self-control easier than others (I don't find it easy myself), but there is a dictator lurking in many, perhaps most, of us, at least in those of us who take an interest in public affairs.

Suffice it to say that we are not living in a golden age of the kind of self-control necessary for a tolerant society in which diversity of opinion is taken in good spirit. And the so-called social media, which allow us to pour out our bile incontinently the moment we feel the inclination to do so, only compounds the problem.

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