

The Left's Puritan Theater

by Christopher DeGroot (February 2018)



A Shed Full of People, Helen Markson

Because it is averse to tradition *per se* and to any authority besides its own, the Left—no longer the party of working people—has become a kind of authoritarian sentimentalism. As such, it reveals the essential irony of American modernity: Our liberal state cannot simply decree that a certain way of life is good and expect us to live accordingly, but since human nature must have some sort of collective moral authority—which communities themselves lose over time—we have become players in a kind of Puritan theater; the nation acting on its Protestant heritage in a warped and decadent fashion. In order to maintain a sense of sin, in effect, Americans have devised all sorts of roundabout forms of social control.

So, for example, a boy whose energetic endowment naturally renders him

unruly some of the time is said to have some sort of disorder: attention deficit disorder, or oppositional defiant disorder, or God-knows-what. The culture being so enfeebled, virtually any plain speaking may be found to cause a "hostile work environment," a comical notion that is not found in more vital peoples. Lack of [affirmative consent](#), for a paranoid many, entails sexual assault by definition, just as the expression of romantic interest is indistinguishable from sexual harassment. *Contra* J.S. Mill and Immanuel Kant, neither consequence nor intent matters: *post-hoc* feeling (i.e., "offense"), though as various as people themselves, is the disciplinary criterion. Whose criterion? Why, a Leftist bureaucrat's, of course.

As in wicked religion, the accusers tell us we are guilty of all manner of sins, and in so doing they distinguish themselves as innocent. Like Milton's Satan, hubris bears no responsibility, being only a victim. There is a profound antipathy to experiencing any sort of conflict or even discomfort, and yet to experience such things is a form of power, so long as one may be considered a victim. Behind all the victimhood there is the vital thing: the will to inflict suffering on one's "oppressor," an activity by which people can vent discontentment that has nothing to do with the "oppressor" and the "suffering." The unrelenting political correctness, our insidious new church, functions as a kind of pretend confession: we pay heed to it regularly, while in private we don't live at all like that. Throughout the culture so-called experts, ignorant of their own ignorance, purport to guide the perplexed multitude. Well, why should they not? There is so much lucre in it.

In its blind hypocrisy—does any member of Antifa realize his own fascist character?—the Left is akin to the borderline personality, whose interests are right by definition, so that whatever is contrary to them is evil indeed. A representative example of this mad logic was furnished on August 19 of last year at a free speech rally in Boston, Massachusetts. Leftist activists turned out to protest what they took

to be hate speech, unaware that their protest was itself an act of free speech. Such hypocrisy and lack of self-awareness now characterize the Left, which, since it loathes nothing so much as traditional values, elects to create all sorts of perverse idols to guide its confused path. Zealously demanding our submission, a power-grab they call freedom, Leftists display a curious puritanical sensibility which, like any hypocrite, they do not see. Hence the various acts in our Puritan theater: in addition to those already named, mandatory diversity training at corporations, bias response teams on college campuses, sensitivity readers at publishing houses, mere cultural influence understood as cultural appropriation, ever increasing gender pronouns which one is supposed to use, and on and on.

In an acute aphorism, Ludwig Wittgenstein says that

the effect of making men think in accordance with dogmas . . . will be very peculiar: I am not thinking of these dogmas as determining men's opinions but rather as completely controlling the *expression* of all opinions. People will live under an absolute, palpable tyranny, though without being able to say they are not free . . . For dogma is expressed in the form of an assertion, and is unshakable, but at the same time any practical opinion can be made to harmonize with it; admittedly more easily in some cases than in others. It is not a wall setting limits to what can be believed, but more like a brake which, however, practically serves the same purpose; it's almost as though someone were to attach a weight to your foot to restrict your freedom of movement. This is how dogma becomes irrefutable and beyond the reach of attack.

Having rejected any notion of power and authority save their own, all other forms of those concepts being evil, the Left posits certain

dogmas that are indeed “very peculiar,” for their purpose lies in “controlling the *expression* of all opinions.” These dogmas, which are intended to obtain power at any cost, “can be made to harmonize” with the Left’s shifting needs and whims. Still, even on the Left, this will not preclude division—hence, for example, the frequent squabbles among intersectional feminists, and not just over whether all cat food should be organic: for despite women’s [unique talent](#) for getting along with each other, white women often struggle to defer to the black queens of victimhood.

No matter what we perceive or reasonably think, what we say or write is to be severely limited, the Left’s dogmas being “irrefutable and beyond the reach of attack.” So, for example, an immigration policy that puts American workers first is now thought to be “racist,” although before the present time such a national good as controlled and legal immigration was known as sheer common sense. “Controlling the *expression* of all opinions,” in its psychological effects, is quite formidable, because to disagree becomes morally wrong, and to criticize, a threat, given the assumption that the Leftist point of view necessarily represents a victim, and therefore the moral high ground. There is, indeed, no more effective repression than severe public disapproval. A culture that feels profound fear will significantly limit its speech and the result will be a significantly limited people: there are problems that cannot even be recognized, let alone dealt with. Of course, though, this is good news for a great many politicians, who will gladly exploit the Left, which is as vulnerable as it is neurotic, allowing the politicians themselves to live it up. “Here’s your entitlements, diversity-rabble,” think the Clinton-style Democrats while eating caviar and sipping champagne in the Hamptons.

The extremity of the Left’s thinking is caused not just by the categorical refusal to accept any *external* power and authority. There is also fear of the darker aspects of our nature, which are anxiously

distorted, in a fashion that again smacks of extreme religion: for the Left is (as it were) nothing but a displaced, debased Christianity. We see this fear, for instance, in the Left's caricature of masculinity. Although the entire material edifice of civilization depends on (mostly unappreciated) male labor—on the manly men who build buildings, pave roads, haul freight, clean sewers, fix electrical wiring, among other thankless tasks, including, above all, defending the state itself—these days many people, especially the “educated,” reduce traditional masculinity to a toxic thing. We see comfortable, plump First World feminists repose on the backs of masculine labor crying “down with the patriarchy!”

It is as if the timid and tractable twenty-first century male intellectual were the very summit of humanity, rather than a pathetic, stunted being, who, in times of duress, must call on *another man* to save him and his family. Now of course, in certain respects, masculinity is understandably disturbing to any morally sensitive person. After all, “history,” in William James' words, “is a bath of blood.” And yet the Bard also was right: Man is “the paragon of animals,” and male aggression one with man's mastery over nature. Nor is our magnificent cultural heritage, our unprecedented historical achievements, imaginable without man's special creative power: a primordial force that, on a biological level, is surely one with his impassioned pursuit of the female.

In contrast to the Puritanical Left, the Judeo-Christian tradition to which the Left is so hostile knows that we can only subdue our bad impulses; we cannot get rid of them, nor annul the contradictions that we are. “If not for the evil impulse, no one would build a house, marry, have children, nor engage in trade,” said the rabbis of the Talmud. About Christianity G.K. Chesterton wrote:

The real problem is—Can the lion lie down with the lamb and still

retain his royal ferocity? That is the problem the Church attempted; that is the miracle she achieved.

Christian doctrine detected the oddities of life. It not only discovered the law, but it foresaw the exceptions. Those underrate Christianity who say that it discovered mercy; any one might discover mercy. In fact every one did. But to discover a plan for being merciful and also severe—that was to anticipate a strange need of human nature.

Religion reflects our contradictory character; it lights up the way for creatures whose virtues require corresponding vices. But there are, it must be said, many people who are comfortably unaware of their actual motives and intentions. They are no more perceptive regarding others. The world in general, they think, is a much better and far less limited place than what the tragic mind perceives. Ignorance, often willful, is the source of the unreasonable expectations that make the lives of such deluded persons so miserable. They don't want to accept that we must live in tension, that opposites need each other. They want to get rid of the lion, yet when they try to do so they harm the lamb. The Left, by not recognizing the permanent human complexity that religion comprehends, is able to seek a false purity and a fool's utopia, thereby only making things a lot worse.

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