

‘Bold vision’

An action or choice can perfectly well be bold without being good



French Artistic Director for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games Thomas Jolly, poses sitting on a wall near the Seine River with the Eiffel tower in the background (R), in Paris, on July 2, 2024. (Photo by JOEL SAGET / AFP)

by Theodore Dalrymple

Speaking of Thomas Jolly, the director of the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics, the chairman of the organising committee, Tony Estanguet, said, “He was a bold choice.” Note that he did not say Jolly was a good choice: the word “bold” was supposed to include that value judgement.

But of course it didn’t. An action or choice can perfectly

well be bold without being good. It can be bold and stupid, or bold and vicious, or bold and cruel, or bold and any number of horrible things. Boldness is not a good in itself.

Bravery is like that too: not a virtue in itself. Those who flew the aircraft into the World Trade Centre demonstrated bravery, but that does not weigh in the balance against the evil they did. Soldiers fighting for Nazi Germany were often brave, but that hardly raises them in our estimation.

M. Estanguet went on to say that the bold choice was consistent with "our vision". Such a phrase is supposed to end the discussion: for who can be so unimaginative, so miserably earthbound, as to oppose a vision. Having a vision is good in itself, he implied. Indeed a guarantor of goodness. Bold visions in themselves preclude negative value judgement. They simultaneously congratulate those who have them and close off discussion.

Oh, I know bold visions from having worked in the National Health Service. Managers had them all the time. In fact, they all had visions to order. Their visions were to close a ward, reduce the number of hospital beds, increase equity and diversity, and get the patients out of the hospital as soon as they would not die within ten minutes of leaving it.

Their real, inner visions, however, were of promotion, pensions or redundancy with a generous provision followed by swift re-employment elsewhere at a higher level.

That last was their boldest vision, and often enough it came to pass.

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