

Diego Maradona was not a victim

We have no sense of the tragic, only of victimhood

by Theodore Dalrymple



Reading a report on the *Guardian* website of the death of the Argentine footballer Diego Maradona, I was much struck by two phrases: “addiction to cocaine took hold” and “his private life spiralled out of control”.

This way of putting it suggested that both his addiction and his private life had an existence independent of anything that he himself did: that addiction, for example, was like Parkinson’s Disease, an illness that could reasonably be said to “take hold” of someone. This is the official, but nonetheless false and simplified, view of addiction, as something that just happens to a person.

And while, no doubt, there are people so victimised by others that their private lives may be said to have spiralled out of control, it seems to me unlikely that Maradona was one of them.

Why this strange way of putting things? I suspect it is because of the great fear that haunts all modern intellectuals, that of being considered censorious, at least about individuals who bring unhappiness on themselves (and often to others). There is, of course, a certain class of person about whom it is *de rigueur* to be censorious, even ultra-censorious, but Maradona, being an idol of the populace, and of humble origin, was not a member of that class.

He was a tragic figure, a man who did not put the fruits of his natural talent to a use that brought him much happiness. The tragedy was in the choices he made and in their consequences, by comparison with the choices that he might have made. The fact that they were his choices is what made his life tragic. If he had contributed nothing to his addiction or to his private life, he would no more be a tragic figure than is a broken vase or a punctured tyre.

But we have no sense of the tragic, only of victimhood.

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