

The TV boss who decides what you watch

Or does he?



by Theodore Dalrymple

The caption of a very large photograph on a recent edition of the *Daily Telegraph* read, “The British TV boss who decides what you watch”. The photograph was of the recently appointed chief content officer of Netflix.

Do we live in North Korea where, in the public space, speeches of the leader are escapable only by deafness? That many people in Britain subscribe to Netflix is indisputable; but even they choose among programmes that are offered to them to watch. Moreover, Netflix is not a monopoly; other channels are available. It is even possible to watch nothing at all.

Does the miswording of the caption matter? I think it does. It

implies that you are but the plaything of others; and since readers of the *Telegraph* are probably, even today, above average in income and level of education, the caption means, a *fortiori*, that practically the whole population is a helpless and passive feather on a wind blown by media executives.

The consequence of persuading people that others decide for them is that they are provided in advance with an excuse for their own bad choices, because they come to believe that they make no choices at all.

In the second place, such a belief powerfully reinforces a tendency, never far below the surface of human mentation, to paranoia. If in so elementary a matter as turning on the television and watching a programme you are not really making a choice, in what do you make a choice? And to what end are those who make choices for you doing so? Surely, there must be a conspiracy afoot?

Then the question arises as to who chooses the choosers. Before long we enter the territory so fertilely ploughed by *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. Yes, they (whoever they are) decide everything, and therefore nothing is, or even could be, our fault.

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