

We apologise for the inconvenience to your journey



by Theodore Dalrymple

On my way from London to the dreadful town from which I take a bus home, where multiculturalism consists of a butcher selling halal meat next door to an “adult shop”, the train began to creep like an unwilling snail to the station. This, said the announcement, was caused by a technical problem, causing us to be relegated from the fast to the slow track.

I could hear the sound of grumbling behind me, even though I was in the quiet coach. The train would be half an hour late. In my case this would mean that I missed the last bus and would have to pay £40 for a taxi – one of those provincial taxis that remind young Britons that if they vomit in it, they will be made to pay the cost of cleaning. Is there another country in the world in which such notices appear in taxis?

The announcement over the train’s public address system was obviously scripted because I have heard the same wording many times before: “We apologise for the inconvenience to your journey.”

This wording infuriates me. A journey is not the kind of thing that can be inconvenienced: the inconvenience is to me, not to my journey, and I presume that the same goes for other

passengers.

Why this wording, so obviously weaselly? The apology is no apology. It is an attempt to downplay the unhappiness caused to actual real living breathing people, and to pretend instead that the damage is done to something inanimate or intangible.

It is the same with the expression property crime. It's not really so bad because, after all, it is only inanimate objects that are harmed. But property crime is really crime against the owners of property, not against the property itself: and crime against the owners of property, as everyone knows who has been burgled or had his car broken into, is not without personal consequences.

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