

Mass Insanity and Confusion



THE SINISTER PHRASE, “Under the guise of freedom of speech” has been enjoying a certain popularity on the left in recent months. It reminds me very much of the Stalinist or Marxist-Leninist use of the term ‘objectively’. ‘Objectively’ was always used in certain circles on the left to dismiss what is actually being said by reference to what the consequences hidden within the proposition might be said to be.

“Yes, what you’re saying sounds rather good, but objectively it’s reactionary.”

Which, of course, always meant, that despite all appearances to the contrary, *you* are as “objectively reactionary” as *your* apparently harmless arguments. Consequently, you could be shot, exiled, expelled, or simply declared *persona non grata*. It is a way of reframing the things said by opponents to mean what you want them to mean, regardless of the intentions or outlook of those you are arguing with.

Basically, this kind of word game which employs the phrase “under the guise of”, or the word “objectively”,

is a way of drawing in the propositions made by people with a different or antagonistic outlook, into your imaginary realm, where you may redefine and repurpose what they are saying to fit your account.

Every argument or discussion has certain parameters, points of reference, limits, within which it takes place. The insanity and confusion, starts the minute people refuse to recognise the limits, register, or range, of a particular proposition. They may stretch it beyond all coherence with the introduction of matters and references that lay well beyond the scope of the discussion, or alternatively, attempt to cram insights and observations foreign to the matter in hand into what they need to think are the parameters of the debate.

If, for example, one insists that the social and psychological experience of male-to-female transsexuals is not the same as that of women-born-as-women, one is often attacked for being 'transphobic'. This is despite the self-evident fact that the experience of transsexual females cannot be said to be *identical* with that of born females, either before or after transition.

Felt alienation from one's own body, the need to bring it into biological and physical alignment with psychological or emotional feelings concerning gender, are profoundly different from the social and cultural experiences of masculinity and femininity of those of us who have never questioned the relationship between our bodies and our gender.

However, many transsexual activists and their allies on the left seek to collapse these differences by insisting that transsexual men and women are indubitably men and women – their gender is *identical* with those born as men and women. In so doing, they are then able to suggest that all those who question or doubt this identity are "transphobes", regardless of what else is said or believed.

The parameters of this argument are drawn in such a way as to suggest that anyone who differs or disagrees must be in the camp of the enemy, and

must be resolutely denounced as “transphobic”. This is regardless of the fact that their opponents’ arguments and conclusions are informed by profoundly different conceptions, and assumptions concerning gender and sexuality, which lead them, perhaps inevitably, to different conclusions.

The charge of “transphobia” then achieves a prime moral purpose in the minds of those committed to the proposition that transsexuals must be accepted, for all intents and purposes, as identical to those born as women or men. Moral arguments are then deployed to reject further discussion. Demands are fielded that those with a different point view – from outside the parameters often drawn by transsexual activists, and their allies – must be denied the freedom to speak their mind. They must be no platformed, be disinvited to speak, because their “transphobic” views are inimical to the safety and well-being of transsexuals.

So, it is argued that ‘transphobes’ are threatening the lives and peace of mind of transsexuals “under the guise of freedom of speech”.

The clear message is, disagree with us, and you will be denounced, as an enemy of freedom and equality and you will discover that your freedom of speech must be denied because you are using it for nefarious and reactionary purposes.

Collisions between different sorts of argument, and disregard for the limits, register, and range, of an opponent’s argument are multiplying in many different directions at the moment, and are causing untold damage to the capacity of people to disagree with coherence and consistency.

A prime example of this is assertions of antisemitism in the Labour Party. Most members of the Labour Party greet these charges with dismay followed by anger. This is because they know that they do not hate Jews or believe in any sense in discriminating against Jews. Consequently, it is profoundly unjust to accuse them of antisemitism.

However, given that it is *de rigueur* on the left to attack Jewish nationalism and the Jewish state of

Israel, while endorsing the national aspirations of Palestinian Arabs, many have concluded that the left seems to have a problem with Jews. Attitudes to Israel has put many on the left of the Labour Party into direct conflict with most Jews, most Jewish organisations, and most Jewish communities, who are resolute Zionists, and as such, support the right of Israel to defend itself against all comers.

The charge of antisemitism arises from the fact that the left's opposition to the ethno-nationalism of Zionism singles out the Jews against all other ethno-nationalisms, and describes the establishment of the Jewish state as a crime, and Zionism as uniquely discriminatory. So, the product of this collision between two different arguments, two different sets of assumptions, two different points of view, is the incomprehension on the part of those accused of antisemitism, and the desperate hostility of those making the accusation.

Perhaps the most useful attempt to disentangle this mess was made in 2005 by Todd Endelman:

Classifying all public criticism of the policies of Ariel Sharon [or Benjamin Netanyahu] as anti-Zionist – and thus antisemitic – is undoubtedly unjustified, for it equates dissent from the Likud program with intolerance and fear of Jews. A more sensible rule of thumb, it seems to me, is to ask when and under what circumstances anti-Zionism shades into antisemitism – when it becomes more than criticism of Israeli policy. From this perspective I would argue that anti-Zionism crosses the line in the following instances:

1. when it questions the legitimacy of the Jewish state, but no other state, and the legitimacy of Jewish nationalism, but no other nationalism, either in the Middle East or elsewhere;
2. when it denies to the Jewish state, but no other state, the right to express the character of the majority of its citizens (that is, to be as Jewish as France is French);
3. when it demonizes the Jewish state, turning the Arab-Israeli conflict into a morality play; a problem that Jews, and Jews alone, created and for which Jews, and Jews alone, are responsible;
4. when it expresses an obsessive, exclusive, and disproportionate concern with the shortcomings of the

Israelis and the sufferings of the Palestinians – to the point that a conflict between two small peoples is transformed into a cosmic, Manichean struggle between the forces of good and evil.

When criticism of Israel crosses any of these lines and begins to traffic in the fantasies, obsessions, fears, and irrationalities that are the stock-in-trade of full-blown antisemitism, it becomes nearly indistinguishable from that which it claims not to be.

Here, Endelman has made a sterling attempt to disentangle the different discourses or arguments concerning anti-Zionism and antisemitism. It doesn't matter whether you think he's been entirely successful or not, but in making the effort he has recognised the problems arising on the left regarding charges of antisemitism and the manner in which the parameters drawn around the arguments in play at any one time must be carefully described.

A similar uproar is now in play regarding the opinions and conduct of Daniel D C Miller, Justin Murphy, and Nina Power. These three intellectuals are being denounced as fascists, and neo-reactionaries, because of their "radical truth-telling", which is said to be: "in actuality a promotion of extremist right-wing talking points, under the guise of 'free speech' unfettered by political correctness". They are accused of wishing to sponsor a 'Red-Brown' alliance between fascism and communism, in which the cultural outlook of the traditional right is emulsified or merged with the economics of the far left.

Indeed, an organisation which rejoices in the name of ARRG – Anti-Reaction Research Group – has said of the writer and academic, Nina Power:

We the signatories of this letter, object to the manner in which Nina Power still presents as both a Marxist and feminist, and is engaged as an academic speaker on this basis. We object to her involvement in hosting neo-reactionaries from her home and to her support in arranging for secretive and private lectures by the same individuals. Considered in the whole, her adoption of many aspects of contemporary fascism, and proximity to known fascists, is incompatible with the manner in which Nina Power publicly poses.

This extraordinary tirade extends to the observation that “Power does not object when Miller and Murphy come to the conclusion that ‘not everyone can have freedom or handle freedom’ and that ‘not everyone wants freedom’.”

The reason Power does not object to what her ‘partners in crime’ are saying is because she acknowledges that drug use and addiction certainly constitutes an inability to “handle freedom” or even to “want” freedom.

It is quite evident that the Anti-Reaction Research Group and this trio of “neo-reactionaries”, Power, Murphy, and Miller, are intellectually on different planets, engaging in different sorts of arguments. They refuse the shibboleths of the traditional left because they and other left-right theorists, like Nick Land, do not believe that concepts of emancipation, or belief in the primacy of human agency, makes much sense in this particular phase of capitalist development.

Now, to reduce this sort of outlook, which is the product of fairly long gestation in quite complicated encounters with the works of Marx, Deleuze and Guattari, Nick Land, anti-humanism, and much else, to “endorsement of fascism” is not simply outrageous, it is absurd; it is also extremely dangerous, because it results in calls for the suppression of free speech – it results in demands for the closure of meetings, the cancelling of lectures, and the banning of certain kinds of cultural production in galleries and theatres.

This is all because, ARRG insists, that “under the guise of freedom of speech” these crypto-fascists are threatening the safety of our diverse society.

It is truly ironic how the defenders of ‘diversity’ are so committed to the imposition of bans and proscriptions on points of view of which they disapprove. Here, morality and moral indignation is brought to bear, just as it is in the cases concerning transsexuality, and Zionism. The outlook of those critical of the theoretical assumptions and practical prejudices of those on the traditional left, are met with

moral condemnation, employed to justify censorship, the suppression of freedom of speech, and of the free exchange of ideas.

This cultural trend in opposition to rational discussion and argument with the living, seeks to extend moral condemnation in all directions, even to the dead – to those who may have profited from the slave trade, the oppression of nineteenth century women, the exploitation of medieval peasants, and many others. This strategy rests upon the insistence of bringing all arguments and propositions onto terrain crudely defined and circumscribed by left-wing ideologues into a singular mode of argument from which no dissent is possible. All questions must be judged and assessed within the left's particular frames of reference. The consequence of not sticking strictly to the script is said to be fascism, racism, misogyny, and elitism.

This vogue for the moral condemnation of anybody who questions the shibboleths, preconceptions and traditional concerns, of the left is leading to a kind of insanity in which rational discussion is becoming increasingly difficult, resulting in confusion and dismay.

The only restriction to freedom of speech should be on speech or writing which specifically advocates violence against individuals, political opponents, or particular communities, because of their nationality, race or religion. Restrictions should not be imposed on speech or writing which is said to be "objectively" reactionary, or which might, lead to violence, or fear.

We must never surrender our right to say and argue whatever we like *under the guise of fighting fascism*, or any of the other reasons people on the left dream up for suppressing discussion of their theoretical certainties, or dissent from their dire predictions concerning the expression of opinions with which they disagree.