

Phobia



I HAVE NEVER been a fan of denouncing my own or other people's prejudices as "phobias". I do not think that the fear or disrespect that many religious folk harbour towards homosexuals is "irrational" in any sense. It's ridiculous to call such people homophobes, when their hatred of homosexuality is well-thought-out, supported by scripture and antique theology. And, their disrespect for the kind of life, we might lead is the product of perfectly coherent reasoning. It is true that a kind of aesthetic repulsion that may also be felt towards the thought of gay sex is not entirely rational, but it makes no sense at all to describe such repulsion as "phobic".

It is simply an evasion of proper argument to call anti-gay people – who are anti-gay for religious or social reasons – "phobic". Their hostility and the absurdities to which it leads need to be analysed and attacked, not denounced as a psychological flaw to

which the 'enlightened' amongst us are mercifully spared. Thorough-going arguments with an outlook worthy of the bronze age, from whence their Godly strictures come, is needed rather than assertions of psychological imbalance.

I think much the same about "islamophobia". My prejudices and preconceptions about Islamism are not in any sense phobic. My hatred of Islamism is produced by an entirely rational defence of democracy against the idea of theocratic dictatorship by the guardians of ancient sacred texts. Similarly, my hostility towards ordinary Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Orthodox Judaism, is rooted in my opposition to the submission of individuals to religious authority which insists upon treating women as inferior, and regarding actively gay people as disobedient and sinful.

So, my prejudices and preconceptions about political Islam, or the Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish, faiths are not in any sense phobic. I don't fear or hate Muslims, Catholics, and Jews. However, I do fear Islamism, and I'm pretty sure that I can adduce a rational case for fearing those who want society to be ruled by religious authority of any kind. So, phobia doesn't come into it.

Recently, I have been called "transphobic". The suggestion has been made that, those who disagree with the prominent transsexual lobbies at the moment, harbour an irrational fear of transsexuals and this tends, *ipso facto*, towards hatred of transsexuals. I'm not entirely sure where this new deployment of "phobia" – irrational fear and disrespect – has come from, but it is having pernicious effects.

Recently, J. K. Rowling has run into trouble by insisting that "people who menstruate" be called "women who menstruate". Now, I don't know about you, but this is like falling into *Wonderland* along with Humpty Dumpty who, as we know, could make words mean what he wanted them to mean. The truth is, as Alice might have hotly insisted to Mr Dumpty, "But Sir! It really is women who menstruate."

This nonsense is now spreading far and wide. Last week Sasha White was fired from The Tobias Literary Agency in New York for saying of trans women:

. . . being vulnerable to male violence does not make you women.

As a gay man who has in the past experienced male violence, I can attest to the truth of Sasha White's assertion. The real problem with Sasha's opinion, however, is that she does not think that male-to-female trans women are women in the same sense that she and other people, identified as female at birth, are women.

Now, apart from the issue of being sacked for having an opinion her employers dislike, which is the real outrage here. The other outrage is the attempt by some people to force us to say things which are manifestly untrue. Everybody, and I do mean everybody, knows full well that biological sex – the difference between the bodies of those born male and those born female are written in their distinctly different genitals. This is an inescapable fact.

It is also a fact that some people who are psychologically ill-disposed to the gender assigned them at birth wish to be regarded as transsexual. Whether or not such people opt for gender reassignment surgery they have every right to be considered trans women or trans men with the same rights as everybody else in society.

However, they do not have the right, and cannot have the right, to insist that they have the same experience as those who are untroubled by the gender assigned them at birth. To put it bluntly, a male-to-female trans women does not have the experience of growing up as a little girl, she has not been a young woman in "a man's world", she does not menstruate, she will not experience the menopause, she will not know life as an old woman.

Male-to-female trans women are not women, they are *trans women* and have every right to be themselves, along with the rest of us. It is well known now that masculinity and femininity are social or historical constructs that vary in their expression from culture to culture, from one historical period to another. Masculinity and femininity are, like human sexuality, infinitely variable. The same cannot be said of our biology; a few people are indeterminate at birth, but the vast majority of us are born male or female. Our physiology – our genitals – leave the mid-wives, doctors, and parents, present at our birth, in no doubt.

As we grow up, we might well become extremely unhappy with the gender assigned to us and registered at birth. In these circumstances we might well opt to identify ourselves as transsexual – as a trans man or trans women. And this means that we have a specific and distinct experience of growing up unhappy with what was decided at our birth, and of negotiating the considerable difficulties of coming out as trans in society. We have the unique experience of learning to move about society and adopting the gender roles and lifestyles of the opposite sex. Whether or not, we opt for gender reassignment surgery, our experience is strikingly different from those of us who are untroubled by the gender assigned to us at birth.

The present uproar and the experience of figures as diverse as Germaine Greer, J. K. Rowling, and Sasha White, results from the claims of some prominent male-to-female trans campaigners that the specific experience of transsexuals should be effaced by the insistence that male-to-female trans women are exactly the same as those born as girls.

This, of course, is entirely untrue. It is in fact, a lie unsupported by common observation, biological science, and historical reason. Consequently, radical transsexual lobbies have resorted to covering their tracks with assertions of phobia, disrespect, and hatred. They insist that all those who disagree with the proposition that male-to-female transsexuals are

indubitably women, are “transphobes” and are promoting hatred of transsexuals. This act of “phobia” it is said resides simply in the disagreement, voiced by J. K. Rowling and others, with the view that our biology is synonymous with our mental state.

The radical transsexual lobby has resorted to another untruth by attempting to claim that they have the support of the overwhelming majority of the population. They assert that their opponents are in the minority, as they insist that all who disagree with them are “transphobic haters”. People, left and right, are being whipped into line with the threat of being denounced or sacked as “transphobes”.

A spurious comparison is also made with the long struggle of gays and lesbians for equal rights with contemporary male-to-female transsexual assertions of equality with those born as girls. This, of course, is yet another lie. The struggle for gay and lesbian equality at no stage challenged gender assignment. Quite the contrary, it insisted that women had every right to have sex with other women, and men had every right to love other men, without the loss of the social and legal rights enjoyed by heterosexuals. No challenge to the biological basis of gender assignment was ever made or intended by gay liberation campaigners.

The nonsense, promoted by prominent male-to-female transsexuals, can only come to an end when they stop insisting that those who disagree with them are held in the grip of an irrational psychological fear – a phobia — and return to rational argument, and the introduction of evidence, to support their opinions.