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## Hate and Faith: Moral Certitude and the New Inquisition

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*This is the second in a five part series looking at efforts to control and censor freedom of expression in the name of fighting hate speech, racism and other forms of thought crime.*

*“People are never so completely and enthusiastically evil as when they act out of religious conviction.” - Umberto Eco*

### New Faiths, Ancient Needs

Looking at the response to the Trump presidential election victory, Andrew Sullivan commented that it had given rise to “new religions”; one on the right with Trump as its demigod, and the other on the left with the inconsistent mantras of Social Justice as its creed.<sup>1</sup> Sullivan argues that they are filling the void that Christianity once claimed but lack the centuries of wisdom and restraint which the older religion had accumulated.

There is, in many people, a fundamental need to achieve clarity in a complex world of moral ambiguity. This is similar to the core human desire for challenge and bonding that William James identified in his essay on ‘The Moral Equivalent of War’ as being a key reason of the appeal for military life.<sup>2</sup> In decades past the Peace Corps was one effort to find an alternative means of channeling such desires. Lacking such outlets, young people will always be drawn to movements that offer them a sense of purpose and brotherhood at the cost of their moral autonomy. Recently, we have far too much first-hand evidence

of how young lives will be unscrupulously used by demagogues and politicians for both ideological agendas and political self-promotion.

Without religion young people will look for other ways of identifying the black and white poles of moral certitude, the axis of saints and sinners, for them to respectively exalt or denigrate. The emotional aftermath of the 2016 election certainly played a role but Sullivan is a little too even-handed in his analysis as it is by far the left which is increasingly turning away from traditional religion.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the American right still holds closely to its Christian heritage, the left is far more likely to take a non-religious, or even anti-religious, stance. While there is certainly a significant core of hardcore Trump devotees, their rhetoric is largely confined to the virtual realm. In the real world, the public actions of right-wing activists whether Alt-right, or patriot militias, are frequently in response to the activities of the radical left and certainly not even close to as widespread or large scale as recent Antifa and BLM protest/riots in Minneapolis, Seattle, Portland and other areas.

In his book ‘The Righteous Mind’, Jonathan Haidt examined the social divisions that exists regarding politics and religion and found that left-wing people, especially the far-left, were far worse at understanding the opinions of right-wing people than the reverse. One of the key problems was that

<sup>1</sup> Sullivan, A. 2018. America's New Religions. *New York Magazine*. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/12/andrew-sullivan-americas-new-religions.html>

<sup>2</sup> James, W. 1906. The Moral Equivalent of War. <https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/moral.html>

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, D. 2019. Three decades Ago, America Lost its Religion. Why? *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/09/atheism-fastest-growing-religion-us/598843/>

while the right often shared many of the left's values, just to lesser degrees, the left would frequently and thoroughly reject key right-wing values such as loyalty, authority, and sanctity. As a result, while the right can frequently see the motivations of the left and appreciate them, while disagreeing with their methods, the left fundamentally fails to understand the right's motivations and so ascribes selfish, bigoted, or malevolent motives in their place. The outcome is that potential dialogue is replaced by angry ranting. The Infowars website became known for the outsized personality of its founder Alex Jones, rather than any particularly high journalistic standards, yet, one of their reporters produced a video where they make a sincere effort to encourage dialogue between members of the left and right outside a Trump rally is fascinating and certainly falls in line with Haidt's findings<sup>4</sup>. The shocking thing is that it was filmed a year ago and since then the extreme nature of left-wing rhetoric has only increased. In today's climate I wonder if the female reporter would have escaped without physical assault.

I consider myself a liberal but I understand conservative viewpoints and, sometimes, agree with them. Because of this I find myself playing devil's advocate to other liberals who cannot understand why conservatives do things unless it is grounded in bigotry and hatred. As a result, I am frequently labelled a conservative myself and by the same rationale found guilty, by association, of the aforementioned bigotry and hatred. I am more guilty perhaps of contumacy, a heretic liberal verging on apostasy. Throughout this article I refer mostly to the Left, for both the reasons above and the clear evidence that they currently have a far stronger influence on public patterns of extremist behaviour than the right. It should be clear, however, that almost all of what I will say is just as applicable to their counterparts on the extreme right. Barring small variations of superficial style and branding, the behaviour and mentality is practically identical.

## Externalised Trauma and Rage as Therapy

**T**HE majority of the members of these groups are young and well-educated. They consider their beliefs to be both intellectually and ethically grounded and themselves to be far smarter than the backward members of the right, who they consider to be mired in privilege, superstitious beliefs and inherent racism. Yet, their statements are all too often driven by emotional needs rather than logical arguments. They decry men and masculinity but agree that women should not be judged purely by their gender, they denounce straight people while arguing that sexuality should not define a person, and they constantly raise the original sin of being born white, often in the same breath in which they claim to be anti-racist. Much like the *Limpieza de Sangre*, your birth determines your initial state of holiness and from this a lack of purity can only be addressed by some combination of repentance and punishment. They do all this and fail to see anything contradictory in their behaviour. You, not they, are the sexist, homophobic, racist.

The level of psychology involved is something even elementary school children can understand. They see bullies gang together, pick on someone, single them out, focus on a minor element of their appearance or behaviour, insult them, and persecute them. But why do they do it, the children ask. And you explain that very often it's a means of either releasing pent-up aggression from personal trauma or boosting low self-esteem.<sup>5</sup> You might doubt that reasonably well-educated adults would continue to act in such a juvenile manner but the underlying need that this behaviour fills is fundamental, regardless of age. We want to have a good opinion of ourselves, we want others to share this opinion, we want to be praised for it. In short, we ask the same question posed in the show 'Legion' (which also touched on this topic),<sup>6</sup> by David Haller when he repeatedly asked, "*Am I not deserving of love?*" Unfortunately, some who lack this sense of self-worth turn negative; rather than build themselves up, they seek to tear others

<sup>4</sup> Uploaded to the Millennial Millie Youtube channel as 'Documentary: Love Trumps Hate 2019' on 11 August 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=iOFKTewi63U&app=desktop>

<sup>5</sup> Ditch the Label. 2016. Annual Bullying Survey. <https://www.ditchthelabel.org/annual-bullying-survey-2016/>

<sup>6</sup> In the 'Moral Panic' scene from 'Chapter 15' the 7th episode of season 2 of the show. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwQqOdfc7pw>

down. The problem cannot be with them, so instead it is society, or the worst members of it, who are to blame and by calling out these bad actors they will show themselves worthy of love.

This new religion is grounded in a key element of Faith, that they are better than their targets. By grounding their aims in negativity, however, their movement is fundamentally self-serving rather than humanistic. It creates social divides by splitting people into carefully defined, and explicitly ranked, castes based upon their most superficial characteristics. It amplifies the most negative emotional currents, pouring gasoline onto tiny flames and nurturing them until they consume whole communities. They denounce, demand and degrade; calling opponents out for imagined crimes, threatening extreme responses if their extortionate rhetoric is not indulged, and treating any sign of weakness as license to engage in further aggression. These are not the children of Gandhi, King, and Mandela but, rather, Torquemada, Mao, and McCarthy.

### The Comfort of Soft Logic

**L**IKE any religion it has its symbols (the raised fist of BLM), its slogans (“No justice, no peace”), its rituals (taking a knee), and its vestments (Black Bloc chic). It even has its own Trinitarian formula in “*We could be better, we can be better, we will be better.*” Its weakness, however, lies in its inconsistent dogma. Its beliefs are too grounded in emotion to sustain any consistency. They change with the needs of the people involved and warp and twist themselves in attempts to escape the nets of logic. Long-standing religions, most notably Christianity, overcome this through centuries of philosophy and epistemological enquiry that seek to meld their core beliefs with some sort of rational, codified structure. Social Justice, in contrast, is a bargain basement creed, closer to a cult, or Scientology (if that’s not redundant), ever-changing according to the emotional whims of its leaders. The fact that it is catering to the emotional and psychological needs of its members makes the use of logic a potential form of self-harm through which the member might begin to question the belief structures that keep them happy.

A good example of these emotional drives and their ability to impair rational dialogue can be seen in the video of a young BLM activist haranguing an elderly black man who was seeking to prevent the destruction of the emancipation statue,<sup>7</sup> a monument to the end of slavery paid for by freed slaves. In case you wonder why BLM would ever want to destroy such a thing, its is because they don’t like the fact that the slave is kneeling and Lincoln standing. It’s bad optics you see. Of course, they also refuse to accept that the Civil War was about anything other than slavery so its hard to imagine how they address the fact that Lincoln, the white leadership of the North, and the (mostly) white 360,000 Union casualties were what ended slavery in the USA. In their ideal world, all white people, Lincoln, the dead Union soldiers, and their descendants, would only be recognised for their inherent racism and privilege:

*Young BLM woman: Yess! Yess! That’s exactly what I’m taking about. People are dying!*

*Elderly black man: Well, tell me the history of the statue.*

*YBW: I can tell you the history.*

*EBM: You don’t even know the history.*

*YBW: Yes I do! Yes the fuck I do! And why are you protecting it?*

*EBM: Why? Who paid for it?*

*YBW: Who, why... (she clearly doesn’t seem to know the answer)*

*EBM: Who paid for it?*

*YBW: The same person we’re talking about.*

*EBM: Who paid for it?*

*YBW: So why are we fighting?*

*EBM: Who paid for it?*

*YBW: You look just like me, why are we fighting?!*

*EBM: Who paid for it?*

*YBW: I could be your daughter! Your sister! You cousin! Why are we fighting?!*

*Second elderly black man: Why are you fighting, I’ll tell you, divide and conquer.*

*YBW: I want change! If you don’t want change step out of the way. Because we’re going to get it, one way or the other.*

The young woman doesn’t seem to know or care that this was built with the meagre savings of former slaves, one of the first completely independent acts they were able to carry out as newly free men and women. She doesn’t care that,

<sup>7</sup> Uploaded to the SmoothMedia Youtube channel as ‘BLM Activist Screams At Elder Man Trying To Save The Emancipation Statue In DC’ on 30 June 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogiX5RNoLPk>

from their perspective, her goal is to tear down a legacy that still means a huge amount to many members of the black community. All she cares about is, her personal interpretation and how her actions will make her feel, and she makes it quite clear that she intends to use force to fulfil those needs regardless of whatever logical, ethical or cultural arguments may stand in her way.

Another example of both the irrational thought process and the movement's treatment of heretics is shown in a recent video of Antifa protestors targeting a man they wrongly believe is Andy Ngo (an American journalist of Vietnamese descent known for his critiques of Antifa).<sup>8</sup>

*Antifa girl: (gives the finger to random passing Asian man) Fuck you Andy.*

*Asian man: Why the middle finger? Do you think that I'm Andy Ngo? You racist c\*\*\*s. I'm sick of this. This is the second or third time this has happened to me at protests.*

*Antifa Girl: It's like you're doing it intentionally.*

*Antifa Man: Andy, what's wrong?*

*Other Antifa Girl: Just be proud that you're not Andy.*

*Asian Man: No, I'm super proud that I'm not Andy but I'm really irritated that you stand here and put your middle finger in my face. You're a bunch of racist c\*\*\*s and you have to stop. Think about why you're here (at a BLM anti-racism protest)*

*Antifa Girl: If you're not Andy then you wouldn't be antagonising us. You fucking piece of shit.*

*Antifa Man: (To Asian man) I don't think your argument has internal validity.*

*Antifa Girl: No logic.*

## The Call for Submission

**I**T is an amazingly absurd interaction, yet, likely all too familiar for anyone who has tried to have a rational dialogue with someone who holds fanatical beliefs. As Churchill once said, the fanatic is someone who cannot change their mind and will

not change the subject. Any interaction is entirely one-sided, they will talk only about what they want to and will hear nothing said to them that does not further confirm their worldview. Evidence of the mentality can be seen in the struggle session a group of Yale students subjected one of their professors to after his wife penned a letter suggesting that letting people wear the Halloween costumes they liked wasn't the most grievous sin ever committed.<sup>9</sup>

Those who contravene the doctrine of their beliefs are judged to be anathema and targeted with the woke fatwa, what has come to be called 'cancel culture', coordinated efforts by small groups of extremists to put sufficient pressure on employers or other institutions that, in order to avoid the attention of a frenzied mob, these weak-willed groups will sacrifice the offender. In some cases outside pressure is not even needed as the faithful have already permeated the upper reaches of the body in question. Such is most certainly the case at Google where engineer James Damore was fired for penning a memo criticising not diversity itself, but Google's heavy-handed way of trying to generate it.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that, very occasionally, if the target is well-established, has powerful supporters of their own, and refuses to submit, they can weather the storm as philosopher Roger Scruton did when temporarily removed from a UK government post.<sup>11</sup> More often, the best that you can hope for is to take the punishment on the chin and refuse to surrender your self-respect. This is the path Kevin Hart chose when fired as host of the Oscars for jokes he had made years before,

*I've said where the rights and wrongs were. I've said who I am now versus who I was then. I've done it. I've done it. I'm not going to continue to go back. . . . We feed on Internet trolls and we reward them. I'm*

<sup>8</sup> Uploaded to the Andy Ngo Youtube channel as 'Antifa harass random Asian thinking he's Andy Ngo' on 14 July 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSc9mMzKKsA>

<sup>9</sup> Video footage uploaded via Youtube Account Booshi on 21 September 2019 as 'Yale Students Berating Professor Highlights'. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMc8pczn-hs>

<sup>10</sup> Wentz, M. 2017. Nerdy guy writes memo; world has nervous breakdown. *Globe and Mail*, 11 August. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/nerdy-guy-writes-memo-world-has-nervous-breakdown/article35960330/>

<sup>11</sup> BBC. 2019. Sir Roger Scruton returns to government role after magazine row. *BBC*, 23 July. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-49087682>

*not going to do it, man. I'm going to be me. I'm going to stand my ground.*<sup>12</sup>

Actor Terry Crews displayed a similar level of fortitude when he was attacked for his recent comments that “Black Lives Matter might soon morph into Black Lives Better.”<sup>13</sup> Unsurprisingly these comments were quickly proven true with singer Nick Cannon declaring that white people’s lack of melanin made them savages that had to rape and kill to make up for low self-esteem.<sup>14</sup> Cannon is the walking embodiment of the mentality Shelby Steele described in his book ‘White Guilt’, as one which,

*Gave blacks a political identity with no real purpose beyond the manipulation of white guilt. Worse, because this identity was thought to be absolutely essential to black power, it quickly became the most totalitarian and repressive identity that black America has ever known. All dissent became heresy, punishable by excommunication, because anything less than uniform militancy weakened the group's effectiveness with white guilt.*<sup>15</sup>

The attacks on Crews show that any attempts to withstand it will result in increased hostility but that you will also find support from those who also share a more humanistic, egalitarian worldview. Unfortunately, many people choose instead to cave, only to learn that apologising is never enough. As Hart found, the first apology is expected to be only a down-payment on a recurring penance, an act of contrition that must be repeated on a regular basis to assure people that you truly have reformed, or, more accurately, in order to debase you, steal your remaining dignity, and destroy your will to live. Throughout

this reinvigorated Auto-da-Fé the mob will be there to remind you of your transgressions, real life-counterparts to the bell-ringing nun from Cersei Lannister's walk of shame.<sup>16</sup>

I do not believe I’m exaggerating the effect on people that this targeted harassment can have. Last year video game developer Alec Holowka committed suicide, under very morally dubious circumstances, in the wake of allegations that he had acted improperly.<sup>17</sup> More recently a professor shamed for a joking tweet also took his own life, and continued to be vilified after his death.<sup>18</sup> Truth is actually a very fragile thing and allegations, if screamed loud enough, widely enough, and for long enough, can irreversibly damage any person’s reputation, and for some people reputation, social standing, or a sense or personal honour, is as important as life itself.

## Religious Hysteria or Political Derangement?

**T**HE danger of such practices might seem obvious. If so, you are not a fanatic. When simple knotted ropes were found hanging from a tree in a San Francisco park, many interpreted them as being ‘nooses’ and a clear sign of racism. When the person who had hung them turned out to be black and had done so for exercise purposes, the mayor of the city declared that, “Intentions don't matter when it comes to terrorising the public.”<sup>19</sup> He was correct as, at least in regard to interpreting articles of faith, intent is irrelevant. This is something that Sue Schafer, a Trump-hating, protest-loving, left-winger learned when she made the ill-advised choice to attend a costume party dressed as tv-host Megyn Kelly in blackface.

<sup>12</sup> Sperling, N. 2018. Kevin Hart Out as Oscar Host After Refusing to Apologize for Tweets. *Vanity Fair*, 7 December. <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/12/oscars-host-kevin-hart-responds-to-criticism>

<sup>13</sup> D’Zurilla, C. 2020. Don Lemon to Terry Crews: Don’t like Black Lives Matter? Start your own movement. *LA Times*, 7 July. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2020-07-07/terry-crews-don-lemon-black-lives-matter>

<sup>14</sup> Calvaro, L. Nick Cannon Speaks Out Following Backlash Over Anti-Semitic Comments. *ET Online*, 15 July. <https://www.etonline.com/nick-cannon-speaks-out-following-backlash-over-anti-semitic-comments-149666>

<sup>15</sup> Steele, S. 2007. *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*. Harper Perennial.

<sup>16</sup> From Season 5, Episode 10 of the tv show ‘Game of Thrones’. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-MB\\_e3rFoA&feature=youtu.be&t=60](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-MB_e3rFoA&feature=youtu.be&t=60)

<sup>17</sup> Davison, D. 2019. Allegations that led to Alec Holowka’s suicide need proper scrutiny. *The Post Millennial*, 3 September. <https://thepostmillennial.com/allegations-that-led-to-alec-holowkas-suicide-need-proper-scrutiny>

<sup>18</sup> Cheong, I.M. 2020. Woke media celebrates suicide of professor who was fired for controversial tweet *The Post Millennial*, 27 July. <https://thepostmillennial.com/woke-media-celebrates-suicide-professor-fired-controversial-tweet>

<sup>19</sup> AP, 2020. ‘Nooses’ in Oakland park were exercise aids, man says. *East Bay Times*, 19 June. <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2020/06/19/nooses-in-oakland-park-were-exercise-aids-man-says/>

Intended as a criticism of Kelly's defense of blackface, she found that the other liberal guests failed to pick up on her intent and newspaper coverage of the incident cost her her job.<sup>20</sup> She failed to remember that her belief system is grounded in self-centrism, everything is subjective: your smile, your handshake, your nod of affirmation or agreement. All that matters is how people perceive it, and thus, all your actions are potential sins.

There are some, however, who do not have to worry about such threats. One example is Justin Trudeau, Canada's current Prime Minister, who was effectively excused of multiple instances of blackface because he'd been part of the far-left clergy for a sufficiently long time.<sup>21</sup> The thing that needs to be kept in mind is that the perceived sins are not about what you have done but instead about how it makes the fanatic feel. This is why the sins of those they admire are so easily cast aside. It makes them feel bad to hold someone they admire to an equal standard so, rather than try to rationalise this dichotomy, they simply ignore it. This is why so many of Hillary Clinton's supporters have no issues with her failure to actually promote feminist policy,<sup>22</sup> it made them feel better to see her a different way so emotions won out over historical fact.

When it is someone they have reason to dislike the punishment will give them visceral pleasure, which is precisely why they will always demand more. Because their natural state is not content or satisfied, the need for emotional stimulation is almost drug-like, they need regular fixes of outrage or persecution to trigger the endorphin rush that

acts as a balm for their self-esteem and convinces them that world adheres to a working system of which they are an important part.

What happens though, when they cannot get a fix? When there are no convenient targets for their animosity? This is when faith begins to dip into religious hysteria, to weeping statues and heavenly stigmata. It should hardly be surprising that recent years have seen a significant increase in hate crime hoaxes.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes this is just simple stupidity, the equivalent of pareidolia, such as the students who mistook covered lab equipment for a KKK rally,<sup>24</sup> 'comedienne' Sarah Silverman mistaking utility symbols for neo-Nazi graffiti,<sup>25</sup> or the recent case of a door pull being interpreted as another case of a 'wild noose'.<sup>26</sup> In others there is a more significant element of criminal intent, as in the still ongoing case regarding Jussie Smollett's especially gormless hoax.<sup>27</sup>

There is a legitimate basis in many of these cases to consider whether it is a clinical disorder, possibly a form of Munchausen Syndrome, wherein the victim has a constant desire for attention and affirmation to the extent that they manufacture fake illnesses to farm for sympathy. Some wonder if this is the root of the trend of 'virtue signalling' the habit of attempting to gain recognition for good deeds. One anonymous online commentator raised a trenchant point when he pointed out that it was less recognition they were seeking, than it was praise, noting that desire for the former arises after the work is done, while those who virtue signal generally engage in activities solely in order to receive praise. All too frequently they also make minimal effort, such as

<sup>20</sup> Soave, R. 2020. *The Washington Post's* Halloween Costume Hit Job Is a New Low for Cancel Culture. *Reason*, 18 June. <https://reason.com/2020/06/18/washington-post-blackface-halloween-costume-cancel-culture/>

<sup>21</sup> Argitis, T. and Hagen, S. 2019. Trudeau's Re-Election Bid Intact Despite Blackface-Photo Scandal, *Bloomberg*, 25 September. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-09-24/trudeau-s-re-election-bid-intact-despite-blackface-photo-scandal>

<sup>22</sup> Crispin, J. 2020. Hillary Clinton is still trying to sell herself as a feminist icon. Don't buy it. *The Guardian*, 24 January. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/24/hillary-clinton-feminist-icon-jessa-crispin>

<sup>23</sup> Riley, J.L. 2019. Hate Crime Hoaxes Are More Common Than You Think. *Wall Street Journal*, 25 June. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hate-crime-hoaxes-are-more-common-than-you-think-11561503352>

<sup>24</sup> Ferguson, E. 2017. College Student Confuses Covered Lab Equipment With KKK Rally. *The Beacon*, 24 January. <https://freebeacon.com/issues/college-student-confuses-covered-lab-equipment-with-klan-rally/>

<sup>25</sup> Geraghty, J. 2017. No, Those Aren't Swastikas On Your Sidewalk. *National Review*, 13 February. <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/no-those-arent-swastikas-your-sidewalk/>

<sup>26</sup> Fryer, J. 2020. FBI says noose in Bubba Wallace's stall was garage door-pull rope, not a hate crime. *Boston Globe*, 23 June. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/23/sports/fbi-probe-says-noose-bubba-wallaces-stall-was-garage-door-pull-rope-not-hate-crime/>

<sup>27</sup> Smith, K. 2020. It's Jussie Smollett Day. *National Review*, 29 January. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/01/its-jussie-smollett-day/>

changing their Facebook picture to reflect the latest trend or tragedy. Even this runs the risk of retribution from the faithful though as Emma Watson found when she posted the incorrect amount of Black Squares to show support for BLM.<sup>28</sup> A recent study has found that the 'dark triad' of personality traits, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, traits which lead to "self-promotion, emotional callousness, duplicity, and tendency to take advantage of others," are more common among those who virtue signal, especially those who portray themselves as victims.<sup>29</sup>

It may go even beyond this, however, to a form of mass psychogenic illness. These are group afflictions that seize people with the same cultural identity or belief structure. In the past it gave rise to effects such as the Salem Witch Trials and the 1980s Satanic Panic<sup>30</sup> but more recently it has been linked to what is termed 'Trump Derangement Syndrome'. Originally used as a joking reference to the hyperbolic left-wing refusal to accept Trump's victory, it may now be reasonably used to refer to an inability for some to judge issues regarding Trump in particular, and the left-right political divide more broadly in any form of neutral or unemotional manner. In the previously linked article regarding Sarah Silverman a journalist states that he became highly uncomfortable when a plumber who might potentially have been a Trump supporter came to his home.

*"He was a perfectly nice guy and a consummate professional. But....I couldn't stop thinking about whether he had voted for Trump, whether he knew my last name is Jewish, and how that knowledge might change the interaction we were having inside my own home....I couldn't shake the sense of potential danger."*

This is a deeply unhealthy mental state and the commonalities with racism and homophobia are clear: unwarranted fear stemming from irrational emotional responses. The emotional needs of the

fanatic must be met and where victims can't be found among their opponents, where no opportunities exist to fabricate drama, they will quickly turn on their own kind. James Lindsay and Mike Naya touched on this in their own analysis of the religious elements of social justice, stating that, "it is blatantly anti-strategic to the point of being quite commonly described as 'eating itself' and a 'circular firing line'."<sup>31</sup>

## An Unsatiated Emotional Void

**T**HERE can be different drivers of this tendency though. Among the political officers it might simply be the standard practice of career politicians to stab people in the back in order to reach the next rung of the ladder. However, among the faithful true-believers it is more the emotional equivalent of Erysichthon's physical appetite. Just as there was never enough food to satiate the mad king's appetite, and just as he would sacrifice even his children to temporarily feed it, so too will the fanatic sacrifice all they claim to hold dear, eventually eating themselves. This is inevitable in a system of belief that has no bedrock principles and which takes pains to slot people into vertically ranked brackets that define their level of inherent virtue and vice. The order of these rankings is clearly going to be, as they say themselves, 'problematic'. As a result, you have different priorities placed on different issues. For some opposition to Trump is key, for others gays rights, feminism, transgender rights, anti-racism, anti-police brutality, immigrant rights, and so on. They are bound together by a rough categorisation of people they hate more than they hate one another. However, as soon as they realise they are not all working from the same playbook, that hate can surface with a vengeance.

A recent wave of excommunications stemmed from internal resistance to the more extreme tenets of transgender activism. Graham Linehan, creator of several successful sitcoms was cancelled

<sup>28</sup> McLoughlin, L. 2020. 'That won't help!' Emma Watson slammed. *The Sun*, 3 June. <https://www.the-sun.com/entertainment/924761/emma-watson-prioritizing-instagram-aesthetic-black-lives-matter-post/>

<sup>29</sup> Nolan Brown, E. 2020. Narcissists, Psychopaths, and Manipulators Are More Likely To Engage in 'Virtuous Victim Signaling,' Says Study. *Reason*, 7 July. <https://reason.com/2020/07/07/narcissists-psychopaths-and-manipulators-are-more-likely-to-engage-in-virtuous-victim-signaling-says-study/>

<sup>30</sup> Romano, A. 2016. The history of Satanic Panic in the US — and why it's not over yet. *Vox*, 30 October. <https://www.vox.com/2016/10/30/13413864/satanic-panic-ritual-abuse-history-explained>

<sup>31</sup> Lindsay, J.A. and Nayna M. 2018. Postmodern Religion and the Faith of Social Justice. *Aero Magazine*, 18 December. <https://areomagazine.com/2018/12/18/postmodern-religion-and-the-faith-of-social-justice/>

despite his own previous efforts to lead the censorious charge<sup>32</sup> against freedom of expression. Even more high profile figures, such as J.K. Rowling, soon joined him in moral purgatory.<sup>33</sup> But perhaps this was a step too far, Rowling joined over a hundred other left-wing academics and journalists in signing an open letter criticising cancel culture.<sup>34</sup> Had they come to their senses and reassessed the ethics of the practice? In some cases perhaps, some of the signatories had been long-standing defenders of free speech. For others, however, it was more likely the realisation caused by a recent series<sup>35</sup> of wealthy liberals<sup>36</sup> losing their jobs and public status<sup>37</sup> due to unintended acts of apostasy.<sup>38</sup>

The lack of sincerity was highlighted by several signatories quickly moving to distance themselves from the letter after they realised they might be tarred by association.<sup>39</sup> The letter was also met by a responding missive signed by more than a hundred eager agents of the inquisition.<sup>40</sup> The response, predictably, followed the standard pattern regarding criticism of the left: downplay the impact of their attacks on free expression, highlight their own victim status, and then attack specific signatories of the first letter for being guilty of heretical behaviour. Or, as they put it, the people calling for civil and open dialogue were actually trying to, “use their platforms to harass others into silence.” The letter encapsulates everything putrid and bitter about this fundamentalist approach to social change, to the extent that it could serve as their faith’s version of

Paul’s missive to the Romans. It classifies people based upon superficial traits, marks the sins of those who violate their beliefs, highlights the victim status of their chosen martyrs, and closes with a confirmation of their right to wield power, not to reconcile, but to attack those they disagree with. It is a perfectly concise representation of the emotional hole that lies at the heart of fundamentalist beliefs whose need for rigidly inflexible belief structures suggests no more than that they lack the warm emotional support systems that permit so many of us to weather life with an at times troubling, but ultimately vital, mixture of doubt and uncertainty in almost all things.

Throughout history, the number of truly open and tolerant cultures has been incredibly small. As Voltaire said, toleration does not start civil wars, instead persecution was the source of the blood and carnage of our past. It can be argued that the late 20th century saw a high point in civilisational tolerance but the Paradox of Tolerance, which states that a society that is excessively tolerant will invariably fall under the control of the intolerant, is being increasingly borne out. Responding to this topic, the philosopher Karl Popper argued that the only thing society should be intolerant of is intolerance. Even this simple message can be distorted in the minds of a true believer to justify their actions, claiming, “See, this is why we need to punch Nazis!” But this is not what Popper meant.<sup>41</sup> If someone, even if they hold extreme or subjectively offensive beliefs of their own, are

<sup>32</sup> Spiked.com. 2020. The hypocrisy of Graham Linehan. *spiked.com*, 10 February. <https://www.spiked-online.com/2020/02/10/the-hypocrisy-of-graham-linehan/>

<sup>33</sup> Haring, B. 2020. ‘Harry Potter’ fan sites cancel J.K. Rowling over ‘transphobic’ views. *New York Post*, 3 July. <https://nypost.com/2020/07/03/harry-potter-fan-sites-cancel-j-k-rowling-over-transphobic-views/>

<sup>34</sup> Zindulka, K. 2020. J.K. Rowling Signs Open Letter Calling For an End to Cancel Culture. *Breitbart*, 7 July. <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2020/07/07/j-k-rowling-signs-open-letter-calling-for-an-end-to-cancel-culture/>

<sup>35</sup> Edmonds, L. 2020. Variety magazine Editor-in-Chief Claudia Eller takes two-months leave. *Daily Mail*, 5 June. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8390929/Variety-Editor-Chief-Claudia-Eller-takes-two-month-leave.html>

<sup>36</sup> Variety. 2020. Bon Appetit Editor-in-Chief Adam Rapoport Resigns. *Variety*, 8 June. <https://variety.com/2020/digital/news/bon-appetit-adam-raoport-resigns-backlash-1234628301/>

<sup>37</sup> Reynolds, G.H. 2020. Bari Weiss’ resignation a sign of narrowing views at New York Times. *USA Today*, 15 July. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/07/15/bari-weiss-letter-resignation-new-york-times-censorship-column/5439150002/>

<sup>38</sup> McKoy, C.R. 2020. Stan Wischnowski to resign as The Philadelphia Inquirer’s top editor. *Post-Gazette*, 7 June. <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/state/2020/06/06/Stan-Wischnowski-to-resign-as-The-Philadelphia-Inquirer-s-top-editor/stories/202006060042>

<sup>39</sup> Ellefson, L. and Yee, L. 2020. Some Public Figures Now Regret Signing Harper’s Open Letter Against ‘Cancel Culture’. *MSN.com*, 8 July. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/entertainment/news/some-public-figures-now-regret-signing-harpers-open-letter-against-cancel-culture/ar-BB16uYEA>

<sup>40</sup> The Objective. 2020. A More Specific Letter on Justice and Open Debate. *The Objective*, 10 July. <https://theobjective.substack.com/p/a-more-specific-letter-on-justice>

<sup>41</sup> Libertarianism.org. 2017. On the Paradox of Tolerance. *libertarianism.org*, 17 August. <https://www.libertarianism.org/columns/paradox-tolerance>

tolerant of other beliefs, follow the rule of law, and show a willingness to engage in good-faith dialogue with others, then they will rank well above any who adhere to close-minded, intolerant views that encourage the use of violence as a means of stifling dissent against their belief system.

Tolerance is grounded by calm reason, rational argument, open dialogue, and a firm measure of self-doubt. If instead, your actions are motivated by heated emotion, inconsistent rhetoric, one-sided diatribes, and a deep-seated conviction in the undeniable correctness of your cause, you are preaching from a doctrine of intolerance. It's usually relatively easy to tell one from the other, if your actions are likely to generate praise from those around you and reaffirm the correctness of your preexisting views, while failing to cause you any personal reflection, you probably exist in an echo chamber that simply reinforces the narrowness of its views by telling you that the more intransigently you behave the better you are. The more advanced religious systems evolved out of this stage through the actions of the philosophers among them who believed in the virtue of the underlying values but saw more tolerant and egalitarian means of promoting them. It may be that the social justice movement, and other extreme political beliefs, can move beyond their fundamentalist stage and mature into a socially positive form of activism capable of respectful interaction with opposing views. However, the historical record shows that where this happens you are still left with pockets of diehard fundamentalists and there is a very real danger that such people will increasingly turn to more and more extreme rhetoric and actions.

In either case, we are currently deep in the movement's Inquisitorial stage and it may be a long, dark night before any Renaissance occurs. Yet, this is why, when faced with intolerant movements, it's important not to dismiss the whole as a monolithic entity. There are always schisms in any belief system and always people within any large group who are more interested in sympathetic rather than antagonistic exchanges. More than ever, it is important that such people on both sides make sincere efforts to share their views in good-faith dialogue and interact to move

beyond what could otherwise become a bloody clash of fundamentalist belief structures.