

# I Think, Therefore I'm Guilty

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Everyone can agree that today's Britain — which we're always being told has become so much more liberal — is the very model of a forward-looking, tolerant society in which freedom of expression is paramount. Correct?

If only. In fact, the intellectual trend in Britain is a remorseless slide towards a dark age of intolerance, reverting to a reason-suppressing, heresy-hunting culture in which certain opinions are being turned into thought crimes.

Astoundingly, people are being arrested by the police — even if the case against them eventually falls — because of what they have said. They are not inciting violence or any criminal activity. They are merely expressing a point of view. Yet for that they may find the police feeling their collars.

It is difficult to say when, exactly, the priorities of the British police shifted from the prevention of criminal offences towards criminalising people for causing offence. The police have become the thin blue line against the Wrong Opinion. Instead of protecting society against oppression, British police officers have become the agents of oppression.

Freedom of religious expression, for example, is a bedrock principle of an open society. Yet if Christians express their religious opposition to homosexuality, they are treated like criminals.

Dale McAlpine, a Christian preacher in Cumbria, was carted off by the police, locked in a cell for seven hours and charged with using abusive or insulting words or behaviour after telling a passer-by that he believed homosexuality was a crime against God.

Harry Hammond, an evangelist, was convicted of a public order offence and fined for holding a placard saying 'Stop Homosexuality, Stop Lesbianism, Jesus is Lord' at a street demonstration in Bournemouth — even though he was attacked by members of the public who poured soil and water over him.

Pensioners have even found the police on their doorstep accusing them of 'hate crime' for objecting to the local council about a gay pride march or merely asking if they could distribute Christian leaflets alongside the gay rights literature.

Such Christians are far from alone in finding that certain opinions are now forbidden. Across public life — in academic, legal, governmental, scientific and media circles and beyond — an atmosphere is being engendered which is inimical to independent thought.

And this is often amplified to incendiary levels through the electronic lynch-mob of the internet. Writers who bust the boundaries of permitted thinking may become the target of frenzied denunciation by a global army of haters whipping up a campaign for the dissident to be boycotted, banned or sacked.

After Jan Moir suggested in the Daily Mail that the death of the gay Boyzone singer Stephen Gately was linked to a louche lifestyle, she was subjected to a fireball of vilification on the internet, Twitter and Facebook.

The Crown Prosecution Service then said 'the Metropolitan Police passed the article' to them 'to determine whether or not any crime had been committed', but Moir would not be prosecuted.

Prosecuted! For making what at most was a tasteless remark? What on earth has Britain come to when the CPS entertains this as a serious possibility?

Moir's particular thought crime was unwittingly to desecrate the hallowed shrine of victim culture. Certain groups of 'victimised' people — lone mothers, ethnic minorities, Muslims, gays — enjoy a kind of Protected Species status, in that they must never be offended; nor can any fault ever be laid at their door.

To offend or criticise them is to be guilty of hate crime. But since hatred is a subjective notion, this has opened the way for an oppressive culture of coercion, double standards and injustice.

Offending such groups has become a hanging offence — and that includes protesting against this very phenomenon.

It took Robin Page, chairman of the Countryside Restoration Trust, some five years to clear his name after he was arrested for remarking at a 2002 rally against the government's anti-hunting laws: 'If you are a black vegetarian Muslim asylum-seeking one-legged lesbian lorry driver, I want the same rights as you.'

To enforce the dogma of thought crime, language has been hijacked and turned inside out. Dissent has been relabelled as either hatred or insanity. Those who disagree with current orthodoxies are therefore deemed to be either bad or mad.

These modern heretics are demonised as Europhobes, homophobes, xenophobes or Islamophobes. They can therefore safely be purged from all positions of influence and their ideas trashed without any discussion.

The taunt of 'phobia', or irrational fear, is used along with outright accusations of insanity to place rational dissent beyond the pale. As the former Today programme editor Rod Liddle recently revealed, a BBC apparatchik said to him of Lord Pearson of Rannoch and other Eurosceptics (whose views happen to be shared by half or more of the population): 'Rod, you do realise that these people are mad?'

Just such a charge was made by totalitarian movements from the medieval Catholic church by way of the Jacobins all the way to Stalin's secret police.

In similar vein, the rational anxieties of millions about mass immigration or militant Islam destroying the culture of the country are held merely to demonstrate that ordinary people are racist bigots or Islamophobes.

The great gift bequeathed to us by the 18th-century Enlightenment is the freedom to disagree. This is now in eclipse. The intelligentsia — the supposed custodians of reason and intellectual freedom — has turned itself into an inquisition, complete with an index of prohibited ideas.

Nowhere is this more starkly displayed than in the hounding of scientists and others who question man-made global warming theory.

Such sceptics are vilified, smeared, denied funding and even — according to the renowned meteorologist and IPCC reviewer Professor Richard Lindzen — intimidated into telling lies to shore up the theory.

Assertions wholly inimical to science, such as ‘the argument is over’ or that global warming is the belief of a scientific ‘consensus’ — the claim once used by the medieval church to stifle Galileo — are deployed to ensure the argument is over before it can begin.

More viciously still, these dissenters have been dubbed ‘climate change deniers’ to equate their views with Holocaust denial. Not only are they thus likened to Nazi sympathisers, but rejecting man-made global warming theory — for which many of the best brains in climate-related science say there is scant or no evidence — is equated with the genocide of the Jews.

Without the freedom to question and argue, science cannot thrive — and without science, reason would be crippled and modernity would grind to a halt. Which is of course the aim of the environmental movement, whose roots lie in a stream of pagan, irrational and proto-fascist thinking which goes back to the counter-Enlightenment.

‘Politically correct’ views all derive from anti-Western, secular ideologies such as anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, utilitarianism, feminism, multiculturalism and environmentalism. These all share the aim of overturning the established order in the West.

So any groups who have power within that order can never be offended or hurt because they are themselves offensive and hurtful, while ‘powerless’ groups can never be other than victims.

This obsession with power is, of course, a Marxist position; indeed, ‘political correctness’ is a form of cultural Marxism. But how has good old empirical, pragmatic, anti-ideological Britain succumbed to such extremism?

Part of the explanation is that, with the collapse of Soviet communism, the left shifted its focus from economics and politics to the cultural arena. Employing Gramsci’s tactic of ‘the long march through the institutions’, it captured the citadels of the culture for a variety of utopian ideas.

Class divisions would give way to equality, capitalist despoliation of the earth would be replaced by pre-lapsarian agrarian communes and all hatred, prejudice and irrationality would be excised from the human heart.

Like all ideologies, these utopian fantasies wrenched facts and evidence to fit their governing idea. Independent thought thus became impossible — which inevitably resulted in an attack upon freedom, because reason and liberty are inseparable bed-fellows.

Because these creeds purported to embody unchallengeable truths, they could permit no dissent. Reason was thus replaced by bullying, intimidation and the suppression of debate.

What we are living through is therefore a fresh mutation of the previous despotisms of first the medieval church and then the totalitarian political movements of the 20th century.

The West has now fallen victim to a third variation on the theme: cultural totalitarianism, or a dictatorship of virtue. For, in a pattern that goes back to the French Revolution, the left believes that its secular, materialistic, individualistic and utilitarian values represent not a point of view but virtue itself.

To oppose such coercive behaviour or uphold factual evidence in the face of ideological distortion is thus to be damned automatically as evil, mad and extreme.

But here's the really striking thing. Progressive intellectuals who scorn 'the right' as knuckle-dragging extremists are themselves promoting a range of secular fantasies which uncannily mirror pre-Enlightenment religious fanaticism.

Anti-imperialism, anti-Americanism, anti-Zionism, environmentalism, scientism, egalitarianism, anti-racism, libertinism, moral relativism and multiculturalism are all quasi-religious movements — evangelical, dogmatic, millenarian and with enforcement mechanisms to stamp out heresy.

Some would call all this tyranny. But to progressives, tyranny occurs only when their utopia is denied. Virtue therefore has to be coerced for the good of the people at the receiving end.

Since progressivism is all about creating the perfect society, it is therefore incontestably virtuous; and so — like Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety, like Stalinism, like Islam — it is incapable of doing anything bad. Unlike everyone else, of course, for whom it follows they can do nothing but bad.

Accordingly, progressives feel justified in trying to stifle all dissent. Never engaging with the actual argument, they instead use gratuitous abuse to turn their opponents into pariahs (while they themselves, failing to grasp the point about evidence, characterise all reasoned arguments against them as outrageous 'insults').

So if you are a white Christian man upholding traditional family values and expressing a desire to stop immigration and leave the EU, while being sceptical of man-made global warming and believing that Darwinian evolution does not explain the origin of life on earth, Britain is no longer your country.

But don't worry. Utopia is taking its place. The police are on their way to tell you.