

Humpty Dumpty deserved to fall

[Other](#) - Thursday August 2nd, 2018

The fat, pompous egg sat precariously on the wall talking down to Alice and said, in a voice dripping with malign contempt: “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.” Alice, a precocious girl who was not easily bullied, replied: “The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things.” Dismissing her objection, the egg countered: “The question is which is to be master – that’s all.”

This of course is the famous scene from Lewis Carroll’s 1872 fantasy *Through the Looking Glass*. The conversation ended with Humpty Dumpty falling off the wall. Happily all the king’s horses and all the king’s men were unable to put him together again.

Until now.

Dumpty and his haughty command of language were channeled last year by Canada’s federal government in Bill C-16, which amended the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to protect gender identity and gender expression. It legitimized an array of gender neutral pronouns recently invented by transgender rights advocates and their progressive acolytes.

As a result the dogma of gender fluidity and its expression is now enshrined in Canadian law. And just as it was once illegal – and dangerous – to criticize the Catholic Church and its dogmas, it is now illegal and dangerous to criticize the Church of Gender Identity and its dogmas.

Gender fluidity is a very Church-like dogma in that it is based entirely on faith. Consider the other grounds for discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Act: “race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.”

Every other ground for discrimination is certifiable with objective evidence. Only gender identity is based entirely in subjective feeling. Yet the new law compels us to act as though the notion that sex and gender are entirely separate phenomena is settled science rather than what it really is: a recently conceived theory built on flimsy data that defies millennia of human experience and understanding.

Classic liberalism concerned itself with the “dignity” of the individual. Progressivism is obsessed with people’s “feelings.” Dignity, a human estate whose criteria reflect extensive philosophical and legal precedents, cutting across all class, racial and gender lines, is a rational basis for a rights discussion. It should be impossible to win an argument based on feelings. But nowadays, they rarely lose.

Much of the #MeToo movement is based entirely in “feelings” of what is or is not “appropriate” speech, tone, gesture or intention. The statement “I felt uncomfortable,” spoken by a woman, holds great social power, sometimes leading to failures of due process that ruin innocent people’s lives. So it is with Bill C-16. In elevating feelings as the arbiter of a human right, individual comfort trumps individual rights. Which makes it not only a bad law, but a dangerous one.

In an illuminating 2011 academic paper, John F. Furedy, now deceased, then a retired professor of psychology at the University of Toronto, correlated totalitarian regimes with institutions and governments that privilege individual comfort over individual rights. Wrote Furedy: “The most striking feature of totalitarian societies is that the comfort criterion takes precedence over considerations of truth in general and fairness to individuals in particular.”

Furedy coined a phrase for this tendency: “velvet totalitarianism.” He described five common characteristics of any form of totalitarianism, velvet or otherwise:

- i) The “presence of uninterpretable laws”, where there is no objective metric for defining an alleged offence;
- ii) The presence and power of pseudo experts, such as equity officers in universities, who exercise control over things like curriculum content or faculty hiring, without valid academic credentials;
- iii) “Status-defined ethics” that allows for persecution of those without victim status, by those with it;
- iv) A fear of engaging in public discussion of controversial issues;
- v) Demonization of those perceived as political or ideological dissidents.

Most journalists are liberals, wired to sympathize with progressive causes and arguments. Most respect the official dogmas of the Church of Gender Identity. Even journalists known for their objectivity tend to treat the Church’s high priests with kid gloves. In the episode of TVO’s *The Agenda* on trans pronoun usage (made famous after Lindsay Shepherd showed it to her class at Wilfred Laurier), for example, the focus was on Jordan Peterson’s resistance to

invented words. His opponent, Nicholas Matte, a transgender academic, claimed that “studies” had proved that sex and gender were completely unlinked. Yet host Steve Paikin, normally a rigorous reporter, did not challenge this whopper at all, likely for fear of being lumped in with Peterson as “transphobic”.

For another example, last December the CBC pulled a scheduled BBC documentary, *Transkids: Who Knows Best?* after complaints from trans activists because it quoted a Toronto psychologist’s cautions against chemical and surgical intervention in childhood. It was a perfectly balanced piece by the ne plus ultra of reliable, credible and even politically correct journalism. In its capitulation the CBC demonstrated that it is ruled, on this subject anyway, by radical progressive activists.

Dr. Kenneth Zucker, psychologist and expert on gender dysphoria in children, appeared in the CBC scrapped *Transgender Kids* BBC documentary.

(In fairness, it must be noted that earlier this month CBC Radio aired a segment on its Sunday Morning program titled “Excommunicate me from the church of social justice’: an activist’s plea for change”. In the piece, Francis Lee, an American Cultural Studies scholar and trans queer person of colour (QTPOC), lamented that the social-justice movement he and now she has long been a part of has become, in its “quest for purity,” as bad or worse than the strictest of Christian churches, without Christianity’s redeeming traits of grace or mercy. Lee described an environment of dictatorship – “controlling and destructive behaviour” – and punishment for thought crimes, and asked: “Have I extricated myself from one church to find myself confined in another?”)

Like Christian churches, the Church of Gender Identity is prone to schism. The turf wars between feminists and trans activists are fierce, hate-filled and even physically violent. This confuses liberal media which want to be trans friendly, but also feminist friendly. They’re pressured to take sides when radical feminists are accusing male-to-female trans activists of being “misogynists in drag” and battling for ownership of the word “woman.”

I don’t normally side with radical feminists, but on this issue they are in the right: if a woman is defined as anyone who identifies as a woman, then trans women have the right to be rape counsellors, an intolerable intrusion into what should be a safe space for rape survivors.

This is where junk science and compelled speech gets us.

I discovered a long time ago that there are Humpty Dumpty language bullies in every movement, and of movements there is no end. Early in my journalism career I collided with the pit bull advocacy movement, whose zealotry – which goes so far as to equate pit bulls with Holocaust victims – equals and often surpasses that of social justice race and gender warriors.

Researching and writing about canine politics also taught me that data, statistics, epidemiology and peer-reviewed research do not interest many journalists half so much as mantras, myths, bogus “studies” and feelings, a phenomenon evident every time, for example, Jordan Peterson is interviewed by a feminist media host.

I have written several critical columns on transactivists’ unseemly aggression, but so far the only “punishment” I have suffered is vilification on Twitter and one lawyer’s letter to the *PostMillennial.com* (where I also have a weekly column), meant to intimidate, but without teeth and ignored. On the other hand, I was fired from a fun gig with CBC Radio, a regular spot on the news trivia comedy show, *Because News*, for indigenously incorrect remarks I made on another network (I wasn’t told which one it was; perhaps it was my statement that the residential schools were based in good intentions).

That suggests the Church of Colonial Oppression is more powerful, and vengeful, than the Church of Gender Identity. Indeed, on matters involving race and culture, progressives have moved beyond old-fashioned concepts like equal rights to claim singular, unique rights based on race and culture and deserving of special legal and social status. It’s kind of a reverse caste system, with the Untouchables on top.

Following last year’s famous “cultural appropriation prize” debacle that claimed the career of Hal Niedzviecki, failed satirist and editor of *Write Magazine*, many journalists paid a stiff price for joining in or defending the parody. Some like Niedzviecki were fired or effectively forced to resign, as my son, Jonathan Kay, did from *The Walrus* magazine. Steve Ladurantaye, managing editor of CBC’s *The National*, was “re-assigned” rather than fired. As part of his punishment he had to sit within a circle of his co-workers, in perfect Maoist re-education style, and apologize to each one in turn. All this for the crime of attempting to apply humour to politically correct absurdities.

There is an Arabic word, “ketman,” which describes the position taken by those who desire to be “at one with others, in order not to be alone”. The word arises in a 1953 book, a series of essays by the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz called *The Captive Mind*, about what happens to the inner lives of intellectuals living under totalitarianism.

When Stalin's Iron Curtain fell over Poland after the Second World War, intellectuals had to adapt very quickly. They were called upon not only to obey the regime but to proselytize on its behalf. Because it was too painful to imagine they were parroting lies, Milosz's fellow Polish intellectuals insisted they were speaking words they believed. They were not lying. Ketman goes deeper than lying. It is a kind of performance engaged in to survive the sensation of living with a divided mind. Those practicing ketman are actors; everything they say is part of a performance. You can feel the performative affect of most spoken and written commentary every time you turn to a progressively disposed newspaper, website or TV show.

Privately, many media people complain about having to defend what they know to be objectively indefensible. But to maintain their status as enlightened or "woke" according to criteria set by ideologues and enforced by Twitter mobs, they will say things they do not believe, but have convinced themselves are necessary to say to advance the unassailable goal of social justice, which is always on the horizon, never arriving, because its utopian goalposts never stop receding. There is an old Jewish joke that applies here. In the era of the Russian pogroms, two Jews are walking home from synagogue when they are accosted by hooligans. They flee, the hooligans in pursuit. As they run, one Jew says to the other: "Why are we running? There are only two of them, and there are two of us." His friend replies, "Yes, but they are together and we are alone."

To be alone in an era of ideological tyranny is not a question of numbers. It is a question of who has the power, who is "together," and who is impotent or near-impotent to fight back. This essay is derived from a presentation I made earlier this month at a public event in Toronto headlined "Bill C-16 One Year Later". Originally scheduled to take place at a downtown YMCA, one activist's complaint was enough for it to be "de-platformed". Cancellation of events featuring politically incorrect topics or speakers occur routinely all over the country.

In the U.S., 62 percent of students who identify as left-leaning agree that silencing speech through protest is acceptable; and one in five college students believe it is acceptable to use violence to stop speech with which they disagree. These are chilling numbers that demonstrate the uphill battle we are fighting. But even though we are alone and they are together, we must not flee. Unlike the Jews in Russia, it is not our lives that are stake, only our self-respect. As the brilliant journalist Charles Krauthammer, who died just weeks ago, once said: "You're betraying your whole life if you don't say what you think – and you don't say it honestly and bluntly."