

The Hallmarks of Political Correctness

Lack of Faith in Human Nature

The politically correct have limited faith in human nature, seeing it as essentially flawed, and hold a belief in its perfectibility with sufficient psychological re-engineering. The African-American academic Thomas Sowell defined it as the difference between the ‘constrained’ view of human nature by those who accept its essential flaws, and the ‘unconstrained’ view of those who believe human nature can be perfected.¹ Those with a constrained vision tend to be more pragmatic and right-wing, those with the unconstrained vision more Utopian and left-wing.

The politically correct believe that people can be made caring, selfless and tolerant, and to see themselves as citizens of the world rather than their country. The politically incorrect may believe that culture and society is improvable—for example in the way that women and homosexuals are treated—but believe there are limits to how much you can change human nature, and that some basic flaws should be accepted and could even be useful.

Political correctness is in this sense very much like Marxism, which believed that personal greed and selfishness could be eradicated from the human character, and that people could be educated to work as hard for the common good as for their personal good. Likewise, multiculturalism transfers the quest for human perfection from the economic sphere to the social and cultural one, requiring people to give up feelings of tribalism and belonging, and requiring them to prefer ‘the other’ to the familiar.

Marxism, it should be noted, failed because it failed to perfect human nature; belief in multiculturalism is now doing likewise.

Promotion of Re-Education

The Utopian quest to perfect human nature drives the promotion of re-education, from the classroom to the workplace. It occurs in PC children's books, which are sometimes rewritten timeless classics that are no longer deemed acceptable. (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, all of whom were also white, is unthinkable nowadays.)

It occurs in the school curricula, which now include such treasures as Black History Month and Gay, Lesbian and Transgender History Month, where history is rewritten on the flimsiest (and even non-existent) evidence that national icons such as Florence Nightingale and William Shakespeare were homosexual.

In workplaces across the country, from companies to army bases, from hospitals to TV stations, people are being subjected to 'diversity training' to re-educate them and make them more politically correct. Across the spectrum of TV programmes, multiculturalism is vigorously promoted.

Like the belief in the perfectibility of human nature, the passion for propaganda and re-education has powerful similarities to the practices of communist societies. While Soviet Socialist Realism promoted the virtue of the proletariat, the BBC promotes the virtue of the multicultural society.

Lack of Faith in Democracy

Distrusting human nature, and wanting to perfect it, puts limits on the politically correct person's faith in democracy. They often justify limits on democracy by saying that if democracy were too direct, then Britain would still

have hanging and homosexuality would still be illegal (although both assertions are questionable; direct democracy would promote debate and understanding). The PC dismiss their opponents as ‘right-wing populists’, as though there was something inherently wrong in being popular in a democracy (there is a considerable difference between being a populist, and being a hatemonger). Political correctness drives many of the curbs on democracy, as discussed in chapter 6.

The PC’s lack of trust in democracy is justified: most people privately object to political correctness. Given how out of touch the PC elite are with the people, democracy is the worst enemy of their most treasured beliefs. When viewers of the ITV programme *Vote for Me* finally chose someone to stand as a politician, it was Rodney Hylton-Potts, who promised to halt all immigration to Britain, and who was denounced as a ‘comedy fascist’.

The novelist Frederick Forsyth wrote that political correctness:

is insultingly patronising and contemptuous of what it describes as ‘ordinary people’. It is a creed for a self-arrogated elite. Anything that is popular is described as ‘populist’, a derogatory adjective referring to the lowest of tastes. Deriving from this, it is antidemocratic; while affecting to approve democracy, it much prefers its own self-awarded elitism. Politically, it prefers government of the few, by the few and above all for the few.²

Support for Censorship

Their conviction that those they oppose are not just wrong but malign, and their desire to perfect human nature, not only leads the politically correct to a distrust of democracy, but also to support censorship. This desire to curtail the speech of opponents they deem offensive ranges from ‘no platform’ policies to overt legal censorship, as detailed in chapter 6.

Liberal Guilt

One of the most powerful psychological foundations of political correctness is liberal guilt. Many in the West from middle-class backgrounds suffer a usually unspoken guilt about their unearned privilege, which in turn can lead to an under-current of self-loathing in their views. Men often feel guilty about being men, and whites often feel guilty about being white, even though these are innate characteristics they can do little about. Men may support women-only university colleges, for example, because it appeases their male guilt, rather than a real belief that they are necessary at a time when more women than men already go to university and on average get better degrees.

When the former BBC director general Greg Dyke described the BBC as ‘hideously white’, what explains the word ‘hideous’ apart from liberal guilt? Asians are now over-represented in law schools and medical colleges, but no one, let alone another Asian, would dream of calling law schools and medical colleges ‘hideously Asian’. No Afro-Caribbean would call Brixton ‘hideously black’.

When Western adults were doing their bit to promote unsustainable world population growth, the West was full of guilt-ridden treatises, leading to a range of pressure groups and charities campaigning to reduce birth rates. It was easy to campaign on: the end of the world was our fault. Now that the population of the West has stopped growing, concern about overpopulation has become very unfashionable because, as Tony Benn put it, it means wanting fewer brown babies. The combination of Western guilt and fear of racism has all but killed off public concern about overpopulation in the last few decades. In the US, when population growth was caused by white people having too many babies, the country’s largest environment group, the Sierra Club, campaigned to control population. But now that US population growth is mainly caused by immigration, it has dropped all policies

on population, and indeed its funding is dependent on never trying to tackle the immigration issue.

Liberal guilt never feels more satisfied than when it is self-flagellating. The euphoria over the Live 8 concert—and the wall to wall coverage given by the media—was only possible because it followed the politically-correct line that African poverty is not the fault of African despots and culture, but our own fault for not being generous enough with aid and not writing off debt. This guilt is not only patronising—saying the Africans aren't able to develop by their own efforts—but also misplaced: no country has risen out of poverty by means of aid and cancelled debts. From China to South Korea, India to Malaysia, they have developed out of their own efforts, with aid being at best marginal.

The 'it's all our fault' line of reasoning—and the soft racism it peddles—was beautifully illustrated in a 'more-politically-correct-than-thou' article on Jamaican homophobia, entitled 'Their homophobia is our fault' by Decca Aitkenhead. She said that Jamaican homophobia was the result of 400 years of Jamaican men being sodomised by their white slave owners, and rather than Western campaigners urging Jamaicans to stop murdering gays, she wrote:

A better emotion would be culpability. Every ingredient of Jamaica's homophobia implicates Britain, whose role has maintained the conditions conducive to homophobia, from slavery through to the debt that makes education unaffordable. For us to vilify Jamaicans for an attitude of which we were the architects is shameful. To do so in the name of liberal values is meaningless.³

Getting Western white liberals to self-flagellate offers an easy way out of the PC conundrum of whether it is acceptable to tell poor black Jamaicans to stop murdering homosexuals. But Rob Berkeley, of the UK's Black Gay Men's Advisory Group, replied:

Today's Jamaicans are responsible for today's anti-gay abuses. They are, like everyone else, capable of rational thought and

THE HALLMARKS OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

ethical choices. Those who are homophobic are not compelled by history or poverty to be anti-gay. To suggest that the people of Jamaica cannot change laws and values inherited from the British colonial era is to infantilise them.⁴

Psychologising Arguments

Instead of addressing the explicit content of an argument, the politically correct attack what they see as the hidden psychology behind the argument: their opponents are not just wrong but bad. Accusing someone of hidden and malign motives avoids the often intellectually and emotionally difficult task of engaging with their actual arguments, and allows the politically correct to remain protected in their castle on the moral high ground.

If a white opposes affirmative action for blacks, they are assumed to be driven by racism even though many blacks also oppose affirmative action (one of the difficult truths for the politically correct). If a man argues that differences in pay between men and women are an inevitable consequence of different lifestyle choices and different legal entitlements to retirement and parental leave, he is automatically assumed to be driven by sexism.

Those who said it was counterproductive to give money to street beggars were simply reviled as mean spirited and selfish, until many homeless charities came out in agreement. Someone who argues that some forms of limited whaling can be justified on conservation and animal welfare grounds is considered anti-nature. Someone who claims that prison works is assumed to be cold-hearted, unable to comprehend the difficult lives of criminals.

Ad Hominem Attacks

The inevitable consequence of psychologising arguments is *ad hominen* attacks, attacking the arguer rather than the argument. Those who question the politically correct shibboleths are deemed a viable target for any personal

abuse in either public or private. Those who critique politically correct nostrums are often denounced as extreme.

The need to be protected against *ad hominem* attacks means that only women can attack feminism, only Muslims can attack Islamic fundamentalism, and only those with a proved commitment to the treating the sick-poor can criticise the NHS.

Guilt by Association: the Personal Form

Just as in Senator Joe McCarthy's excessive hunts for communists, or the Soviet Union's attempts to root out dissidents, the politically correct have a tendency to assume guilt by association. If someone is deemed guilty of a thought crime, then anyone linked to them is often also considered guilty. This guilt by association argument has a very powerful effect in isolating those who break politically correct taboos because even closet sympathisers don't want to be publicly associated with them.

Guilt by Association: the Intellectual Form

The politically correct have a tendency to oppose arguments not on their own merits, but on the grounds that they have been associated with other arguments or people which are taboo. 'That's what the National Front said' is often used to dismiss the argument that immigration can have an impact on the labour market opportunity and wages of some native workers, even though many of the world's top labour and immigration economists have produced much econometric evidence that supports the claim. The truth or otherwise of arguments doesn't depend on who supports them, nor on what arguments they have been linked with in the past. It makes as much sense as telling vegetarian conservationists to change their ways on the grounds that Hitler was a vegetarian who loved nature.

Preference for the Personal rather than Abstract

Being based primarily on emotion rather than reason, the politically correct prefer the personal in an argument rather than the abstract. This is not just making arguments personal by using *ad hominem* attacks, but telling personal stories, particularly hard luck cases. These personal stories, which work well for TV, may shed light on a general issue, but often they don't. Concentrating on the horrors faced by a starving African child will induce a sense of guilt in Western readers, but it gives no clue to whether the child is starving because of corrupt governments and lack of rule of law, or because the West is not giving enough aid.

Powerful Victimhood

Political correctness grants a special status to those whom it deems the victims of the established power structures in society, or those who claim they are. A victim of domestic violence is deemed to be an automatic expert on it, even though someone who walks out of an abusive relationship before violence occurs is probably more worth listening to. One consequence of the power of victimhood in the US is the new phenomenon of race attack hoaxes, whereby people fabricate racist attacks against themselves (see chapter 4).

Promoting Group Identities

Classifying someone as a victim or oppressor before considering the rights or wrongs of an argument is much easier if you divide humanity up into groups of victims, identified and united by their victimhood: blacks, Muslims, gays, women, disabled. Classifying humanity into group identities almost automates the PC thought process: Woman = victim = right; man = oppressor = wrong.

It is only one step further from attributing group identities to giving people rights on the basis of those

group identities (so long, of course, as they are victim groups). If you are black or Asian, you may have a right to affirmative action to help you enter higher education or desirable careers. But such group identities can be inherently unjust—middle-class Asians can be born with far more advantages in life than working-class whites. Judging people by the group they belong to rather than who they are also just replicates the prejudice that the PC fight: it is the basis of discrimination and racism.

The politically correct have become so obsessed with defining people by their group identity that they require everyone to classify what group they belong to, and for the institutions they attend to classify them. As part of the inexorable logic of PC, students, patients and employees are now pigeonholed into categories such as black, white, or Asian. Police forces have even been required to ask recruits whether they are homosexual or not—a gross intrusion into their private life—so they know what group box to tick.

Judging people by the group they belong to makes them more likely to be seen as little more than products of that group, and less likely to be seen as individuals, responsible for their own destiny. It is, ultimately, not just patronising, but dehumanising and counterproductive. It is the vulnerable who refuse to be pigeonholed who escape their vulnerability.

Double Standards

If all powerful people were malign and all vulnerable people benign, there would be no conflict between reason and political correctness, between supporting what is right and supporting those who are weak. But they are not, and there is. That conflict between reason and political correctness often leads to extraordinary double standards.

There are countless groups, associations and publications based on ethnicity which would be unacceptable

THE HALLMARKS OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

if they were working for whites. For example, the Society of Asian Lawyers actively promotes the career opportunities of lawyers solely on the basis of their Asian ethnicity, while Tower Hamlets recently opened an 'Asian only' housing development.

Men are (still) openly legally discriminated against in terms of retirement rights in a way that would be utterly unacceptable if it applied to women, despite the fact that men live shorter lives and thus would be expected to retire earlier.

Although European enslavement of Africans is endlessly commented on, the Islamic world's enslavement of Africans (and to a lesser extent Europeans) is rarely discussed, even though it has occurred on a similar scale (less intensively but over a longer period) and is still ongoing. From a slave's point of view, who enslaves them is less important than the fact that they are enslaved; the West's refusal to confront contemporary Islamic slavery is a reflection of the inability of PC thinking to engage a non-PC reality.

As Peter Tatchell, a man of such uncompromising principles that he has infuriated many on the relativist left, said about Ken Livingstone's open embrace of the homophobic, misogynist, terrorism-supporting Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi:

Livingstone argues that he welcomed the cleric because he is a major religious leader. Would he greet a Christian fundamentalist who advocated, as al-Qaradawi does, the creation of a theocratic state where democracy and individual liberty would be erased, where gay sex would be punishable by death, where wife-beating would be permitted and where free speech, trade unions and the right to protest would be crushed?⁵

Left-wing activists have campaigned hard and passionately against the Israel's occupation of the West Bank, while being almost totally silent on the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, and pretty mute on the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The double standards, and targeting just of Israel, is

not because Israel is worse than the others, but because PC calculus has trouble condemning Arab and Chinese dictatorships and finds it easy to condemn democracies.

The double standards of PC have ensured that communist dictators, such as Stalin, are treated far more leniently than fascist ones such as Hitler. This is not explicable by the number of deaths they caused: in the twentieth century, communism (in the Soviet Union, China and South East Asia) was responsible for far more deaths than fascism.

Extremism

The elimination of critical opposition means that PC is often taken to extremes. Sometimes this is an insistence on 'zero tolerance', but sometimes goes beyond. Isolated from any tempering voices of reason, the politically correct in local authorities and academia can take their views to extremes that to outsiders are simply ludicrous. The canteen of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies upbraided one German student for asking for white coffee because it could be construed as racist: she was told to ask for coffee with milk.

Taking Offence

The intolerant, sanctimonious moral superiority that sustains the beliefs of the politically correct means that they are easily offended by the views of others. There are few as intolerant as those who preach tolerance. In contrast, if your beliefs are upheld by reason and empiricism, then opposing views don't offend you, they intrigue you.

Lack of Sense of Humour

With its *ad hominem* attacks, psychologising, zero tolerance, extremism and preference for censorship, political correctness is well protected from most forms of intellectual assault. But none of them work against humorous satire, the soft underbelly of political

THE HALLMARKS OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

correctness. The politically correct can resist jokes at their expense by stamping their foot and saying ‘it’s not funny’, but satire can be far more potent.

In the United States, conservative students found that the only way to attack affirmative action—whereby students are admitted to university on the basis of skin colour, as under apartheid—was to satirise it. Copying affirmative action programmes that automatically give lower entrance thresholds for members of ethnic minorities or women, conservative students set up stalls selling cookies for \$1 to men, 50 cents to women, and 25 cents to African Americans.

Fox News reported:

Through Affirmative Action Bake Sales, conservative groups on campuses across America are satirically and peacefully spotlighting the injustice of Affirmative Action programs that penalize or benefit students based solely on gender and race.

The sales are intended to spark discussion, not profits. They are in the same genre as guerrilla theatre—an effective counterculture tactic usually associated with the Left—through which societal assumptions are challenged by acting out scenarios. To the amazed query, ‘Are you allowed to do this?’ one cookie rebel responded, ‘Admissions officers do it every day’. By shifting the context from university policy to baked goods, the assumptions of affirmative action policies are not only challenged as sexist and racist but also revealed as nonsense.

The cookie rebels are doing the one thing political correctness cannot bear: revealing its absurdity and laughing in its face. They are not merely speaking truth to power; they are chuckling at it.

To regain the moral indignation they prize so highly, the politically correct must demonize the sale of baked goods. Thus, at Indiana University one student filed an official complaint saying that the cookie sale would ‘create a climate of hostility against students of color and women and can easily turn violent’. (The fact that those students were the ones given a price break didn’t seem to occur to the irony-starved critic who equated a buyer’s discount with a threat of violence.)

The College Republicans at the University of Washington sponsored an affirmative action bake sale on 7 October. CR

THE RETREAT OF REASON

President Jason Chambers reported: ‘Approximately 150 students were gathered around our booth discussing the issue [AA] by about 12:30 when our booth was attacked by leftist students who disagreed with our stance on affirmative action.’ The Leftists threw cookies to the ground, tore down the display and physically attacked one vendor.

The University of Washington is not alone.

- The University of California-Irvine shut down its bake sale as discriminatory.
- Northwestern University ordered students to cease selling cookies or face the police.
- Southern Methodist University closed the bake sale after 45 minutes because it created an ‘unsafe’ environment.
- William and Mary officials—claiming to be ‘shocked and appalled’—also cut off the cookies.

Clearly, universities don’t like the affirmative action bake sales. One reason: The sales, like that at Indiana University, often feature petitions ‘to ban the collection of racial data, particularly in the admissions and hiring processes’.

But most of all, the politically correct do not like being publicly mocked and revealed as ridiculous.