

AGM and Annual Conference Saturday 30 May 2020

Royal Air Force Club, 128 Piccadilly, London W1
10.30am to 4.45pm Admission free

Guest speakers

Professor David Paton

Does mandatory sex education cut teenage pregnancies?

Robin Aitken

Turning the tide: How to get a hearing from a hostile media



David Paton is Professor of Industrial Economics and Associate Dean for Faculty and Resources at Nottingham University Business School. The economics of teenage pregnancy is one of his research interests and he has had articles on the subject published in several peer-reviewed journals including the *Journal of Health Economics, Social Science and Medicine, Demography* and *Education and Health*. He will evaluate the evidence for the impact of mandatory sex education on teenage pregnancy rates.



Robin Aitken is a former BBC reporter and journalist who spent 25 years working across all levels within the Corporation, from local radio to the Radio 4 *Today* programme. He is the author of *The Noble Liar: How and Why the BBC Distorts the News to Promote a Liberal Agenda* (see review on p.5 of this bulletin). In 2014 he was awarded the MBE for his work with the Oxford Foodbank which he co-founded in 2009.

Two-course lunches in the RAF Club's Presidents Room are available at the subsidised cost of £29.50. To reserve a lunch, please send a cheque for £29.50 made payable to 'Family Education Trust', to reach us before Wednesday 20 May 2020.

For further information and/or to book a place, please email Piers Shepherd at piers@familyeducation.plus.com or call the office on 01784 242340. Please let us know if you are planning to attend.

Divorce Bill – a ‘deceptively simple piece of legislation’ that exalts individual choice above commitment, self-giving and sacrifice

The government's proposal to reduce divorce to a statement by either party that the marriage has irretrievably broken down is a 'deceptively simple piece of legislation [which] actually creates more difficulties than it resolves', according to the Bishop of Carlisle, James Newcome.

Speaking in the House of Lords during the second reading debate on the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill, Bishop Newcome expressed concern that marriage was being treated as a mere 'social arrangement between two adults' or 'a contract that can be ended at will'. The government seemed to have lost sight of the fact that marriage involves solemn binding vows. '[T]he Bill promotes individual choice over and at the expense of the sort of commitment, self-giving and sacrifice that lie at the heart of the marriage covenant,' the bishop added.

Alarm

Lord McColl of Dulwich similarly expressed alarm at the ease with which divorce proceedings could be unilaterally initiated under the legislative proposals:

'If one person wants out, all they would need to do under the Bill is assert that the relationship has broken down, irrespective of whether it has, beyond the fact that he or she has asserted the statement and started divorce proceedings.'

He argued that 'there are two elements in the current law that seek to reflect the serious nature of the marriage commitment':

'The first is the fact that this serious commitment cannot be swept away without an equally serious development that merits it, the raising of which necessitates the attribution of fault.'

'The second is that, having made this commitment, one cannot simply walk away. The serious nature of the commitment is reflected in the fact that terminating the marriage commitment takes time.'

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Wise words from the House of Lords



The Bishop of Carlisle, James Newcome

‘Marriage, as we all know, is not just a social arrangement between two adults or even a contract that can be ended at will. It involves solemn binding vows and has for centuries been a significant building block for social cohesion. Its benefits are generally recognised, not least for the upbringing of any children resulting from

the marriage. While in certain circumstances divorce may well be the least-worst option for some couples, the Bill promotes individual choice over and at the expense of the sort of commitment, self-giving and sacrifice that lie at the heart of the marriage covenant.

‘Reducing divorce to a statement made by one party that the marriage has broken down undermines the seriousness with which marriage and divorce are regarded and has the unfortunate effect of shifting any power in the process away from the respondent to the person initiating the divorce...’

‘As for the children, it will further threaten the stability that marriage is meant to provide and contribute still further to the growing incidence of mental health issues among our young people. Divorce is far more than just a temporary crisis; it has long-term effects.’



Baroness Howe of Idlicote

‘In the past, the seriousness of the marriage commitment meant that marriage could not be exited at will but only if circumstances demonstrated that the commitment had been broken. There were consequently some external constraints. Under this Bill, however, marriages are released from these constraints, such that if either party wishes to exit the relationship, they can do so simply by starting divorce proceedings, stating that the relationship has irretrievably broken down. No evidence is required to back up this assertion, so while the statement may, on some occasions, mean that the relationship has indeed irretrievably broken down, on other occasions, it may be nothing more than a euphemism for “I do not like being married to you any more.”’

‘[I]t is hard to see how making marriage a relationship that one can exit unilaterally, simply by saying that you want out, will not undermine the ability of marriage to bring stability to the lives of children.’



Baroness Eaton

‘Under the proposed law there is no requirement to prove irretrievable breakdown. It can be a legal fiction asserted by one party who is simply bored of the marriage...’

‘Anyone in a marriage is a potential respondent and thus, if the Bill becomes law, it will inevitably heighten the sense of insecurity in marriage...’

‘[I]t is hard to see how making marriage a relationship that one can exit unilaterally, simply by saying that you want out, will not undermine the ability of marriage to bring stability to the lives of children.’

Divorce Bill – a ‘deceptively simple piece of legislation’

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But under the government’s plans, Lord McColl pointed out, it would be quicker to exit the lifelong commitment of marriage than to terminate a typical mobile phone contract.

Cheapening marriage

Introducing the Bill, the government Justice spokesman Lord Keen of Elie had stated that the purpose of the Bill was to reduce unnecessary conflict from the legal process of divorce. He argued that the current law makes the legal process of divorce unnecessarily antagonistic by ‘incentivising the attribution of fault’.

However, former Conservative Party treasurer, Lord Farmer objected that the government’s plan to remove fault from divorce legislation ‘sends a very strong signal that marriage can be unilaterally exited with no available recourse for the party who has been left’. He expressed concern that the proposed reforms would cheapen marriage and lower its status:

‘Some argue that it will strengthen marriage because the barrier to entry is lower if parties know they can exit cleanly. That suggests that in reality, people are making a much more contingent and shaky commitment, so why go to the bother of getting married at all?’

Fewer marriages, Lord Farmer added, did not bode well for family stability and the consequences would be far-reaching:

‘Less marriage will tend to mean more cohabitation, an inherently less stable relationship form. The whole of society is affected when the contract of marriage becomes devoid of meaning.’

As a result of the devaluation of marriage, not only would fewer people be disposed to marry in the first place, but those who did still choose to marry would be more inclined to seek a divorce if the going got tough. The DUP peer, Lord Morrow warned:

‘My concern is that this Bill, in making divorce more accessible, is likely to elicit a greater readiness to turn to divorce and will thereby foster a lower dissatisfaction threshold within marriage when previously couples would have exhibited a greater willingness to stay and fight for their marriage.’

Unilateral, no-reason divorce

During the course of three-hour debate, several peers observed that the majority of respondents to the government’s public consultation on reform of the legal requirements for divorce did not support the proposed reforms:

- 80 per cent did not agree with the proposal to introduce a simple notification process in place of the current requirement to give evidence of one or more of ‘five facts’ to establish the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage; and
- 83 per cent supported the right of a married partner to contest a divorce.

The Bishop of Carlisle commented: ‘People realise that when there is no longer any need to demonstrate irretrievable breakdown, and when there is no longer any possibility of contesting the alleged breakdown, we will in effect be introducing unilateral, no-reason divorce.’

● **Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill, Second Reading debate, House of Lords, 5 February 2020.**

The Fastest Divorce Law in the World?

The government's proposals for divorce law reform have been described as 'very fast and very unfair' for recipients of a divorce petition by a leading family lawyer.

David Hodson, a partner and co-founder of the International Family Law Group (IFLG) and a longtime supporter of no-fault divorce, has warned that the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill 'puts all the cards into the hands of the petitioner', leading to 'probably the fastest divorce anywhere in the world' as far as the other party to a marriage is concerned.

The Bill makes provision for divorce after a 26-week period from beginning to end, consisting of 20 weeks between filing papers and granting a *decree nisi*, followed by a further six weeks before the decree absolute is granted.

The purpose of the 20-week period prior to the granting of a *decree nisi* is to allow time for meaningful reflection and an opportunity to turn back, but for most of this period the other party may be blissfully unaware of the intentions of his or her spouse.

Blissful ignorance

In an article published by IFLG, David Hodson explains:

'It is the petitioner who decides when to commence the proceedings. It is the petitioner who files the papers at the court, very probably online. Perhaps even hastily after a marital bust up because of the ease of online filing, and there is some evidence that this is already occurring.'

'At that point of filing at court, the 20 week starts to run. It is then the petitioner who decides when to serve the respondent, specifically whether at the outset or towards the end of the 20-week period.'

In other words, a husband or wife may be blissfully ignorant of the fact that his or her spouse has set the wheels in motion to bring the marriage to an end until little more than six weeks before the divorce is finalised. Mr Hodson spells out the consequences for the spouse who is being divorced without his or her knowledge:

'The respondent may have just over six weeks' notice from receipt, service, to

the date of the final divorce decree. It will leave the recipient with almost no time to come to terms with the divorce or take protective financial steps. This inherent unfairness and haste could set the tone for what follows for the couple; an impact on co-parenting, terms of separation and accommodation and financial support.'

Unpleasantness

David Hodson notes the irony that in seeking to remove the 'unpleasantness' of allocating the blame of fault, the government is introducing another form of unpleasantness in enabling the petitioner to determine the timeframe in which his or her spouse will be told. He argues that greater attention must be paid to the impact of no-fault divorce on respondents and safeguards need to be put in place to protect their interests:

'She or he may not know of the unhappiness of the other spouse. She or he may not know of the affair prompting the spouse to seek a divorce. She or he may have a genuine belief in the possibility of the marriage continuing with the benefit of marital counselling. She or he may want to delay the divorce for the sake of the children including a key stage in their education. She or he may lose out badly in the financial consequences if the final decree precedes the final financial order. These aspects are all stacked against a respondent in a no-fault system. Yet they cannot delay or stop the no-fault divorce. That is why there must be protections and safeguards.'

• David Hodson, *The Fastest Divorce Law in the World? International Family Law Group, January 2020.*
<http://www.iflg.uk.com/printpdf/1228>

A voice for the voiceless in Parliament

*Under section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, the Westminster Parliament has decriminalised abortion in Northern Ireland. In her maiden speech in Parliament, **Carla Lockhart**, the newly-elected MP for Upper Bann, spoke powerfully on behalf of the unborn.*



'I feel it is imperative that I speak on this to attempt again to highlight the anger, disappointment and frustration concerning the change in abortion laws that have been foisted upon the people of Northern Ireland. These changes came in the most roughshod way, with complete contempt for the devolved Administration and the views of the people of Northern Ireland...'

'Abortion was and should be a devolved matter, yet this House has imposed on Northern Ireland the most extreme measures of abortion anywhere across Europe.'

'Northern Ireland has been a country that has always supported life-affirming laws. Back in 1967, our politicians said no to the Abortion Act, and according to research conducted by Both Lives Matter, 100,000 more people are alive today. England and Wales back then did support the Act, and as a result over 8 million babies have been aborted—three every minute, 23 every hour or 561 every day, with only a small percentage of them being aborted on the grounds of sexual crime or fatal foetal abnormality...'

'In Northern Ireland, abortion on request for any reason will be legalised to the point at which a baby is "capable of being born alive".'

'This includes on the grounds of disability. I implore my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Minister to accede to the request to have section 9 repealed as part of the ongoing negotiations...'

'I want a society in Northern Ireland that values life, and I want to see services that will help women choose life... Help us create a culture of choosing life, as opposed to killing an innocent little baby that does not have the voice to say, "No, mummy!" It is incomprehensible that the Government, knowing that abortion was a devolved matter, have published consultation proposals to introduce changes that go far beyond what has actually been required by Parliament. If the Government want to maintain any commitment to devolution, I would implore them to rethink their coach-and-horses approach to a life-and-death piece of legislation.'

• HC Hansard, 8 January 2020, cols 565-566.

DfE encourages LGBT-inclusive teaching in schools

From September 2020 Relationships Education will become compulsory in all primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in all secondary schools in England. In preparation, the Department for Education (DfE) is currently working closely with over 1,600 schools which have introduced the new subjects on a voluntary basis during the current academic year.

According to the Schools Minister Nick Gibb, this engagement with early adopter schools will assist the DfE in the development of its programme of online support for the new subjects which will 'offer opportunities for teachers to improve subject knowledge, build confidence and share best practice' and include 'innovative materials to support staff training'.¹

LGBT-inclusive

Asked whether the training provided for schools would be fully LGBT-inclusive, Mr Gibb responded:

'The online training modules will also support teachers in developing inclusive teaching, including LGBT-inclusive approaches. The Department is working with a wide range of schools, teachers and expert organisations, including Stonewall, the NSPCC and teaching unions, to develop this support...

*'The Department will ensure that the central programme and materials supporting implementation of the new subjects are inclusive. We recognise fully the need to disseminate the good practice in teaching about LGBT relationships that is seen in large numbers of our schools.'*²

Flexibility and discretion

The statutory guidance to which schools must have regard when teaching Relationships Education and RSE allows for flexibility in the delivery of the subjects and requires consultation with parents. It states:

*'Schools will retain freedom to determine an age-appropriate, developmental curriculum which meets the needs of young people, [and] is developed in consultation with parents and the local community.'*³

Ministers have repeatedly stated that while secondary schools are expected to teach LGBT content, primary schools have discretion and are 'encouraged and enabled' to teach it if they regard it as age-appropriate.⁴

Right of withdrawal in Wales

Meanwhile in Wales, the Welsh Government has confirmed that parents will no longer have a right to withdraw their children from either Relationships and Sexuality Education or Religious Education classes when the new curriculum is introduced in 2022.⁵ The decision has been made in spite of strong opposition to the right of withdrawal in response to two public consultations during 2019. As many as 89 per cent of respondents to the first consultation supported retaining the right of withdrawal.

The second consultation did not ask respondents whether or not they supported removing the right of withdrawal. Instead it asked, 'What implications would there be for learners, parents/carers and schools if all learners were required to receive RE and/or RSE lessons in the new curriculum?' Even so, 60 per cent of respondents answered the

question negatively and a further 21 per cent expressed a mixture of positive and negative implications. Only 19 per cent were positive about the proposal.⁶

Notes

1. HC, Written Question 3204, answered on 22 January 2020.
2. HC, Written Question 12290, answered on 10 February 2020.
3. DfE, *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers*, 2019, para 114.
4. For example, Written Questions 223981 answered on 1 March 2019 and 236526 answered on 28 March 2019.
5. Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education, Written Statement: Ensuring Access to the Full Curriculum, 21 January 2020.
6. *Ensuring access to the full curriculum, Consultation Analysis*, January 2020.

No plans to impose smacking ban in England, say ministers

The government has confirmed that it has no plans to bring forward legislative proposals to ban the use of physical chastisement of children in the home in England. In response to a parliamentary question raised by the Labour MP for Croydon North, Steve Reed, the Minister for Children and Families, Michele Donelan stated:

*'The government does not wish to interfere in how loving families bring up their children. Legislation already exists to ban the beating of children by their parents; the defence of reasonable chastisement can only be used when a parent is accused of assault and not when the charge is actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm or child cruelty.'*¹

Smacking bans in Scotland and Wales

The reaffirmation of the longstanding policy of successive governments at Westminster comes shortly after both the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly voted to criminalise smacking in Scotland and Wales respectively. The prohibition of all forms of physical chastisement in Scotland is due to come into effect in November 2020, while it is expected that the legislative change in Wales will not take effect until 2022.

Immediately prior to the final vote in the Welsh Assembly, eight experts in the fields of sociology, criminology and child psychology wrote to the *Western Mail* arguing that 'using the criminal law as a blunt instrument to prohibit reasonable discipline is a dangerous experiment'. They warned that if the defence of reasonable punishment were removed:

*'ordinary mums and dads could be investigated by the police, cautioned, and even convicted of a criminal offence for using the kind of light physical discipline that many of us experienced, or have used with our own children in the past. A criminal conviction could affect a parent's employment and, by extension, the stability of the family home – putting the welfare of children at risk.'*²

According to the Welsh Government's Regulatory Impact Assessment, the estimated cost of implementing the legislation will amount to between £6.1m and £7.8m, with the cost of awareness-raising alone costing up to £2.7m spread over seven years.

Jamie Gillies of the Be Reasonable campaign commented:

'The money set aside for a smacking ban is enough to fund hundreds of police officers, teachers or nurses, or millions of free school meals. Instead, the government is determined to legislate for an unnecessary law which will affect families, communities and vital services for years to come.'

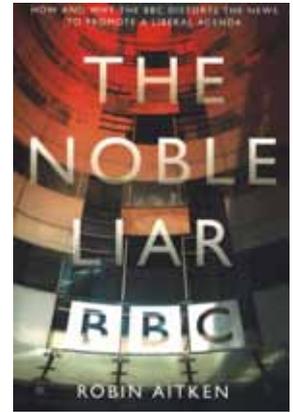
Notes

1. HC Written Question 12407, answered 10 February 2020.
2. *Western Mail*, 22 January 2020.

The Noble Liar: How and Why the BBC Distorts the News to Promote a Liberal Agenda

Robin Aitken, Biteback Publishing, 2018, pb, 288pp, £12.99, ISBN 978-1-785-90349-6

The purpose of this penetrating critique of the BBC is to examine ‘why there is such a gulf between the world as the media presents it, and the world as most ordinary people experience it’ (p.10). Robin Aitken writes out of 25 years’ experience of working for the Corporation as a reporter and journalist at all levels from local radio to the Radio 4 flagship *Today* programme, and sets out to explain how the BBC has become so hostile to social conservatism and become an unthinking champion of liberal values.



The title of the book is derived from a concept found in Plato’s *Republic*, where a ‘noble lie’ is ‘a myth or an untruth, knowingly propagated by an elite, in order to promote and maintain social harmony or advance an agenda’. Aitken writes: ‘It is the contention of this book that the BBC, along with its media and establishment allies, has become the vehicle for the propagation of a series of noble lies in pursuit of a political agenda.’ (p.13)

Profoundly political

He observes that, ‘There is no other organisation, in any sphere of national life, ...which touches so many of us so directly and as often as the BBC.’ (p.22) He describes it as ‘a profoundly political organisation’ (p.29), which enjoys the huge advantage of financial stability afforded by the licence fee. It has employed its unrivalled position to mock, marginalise and ignore the concerns of social conservatives. In so doing, it has exerted a profound influence on other British broadcasters, such that there is no national broadcaster in Britain which champions a conservative social agenda.

During the 1950s, broadcasts were carefully scrutinised for any hint of impropriety, but in the 1960s, a younger generation began to push the boundaries. The BBC failed to resist the spirit of the age and ‘began to embrace a sharper, edgier type of programme’ (p.51).

While BBC journalists strive to be impartial, it is inevitable that underlying convictions and presuppositions will colour the everyday editorial decisions of programme makers. It is not without significance that the Corporation’s staff are overwhelmingly drawn from a ‘meritocratic elite’ marked by ‘a set of assumptions and values that turns out identikit opinions’ (p.91).

Agent for change

Aitken illustrates his contention that the BBC judges issues according to its own priorities and prejudices with reference to its output on a range of topics, including: abortion, euthanasia, divorce, religion, pornography, Brexit, race, immigration,

transgenderism and multiculturalism. In serving as an agent for change, agitating for a new morality, the BBC has invariably depicted socially conservative arguments as callous, reactionary and dogmatic: ‘The favoured tactic of the modern-day pharisees is to disparage their opponents rather than engaging with their argument.’ (p.208)

While it is rare for the BBC to get its facts wrong, it is not exempt from the charge of fake news. ‘A report can be accurate and still deeply unfair, whether by selection or omission. “Fake news” is not so much about factual inaccuracy as about ideological bias; there are “alternative truths” depending on the standpoint of the individual.’ (p.251) On some topics, debate has been well-nigh shut down altogether:

‘The media – and the BBC in particular – has no interest in promoting [a debate on divorce and family breakdown] because it offends against all its core beliefs about how society should operate. It would offend libertarians who object to anything which can be labelled “judgmental”...and it would enrage feminists who would see it as an assault upon the sacred prerogatives of “empowered” women to do exactly as they please. For, as long as these considerations remain the guiding principles of our culture, the needs of our children will be secondary to our determination to live as we please.’ (pp.259-260)

Aitken argues that feminist philosophy is so closely woven into the BBC’s view of

the world that it neither encourages nor allows any serious challenge to feminist theorising.

‘No challenge is ever made to radical feminism’s central charge that women are oppressed by an oppressive patriarchy... [T]he starting point of any BBC discussion on issues involving women is that females have been, and still are, treated unfairly by a society weighted in favour of males.’ (pp.269-270)

Hopeful note

The Noble Liar is a sobering read, but ends on a hopeful note that ‘the old beliefs’ may yet ‘triumph again over the arid fictions of our current noble lie’ (p.282). The BBC, together with the rest of the mainstream media, has sought to fill an ideological vacuum with an ‘incoherent philosophy’ that runs counter to human nature and is doomed to fail (p.276).

‘The liberal hegemony,’ Aitken writes, ‘has created an unhappy society which doesn’t really know what it believes in’ and it will not last (p.282). The bullying tactics of bigoted liberals who have mastered the techniques of media shaming will not succeed in silencing the majority indefinitely: ‘Social engineering pursued in the name of dangerous and half-baked theories will, at some point, create a backlash.’ (p.191)

● **Robin Aitken is due to be speaking at our annual conference on Saturday 30 May – see details on front page.**

The sexual revolution and the vulnerability of women

‘The sexual revolution reduced the number of men who could be counted on to serve as protectors... Broken homes put father figures at arm’s length, at times severing that parental bond for good. The ethos of recreational sex blurred the line between protector and predator, making it harder for many women to tell the difference. Simultaneously, the decline of the family has reduced the number of men offering affection and companionship of a non-sexual nature – fewer brothers, cousins, uncles, and others who could once have been counted on. Also simultaneously, the overabundance of available sexual partners has made it harder to get the attention of any one of them...

‘[W]omen, for all their empowerment on other fronts, are also now more vulnerable than before, thanks to the changes wrought by the very revolution that feminism embraces... Many women are now exactly what feminist identitarians say they are: victims – only not in the way that feminism understands.’

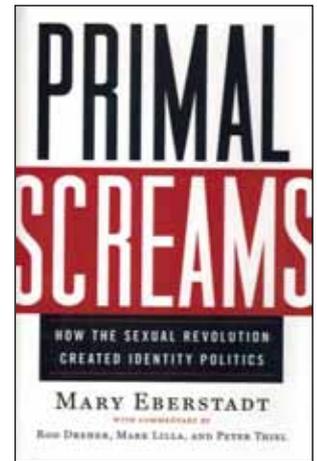
● **Mary Eberstadt, *Primal Screams*, pp.74-76.** (See review overleaf.)

Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics

Mary Eberstadt, Templeton Press, 2019, hb, x+179pp, US\$24.95, ISBN 978-1-59947-411-3

The precise origin of the term ‘identity politics’ is uncertain, but there is general agreement that it has been in use for at least 50 years, though it has only come to the fore in more recent times. Various definitions, Douglas Murray has helpfully described the effect of identity politics in the following terms:

*‘It atomizes society into different interest groups according to sex (or gender), race, sexual preference and more. It presumes that such characteristics are the main, or only, relevant attributes of their holders and that they bring with them some added bonus. For example (as the American writer Coleman Hughes has put it), the assumption that there is “a heightened moral knowledge” that comes from being black or female or gay. It is the cause of the propensity of people to start questions or statements with “Speaking as a...”’.*¹



‘The Great Scattering’

In *Primal Screams*, Mary Eberstadt, a Senior Research Fellow at the Faith and Reason Institute in Washington DC, takes as her starting point the hypothesis that ‘the modern clamour over identity cannot be understood without grasping the massive, radical and largely unacknowledged communal dislocations’ (p.9) in the West since the 1960s. The unprecedented degree of familial dispersion witnessed over the past six decades is dubbed ‘the Great Scattering’ and attributed to the sexual revolution.

Dr Eberstadt argues that the de-stigmatisation of nonmarital sex and the sharp rise in behaviours that were previously rare and/or stigmatised have brought destruction on humanity. In making this assertion she stresses that she is not concerned with the choices that individuals make about how to lead their lives, but rather with the collective environmental impact of millions of such choices taken over the course of many years.

As a result of the sexual revolution, increasingly people no longer define themselves and their purpose with reference to their immediate family, extended family or real-life larger communities. Radical individualism is marked by an unparalleled atomisation and estrangement from family members. Eberstadt represents the current clamour over identity as an authentic ‘scream’ for answers to questions of belonging – hence the title of the book. Her primary argument is that such unrest did not spring from nowhere, but is the product of family liquidation.

The familial dimension

In asking what the current non-stop obsession with identity is telling us about ourselves, Dr Eberstadt is careful to emphasise that post-1960 levels of fatherlessness, divorce, shrinking families and abortion are not the only phenomena propelling identity politics, and acknowledges that real crimes and injustices have been committed against sexual, racial and other minorities. However, she maintains that: ‘The fact that racism and sexism exist does not make the crackup of the Western family any less inte-

gral to the post-1960s human story.’ (p.15)

The opening chapter of *Primal Screams* offers an overview of the debate surrounding identity politics to date. Various attempts have been made to identify the root cause(s) of identity politics, but in this book Mary Eberstadt focuses on the familial dimension which has hitherto been largely overlooked by social commentators.

In Chapter 2, Dr Eberstadt advances ‘A New Theory: The Great Scattering’. Prior to the middle of the twentieth century, most children and young people grew up with the general expectation that they would marry and have a family, and that their immediate and extended family would remain their primary community. However, ‘the post-1960s order of sexual consumerism has upended every one of these expectations’ (p.38). Erotic leanings and ethnic claims have now become substitute answers to the question, ‘Who am I?’

Unnaturally detached

As a result of the sexual revolution, more and more people in the West are living in an unnaturally detached way. There is a direct link between recreational sex and the loneliness of the elderly. Eberstadt writes:

‘Not only have divorce and cohabitation loosened the gravitational pull of family; simultaneously contraception and abortion have also shrunk the nucleus further. The result is a new generation of elderly, some of whom reach the end of their years not only sans teeth and sight, but sans spouse, sans children and grandchildren... [S]ubstantial numbers of older people now hail from small, broken, isolated and distant families.’ (p.55)

In Chapter 3, she observes that ‘some people, deprived of recognition in the traditional ways [i.e. within the family], will regress to a state in which their demand for recognition becomes ever more insistent and childlike,’ leading to an ‘infantilised expression and vernacular’ (p.64). This ‘chronic regression to preadolescent language and behaviour’ testifies to the ‘pre-rational origins’ of identity politics (p.69).

Chapter 4 focuses on the vulnerability of women as a result of the sexual revolution and the way in which identity politics amounts to a survival strategy within that context.

In Chapter 5 the focus moves to the way in which ‘the Great Scattering has increased pressure to gravitate away from the traditionally masculine and feminine and instead toward a more ambiguous, androgynous mean’ (p.82). Eberstadt argues that ‘the new androgyny’ which pervades Western culture is driven by the collapse of family and community. She writes of:

‘a cultural incentive system that has increased the rewards for women to behave in stereotypically male ways and reduced the social approbation for those who would persist in traditional female ways – marrying, raising a family of size, devoting time and talent to what used to be called domestic arts, volunteering, and otherwise contributing to the world apart from the paid marketplace’. (pp.84-85)

‘The collective human howl’

Finally, Chapter 6 reflects on how many women have been socialised ideologically to believe that they do not need any protection at all – from a father, husband, brother, or any other male relative. Dr Eberstadt discusses the #MeToo movement and concludes that the hysteria of identity politics is nothing more or less than ‘the collective human howl of our time, sent up by inescapably communal creatures trying desperately to identify their own’ (p.109).

As the short commentaries from Rod Dreher, Mark Lilla and Peter Thiel which form Part Two of the book indicate, not all will be convinced by Mary Eberstadt’s thesis at every point. Nevertheless, there can be no question that *Primal Screams* makes an incisive contribution to a contemporary phenomenon and highlights the far-reaching and adverse impact of the sexual revolution.

Note

1. Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds*, Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019, p.3.

The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity

Douglas Murray, Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019, hb, 288pp, £20.00, ISBN 978-1472959959

In this bold and provocative title, political commentator Douglas Murray focuses on four of the issues which, he says, form 'the basis of a whole new societal morality': sexuality, women's rights, race and the transgender debate. He writes:

'To raise the plight of women, gays, people of different racial backgrounds and those who are trans has become not just a way to demonstrate compassion but a demonstration of a form of morality. It is how to practise this new religion. To "fight" for these issues and to extol their cause has become a way of showing that you are a good person.' (p.231)

Murray asserts that to interpret the world through the lens of 'social justice', 'identity group politics' and 'intersectionalism' is 'probably the most audacious and comprehensive effort since the Cold War at creating a new ideology' (p.2). He writes of a 'liberal dogmatism' which is attempting to fill the vacuum left following the rejection of religion and a rejection of secular hopes held out by all political ideologies.

The result has been 'a great crowd derangement', with people in both public and private life 'behaving in ways that are increasingly irrational, feverish, herd-like and simply unpleasant' (p.1).

In each of the areas discussed in this book, Murray argues, 'a demonstration of virtue demands an overstating of the problem, which then causes an amplification of the problem' (p.8).

What is 'intersectionality'?

'[The originators of 'intersectionality'] simply assert that Western democracies include a range of groups (women, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities and others) who are structurally oppressed in a "matrix of oppression".

'From there what the intersectionalists urge is a political project rather than an academic discipline. The interests of one of these groups is portrayed as the interest and concern of all these groups. If they unite against the common enemy of the people at the top of the pyramid who allegedly hold the power, then something good will happen.

'To say that intersectionality has not been thought through is an understatement. Together with its other faults it has not been put to the test in any meaningful way anywhere for any meaningful length of time. It has the most tenuous basis in philosophy and has no major work of thought dedicated to it...

'[In the absence of a fully worked-out structure of thought] it would ordinarily be deemed presumptuous, not to say unwise, to try to roll out [a] concept across an entire society, including every educational institution, and every profitable place of business.'

The Madness of Crowds, p.91.

Sexuality

The book is divided into four parts – 'Gay', 'Women', 'Race' and 'Trans', with an interlude between each section. The chapter on sexuality is all the more pertinent, given that the author is openly homosexual. He contends that the accepted opinion on gay rights in the West has shifted so quickly that 'unexplored, even unexploded, issues and arguments are left behind in the wake' (p.22). Society has replaced one dogma with another:

'A straight who becomes gay has settled. A gay who becomes straight has rendered himself an object of permanent suspicion. From being strongly inclined towards straight the culture has settled with a mild inclination towards gay.' (p.23)

He considers it 'a form of absurdity' for politicians to speak of LGBT people as if they exist like a racial or religious community and asserts that 'Gay men and gay women have almost nothing in common.'

Women's rights

Following an interlude on the Marxist foundations of identity politics and intersectionality, Murray turns his attention to women's rights and highlights some of the internal contradictions and inconsistencies in feminist rhetoric. For example, it is held that 'women are in every meaningful way exactly the same as men, possessing the same traits and competencies and able to challenge them on the same turf at any time. Yet simultaneously, magically, they are better than men. Or better in specific ways.' (p.80)

He goes onto to trace the history of successive waves of feminism and refers to 'a move less intended to improve men than to neuter them, to turn any and all of their virtues around on them and turn them instead into self-doubting, self-loathing objects of pity' (p.104).

An interlude on the impact of technology highlights how the presumptions of Silicon Valley are imposed on the world via Google, Facebook and Twitter etc: 'On each of the maddening issues of our time...the Valley knows what is right and is only encouraging everybody else to catch up.' (p.111) Truth is being sacrificed in pursuit of a political goal.

Race

On race, Murray argues that we have 'gone past race-unbothered straight into race-obsessed' (p.124). Speech itself has become unimportant:

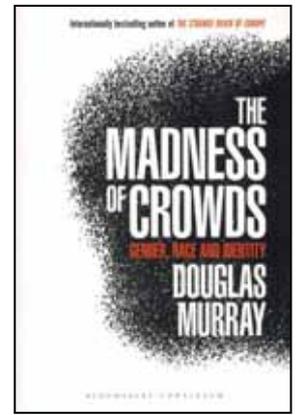
'What matters above everything is the racial and other identity of the speaker. Their identity can either condemn them or get them off... [R]ather than managing to ignore the issue of race we are going to have to spend the foreseeable future constantly focused on it, because only by concentrating on people's race can we work out who we ought to allow ourselves to listen to.' (p.162)

The chapter on race is followed by an insightful interlude on forgiveness in which Douglas Murray makes the observation that in the internet age, where allegations, mistakes and moral failures are inscribed for ever, 'we have created a world in which forgiveness has become almost impossible'. The internet will never forget.

Transgender

Murray observes that trans has become close to a dogma in record time, and discusses the intimidation tactics employed by transgender activists in an attempt to silence dissenters from the new orthodoxy. He illustrates the history of the transgender movement with personal stories and anecdotes and expresses alarm at 'the spurious certainty with which an unbelievably unclear issue is presented as though it was the clearest and best understood thing imaginable' (p.230).

If you can overlook the explicit sexual references in the chapter on women and the quotations containing expletives in the chapter on race, *The Madness of Crowds* provides a penetrating analysis of where we are as a society on four of the hot button issues of our day and how we got here. However, other than calling for the freedom to openly debate these contentious issues, 'a dose of humility to be injected' (p.232) into liberalism where certainty has prevailed, and 'an inclination towards generosity, not just among allies, but towards ostensible opponents' (p.254), Murray has little to offer in terms of providing an answer to the madness he so ably describes.



My Body is Me!

Rachel Rooney, illustrated by Jessica Ahlberg,
Transgender Trend, 2019, 24pp, £4.99, ISBN 978-1-5272-5154-0

'If you wouldn't let your kids read terrorist propaganda, don't let them read this.'

When you read such a solemn injunction, what kind of book enters your mind? Perhaps you wouldn't immediately think of a delightful rhyming picture book written for toddlers and young children. Yet that was one warning tweeted against this little 24-page full-colour children's book bearing one simple message:

*'You're born in your body. You don't have a spare.
So love it. Hug it. Treat it with care.
Bodies are great! They fit perfectly.
I am my body. My body is ... ME!'*

Beautifully illustrated by Jessica Ahlberg (daughter of Janet and Allan Ahlberg, whose books have charmed children for over 30 years), there is plenty for little ones to talk about as they follow the antics of a bunch of little characters from one page to the next.

Real-life Mums

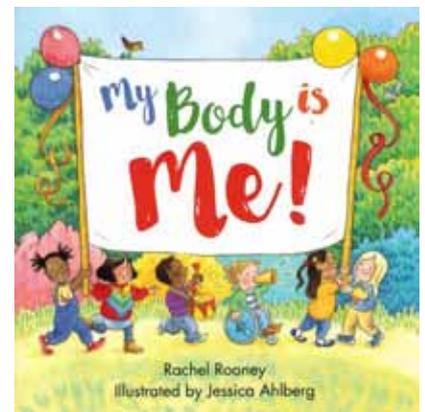
Thankfully the real-life mums on Mumsnet, who are dealing with children at carpet level from day to day know that this book will be loved by their little ones and perfectly reflects their view of themselves in spite of what some ideologues might try to tell them: 'It's genius and would have been a great book even if it wasn't so desperately needed right now.'

Hopefully these mums and many other people will ignore the advice of one of Rachel Rooney's fellow children's authors who tweeted:

'Important! Parents, teachers and librarians should be aware that the picture book My Body is Me, with its seemingly wholesome "love the body you were born with" message is published by Transgender Trend, a politically motivated trans-hostile group seeking in particular to infiltrate schools and undermine support for trans and genderinquiring children.'

This book respects children's integrity, will affirm them in their common sense view of themselves and counter the detrimental message they might be receiving that perhaps their body is not the right one for them. Hopefully many copies will find a place in homes, schools and public libraries.

• **Copies of *My Body is Me!* may be ordered from Transgender Trend at <https://www.transgendertrend.com/my-body-is-me/> from where teachers' notes, a lesson plan and accompanying worksheets may be downloaded.**



Gender identity development services for children give rise to ongoing concerns

The government has been asked what assessment it has made of reports that clinicians at the Tavistock Centre have been too quick to give children and young people gender reassignment treatment and what action it intends to take as a result. In reply, the health minister in the House of Lords responded that 'the matter is subject to an ongoing legal process' and therefore her department was 'unable to comment pending judicial ruling'.

A request in the House of Commons to 'bring forward legislative proposals to ban the prescription of hormone blocking medication to minors' received an identical response.

The questions were raised amidst mounting concerns at the increase in referrals to the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS). The number of children referred to the service has risen from 678 in 2014/15 to 2,590 in 2018/19 – an increase of 382 per cent.

The government is currently awaiting the outcome of an application for judicial review which has been made by the mother of a 15 year-old autistic daughter who suffers with gender confusion, together with a young woman who received gender reassignment treatment in her teens and subsequently detransitioned.

Meanwhile NHS England is conducting a review of puberty suppressants and cross-sex hormones and will be considering whether changes are required to existing clinical policies that underpin the use of such treatment on the NHS. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence will also be undertaking a thorough review of the latest clinical evidence to help inform the NHS working group's review.

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