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# Colloquī *: to discuss*

## **The Man in the Bubble**

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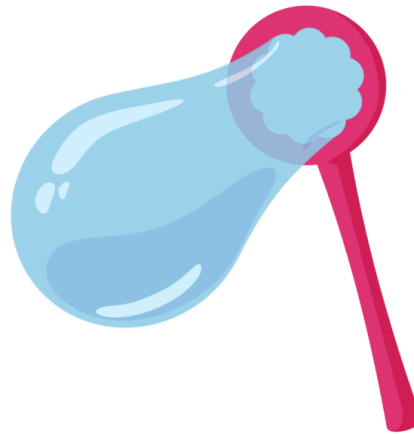
Suddenly, as if overnight—though, if that be so such suddenness has certainly overrun the darkness—there is an odd fascination with bubbles, big ones, small ones, bubbles everywhere. There are bubbles within bubbles within bubbles. Even the inestimable Bard saw that troubles come with bubbles, “Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn and caldron bubble.”<sup>1</sup> Children are fascinated blowing bubbles, thin globules of liquid—imprisoning gullible free air—that float upon the wind defying gravity. There are, of course, grownup bubbles in which defying gravity plays no part, rather, such schizophrenic opaque bubbles serve as ideological *pieds-à-terre*,<sup>2</sup> where thought, emotion, and behavior are isolated, defying reality and truth. Of course, bubbles can be much larger, a domed enclosure, large enough to create a modern media fantasy, a utopian technicolor dream, much like *The Truman Show*,<sup>3</sup> or, come to think of it, of overarching biblical proportions.<sup>4</sup>

People are captivated by bubbles, especially bubbles large enough to carry them away to Neverland where they never have to grow up, or Camelot where by law it never rains till after sundown, or any fairy tale they will to imagine, where there are forever roses without thorns and life a bed of fragrant rose petals fit for a king or queen or whatever gendered alphabet one can imagine; demigods forbid XX or XY.

## The trouble with bubbles

It matters a great deal whether inside or outside the fog the mind resides. From within looking out, the view is myopic; the mind conjures a universe dangerous, wild, uncertain, and evil; inside subjective relativity reigns, what the eyes deny, what the mind will not accept, the bubble glosses, superficial comforts camouflage prison walls with promises of earthly paradise. What is seldom recognized and even rarer acknowledged, the bubble is as

a one-way mirror—outside looking inward: surveillance and manipulation; inside looking outward: a reflection projecting faux reality. Existing in a bubble is neither life nor death, but mere questionable existence without purpose. Man’s search for meaning is short circuited: there is no God other than pompous demigods outside the bubble pulling strings and changing scenery; there is no meaning, only a dull wooden nothingness. Should one ask what gives them satisfaction, bubble residents smile and laugh, then looking broadly round, will point to things they have accumulated, the wealth they have attained, their friends, their health and “happiness,” all their marvelous baubles—and then some; for they are free to continually ask for more subsistence from their sovereign demigods. They ignore, no, they remain blissfully unaware of the strings attached that must be pulled to make them dance while demigods’ breath floats their bubbles. Free Will, a blemish to be mascaraed; Reason, a character flaw to be corrected; the Soul, a vestigial delusion to be psychoanalyzed, then exorcised from the mind. Outside the bubble nothing matters ... until it does.



“It is the true believer’s ability to ‘shut his eyes and stop his ears’ to facts that do not deserve to be either seen or heard which is the source of his unequaled fortitude and constancy. He cannot be frightened by danger nor disheartened by obstacles nor baffled by contradictions because he denies their existence. ...And it is the certitude of his infallible doctrine that renders the true believer impervious to the uncertainties, surprises and the unpleasant realities of the world around him. ...”<sup>5</sup> “It is obvi-

ous ... that in order to be effective a doctrine must not be understood, but has rather to be believed in. ...The devout are always urged to seek the absolute truth with their hearts and not their minds.”<sup>6</sup> Such describes the fanatic, yet such fanaticisms are not limited to the true believer whose “passionate attachment is the essence of his blind devotion and religiosity.”<sup>7</sup> Far too many of those with minds of moderate thoughts willingly, even unwittingly,

live quite contented lives in a bubble. How can you tell? When “confronted with facts, statistics, history, experience, ethics, faith, or what have you, it is of no consequence.” No amount of suasion will dissuade the bubbled mind. “The fanatic cannot be weaned away from his cause by an appeal to his reason or moral sense. He fears compromise and cannot be persuaded to qualify the certitude and righteousness of his holy cause. ...His passionate attachment is more vital than the quality of the cause to which he is attached. To live without an ardent dedication is to be adrift and abandoned. He sees in tolerance a sign of weakness, frivolity and ignorance. He hungers for the deep assurance which comes with total surrender—with the wholehearted clinging to a creed and a cause. What matters is not the contents of the cause but the total dedication and the communion with the congregation.”<sup>8</sup>

Nothing exemplifies the bubblecratic mind as much as the masking of America—and the world—but America more than elsewhere. “We should never fully return to our maskless society where only health care providers donned a mask, because judicious use of masks will continue to save lives.” That view was not expressed by some fringe lunatic or cultish crackpot but by two doctors at New York’s Mount Sinai School of Medicine. It would seem absurd for further mask mandates, but as we have seen recently, fauciistic public health experts now find it again the time to double down. And according to a reporter for the Guardian, many Americans like their masks just fine. Why would they say that? According to Francesca, a 46-year-old, fully vaccinated professor in New York, she will not abandon her “invisibility cloak” just yet because “it has been such a relief to feel anonymous. It’s like having a force field around me that says, ‘don’t see me.’” Sounds more like a bubble than a force field. Then there is Becca, a 25-year-old bookstore employee near Chicago, who reports that she and her co-workers “prefer not having customers see our faces,” because “with a mask, I don’t have to smile at them or worry about keeping a neutral face.” Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble. Bob, a 75-year-old, says wearing a mask “frees” him from having to “appear happy.” Aimee, a 44-year-old screenwriter likes the “emotional freedom that comes from wearing a mask: ‘It’s almost like taking away the male gaze.’” “Ostensibly, the point of wearing masks is not to furnish oneself with

an emotional crutch,” yet, even with the small sampling it is easy to come to just such a conclusion. “Seeing and showing the face is a fundamental aspect of human existence. A society that forgets this straightforward truth will likely also fail to realize that faceless people may make for compliant subjects but not generally for good citizens.” Despite the overwhelming scientific evidence to the contrary, public health “experts” continue to proselytize a rosy assessment of the effectiveness of masks. The evidence is clear, “the dubious health benefits of widespread mask-wearing come at an enormous social cost, which is almost never acknowledged by those writing and enforcing the mandates.”

When we look at our fellow human beings’ faces, we tend to process the whole face at once. Almost needless to say, a mask covering the lower two-thirds of the face greatly disrupts such processing—which is harmful to children, especially to babies. One wonders how much damage we have done to those born in 2020 by blocking our faces from them during their crucial first year of life. Stanford medical professor Jay Bhattacharya states that “the evidence is overwhelming that masking can harm children’s developmental progress.”

All of this helps to answer the blithe question so frequently posed by mask enthusiasts: what’s the big deal? It is a very big deal. Masks hide from view the familiar faces, infectious smiles, and warm glances that bring light and color to everyday life. To dismiss this loss so cavalierly is to devalue human warmth and sociability in a remarkably callous way. In his detailed study of emotions, Charles Darwin observed that human beings’ reliance on facial expressions is a key difference between us and animals. He wrote an entire book on the subject, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). Communication, according to Darwin, was “of paramount importance to the development of man.” Human communication is “much aided by the expressive movements of the face and body,” and the face is “the chief seat of expression.” Darwin adds that we immediately perceive the importance of facial expressions “when we converse on an important subject with any person whose face is concealed.”<sup>9</sup>

The unassailable result is what I call the “Bubble Effect,” large swaths of the population bubbled up, anonymous, unhappy, emotionally and mentally crippled, afraid they might discover happiness unmasked and unbubbled. “It is worth noting that this is precisely why the mask appeals to its most devoted fans, ... longing to wear

masks means longing to hide from human social life.” It is also worth considering that the rationale for enforced masking adds anti-social bubble protection, turning human beings into faceless, nameless drones.

## Blowing Bubbles: The Bubble Makers

Why then do so many prefer the surreal reality of the bubble? After all, a simple prick would do the trick to burst free from their captivity. I suppose there are many reasons, though beyond ambivalence and vincible ignorance,<sup>10</sup> two bubble makers are most instructive: the Press<sup>11</sup> and Education. All things considered, according to Chesterton, “At present it is not we that silence the Press; it is the Press that silences us. It is not a case of the Commonwealth settling how much the editors shall say; it is a case of the editors settling how much the Commonwealth shall know.” That was then, now I contend it is worse, much worse, for now it is the case of the editors, collaborating with their sovereign demigods of oligarchy and polity, settling on *what* the Commonwealth shall know and not know; what they leave to be known is served up with a heavy slice of slant, a progressive side of bias, and on the rarest of occasions, a trifle of truth for unjust deserts; all neatly wrapped in a hermetically sealed bubble. Severe cases of dyspepsia, though universally common, must be summarily suppressed and denied. Just suck it up buttercup!

I recently had lunch with a friend of mine who was a defense attorney in a somewhat prominent criminal case. He was bemoaning the fact that justice in this country has been turned upside down and the current method seems to be to declare people guilty until they are proven innocent. But it is not the court making the declaration, it is the press. And the press presses the pre-trial declaration of guilt in every headline, assuming—usually correctly—that the headline is the only thing a reader reads. Similarly, another friend of mine recently watched his career and reputation destroyed when a major newspaper named him in an unproved and unprosecuted allegation as part of a story that wasn’t even about him, but was an attempt to besmirch an important political figure whose views on abortion do not align with the newspaper’s.

It was astonishing that so many people did not see through this and did not make the real connection instead of the false one. But as G.K. Chesterton notes, the press presumes everyone is as ignorant as a four-year-old. And the problem is: a lot of people *are* ignorant.

The press treats them that way because our schools have made them that way. It is part of a one-two punch. The press finishes the job the schools have started. Don’t expect to find the truth in either the newspaper or the classroom.

Chesterton understood the problem with the press because he was a journalist. He saw from the inside how things worked. He experienced being silenced and being marginalized for what he wrote or tried to write. He finally started his alternative paper in the days when most papers were in the hands of just a few rich men who controlled information. If that sounds familiar it may help you realize why Chesterton is still so relevant.

But the newspapers are only a fractional part of the problem. Chesterton also understood the danger of letting the state control education: forming the minds of young people at the most influential time of their lives has an exponentially greater effect than telling them what to think about current events when they are adults.<sup>12</sup>

Chesterton, the prolific writer that he was, wrote in October of 1921 arguably one of his better known essays for *The New Witness*. In it he strongly suggested that the public educational experiments, as he called them, were seriously misguided. “The truth is that all our educational experiments are in the wrong direction. They are concerned with turning children, not only into men, but into modern men; whereas modern men need nothing so much as to be made a little more like children. The whole object of real education is a renaissance of wonder, a revival of that receptiveness to which poetry and religion appeal. Instead of turning the nursery or the infant school into an image of the political meeting or the stock exchange, there would be a far better case for turning the senate or the market into an imitation of the nursery. It would do the masters of bureaucracy or big business a great deal of good to be governed as children are governed, and taught to amuse themselves easily as children do.”

I am not prepared to say how far such a saturnalia of simplicity can be regarded as being within the sphere of practical politics. But I am quite serious when I say that this should be the direction of all education; and that nearly all modern education is a wild waste of money and time, because it is working in the opposite direction. It is trying to sophisticate the people who are simple; or in other words to pervert the only people who are right. When I was in America, for instance, some lunatics were actually trying to teach children to take

care of their health. In other words, they were teaching babies to be valetudinarians<sup>13</sup> and hypochondriacs in order that they might be healthy. They were even proud of their half-witted and wicked amusement; and one of them actually boasted that his schoolchildren were “health-mad.” That it is not exactly the aim of all mental hygiene to be mad did not occur to him; but surely such teachers have everything to learn, I will not say from healthy children, but from all the naughty children who ever fell into the river, and possibly drowned, before they could grow up into maniacs.

If anyone thinks this a merely violent form of words, I refer again to the example in which the words themselves were used by the people themselves. In America some educational enthusiasts did really announce with pride that the children in a particular school were “all health-mad.” This meant, it really and truly meant, that the infants were in an intense state of vigilance and concentrated excitement on the problem of the preservation of their own bodily health; on how to foresee indigestion or mark the stages of a cold. And the man meant, he really and truly meant, that this was a condition on which they were to be congratulated. So that, instead of toy helmets or toy swords, they would have toy goggles and toy respirators; possibly little toy bottles of disinfectant or even a toy hypodermic syringe. That anybody should be mad on health is always of all things the most unhealthy. That children should be mad on health is something so horrible that one would hardly dream of it, outside some such torture-chamber as the tale called “The Turn of the Screw”; where children are possessed by devils. Yet I repeat that I read the boast with my own eyes in an American paper, as a report of the success of a hygienic educational campaign. It was some silly stuff about sending a clown round to give serious advice on hygiene, enlivened with jokes; I bet the jokes were not so amusing as the serious remarks.

I was seriously taken aback by Chesterton’s suggestion of toy goggles and toy respirators, toy bottles of disinfectant and toy hypodermic syringes. The sheer lunacy of such madness, but then reality struck a discordant chord; it was, as I of a sudden realized, all true, though the goggles (now masks,) respirators, disinfectant, and syringes were no longer toys for toddlers. The madness Chesterton saw in America a century ago is no longer a teaching exercise gone looney-tunes: the clowns have become drag queens, children are forced to wear masks inside and out, and the education establishment is demanding children to be shot with a nostrum yet determined to be safe for adult human inoculation, let alone for infants. What next, one

could ask? Lockdowns and isolation? Say again, how do you spell bubble? Sorry, spelling has been determined to be misogynistic, racist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, and totally unnecessary for the proper education of our young. Remember? At least I think there is an app for that, though, nowadays it is so difficult to think at all.

## Inside the Education Bubble

What was true then (1921) is even truer today (2021,) only public schools no longer educate, they indoctrinate. On the first day of the 2021-2022 school year, a U.S. history teacher at McQueen High School announced to her senior class that they would not be discussing the Civil War, the American Revolution or the U.S. Constitution. Instead, she would be “teaching” Black Lives Matter Marxist doctrine and the “merits” of the LGBTQ anti-religion. According to one of her students, who testified before the Washoe County School District Board of Trustees<sup>14</sup> on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the teacher went on, notifying the students that if they were born a male but now consider themselves female, that she would keep their secret safe and not tell their parents. She also handed out cards asking the students to write down their preferred pronouns. Courageously, the student told the teacher and the school board that he was withdrawing from the school and would complete his senior year on his own.

Education in America is a failure of epic proportions, but from “the standpoint of the education establishment in general, and the teachers’ unions in particular, our education system is not a failure, even though American children usually finish at or near the bottom in international tests.”

Tests show that most low-income students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade still cannot multiply or divide two-digit numbers by other two-digit numbers. That is, they cannot tell you what 14 times 15 equals or what 60 divided by 12 is.

Against this background, you might think that there would be enormous interest in those particular low-income and minority schools where the students equal or exceed the national norms in verbal or mathematical skills. But you would be wrong.

Some of these successful schools have had to run a gauntlet of hassles from education bureaucrats. A principal of a successful minority school in California was

hassled because she used phonics instead of “whole language” and because she taught foreign-born children in English instead of the various languages in the bilingual programs. The fact that she was succeeding where others were failing did not exempt her from being harassed.

In Massachusetts, a principal had trouble even getting approval to set up a school that would be using standardized tests to assess the progress of his students, most of whom were from minority groups. He was called a “racist” and a “Nazi.” His students ended up with the highest test scores in town. Some Nazi!

Despite having to buck the education establishment, some brave principals and teachers have created oases of excellence for low-income, minority students in a vast educational desert. ... How have successful schools for low-income, minority students done it? Largely by ignoring education “experts” and going against the theories and practices that reign elsewhere in American schools. Those schools which have low-income black, Hispanic and other minority students scoring higher than many white, middle-class students elsewhere in math and English typically feature real teaching rather than “activities” or “projects,” phonics rather than “whole language,” standardized tests rather than mushy evaluations, and in general a back-to-basics approach.

However, do not think for one moment that the fact that one theory of education fails and another succeeds is going to change the people who run our public schools or who control our teachers’ colleges. Those people have tenure and their pay is not affected in the slightest by whether or not they produce education students.

The public school system is a success for those who run it, in terms of protecting their jobs, their turf, their dogmas and—above all—their power to use vulnerable children as guinea pigs for the fads that come and go. Parents, voters and taxpayers also need to understand that our public schools are not failing. They are succeeding in substituting self-serving agendas for the task of conveying the accumulated knowledge of the past to today’s younger generation.<sup>15</sup>

The failure or success—depending upon your point of view—of the public school system begins at the academy as a chain reaction, “similar to Leo Szilard’s insight on atoms, which are increasingly split until their release of energy theoretically equals that of an A-bomb.” Only with academia, the atoms are lies.

In higher education, a single lie is too embarrassingly

self-evident and therefore must be obscured by a second lie which, in turn requires four additional lies and, eventually, a torrent of lies to bury the initial falsehood. But, instead of the release of energy, the output of these layers of lies is an explosion of bureaucracy and turgid, dishonest reports.

The lie starts with one academic dean, who begets two associate deans, who in turn produce four assistant deans and before you know it, armies of special assistants, project coordinators, and administrative assistants. Committees proliferate, staff is hired, and thick reports come forth, but none of this has anything to do with creating knowledge.

This chain reaction of mendacity is most evident when universities are confronted by accusations of racial discrimination in admission. The reality is self-evident: blacks receive substantial preferences and Asians are penalized. Such racial discrimination is, of course, unconstitutional and unfair but no matter, universities for decades have routinely denied this plain-to-see reality.

The college president fires the first mendacity particle into the nucleus: everybody admitted to his institution meets the highest standard, and the incoming freshman class has been carefully “crafted” to reflect a range of backgrounds to maximize every student’s educational experiences. Trusted subordinates then explain how the school will develop the heretofore hidden talents of students with low test scores who will, assuredly, now thrive thanks to all the stellar support services. The loyal legal department twists or hides smoking gun statistical evidence exposing these preferences, or just insists without a scintilla of evidence that admission policies are “broadly consistent” with court rulings since they reflect the admittee’s contribution to his community and leadership potential.

Meanwhile freshly hired campus bureaucrats offer up convoluted “research” demonstrating how blacks are struggling in STEM courses due to their instructors’ prejudices, or how minority students have been denied access to high schools offering advanced calculus. If the handful of minority admittees are overwhelmed academically, the university announces it will double or even triple their numbers on campus to achieve a critical mass of such students, as if reaching yet deeper into the application pool will boost classroom performances. A committee is tasked with fixing the “too-white” physics department, though nobody can explain how physics is too white.

Elsewhere, campaigns are launched to end racially tinged micro-aggressions, purge the names of racist donors on buildings, and remove all inanimate objects that hinder black students from achieving their full potential. Everybody receives mandatory anti-racism



training. If asked why all the effort to only target blacks, or why it will work as advertised, “rooting out systemic racism is not easy or cheap” is the answer. End of permissible discussions.

In such an environment, why agonize over what is true or false? Better to just sense which way the ideological wind is blowing and follow the politically correct mob. It will not be easy to reverse a culture where War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength, and where keeping the campus peace is a college president’s most notable accomplishment.<sup>16</sup>

The results are unsurprising. The lowering of academic standards to meet diversity and equity objectives has dramatically increased the numbers of those who fail to graduate and for those who manage to graduate—with such career destroying studies in gender, women, men, queer, LBGTBQ+MNOP, African, Asian, Indigenous, Martian tree-hugging, cultural arts, etc., ad nauseum—dismally unprepared for productive endeavors, especially for career engagement in pediatric pedagogy (that is child education, for those who struggle with big, bad, scary words.)

## Bobbing Bubble Heads

Sowell, equally as outspoken as Chesterton, would subsequently add to his complaint, remarking of the shallowness of admissions committees. “All across the country, at both elite institutions and non-elite institutions, admissions committee members act as if they have some deep insight which enables them to judge individuals’ inner motivations, rather than their actual record—and to pick out those who will become ‘leaders,’ as that undefined term is conceived in the psychobabble of the day.”

This would be incredible arrogance, even if admissions committees were composed of higher-caliber people than they usually are. Given the kinds of third-raters who too often find their way onto admissions committees, even at elite colleges, it is a tragic farce. After all, someone who has graduated from Harvard or MIT with top honors is likely to have a lot better career options than becoming a staffer on an admissions committee at Harvard or MIT.

The mystery is not why shallow people do shallow things. The mystery is why we put so much arbitrary power in the hands of shallow people—especially when that power would be dangerous in anybody’s hands. College admissions committees are just one example.”

Social workers have gotten gestapo-like powers to snatch people’s children from their homes on the basis of unsubstantiated charges that have never even been heard in a court of law. They can deny an orphan a decent home because the family that wants to adopt does not fit their arbitrary notions and unproven theories. Minority children have especially been denied homes with white families who want them and instead have been consigned to a life of drifting from one foster home to another for years on end.

Our public schools are the most massive examples of arbitrary power put into the hands of shallow people. While social work and college admissions committees usually fail to attract people of high intelligence, the public schools positively repel many such people by requiring them to sit through years of unbelievably stupid education courses, as a precondition for a permanent career.

Students’ whole futures may prefer using them as guinea pigs for the latest fads, such as psychological manipulation, social engineering and proselytizing for politically correct causes. If—heaven help us—the child is very bright and is bored to death by the drivel presented by shallow teachers, the answer may well be to drug the student with Ritalin, rather than let him or her become restless.

The time is long overdue for us all to recognize that there are tasks and roles beyond the capacity of even the most intelligent people—and that only the least intelligent are likely to take on those impossible roles. It has been known for centuries that fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

There is no need to abolish college admissions committees, social workers or teachers. But their roles need to be kept within much narrower and more defined bounds. Above all, what they do must be subjected to some test other than what makes them feel good or what sounds good to their like-minded colleagues. Otherwise, we are putting the inmates in charge of the asylum.<sup>17</sup>

One could legitimately argue that the same holds true for school boards, school administrations, and teachers’ unions. While there are certainly dedicated and talented teachers among us, the reality is there are far too many for whom George Bernard Shaw’s irritation remains more than an itch they cannot scratch, “Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach.” And, I must add, “those who can’t teach, administrate ... too often, badly, and those who can do neither, unionize.”

There are those among my readers who have, with some frequency, accused me of purposely inciting violent insurrection with my choice of words and phrases. I admit there may be more than a grain of truth in such accusations. But and this is a monumental but, with the assistance of a decent Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, my thoughts I trust are generally decipherable. I am from the old school of exercising proper grammar and parsing sentences, correct spelling, and common sense, studying classic literature, history, civics, and mathematics. I am, however, not so proud as to never admit to an occasional error. That being said, should I ever write such drivel as the following, you have my permission to quickly put me out of my wretched misery. "Much of modern postsecondary intellectual discourse emblemizes a regressive displacement of phraseology toward loquacious amalgamations intended to subvert intelligibility."<sup>18</sup> And no, I have no idea what the bobbing bubble head writer meant, for as far as I can decipher it is pure unadulterated gibberish presented as academic writing. Sorry, I do not speak baby talk, Esperanto, jive, or gibberish. To emphasize the sorry state of higher education—which quite naturally descends sooner than later to the lower, try to decipher this response from Sidonie Smith, Ph.D.—Professor of the Humanities at the University of Michigan—about her new book, *Manifesto for the Humanities: Transforming Doctoral Education in Good Enough Times*, to the question, "What is the 'possibly posthuman humanities scholar' and how does this idea relate to doctoral education?" Please consider the source and what might be the impact on your child or grandchild having to listen to anyone taught by professor Sidonie Smith. God help us all!

Writing this book, I came to see the new scholar subject as a performative of passionate singularity, hybrid materiality and networked relationality. This is one sense in which the humanities scholar that is becoming is possibly posthuman, and a posthumanist scholar. The locus of thinking, for the prosthetically extendable scholar joined along the currents of networked relationality, is an ensemble affair. It involves the scholar, the device, the algorithm, the code. It involves the design architecture of platform and tool, the experiential architecture of networks, and the economy of energy.<sup>19</sup>

## Judge Not in the Bubble

It is easy to complain against fanaticism, to take um-

brage when falsely labeled a fanatic, extremist, or radical; it is easier yet to boast of moderation, of holding onto virtue, of believing in the good. Bubbles are occupied by both the fiercest fanatic and the modest moderate to the same end: the true purpose of the bubble is to provide a safe zone for their preconceptions while hiding the truth from themselves. What is unknown will never harm you. Ignorance is bliss; unrestrained knowledge a bugaboo to be avoided at all costs.

Philosophers have long believed that man lives to serve rational, natural ends. "The precondition of happiness was virtue: attaining excellence in our moral capacities."<sup>20</sup> Aristotle held that virtue is a mean between the extremes of "too much" and "too little" which was typical of classical Greece at its best, a civilization that valued moderation in all things. "Thomas Aquinas was a great fan of Aristotle. Rarely has any disciple been more devoted to his master than was Thomas to Aristotle. Yet Thomas was more devoted still to Christ. So when the question arose whether one should be moderate in the virtue of love of God, Thomas says no. He rejects (Greek) moderation and says that there is no such thing as too much love of God."<sup>21</sup>

And yet, with God—the lone exception to the rule—it seems, as David Carlin suggests, a good many people of great piety, intelligence and education, who espouse moderation in all things and for whom love overflows for their fellow human beings, are unwilling to inflict harm on others with deeds or words; they go so far as to be unwilling to think unkind thoughts of others. These are those who especially favor the words of Jesus, "Judge not." Carlin humorously, though with a heavy dose of seriousness, remarks, "Now if I had been with Jesus in Palestine, I would have warned him not to utter these two words. 'Do you have any idea,' I would have cautioned him, 'how people, especially moral liberals living in the USA 2,000 years from now, will misuse your words to justify abortion and other dreadful practices?' Of course, He knows best."

And yet, far from accepting modern moral liberalism, the most moderate of Christian is all too willing to condemn the sin while unwilling to condemn the sinner. "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). Why is



it that the self-righteous are so willing to “judge not,” unless, perhaps, it has something to do with that disturbing dependent clause, “that you be not judged?” Likewise, those who refuse to judge based on moral grounds give as justification that only God can judge because only God knows what is in the sinner’s heart. First, Jesus never said it; second, God will ultimately judge us all, but neither the Father nor the Son ever denied man the obligation to reasoned judgment. To abdicate one’s duty to judge grants license to evil to commit greater evil. For instance, when asked if Hitler ought not be condemned for the holocaust and other crimes against humanity, a not atypical modern moral liberal response might well be, “Hitler had a difficult childhood.” As did almost everyone, especially those 6,000,000 Jews and other undesirables exterminated as dehumanized vermin. “Well, only God, who unlike us knows all things, truly knows Hitler’s heart. So, God alone can judge Hitler...or anybody.” God alone can judge and condemn a soul to the everlasting fires of hell or welcome souls to the eternal bliss of his eternity, but justice is not served by those who will not judge evil men for the evil that they do. The self-righteous abrogate their reason and judgment by selfishly deferring to God’s judgment, but God’s response is not “divine punishment,” instead he utilizes human agents to execute judgment: “Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth has fallen in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey” (Isaiah 59:14-15). Carlin notes that while the individual cannot stand alone against evil, he is never truly alone. “I am not an individual related to God *through* the Church. I am related to God as *part* of the Church. The Church is not a third thing that stands between me and God. There are only two things, God and the Church, and I am part of that lesser thing—a thing that is called the Bride of Christ or the Body of Christ.”

Now an individual Christian ... can afford to think well of everybody, can afford to believe that everybody, even apparent enemies, may be well-intentioned. But an institution cannot afford to think this way – and the RC Church is an institution. For, an institution is bound to have enemies. And the Church, both today and throughout its long history, has had tons of enemies. And so the Church has to be constantly on guard. It has to be constantly suspicious – rather like the way Secret Service agents surrounding the president have to be

constantly suspicious.

It follows that I, as part of the Church, have to be suspicious. For example, when I see the LGBTQ+ movement everywhere making advances in American society, neither I nor our bishops can afford to have that excess of charity.... [Some] can afford to say, “For all we know, they have good intentions. Only God can judge.” No, we Catholics must say, “There, we strongly suspect, is a mortal enemy. Either we will destroy it, or it will destroy us.”

One of the most important lessons I learned when, decades ago, I was a politician is that you have to recognize your enemies. It can be a fatal error to mistake an enemy for a friend or even for a neutral. My impression is that many Catholic bishops have minds that are insufficiently suspicious, at least when it comes to detecting enemies of the faith.

These are the same moral hypocrites living in secure bubbles that call for justice only when they themselves are victims, when it is they who are beaten, raped, robbed, stabbed, shot, or worse by thugs and violent criminals released from prison because of “overcrowding” or “systemic racism” or gangs and cartels illegally operating within our borders; the same ones who call for defunding the police and criminal justice reform—another progressive term for no justice at all. A prime example: Cori Bush, progressive democrat, U.S. Representative for Missouri’s 1<sup>st</sup> congressional district, who during an interview with CBS said, “I’m going to make sure I have security because I know I have had attempts on my life. And I have too much work to do, there are too many people that need help right now for me to allow that. So if I end up spending \$200,000, if I spend ten more dollars on it, you know what, I get to be here to do the work, so suck it up. And defunding the police has to happen. We need to defund the police and put that money into social safety nets.” Ignore who pays for her private security (you the taxpayer.) Judge not the hypocrite. Suck it up, buttercup. Now, who is being played for a sucker?

### “The evil that men do lives after them”

It was Bonhoeffer who said it with perfect clarity: “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil.” This is true as is its corollary, “Cowardice in the face of evil rationalizes itself evil.” In the 2008 film, *Good*, the central character, John Halder, is the quintessential “go-along-to-get-along type, someone who might have passed through life without

committing any grand evil if not for the fact that evil found him—and found him wanting.”

In *Good*, John Halder (played by a thin Viggo Mortensen) is an unassuming, middle-aged professor of literature in 1930s Germany. Lonely and burdened as he takes care of a senile mother and a neurotic wife, Halder is easily seduced, both by the sexual advances of a student and by the Nazi party, which summons him to the chancellery to discuss a piece of writing that has come to the attention of Adolf Hitler himself. The work in question is an obscure novel by Halder, a romance in which a lover helps his suffering companion take her own life in the face of painful, terminal disease. The Nazis ask Halder to write a brief paper defending euthanasia, and the bookish academic, both intimidated and flattered by the attention, complies.

This puts Halder on a dangerous path, as he proceeds to take baby steps—both mental and material—in going along with the Nazis, always out of a mixture of fear and self-interest. Distressed at first by book-burning at the university, he soon rationalizes the act, with the help of his new mistress, Anne (Jodie Whittaker). Reluctant initially to join the Nazi party, he soon relents, as it helps advance his academic career. Learning to ignore his conscience, he deserts his wife and makes a new life with Anne, and though he never takes the step of putting his increasingly burdensome mother out of her misery, he chastises himself after her death for letting her suffer so long.

The one serious obstacle to Halder’s full embrace of Nazism is his long-time friend, Maurice (Jason Isaacs), a Jewish psychiatrist (with a penchant for the f-word) alongside whom Halder fought in World War I. A moral vacuum who relishes in Halder’s dalliance with Anne and whose deepest concern seems to be when he will drink his next beer, Maurice nevertheless is morally outraged at Halder’s cooperation with the Nazis. In one scene, Maurice chastises Halder for joining the Nazi party, and Halder’s response is the quintessential one of the cowardly rationalizer: “It doesn’t matter if I agree with them. The fact is they’re in power,” Halder says in his defense. “At least I’m doing something. If we want to change anything, steer them in the right direction, we can’t stay sitting on the sidelines.”

Eventually, as the situation of the Jews worsens, Halder realizes that he has gotten himself in too deep with evil. Still, he cannot bring himself to risk the benefits of his new life to help his friend. The enthusiastically pro-Nazi Anne (“Anything that makes people happy can’t be bad, can it?” she opines during a Nazi-sponsored parade) tries to assuage any guilt Halder feels during his transformation to a tool of evil. In a scene near the

end of the movie, Halder accidentally bumps Anne to the floor as they argue about Maurice’s plight. She is momentarily stunned, and the viewer expects her to lash back at Halder. Instead, she is sexually aroused by his display of power. “Oh, John, look at you,” she coos, as she directs his gaze at the mirror, where Halder looks at himself in full SS uniform. Mortensen conveys wonderfully Halder’s sense of both befuddlement and shock at what he has become.

By the time Halder acts to save Maurice, it is too late. The movie ends with a memorable shot of the horrified Halder, dressed in his SS uniform, helplessly watching Jewish prisoners being herded into a concentration camp, with the mocking “Jewish music” of Mahler’s First Symphony playing around him (Halder hears Mahler whenever he is under stress). A man who once considered himself “good” sees first-hand the ultimate ramifications of his cowardice.

“I never thought it would come to this,” a despondent Halder cries near the film’s end. *Good* above all warns us of the dangers of failing to speak up against evil. “When bad men combine, the good must associate,” counseled Edmund Burke. “It is not enough... that a man means well to his country; it is not enough that in his single person he never did an evil act.” See *Good* then, but be forewarned that you may see someone you know—or perhaps yourself—in the character of John Halder.<sup>22</sup>

Halder is the existential man in the bubble. He refuses to admit he is being manipulated, that there is evil, real evil in cooperating, in going-along-to-get-along. How many John Halders are occupying bubbles in the world today? “Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn and caldron bubble.”

## Faith and Politics in the Bubble

What is intriguing is what little changes in the polity of human governance. In a lengthy essay<sup>23</sup> for *The American Mind*, Michael Anton writes, “I long ago concluded that a full and accurate account of Niccolò Machiavelli’s work will forever elude my grasp.” Notwithstanding his frustration, Anton, a lecturer and research fellow at Hillsdale College and senior fellow at the Claremont Institute, thankfully, presents several Machiavellian ideas developed over the last decade or so; he notes that “Machiavelli’s relevance,” with today, “is direct. For, if my read is correct, Machiavelli faced a challenge so startlingly similar to ours that it almost seems as if history does repeat itself. To put it as succinctly possible, he sought to

liberate philosophy and politics—theory and practice—from a stultifying tradition and corrupt institutions.” Specifically, Machiavelli seemingly targeted the corruption and perversions of faith within the Christian traditions and institutions which were at the time—fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—the dominant force in virtually every aspect of practical politics and philosophical thought.

Machiavelli believed that, by his time, the weak interpretation of Christianity had long since taken over the faith, that the institutional Church was rotten to the core and exerted far too much (and almost wholly deleterious) influence on politics, and that thought itself had been captured by a narrow orthodoxy and placed under strict supervision. In short, princes aside, the symbiotic combination of thought (doctrine) and institution (Church) was the real sovereign, one that tyrannized the common people no less than the mind of man.

The parallels to our time should be obvious enough. Any sign of life or strength from Christianity is relentlessly attacked while interpretations according to weakness are broadcast at a hundred decibels. Other enfeebling doctrines—attacks on masculinity, the family, tradition, community—further weaken man. And not just doctrines but practice: live in a pod, eat the bugs, take your meds, and stream some porn is the regime’s message to young men. (For women, replace the last with “make some porn.”)

Our institutions are rotten. For two [recent] examples see, first, the way the government colluded with hedge funds to crush small online investors trying to block an all-too-typical financial sector wealth-extraction power play; second, look at Anthony Fauci’s transparently false denials of having funded COVID research in China, and the media’s (and government’s) shameless attempts to cover it all up. There is really not one institution left in America that is not corrupt in both senses: borderline incompetent, but also venal, self-serving and lawless.

Thought is in slightly better shape than it was in Machiavelli’s time, but it won’t be if the ruling class gets their way. They’re working hard to constrain expression through censorship, de-platforming, cancellation and above all endless propaganda that drowns out all other ideas. If technology allows it, the control they’ll exert over the mind will make the measures Machiavelli faced seem permissive.

The universities are equivalent to Machiavelli’s monasteries—the places where doctrine is formulated, incubated, refined and defended—while the media is their church, the means of dissemination to the masses. The real sovereign is not any elected official or anyone for-

mally and visibly moving the levers of power; it is the doctrine (neoliberal capitalism, “expert” managerialism, socially corrosive libertinism, anti-whiteness) and the people and institutions pushing it.

Other parallels, Anton suggests, can be seen in wokeness, “a radicalization of the Catholic teaching on original sin, only without the possibility of redemption or grace, and targeted only at those guilty of whiteness. (Other demographics are said to be inherently Christ-like, without sin.) People, especially men, are told they should hate themselves. Their spirits are deliberately degraded. They are made weak. One need read Machiavelli with only ordinary care to see that he arrived at a similar conclusion about his own times.”

Whereas sophistry is the art of persuading a particular democratic assembly on a given issue on a specific day, propaganda aims to shape public opinion broadly and, if not permanently, for as long as humanly possible. ... the classics’ reluctance to innovate—their dispositional conservatism—made them vulnerable to conquest via this new weapon. The conquest happened. Christianity waged a spiritual war against the classical world which the latter proved unable to resist.

In Machiavelli’s account, in every city or state or province—hence always and everywhere in the generality of mankind—two “diverse humors” (*P* 9) are found: the people and the great. The classical philosophers chose to ally with the great, for self-protection, out of a preference for aristocracy over democracy, and because the “great” (understood not merely as the rich but above all the naturally virtuous) were more receptive to philosophic attempts (in Strauss’s words) “to humanize imperfect society within the limits of the possible.”

But this meant that the classics left the people prey to capture by a charismatic new prince. When He came, promising eternal life and aided by the Roman destruction of freedom throughout the ancient world, the classics were routed.

Machiavelli’s overarching strategy, then, is to win over—not “win back,” since the philosophers never had them—the people. He proposes to do this via a popular-philosophic alliance in which the people are convinced by a new type of propaganda, disseminated by Machiavelli’s successors, to allow the philosophers to rule (indirectly) in exchange for philosophy providing what the people most want: material plenty and a modicum of security (*P* 25). Fat and happy, they will forget God, or at least bestow their gratitude on others. (Though there’s a lot more to it than just this.)

Anton goes on to note the many situational similarities between Machiavelli's time and now. "We must first see clearly the biggest differences between his situation and ours. Our Godless tyranny of 'experts' is not religious. Many of our best intellectuals who say it is are certainly right that wokeness is *akin* to a religion. It's supremely self-confident and intolerant. It's irrational—even anti-rational. It clearly has roots in various perversions of Christianity. Some may even be right that wokeness is morphing into a religion."

But for now, in the decisive respect, it is not one. A real religion recognizes a distinction between the natural and the supernatural. A real religion says to its faithful "there are things we cannot understand but that we believe are true." Even the highest priests cannot explain the central mysteries. They know *that* certain truths are beyond their comprehension, and they believe regardless, based on trust (and love, and fear).

The ruling doctrine of our time by contrast understands itself as natural, as "scientific," as not merely true but *knowably* true to the unassisted—that is, unassisted by revelation—human mind. We are tempted to see wokeness as a religion because we see its irrational basis, its lack of grounding in anything real. Its adherents manifestly do not.

Our challenge is then in a sense the reverse of Machiavelli's: to reacquaint the people with God and an intellectual elite with the Good. If we do our work wisely and well, prudence may still rule indirectly, but it will be a prudence that is better and truer—than what have now, certainly; than Machiavelli's, arguably.

America's constitutional order has been dead—fifty years? Less? More fundamentally, Machiavelli's enemy was less a corruption and cooption than a replacement of the ancient orders. He had no wish whatsoever to restore its glory. Our regime by contrast rules in the name of Constitution. That's a lie, but the constitutional order that operated admirably within the living memory of so many feels, to some, still within reach. Should those of us who cherish that order try to go back or forward? This is a prudential question that Machiavelli didn't face.

When Machiavelli took up arms, his enemy was 1,500 years old. How old is ours? If we understand our present problems as originating with modernity itself, then it is at most 500 years. If as Second (Rousseau) and Third (Nietzsche) Wave modernity, then half that. If as Progressivism, then half *that*. If only since the 1960s, then half that.

Anton concludes with an admonition and a suggestion. "Is our enemy as decayed and corrupt now as Machiavelli's was in his time? There are many reasons to believe so. But there are also reasons to believe a new woke-faith is still forming itself. If so, that might be a cause for optimism since it's always easier to destroy a new sect (*D II 5*) in its infancy than in its maturity. It's also possible (I would say likely) that with technology, things move faster, so dynamics that once took centuries now play out much quicker. Bottom line: we don't know. But I think I know what Machiavelli would say if we could ask his advice: assume the hour is late and fight." And fight we must. "It is now incumbent upon us all to engage in a most serious discussion about just what is Caesar's and just what is God's, understanding that some must be reserved for the latter, lest what is absolute and divine be attributed to the former." The bubble must be burst, our comfort sacrificed for the love of our humanity. "Let us remember that love lives through sacrifice and is nourished by giving. Without sacrifice, there is no love" (St. Maximilian Kolbe).

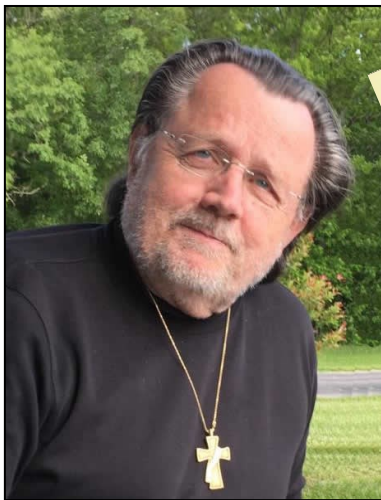
1. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, *Song of the Witches*.
2. **Pied-à-terre**: ( French pronunciation: [pjɛtəˈtɛʁ], plural: pieds-à-terre; French for "foot on the ground") a small apartment or condominium, usually located in a large city some distance away from an individual's primary residence. Often used for hidden liaisons. A more *avant-garde*, *haute couture* name for bachelor pad.
3. The Truman Show (1998): Set in the 1950s, Truman Burbank is happy with his life. He is a successful businessman; he has a nice wife and many friends. However, Truman finds his life is getting very repetitive. The reality is that every moment of his life is being filmed, being watched by millions, and that his world is limited in a small Hollywood film set. Truman's world is controlled by a TV producer named Christof, whose control room is high in the artificial dome (bubble) that provides the sky and horizon of Seahaven, an island supposedly off the coast of Florida. Truman was adopted at birth by a corporation.
4. "Then God said, 'Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other.' And so it happened: God made the dome, and it separated the water above the dome from the water below it. God called the dome 'the sky.'...Then God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basis, so that the dry land may appear.' And so it

4. (cont.) happened: the water under the sky was gathered into it basin, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land 'the earth,' and the basin of the water he called 'the sea'" (Gen 1:6-10).
5. Eric Hoffer, *"The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements"* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2010), 80.
6. Ibid., 80-81.
7. Ibid., 85.
8. Ibid., 85-87.
9. Jeffrey H. Anderson, *"The Masking of America"*, Claremont Review of Books, Summer 2021, 11-14.
10. **Vincible ignorance** is, in moral theology, ignorance that a person could remove by applying reasonable diligence in the given set of circumstances. It contrasts with invincible ignorance, which a person is either entirely incapable of removing, or could only do so by supererogatory efforts. Aldous Huxley put it more succinctly: "Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don't know because we don't want to know."
11. The Press in Chesterton's day meant newsprint, while today one must include television, social media, etc., thus the Press we now call the Media or alternatively, the Mainstream Media (MSM) or somewhat derisively the Lamestream Media.
12. Dale Ahlquist, *"Join the Revolution"*, Gilbert! Vol. 24, No. 06, July/August 2021, 2.
13. **Valetudinarian**, *noun*: a person who is unduly anxious about their health.
14. Washoe County, Reno/Sparks, Nevada, [https://youtu.be/L7Iz7FNM\\_qc](https://youtu.be/L7Iz7FNM_qc).
15. Thomas Sowell, *"Controversial Essays: No Excuses"* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2002), 151-53.
16. Robert Weissberg, *"The Chain Reaction of Academic Lying"*, Intellectual Takeout, <https://www.intellectualtakeout.org/the-chain-reaction-of-academic-lying>, August 09, 2021.
17. Thomas Sowell, *"Controversial Essays: Deep Trouble From Shallow People"* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2002), 243-44.
18. Daniel Lattier, *"Academic Writing is Becoming a Caricature of Itself"*, Intellectual Takeout, <https://www.intellectualtakeout.org/blog/academic-writing-becoming-caricature-itself>, January 07, 2016.
19. Ibid.
20. "Humane Economy", Ed., *Modern Age Journal*, Summer 2021, 7.
21. David Carlin, *"An Excess of Christian Charity?"*, The Catholic Thing, <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2021/08/06/an-excess-of-christian-charity>, August 06, 2021.
22. Stephen M. Klugewicz, *"Cowardice in the Face of Evil: Viggo Mortensen in 'Good'"*, The Imaginative Conservative, August 7, 2021, <https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2021/08/cowardice-face-evil-viggo-mortensen-good-stephen-klugewicz.html>.

23. Michael Anton, *"The Art of Spiritual War"*, The American Mind, <https://americanmind.org/salvo/the-art-of-spiritual-war>, June 08, 2021.
24. Christopher Kaczor and Matthew R. Petrussek, *"Jordan Peterson, God, and Christianity: The Search for a Meaningful Life"* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, 2021).







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