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The real pandemic is everyone doing as they are told

By **Michael Driver** July 29, 2021



If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

Henry David Thoreau

WE LIVE in the age of the oxymoron. Diversity means everyone thinks the same. Tolerance means the vicious exclusion of anyone who doesn't. Levelling up is literally exacerbating inequality to medieval levels. Freedom passports means you require papers to watch football. Vaccines don't prevent the infection or transmission of disease. Democracy is the imposition of new laws and policies no one voted for. Journalism is propaganda. Modern Monetary Theory means effect before cause, the 'wet pavements cause rain' branch of economics. Education is the process of removing information rather than importing it. That you don't think but repeat is more important than that you learn and grow. Asymptomatic transmission means the healthy can infect the immunised. Sociopaths are philanthropists. Virtue signalling is camouflage for a collapse in morality. The green new deal is neither green, new or a deal. Environmentalists means a collection of the world's most polluting corporations. Climate change policies are any act which preserves the most extreme forms of exploitation. War is peace, freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength. Owning nothing is happiness, as Orwell might have added if he were around today. Probably on social media (another oxymoron, they're hard to escape).

A parlour game for this age of absurdity is to see how many of these logical inversions you can think of. Now I want to head in a different direction and consider two questions: What is the effect of collective cognitive dissonance? Where will it lead us?

I believe the effect of collective cognitive dissonance is the mass abdication of responsibility to authority. When something becomes impossible to understand or reconcile, the natural human instinct is to rely on authority figures – to herd. When people feel intense insecurity they abdicate freedom for perceived safety.

According to psychologist Erich Fromm (1900-1980): ‘Most people are not even aware of their need to conform. They live under the illusion that they follow their own ideas and inclinations, that they are individualists, that they have arrived at their opinions as the result of their own thinking – and that it just happens that their ideas are the same as those of the majority.’

Fromm described the concept of automaton conformity as ‘changing one’s ideal self to conform to a perception of society’s preferred type of personality, losing one’s true self in the process’. Fromm described the desire to subsume the self into the herd.

The human species now sounds like a herd of animals with the relentless repetition of alliterative phraseology: for build back better I hear moo moo moo, new normal baa baaa etc. A cacophony of mindless agreement is expressed as poetic assonance: ‘double jabbed’, we yabber at each other like a flock of jabbering birds. Another parlour game for the next lockdown is to list all the new terms and phrases which sound like advertising slogans or neuro-linguistic programming. Why the repetition? Why the repetition?

The real pandemic is everyone thinking the same, a culture so mono it feels as if ISIS won. So why is this conformity reckless?

The width of the edge is what really matters in society. Too wide and we have anarchism, too narrow totalitarianism. Mass conformity is the mechanism of totalitarianism, it is the most reckless act. Progress is always ground up, never top down. All the good stuff happens at the edge. Great art is never produced by corporations. Scientific discoveries take place in patent offices, medical breakthroughs in dirty Petri dishes, great music is made by the unemployed, entrepreneurs succeed via repeated failure. Mandela didn’t change the world from Davos. The moment the pressure on de Klerk forced him to widen the edge, the idea of freedom nursed by Mandela blossomed like a giant protea. The campaigners for women’s suffrage were on the edge of society. Nothing changes from the middle. A third game might be to look around you and list everything born of the maverick. Start with the device you’re most likely reading this article on and work your way out.

Returning to the Thoreau quote at the top of this piece: mavericks need space to dance to a different tune. The edge needs to be just wide enough. ‘And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music,’ as Nietzsche might have said. Reckless conformists hear only one note, mavericks the whole range. Think of us as the control group.