

A Dilemma for Education — The Problem of Labels in an Age of Political Identities

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Abstract

A case study presents a student labelled as *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder* (ADHD), in a world of political identity movements encouraging this personal tag. Instead of leading to social justice, identity activists produce conflicts and dangerous practices, like cancelling (*dismissing*) people if their views differ to the ones championed. If things are to change we have to pursue “*Insurgent Universality*” (Tomba, 2021), *defending repressed, exploited and ignored persons*, as no one should be abused for their characteristics or dismissed for their views. This demands taking a hard look at society, which in Britain has adopted an “anything goes” approach to accommodate the many different citizen groups. We must pursue core values of kindness and forgiveness for liberty and happiness to be reality. This has to respect differences and understand the needs and desires of people. In Britain, such tolerance comes from a Christian tradition, but is collapsing as the many faiths now existing wish to differ, so will this survive? Equality must be a common objective, with humility from elites, who often dominate rather than listen and lead, chasing their own interests at the expense of the majority. The case study shows how a label limits perception, to the detriment of learning opportunities and increase of mental anguish. How negative influences can be minimised is explored at both micro and macro levels.

1. Introduction: The Background

Talking with a teenager, we rifled through a newspaper to be hit by a headline, *Nike ‘mocking real women’ by paying trans star to wear sports bra*” (Corless, 2023). I was asked for a view, but immediately froze not knowing what was permissible to say in an age when silence is golden. I was cancelled for defending a *Practitioner Doctorate* - considered not top ranking to “cannibalise” the system, resulting in death threats and vile emails. Then, following a Magistrates in the Community presentation, when staff said teachers were leaving the profession in droves, I commented that 72% of females suffer abuse in schools (NASUWT Research, 2022)* to cause furore. Magistracy elites were alerted and a letter received, with pronoun preferences under the signature, with me thinking: “*stop the world I want to get off*. This is one story, with similar ones told by others, like the student below.

The *same* reaction for freedom was admitted by a student I was asked to see, labelled with *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity*

Disorder (ADHD). He was confused and upset by the green and gender ideology taught at school and expressing his views had led to negative reactions, blamed on his disorder. Investigations by Policy Exchange found that “affirming” a student’s gender – like calling them by a new name or pronoun on request – has become “embedded” in classrooms, with schools facilitating acceptance and medical interventions (Moore, 2023). A 6th form student said that only two in her class were not trying to change their gender, as it has become fashionable to do so. Amazingly, 40% of parents are kept in the dark about their offspring’s new gender, posing a safeguarding risk. With multiple genders now standard, educators have become involved, often buying teaching materials from external organisations, with some contested subjects presented as objective facts. Sexual diversity.org cites 105 identified genders, with numbers changing over time. In “*Real Lives*” (2023), a mother tells of her boy’s desire to transition, as a result of school lessons, that became a family nightmare because of his obsession with Japanese anime that drove her to the brink of suicide. He grew out of the phase (*after 7 years of hell*) just like around 90% of other influenced young people.

In a generation of anxious students, progressive teachers and civil servants, the educational landscape has been transformed from this virtue signalling. Our political identity culture, which promotes group labels, now dismisses anyone who might think differently to the position being plugged. The ADHD student referred to was puzzled and distressed as to why some students come to school as a girl one day and a boy another and woe betide if you use the wrong pronoun label. Non-binary is the usual term to describe those not neatly fitting male/female categories, but other names include genderqueer, agender, bigender and genderfluid to confuse people. The game “*mixed berry muffins*” teaches children gender fluidity. A 170 page booklet, produced by academics for 7-18 year-olds, claims that sex is not just male and female and advises teachers on helping non-binary children. Many find this emphasis disturbing and the labels mind-boggling! To state the reality that humans are a sexually dimorphic species, like all other mammals, is to find yourself cancelled and abused as some people have experienced.

A similar situation is happening with climate change. Some schools do not seem to be informing on facts and are terrifying students into believing the world is about to be destroyed because of human selfishness. This is a reason why 60% of 16-25 year-olds are seriously stressed about climate change and feel powerless to act, according to a world survey (Hickman et al. 2021). The politics of race has also been foisted on schools, known as “*Critical Race Theory*” (CRT), when students are taught about “*white privilege*”. The ADHD student discussed was the only white boy in a class of black students and complained of constant bullying and attacks from peers, which he felt was not taken seriously, as *they* were seen as the victims and not *him*. Although in 2021 the teaching of CRT was said to be unlawful by Government, it appears that it is still being taught. A Lewisham school reportedly told students that white skin conferred privilege, so protests were in order. A Berkshire academy handed out worksheets that defined police as “*workers chosen by, protecting and serving people in power*” (Strimpel, 2023).

2. Our Problem with Labels

The narrative is one of labels and exclusion: you are too white, too thin, too fat, too outspoken, in a wheelchair, ADHD, dyslexic etc. Often, desperate to know who they are and want to become, children assemble ideas from television, films,

the web, social media, friends and activists. The messages received are consistent with dominance, aggression, violence and laws of the jungle (*the idea that people who care only about themselves will be most likely to succeed in a society/organisation*). We hope for a world where rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs conduct. A case presentation of the ADHD student discussed is given below to show how labels limit people perception and are interpreted from their own knowledge background. This can mean that students do not receive the management required, because the label obscures a major issue that is fundamental to address.

2.1. Background

I saw “Bertie” (B) (*not his real name*) as the family had concerns about school progress and ability to understand and behave appropriately in this large, formal context. They feel the school do not understand his issues, with many dismissed. He presents as a lively, intelligent, interesting, active lad of 12+, with creative responses. For example, I had a pile of paper with me and he immediately took some sheets and folded them into planes, cars etc. as in Origami. He likes sports such as football and follows Birmingham City, as do the rest of his family.

2.2. General Comments

I visited B at home. On arrival, he was playing football with his brother, age 14 years. B was wary for a while, because I was a stranger. However, we chatted about how I knew his cousin and he began to relax. I said we could look at things I had brought and talk about them and he was then happy to cooperate and led me to his room full of pictures he had painted.

2.3. Specific Comments

The first task was to select any **object** from a box of interesting things and **talk** about it. B choose a red racing car and easily named 14 attributes, showing he could generate ideas above his age level. He went on to complete some items from the *Ravens Progressive Matrices* and the *Crichton Vocabulary Scale* to assess **educative** and **reproductive** ability. These tests are used in the Flynn studies (2012), documenting world intelligence over many years and viewed as more reliable than more verbally-based IQ assessments. **Educative ability** is making meaning out of confusion - using insight to form constructs for solving complex problems and deal with spoken language and its secondary written forms - letters and numbers. **Reproductive mental behaviour** involves mastering, recalling and reproducing largely verbal material from a cultural store of explicit, verbalised knowledge. B scored in the above average range for these **component-style** tests. Following these, B completed the SALT Narrative Thinking and Language Test A, to see how he processed verbal information. This was assessed via questions requiring different narrative level responses. Scores: **Content** (*ideas*) **38**, **Convention** (*word structure*) **35**, **Clarity** (*pitch, pace, pause power, pronunciation*) **30**, **Conduct** (*use*) **19**. Although the overall score of **122** is the mean for a 12 year old, the profile is uneven to require further investigation.

B showed a grasp of the **5 essential conversational moves** (*following the conversation thread, asking & answering questions, assembling & contributing ideas*, whilst demonstrating limited **maintenance behaviour** - eye contact,

smiling, nodding) - that enable informal dialogue to shift into the extended, formal narratives encountered in school. He interacted with me but in a limited way, with little eye contact when spoken to and rare instances of other maintenance moves.

2.4. Comment

Observations and assessments suggest that B may have functional issues in the brain amygdala area - responsible for regulating behaviour and emotion and expressing this in narrative forms. The amygdala is in the frontal portion of the temporal lobes close to the hippocampus. Problems here (*making connections with other brain areas*) cause difficulties with learning, emotional sensitivity and fear. The history given by the family suggests that he exhibits these problems - likely to be a combination of genetics and environment. Problems are commonly labelled as *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia or Higher Language Deficit*, according to how a person is assessed and the professional background of the person evaluating them.

A possible Higher Language Deficit - *Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder* - may be present (SCD), based on these assessments. Those with SCD have trouble using spoken language in socially appropriate ways, but are usually good with the mechanics of speaking (*pronouncing words and constructing sentences*) and viewed as good talkers and verbally fluent in dialogue situations. Everyone struggles with social situations at times, but for someone with SCD, navigating social situations is a daily challenge, because they find it hard to grasp the rules of how to conduct oneself in different situations. A discussion with B about school suggested that this might be an issue. He used avoidance (*viewed as a behaviour problem*) to dodge difficult situations.

Observing B, he displays less problems in the haptic modality (*sense of space, feeling & movement*) as he is exceptionally good at football and drawing. Therefore, activities should be experiential to make maximum use of this sense in learning. The La Doux studies (New York, 1996, 2019) have shown the importance of language for regulating and developing appropriate behaviour and learning, so emphasis on narrative abilities is positive. **Higher-level language** problems, like SCD, affect assembly of both verbal and non-verbal information for meaning, processing and expressing thinking and emotion, particularly in formal classrooms with limited chances for student control. Thus, B may struggle to fully comprehend situations regarding various communication uses. This can result in avoiding/disruptive behaviours when things get too much, mentioning how he avoids difficult situations rather than tackling them head on. He knows sophisticated terms ('savvy'; 'compassionate') and memorises words, but retelling quantities of information show some problems with order and detail to cause confusion at times. People with SCD are unable to process all given information in certain situations.

To grasp events one gains the gist from a **top-down processing strategy** and analysing the **whole** into **parts - bottom-up processing**. The latter develops between 7-9 years, although students are required to data from 4 years in Britain, as in the phonics programme, well before brains can manage this easily (Sage, 2000). It is not surprising that the top nations educationally do not start formal learning until around 7 years, in line with brain development. B did not show coordination of both modes and needs these structuring. Before recalling an event, it should be **summarised** (2-3 sentences) and then

briefly **re-told** by the student before considering details. This enables exposure to both thinking strategies. We have a **preferred processing mode** (*top-down or bottom-up*) but must use both for meaning. The problem is that when communicating information it is given in our **preferred** style. If a teacher prefers a **bottom-up approach to process**, they will tend to give information without an initial **overview**. If learners have an **opposite preferred style** they may find it difficult to follow discourse. The population has equally distributed styles, meaning that half the class will find it harder to comprehend the teacher, unless accounted for in presentation. This is a reason why some teachers are easier to follow than others. B needs this information processing structure reinforcing (Sage, 2000, 2020).

B must be confident in the 5 conversational moves, with meaning largely available from the context, before coping satisfactorily with school extended, abstract, de-contextualised talk, when teachers mostly give instructions in threes (e.g. *get out your books, find page 59 & in paragraph 2 discover what is happening*), presenting information in narrative forms. These require **reference** (*knowing who he, she & they refer to – now more of a problem*), **inference** (*filling in information & opinion gaps*) and **coherence** (*assembling information for meaning*). In view of difficulties, he would be better placed in a **small learning context**, where focus is on structured linguistic and cognitive development.

2.5. Suggestions

- Slow speech when talking and **pause** well between sentences to help information processing.
- Before events - **summarise** what will happen & if possible **talk through actions** to match with words.
- Encourage short, story-poems to consider information/opinion gaps: eg. Algy met the bear - The bear met Algy
- The bear was bulgy - The bulge was Algy - illustrating that the **message** (bear ate Algy) is missing & must be inferred.
(*I have seen many 15+ students who cannot get this message*)
- Build narrative levels in natural situations, starting with **generating ideas**. Talking about an object to produce ideas helps focus on details in narrative events.

Goal	Idea development	Description
1	Record	Produce a range of ideas
2	Recite	Arrange simple ideas coherently
3	Refer	Compare ideas
4	Replay	Sequence ideas in time
5	Recount	Explain ideas – why? How?
6	Report	Introduce, discuss describe, evaluate ideas
7	Relate	Setting, events, actions, results, reactions

- Encourage expressive activities like **art, drama, sport** etc. to develop, organise & present ideas
- Give time to process & produce information. (*B has an interdental fricative issue (problem with “th”) so needs exercises for tongue tip control*).

- Keep a **progress journal** to review learning patterns.

2.6. Comment

B is an interesting young lad, whose perception and responses suggest he could learn effectively in a situation suited to his particular needs. He requires an approach coordinating both left and right brain areas, like the PACE technique (Sage, 2000). A small learning group would be less threatening for him. He has a supportive family. His above-average problem-solving and practical abilities are to be feted, but without attention to issues that make it difficult to process information, he will struggle to reach potential in a UK one-size system for all, with more school tests than other nations, adding to student/teacher stress. B needs:

- teaching support from a professional who understands his particular brain patterning
- awareness of his challenges and help with how to cope with them
- active learning opportunities to make the most of his haptic strengths
- tasks that encourage narrative development through the cognitive-linguistic levels

B is an intelligent student who will do well in an environment recognising learning needs. His issues are not unusual, but a modern tendency to medicalise and label behaviour means that many receive inappropriate management. Medicine to reduce/stimulate action has short-term effects, confirmed by research (Krinzinger et al. 2019). Communication and language must take higher priority in learning as in some other cultures. An approach is to assist coping strategies in situations that present as challenging. Traditional verbal ways of measuring intelligence mean that B may not score accurately, so assessment should have a psycho-linguistic approach. Views must be treated cautiously as he has only been seen once for assessment, but tests and observation indicate that SCD should be considered.

3. Understanding the Amygdala to Grasp the Role of Language in Behaviour

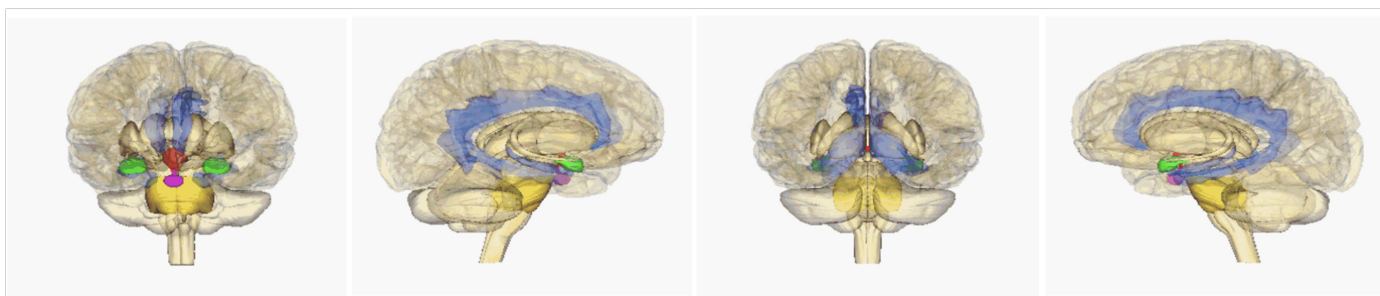


Image of the brain. Hippocampus is blue & amygdala green.

The amygdala is part of the limbic system with the hippocampus and hypothalamus, located below the brain lobes. It encodes emotion and with the hippocampus all the event details: *people, situations, things and where they took place*. The amygdala and hippocampus together ensure processing of memories with an important role in enabling narrative

language. We are more likely to remember something if having feeling for it. Narrative processing/production and capacity to respond appropriately to significant visual or auditory stimuli is disrupted if there are problems in this area. The amygdala is primary for perception and expression of social and emotional nuances and largely responsible for expression and comprehension of human speech. Portions of the auditory neocortex - extending from the anterior and medial temporal lobe and beyond the insula to the superior temporal lobe and the inferior parietal lobule - are partly an evolutionary derivative of the amygdala.

It could be argued that the primary, secondary and auditory association areas, including Wernicke's visual area, have evolved from the amygdala and are extensively interconnected with the nuclei via the inferior portions of the arcuate fasciculus as well as the claustrum. In consequence, when the neocortical auditory areas are impaired, the amygdala is sometimes disconnected and can no longer extract or impart nuances to incoming or outgoing sounds and sights. Although the left (L) and right (R) amygdala are functionally lateralised, with the R significantly larger than the L, both contribute to language processing, perception and expression and assist in maintaining the functional integrity of the neocortical auditory areas in the R and L temporal lobe. Through these interconnections languages are hierarchically organised at the level of the temporal neocortex. This information helps awareness that many emotional and behavioural issues have connection to language and improving communication must be part of management. Teachers need this knowledge to understand how brains work for learning.

4. Social Communication Disorder often ignored in ADHD management

Concerns about SCD are when someone is inconsistent to social initiatives from others, demonstrates difficulties in interactions and experiences and finds responding to various social interactions challenging. Those with SCD may have trouble learning how to start a conversation, listening, phrasing a question, staying on topic and knowing when a chat is over. They can show a lag in developing literacy, particularly reading comprehension. Difficulties are - using nonverbal communication within social interactions - eye contact and gestures - understanding nonliteral language - inferences, references, jokes, sarcasm, metaphors and idioms used in talk. Symptoms of SCD may be subtle and easily ignored, especially in large group situations like classrooms.

During conversation someone with SCD may show some of the following:

- Inappropriate or unrelated responses
- Difficulty understanding conduct - may monopolise talk, interrupt or not respond
- Difficulty adapting language to different listeners (formal manners with adult v. casual with peer)
- Poor adjustment of volume and tone of speech to fit the social environment
- Difficulty making inferences and understanding implied information not explicitly stated
- Lack of background information offered when speaking to an unfamiliar person
- Misunderstanding of facial expressions and gesturing
- Misunderstanding of jokes, riddles, sarcasm and metaphors

- Being too close to people when they talk

Subtle symptoms are present early and noticeable as a child grows and communication becomes more complex. Those with SCD are more likely to have ADHD as their label (Sage, 2004, 2007). A diagnosis of SCD should not be made until at least 6 years old, so that full testing can detect communication deficiencies. Around 8% of children experience difficulties with SCD, with higher rates in males than females. Clinical experience suggests this may be an underestimate. Management should include opportunities for generalisation of social communication abilities in various settings with different partners. A therapist may use *Applied Behavioural Analysis*, *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy* and social groups. Turn-taking, introduce and end topics, plus other conversational abilities need practising. Role playing games and visuals help learning strategies to manage social situations.

Those with SCD can be explicitly taught abilities to engage in expected ways with others and reinforced through practice. Our social worlds are filled with nuanced and context dependent expectations. For example, greetings vary based on changing factors. These include the particular context, the relationship between individuals, the time lag since they last saw each other and their behaviour. Therefore, “one size-fits-all” prescriptive teaching is rarely successful. Social abilities are best introduced through building awareness and teaching that rules shift based on a situation. The Communication Opportunity Group Strategy (Sage, 2000, 2020) addresses lagging abilities by focusing on these concepts. Teaching can be done either individually or in small groups and must be practised with peers. In addition, abilities need reinforcing in the context where the individual engages, for generalisation to occur.

For this reason and due to effects of symptoms on educational functioning, those with SCD are eligible and often receive management services through schools/colleges. They can also have outpatient individual and group services that promote social communication. Research confirms that the clinical characteristics of impairment include difficulties understanding and using language in varying contexts and/or following social rules, despite relative strengths in word knowledge, grammar and syntax (Sage, 2020). Thus, they can have fluent, complex and clearly articulated expressive language but exhibit problems with the way it is used. Typically, they are verbose, but have problems understanding and producing connected discourse, with responses sometimes socially inappropriate. They often develop eccentric interests but not as strong as people with autism spectrum disorders. A further problem caused by SCD is the assumption of literal communication. Obvious, concrete instructions are understood and carried out, whereas simple but non-literal expressions, like jokes, sarcasm and general social chat can lead to misinterpretation. Lies are also a confusing concept, involving knowing what the speaker is thinking, intending and meaning beyond a literal interpretation.

5. Review

Research shows labelling someone can bring negative outcomes, including feelings of rejection and discrimination (Winick, 1995). This leads to the worsening of a person's overall mental health and well-being. With a label, the law often marks people as incompetent to exercise certain rights or play specific roles. It alters the way others view and react to the labelled individual and affects their self-esteem and self-concept in ways that may inhibit performance, diminish motivation

and depress mood.

We label others as it helps to classify situations and behaviours but can limit curiosity about them. This may end a connection with someone, because we think we know them and they might not align with us. Context, nuance, complex emotions and past experiences are behind every label. They end up conveying an *absolute*, which is difficult to dismiss. When casting labels aside, we can invest in the real person and their potential. If believing an ascribed label cannot change, actions are limited to make life more stressful. Thinking about personalities and abilities in a less fixed way stops us being an *essentialist*. This belief is that things have a set of characteristics and that the task of science and philosophy is their discovery and expression. The doctrine that *essence is prior to existence*, states that:

- All children should be taught on traditional lines the ideas and methods essential to their culture.
- People labels - women, men, homosexuals or ethnic groups - denote different characteristic natures.

Denying possibility to change and move in a different direction, means humanity is destroyed. Labels take on an "all-or-nothing" meaning, so the brain makes irrational shortcuts. The first time individuals walk into a place, like school or work, they are judged, labelled and boxed. Most individuals have that label until they leave. A study of high school students found that if they believed personalities had ability to change, they were less stressed and not as prone to underachievement and health issues. (Yeager et al., 2014) Believing labels are not absolute is important in formative years, although they are seen as useful for gaining specific help for students. In order to solve the problems of labels....

- **Create solutions and strengths**

Acknowledge and accept strengths and weaknesses to focus attention. Consider labels that you/others might have. What have people labelled you/others? How do you label yourself/others? Find similarities or compromises between them? From awareness of labels - challenge them: What do they mean? Why? What led to the label? Think of labels as learning strengths. What did you learn? What did you gain? Instead of saying, "*In 2023, I dropped out of school/college/work as I was a failure*", push "dropout" and "failure" aside and take a holistic view of situations and what is learned. No one is a permanent "dropout", so awareness leads to new opportunities and personality changes.

- **Discuss assumptions to minimise misunderstanding**

Labels are simplistic and hold us back. People might want to keep labels, like "*a good person*," but to think that someone is always "saint-like" or believe that a "bad person" is all evil makes no sense. No one is totally good or totally bad! Reflecting on labels urges us to think about the society we want. Do you believe in giving people chances to change themselves? Why do we label others? Is it because our self-esteem is lacking? Labelling others makes us feel superior but prevents us seeing the authentic self. Life is more stressful with complex labels holding potential back. In the news discussed in section 1, there were reports of a prisoner and an actor suffering from *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD) to show fixation with labels. Originally PTSD referred to severe war traumas, but now many people claim to have it. Under-performing children must be suffering from dyslexia, ADHD or autism. Perfectionists are labelled "obsessive compulsives" and political parties "extremist" - far left or far right.

In the Guardian's "Secret Teacher" column "*We are too quick to label children who aren't perfect*" (June 20, 2015) a teacher wrote: "*The range of options available to the discerning child-labeller is growing: social issue, learning difficulty, behavioural need, obsessive tendency, food intolerance or – my all-time favourite – being on the spectrum*". The Secret Teacher says, "*I find this immensely frustrating for a number of reasons. First, the diagnosis is often performed by someone with no skills, qualifications or expertise – a well-meaning colleague, an over-concerned parent, a kindly friend. The only requisite is that they have access to the internet or have seen a TV programme about the condition in question. Second, it is upsetting and insulting to people who battle with genuine problems that others casually assign themselves and – most of all – because we as teachers are increasingly forced to pander to them.*" Thus, labels produce rapid conclusions, often to the detriment of students. We use them to cope with context complexity but they contribute to problems, which seem to be increasing with the identity politics movements and virtue signalling confusing and distressing people.

Social psychology researchers showed white college students pictures of a man who was racially ambiguous (Eberhardt et al, 2003). He could have fallen into the 'white' or 'black' category. Half the students were told the face belonged to a white man while the others were told it belonged to a black man. The students were then asked to draw the face on a screen. Although all students were looking at the same face, those believing race is an entrenched human characteristic drew faces that matched racial stereotypes. The race label was the lens through which they perceived the man and so were not able to view him independently of it. Labels help to catalogue information, but we need to reflect before pigeonholing people. The more we label people as rich, poor, white, black, outspoken or ADHD, the more we make them so. Political identity culture encourages this and prevents expression of different views. It enhances divisions and causes conflicts, so no one wins. Despite standardising globalisation effects, identity politics have gained significance—numerous groups have achieved political goals and increased recognition and rights based on their common gender, religion, ethnicity or disability etc.

The 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, written during the French Revolution, was the start for the modern conception of human rights, held to be universal, at all times and in all places. However, recent crises have shown that this idea, sacred among human rights supporters, is not reality. Massimiliano Tomba (2021) advocates *political universality* as an alternative to the *juridical universalism* of the Declaration. Known as "*Insurgent Universality*", this idea is not based on sharing some common humanity, but on the democratic excess by which people disrupt and reject an existing political and economic order. It brings into play the many powers to which ordinary citizens have access, not through national citizenship but in daily political practice.

Recent history sees experiments in cooperative, insurgent democracy: the Indignados in Spain, the Arab Spring, Occupy, the Zapatistas in Mexico and further back, the Paris Commune, the 1917 peasant revolts in the Russian Revolution and the Haitian Uprising. Such movements belong to a common legacy of insurgent universality, characterised by alternatives that since have been repressed, obstructed and forgotten. They are not based on the natural rights of speculative individuals but on insurgencies of actual people, who reject exclusion, domination and exploitation, shown through their actions. Movements like this arise in particular times and places, among specific people with precise demands, with the

principle *that no one should be oppressed*. Such an idea is difficult to impose on people, with their varying personalities, cultures, traditions, religions and moral positions, but society has reached a watershed and change must occur if life, liberty, happiness and peace is to be realistic.

The Fifth Seal, a film set in the Nazi period, illuminates these moral issues. *Amercenary, neurotic, cynic and adulterer* debate philosophy, joined by a *photographer*. The cynic poses a challenge: *If you had to choose between a cruel, guiltless master and a tortured slave knowing right from wrong, which would you be?* The *photographer* says “slave” and the others scoff, so he reports them for sedition and they are imprisoned. The Nazi police offer release on condition they must slap the face of a half-dead bigot hanging from the ceiling. The cynic (*hiding Jewish children and anxious to return to them*) is the only one to do it, so the other three are shot. This story undermines lazy moralism. Everything in our culture is black and white, right or wrong. Those disagreeing with a prevailing view in their context are crucified. We might debate if this moral hype replaces Christianity or is its natural end. Humans are imperfect and navigate a flawed world. The film characters are in a pickle, so abstract debate about morality becomes an exercise of conscience in real time. What might you do? A *utilitarian* would slap the bigot as the means to live, whereas the *moral absolutist* honours refusers and condemns the cynic, arguing some things are always wrong and must not be done. Another view is that wrong was done for right reasons. Life presents awful choices that can only end badly. Christianity brings love and forgiveness for our bad decisions, greed and pride. If we embrace this message in a tough world, it brings hope. Reducing a tendency to label others, which splits people and has dangerous consequences, must happen if needs are to be met. These often go unacknowledged and unaddressed because their label is narrowly perceived. Solutions depend on *insurgent universality*, for less suppression and oppression and better investigation. Situations require holistic appraisal to grasp that virtue signalling and labelling impede a moral stance that could suppress the urge to cancel those with different opinions to those held by leaders and activists. This would produce a more facilitative learning experience.

**This comes from across the school community, with 58% experiencing misogyny from pupils, 45% from members of their senior leadership team, 42% from other teachers, 30% from their head teacher and 27% from parents, with sexual and physical violence cited. Asked to indicate the nature of the behaviour, most responses highlighted intimidating, undermining or unprofessional behaviour (76%), followed by comments about their ability (51%), intellect (33%), body (32%), teaching style (30%) and clothing (29%).*

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