

It Wasn't Me

Why Everybody is to Blame and You're Not

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Extract

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INTRODUCTION

We're doomed. All doomed. There has never been a worse time to be alive. I mean, sure, we don't have smallpox any more, and most people can reasonably expect to live past their twenty-fifth birthday and all that. And, yes, there are fewer incidences of folk being trampled outside their own caves by mammoths, and we need no longer live in fear of attacks by 60-foot women, (that's true). Nonetheless, it's difficult to avoid the feeling that not only is life more stressful and unhappy than ever before, but the world is on the brink of some terrible catastrophe.

It's true. Look around you. The world is going to Hell. People may quibble about how exactly we're going to get there – in a handcart, in a hand basket, trussed up with gaffer tape and gagged with a squash ball in the back of a CIA plane – but Hell is where we're headed: standards have fallen;¹ old values count for nothing;² our streets

¹ No one has ever made clear what exactly these standards are, or from what point we are measuring the drop in them; however, we can be certain that standards *have* fallen because everyone seems to agree.

² Except for casual racism. That never goes out of fashion. That's a perennial British classic – like brogues and early heart attacks.

seethe with a mass of dispossessed youth who feel no connection with or affinity for SOCIETY or the use of consonants. The state of our national finances is such that currency speculation in cowrie shells is beginning to look attractive. Politics is peopled by pinched-faced career monkeys and Flashman-lite toffs who spend far too much of their time saying, ‘Well, Jeremy . . .’ and not enough reading *Running a Modern Western Democracy for Dummies*. No one feels safe any more. You can barely walk down the street without being globally warmed to death or exploded by a terrorist with a grievance, a poor grasp of most major gods’ attitude towards wholesale slaughter and a chromosome missing. Our front doors used to be open and now they are shut.³ We don’t trust our neighbours because we don’t know them, and if we did know them, we’d trust them less.

The world, as I say, is going to Hell. The question is, who bought the ticket? Sure, we could spend our time usefully trying to rectify the situation – involving ourselves more actively in politics, creating a sense of community in our neighbourhoods, secretly arming the police, that sort of thing – but these days *blame* is where it’s at. If adverts for ambulance-chasing shysters on daytime television have taught us anything, it’s that.⁴ Because so many aspects of the modern world

³ A fact that has decimated the paperweight industry.

⁴ And if they’ve taught us anything else, it’s that there are some really, *really* bad actors out there.

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have – if you'll forgive the technical term – gone to cack, it is often difficult to locate precisely whom or what to blame. There are so many candidates – EUROPE, MULTINATIONALS, FAT PEOPLE, you name it. Everyone blames everyone else. THE RICH blame THE POOR and vice versa. Older generations are sure the young are the cause, while the young look at the older generations' history and cry foul. Doubtless you will be the same. In fact, the only thing of which you will be absolutely certain in this confusing melee of finger-pointing and mud-slinging is that none of it – absolutely none of it – is your fault.

That is why this book is for you. It is, in essence, the case against everyone else. Proof, as if you needed it, that pretty much all other members of our blighted species are, in some measure at least, to blame for the appalling state in which we find ourselves. After reading this book, you will know that you, and you alone, can look at yourself in the bathroom mirror and say, 'It wasn't me.'

Oh, and while you're there, you might as well squeeze that blackhead.

SOCIETY

One of the many questionable things to pass MRS THATCHER's lips during her inexplicable 408-year tenure as big cheese was her famous assertion that there is no such thing as Society. This is entirely wrong. To be fair to the old sociopath, it's near enough inevitable you'll end up with this impression if you live on Downing Street for long enough, as the only people you'll see out of your window are POLITICIANS and journalists. However, a glance at the census ought to have shaken her out of her error; it reveals almost by the end of page one that there are a number of people in this country from a number of backgrounds fulfilling a number of roles. In other words, there is Society. And this Society is *to blame*.

Gun crime, obesity, alcoholism, the adoption of hoods by teenagers in place of the more traditional battered top hat with the top bit bent upwards, and the apparently endemic compulsion to name infants Charabanc or Boswellox or whatever other fatuous noun occurs to the parents are but a few of the many things regularly laid at Society's door. And, to be

honest, the fact that it has managed to summon the wherewithal to curate even this disappointing parade of unfortunate cackery is quite something when you consider how often Society is breaking down. You only have to open a newspaper to be convinced of this fact; Society's interminable breakdown is the second most oft reported in the world, after that of Amy Winehouse. Society is, to borrow one of the great irritating phrases of our times, not fit for purpose.

Now, why?

One of the great problems with Society is that it has been tremendously badly designed. Whoever thought it might be a good idea to have the poorer people as the majority and the richer as some sort of elite minority wants to take a long, hard look at themselves; it's a thoroughly idiotic state of affairs and has frankly caused nothing but fuss and bother since they brought it in. It's remarkable that they managed to get it through the planning committee at all. Common sense alone ought to have dictated that by far the greater number of people be rich – thus preventing a good deal of the social problems we face today, albeit at the expense of the crispy pancake industry – and only as many people be poor as are necessary to sustain daytime telly.

Society is also perhaps the ultimate example of the ‘too many cooks’ principle. At first glance, it seems a commendably inclusive organisation, numbering among its personnel absolutely everybody. This is

nicely modern, extremely good for its public profile and plays well with the key ABC1 25–45 demographic, but it is apt to make the whole thing a little cumbersome and directionless. It is by no means certain that an IT consultant's worldview will be the same as that of, say, a milliner, or a steeplejack's the same as a pole dancer's, or a lawyer's the same as an actual proper person's, or a hippie's the same as an even more self-righteously judgemental hippie's. The fallout from this takes two main forms: firstly, a depressing number of highly tedious radio phone-in programmes in which idiots invite idiots to call and explain why they think other idiots are idiots; and secondly, Society appears to have no coherent standpoint on anything at all.

Part of the issue here is a very modern one. Present-day Society has no one from whom to take a steer on what to think; it is no longer clear who is in charge. In the old days, it was easy to tell who was in charge of Society because they were the ones on a horse chasing after you and your screaming, stumbling family and whirling a polo mallet. Later on, as you pressed your hard-earned ha'penny into a goat turd to hide it from marauding thieves and listened to the degraded grunts of the squire exercising his *droit de seigneur* on your womenfolk in the paddock, you had the comfort of knowing your place and enjoyed the accompanying abdication of responsibility. Nowadays, thanks to decades of misinterpreting egalitarianism as the right

to ignore everyone else and the insistence of the political classes on carrying on with all the dignity of a Christmas party in a temping agency, Society is left without any real notion of whom to look to for its opinions. The only thing that remains from those former, more certain times that even approaches a reading from the collective moral compass is ‘Thought for the Day’ on the *Today* programme, and that is, in truth, little more than a signal to the nation to get in the shower.

Without leadership, Society has naturally turned in on itself and succumbed to internecine squabbling, to the point where it’s difficult to see any sort of useful agreement being reached about anything at all without dropping the whole bally shower on to an island and coming back later to see who’s still alive and holding the conch. The problem with this is that Society is already on an island and has been for some time now with no sign that anyone’s found the conch, let alone kept hold of it. To be fair, though, some of us are a bit busy to go around looking for conches – that word search isn’t going to solve itself.

There is a subsection of Society, however, whose job it is to provide at least the semblance of leadership and they are not doing it. Among other things, we call them POLITICIANS.