



# THE TYRANNY OF THE GUARDIAN-READERS

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# The Guardian

### INTRODUCTION

Is there a typical *Guardian*-reader? For example, I once said that *Guardian*-readers are stupid people who go around telling us all how intelligent they are. The problem is that there are some people like that who don't read the *Guardian*. And, of course, some *Guardian*-readers actually are intelligent. In a similar (jocular) mood, I once remarked that the difference between a working-class thicko and a middle-class thicko is that the latter has a degree and reads the *Guardian*. But that statement, too, is clearly at fault, for much the same sorts of reason.

I do not think that there is one simple type into which *Guardian*-readers fall (except, vacuously, the type: *one who reads the Guardian and generally approves of what it says*<sup>1</sup>). It is, rather, the case that a *Guardian*-reader will have most of a specific set of characteristics (though different *Guardian*-readers will have different subsets of this set of characteristics). Each of the characteristics in this set is abominable; and they make *Guardian*-readers, and thus the *Guardian* itself, symbolic of everything that is wrong with our society today.

I will explain this by illustrating some of the most salient characteristics which are typical (in the sense just described) of *Guardian*-readers.

### HEALTH MILITANT

We all value a great many things, and we all trade some things we value for other things which, in the circumstances, we value more. For example, my time and skills are precious to me (there are so many things I can do with them), but regularly I give hours of use of them away (to my employer) in exchange for something else I find valuable, viz., money (because there are so many things I can do with that).

No-one in their right mind could deny the value of health: it is not only good in itself but also enhances our enjoyment of many other good things (and is, indeed, a *precondition* for enjoying some things). However, we often have to trade some of our health for some other things which we value. There are the obvious examples: people who enjoy sport generally have to suffer sporting injuries; people who smoke run a higher risk of lung cancer;

people who drink incur a greater risk of cirrhosis; people who get drunk tend to suffer the morning after; voracious people who avoid exercise tend to have a higher risk of heart attacks; and so on. There are also less obvious examples: pursuing certain occupations (e.g., coal-mining) involves significant damage to health; various everyday pursuits (e.g., travelling by car or train) incur additional risks to health; some surgical operations to improve the quality of life (e.g., hip-replacement) involve a risk to life itself (some people don't survive the general anaesthetic, and sometimes there are other complications); and so forth.

In short, health is an important ingredient in the quality of life, but it is one amongst many others; and it makes perfectly good sense to trade away some health for some other things if you thereby improve the quality of your life (and, in fact, all of us do this to a greater or lesser extent). What, after all, is the point of living a long and healthy life if you never do any of the things you enjoy?

The health militant is identified by two features:

- (a) he/she claims to see health not only as valuable, but as a value which must not be traded for other things of value;
- (b) he/she campaigns to have legal prohibitions on some activities which involve an actual or potential trade of health for other things.

I say "claims", in (a), because the behaviour of the health militants shows that they do not effectively believe these claims: they have surgical operations, they play sport or keep fit, they travel in trains and boats and planes, not to mention motor vehicles, they use electrical equipment, they have connections to gas supplies, and so on and so forth for a whole range of everyday activities which damage, or involve a risk of damage, to one's health. This in turn shows that their campaigns are selective and invidious: they find some exchanges of health for other benefits acceptable, while other such trade-offs they want to outlaw or restrict.

Thus we witness health militant campaigns against boxing, smoking, drinking, rich foods, sweets, drugs, loud music, sado-masochism, raves, bungee jumping, and doubtless other activities too, even when (as is usually the case) these activities are enjoyed by consenting adults. Instead of leaving people free to weigh for

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

themselves the balance of costs, risks and benefits, the health militants campaign to force people to abstain from certain benefits; which amounts to compelling people to conform to the kind of pedestrian lifestyles of which the *Guardian*-reading prigs approve. It is ironic that people whose professed concern is health and life should in fact be so life-denying.

### PRO-CENSORSHIP

Freedom of speech, and freedom of expression generally, are not only the means through which fallible creatures like us discover the truth and better (or different) ways of living, but they are also prerequisites of personal development and human flourishing. They follow from the right of adults to run their own lives, to pursue their own conception of the good life in their own way. Further, the machinery of censorship and suppression is fickle: even if it is currently being used in a way of which you approve, there is no guarantee that it will not later be used against you.

However, these elementary truths of civilised living make little impact on *Guardian*-readers, who typically support and campaign for various types of state censorship and suppression. One will hear them commending or recommending prohibitions of pornographic magazines; excision of sexy or violent or “politically incorrect” scenes from films and television programmes; bans on advertising of products of which they personally disapprove (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, erotic materials, foods they deem “unhealthy”); censorship of political views, and even outlawing of political parties, with which they disagree (usually on the grounds that the views or parties foster racial hatred, despite the fact that *Guardian*-readers themselves tend to be sympathetic to views or parties which foster class hatred). It is therefore ironic that *Guardian*-readers are often quick to denounce anyone with whom they disagree as a “fascist” (which is reminiscent of the fact that some of the most vociferous homophobes are themselves latent homosexuals).

### IN FAVOUR OF ARTS SUBSIDIES

*Guardian*-readers can be counted on to support government funding for the “arts”, i.e. for opera, ballet, classical music and unpopular theatre. I will make three points about this.

First, note how selective it is. As someone from a working-class background, all of these subsidised arts are quite alien to me: my idea of art consists of heavy metal, pornography, MTV’s *Beavis and Butt-Head* cartoons, and Arnold Schwarzenegger Terminator-style films. Do we hear any *Guardian*-readers calling for subsidies for these? Quite the contrary: they usually want them banned or restricted. The subsidies are only for the cultural activities favoured by the *Guardian*-reading middle-classes.

Second, note the offensive redistribution involved: taxpayers in general (including some of the poorest in society) are being forced to pay towards the leisure pursuits of well-to-do people who can easily afford to pay the full cost of their pleasures themselves. Arts subsidies are just a tax levied on all for the benefit of the *Guardian*-readers, who try to cover up this fact by contemptuously dismissing as a “philistine” anyone who attempts to point it out.

Third, the subsidies hinder artistic creativity and progress. For the grant-awarding bodies are prey to the lobbying of established interest groups, making it more difficult for fresh, innovative artists to get a foot in the market (they have to compete against the subsidised tosh). Further, the judgement of the subsidisers is perforce exercised within the limits of their own partial cultural perspective, which means that equally worthwhile but very different artistic productions are liable to be discriminated against, and this inhibits cultural and artistic diversity (which is particularly inappropriate — and divisive — in a pluralistic society).

### PARASITIC

An entrepreneur with an idea for a new product or service will typically invest time, energy and money in securing the resources and organisation to deliver the product or service. The product or service will then be put on to the market, and people will either buy it if they like it, or ignore it if they don’t. If enough people

buy it, the entrepreneur will stay in business and may eventually earn a profit; otherwise the entrepreneur will make a loss. In this way, business people are rewarded for providing good service to the public and punished for failing to do so. Prosperity results from this process of trial and error which encourages ever more innovative ways of serving the public.

What happens if a *Guardian*-reader has an idea for a new product or service? Typically he/she will campaign to get government funding; i.e., he/she will start a campaign to *compel* the public to pay for the product or service through taxation. The market test of whether the public actually want the product or service (and at what price) is thereby sidestepped (deliberately, since few people would voluntarily pay for these “services”). Effectively, the *Guardian*-reader writes a job description for him/herself and then forces the public to pay the salary and other costs, whether anybody actually wants the product or service or not. A whole class of *Guardian*-reading parasites results from this process which encourages ever more innovative ways of living on the backs of the productive population (which has to languish under the costly and often unwanted attentions of social workers, health and safety executives, equality officers, industry regulators, job evaluation “experts”, planning departments, advisory bodies and state-funded pressure groups — on health, smoking, alcohol, etc. — arts councils, preservation busybodies, and so on and so forth, not to mention the vast supporting army of bureaucrats in central government, local government, quangos and the EC).

### PREJUDICED AGAINST MARKETS

With the collapse of socialism and the revelation of its horrors, *Guardian*-readers are resigned to a grudging acceptance of markets; but they are inclined to take every opportunity to disclose their distaste. Typically, they abhor competition, they outwardly despise money, they detest profit, and they exalt “public need” over “private greed”.

However, the market is a system of spontaneous co-operation in which people make voluntary exchanges for mutual benefit. In market competition, people are competing to co-operate, e.g. sellers competing with each other to be the one who co-operates with the buyer in the trade which is advantageous to both parties. The virtue of this competition is that it provides a powerful incentive to be of good service to others; for if you are not, your competitors will be, and then they — and not you — will reap the benefits of co-operation. Profit is the reward for taking risks in providing goods or services that the public decide (for themselves) that they need; and money is just the common medium of exchange which facilitates the whole process.

It is therefore quite impudent for *Guardian*-readers to describe their tax-funded activities as “public service” directed to “public need”, in contradistinction to the activities of businesses which are pursued for “private greed”. The truth is that greedy capitalists provide better quality services at lower costs than greedy tax-guzzlers, because the market gives them strong incentives to do so. The *Guardian*-readers’ bias against markets is at best a confusion and at worst an apology for the vested interests of public sector employees.

### REDISTRIBUTIVE

A reason given by *Guardian*-readers for their preference for services provided by the state, rather than through the market, is that it is a way of redistributing wealth from rich to poor. However, if redistribution were the aim, it would make more sense to redistribute money: this would give the poor greater purchasing power, allowing them to make their own choices and to take responsibility for them. Instead, state provision takes power and responsibility from the general public and gives it to state employees (bureaucrats and professionals); and it also effects a redistribution of wealth in favour of the affluent and educated who understand how best to work the state machinery to their own advantage, thereby securing for themselves the benefits of the state-run services. As with arts subsidies, we have here a redistribution in favour of the middle classes.

However, the *Guardian*-readers' attachment to redistribution, or "social justice", is at fault in principle, since it is inherently totalitarian. For suppose some *Guardian*-reader's pet pattern of distribution were realised; it could only be maintained by strict controls over what people were allowed to do even in their leisure hours. For example, if someone were to carry out odd jobs for his/her neighbours at the weekend, either in return for money, or in return for some other service, or even as an act of charity, this would involve a redistribution liable to upset the pattern supposedly demanded by "social justice". In case it is thought that the exchanges or gifts involved here would be too insignificant to have much of an impact on the favoured distribution, consider first that the accumulation of lots of small changes could make a big difference to the pattern of distribution. Consider, second, two extreme cases: the boy who becomes very rich by running his own computer consultancy after school (there are actual instances of this); the ascetic who gives the larger part of her income to others because she wants to live an abstemious but charitable life. The ordained pattern of distribution could be upheld only by prohibiting or severely restricting voluntary exchanges and gift-giving, and this would involve the most oppressive and totalitarian regulation and monitoring of every aspect of our lives.<sup>2</sup>

### AVERSE TO PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

*Guardian*-readers tend to view people as passive and malleable victims of external forces rather than as beings capable of independent action who can think and consider options and make decisions for themselves in the light of their own particular circumstances. Thus, the impaired health of some smokers is attributed to marketing by tobacco companies rather than to the free choices of individuals who are aware of the health risks but think that the benefits are worth it. Similarly, crime is attributed to poverty or unemployment rather than to the decisions of criminals to violate the rights of others; and all manner of "addictions" are invoked instead of recognising other selfish or irresponsible behaviour for what it is.

However, not only are *Guardian*-readers averse to recognising personal responsibility in others, but they are also reluctant to accept personal responsibility themselves. This is perhaps clearest in their typical response to hardship in society: rather than helping others themselves, they call on the government to take action at the expense of other taxpayers (particularly the rich). They are then, of course, first in the queue to be the salaried bureaucrats who carry out the government programme, thereby turning the human misery to their own financial gain. In an unlikely perversion of language, they describe this kind of response as "caring"; and this in spite of the fact that the idea that the government will always bail people out encourages everyone to not-care-less about others.

### OPTION-BARRING

One thing which perturbs *Guardian*-readers is that some people's pay is at a level which the *Guardian*-readers regard as not "decent". They are almost unanimous in advocating the establishment of a legal minimum wage. If they succeed in this, what will happen to those who are currently earning below the prescribed minimum? They will *not* all get a pay rise: if this happened, the costs of their goods or services would rise, which would mean that, if the company is to survive, prices would have to rise; but if prices rose then many people would stop buying (they can get something better at the higher price elsewhere); which means that either the company would go bust, or it would lay off significant numbers of staff. Either way, most of these people who were previously in paid employment would be thrown out of a job: not only would they not get "decent" pay, they would not get any pay at all. Of course, they had the option of unemployment before, but they preferred to work for a relatively low wage. However, as a result of minimum wage law their preferred option will be barred to them, and they will find themselves instead in the ranks of the unemployed.

Who will benefit from this? Well, the *Guardian*-readers will be able to sleep soundly at night in the belief that no-one is being paid below a "decent" level; but the people they are ostensibly

trying to help will actually be worse off, being forced to take options that they previously passed over.

The minimum wage is just one illustration of a general point. Other illustrations are: equal pay legislation, maximum working week, rent control, slum clearance, minimum health and safety standards, enforced price ceilings, mandatory occupational qualifications, licences, and so on *ad nauseam*. What is common to these cases is that there is an option which people voluntarily choose because they find it beneficial (better than the available alternatives). The option offends the aesthetic sense of the *Guardian*-readers who declare the option "not decent". They therefore campaign to have the option outlawed, and this type of campaign has been very successful. As a result, the very people who the *Guardian*-readers claim to be helping are made significantly worse off by having their best available options closed off to them; but the *Guardian*-readers are happy because their sensibilities are no longer offended (and some of them have well-paid jobs enforcing the option-barring legislation).

### PRO-DEMOCRACY

If any activity is to be carried out by government, then it is best that the government be under some form of democratic control, so that the public have some way (through a vote) of holding their governors to account. However, democratic accountability is a very blunt instrument: you only get to vote every so often; you only get a choice between whole packages of options (represented by the different, or not so different, manifestos of political parties); and everyone ends up with the same package, viz., whatever package the majority selected. Market accountability, on the other hand, is much more fine-tuned. You can make purchasing decisions on a daily basis. If a company produces a good that you don't like, you don't have to buy. You are not normally compelled to buy a whole bundle of goods which have been lumped together, being able instead to pick and choose, buying the things you want and leaving the things you don't. And we don't all have to buy the same things: we can all go our separate ways and be happy in our difference (if the majority are buying Madonna CDs it doesn't bother me, since I am still free to buy my Megadeth).

*Guardian*-readers, however, tend always to see accountability in democratic terms, and often (if not usually) campaign for replacing market accountability by democratic accountability, with the consequent loss of individual choice, power and responsibility that that entails. In fact the *Guardian*-reader is usually blind to market accountability altogether. Take, for instance, the scandal that around 20% of money raised in taxation is spent by quangos which are unaccountable to the taxpayer. The *Guardian*-reader response is to demand democratic accountability; but it would be much better to put these bodies on to the market, give people back the tax monies currently used to pay for them, and let people decide for themselves (each in their different way) whether or not they want to pay for the services of these bodies. (If, in addition, the markets were deregulated — freed, opened up to competition — the very rationale for many of these quangos would disappear.)<sup>3</sup>

### PO-FACED

Little upsets a typical *Guardian*-reader more than the thought that people might be having some fun. We have noted this already with respect to health militancy, but it applies also to activities that are positively good for our health, in particular, laughter and sex. *Guardian*-readers characteristically carry a whole list of topics in relation to which levity is impermissible; and any attempt to bring sex into the open, or even any expression of interest in the subject, will be stigmatised as "sexist" (including, even, advertisements for lingerie!).

The weapon customarily used by this humourless gestapo is that of taking offence (and making formal complaints). This weapon is pretty effective, because decent people of goodwill try not to cause offence to others and they consequently tend to alter their behaviour in response to complaints. However, it has to be made clear that, for virtually any activity, there will always be someone (often a *Guardian*-reader) who can take offence at it; but that doesn't

necessarily mean that anything should be done about it. For instance, some people take offence at black skin, but that doesn't imply that we should do anything to accommodate their sensibilities. The question that needs to be asked is whether it is *reasonable* to take offence at the activity.<sup>4</sup> The problem with *Guardian*-readers is their *unreasonable* propensity to take umbrage at harmless fun.

Parenthetically, there are a number of inequities engendered by the curmudgeons' complainings, of which I will give one example. My bedroom wall is adorned by the *Sun* Page 3 calendars going back to 1989. If I were to take one of these into work and hang it in my office, I would be told to take it down and I'd get a ticking off too. The reason would be possible offence to female members of staff. On the other hand, in one of the Finance sections, where the staff are around 80% female, the *Sun* Page 7 (male pin-up) calendar is openly displayed, along with a number of other male pin-up posters. No-one complains about these (there's no reason to); but there is ground for complaint about inequity.

## DISCRIMINATING

"Multi-culturalism" and "anti-racism" are *Guardian*-reader watch-words; but what do they mean by them? Some *Guardian*-readers declare that all cultures are equally deserving of respect. However, they can't mean it, for two reasons:

- (i) they rightly condemn cultures in which racism is the norm (e.g. the white supremacist culture of old South Africa, the culture which prevailed in National Socialist Germany, the slave culture of the antebellum American South, and so on);
- (ii) they couple their multi-cultural claptrap with vehement deprecation of contemporary Western culture.

The *Guardian*-reader affirmation of multi-culturalism appears to be just a way of favouring some other cultures over our own.

Turning from culture to the separate question of race, the *Guardian*-readers are here similarly discriminating. "Anti-racism" means excoriating South Africa while remaining silent about the black African tyrannies (some of them far worse than South Africa); it means not being allowed to say that most muggers in London are black; it means vilifying white racists while showing remarkable tolerance towards black racists; it means preferring non-white candidates (for employment, college places, etc.) over better qualified white ones; and in general it means applying lower standards to non-whites than to whites. This is tantamount to excusing non-whites from the common standards of human behaviour because they are non-white; which is the expression of a superior and condescending attitude to the non-white races; i.e. it is racism. Further, considering that, when less is expected of people, they also tend to expect less of themselves, it is doubtful whether this attitude and its concomitant practices really favour non-whites at all.

Let us briefly note a few points about positive discrimination in employment. First, it is unjust: it is not fair to the better qualified people who are passed over. Second, it impairs efficiency, which demands that the best person for the job should be appointed. Third, it is insulting to members of the groups favoured with preferential treatment, since it assumes that they cannot make it on merit. Fourth, as those selected purely in order to "make up the quota" are inferior to their counterparts outside the favoured group, the general impression arises that all members of the favoured group are incompetent. Fifth, this is particularly unfair to those members of the favoured group who didn't need the preferential treatment, but could have made it on merit, for they too get tarred with the "quota" brush. Sixth, there arises, quite understandably, resentment against members of the favoured group, with a consequent deterioration in relations between members of that group and others.

## CONCERNED

Always beware the word "concern". It is the *Guardian*-reader's non-pejorative term for the defining desire of the interfering busy-body. If a *Guardian*-reader is "concerned", there is a batch of restrictions, regulations or outright prohibitions in the air; and you

can guess who will be the salaried official enforcing them.

## CONCLUSION

As I made clear in the Introduction, this is not a comprehensive survey of the most salient features which typify *Guardian*-readers: I could go on (and on). However I think I have said enough for us to appreciate the nature of the beast (and beast it is). The *Guardian*-readers typically prefer state coercion to voluntary co-operation; they are interfering busybodies who love to force their values on to other (unwilling) people, using as much of the equipment of state suppression and censorship as they can get their hands on; they also want other people, including the poor, to be compelled to pay for the *Guardian*-readers' pet projects and amusements; they detest the freedom of the market and the variety and the individual self-development that it makes possible and encourages; they want to deprive people of responsibility for their own lives so that *Guardian*-readers can get fat by making decisions on behalf of the public (decisions that many or most of the public would never have made for themselves and would vehemently object to); they think nothing of worsening the conditions of some of the least-well-off if the social pattern that results appeals to their aesthetic sense; and they want their patronising and smug demeanour articulated into paternalistic policies which undermine the very people they are purported to protect.

Further, their inversion of the language is not just curious or ironic: it is downright offensive. Thus an ardent desire to prevent people from making the most of their lives becomes "concern"; objections to privilege become "philistinism"; public sector parasitism becomes "public service"; real public service through the market becomes "private greed"; totalitarian regulation becomes "social justice"; insouciance about and/or exploitation of human misery becomes "caring"; depriving people of their best available options becomes "decency"; taking power away from ordinary folk and giving it to committees of *Guardian*-readers becomes "accountability"; racism becomes "anti-racism".

Of course, it is not the case that *Guardian*-readers are engaged in a conscious conspiracy, pursuing a malevolent course of self-aggrandisement at the expense of others. There may be some who are fully aware that they are pursuing their own interests to the detriment of the general population. Many may be responding to their own self-interest at a subliminal level. However, on the whole, I think that *Guardian*-readers are basically decent people who just don't realise the harm of what they do, the damage done by what they support, the injuriousness of what they campaign for, the perniciousness of what they are caught up in. They — like the *Guardian* itself — are prone to wishful thinking and flights of fancy and are thereby dupes for every oppressive left-wing pressure group and crackpot atavistic "ism".

However, no matter how they arrive at it, the philosophy of the *Guardian*-readers is simple: all power to the *Guardian*-readers! And they can be relied upon to use this power to deprive us of our dignity and to force us all to live in the barren, insipid style that they think is fit and proper for us.

God save us from this tyranny!

## NOTES

1. I use the emphasised expression as a definition of the term "*Guardian*-reader" for the purposes of this paper.
2. I put "social justice" in quotation marks because social justice isn't any kind of justice (just as the "people's democracies" were not any kind of democracy).
3. A strikingly uncomprehending front-page report in the *Guardian* on 19 November 1993 attributed the proliferation of quangos to the government's commitment to free markets! The *Guardian* is a newspaper for the economically illiterate.
4. I use the word "offensive" a couple of times myself in this paper: readers will have to decide for themselves whether my use of this description is reasonable.