

# My Gang

by

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Identity politics has become the zeitgeist of our times; and the identity being trumpeted is social rather than personal. It is an identity based on the group I belong to rather than the person I am. Am I black or white? Am I male or female? are questions about social identity. It is a bit like being part of a gang. We can fight for equal rights between gangs; and, as individuals, we can relate to our gang in any way we choose; but we are not always free to choose our gang. What follows is about choice and constraint; our freedom to choose who we are, and its limits.

## **Who am I?**

This question has pride of place in Philosophy. Descartes founded everything on 'I think therefore I am'. Without 'I think'; he, me, you, others, the world, the creator and creation crumbled.

The irony is that for me and you, leaving aside the creator and creation, the fact that Descartes 'thought' is inconsequential. All humans (and probably most animals) think, and those that died before us thought. 'Who I am' is not a consequence of 'I think'. Also, events like Descartes' mother dying shortly after his birth, or him being a mercenary in the religious wars or having an illegitimate daughter or teaching Queen Christina are biography rather than identity. For us, and for history, Descartes' identity is that he was different from most others. Most of us are commonplace thinkers. Unlike us, he was a great thinker; on a par with some others, like Plato, Leibnitz and Kant.

Thus, 'who I am' has two essential components. First, it identifies something about me that makes me different from most outsiders. Second, my difference from most outsiders is also something I share

with some insiders. This 'something' that I share with insiders is my social identity. The insiders are my gang!

Like most people, I was born into five gangs: 1) Family; 2) Country; 3) Class, 4) Colour and 5) Gender. Leaving aside gangs that come along later in life, such as work, my identity is an amalgam of the five gangs I inherit.

## **Family**

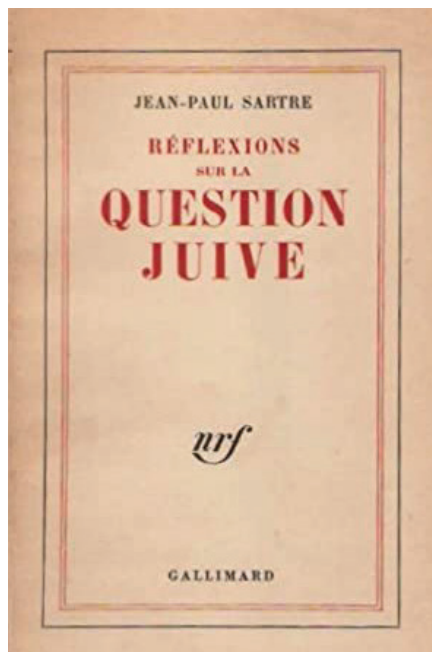
Family can create an instant identity at two extremes. Where there is no family, there is no gang and you are an orphan; or, historically, where there was no legitimate father, you were not accepted by what should have been your family and you were rejected as a bastard. At the opposite pole, when born into a dynastic family, your family became a true gang; the Montagues and the Capulets are little different from the Crips and the Bloods in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*.

Most families are not their own gang, usually they are members of a larger gang, e.g. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists etc. In my case, I was born into a Jewish family and accepted it as a fact of life that the Jews were my gang. My family was religiously unobservant except for the occasional high holidays (Passover) and key ceremonies (Bar Mitzvah). As I grew into adolescence, I became an atheist, but despite rejecting the Jewish religion I still saw myself as a Jew; as did my gang! A Jew is a Jew is a Jew, so long as he/she has a Jewish mother. Later, I became disenchanted with Zionism, but despite rejecting my 'right to return' to the land of Israel I still saw myself as a Jew; as did my gang! A Jew is a Jew is always a Jew.

How do other gangs see my Jew gang? The various Christian gangs have a striking range of views. The tolerant Christian gang embraces my gang as a faith ally and welcomes a defection from my gang to their gang with open arms. The Christian fundamentalist gang still welcomes defections from my gang into their gang but prefer for the rest of my gang to go to where we belong, Israel, to hurry along the second coming. The Christian vendetta gang sees my gang as the assassin of their gang leader even though their gang leader was a member of my gang at the time. Their gang sees my gang as the enemy.

How do I see other gangs? When they are not harmless, I see them as rife with fanatical internal wars (Catholic versus Protestant, Shiite versus Sunni) and equally murderous external wars (Hindu versus Muslim, Hutu versus Tutsi)

I also recognise that my gang is partially forged by the enmity of other gangs. Sartre's 'Reflections on the Jewish Question'<sup>1</sup> is a masterful account of how a Jew is always a Jew because of the anti-Semite. No matter if I convert to Christianity, no matter if I formally reject my gang and join a Christian gang, the Nazis still target me as an enemy agent, a Trojan horse, because a Jew is always a Jew. Curiously, my gang and the Nazi gang, though deadly enemies, are united in their accord that I am forever a permanent member of my gang.

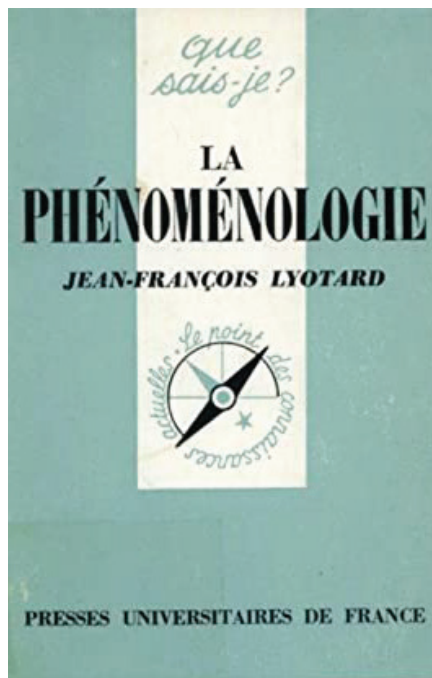


Sartre also revealed something about my Jewish identity which he, as an outsider, had observed and of which I was unaware. Sartre describes the 'inauthentic' Jew as a Jew who tries, vainly, to escape from the stereotype created by the anti-Semite. If the anti-Semitic gang attacks a Jew for lacking loyalty to their country of birth, the inauthentic Jew responds by extolling the virtue of internationalism and world solidarity. If the anti-Semitic gang attacks a Jew for irrational motives, the inauthentic Jew responds by appealing to reason and science. If the anti-Semitic gang praises the virtue of 'travail, famille, patrie' the inauthentic Jew champions 'liberté, égalité, fraternité'. If the anti-Semitic

gang vaunts the merits of toil, sport, and the rural, the inauthentic Jew favours books, intellect and the city. I read Sartre's text when I was in my early 20s and found that he was describing me! Did it make me change my mind as to my values? No. But it did illuminate that I was indeed Sartre's inauthentic Jew; and that my identity was forged by my gang and my response to another gang's enmity.

## Country

Country can give rise to passionate national identity. Movements such as UKIP, MAGA, or more terrifyingly 'ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer' are essentially my gang against all other gangs (with more virulence towards some than others). Country can also express identity in simpler things like sport, where World Cup supporters see themselves as my gang against your gang. Though I was born, and mostly brought up and educated, in Britain, I never considered Britain to be my gang. As an inauthentic Jew (as above), I was an internationalist and therefore discounted the possibility that my British gang provided me with anything more substantial than my sporting affiliations and the general comfort of belonging to a tolerable democracy and a welfare State. However, there was a startling moment in my life when I discovered that Britain was indeed my gang in a manner I had not foreseen.



I was a first-year university student in Paris in 1959/1960 and had the privilege of being taught by an extraordinary Philosophy lecturer, Jean-Francois Lyotard. Though Lyotard was without doubt the most thrilling and inspiring teacher I ever encountered, this did not stop me from waging war with him. Every week I wrote a dissertation pointing out that what he had been saying was without meaning. Week after week I pointed out that his statements lacked validity. At the Easter vacation I returned to London. While visiting Dillons (now Waterstones) bookshop in Gower street, I stumbled across a book by the philosopher A. J. Ayer. Aside from Bertrand Russell, Ayer was the most famous philosopher in the UK at that

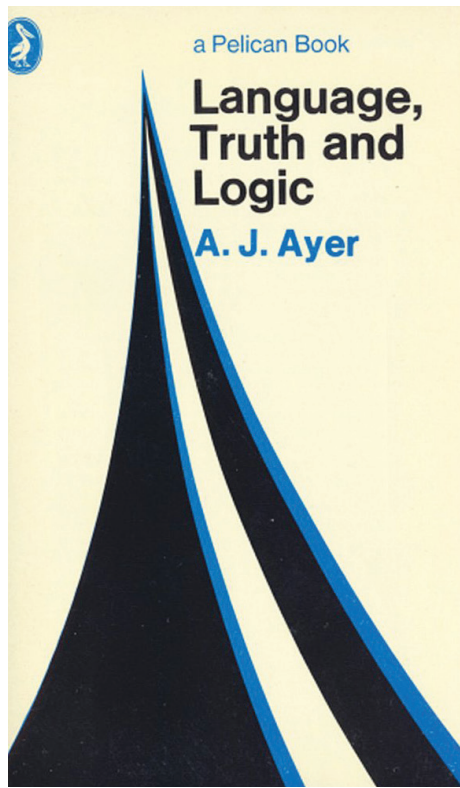
time because of his regular participation in a TV discussion program (The Brains Trust). The book was "*Language Truth and Logic*"<sup>2</sup>. To my surprise,

I found that everything I had been struggling to say in my criticism of Lyotard was contained in this slim volume. The argument was simple and crystal clear. There are only three forms of language:

- 1) *Empirical language, i.e., language about the real world, statements like "this chair is made of wood" where the language is subject to validation, or, more exactly, invalidation. In other words, a statement of fact is only a statement of fact because it is capable of being empirically challenged; the reason that I am entitled to say "this chair is made of wood" is because I can do all sorts of things to try and prove the contrary, and my statement remains true only for so long as I fail to invalidate it. The argument is essentially Karl Popper's falsification theory to describe the scientific method.*
- 2) *Tautological language, i.e., statements which are self-referring, which repeat themselves, where there is no relation with the outside world or any statement of fact. These are mathematical and logical statements like " $2 + 2 = 4$ " and they are not capable of being challenged by anything other than their own rules of self-coherence and self-consistency.*
- 3) *Metaphysical language, i.e., a language which pretends to be talking about the real world but is incapable of being validated, a language which produces statements like "God exists" which is apparently a statement about something "real" but which is incapable of being disproved by any scientific evidence.*

*Language Truth and Logic* is a polemic against metaphysics, castigating its statements as a hybrid of the empirical and the tautological, a trick of language, and denouncing its utterances as pure nonsense.

I had found my champion! Armed with *Language Truth and Logic*, I returned to Paris prepared to fight the good fight, Lyotard would soon be vanquished.



And then abruptly a sense of uncertainty overtook me. My self-satisfaction evaporated as I began to face up to an extraordinarily simple puzzle. Why me? Why should I, alone amongst all the other students attending Lyotard's class, be challenging the very fundamentals of his language? How was it possible that I, who had never had a single lesson in philosophy before I arrived in France, be capable of elaborating a philosophical system which underlay the core of the difference between British and French philosophy at that time?

The answer was obvious. Since I was the only British student in the class, it had to be Britain! Somehow, without any formal training in philosophy, I had acquired throughout my childhood

a way of thinking, a form of thought which inexorably led me to be the champion and defender of empiricism. I was a creature of my British gang, an insidious gang, a gang that was capable of controlling my mind. From that moment I ceased to wage my war against Lyotard. I

realized it was not a war of truth against falsehood. It was a conflict between gangs. I was Anglo-America against the Continent, logic against claptrap, adhering to a gang that, until then, I had failed to recognize. Does that mean that I rejected my gang? Not at all. But, as with my Jew gang, it did mean that I saw myself more like a British gang member.

Instead of the Crips versus the Bloods, I was the solitary Empiricist in the land of the Metaphysicians.

## Class

Class binds and divides. It can be declared openly with pride or hinted by secret signals. British Railways in the 1950s had only two classes, First and Third. By skipping Second, British Railways was signalling a divide between classes that was too big to cross, almost like the Brahmins and Dalits (untouchables) in the Indian caste system. On a personal level, I have a friend who whenever she buys a ticket on a train or to a show will always buy a lower price ticket even when the difference from the top tier is a pittance. She is not a miser; she is signalling that she self-identifies as second class.

Marx was a genius who described, analysed and proselytized on the class system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His error, there were some, was to assume that members of a class will mostly act in their own interest, in particular that the workers of the world could and would unite; and that the intelligentsia could and would serve the people rather than their own elite.

In our times, in most of the developed world, class identity focusses on wealth rather than heredity, caste, profession or labour. The old days when "NOCD" ("Not Our Class Dear") was a snide snobbish aside has lessened and been replaced by the Rich List where the only qualification for class identification is money. Today we are all born into a monied class: Upper Class (money never a problem), Upper Middle (money seldom a problem), Middle (money sometimes a problem), Lower Middle (money often a problem), and Lower (money always a problem). We stay in our class, or move up or down throughout our life. Class conflict has transitioned from the Dictatorship of the Proletariat to Social Mobility (with no expectation that it is always upwards!)

As for class identity, it is fairly simple to self-identify within the monied classes. I was born into an upper middle-class family and have mostly lived my life in that gang. The way I see my gang and the way other gangs see my gang are not in conflict; nor is the way I see their gangs any different from the way they see their gangs. If class is money, the gangs are about money. The Rich gang protects privilege (tax concessions for the wealthy); the Poor gang attacks privilege (higher taxes for the wealthy to pay for education and health cover for the poor). You cannot escape your gang. If you are monied, you are monied; if you are poor; you are poor. My gang tries to protect its members by protecting their wealth. The Poor gang, however, has lost its way. Where Marx proposed that the Poor

(proletariat) should seize power, the current Poor gang just look for ways for their members to become members of my gang (upward mobility).

Whereas self-identification is simple, adherence is complex. There is a major issue as to whether a gang member supports their own gang or not. In my case, I prefer to support the socialist aspiration of the Poor gang against the conservative ambition of my gang. Conversely, many members of the Poor gang prefer to support the conservative ambitions of my gang either because they believe my gang deserve their benefits; or because they are encouraged by their gang to join my gang and, when they do, they want to reap the benefit.

## **Colour**

Here we engage with one of the great signs of our time. To make it simpler, let us consider two gangs: Black and White.

It is one of the great scandals of history that my gang, the White gang, colonised massacred and enslaved the Black gang for centuries. Of course, some members of my gang were abolitionists and disassociated themselves from the slave-defending White gang; but it was my gang who were the defenders of slavery. Even after slavery, the white supremacists within my gang continued to assert their superiority over the Black gang by invoking apartheid (the pretence of equal but separate as a way of maintaining inequality) in South Africa and segregation in the Southern States of the United States. Today the white supremacists within my gang are mostly a declining minority whose feeble defence of police brutality against the Black gang is to chant 'All Lives Matter'.

Unlike the gangs in the previous sections, the Black and White gangs are gangs you are born into, and from which there is no escape. Despite my Jew gang (and the ant-Semite gang) insisting I am forever a Jew; I can still profess a non-adherence to my Jew gang and adopt another gang (e.g., the Christian gang) and have that other gang accept me as one of them. This cannot happen with Black and White. If you are born black, you are Black; if you are born white; you are White. I was born white so my gang is the White gang.

If someone white self-identifies as black, it is unacceptable for both gangs. Recently Jessica Krug, who pretended to be a black historian at George Washington University, confessed that she was “a white Jewish child... under various assumed identities within a Blackness that I had no right to claim.”<sup>3</sup>



## Jessica Krug, the white professor who pretended to be black, denounced by publisher

Publisher, Gisela Fosada, said to be “sickened, angered and saddened” by Krug’s fraudulent actions

There are two reasons why transitioning from one gang to the other is inadmissible. The first is because it is not a question of choice, it is a fact of birth. The second is that it is offensive. Both gangs view anyone who pretends to be a member of the other gang as a plagiarist, someone who has stolen a colour rather than a text. In the case of Jessica Krug, motives for her thievery are sought. Maybe she was sick and had mental problems? Or, maybe she was trying to advance her career, pretending social disadvantage to gain academic advantage? Or, maybe she was guilty of a crime of our times... Cultural appropriation?

As a child I much admired a performer who has come to epitomise cultural appropriation; it was the white Al Jolson blacking up to play a black minstrel. As a child of the White gang, I experienced it as affection, copying and homage; the Black gang see it as mockery, expropriation, and stereotype. My current White gang has now accepted that our gang’s motives, however amiable they profess to be, cannot overrule the Black gang’s perception; and the White gang, to which I adhere, now acknowledge that it is offensive for a White gang member to pretend to be Black.

Cultural appropriation, however, is not always a negative. Copying something from another gang can be a genuine act of appreciation; just as mockery can be a genuine act of militancy. For example, Jean Rouch, the great French documentary film maker, made a short film, ‘Les maîtres fous’ (“The Mad Masters”)<sup>4</sup>, which records an appropriation ceremony

performed by the Hauka, a religious sect from Accra. The film was made in 1955 at a time when the white governor, Sir Charles Noble Arden-Clarke, ruled the Gold Coast, today Ghana, as a British colony. The film records how the black Hauka leave the city to perform their ritual in the remote countryside, where they dress themselves up to parody their white colonial masters and mock their absurd formal ceremonials in a crazy recreation which is both derisory and aimed at appropriating the power of the colonial oppressor.

Another sign of our times is cultural diversity. The White gang is still dominant in the entertainment industry (amongst many others). Most movies and plays are populated with mostly white roles and with disproportionately few black roles. The White gang's motive for casting white actors in white roles is that it is appropriate casting. Since acting is make believe, and since the Black gang want white roles opened to black actors, the Black gang argue that you can just as easily make believe a black actor in a white role as a white actor in a white role. My current White gang now accepts that our gang's casting directors, however objective they profess to be, cannot overrule the Black gang needing to re-balance the predominance of the White gang within the entertainment industry.

There is no conflict between cultural appropriation and cultural diversity. The first is an action which steals one gang's identity to rebrand it in the other gang's name, as when Al Jolson blacks up to play a black minstrel as a white man. The second is a process which promotes all gangs of whatever colour by being colour blind. I was as colour blind watching the black actor, Hugh Quarshie, playing a white character, Hotspur, in Henry IV; as I was being age blind watching the 46 year old Ulanova dancing the role of the 14 year old Juliet, in Romeo and Juliet.

Cultural appropriation heightens antipathy between gangs; cultural diversity diminishes it.

## **Gender**

It is one of the great scandals of history that my gang, the Male gang, has dominated the Female gang since the dawn of time. Of course, some members of my gang supported the feminists and opposed the patriarchy of my gang. Today, there are countries such as Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran, where patriarchy still maintains the servitude of women. Even in countries where equal rights are professed, there is male domination of society in most areas and even some lingering murderous male supremacists like Elliot Rodger with his INCELS (involuntary celibates)

manifesto. The civil rights movement of the Female gang has been for equal rights in everything except where the difference between the Male and Female gang is inescapable, namely biology.

Biology rules as a physical difference between males and females. Consequently, the Female Gang cannot compete with my gang in sport; and the two gangs are separated with the consent of both.

But Gender is the upside down of Colour.

With Colour, a member of the White gang who blacks up is condemned for performing an act of cultural appropriation. With Gender, a member of the Male gang who dresses up as female is applauded. It is the culture of the British pantomime for a man to play the panto Dame and no one (as yet!) objects despite the intentional stereotyping of women. Indeed, the greater the stereotype, the greater the fun.

With Colour, 'Gone With The Wind' is labelled, correctly, as portraying 'outdated values' because of the stereotyping of Blacks. With Gender, 'Some Like It Hot' carries no label; and yet we laugh at Jack Lemon and Tony Curtis parodying women.

Cross-dressing males, like Grayson Perry and his alter ego Claire, have become part of everyday life without the Female gang raising any opposition.

Everything is upside down when we pass from Colour to Gender, most especially the transition from one gang to the other. With Colour we argued that transitioning from one gang to the other is inadmissible because it is not a question of choice but a fact of birth. With Gender, it is the opposite. Despite the fact that being born Female or Male is closer to a biological binary (XX versus XY) than being born Black or White, a binary approach to Gender is condemned as blinkered and Transphobic.

With Colour, transferring from one gang to the other is decried as theft; and we seek what motivates the thief. Gender is the opposite. A male can self-identify as female (and vice versa) and it is those who oppose self-identification who do so for nefarious motives. To see how topsyturvy this is, let us assume that Jessica Krug had been a white male. If Jessica Krug, the white male, transitioned to a black male, J K Rowling would be applauded for opposing the transition. However, if Jessica Krug, the white male, transitions to a white female, J K Rowling is condemned for querying it. Instead, it is the motive of J K Rowling which is questioned. She is a TERF, a Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist, and her motive is Transphobia <sup>5,6</sup>



## **JK Rowling and the publisher's staff revolt: Workers at publishing house Hachette threaten to down tools on her new children's book because of her 'transphobic' views**

- Author JK Rowling has expressed 'deep concerns' about transgender activism
- Those criticising her have included movie stars she helped make famous
- At publishing house Hachette, several of those involved in Miss Rowling's new children's book are said to have staged their own rebellion during a meeting

Why this difference between Colour and Gender?

Partly this can be explained by the mis-association of Gender Identity with Sexual Desire as epitomised by the ever-lengthening acronym LGBTQQIP2SAA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Queer, Intersex, Pansexual, Two-Spirit, Androgynous and Asexual).

Gender Identity and Sexual Desire are different entities. Where Gender Identity is 'who I am'; Sexual Desire is 'what I seek'. Gender is about me; Sexual Desire is about other. What other? Mostly straight, gay or bi; with variations such as kids, dead bodies, torture, fetishism, animals, etc.. The awareness of Sexual Desire is simple. You know what turns you on; it can be multiple, and vary throughout life. Also, you can express or suppress your Sexual Desire in function of your ethics and the law. So, the Gay gang is composed of members who proudly proclaim their Desire (Gay Pride) through to members who conceal it (Closet Gays). You cannot be denied your Desire. It is there, it is yours and you are free to express it or repress it. Also, society has a say about Desire; it can outlaw enacting a Desire which hurts others. Paedophiles and rapists are ordered to suppress their Desire by law.

Gender Identity is not Sexual Desire.

This became clear to me when I had a male research worker many years

ago who told me he was planning to have hormone therapy and an operation to transition himself to herself. The Trans gang did not exist and transitioning was a rare event. I was puzzled by it, principally because I was unable to understand why anyone would feel the need to change their Gender. I had been born male; and was happy in my Gender as there were many advantages to being male. However, I never defended my gang's advantage, instead I supported the feminist movement for equal rights. Even more important, I had no attachment to my Gender. I could just as easily imagine myself being female and did not see why that would bother me. Being Male or Female was the luck of the draw (sperm!). My attitude was "So what, who cares, least of all me?" I had no conception of what it meant to experience oneself as being in conflict with the Gender of one's birth. For me, Gender was not a need; it was a fact. Consequently, I had intense conversations with the research worker as to what was propelling this urge to change Gender. He also sought to supply motives for his need to become her; and eventually found a solution by linking Gender Identity with Sexual Desire. He told me that his motive for transitioning was so that he could "have sex with a man like a woman".

It was a reasonable explanation, but it also seemed like a fabricated rationale for what was otherwise an irrational need. To explore further, I presented the research worker with a fairy tale which went something like this:

"Suppose for a moment that I have infinite powers. Suppose that I can wave a wand and instantly change you to a woman. Suppose my powers are so great that all your external features are turned from male to female; that your penis transforms into a vagina and clitoris, that your breasts enlarge and your Adam's apple shrinks, that in every outward feature, you are a woman. Even more, suppose my powers are so great that my wand can convert all your internal organs female; that your testes become ovaries, that you have a uterus. Indeed, suppose my powers are total and that my wand will eradicate every last shred of your masculinity and turn every part of you female so that even your chromosomes will transition from XY to XX."

As can be imagined this fairy tale was turning into a dream come true for the research worker.

"All this will be yours with a simple wave of my wand... But there is one condition."

"What?"

"That you never ever again have sex with a man."

The answer was instantaneous.

“I accept!”

The fantasy was irresistible. It blew away the make-believe motive of ‘have sex with a man like a woman.’ The research worker had no hesitation in sacrificing Sexual Desire to achieve Gender transition; and I was enlightened that Gender Identity had little (or nothing!) to do with Sexual Desire.

Adding T to LGB is appending a discontinuous link. LGB is all about Sexual Desire and its legitimacy, T is all about Gender and self-identification. The two are not one.

## **Conclusion**

Belief feeds Desire which is partially protected by Rights, and ultimately controlled by Choice unless stymied by mental Health. These are the key factors which influence how we relate to our own and to other gangs.

### **a) Belief**

One of the great gang wars of history was Catholic against Protestant; and one of the central conflicts in that war was the clash of belief and reality. On one side was the Catholic belief that the bread and wine of the mass was transubstantiated to the body and blood of Christ. On the other side were Protestants protesting that bread and wine are just that, and that belief does not change reality. Many were burnt at the stake for taking the wrong side in that war.

I was born a Jewish English middle class white male. Over time I became bald and old. Let us consider the issue of belief and reality with the least contentious of these gangs, ‘bald’ and ‘old’.

Am I really bald? I can choose to disassociate myself from my bald gang by wearing a toupee to hide the fact that I belong to the bald gang, and become a sort of closet baldie. I can even deceive myself into believing I am not bald because I wear a toupee. I recently saw a documentary on Phil Spector and the assortment of wigs he wore at his trial. When he was

encouraged to choose wigs that were more suitable for a courtroom, he answered "What wigs?" For Spector, the wigs did not exist; they were his hair. For everyone else, they were still just wigs. His belief did not change our reality. However, if the cosmetic remedy of a wig was replaced by medical intervention which allowed my real hair to regrow then 'reality' would also change; and I would no longer be bald. Since no such medical intervention exists, wig or no wig, I am still really bald.

Let us move it up a notch. Am I really old? I can choose to disassociate myself from the elderly gang by pretending to be young. I can do what Aschenbach, the Dirk Bogarde character in Visconti's *Death in Venice*, chose to do. He undergoes a cosmetic makeover at a barber shop, where the barber dyes his hair, powders his face and rouges his cheeks. Achenbach is deceived into believing he is young again by the duplicitous barber. What Aschenbach cannot do is deceive Tadzio, the youthful object of his desire; any more than I can deceive the Home Office into reissuing my passport with a different date of birth because I choose to self-identify as a youth.

With age, if it hurts no one, we ignore the disparity between belief and reality. Once upon a time I had the pleasure of working with Joan Rivers. She was a great feisty comedian in public and a gentle lady in private. Like many women of her age, she would have preferred to be prettier and younger. Unlike most women of her age, she tried to become prettier and younger by using plastic surgery. It fooled no one, least of all herself; but it made her feel better and it did no harm to others. If, however, Joan Rivers had stated at the age of 70 that by virtue of cosmetic surgery she had transitioned to 20, and that we must acknowledge her right to self-identify as 20, we would have queried her sanity and prevented her exercising rights reserved for the young.

Age is a chronological reality which cannot be altered by belief or medical intervention. Cosmetic surgery or not, I am really old and getting older every day.

Is the same true with the most contentious of my gangs? Am I really a man?

Battle rages on the issue of Gender. It is obviously a problem for the Female gang as to whether it should include, even as an ancillary part of their gang, biological men who self-identify as women. There are obvious

problems; for one, biological men will likely rule the roost in sporting events reserved for members of the Female gang. But it also raises a problem about self-identification itself. What are its limits?

There is a clear biological reality about Gender which is decided the moment an egg joins with a sperm. The egg carries one of the mother's two X chromosomes and the sperm carries either a) a single X chromosome from the father, or b) a single Y chromosome from the father. When egg X meets sperm X, the embryo is an XX female. When egg X meets sperm Y, the embryo is an XY male. Genotype is followed by phenotype; so, as the embryo becomes fetus, neonate, child, adolescent, and adult, the XX and XY chromosomal genes create the hormones, organs and the bodily appearance of the female and male Gender.

No one doubts the conviction of a Trans who believes firmly that they have been born into the wrong Gender, and few oppose a Trans for seeking medical intervention to make them as similar as possible to the Gender they want to be. However, it is a biological reality that no current medical intervention can convert an XY male into an XX female or vice versa.

So, if I was a male Trans, what are the options? My conviction (belief) is that I do not belong in the Male gang, as an XY male, because I self-identify as a woman. I am therefore entitled to disassociate myself from my Male gang by discarding my male name, dress, and appearance; and to seek corrective surgery and hormonal supplements to make myself as much like a female as possible. I can also expect others to respect my beliefs, and for the medical profession to assist me. But I cannot expect (demand!) that others, especially members of the Female gang, acknowledge that I have transubstantiated, and am now a member of their gang. My transubstantiation beliefs are mine; it does not alter the biological reality that the Female gang, until now, has been composed exclusively of those with an XX genotype.

If it was me, if I was a Trans male, I would not insist on being a member of the Female gang because I would recognise the 'biological reality' that 'female' originates as an XX genotype. Certainly, I would not claim the rights won by the XX Female gang over centuries from my old gang, the XY Male gang. Instead, I would acknowledge that I belong to a different gang, a new gang, the non-binary gang, the Trans gang, My Gang!

## **b) Desire**

Desire is much more than sexual Desire and certainly very much more than the simple SLGB subheadings of sexual Desire. Desire plays a central role in every aspect of life. It fuels ambition (sporting or career), it inspires the arts (music, painting, performance), it spurs gastronomy, it imbues religion, it encompasses everything we wish for and want.

Desire is also enmeshed in the image we have of ourselves. We all play a role when we encounter others, we fashion our social interaction with others to influence how 'they' see 'us'. This includes adjusting our bodily appearance to suit our internal image of myself, smart or slovenly, young or old, desirable or undesirable. There is a distinction between our Desire for what we desire versus our Desire to be desirable. Aschenbach Desires Tadzio but he also yearns for Tadzio to Desire him. His makeover by the deceitful barber is his attempt to achieve both. The research worker's Desire "to have sex with a man like a woman" was trumped by the greater Desire for others to see him as her.

Trans Desire is almost entirely based on self-image, on how I see myself; and, crucially, on how others see me. Gangs, however, are mostly about something else. The issues which concern the Male gang are principally about power, potency and patriarchy in relation to the Female gang. The issues for the Female gang are principally about righting the wrongs of its relationship with the Male gang. The Trans gang, if it were to exist, is about self-image. Everything that supports and reinforces self-image is desirable, like dress, name, birth certificate, pronouns, surgery, hormones. Anything that undermines self-image is irrelevant, like genotype.

Part of the debate which rages round Trans Desire is that a Trans gang is almost a self-contradictory concept. As a Trans male I can choose to renounce my Male gang; but my new gang cannot be the Trans gang, because that might be seen as me NOT being a member of the Female gang. If I do not belong in the Female gang, 'you' will continue to see 'me' as something other than a 'woman'. So, if I am a Trans male, my Desire is to be a bona fide member of the Female gang; and if current members of that gang reject my right of entry, they are to be denounced as TERFs and Transphobes.

The self-contradiction implicit in the concept of a Trans gang is reflected in the uncertainty over the use of pronouns. Is a Trans XY to be called 'she', and a Trans XX to be called 'he'; or, are they both better called 'they'? The 'they' gives promise of a Trans Pride movement, a Trans gang which does

not claim the rights of another gang. Instead, it proudly beats its own path for rights reserved for 'them'. If 'my' is 'our', my new gang is the non-binary Our Gang!

### **c) Rights**

Do I have a right to affirm and proclaim my belief, whatever it is? No: there is no human or legal right which legitimises my belief that you should be exterminated or enslaved. Do I have a right to affirm and pursue my Desire whatever it is? No: there is no human or legal right which legitimises my Desire to rape you. On the whole rights are granted to protect me from being harmed by others (individuals and institutions) so long as what I am doing is not itself harmful to others.

I had a dear friend, he died too young, who was a human rights lawyer. Shortly before his death he sent me a paper he had prepared for the UK Labour Party arguing that 'conversion therapy' was a violation of 'human rights'. Conversion therapy was defined as "any attempt to erase, repress or change the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of a person"<sup>7</sup>. He argued that any attempt to turn a gay straight, or oppose gender self-identity would be "a serious and systemic human rights violation". As far as I know, his briefing paper has since been accepted as official Labour Party policy.

My riposte was that 'conversion therapy' is wrong and bad because it does not work. It is stupid and cruel and deceives its victims. If it is to be banned it is not because of 'human rights' but because it offends the Trades Description Act. The problem with invoking human rights is what if it did work? If, in the future, medical treatment evolves so that a bald man can grow his own hair, he is no longer bald. Similarly, if gay or straight is offered medical intervention in the future which can truly alter their sexual orientation, are we really in favour of a 'human rights' ban that would prevent it, and criminalise the medics who assist? My friend argued "The state cannot permit – or sanction in any way – attempts to erase, repress or change sexual orientation and/or gender identity."<sup>7</sup> However, by coupling 'sexual orientation' with 'gender identity' my friend was coupling opposites. 'Sexual orientation' is categorised by him as something fixed

and unchangeable, while 'gender identity' is whatever you choose and fluid. Thus, assisting the Desire of a gay to be straight (or vice versa), is a human rights abuse; as is its opposite, preventing the Desire of an XY male to be a woman (or vice versa). What is deplored with one, is applauded with the other. As for forbidding the State 'repressing' sexual orientation, what about sex with children? Castration, hormones and criminalisation can certainly 'repress' their sexual orientation. Are we arguing that 'human rights' override the State's right to repress a paedophile acting on their sexual orientation?

Rights are for what you do, not for who you are. I have no 'right' to life, but I have the 'right' to live my life in any which way I choose so long as I harm no others in doing so. The same applies for sexual orientation, I have no 'right' to my sexual orientation. I have the 'right' to pursue my sexual desires without being harmed by others (individuals or State) so long as I harm no others in doing so. Similarly, I have no 'rights' about my Gender any more than I have 'rights' about the colour of my hair. I do have the right to alter my Gender (or dye my hair) so long as, in doing so, I harm no others. Claiming the 'right' to be a member of another gang is a questionable hurt. On the whole, TERFs have no problem with a Trans severing themselves from the Male gang, but they do oppose the 'right' of the Trans to be a member of their gang. Human rights legislation is the wrong way to right the wrongs of homophobia and transphobia. Anti-hate laws which prevent others from hurting you, and vice versa, make a lot more sense.

#### **d) Health**

The medical profession has got things disastrously wrong on many occasions over the centuries, especially when labelling normal behaviour as disease simply because it lies outside the ethics of the age. Thus, homosexuality can be medicalised as a 'curable illness' in an age or a country where it is punishable by law or abhorred by religious belief. Mostly, in our liberal society, we do not label behaviour, which does no harm to self or others, as a medical disease.

So, what is disease? It is mostly biological, e.g. cancer, heart failure etc.; but it is also behaviour patterns which are so harmful, e.g. schizophrenia, bipolar etc., that we label (and treat) them as psychiatric disease irrespective

of whether we can find, as yet, a biological cause. Amongst such psychiatric illness are body dysmorphia and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Anorexics suffers from body dysmorphia. They believe their body is overweight when, in reality, it is so underweight that they are on the edge of death. No sensible physician would reinforce an anorexic in their belief that they are overweight and watch them die from self-induced starvation. Current medical intervention may fail to 'cure' an anorexic, but the responsibility of the physician is to try and lead the patient out of their belief (delusion) to save their life rather than to reaffirm their 'right' to self-identify as fat and leave them to die.

Another, rare, form of body dysmorphia is Body Identity Integrity Disorder (BIID)<sup>8</sup>, a condition characterized by "a burning and incessant desire to amputate an otherwise perfectly healthy limb." Medics recognise this as a delusional belief and (mostly!) refuse to amputate the limb despite the patient insisting that the limb is not them. "Most BIID sufferers... describe their feelings in terms of identity... 'My left foot is not a part of me,' said one patient.... 'the way I should always have been and for some reason in line with what I think my body ought to have been like' says another."

If we replace 'limb' with 'Gender', this is exactly how a Trans describes their condition to a doctor, when requesting reassignment therapy/surgery. I would argue that transitioning could be considered a form of BIID; and that both are a form of 'obsessive disorder' where obsession is defined as 'thoughts that are repetitive, intrusive, involuntary, irrational, and anxiety-provoking'.<sup>9</sup>

If it was me, if I was a Trans male, I would much prefer medical intervention that could give me easy acceptance of my biological Gender rather than a cosmetic makeover which can never fully satisfy my Desire. It is unfortunate that no such medical intervention is available. It is also an unfortunate sign of our times that Gender transition has been sanctified by identity politics into a human rights campaign rather than a health issue.

## e) Choice

Alone among all living species, we humans have the extraordinary property of being able to see ourselves. However, 'seer' and 'what we see' are different. Consequently, we (the seers) are always free to choose how we relate to our self-image and/or our gangs (what we see). This freedom of choice defines our humanity.

Identity politics is a comparatively new way to describe the autocratic political appeal which is used to promote my gang and to defend my gang against yours. Over centuries 'patriotism' has been the rallying cry for Nation gangs; in the 19th century the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' proclaimed the dominance of the working class above all other Class gangs; and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century 'apartheid' did the same for Colour. Identity politics argues that it is our destiny to support our gang(s). For example, if I am 'French', 'White', and 'Working Class', I should defend my gang(s) against 'Foreigners' (including the trans-national European Union), 'Blacks' (and non-Christians) and the 'Elite' (the énarques); while the same for the 'USA' has 'Foreigners' as shithole countries, 'White' as preferably WASP, and the 'Elite' as the Washington swamp. For identity politics, it is the duty of a gang member to promote and defend their gang, right or wrong, just or unjust.

Identity politics (my gang is best) is the opponent of civil rights (all gangs are equal). The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement highlights the disparity of rights shown by the police and aims to correct a wrong. The feminist movement highlights the disparity of rights between men and women and aims to correct the wrong. The Gay rights movement highlights the disparity of rights between gays and straights and aims to correct the wrong. Civil rights is a call for all gangs to benefit from equal justice, and to oppose gangs that proclaim superiority.

So, let us return to Choice and that famous gang war of the past, Catholic versus Protestant, and the issue of transubstantiation. In that war beliefs have not changed but peace has been declared. Why? Because, by Choice, both sides stopped insisting that they were part of a single 'Christian' gang, where the beliefs of one side were disallowed by the other and battle raged over what it meant to be 'Christian'. Instead of 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' being adjectives for 'Christian', they became the descriptors of their own gang, leaving the other gang to believe whatever it liked. The Trans versus TERF war is a gang battle over what it means to be a 'woman'. A simple resolution of that war is, by Choice, for the Trans gang to be the 'Transubstantiation Female' gang and for the TERF side to be the 'Biological Female' gang and for both to allow the belief of the other to flourish or die.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre 'Réflexions sur la question juive' Editions Gallimard 1954. Translation see: <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/jean-paul-sartre/portrait-of-the-inauthentic-jew/>

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Ayer 'Language, Truth and Logic' Reprint Dover Books 2002 ISBN: 978-0486200101

<sup>3</sup> "The Layered Deceptions of Jessica Krug, the Black-Studies Professor Who Hid That She Is White" by Lauren Michele Jackson. The New Yorker 12 September 2020

<sup>4</sup> 'Les maîtres fous': The Mad Masters 1955 Jean Rouche. See: <http://icarusilms.com/if-mf>

<sup>5</sup> "JK Rowling triggers ANOTHER transphobia row" in the Daily Mail 23 September 2020. See: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8763695/JK-Rowling-triggers-transphobia-row.html>

<sup>6</sup> "A Complete Breakdown of the J.K. Rowling Transgender-Comments Controversy" By Abby Gardner in Glamour 15 September 2020. See <https://www.glamour.com/story/a-complete-breakdown-of-the-jk-rowling-transgender-comments-controversy>

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Cooper: "The Labour Campaign for Human Rights: Why Conversion Therapy Needs to be Banned Now" April 2021 See: [https://www.lchr.org.uk/why\\_conversion\\_therapy\\_needs\\_to\\_be\\_banned\\_now](https://www.lchr.org.uk/why_conversion_therapy_needs_to_be_banned_now)

<sup>8</sup> The science and ethics of voluntary amputation: Should amputation be offered as a treatment to people suffering from Body Integrity Identity Disorder? By Mo Costandi in The Guardian 30 May 2012. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/neurophilosophy/2012/may/30/1>

<sup>9</sup> What Is An Obsession? By Kevin Majeres 2 August 2020. See <https://drmajeres.com/anxiety/what-is-an-obsession.html>