

Daniel Yabrudy

The Revolt of Those Who Think

Distraction as a Totalitarian Threat

Truth is under attack. Today, the enemies of democracy wield a subtle weapon: distraction and polarization, using them to blur the truth— to relativize it and strip it of its value.

The enemies of democracy want us overwhelmed by triviality. To achieve this, they exploit our craving for dopamine—that feeling of satisfaction we experience when we accomplish something worthwhile— but in this case they promote satisfaction without any real achievement. It is an illusion. This natural human mechanism is being corrupted and redirected toward distraction and, consequently, toward the weakening of a thinking and engaged citizenry. This addiction is fueled by novelty, by the fear of missing out (FOMO), and by low-quality entertainment. This culture of triviality is increasingly dominating the time and minds of today's society.

The enemies of democracy seek to dominate our emotions. Another tool they use to cloud our minds, creating people addicted to their screens, is polarizing narratives. These narratives capture our attention and drive us toward irrational conclusions

where unchecked emotions prevail. The strategy of polarization is based on relativizing facts by framing them in ways that trigger an “all-or-nothing” mindset. Through polarization, the truth becomes relativized, and our emotions become clouded. We no longer feel appropriately. Propaganda disguised as news manipulates compassion through false empathy and turns the thirst for justice into hatred. This strategy is not meant to inform but to dismantle society.

The enemies of democracy seek to take possession of our spaces of silence. Our capacity to develop a critical and reflective mind is under threat because we live in an environment that is fundamentally hostile to thought. The tyranny of noise has robbed our minds of spaces for reflection. Our surroundings are filled with stratagems designed to capture our attention through content that, ironically, leaves us empty.

Ultimately, the enemies of democracy seek to seize political power by weakening the power of citizens, relying on a distracted, irrational, and atomized people —a distracted society as the tyrant’s ideal instrument. In other words, the pursuit of democratic consensus is displaced by the relativization of truth and by conflict among groups that are deeply misinformed and incapable of reaching agreement. A society lulled into complacency by the distractions and radicalizing effects of the smartphone is easily manipulated.

“Your Truth” or “My Truth”?

Truth is objective. It is grounded in facts and realities that transcend personal opinion. Truth is coherent. However complex these objective facts may be, they do not contradict one another; rather, they give us the opportunity to understand the meaning of reality. In this sense, truth is demanding. The search for it is

anything but simplistic: it requires both intellectual and emotional effort. Humility, therefore, is an essential virtue for anyone who seeks the truth. Truth does not bend to our personal agendas; rather, wisdom lies in allowing the truth to shape our judgment and our character. Finally, truth lays the foundation for a lasting social covenant. A society that takes itself seriously —with a long-term vision and an aspiration to prosper— cannot be built on relativism but on the firm foundation that truth provides.

By contrast, relativism is subjective. In its pursuit of equality, the relativist maintains that two cultures with diametrically opposed values can both be equally right. If everyone has “their own truth,” then subjectivity becomes the norm. Relativism is also incoherent. If there are no universal truths that provide a unifying thread to human experience, then it is impossible to maintain that truth itself is relative. Finally, relativism is tyrannical, for it imposes its own vision in order to define reality rather than conforming its vision to reality. This tyranny naturally gives rise to a society devoid of social capital, incapable of debating ideas in pursuit of the common good. In the end, “your truth” and “my truth” amount to saying that there is no truth. Relativism, therefore, becomes a path toward meaninglessness, emptiness, and chaos.

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This is no trivial matter. Relativism threatens thoughtful society, free debate, and liberty itself. We must confront this tyranny of relativism with the revolt of those who think.

When attention is scarce and countless interests compete to capture our minds, the pursuit of truth declines dramatically. In a climate of polarization, being right becomes more important than discovering what is true. It becomes easier to surrender

one's conscience to relativism than to remain faithful to the truth, because the consequences of doing otherwise can be severe. Whoever seeks the truth inevitably challenges today's moral absolutism and, as a result, risks being canceled, isolated, or worse.

Yet this struggle is worth undertaking. Today, protecting our minds is an act of rebellion. Devoting ourselves to deep reflection and cultivating a state of intellectual and spiritual vigilance will make us citizens of greater discernment and greater civic strength.

There is something profoundly encouraging about this. The battle for the heart of our society and our nation does not require weapons but minds and souls strengthened against the totalitarian threat, together with the conviction that, united, we can build a great and sovereign nation. Citizens armed with courage, conviction, and hope can overcome the strategies of totalitarian relativism and forge a shared commitment to freedom and progress.

The Identity Crisis in the Age of Relativism

The most enduring and successful forms of consensus are those built upon the foundation of truth. Two hundred and fifty years ago, a nation was founded on an understanding of truth that has enabled it to become one of the world's longest-standing uninterrupted representative democracies. The founding document of the United States declares: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* (Declaration of Independence of the United States, adopted July 4, 1776.)

This conviction has served as a pillar of the identity of an entire nation that has weathered –and continues to face– great challenges.

Today, however, the United States is experiencing an identity crisis in which relativism has played a critical role. Founded upon the idea of a Creator from whom unalienable rights are derived, the United States has, for decades, been grappling with the consequences of a postmodernism marked by a distinctly anti-Christian orientation (by its very nature, postmodernism stands in opposition to all metanarratives). The effort of various groups, including segments of academia, has been to dismantle the metanarrative that gave rise to a unifying idea of the nation.

What has been proposed to replace the United States' founding metanarrative? Relativism. The notion that truth can be neither absolute nor objective, and that it has merely served as an instrument of domination. Indeed, relativism and victim-centered narratives go hand in hand. More specifically, the relativist vision seeks to replace a national identity rooted in a history rich in shared values and convictions with identities based on oppression and the struggle between social or ethnic groups. In this way, each individual loses his or her sense of rootedness and becomes isolated within an echo chamber of polarization.

What Is a Woman?

One example is gender relativism. For centuries, the prevailing understanding has been that there are only two sexes –female and male– and that this is a self-evident truth grounded in empirical observation, scientific inquiry, and divine revelation acting in harmony. By contrast, relativists have sought to separate sex from gender. They argue that human beings are born with a biological sex determined by chance, but that this does not define

their gender. Rather, each person may —or perhaps should?— define their gender according to their own subjective *feelings*. In other words, the individual need not conform to empirical reality, much less to the civilizational metanarrative that has shaped the West, but instead must discover who he or she is solely by looking within. This is perhaps arrogance in its purest form, with deeply regrettable consequences. It is a tyrannical imposition in which each individual becomes his or her own god and ultimate source of truth.

The harm this ideology inflicts on society and culture lies in the extent to which it is detached from reality. For example, when a biological male who identifies as a woman competes in women's sports, conflict becomes inevitable because sex and gender cannot ultimately be separated. This issue, virtually unimaginable before the twentieth century, has now reached the Supreme Court of the United States, where on multiple occasions the traditional understanding has been reaffirmed: that human beings are either female or male, and that men may not compete in women's sports.

This is not merely a philosophical debate. Rather, it demonstrates the impact that ideas have on everyday life. Disagreeing with the relativist generally results in social or political condemnation, and when the relativist happens to hold political power, it may even result in persecution. Here we see how relativism, by abandoning rational and democratic debate, becomes a foundation for tyranny. It serves social tyrants who elevate group identity above individual critical thought, and it serves authoritarian rulers who justify political persecution under the banners of peace and the fight against hate. It can go so far as to relativize hatred itself. There is no longer an objective understanding of what it means to hate another person; there is no metanarrative to explain it, no conscience to validate it —only the ideological narrative according

to which anyone who disagrees with an idea is said to hate the person.

In the face of the anti-democratic threat posed by relativism, it is an urgent civic duty to devote ourselves to thinking —to thinking as both an intellectual and a spiritual discipline that strengthens our civic engagement. We must think not only as individuals but together, unafraid of disagreement, discussing and debating ideas while strengthening our democratic culture. We must do so face-to-face, not merely through pseudonyms and anonymity on social media. We also have a duty to strengthen our defenses against the distractions that seek to dull our minds and the false dichotomies that aim to polarize and isolate us. Today, it is the duty of every citizen to advance the Revolt of Those Who Think, enriching our society with democratic culture, thoughtful reflection, and a profound love of truth.

The Revolt Against the Epidemic of Distraction

The culture of relativism flourishes in the fertile soil of a society with fragmented attention. Such a society is incapable of carefully and rigorously examining the absurdities proclaimed from a smartphone or from the presidential podium.

The good news is that this revolt is armed with knowledge and spiritual strength. It is armed with a commitment to democracy, truth, freedom, and human dignity. While the distracted are swept along by the current of relativism and, in their arrogance, impose their own vision upon the truth, those who think seek out and test the rock on which they stand, and in humility they live according to the truth. The bad news is that, like every revolt, this one is under attack. To choose the path of keeping both mind and heart awake is to choose the more difficult path —but also the one that offers the deepest sense of purpose in a distracted world.

A distracted person lacks the inner strength needed to influence and support his or her community —the real community of flesh-and-blood people encountered every day, whose names may be less familiar than those of social media personalities. The distracted mind is perpetually dissatisfied, constantly chasing the next dopamine hit in order to feel “good.” Such a person is easily manipulated and rarely contributes anything of lasting value to the community. The influences that dominate this person’s attention encourage the squandering of life’s most valuable resource: time. Such is the irony of being influenced by “content creators” only to be left with an even deeper sense of emptiness.

In response, the thoughtful rebel must discipline both mind and heart. He or she must recognize the cunning of those who seek to undermine the capacity for critical thought and build the necessary defenses. There are countless strategies for overcoming addiction to distraction, and they are well worth considering. Yet a thousand strategies are of no use without a clear vision and a compelling sense of purpose. That is why the rebel is not merely a rebel, but also one who thinks.

We are not condemned to live in a tyrannical, polarized, and distracted society. This revolt begins in the home and moves into the public square with a willingness to discuss ideas openly and face-to-face, from the academy to the local parish council. It is a revolt against the meaninglessness of relativism and in favor of building worthwhile projects within every community while defending our society against totalitarian ambition. It is a revolt in which we demand of ourselves, as a society, that we be participants rather than mere spectators. It is a revolt in which we insist on being treated as thoughtful and responsible citizens, not merely as beneficiaries.

The pursuit of truth is the most powerful revolt against the emptiness and chaos of relativism, and it is the finest way to live both as individuals and as a society. It is the Revolt of Those Who Think.