

## Are Crusaders against Crusades any Different?

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What came out of Wuhan was not just a crisis, but also a model of how to deal with crises. That model went viral because it is so easy to remember: There is only One Way to deal with any crisis (consult today's press release for the latest version) and anyone who deviates from or even questions this One Way is an enemy that should be surveilled, sequestered, and silenced—for their own good, of course. This model has been emulated by many countries and people. So, at a time when China should be looking more like the West, the West is looking more like China.

Mattias Desmet estimates that, when a society starts drifting towards such totalitarianism, a medium-sized portion of the population (about 30%) is ideologically militant, a minority (10-30%) speaks out, and the majority (40-60%) stays silent. Naturally, Desmet believes he is part of the “small group of people who manage to escape these forces” of mass formation (p. 137). According to Desmet, those who speak out must be careful to aim only for true speech. Naturally, Desmet believes he is aiming only for true speech. According to Desmet, people are susceptible to falling under the quasi-hypnosis of mass formations when they suffer from free-floating anxiety. Naturally, Desmet does not believe he is suffering from free-floating anxiety. According to Desmet, free-floating anxiety is more likely when one has what Graeber calls a “bullshit job.” Naturally, Desmet does not believe he has a bullshit job. According to Desmet, the majority of academic work is flawed. Naturally, Desmet does not believe his academic work is flawed.

In sum, whenever Desmet draws a distinction, he ends up on the more desirable side of it. This alone should give us pause.

### We, the chosen ones who see things clearly

The flattering self-portrait painted by Desmet is understandable. After all, when we watch *Star Wars*, we identify with the heroic Rebels, not the mindless Empire. Still, in non-fiction, such self-congratulatory identification should be cause for concern. Those who dissent from mainstream lockdown and vaccination policies think that Desmet's work proves why they are right and the majority is wrong. It might. However, his work might seem correct precisely because it confirms in a more elaborate way what dissenters have already decided.

Consider, for example, this complaint: “I’m sure I’m not alone in my futile attempts to spread logic and common sense to person after person without ears to hear. There is simply no changing people’s minds with new statistics or information. What will it take to break this trance?” (Wetzler, “How Have we Gotten Here?”). Was this written by a vaxxer or an anti-vaxxer? It is hard to tell. The World Health Organization issued a

pamphlet where we are told that “individuals who do not accept recommended vaccines [...] are not open to a change of mind no matter the scientific evidence” (p. 5). The complaints—and the implication of being right—are identical on both sides.

Once we realize that both sides can claim to be occupying the moral or epistemological high ground, we are left with (at least) four possibilities:

- a) We can say that the other side truly merits accusations of closed-mindedness, whereas our preferred side is actually open-minded. End of story.
- b) We can throw up our hands and proclaim that attaining objectivity is impossible.
- c) We can proclaim that attaining objectivity is impossible—until, that is, sufficient time elapses, evidence accumulates, and inquiry reaches greater clarity.
- d) We can claim that special methods allow us to transcend or rise above the impasse and view the situation clearly.

As far as I can tell, Desmet vacillates between responses (a) and (d). He officially defends (b) in writings like *The Pursuit of Objectivity*. However, the confidence with which he defends his critique of objectivity essentially renders that critique self-defeating. As for (c), it ostensibly never occurs to him.

The fact that a stance *feels* right does not mean that it *is* right. How, then, can the individual who speaks out against the prevailing orthodoxy be sure that they are not part of another—albeit less large—mass formation?

### **Crusader, *moi*?**

In a discussion with Bret Weinstein, Desmet contemplated the possibility that both men may be answerable to the very process of mass formation that they decry. The Belgian psychologist and American biologist would probably have never met, but now they find themselves united in a common struggle that provides them with a sense of purpose. As Weinstein notes, “Everybody is looking for camaraderie and there are a couple of different paths.” Weinstein toys with the terms “mass” and “anti-mass,” but Desmet proposes to distinguish between “sound and fruitful *group* formation” and regular (harmful) *mass* formation. The implication, of course, is that Desmet’s association with like-minded individuals betokens the good kind.

This is certainly a comforting thought. After all, no decent person would wish to participate in a social phenomenon they deem reprehensible. Yet, given that personal conviction and common causes can be found on all sides, how can Desmet be so sure that critics of government measures enjoy “a real solidarity”—whereas proponents of lockdowns and vaccines are united by something nefarious?

Desmet reassures Weinstein that they are not gripped by any mass formation because, in his words: “When you and me are talking now, we can have a different opinion”—to which Weinstein replies: “Yes, *that* is how we know this isn’t a mass.” Is this enough, though? Clearly, neither thinker is disposed to endorse, say, a strong pro-curfew stance. The presence of some disagreements therefore cannot be a litmus test, since any side on any issue will invariably have some disagreements. After all, it is not as if all those who

endorse lockdown measures see eye to eye on every issue. It is thus hasty to conclude that you are on the good side, merely on account of some discursive leeway.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that, according to Desmet, when a mass formation occurs, “populations fall prey to it *unsuspectingly*” (p. 2; my emphasis). Desmet has a clear sense of where he (thinks he) stands. But, outsiders would say that his association with proponents of ivermectin like Weinstein and belief in surgeries performed under hypnosis (p. 168) match his description of a “subject that no longer knows the difference between (pseudo)-scientific fiction and reality” (p. 24). Desmet eventually qualified some of his claims. Still, most would say that his eagerness to be on the right side of history renders him gullible.

### **The anti-social social club**

Desmet argues that a crisis can provide individuals with a mock sense of solidarity by supplying a shared target for their anxiety. This is true. In addition to filtering air, wearing a mask signals a commitment. So, when a masked person walks by another masked person, they experience a minimal kinship that would have otherwise been absent. It is the hijab of the medically woke. Yet, in a world where most people wear masks, the same kinship is arguably experienced by those who *don't* wear a mask. What, apart from the superficial choices involved, is the difference?

I recall seeing a hoodie that said “anti-social social club.” This is the club where Desmet’s work is well received. Yet, nonconformists conform in being nonconformists. This is not necessarily to be avoided. Often, dissidents would be wiped out immediately if they did not ban together. Still, to avoid sliding outright into the pattern denounced, there must be some awareness that group dynamics also apply.

A social pariah may seek comfort in the mantra that “In a mad world, only the mad are sane,” but this is exactly what you would expect a mad person to say. It is therefore naive to think that, owing to your fortitude or independence of thought, you are somehow exempt from the social forces governing humans.

### **I know I am right, so I can skip peer review**

Had the theory of mass formations put forth in *The Psychology of Totalitarianism* used MAGA hysteria as its core example (p. 138), Desmet would have become a media darling. As things stand, what people in the mainstream are upset about is not Desmet’s theory *per se*, but rather the fact that he aimed that theory at one of their sacred cows. Consensus nevertheless determines the onus of proof, so anyone who wants to dismantle heterodox views must hold themselves to a higher standard. Unfortunately, Desmet’s sense of mission lets his scholarship slip, making it easy for critics to find flaws in his account.

Desmet is fond of saying that “85 percent of medical studies come to questionable conclusions due to errors, sloppiness, and fraud” (p. 31). *If* this assessment is correct—and that is a big “if”—what are we supposed to do? One straightforward step in a better direction would be to ensure that peers check each other’s work. For example, Desmet draws heavily on the ideas of the philosopher Hannah Arendt and the sociologist Gustave

Le Bon, but he is neither a philosopher nor a sociologist, so it makes sense to seek input from specialists who have devoted their careers to these figures and fields. Such input was offered to Desmet by the Karl Jaspers Society of North America, but he turned it down. So, instead of “making himself available to engage in dialogue, he disregards critique and labels [such dialogue] as an example of being hypnotized or of being supportive of these sinister motifs” (Schwartz, “COVID-19 Vaccination,” p. 104).

With an entire special issue of a journal and this volume devoted to his thought, Desmet cannot claim to be a victim ignored by the establishment. He is right that blind peer review does not rid reviewers (or authors) of their unnoticed biases and capacity to err (p. 22). Should we then throw up our hands and veer into the response (b) catalogued earlier, which says that objectivity is futile to pursue? Given the byline about Desmet publishing “one hundred peer-reviewed academic papers,” maybe he thinks that the usual standards don’t apply in cases where an author seeks to denounce the system itself. Whatever the case, I find his choice to abandon scrutiny mistaken. As Sydney Smith wrote: “It is the greatest of all mistakes, to do nothing because you can only do little.”

Scrutiny by specialists revealed that Desmet frequently misquotes thinkers (Iakovou, “On the Misuse”). The article that claimed that 85 percent of research findings are false is cited selectively by Desmet (see Ghaemi, “Postmodern Anti-Science,” p. 89), since the original source applies this numerical estimate only to *some* (random vs. non-random) types of studies. As if this wasn’t enough, images of brain scans in Desmet’s book were airbrushed and differed from the originals (see the comparison in van Erp 2022)—despite the fact that Desmet (p. 18) cites the manipulation of images as a reason for distrusting scientific papers. The scholars who discovered these mistakes “learned of Desmet’s cancellation only after having submitted their critiques,” but in many instances participating in the special issue “would have been sufficient time for Desmet to correct the manuscript of his book” (Wautischer, “In Lieu of the Author,” p. 80). So, it is not that the corrective mechanisms of academia don’t work. Rather, Desmet doesn’t *want* them to work.

Unfortunately, many outside academia rely on Desmet to gauge what is happening inside academia. Ironically, the article that Desmet invokes to justify his pessimism about science enjoins us to always look at results in comparison, since “several research teams, often dozens of them, may probe the same or similar questions” (Ioannidis, “Why Most Published Research,” p. 697). The moral is that you shouldn’t get your view of totalitarianism solely from Desmet. Read what others have to say.

### **Things you will never hear Desmet mention**

Desmet claims that, if we construe the universe as “a machine, the components of which are measurable,” we will invariably espouse a society “led by expert technocrats” (p. 49). I have spent my career opposing machine-like views of the world and humans (see “Choosing Between” and more recently “Reality and Semiosis”) and have no desire to have my life and body micromanaged by others, so I applaud Desmet’s efforts. There are, however, important problems with his account.

First, Desmet completely overlooks that we can endorse an orderly universe while insisting that finite minds like ours could never fully grasp its order. He seems to think

that, if you fix the theory of reality (metaphysics), you thereby fix the theory of knowledge (epistemology)—but of course, this is completely erroneous. I can fail to locate my car keys yet hold fast that they await me, somewhere.

Second, Desmet's attacks on mechanism neglect to mention a bothersome fact, namely that almost everyone believes in God. God, however, is not a tiny particle impacting others in accordance with physical laws. Hence, the mechanistic worldview cannot be nearly as popular or dominant as Desmet claims. In fact, it is questionable whether any society was ever predicated on mechanism (note that the “dialectical materialism” of communist regimes does not count as mechanism, insofar as it makes room for internal contradictions—a feature that mechanism would never allow).

Third, if “the process [of mass formation that] Desmet describes were true, it is strange that this development was only manifested in Germany and Russia. So what about the most industrialised countries like the United States and the United Kingdom?” (van Erp). Further disproof would come from China, where most ordinary people believe in a world where chance, the four elements, and even spirits rule. Yet, during the communist revolution and more recently the corona crisis, the population of China slid easily into mass formations. Desmet says that the best way to “find a durable solution to current and future crises” is to “tap into the possibilities offered by a more psychological approach to human beings” (p. 173) and uses placebo effects to illustrate what this might mean (pp. 167–169). However, the prevalence of acupuncture in China shows that making room for “mind over matter” in no way prevents a society from being overtaken by totalitarianism. Why would it?

A similar counter-example would be the Iranian regime, which explicitly grounds its political authority in a religious, not scientific, worldview. Desmet never discusses these non-mechanistic yet totalitarian cultures, so he ostensibly “has a blind spot for developments that do not fit into his ideology” (van Erp).

### **Mechanism is unlikely to be the sole cause of anxiety**

Has Desmet shown that a mechanistic worldview can lead to levels of anxiety capable of morphing into mass formations? I think so. Has he shown that *only* a mechanistic worldview can do this? Not at all. Defending the latter claim would require a contrast with other worldviews—in the same way that arguing for the superiority of Kia cars requires an examination of Fords, Teslas, Nissans, etc. The average customer might be moved by a Kia-only sales pitch, but those working in the automotive industry can make the contrasts crucial to actually gauging such merit. Similarly, those of us who work in the idea industry can spot all that Desmet leaves out.

There is no shortage of views to choose from in metaphysics, but you would never guess who the competitors are by reading Desmet. Pepper, for example, proposes a classification where, in addition to mechanism, we have formism, contextualism, and organicism (*World Hypotheses*). Surely, these other worldviews can also lead to anxiety.

What if I said, for instance, that a medieval European view of Earth as caught between heaven and hell generated the anxiety that was eventually vented into the Crusades? You can re-endow humans with a soul, but now instead of worrying about a

lack of place and meaning in a disenchanted universe, humans would worry about their fate in the afterlife. Say what you will about a world made exclusively of matter, it never allowed for a concept like eternal damnation. Blaming the non-materialistic Christian worldview for mass formations like the Crusades or the Inquisition thus sounds as plausible or implausible as anything Desmet says.

Counter-examples abound. Plato, for example, wrote an influential manual for how the state can and should use force and propaganda to fully control the lives of citizens (Popper, *The Open Society*). Yet, Plato also believed that all things participate in timeless patterns that intuition alone can know. This sounds like the worldview that Desmet champions. So, when we join the pieces of Plato's philosophy together, we get a thinker who defended a non-material universe yet who defended (and indeed pioneered) totalitarianism in politics. This shows that rejecting mechanism and materialism won't stop totalitarianism.

Another counter-example would be Leibniz, the polymath who outdid Desmet by making souls the very stuff of the universe—yet who held that all problems could be confidently solved with the cold calculations of logic. This relevant datum is not conducive to Desmet's historical narrative, so it never shows up on his radar.

According to Desmet, totalitarian control becomes more likely when four conditions are present, namely 1) generalized loneliness, 2) lack of meaning in life, 3) widespread presence of free-floating anxiety and psychological unease within a population, and finally 4) irritability and aggression. Desmet singles out mechanism as the source of these conditions, but all you need to get his account of totalitarianism going are these initial conditions. His theory would therefore be more robust if it construed mechanism as *a* source, not *the* source, of existential unease. This would allow him to frame mechanism merely as a case study (perhaps reflecting his personal interests), without closing the door to other possible sources.

### **Dubious methods coupled with grandiose claims**

Desmet holds that conviction in the full knowability of the universe is what ultimately leads to totalitarian control. The tenuous nature of this diagnosis comes into sharp relief when we contrast it with Leonard Peikoff's *The Ominous Parallels*. Peikoff starts with roughly the same materials as Desmet—the Nazi regime and the work of Hannah Arendt—yet he reaches a diametrically opposed conclusion.

Whereas Desmet blames the Enlightenment for generating the gulags and gas chambers (pp. 89–90), Peikoff thinks only a return to the ideals of the Enlightenment can save us from further gulags and gas chambers (p. 13). Whereas Desmet sees Kant as the poster boy of Enlightenment thinking and sees Kant's advocacy of rationality leading to “fanaticism” and “radical self-destruction” (p. 89), Peikoff sees Kant as “the man who, more than any other, put an end to the Enlightenment” (p. 31) and sees Kant's advocacy of irrationality as “generating the disease of collectivism and transmitting it to the dictators of our century” (p. 26). According to Desmet, Kant wanted to “dispel the darkness with the light of reason” (p. 12). According to Peikoff, Kant wanted to show how “[m]an's mind [...] is unable to acquire any knowledge of reality” (p. 32).

Desmet and Peikoff both write as if they are on a mission to awaken their fellow humans from coming atrocities. Each has amassed loyal followers united by a shared goal. The fact that these dissenters are in the minority only emboldens them. Still, Desmet's and Peikoff's diverging accounts of society's current ills can't both be right.

If your goal is to criticize a public policy, engaging with all of world history is not the shortest distance between two points. Such a grand detour, which hardly any professional historian (much less psychologist) would attempt, probably introduces more problems than it solves. That is okay. You needn't question all of human history to question what your government did these past couple of years.

### **Is objectivity really as hopeless as Desmet says?**

Desmet turns to historical interpretation because he is disillusioned with quantitative methods. He justifies his disillusionment with an analogy: "With the folding rule, the carpenter concludes that window 1 is 180 cm wide; with the tape measure, the same window is 130 cm wide; and with the laser measure, it is 60 cm wide." Desmet rhetorically asks: "Would you hire this carpenter? This is about the best you can expect when psychologists use three different measuring instruments" (p. 21). I agree that psychology is flawed. Yet, everything hinges on the options available. I might hire a carpenter to measure my windows if the alternative was hiring someone equipped with, say, a Ouija Board. I will take an imperfect method over a hopeless one any day.

At one point in *The Psychology of Totalitarianism*, he shows the coastline of Great Britain and observes that, if we encircle that landmass with an irregular polygon whose sides are 200 kilometers each, we will measure its coastline as 2,400 kilometers long. He then notes that, if we allow those sides to instead be 50 kilometers long, the total measurement comes out as 3,400. So far, this is all correct. Yet, he concludes that, "[a]s you decrease the unit of measurement, the length of the coastline of Great Britain increases to infinity" (p. 50). This conclusion is either horribly mistaken or horribly worded. To see why, picture an eight-sided stop sign and give it instead 16 sides, then 32 sides, 64, and so on. At the extreme, you would get a circle—but the circumference and area of that circle would not magically expand. This is because, when you double the number of sides, you halve those sides. So, when you use an increasingly multi-sided polygon to hug the contour of a shape, you obtain an infinite number of *sides*, *not* an infinite length. Otherwise, measuring with a tiny ruler would supply Britons with endless seafront property and mainland real estate.

It is disheartening to think that some readers will relinquish the pursuit of objectivity merely on account of such a bad parlor trick. The mapping situation discussed by Desmet does not suggest an abandonment of truth, but rather a view of truth as the asymptotic limit that inquiry approaches (see Legg, "Charles Peirce's Limit Concept of Truth"). Whatever the actual circumference of Great Britain—call it  $x$ —we get closer to this  $x$  by improving the discriminatory power of our measuring instruments. Even the Wikipedia page where Desmet got his image recognizes that "[t]he more accurate the measurement device, the closer results will be to the true length of the edge" ("Coastline paradox"). Hence, the example of coastlines given by Desmet should make you a realist, not a skeptic.

Looking at the irrational number pi, it would be dogmatic faith in reason to hold that a neat ratio of two integers will eventually reveal itself. I thus join Desmet (p. 154) in accepting that reality extends beyond our best cognitive grasp (see “Kantian Humility”). Desmet, however, uses this belief in the unknowable as an excuse to question the parts we *do* know. A preferable option is to keep improving our representations, knowing full well that the quest for knowledge will never end. Far from abandoning science, such a view rests on “hope that in the progress of science its error will indefinitely diminish, just as the error of 3.14159, the value given for  $\pi$ , will indefinitely diminish as the calculation is carried to more and more places of decimals” (C. S. Peirce, quoted in Legg).

Solutions to our problems needn’t be perfect to be good enough. When calculating pi, counting covid deaths, or measuring coastlines, we may never attain a final number, but this does not make everything hinge on “subjective choices” (p. 51). Your decision to model the circumference of Great Britain with, say, only five sides, doesn’t suddenly turn the thing modeled into something up for grabs. It merely announces to others that you are not really serious about getting things right. Similarly, God only knows how many deaths were caused by covid. But, if I say 3 deaths and you say 100, then I am more wrong than you are. All we need to justify confidence in objectivity is such pairwise ranking, not a final destination.

### **This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius**

Much like Jordan Peterson, who criticizes “trans” legislation mainly as a means of advancing his Biblical agenda, Desmet uses the corona crisis as a springboard for something far grander. You typically have to wait a while, but his endgame eventually gets disclosed.

In an interview with Tucker Carlson, Desmet reassured dissenters from covid measures that, if they stick to their beliefs, “something wonderful will happen.” Not only will they prevent the hypnotized masses from committing atrocities, but they will also “go through a very fast process of mental evolution” allowing them to “resonate” with the timeless principles of the cosmos itself. Similar claims are repeated in *The Psychology of Totalitarianism*, where “a more psychological approach to human beings” (p. 173) gradually “gives way to a new spring of life” (p. 188).

Desmet does not reject utopian thinking; he simply champions a utopia different from the prevailing one(s). Now, for all I know, this feel-good stuff might be correct. Still, I wish Desmet was more aware of how crypto-religious and messianic he sometimes sounds.

Instead of hoping for a “tectonic shift” in worldviews (*Psychology of Totalitarianism*, p. 8) that will finally leave humans free to “resonate” with the cosmos and work non-bullshit jobs in camaraderie without anxiety, we should accept that “barbarism is always waiting in the wings and civilization is simply ‘a thin crust over a volcano’” (Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society*, p. 95). Such an outlook requires us to accept “inherent limitations that cannot be overcome merely by changing institutions or by compassion, commitment, or other virtues which those with the vision of the anointed”—like Desmet or Anthony Fauci—“advocate or attribute to themselves” (Sowell, p. 96).

According to Desmet, “the belief that [the] human intellect can be the guiding principle in life and society” (p. 175) isn’t just “conducive to” or “a predictor of” totalitarian thinking. Rather, it *is* totalitarian thinking (*ibid.*). The “is” of identity lets the inferential relation go both ways, so it is one of the strongest claims in the logical repertoire. “Only a Sith deals in absolutes,” says the *Star Wars* character Obi-Wan Kenobi to a young Darth Vader. Yet, if internet memes are any indication, even basement trolls grasp that Obi-Wan enunciates an absolute. It is therefore self-defeating for Desmet to spend 174 pages using his intellect to dismantle totalitarianism only to proclaim, at the start of his final chapter, that anyone who employs their intellect is a totalitarian.

Desmet forgets that, if there are aspects of the human condition that are ineffable—as I think there are (see my “Consciousness”)—then these ineffable aspects cannot be marshaled as premises in any argument. Champions of the ineffable who fail to respect this impotence thus risk giving themselves blank checks for excesses that reason and evidence would never allow.

I thus worry what a Desmet-inspired government would look like. A dash of mysticism in your private life is fine, but how are we supposed to craft, justify, and revise public policies, if not by an impartial appeal to evidence and reason? Technocrats must at least pretend to back their schemes with evidence and arguments. The mystic, by contrast, can always say that, for those who understand, no explanation is necessary, and for those who don’t understand, no explanation is possible. I thus tremble at the thought of a hippie policy maker who, “having travelled this journey [of science] far enough,” no longer resorts to proofs and “just knows” (*Psychology of Totalitarianism*, p. 178) that their imposed measures are right.

### **Desmet isn’t “vaccine-hesitant,” he’s reality-hesitant**

Woke people mistakenly believe that to tolerate alternative appearances and lifestyles, we have to deny the reality of biological sexes and gloss these as mere “social constructs” (Champagne, “Peat Bogs, Sperm and Family Values”). Desmet has the same reflex, since he mistakenly believes that, to tolerate alternative approaches to the coronavirus, we have to deny the reality of medical treatments. Everything, right down to the quantum level, is supposedly a subjective psychological state (p. 163). This social constructivism looks like it was taken straight from the Sokal hoax (*Fashionable Nonsense*, pp. 212–258).

Desmet says that “[s]cience can, in essence, be defined as open-mindedness” (*Psychology of Totalitarianism*, p. 13). Science is *in part* open-mindedness (since we need hypotheses), but it is also reality-oriented (since we need refutations of hypotheses). We don’t get to decide which hypotheses are true or false. For example, the coronavirus came either from a Wuhan market or a Wuhan lab. We may never know the exact point of origin beyond all doubt, but that doesn’t transform it into a subjective preference, akin to preferring Meghan the Duchess of Sussex over Catherine the Princess of Wales.

There are better ways of countering totalitarianism. In the Nobel prize-winning work of Friedrich Hayek, for example, we find a much more rigorous defense of Desmet’s insistence that “knowledge does not belong to man, but has to be situated in the wider system of which man forms a part” (p. 178). As Hayek points out (“The Use of Knowledge”), no single leader or policy maker can hold in her skull all that humanity

knows. Because knowledge is dispersed, forecasts of social phenomena are always liable of being wrong. This unpredictability is enhanced by the fact that individuals modify their decisions in response to the choices before them (Hacking, “The Looping Effects”). When China’s regime banned signs expressing dissent from zero-covid policies, protesters started holding up blank sheets, thereby conveying their message more forcefully. I doubt this is what Chinese officials intended.

No one can have a God’s eye view of society and individuals are not malleable hunks of clay, so the concept of “central planning” is doubly impossible. In spite of this impossibility, central planning provides both rulers and ruled with a mock sense of certainty, so it constantly threatens to swallow our lives. We need able writers like Desmet to remind us of this totalitarian threat, especially in a pandemic context. But, when you read the work of people such as Hayek or Thomas Sowell, you find a critique of totalitarian thinking that sounds a lot like Desmet—minus the New Age gobbledegook.

### **As a rule, everyone sees themselves as an exception to the rule**

Confidence in your stance is like beer: a little is good, more might even be better, but too much invariably clouds your judgment. Desmet may describe the masses that conform to large-scale patterns as hypnotized, but those masses would insist that they are seeing things clearly. In their estimate, they are on the right side of history and fighting the good fight. It is thus counter-productive for opponents/critics of those masses to describe themselves as on the right side of history and fighting the good fight.

In *The Vision of the Anointed* (p. 5), Sowell identifies four elements that crusading movements have in common:

1. Assertions of a great danger to the whole society, a danger to which the masses of people are oblivious.
2. An urgent need for action to avert impending catastrophe.
3. A need for government to drastically curtail the dangerous behavior of the many, in response to the prescient conclusions of the few.
4. A disdainful dismissal of arguments to the contrary as either uninformed, irresponsible, or motivated by unworthy purposes.

The medically woke fit this description. Yet, so does Desmet. He merely lacks the platform of 3.

Desmet claims that “[w]ith the coronavirus crisis, we have, for the first time in history, reached a point where the entire world population is in the grip of a mass formation” (p. 93). The *entire* population? If the process of mass formation is as pervasive and powerful as Desmet claims, then that insidious process ought to govern his beliefs as well. If not, then we are owed an explanation of how a select few, like Desmet, allegedly manage to escape its grasp. Scientists should stop acting like priests, but so should those who counter them.

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