

Eccentrics Rule: The Case for Being a Weirdo in an Upside Down Culture

I'm what you might call an eccentric. I've been labeled as different, wild, strange, crazy, whacko, a weirdo, a freak, a jagoff (Pittsburgh slang for a contemptible person), a clown, an idiot, and a few other not-so-nice names.

I plead guilty to some of these charges. And I must confess that at least some of the time I do things that might appear strange to others—such as being a straight man who cooks, who loves gardening and landscaping, and who has a slacker's tendency to not get his hair cut for months. I'm the stranger who plays Johnny Cash gospel music loudly on Sundays as if by religious rite, who talks out loud to the neighbor cat hanging out on his front porch, and who digs footstool-size rocks out of the woods across the street to use in the yard.

Today, far more than in recent memory, we need eccentrics—lots of them.

How do you know if you're an eccentric? You might be one if you believe that a dress-wearing man cannot transform himself into a real live woman. You might be one if you believe that your ancestors aren't evil for having white skin. And you also might be one if you think your parents were good people or that U.S. troops going on foreign ventures hurts the little guy and our own country.

Eccentric cranks weirdly insist that it's criminal to allow millions of illegal workers to be imported to steal the rightful jobs of American citizens, saving some rich employers money, while drastically depressing workers' wages overall and making it harder for many Americans just to get by. Such eccentrics demand that citizens have a right to be protected

from this evil, which, they insist, could be defeated by a government that enforces its immigration laws.

In essence, if you are what was once a normal person, you are now an eccentric, because these days, the obvious, commonsensical things that we all used to know are no longer commonly understood.

Me, I don't have a problem being thought of as an oddball. I figure it comes with the territory, as I'm a loner anyway. But many of my countrymen don't feel as comfortable going against the grain—largely because they have steady jobs and fear being fired for their views.

Tough luck, lads and lassies—you're going to have to get comfy being a bit weird if you want to be free. You're going to have to go against the grain and speak up in opposition to the party line, presenting the argument in such a way that others can understand the real truth.

Philosopher John Stuart Mill spoke of these eccentrics and society's need for them in his 1859 work, [*On Liberty*](#).

In this age, the mere example of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded, and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigor, and moral courage which it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of the time.

To dispel any doubt in those inclined to take my advice, and as an encouraging reminder of their worth, I have an affirmation. Please repeat after me: "I'm not a domestic

terrorist, nor am I a hater. I'm a truth-telling, freedom-loving, lovable old eccentric!"

Nowadays, the biggest weirdos of all are those with the nerve to tell the truth out loud.

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