**Political Arrogance**

**A Paper**

**by**

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**What is Political Arrogance?**

**Political blame is the sport of party politics. The problem for this political scientist is that the political blame game is becoming not only increasingly imbalanced with insults hurled with little respect for the legitimate articulation of genuine political concerns but there is also no impartial refereeing of claims and counterclaims. Neither the press nor the broadcast media or for that matter the appointed heads of public enquiries are ultimately neutral. Political arrogance has become the consequential act of participation in political debate rather than the accidental result of deliberately sought after political aggrandizement. Political arrogance has become a symptom of rather than being caused by contemporary politics. It is a worrying trend. The question is has sought after participation in politics in the modern era simply become a manifestation of politically arrogant behaviour by those who believe ultimately that their views and thus their politics is superior and more correct than that of their political opponents. The direct result is an increasingly negative public perception of the role and motivation of politicians in twenty first century democracies in particular. Politics and lying or should that be political dissembling have become synonymous with one another. Political arrogance has become an embedded stereotype. It is becoming increasingly difficult to see past the image of politicians without evoking perceptions of political arrogance.**

**Political Arrogance: A Definition: Political Immaturity and Political Humility**

**Arrogance according to Webster’s dictionary is, “An attitude of superiority manifested in an overbearing or in presumptuous claims or assumptions.” Arrogance in this sense is a function of political conflict resolution and compromise formulation. It is also an ineradicable feature of one's emotional political development - the realization of the superiority of the righteousness of one's political cause or creed. There is a political dark side to this process with a blanket refusal to contemplate alternative political scenarios and overcompensate through an unwillingness to consider equally plausible political alternatives especially in an era of zero sum politics. Political humility has come to be regarded as a symptom of political weakness rather than strength despite a willingness to entertain alternative ideas and contemplate full-scale political change. It is the ultimate act of political arrogance in the modern era - the failure to explore and entertain the new policy ideas. The only way or the highway breeds the worst kind of political arrogance and in many senses is resonant of the worst kind of political immaturity - the sheer unwillingness to countenance the notion that the ideas of one's political opponents might actually have value and worse still might actually provide answers which might unlock closed political issues..It is dogmatism in the extreme and demonstrates a lack of political realism. Failure to acknowledge the potential of opposition policies in certain instances is leading to sub-optimal political and policy outcomes. Opposition policy is not bad simply because it comes from the opposition. Indeed it might actually be superior to that of the ruling government. To dismiss it out of hand is an act of supreme political arrogance. Political humility is a seldom trodden path and is generally done so in circumstances when there is a greater national interest at stake. This is not a plea for coalition government but one must acknowledge that the most successful delivery of domestic policy in the last 100 years has taken place when political leaders have had to bend to the will of their political opponents in order to govern - Churchill and Cameron being the most prescient examples.**

**In this sense political arrogance becomes an adjunct to political debate. It becomes a method of simply points scoring in the public arena with the aim of simply looking to impress at the expense of one's political opponents. It is the supreme form of political egotism. Political egotism (dare we say hubris) comes before a fall.**

**Political Arrogance and Political Change**

**Failure to contemplate the need for change is inviting political failure. Change is ever present. It is folly therefore to ignore the fact that if we absolutely know that change is inevitable and constant then policy needs to be continuously amended. Like Canute realized-it is an act of supreme political arrogance to believe that declaratory statements can hold back the tide of progress. There has been a perception amongst British Political Scientists that change in policy regimes in the UK are incremental and gradual in nature in comparison to France where rapid revolutionary change follows periods of political stalemate and bureaucratic inertia or the failure or collapse of existing policy regimes. Fundamental political upheaval has also occurred in Britain at critical historical junctures: 1979, 1990, 1997, 2010 and dare one say 2016-17 when the political system is unable to accommodate sufficiently far reaching political change because of the arrogance of the political leadership and its unwillingness to acknowledge the need for a significant restructuring of the political system and the way that it operates especially in terms of policy deliverables. Typically this is accompanied by the political demise of the Prime Minister of the time who epitomizes the political arrogance of the departing regime - in 1979, Callaghan , in 1990 Thatcher, in 1997 Major, in 2010 Brown and in 2016 Cameron. In 2017 it very nearly spelled the demise of Theresa May after leading what many commentators remarked was the most arrogant General Election campaigns in living memory and certainly the most presidential. A slogan which eulogized "strong and stable leadership in the national interest" came to be perceived as the height of political arrogance particularly when an unpopular Manifesto commitment on social care began to unravel in public and was perceived as an attack on one of the principle parts of the conservative voting electoral demographic - one which believed a Conservative Prime Minister could never be so arrogant to not understand one of the fundamental principles of conservatism. Membership of a property owning democracy gave you a vested interest in supporting a government that acted in your favour, it was the height of political arrogance to even suggest that the value of your property minus a set aside of £100,000 should be collected by the government as a form of tax to pay for your social care in old age. Many older voters and a significant number of middle aged ones saw it as supreme political arrogance to tell them how to spend their children's inheritance after years of eulogizing that the role of government in people's lives should be reduced.**

**Arrogant Prime Ministers: The gap between belief systems and emergent political reality – an Outmoded Worldview**

**Political arrogance is consequential upon the actions and behaviour of Prime Ministers. In the first four instances identified this was the consequence of the failure of the office holder to perceive and indeed acknowledge there was a growing gap between their political belief system and the emergent political reality. In Callaghan's case it was gap between his conviction in the trade union movement and the disruptive impact of strikes and inflationary wage settlements on the performance of the U.K. economy. In Thatcher's case it was the gap between her convictions relating to political sovereignty and national self determination and destiny and the progressive impact of the EU Single Market and pooled sovereignty in the form of the EU institutions: the Commission, the EU Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the European Court had on British political life, institutions and the economy consequent on the impact of the Single Market. In Major's case it was the gap between his convictions in membership of the ERM and the imperatives of the Single Currency and the inherent tensions between the core and peripheral (developed and lesser developed EU economies) EU states, in particular a reunified Germany. In Brown's case it was the gap between his conviction in the role played by the City of London and in particular the Major High Street and Investment Banks as the engine of economic growth in a Social Market Economy providing off balance sheet deficit funding for a burgeoning welfare spending and a growth in the size of the state and its institutions.**

**The history pre-emptors: Cameron and May**

**In the four instances above political arrogance is associated with an outdated outmoded worldview. So profound had the disparity become that the Prime Minister became like a rabbit trapped in the headlights unable to escape the inevitable laws of history. It is only with the most profound political hindsight that even the most powerful politician can achieve sufficient autonomy to change the course of history in their favour. It is fair to say that pitifully few have succeeded in doing so. Perhaps the last Prime Ministers to do so were Thatcher with victory in the Falkland's War and Heath with membership of the EEC as it was. Recently political arrogance has been manifested in a different way as both Cameron and Theresa May have sought to preempt history but there has been a complete failure to anticipate the consequences of their actions. In Cameron's case it was his failure to realize that he would lose the In/Out Referendum on Britain's continued membership of the European Union. There was a fundamental gap between his conviction in the inherent reformability of the EU and its institutions and his wish to dish UKIP stopping movement politics in its tracks. What he failed to realize was there was a majority in the country for Leave but even had he achieved a narrow victory on the back of a palatable deal negotiated with the EU, UKIP would not have been defeated, indeed it would likely have grown progressively stronger because any deal short of Leaving the EU would not have addressed free movement of workers and thus the problem of immigration from the EU.**

**The 2017 General Election**

**Theresa May's attempt to jump start history by seeking to absorb the UKIP Vote in its entirety was destined to failure. Any Political Scientist with an ounce of nous who had read Rob Ford and Matthew Goodwin's excellent book, "Revolt on the Right" could have told you that as many Labour as Conservative Voters supported UKIP. There was a failure to understand that the key valence issue was not Brexit, it was austerity. The majority of UKIP supporting Labour Voters did just that - they returned to the Labour fold. They were highly unlikely to vote Conservative. For them the vision held out by Jeremy Corbyn of a pre Neo-Liberal pre-EEC Big State Britain was extremely attractive. The majority of the electorate had voted for Brexit and the electorate expected a party of either colour to deliver it. There was a gap in Theresa May's understanding that all the electorate was interested in was Brexit failed to offer the electorate a domestic reform agenda - dare one say a sufficiently enticing vision of post-Brexit Britain. Steady as she goes was enough to grow the Conservative Vote in its heartlands in particular in areas (Scotland excepting) where the party was already strong. The breakthroughs in the Marginal seats in the North, West and East Midlands were far too few and far between.**

**Politically Arrogant Behavioural Traits**

**Politicians when competing for the political prize will dissemble and manipulate the public. It has sadly become expected behaviour, The key measure of public trust has become identifying the least arrogant politician - the one who tells the least untruths has the highest standards of veracity and appears in public at least the most sincere although of course one is never too sure whether the politician has been the beneficiary of media training and interview coaching skills so that they come across in the least arrogant manner possible.**

**Political Arrogance as Power …and Weakness**

**The hash marks on the game board of electoral politics are the defining points of how arrogant a politician can appear in public. Politicians are becoming increasingly sensitive to their key demographics and deliberately play to this crowd. They know largely what they can get away with and how far they can push their reputation and parade their arrogance. It is those groups outside the key demographic that they typically upset and cannot predict with any degree of certainty whether what they say will be lapped up as typifying their behaviour or be perceived as an unbelievable unapologetic act of political arrogance. Thus remarks about dead bodies on the streets of Sirte conform with the image expected and accepted by a loyal audience where arrogance of this nature is not tolerated but is accepted as being part of the make-up of Boris Johnson. The other audience regards such remarks as conceited arrogance in the extreme and line up in calling for his resignation. To sack or not to sack? That is the question. But who is the more arrogant? The Prime Minister who arrogantly called an election in the certain and sure belief she would win but didn't? Or, the symbolic former Leader of the Leave Campaign who published articles in national newspapers outlining his vision of a post-Brexit Britain and stating his red-lines on the Brexit negotiations despite the nominal agreement of his Cabinet colleagues. It is a moot point but it is clear that you can be as arrogant as you want in the public eyes - as long as you are seen as a winner! When you're not you're arrogance is perceived as a mark of diminished power and influence. Perhaps therefore instead of talking about the arrogance of power we should talk instead of the power of arrogance. Political arrogance is a power to be used in the right circumstances. Used too much and its effects are inherently self destructive and negative. Used in the right way and it becomes a powerful resource which can be used to underpin political power and influence.**

**Political Arrogance and Charismatic Leaders**

**It is charismatic leaders who possess the innate ability to parade their arrogance preying on the fears of their supporters, appealing to individual interests and disillusioned followers creating what is ultimately in effect a cult of personality. A cult can be a following, a group that embraces an eccentric non-mainstream leader. The media and politicians know what peaks our interest, and if they have to, they will deliberately create the kind of car crash politics which vies for our rubber necking interest. We can all too easily become victims of the media. Really we are no different from the elderly giving their savings up to charismatic Evangelical TV preachers. We can become manipulated and sucked into the embellishment of politicians and their brand of arrogant repartee. At the same time political arrogance can just as well result in disillusionment and disgust. This situation is very dangerous, once societies fail to believe in their politicians there is a danger that they will become seduced by far less credible alternatives because they perceive them to be more authentic even when they clearly aren't. Sound familiar? Until the political classes realize this that their arrogance is breeding contempt then we will witness the onset of the malaise of society. Indeed it may already be here.**

**The Political Hubris of Political Leaders**

**A book that I return to frequently is The Hubris Syndrome: Bush, Blair and the Intoxication of Power by the former Labour Foreign Secretary and Leader of the SDP, Dr now Lord David Owen. It is a misnomer to argue however that we are suffering from a pandemic of hubris. Prime Ministers like Tony Blair are extremely rare historical occurrences otherwise all occupants of the office of Prime Minister would be able to act with spectacular arrogance and maintain a Teflon personality to boot. The fact that they don't is sufficient evidence that Hubris is very much a person centred phenomenon.**

**The Hubris Syndrome**

**The pursuit and exercise of power is an intoxicating drug, and can affect actions and decision-making. The ancient Greeks called it hubris, and identified arrogance and contempt for others' opinions as classic traits of Hubris. Hubris goes beyond arrogance by inviting disaster through the way in which political leaders take decisions and not just talk about politics or behave. Hubris in this sense is the practical manifestation of political arrogance. According to Owen George W. Bush and Tony Blair developed hubris syndrome during their terms in office. From their behaviour, beliefs, and governing style, Owen analyzed the two leaders, with particular reference to the Iraq War, to show that their handling of the war was a litany of hubristic incompetence. The arrogance of excessive self confidence and manifest contempt for the views of others becomes hubristic when leaders are allowed to engage in displays of incompetence with regard to the nuts and bolts of policy making. Thankfully the loss of contact with reality and political bunker mentality associated with hubristic political leaders seems only to occur after long periods in office when the leaders concerned are at the very apogee of their power. Commentators and the General Public alike are surely prescient enough to spot the incipient signs of a potentially hubristic politician such as: a tendency to take action to enhance personal image, a disproportionate concern for image and presentation of views and the display of impulsive actions. Or are they?**

**Political Arrogance, Dumbing Down and Political Inertia – Mass Publics and Political Elites**

**Is there a direct relationship between the step-child of political arrogance – the ‘dumbing-down’ of political discourse and political inertia the lack of a movement in support of serious political reform of our constitution and political institutions allowing them to atrophy and decay from within? The concurrence of two schismatic referendums over the issues of Scottish Independence and Britain's continued Membership of the European Union and an inconclusive General Election result which was ultimately over the prolongation or ending of austerity became the only ways of breaking the political log-jam caused by the failure to either to acknowledge or listen to the concerns of the mass public by an arrogant and unresponsive political elite. That in two of the three cases the political elite lost control of the direction of political debate is testament to the fact that the mass public in this country embarked upon a narrative of a different direction from their political elites to counter the arrogance that had become the dominant form of political rhetoric and thus the orthodox neo-liberal narrative. It is interesting that commentators explain the behaviour of the mass public as some way of punishing the political elites. Either this is the supreme last act of arrogance of a recalcitrant political elite before they recant for their failures or the mass public has become just as arrogant in the pursuit of its self- interest. Both can't be right - the political elite governing in what it arrogantly perceives to be the interests of the mass public or the mass public forcing its will upon a reluctant political elite to do something it does not really want to do - in this case Brexit. Something will have to give.**

**The generational replacement of arrogant political elites**

**The problem is that the only skill political leaders seem to possess is an uncanny ability to alienate the people with their arrogance. If that energy and ability could be channeled into positive political changes and growth, we would not be mired in the current political doldrums. Instead, we would have a blooming political system of real potential and success. This is why across several European states there appears to be a movement in favour of a generational replacement in the political elite typified by Emmanuel Macron in France. It is why commentators are loudly talking up the prospects of the next leader of the Conservative Party as coming from either the junior ranks of Government or the more recent parliamentary intake. The first one to capture the public imagination with a fully articulated vision for a Post-Brexit Britain and a raft of policies to boot will, I suggest, develop an unstoppable momentum in the way that Jacob Rees Mogg hasn't.**