

# Our Power-Hungry Pharisees

by [Guy Walker](#) (October 2019)



*Christ at the Column, Caravaggio, 1607*

**Boris Johnson's tactical prorogation of Parliament** led to strident denunciations that this amounted to a 'coup' and that he was a 'dictator.' This is evidence of the neuroticism and paucity of imagination of the modern mind. It is neurotic because it can't deal with the emergence of the new and the unpredictable in the present moment. Instead it tries to manhandle such events into the comfortingly familiar templates of a past which is fixed and cannot surprise us. It lacks imagination because it can only interpret the excitements of the present according to what has already happened. It simply can't believe that there is such a thing as the new and, if it does believe in it, it is afraid of it and cannot adjust to

it.

On a similar theme, it is sometimes pointless to mention [Jacob Rees-Mogg are fascists](#), add to my designation of such behaviour as neurotic and unimaginative a comical disproportionality and historical illiteracy. One is left with the question, though, if there is totalitarian brutality and bullying in the Western world, where does it actually reside?

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Three things distinguish humans from other animals. We are self-aware, have free will and are moral. Indeed you can't be truly moral unless you are free as morality implies the making of free choices between good and evil, right and wrong (which also, incidentally, explains the inevitability of the presence of evil in the world). Morality is, therefore, a facet of human freedom and a defining element of human nature however much it may seem that we have forgotten this fact. Contrary to Freud's line that sex is paramount, morality is truly where our feet touch the bottom of the swimming pool of human consciousness and where we get purchase. In sophisticated societies, if you want to get a handle on a human, that handle is usually moral. The proof of this used to be that the central features of religions, which seem to spring up spontaneously in most human societies, were moral ideas like propitiation, sin and judgement which cried out to be addressed in some manner; in other words morality matters to us and is integral to what we are. Because of this our moral fate and being known to have integrity is crucial to a human

in society. A reputation for probity and trustworthiness matters in both social and commercial relations. Everyone wants to have moral credit in the bank. Even in irreligious societies such as Hitler's Nazi one or Mao's or Stalin's Communist ones the surface appearance of some version of morality (however debased and compromised) is maintained and paid lip service to.

As a result if someone set out to destroy a person in such societies it was often their moral reputation that was attacked first; hence Stalin's public Show Trials. In Nazi Germany the propaganda backstory about the conniving wickedness of Jewish capitalists embodied in international conspiracy theories came first followed later by the removal from professional positions in universities and on committees, the destruction of livelihoods in events like Kristallnacht, forced sale of property, confiscations, singling out, beatings, transportation and then extermination. The complex superstructure of the attributes of a human person was systematically dismantled and reduced from the top beginning with the removal of moral standing. Once permission was given *de jure* by anathematising a person's moral quality with a plausible narrative then the *de facto* power asserted by the thuggery of Mussolini's Black-shirts or Hitler's Brown-shirts was authorised to follow on with the destruction of property and then the person itself. Most of the time, when the thuggery is on a wide scale, even the worst thugs (apart from a few psychopaths) need to feel public moral justification for their acts.

This is not new. The realisation that the moral is the place where the lever is inserted in order to direct human affairs is also what empowered the Pharisees in New Testament Palestine. They understood that if one gained control of the

moral sphere one had access to real power over other people and a power that even their militarily potent Roman rulers felt compelled to take into account. The Pharisees made the simple calculation that it was infinitely preferable to be the accuser rather than the accused, the judge rather than the judged and to wield the pitchfork rather than to have it at their back especially when, given a somewhat paranoid view of human affairs, they suspected that surviving in such an arena might be seen as a zero sum game like musical chairs.

The gospel stories show us that Christ understood that the real, cosmic battle was not fought at the military level of the Romans or at the philosophical level of the Greeks. He understood that the levers of real power resided in the moral sphere (a sphere where things should rightly be resolved and mediated privately between a man and his maker in the man's heart) and that the Pharisees had seized them. This gave them the de facto ability to tyrannise over Jewish society. As a result, in full knowledge of the consequences, he deliberately set himself on a course whereby his opposition to the pharisaic mind-set was implacable and unequivocal and it did not take long for the pharisaic caste to come to the conclusion that this trouble-maker had to be eliminated with extreme prejudice and by any means necessary. He challenged the whole basis on which their authority was founded. To them, as someone who understood and exposed how they operated, he was more dangerous than a murderer like Barabbas who merely endangered the physical. Christ felt the full force of their vindictiveness and hatred to the point of being physically destroyed by them after multiple assaults on his reputation occasioned by the various cross-examinations and attempts to trip him up chronicled in the gospels. His ability to sidestep these cross-examinations and to leave his opponents flat-footed with his replies only enraged them the more. Christians believe, of course, that his death revealed the true nature of

God—a deity very different from the one pedalled by the Pharisees who amounted to little more than a constant threat designed to keep people in line. They also believe, of course, that Christ defeated the Pharisees by being resurrected because the fabric of the universe contained something stronger than the Pharisees' frightened, neurotically controlling and vindictive power.

The original Pharisees founded their power on Jewish Law observed in minute detail and in the letter rather than in the spirit; hence the array of sumptuary and hygiene laws. In modern times we have an identical caste wielding the most brutal, bullying and intimidating moral power, founded on ubiquitous, underpinning Marxist narratives which view everything in terms of dynamics of exploitation and oppression. These serve the same purpose for them, in terms of irrefutable authority, as the Jewish law. They know that this grievance and victimhood-based underpinning provides them with a highly complicated and powerful moral currency. Its complexity is such that, if they wish to trip someone up cause can usually, easily be found by means of various forms of offence archaeology.

Not very long ago we have seen this caste in action in the attempted destruction of the reputations and the consequent impact on the professional careers of Roger Scruton, Jordan Peterson, Toby Young, Danny Baker and Nobel Laureate Tim Hunt all of whom have had their reputations and integrity impugned and who, consequently, lost jobs. In these cases, as in many others, including that of the disabled meeter and greeter at Asda [Hitler's Nazis turned their backs on the Communists in the Reichstag in 1930](#) and B) The Brexit Party MEPs turned their backs on the EU, so . . .

This can also be expressed in terms of overlapping sets in Venn diagrams. My set overlaps with Hitler's in that I, too, like dogs. Therefore I overlap in every respect with Hitler's set. Such B-must-follow-A conclusions are, of course, unwarranted because, while national pride and public protests can be encouraged for bad purposes they can also be encouraged for innocent or good ones. There is no pre-destined necessity that they will lead to evil not least in people who are perfectly aware of recent history and have the usual attributes of human freedom and choice.

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This, incidentally, buys into one of the most important debates of our age; the one between determinists and those who espouse free will. Those who demonise Farage or Trump suggest an inevitability about the career from A) to B). Once you have turned your back in the European Parliament you are, apparently, fixed and tied to an unshakable destiny like the Flying Dutchman and can only end by burning the Reichstag and massacring the Jews. In other words there is no such thing as freedom and that freedom to turn away is not available every step of the way to Hell. In addition to this such versions of Trump's and Farage's destinies leave out the very likely fact that both men will have grown up watching perhaps hundreds of war films starring Audie Murphy, John Wayne, Richard Attenborough and Noel Coward who battle the evils of the real Fascists, and could, therefore, hardly be unaware of the

political and moral landscape of the 1930s and 40s and the dangers it contained. But, for their opponents, by one deed you can know them and, thus, condemn all of their future deeds. One can go on to speculate about why people, in this way, characterise their enemies as algorithmical robots unable to escape the confines of an algorithm as if they are nightmarishly trapped within a two dimensional Boolean circuit diagram. A vital aspect of human dignity and nobility is the sense that we are free and responsible for our destinies. Such mechanistic Cartesian visions abolish this view of our humanity and seek to replace it with a bleak determinism whereby we rattle along predestined rails unable ever to change course.

In our times people's reputations are being destroyed and professional posts stripped from them for peccadilloes which are misrepresented as felonies. Our modern pharisaic caste are, therefore, mimicking what the real Nazis and Stalinists did by beginning at the top of the human hierarchy with the moral. One can only consider such actions as vicious and unjust. Those guilty of viciousness and injustice at the outset (rather than of neutral actions, like Johnson's, Farage's or Trump's that merely have a shadowy and superficial resemblance to past events) seldom revert to virtue and peacefulness in what follows. One has to ask, therefore, who bears a closer resemblance to the Fascists and Stalinists and is most likely to follow their well-beaten paths in these cases—the generally conservative people I have listed or their Twitter accusers on the liberal left? While not setting ourselves up as Christ-figures perhaps, intelligent people should, in imitation of him, implacably oppose the tyranny of this new caste who are sometimes styled as 'liberals.' Ironically they are, in reality, the tyrants in opposition to which true Liberals and lovers of liberty should be defining themselves.

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**Guy Walker** a retired French teacher living in the South of England. In addition to writing poetry, Guy has published articles on political and health issues in [The Conservative Woman](#). He is technically a Catholic with a predilection for a conservative outlook. He blogs at [roseatetern.blogspot.com](http://roseatetern.blogspot.com).

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