

Sittin' on offence

Kris King – December 5th 2011

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2011/12/sittin-on-offence/>

Over the last day or so I've been engaged in a scientific argument (of sorts) on Twitter with a user by the name of @Adam4004. While I would love to make the infuriating futility of the false equivocations, straw-man arguments, and dishonest logic of his claims the basis of this week's post, it will have to wait for another time. As is so often the case there will always be certain other events occurring in the world that prompt those of us with a predilection for passionate ranting to jettison our current plans and instead focus on the hot potato that has suddenly landed in our laps. This week, that potato is the idea of offence; I don't mean the wooden thing that separates your garden from next door, that's a *fence* – I mean the idea of causing offence, or of being offended, and what prompted me to talk about it this week was the fact that, yet again, Jeremy Clarkson has said something amazingly fucking stupid.

If you're not familiar with this story, the Top Gear presenter had made [comments on BBC's "The One Show"](#) in which he'd said that the striking public sectors workers, who were demanding nothing more from the government than a fair pension for a lifetime of (often thankless) public service, should be executed in front of their families. Naturally this created a furore, with Clarkson (imagine the following said in his voice) becoming one of Twitter's highest trending topics ... *in the world* (sorry – I couldn't resist it) ... and thousands of people, who somehow managed to scrape together what few IQ points they possessed AND stop frothing at the mouth long enough to speak into their telephone machines without pouring bucket-loads of Daily Mail-branded bile and spit into the mouthpiece, complained to the BBC about the tragic dickhole's arse-brained comments and demanded that "Jezza" (as he is known affectionately by twats) be sacked.

Now, I'm not about to defend Clarkson's comments; they were tasteless and needlessly inflammatory, as it is with pretty much everything that vomits forth from his fetid word-hole. He doesn't really *believe* most of the patently retarded things he says ... he's just making "jokes" that he knows will offend or upset people purely as a means to get attention. He is, for want of a better expression, a troll (actually, there are plenty of better expressions, but none really work as verbs in the next part of the sentence), and he's been trolling the general public through his newspaper columns, books, videos, and TV shows for more than twenty years (see, I told you, "he's been bell-ending the general public" wouldn't really have worked – actually, thinking about it, it kind of does). The man isn't an idiot, by any means – I think he knows exactly what he's doing because he seems to have made a £1m per year career out of it. He is unequivocally, however, a moronic little bell-end.

Like every troll, Clarkson is after a particular reaction – a response that lets him know that he remains as successful as ever in pissing off the those people who have never really liked him, while simultaneously eliciting "Clarkson you legend!" and "Jezza for PM!" type responses from the motor-mouthed, swarfega-brained petrol-heads who have made him a multi-millionaire by buying his "driving lots of fast cars really fast" videos to wank over, and his "why can't we kill hippies and what is the point of the environment?" books in order that someone else can read them to them. In this respect he's like Marilyn Manson (only less attractive); find the one thing you can do that annoys your detractors as much as it pleases your fans – then keep doing it. Our reaction here shouldn't be to demand his sacking, because, like Manson, as long as he keeps his fans happy he will always survive such setbacks. Instead we should simply respond by saying "he's a knob" and move on. As the expression, oft-repeated in many a forum, goes, "don't feed the trolls!"

The point I'm getting at here is that Clarkson (and Manson – actually, "Jeremy Manson" and "Marilyn Clarkson" are perfectly interchangeable since they have matching numbers of syllables – must remember that for later, it could be important) has a particular modus operandi, and that is to take the opportunity to offend people whenever and wherever it may arise. It may not be a conscious decision (although in many instances it undoubtedly is), but the willingness to *intentionally* cause offence is surely influenced by having become aware at some point that the ability to do so represents the possession of a certain measure of power. Knowing that one can provoke storms of

outrage and rabid ire in others with just the right combination of words is rather like knowing that your child abhors sprouts with such vehemence that they will throw an epic fit if you so much as suggest there are some in the house; in both cases you have a useful weapon to employ against them and, more crucially, it's one that they themselves foolishly handed to you along with a comprehensive instruction manual in four different languages.

You see, what many of those who so readily profess to being offended by something are almost entirely unaware of is that being offended is a **choice**. We *choose* to be incensed when Clarkson refers to a car being a bit "ginger beer" (rhyming slang), or when he describes the daily activities of truck drivers as including the murder of prostitutes; we *choose* to be outraged when Sinead O'Connor rips up a picture of Pope John Paul II on television; we *choose* to be disgusted by the "Brass Eye" special in which Chris Morris satirises the way the media sensationalises the subject of paedophilia. To be offended by any of these things is to decide that you simply don't *like* them, or that you don't agree with them, both of which are conscious decisions – there is something about them that you have wilfully objected to when you could have just as easily concurred with the sentiment expressed.

In effect, being offended by something is a form of self-pitying whining. It's saying that your delicate sensibilities were in some way harmed by hearing or seeing something that you don't happen to like, and that you shouldn't have to put up with it. It's both childish and arrogant to assert that you are somehow above having to be exposed to things you don't agree with, that you should be in some way protected from ideas that you find personally objectionable. To do so is to make demands of everyone else that they voluntarily censor all of their opinions lest they upset you, or to insist that your feelings absolutely trump the right of another to speak freely. It's nothing more than casting yourself in the role of a feeble, pathetic baby who needs to be wrapped in cotton wool and cuddled, coddled, and cooed at every turn so you never have to bash your fists against the high-chair and wail, "Wah, wah, wah! What about me?!" No matter what form the offence may ultimately take, you do *not* have the right to **not** be offended.

Don't get me wrong, you *totally* have the right to be offended; you are absolutely entitled to be upset, angry, hurt, pissed off, or thoroughly fucking annoyed at whatever someone else might say to you. It would be more than reasonable for you to be utterly disgusted, appalled, sickened, enraged, or forehead vein-poppingly incensed by something you see or hear on TV, on the radio, in print, or on the internet. You just don't have the right to tell anyone, "you can't say that!" because they **do** – you are not so special that you should be protected in that way. I have as much right to offend you, with the things that I say or the things that I do, as you have to be offended by them. Of course, if we're in your *home* then you have the perfect right to demand that I do not say or do anything to offend you – I am, after all, a guest – and if I can't accede to that demand then I should not expect to stay ... your house, your rules.

The rest of the world, though, is not your house ... it is *ours*, it belongs to all of us, and so it is *our* rules by which we must abide. In a society built by an interdependent species, run for the benefit of all, the rules must be designed to limit the capacity of a given action to cause harm by reducing first the number of individuals that can be damaged by that action. This is why we have laws against murder, rape, assault, and theft, because to permit such behaviour is to put *every last one of us* in danger; telling a morbidly obese man that he should be dissuaded from going swimming because Greenpeace might mistake him for an orca whale and try to drag him back out to sea, providing it is not part of an active campaign of verbal abuse and bullying, is likely to result only in hurt feelings and a bruised sense of self-esteem, and is the kind of offence that doesn't warrant a parliamentary debate to introduce laws prohibiting the saying of "not very nice things".

Regardless of how uncomfortable it may be that someone is able to say obscenely hurtful or insensitive things with relative impunity, it is one of the most important, nay *fundamental*, keystones in a truly free society. When one starts imposing restrictions on speech, you begin placing ever more massive weights around the neck of democracy. The freedom to criticise, to air grievances, to draw attention to injustice, to mock, to speak out against tyranny, to express one's thoughts, feelings, and opinions, and to know simply that your voice can always be heard, is a freedom whose absence or suffocation would surely result in the eventual death of liberty in toto? You may not like it, but the right to speak freely, even if it is to say something offensive, is so vital to our basic freedom that it cannot ever be compromised solely to protect an individual from criticism, or from being made to feel like they're not the centre of the universe like mummy and daddy always said they were.

As I said, the freedom to offend does not translate into the freedom to bully, and that's why we have

laws to punish anyone found guilty of such behaviour. Some may ask where the line is drawn between the two, and I would reply that if you even need to ask that question then you've got bigger problems to worry about – the overwhelming majority of reasonable people can tell the difference. Even some of the more common flavours of bigotry and intolerance, particularly racism, homophobia, or sexism, *do* exist in forms that don't constitute bullying – in most cases, they manifest as little more than just an offensive opinion (for example, "French people are smelly") which only ever really harms the idiot who holds it (advertising, as it does, to the world at large that this idiot is an idiot). When this opinion is employed as a stick with which to beat the target of the offence, however, **that** is when it becomes bullying.

The right to hold, and to express, an offensive opinion can actually have a *positive* effect on people (although not always the one intended by those with the offensive opinion). For a start, the fact that groups like the English Defence League (EDL) and the British National Party (BNP) are subject to the same guarantees of freedom of speech as the rest of us has resulted in a unity amongst the population of this country not seen since thousands gathered to hurl abuse and burgers at David Blaine as he dangled in a plastic box above the Thames. Had there been a law banning offensive speech, we would never have been treated to the sheer joy of seeing just how unbelievably fucking stupid both the EDL and the BNP truly are, and their racist, homophobic bigotry may very well have gone unchallenged, or even unnoticed until it had become too acceptable to shift without a considerable fight.

As BNP leader Nick Griffin's appearance on BBC's "Question Time" showed, the best way to expose the festering, rancid, shit-for-brains opinions of xenophobic, hate-filled turds like Griffin, his party, or the EDL, is to simply let them speak ... they'll quickly find a way to let the world know what a bunch of jelly-headed fucknuts they are. Honestly, the BNP leader shot himself in the foot so often on "Question Time" it was amazing he was able to stand afterwards, let alone haul his bloated, pie-stuffed carcass out of television centre and into the nearest taxi (it was probably a black cab as well, which must have pissed off the racist spunk-bubble something rotten). As for the EDL, well, you only had to see [this infamous clip](#) of what has to be the most incoherent, brain-dead, phallectomy patient ever to stand in front of a TV camera. Seriously, if there were lorry drivers rocking up in France, filling their trucks with illegal immigrants and dumping them on this guy's doorstep, I'd gladly pay their fuel costs.

Speech, at the end of the day, is free for everyone, or it is free for no-one. If you want to be able to express your views, you've got to afford the same right to dickwards like the BNP, the EDL, or even Al-Qaeda, the Westboro Baptist Church and, yes, *even* Jeremy Clarkson. Only when it can be demonstrably proven to *directly* cause harm should free speech have to take a time-out while other legal considerations come in to play. The age-old notion that freedom of speech does not extend to yelling "fire!" in a crowded theatre is still relevant today, as it will be always; similarly, we have laws against incitement to riot, violence, or racial hatred because almost no-one would argue that the right to actively goad people into committing a crime should be counted as "protected" speech. We even have a law prohibiting incitement to religious hatred which, seems sound in principle, but falls completely fucking flat when you realise that the holy books of the big three faiths contain so many examples of inciting hatred towards other religions that one would have to jail every priest in the country.

Barely a day goes by without some self-righteous scum-bucket (usually the Daily Mail, but the Murdoch papers often hypocritically chime in too) goes on a vicious tirade against the BBC and their perceived, yet patently non-existent, effort to abandon decent standards in favour of becoming a 24 hour, multi-channel monument to offending the morality of everything we British hold dear. Putting aside the fact that the sources of these accusations are usually about as concerned with morality as a smack-addicted paedophile with a terminal illness and nothing left to lose who has mysteriously, yet fortuitously, found himself locked in an opium factory with a bus-load of school children, it completely ignores the fact that, a) it simply isn't true, and b) they're a public service broadcaster whose remit is to produce programming for *everyone* and, given that offence is entirely subjective (what *you* find offensive is not necessarily offensive to *me*) then, by definition, you are simply not going to like everything you see or hear.

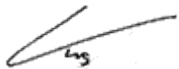
To these people I have only one thing to say; **change the fucking channel**. I used to get amazingly wound up when my dad (many years ago) used to complain about the crap that he was being forced to watch on TV. Thank fuck he came to his senses and changed his attitude because I don't know how I, as an adult, would be able to stop myself from screaming "**NO-ONE'S MAKING YOU WATCH ANYTHING!!!**" so loudly in his face that his ear drums would burst. Seriously, people, stop fucking

whining and change the bastard channel! No one is forcing you to watch shit you don't want to watch. No one is holding a gun to your head. Get off your lazy, bitching, self-righteous arses and turn the fucking thing off if you're that put out by it. Stop writing that letter or email complaining to the BBC, you twats, we know you can't write, you're not fooling anyone ... **change the fucking channel.**

"B..B..But I **pay** for the BBC! I shouldn't have to pay to be offended!" Yes, that's right, well done, you *do* pay for the BBC ... **and so do I**, and I have to pay for all the moronic shit that you watch that I can't fucking stand. I have to pay for "Tonight's The Night" with John Barrowman; I have to pay to have programmes I want to watch shelved because the fucking football went into extra time; I have to pay for another series of "Come Fly With Me"; but worst of all I have to pay for Chris fucking Moyles. The difference between you and me is that I understand that *that's how it works*; there will be stuff on that you love and I hate – there will be programmes that, were I you, I would describe myself as being "offended" by them. But I'm not you because whenever I see something I don't like, *I change the channel* ... I don't throw my toys out of the pram and demand that it be cancelled and insist that everyone involved get the sack. Why? Because I'm not a whiny prick with a grossly-inflated sense of entitlement, that's why.

Jeremy Clarkson was, and is, a total dickhead. He was a dickhead before his comments this week, he was a dickhead after them, and he will likely remain a dickhead for the rest of his life. Nothing has changed. His career has been like watching a mid-life crisis in slow-motion (sometimes I can't help but wonder if he emerged from the womb middle-aged and wearing a pair of string-back driving gloves). But if he wants to be a pathetic, middle-aged, speed-obsessed, reactionary dickhead who says offensive things to get a laugh, without actually bullying anyone in the process, I for one am not going to stop him or complain like a little fucking baby to the BBC about it ... I'm just going to change the channel ...

Maybe you should grow up and do the same?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. King', written in a cursive style.