

Dr David Owen has written a new book called 'The Hubris Syndrome'. It's all about when politicians start to believe their own rubbish. He reckons it happened to Stalin, Hitler and to Tony Blair. Everything they say gets reported and analysed to death, and even a trivial comment begins to assume an importance all of its own. They develop a narcissism and recklessness that leads them to a powerful self-belief.

Dr Owen is safely able to write about such things of course because as leader of the SDP he never gained ultimate power. You have to be the top dog to catch this disease and that role eluded him. He did however train as a neurologist and worked as a doctor for many years before becoming a politician.

Once you catch the illness, you start to believe that what you say is more important than it actually is. You are rarely contradicted and when you are you think it's only because your adversaries have an agenda which means they will disagree with you no matter what. You think you are always right. It is a dangerous condition and can lead to dangerous situations, like illegal wars and quantitative easing.

Plato; who might have been a bit misguided in matters of slavery, had the right idea when it comes to politicians. He suggested that a leader's normal route to power; be it through force or democracy, gives us the wrong kind of leader. The single-minded ruthlessness required to reach the top, he argued, was not conducive to empathy with the lesser mortals he becomes responsible for.

Having studied philosophy myself, I suspect I may be slightly biased but I can see the sense in his argument that a thorough grounding in philosophy is the best preparation for a leader. His "Philosopher King" would reach the top by demonstrating a clear and logical mind and by showing high ethical standards and fairness to all.

He doesn't specifically mention spin doctors or media manipulation and I am not entirely sure how or by whom the leader is chosen if Plato isn't around to guide us. Neither does he mention how, once elected, the leader is supposed to avoid hubris syndrome, but then the syndrome was only just identified, so he never had a chance really.

In an enormous leap of arrogance, I now present a comparison between my little contributions here every week and the musings of our most notorious politicians. I think I have caught a little bit of hubris syndrome myself. Now I am no Jeremy Clarkson, mouthing off about everyone I disagree with, but I do my bit. It's a lot easier to pontificate in a column than to be part of a discussion with real live people. It takes a week for me to see any letters or emails from people disagreeing with what I write and even then I can choose to ignore them.

I can now use the phrase heard so often in my childhood when parents and teachers couldn't or wouldn't justify their actions; 'because I say so.' It allows me to say anything I like while kidding myself that everyone in Ross-shire is hanging on my every word and that I have educated you all in the correct way of thinking about everything from the Highland Council to path maintenance. I have no knowledge of this column ending up in the bottom of someone's chicken coop.