



Why do we care about *this*?

Sorry, this is about Brexit. It's hard for it not to be.

Except it's also not about Brexit, for today, I'm not so interested in the issue itself as the interest in the issue, if that's not too philosophic.

It's clear that it has *become* the most significant political issue of the decade, but does it deserve to be?

Think back to your life up until, say, 2015. At any time in those years, was the issue of the appropriate trading and political structures between Britain and the UK at the top of your priority list? Or was it education, health and the NHS, housing, terrorism, crime? For all these have had their moments in the sun, and I can see why they are important.

Yet the EU? Not really.

Rather, what has turned this into such a definingly massive thing is not the issue itself; it is the *way* it was dealt with. It is all to do with holding a referendum.

By holding a referendum, it compelled people, who might otherwise have a balanced view of the issue, to take one side or other, and then to start defending that position vigorously.

Sure, there were some people at the extremes, but an awful lot of people were in the middle. No longer.

It strikes me that there is something new in the virulence of people's opinions on something that until

the referendum only interested a small minority. For Brexit has become a land upon which some many other flags have been planted; control; Britishness; will the elite listen?; tolerance; welcome; elitism; populism; popularity ...

It is a lens through which so many other things have been refracted that it is now generating its own momentum, and Parliament is eating itself as a result.

But let's step back a bit. Why do so many people care about *this*?

Here are a list of things which arguably deserve your attention more: homelessness, lack of care for the elderly, special needs provision in schools, in-work poverty, mental health crises, obesity levels, global warming... And, for sure, they are tangentially related to Brexit, if you make the link between Brexit and an economic decline, because there will be less money to go round for the government to deal with these things. (Some would argue otherwise.)

You would think that at least *one* of these issues would generate passion in people, more than Brexit. Yet none of them can get a look in.

This is not because they are intrinsically less important: rather, it is because our emotions have been manipulated by a political process, of the referendum. In all the passion about Brexit, could we not find some passion for some of these other things?