INTRODUCTION

Back in March 2019, the writer Will Self – a Remainer – was involved in an on-air altercation with Mark Francois MP – a leading Brexiter. Their exchange on the BBC *Politics Live* show was particularly heated. At one point Self said that while not all Brexiters are racists, all racists are Brexiters. Francois was outraged, and demanded an apology for what he understood to be an accusation of racism against the Brexit camp.

Self's seemingly sophisticated put down was subsequently hailed across social media, particularly by Remainers. Actually, Self is not the first person to employ this sort of remark. Philosopher J. S. Mill famously said that 'I did not mean that Conservatives are generally stupid; I meant that stupid persons are generally Conservative.'

But, if intended to discredit a political campaign or movement, is the remark as clever as it seems?

Compare: 'All murderers want the death penalty abolished but not all who want the death penalty abolished are murderers.' That is quite probably true. But of course the fact that murderers want the death penalty abolished – even if they want it for entirely bad and selfish reasons – would do nothing at all to discredit either the aim of abolishing the death penalty or those campaigning for it.

What Self might have said is (e.g.): 'The Brexit campaign was motivated by, and exhibited, racism.' That might even be true. Unfortunately, rather than say that, Self opted for a more 'clever' put down, which, it seems to me, is not so clever after all. The fact is, even noble causes can be supported by people for bad or selfish reasons.

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