

## Feral

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Another discussion of a word, also from the Guardian. As Jon Henley noted yesterday:

*Feral: there's a lot of it about, lately.*

Too true: as he notes:

*Intriguingly, though, the word isn't the exclusive property of the right. Tony Blair used it a few years back to describe [a vicious media beast](#), "tearing people and reputations to bits". The tax campaigner Richard Murphy chooses it to identify [a destructive, out-of-control global financial sector](#) "existing way beyond the limits of the real economy" (or simply "feral bankers", as John Prescott had it on Twitter today). Neal Lawson of the left-of-centre group Compass applied it to [a corrupt British governing elite](#) of bankers (again), media barons and politicians for whom "private interest takes precedence over public good".*

Well I'm happy to be credited with coining the term in that context. I'd argue feral capitalism is an entirely appropriate phrase. After all as Jon Henley notes:

*According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "feral" has three meanings: "existing in a wild or untamed state"; "having returned to an untamed state from domestication"; and "of, or suggestive of, a wild animal; savage". Importantly, the word is most commonly used in the second of those contexts, to describe domesticated animals that have left human society and control and now live on their own: we talk of populations of feral cats, for example.*

I think feral capitalism fits perfectly in that context.

Just as much as it is highly offensive, and wholly inappropriate to apply the term to some youths in society, as Ken Clarke has done. As Jon notes:

*Ken Clarke, the justice secretary, caused a bit of a Twitterstorm today [by pairing it with the term "underclass"](#) to refer to the people who took part in last month's riots; London mayor Boris Johnson went one better, speaking of a ["feral criminal underclass"](#).*

And that's the problem. In the sense of "abandoned by — or escaped from — society", "living outside the mainstream", "beyond the control of rules, regulations and accepted norms", even "gone wild", feral seems quite a reasonable choice of word to describe something big and faceless such as an economy, the media, or even, at a pinch, a powerful and privileged elite. But when you start applying it to people (youths, yobs), or to a disadvantaged group of people (an underclass), it's somehow different. Then feral becomes, intentionally or not, dehumanising. Use it in that way and you're comparing humans to animals. Which isn't, can we agree, a very nice thing to do.

But Jon, you miss their point.

The right - of the sort we now have - want to generate underclasses that masses can hate and fear. They are dehumanised so they can be abused. Note recent Express headlines on those claiming benefits as evidence. It's not nice, but then nor are the Tories. They're very un-nice and it's their wish to use some in society as the dehumanised groupings who can be used to justify their deliberate policies of real abuse aimed at the majority, who accept them because of their fear of a minority set up as deliberate figures of hate.

Ken Clarke, in other words, knew exactly what he was doing.