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Skepticism and Euroskepticism in British Politics

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Title: Skepticism and Euroskepticism in British Politics

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Abstract. This article provides an analysis of the variants of Euroskepticism voiced in the British political discourse on furthering integration of the United Kingdom with Europe.

Political discourse in the United Kingdom (UK) seems to revolve around three positions on further integration of the UK with Europe. A Europhile position suggests that further integration on many different dimensions will be a boon for the UK and will induce--in a "straight" reading of Voltaire's *Candide*--the best of all possible worlds. A Europhobe position suggests that further integration (often on any dimension at all) will be a bane for the UK and will precipitate a one-way trip to the deepest recesses of Dante's *Inferno* and a starring role in the Black Plague of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. A Euroskeptic position actually suggests a number of alternatives on arriving at an opinion on UK-Europe integration and merits close analysis.

Euroskepticism may relate to a Socratic skepticism that all positions should be questioned. Each potential certainty should meet the crucible of doubt--through developing and evaluating the consequences that could inductively or deductively be said to follow from each potential certainty. Only the Truth should be left standing. In other words, there is a correct position on UK-Europe integration that can be arrived at through a specific process. The one thing that this sort of Euroskeptic is not skeptical about is the value of this epistemological means. Here Europhiles and Europhobes are judged to be on very fragile ground if they have arrived at their positions through alternative means.

Euroskepticism may relate to a Protagorean skepticism that is also called relativism. The basic position here is that when two or more individuals disagree, none are necessarily wrong. All may be right and, in fact, just about anything one believes may be true for the believer. This sort of Euroskepticism views as nonsensical the notion that one can discern among true and false options--regardless of the epistemological means employed. One's stance on the UK-Europe Issue might then focus on the politics of managing divergent opinions--politics being the heart of the matter as opposed to Truth.

Euroskepticism may relate to a nihilistic skepticism. Here the position to take on UK-Europe integration is that there is no position. There is nothing to believe except that there is nothing to believe. There is no compass one can rely on to tack towards the Truth, for there is no truth. This is the case for all policy Issues--actually for all epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical Issues. Such Euroskeptics may do no more than sneer at Europhiles, Europhobes, and other Euroskeptics.

Euroskepticism may relate to a Pyrrhonist skepticism. This position suggests that any position based on anything more than "definite evidence" should be doubted. Only the simple appearance of things are certain, conjectures on other matters should not even be attempted. This Euroskeptic should maintain a calm indifference to the Issue of UK-Europe integration for it is an Issue that the human mind cannot possibly resolve--either the simple appearance of things is not enough to resolve the Issue or there is too much controversy over what constitutes the simple appearance of things.

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Euroskepticism may relate to the skepticism of Cartesian doubt. Potential certainties must be subjected to doubt similar to the skepticism of Socrates. However, the most pervasive of all possible doubting mechanisms must be applied--in a manner dissimilar to Socrates,. Examples of this might include, not only the logical consequences of potential certainties, but also seemingly far-fetched hypotheses as the demon possibility--that some evil spirit was actually responsible for what was perceived as certain or potentially certain. What survived such extreme doubting mechanisms would be deemed as certain. Descartes had problems even demonstrating the existence of the self, let alone the correct position on a multilateral political Issue. Some political authorities, perhaps unknowingly in the throes of a demon possibility, profess to have little problem arriving at political certainty through the avenue of Cartesian doubt.

The above analysis of the variants of Euroskepticism suggests that many skeptics in political discourse on UK-Europe integration may be speaking above, under, around, and through each other--anything but to each other. Of this, indeed, there may be little skepticism. (See Alcock, J.E. (1991). On the importance of methodological skepticism. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 9, 151-155; Hansen, F. (1979). A critique of the epistemological skepticism of Campbell's phenomenological behaviorist psychology. *Behaviorism*, 7, 65-84; Hoge, W. (October 15, 1999). Blair calls ruling out one currency 'madness.' *The New York Times*, p. A15; Kreweras, G. (1991). Skepticism and truth. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 9, 197-201; Rosenau, P.M. (1992). *Post-modernism and the social sciences: Insights, inroads, and intrusions*. Princeton University Press.)(Keywords: Europe, Skepticism, United Kingdom.)