The

Salisbury Review

Absolutely the wrong opinion on everything

In Memoriam Roger Scruton
Robert Grant

Modern Vietnam
Catherine Blaiklock

Ireland Falls in Love with Islam
D C Kohn

Stasi in the Stands
Thomas Less

Medical Negligence
Berenice Langdon

The Yellow Vests
Theodore Dalrymple

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During the recent murder trial at the Old Bailey of Mohammed Abdul Shakur for killing his two daughters and wife, the latter because she would not help him with his asylum claim, the court heard, among the horrible details of this appalling crime, that, '….while working in the Ancient Raj Indian restaurant in Frimley, Surrey, Shakur was paid £130 a day cash in hand and was allowed to live above his work. Shakur sent money to his family in Bangladesh while Ms Begum (his wife) received child benefits.'

To earn the equivalent with tax and national insurance paid, he would need to have earnt about £50,000 gross. It could be that Shakur paid all his taxes, but immigrant tax fraud, especially in South Asian and Somali communities; paying no tax, running profitable businesses and claiming state benefits using fake separations of wives and dependents, or running illegal restaurants, is a huge problem. Some say HMRC is frightened of tackling it for fear of being called racist, just as Muslim rape gangs were a no go area for Rotherham police and social services. Former insiders in HMRC deny this. They say the service can bust thousands of businesses not paying tax but it is a pointless exercise chasing them through the courts, as the money will have vanished.

In March 2019, *The Times* reported that a network of British Asians using VAT and benefit fraud netted an estimated £8 billion over two years, 'a sum almost triple that of the Treasury's annual expenditure on MI6, MI5 and GCHQ'. Money from the frauds was used to fund bombings and terrorist attacks. Yet it was all kept quiet. Court orders, reported *The Times*, going back 10 years, prevent anybody knowing the identity of the fraudsters.

HMRC would not tell the security services about what they knew in case it breached the criminals' human rights to privacy. Nazir Afzal, the lead prosecutor who brought the Rotherham sex grooming gangs to justice, remarked of this astonishing cover up: 'The scandal here is that individuals have been to prison, come out of prison and yet the public still don't know about it.'

In addition, billions more exit the country through networks of small corner shops working with money laundering gangs. You hand over cash at the counter and the equivalent amount appears in Lahore or Dacca the next day.

Is this type of fraud ever debated on BBC *Question Time*? Is it mentioned during debates about funding the NHS, recruiting more police or providing better care for our elderly? The sums I have been writing about are huge, so huge they represent a raid on the Treasury identical to brigands breaking into the Bank of England each year and seizing vast quantities of our cash.

Failed states, where many migrants come from, fail because taxes are only paid by the weakest, and property rights are never enforced; anything lying around is yours, until somebody bribes a judge to say it is somebody else's, not necessarily the real owner. It is not surprising therefore when an immigrant discovers free health and social security benefits lying round as it were un-policed in Britain, it is natural to pocket them. Even easier when they realise the state is frightened of prosecuting.

A friend of mine let a holiday cottage to a South Asian family. When the time came for them to check out, they refused, began cooking lunch and locked the door on the man who came for the keys. When my friend got into the house by the back door her unwelcome guests, calling her a racist, tried to call the council and have her evicted. Realising it might be months before she got her property back if council officials arrived, she began (rather boldly) packing their luggage and putting it outside, at which, and because it was Sunday and her guests got no answer from the council, grumbling about racism and rights, they left.

'It was only afterwards,' she said, 'considerably shaken, I realised that had they called the council that they would have had the government behind them.'

She is right. Johnson's government has gone back on its election pledge to set up a separate Department of Immigration to secure our borders. Quite the contrary, it is about to clamp down on immigrants from Eastern Europe who pay their taxes in favour of continuing with unlimited immigration from the third world. To pay for this folly we are to have a rise in the rates, an official way of stealing the house of my friend by instalments. Who will benefit? The tax dodgers.

IN MEMORIAM

Roger Scruton (1944-2020)

Robert Grant

What? Roger, still youthful at seventy-five, with never a serious illness till now, insidiously struck down only months ago, and abruptly taken from us when we thought there might still be hope? He leaves a gaping hole in our lives, and one just as great in the nation's life and even the world's, as the blizzard of tributes now snowing in from every corner shows. Over more than forty years I have learnt so much from him, as we all have in our different walks of life, that life without him is barely imaginable.

Nothing can fill that hole, not even his fifty books, so we must patch it with memories. Whether naturally, or because of his unhappy childhood, Roger was private, shy and reclusive. Despite this, he made himself into a public figure, not from vanity, but because he had things to say which he thought the world needed to hear. He cared greatly about the world, and worried about it. His earliest forays into the public sphere, such as his *Times* columns, were tightly packed pipe bombs, calculated to blow unthinking Establishment complacencies sky-high. I thought these shock tactics unwise, and his sentiments exaggerated, and said so. 'Don't worry, I know what I'm doing,' he replied. But I am not sure that he did, since he always remained surprised, even hurt, by the outrage he provoked. That notoriety did enormous damage to his career. But he was aiming higher than academe (not hard), and was finally vindicated. He came to substitute for the pipe bomb both the slow, patient exposure of fallacies and the rapier-thrust of well-aimed aphorism.

He had an engaging innocence that at times was even laughable. Judging by his rather callow first novel, he thought a Kirby grip (a girl's hair clip) was a 'curvy grip'. Such mundane details were beneath his notice, you might think. Yet in this same book he describes a cruising housefly, with its split-second changes of direction, as 'bouncing off the walls of an invisible sphere'. No one would have noticed that, who was not minutely attentive to the outside world.

On everything he undertook he made himself into a genuine expert. He was not only a respected philosopher, but had studied music, law, Ancient Greek, Turkish, Czech, Arabic, and even it now seems, unless he was joking, Persian, all at a high level. There were other things he also did not do by halves. Many people here present enjoy hunting, for its skill, exercise, discipline, etiquette, rituals and comradeship. Hunting made Roger happy at last, so he said. It introduced him to Sophie, and thus indirectly provided him with a loving family. But he also got out of it a brilliant book, both popular and scholarly, amongst other things tracing hunting back to its roots in antiquity.

Like most civilised people, he liked good wine, but unlike most he wrote a serious book about it and for some years was wine columnist of an intellectual weekly. Owning a farm, and having farming neighbours, he came to know a great deal about agriculture, the countryside and the environment. He founded the Town and Country Forum and edited with his co-founder a subsequent book on those subjects. He once took me to a sale of second-hand farm machinery. One venerable geezer, inspecting a decrepit tractor, observed to Roger in passing that 'I don't like the look o' he.' This was the cue, once he had gone, for a Scrutonian disquisition on local dialects.

Roger took the trouble to master even quite trivial things. When I first knew him, he joined us briefly at the coast, and both impressed and worried everyone by swimming vigorously out to sea till he was a mere dot

in the distance. I only lately came across a piece he had written mentioning the continuing value of 'practising one's strokes'. Neither I nor most swimmers have ever done that beyond the learning stage.

In view of his astonishing polymathy, and indeed the variety of his less intellectual pursuits, you may ask whether there was a unifying principle behind his thought and his life. There was what he called 'the priority of appearance': there are some features of our collective life – art, friendship, love, morals, society, culture, the sacred, value generally – which are perfectly real, but which lie beyond the competence of science to explain. Although, or rather because, they lie on the surface, these are the things which really matter to us, and which make us specifically human rather than the animals or machines we also are. They cannot be bought or exchanged, and are valuable simply in themselves.

You do not need any degree to understand this. It is those things, therefore, which we most need to defend, since on them depends our whole existence as persons. And the terrible, murderous history of totalitarianism, which Roger did so much in both theory and practice to counter, stems from its pseudo-scientific refusal to recognise persons for what they are: self-aware creatures, endowed with rights, but also burdened with duties. If I am only an animal or a machine, I am not responsible for the injuries I inflict on you, nor have you any right to seek redress.

There is much more I could say, but the published tributes have between them done a good job. Roger has been compared to the eighteenth-century thinker and statesman Edmund Burke, though his own thought is more systematic and his manner less lush. Nevertheless, Dr Johnson's comments on Burke apply equally to Roger: 'Burke is an extraordinary man. His stream of mind is perpetual.'

Roger was certainly the most extraordinary person I have ever known. And here is Johnson again: 'You could not stand five minutes with Ned Burke beneath a shed while it rained, but you must be convinced you had been standing with the greatest man you had ever seen.' In our carping, mediocre times, the great man is an unfashionable concept. But reviewing Roger's achievement, and comparing him with great people in the past, I conclude that a great man is exactly what he was.

My second witness is Roger's elder sister Liz. He cannot have been present when she testified to his other side, which underlay his excellence as a teacher and his deep capacity for friendship. Well-oiled after dinner, we jokingly asked her what he was like as a child: 'He was the sweetest, kindest, quietest little boy you can possibly imagine.'

You could have heard a pin drop – just as you can now. It was simply the same side of him, only in another guise.

Robert Grant is a retired University Lecturer. This was his funeral eulogy for RVS, Malmesbury Abbey, 24.1.20.

A Lesson in Metaphysics

Myles Harris

'Metaphysics,' said the monk. 'Metaphysics' he repeated, smacking his lips. Every day after the Angelus, we had half an hour of religious instruction.

The monk turned to look briefly out of the window. I followed his glance. It was a late winter afternoon and a man and woman were walking across Berkeley Square. The man was wearing a bowler, the woman a small hat with feathers. They were holding hands. I wondered if they had had sex. I knew about sex; the farm boys had told me about it. And, lying in our orchard among the smell of apples, I had read 'For Whom the Bell Tolls'. It had filled me with a feverish ache.

The girl stooped as she came out of the cave mouth carrying the big iron cooking platter and Robert Jordan saw her face turned at an angle and the same time the strange thing about her.....Her hair was the golden brown of a grain field that has been burnt dark in the sun but it was cut short all over her head so that it was little longer than the fur on a beaver pelt.

Thee came barefooted.

Yes.

Then thou knew thou wert coming to bed.

The monk had transferred his red, Dracula eyes to the class. Like all monks, he smoked incessantly, lighting up as he left the classroom, smoking each fag right down to a smallness sufficient to burn his eyes. I knew why. He could not have sex. The red eyes peered through a pair of cheap horn rims at the crucifix at the

back of the class.

'Would there be any of you in the room who knows what metaphysics is?'

'A type of physics?' suggested Jervis Prout. He had a Gloucestershire accent you could cut with a knife. Last week he had read out 'Et tu Brute' from Julius Caesar as 'Eat too brute' and the class had fallen about laughing. He still could not understand why.

'Have any of you heard the name of Aquinas?' asked the monk sarcastically. We had. The monks dreamt, slept and eat Aquinas. Over and over again they took us through Aquinas' proofs for the existence of God. Everything had a cause, said Aquinas, except God. I thought there was something wrong with that. How could everything have a cause but not God? It wasn't something you dared ask. Expressing an interest in religion was more dangerous at St Brendan's than putting your hand through the bars of a tiger's cage. If the monks thought you were religious, they would try and sign you up for the priesthood.

'Another name for Aquinas?' the monk demanded.

'The Divine Doctor,' answered a boy with rimless glasses and a long pale face who wanted to be a priest. Soon he would be taken away to a seminary. It was terrifying.

Aquinas must have been a terrible creep. He was not even a real doctor. Real doctors were a lot more important than priests because they knew about illness and made people better. They could even put you in an iron lung of you caught polio. All priests did was to smoke endless Woodbines and drink tea.

'Today,' announced the monk, 'we will be talking about heaven. The study of heaven, the belief in which is part of our Holy Faith, is a branch of what is called metaphysics, the ultimate meaning of reality. Aquinas was quite clear on heaven's existence.'

The Irish voice droned on. Words like 'the glorification of the body', 'agility' and 'subtlety', floated around the class. Nobody, except the boy who wanted to be a priest, was listening. We all knew there was no sex in heaven. As nobody died there was no need for it.

I imagined heaven to be like a huge raft hanging in the sky. By now it must be packed with people called 'The Faithful Departed', a phrase the monks used as if the three words were written in capital letters. The Faithful had been Departing for nearly two thousand years. There must be an awful lot of them, not to mention the inhabitants of the huge hole next door to heaven called Purgatory. Purgatory was full of savages who had been born before the White Fathers had arrived in Africa to convert them, babies who had died before they were baptised, as well as people from the Stone Age, ancient China and Egypt. Catholics who died in venial sin also went to Purgatory, but I did not think there could be that many. Most Catholics, if you believed the monk, were roaring in hell.

Yet none of the monks seemed to know exactly where heaven was. They just smiled in a hugely irritating way if asked or quoted Aquinas. Aquinas was just a lot of old words.

I thought I knew. We had started mechanics this term with a monk called the Mekon. He was called the Mekon because he had a huge bald head like the Mekon in the *Eagle* Comic. The Mekon ruled the evil empire of Mekonta and had a plan to take over the earth.

The Mekon told us that Archimedes had said, 'Give me a lever and I will move the earth.' His long thin hand had written a formula on the blackboard showing how, if you knew where the fulcrum was, you could calculate the length of a lever needed to lift a particular weight.

If you knew the weight of heaven, you could calculate the length of the lever needed to move it. If you knew the length of the lever you would know how far away heaven was. It would then only be a matter of sweeping the sky with telescopes. On my crystal set I had heard they were building one at Jodrell Bank. It would be just right for finding heaven as it could listen in to radio waves.

Levering up the lid of my desk a couple of inches I felt for an exercise book. All exercise books and writing things had to be put away during religious knowledge. I got it out and, resting it on my knees, drew a large beam and fulcrum like a balance in the physics lab. I drew five stick men at one end of the beam, one with his legs over the side. I drew a cross above them with RIP on it. They were 'The Faithful Departed'. At the other end I put Aquinas. I always imagined Aquinas to have a floppy hat. I drew a hat and wrote his name on it. Aquinas probably weighed about ten stone. I would have to guess how many Faithful Departed had lived since hell began and then multiply the number by their weight.

I kept glancing up at the monk. He was on perpetual watch for anybody whose attention drifted. He knew the difference between mere passing inattention – searching for a pencil, coughing – and deliberate wilful, money and time-wasting inattention. He could even spot it with his back to us. He never looked at the class but just over it, his snub Irish nose with its hairy recesses pointing straight ahead. There was no way of telling how he knew except a few seconds before he struck, an unseen signal went out from those nostrils that paralysed us with fear and expectancy.

Suddenly the class went rigid. The monk was in motion, edging his way down the narrow gangway between the desks. We knew what it meant. This monster in a dandruff speckled soutane had already selected his victim. The victim himself might not know

he was doing anything wrong. What was wrong to the monks was seldom wrong to normal people. But it was as well to be prepared. I put my hands on the desk and held the exercise book up between my knees and its underside. I would be able to let the exercise book drop when the class rose. The banging of desks would drown the noise of its fall.

The monk passed me in a wave of stale tobacco breath. It was like the breath of a wild and dangerous animal; stopping, sniffing then padding on. Behind, and three feet above me The monk stopped to give tongue.

'There are some boys,' declared the Irish brogue just behind my ear, 'Who despite the sacrifices their parents, especially their mothers, of whom Our Lady was a prime exemplar, (the monks never allowed a reference to our mothers to pass without coupling them with Our Lady), insist on coming to this school to indulge in corner boy smart alecking of the very worst class.'

I looked straight ahead, my knees holding the exercise book to the desk. 'Dear Lord,' I prayed, 'make him go away'.

'I will have *none* of it,' said the monk in the same final tone as he had said 'metaphysics'.

A tremendous blow caught me on the top of my head. Nicotined fingers grasped my right sideboard and with a practised yank pulled me to my feet. Like an aboriginal hunter with his prey, and still holding on to the hairs of my right sideboard, he ran me to the front of the class.

He pointed at the boy who had been sitting next to me.

'Now I will ask your confrere to bring the exercise book that you have been scribbling on and which has fallen to the floor, to me.'

My neighbour brought it up, offering it to the monk with two trembling hands. The monk, one hand still grasping my sideboard, with the other opened the page I had been writing on. He bent forward to look at the numbers. He had a small black mole on his right cheek. His face, when he turned, was alight with rage.

'Now what is this that makes Horris,' not one of the monks could pronounce my English name properly, 'so enamoured of his own thoughts he can ignore what his betters are saying?'

A sigh of pleasure went around the class. This was a beating business that would take up the rest of the religious knowledge period.

'My homework sir?' I offered.

He glanced at my picture of Aquinas.

'Your homework is little men in funny hats? Have ye nothing better to do than to be after filling page after page of a valuable exercise book with trash?'

His breath, stale with Woodbines, came closer.

'Well?' he screamed, the hairy mole two inches from my face.

I felt my knees beginning to give. I had had many beatings but I could not explain to this madman what I was doing. I knew exactly what would happen if I did. He would go through each page reading out the choicer bits, the whole class laughing at each sally. It would stick to me for days, if not weeks. I might even get a nickname like 'Heaven'. I was better off taking the strap.

It was the opposite of what I wanted. The discovery of how much heaven weighed might, I thought, bring me modest fame, even the attention of the convent girls at La Retraite. Some of the boys had sisters there and they would be bound to mention my discovery to them. Instead, in front of me was a maddened, dandruff-covered monk.

'Is it dumb insolence ye are offering me?' he screamed.

Suddenly, a brown leather carpet beater was in his hand.

'Is it the other place ye are after? Because I'll give it to ye. Put your hand out.'

By 'the other place' the monks meant Hell. They really believed it existed. Hell was a place beyond the reach of The Divine Mercy. There were lots of ways to get there but one of the surest was pride. Dumb insolence was pride.

I extended a trembling left hand. Like an executioner adjusting his victim's head with his sword the monk tipped it downward with the round end of the strap so as to get a better swipe. I edged my hand higher. We all knew that the higher you held your hand the less painful the blow. A look of extreme malignity had set in around the monk's eyes. This was going to be six of the best.

'Well?' he shouted, the strap half way up in the air. I could see the carefully sewn welt running around the edge. Straps were made by sewing four or five carpet beaters together.

'It is just my homework sir.'

'Well here is some work for ye.'

The blows came one after another, a burning sensation like sandpaper followed by a throbbing ache which came and went in waves.

'Now get out,' the Irish brogue began to chant, increasing by octaves with each chant, 'Get out of here you nasty, spotty boy. Get out of the class altogether. Get out, get out!'

I extended a burning hand to take my exercise book but the monk crashed his strap down on the cover.

'Ye will leave it.'

Close to tears, I fled into the semi-darkness of the corridor.

I stood in the dark corridor hating the monk. Impossible scenes of justice crept into my mind where the British police broke into the school and began to ask calm British questions these Irish madmen could not answer.

'So, you believe in something you call the Holy Ghost, do you sir? And what might that be – sir?' Any proof sir; paperwork, photos, witnesses? Anybody reliable?'

I was restored to the class next day to bask in the false glory of a troublemaker. My sore hands recovered soon enough but theological iron had entered my soul. From then on, I took the British police view of all matters philosophical, be it Catholic, Church of England, Bhuddist, Hindu, or the secular ramblings of Kant and Hume. If the suspect doesn't have the paperwork then his allegations are unlikely to be true and arrests should be made. Nobody has seen creation's paperwork.

Myles Harris is very grateful to the Christian Brothers for a terrific education, the greatest gift I could receive and one shared by ten thousands of their pupils all over the world.

The Stasi in the Stands

Football succumbs to virtue-signalling metropolitan PC snobs

THOMAS LESS

Here are three occasional chants at English football grounds:

We can see you holding hands
Sir Jimmy Savile – he's one of your own
Yid army

The first is aimed at supporters of Brighton and Hove Albion, in reference to the gay capital of Britain. The second is reserved for Leeds United fans, whose city spawned the BBC personality and child sex predator (the knighthood somehow adds to the taunt). The third is chanted by the legions of Tottenham Hotspur, identifying themselves with the club's traditional Jewish support.

Only one of these is permissible now – can you guess? The answer is provided by the Equality Act 2010, that dreadful last statute of the Blair-Brown administration. As sexual orientation is a protected characteristic, the teasing of Brighton supporters is prohibited. Tottenham fans are skating on thin ice with 'Yid', despite its positive use, because this is a derogatory term for Jews. You may still rib lads from Leeds on their late fellow citizen, as paedophilia (despite the efforts of some Labour politicians in the 1970s) is unequivocally reviled. Terrorism, however, is more complicated. Leeds was also the home of the London tube bombers, but it would be 'Islamophobic' to shout about this.

Are football grounds really theatres of hate? Undoubtedly there is nastiness in football, but the current moral panic is two or three decades too late. In the last century, Tottenham fans were greeted with 'Spurs are on their way to Auschwitz' followed by hissing. Celtic fans taunted Rangers about the Ibrox Park disaster, and Liverpool supporters celebrated the tragic loss of the Manchester United team at Munich. When Johnny Doyle, a Celtic forward, electrocuted himself in a DIY fatality, Rangers fans adapted the Lesley Gore song to 'It's my attic and I'll fry if I want to'.

Nowadays the plastic seating of the premier league is increasingly populated by genteel middle-class spectators. The Emirates Stadium, home of Arsenal, is dubbed 'The Library' for its lack of fervency. But some unfashionable clubs still have a hooligan element, and no team relishes being drawn away to Millwall in the FA Cup. Last season Everton supporters were treated to the ditty 'I'd rather be a Paki than a Scouse', and the media outrage led to closure of a section of The Den. This chant was understandably regarded as racist, although literally the Liverpudlian visitors were the target.

Recently three Barnsley supporters were arrested for verbally abusing a Stoke City player. James McLean has provoked ire by refusing to wear a poppy on his shirt on Remembrance weekend and his frequently expressed anti-British sentiment. Like ex-MP Anna Soubry, who smeared Leave campaigners as fascists, apparently it is okay for McLean to offend, but members of the public are not allowed to respond in kind, two of Soubry's critics were given jail sentences.

Tightening of the ratchet on the weekly release valve started in Glasgow. The SNP government saw that promoting Scottish unity was impeded by sectarianism. The Catholic community retained its descendant Irish identity, expressed in support of Celtic, while Protestants identified with Rangers and Ulster loyalism. The SNP passed a law to stop the praising of the IRA or Orange Order. However, Scottish nationalists abhor the Union

Jack more than Irish rebel songs, and prosecutions have been biased against Rangers fans.

The Glaswegian divide is a special case, but there are many intense rivalries between clubs, and between regions. Is it acceptable for Liverpool fans to insult Cockneys, but not the other way round? Various identity groups have jumped on the bandwagon of victimhood, and just as a joke about the Irishman is classed as racism, similar protection may be given to Scousers if they complain enough. How long before shouting 'Northern bastard' after a brutal foul by a Middlesbrough centre-half is an aggravated offence?

Selective imposition of identity politics is causing fear among ordinary supporters who see nothing wrong in venting their spleens at the opposition. All around the stadia are messages imploring fans to report 'hate', while a plain-clothed Stasi mingles with the hardcore supporters. A crude comment could get you arrested and your face all over the media. While bluntly racist or other extreme behaviour should not be tolerated at football grounds, this middle-class assault on a bastion of working-class culture must be challenged. True supporters are being pushed out, first by prices and now by puritanism. If there is anyone football fans should hate, it's the virtue-signalling snobs who are ruining their Saturday afternoon.

Thomas Less is a journalist.

The Universities

Don't waste your money on an arts degree

ANDREW TETTENBORN

Universities have never been far from scandal. Two hundred years ago it was dilatory dons, indolent students and what we now see as amusingly Spanish practices, such as a curious rule, survived into the nineteenth century, that undergraduates at King's College, Cambridge were entitled to get their degree by merely keeping terms and need not be troubled with exams.

Today, we see, or at least are told we should see, something much darker: the worry that university is a dangerous place replete with perils that students need protection against. Think of mental illness; uncaring staff; hurtful comments; racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia on and off campus; sexual harassment; violence, and so on. Few months pass without a sensational report of something like this, be it sexual misconduct by one student towards another, a bunch of privileged yobs subscribing to a risqué or racist Facebook group, or a depressed student who attempts suicide. Importantly, nearly all such reports do two things: they suggest that the underlying problems are endemic, and demand firm action by universities to stop it.

The government, in the way of all governments looking for a buck to pass, is happy to stoke these fires of moral panic. This January, its Office for Students, a quango existing to assure students what it calls a 'fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers', proposed to sanction universities that did not fall into line with the prevailing view and agree to act, drastically and fast. They had, it said, to 'embed' (a telling piece of pseudo-scientific management-speak) prevention of and response to all forms of harassment and sexual misconduct, and (more management-speak) introduce 'proactive and meaningful engagement with students and student representatives in the development, implementation and evaluation of systems, policies and processes for preventing and responding to harassment and sexual misconduct, and in how to support students who have experienced it.'

The university administrative class, which now sees itself as a cadre of managers on a mission and not mere boring promoters of scholarship, has tagged along, and with gusto. Every institution worth the name now has a raft of 'safeguarding' policies: speech codes, policies against creating a hostile atmosphere, zero-tolerance policies against homophobia, bystander initiatives, and so on. In January 2020 Sheffield University even announced that it would be paying students to act as 'diversity champions', to listen in to conversations and help root out expressions and actions that might make some students feel unwelcome.

As viewed by the managerialists, this is no doubt a noble co-operation undertaken in order to solve a serious problem by executive action. From outside, and for that matter from the point of view of ordinary students and academics, it seems less so.

The suggestion that universities are hotbeds of constant racism, sexual predation and worse, and thus in need of a drastic cure, is tenable only if one lumps together some very disparate events. Sexual harassment, for instance, runs from the don who offers better grades to the girl who will sleep with him, down to the over-importunate would-be boyfriend or the teller of risqué jokes. The first is a deadly serious problem. The other two are not; they merely reflect the vicissitude of life in general, so too with what is now excoriated as racism. Drunken yobs throwing bananas into a black student's windows on campus when he is trying to work while shouting 'N******s aren't welcome here' need booting out quick. The conversationalist who criticises ethnic food as foul-tasting, and the well-meaning person who asks a black man which country he's from and is crossly told 'Stoke-on-Trent', do not. They may cause minor annoyance but should not worry us further, unless we really want to reduce universities to places where ordinary conversation is frowned on and only the most banal and inoffensive remarks permitted.

While it is a good thing to safeguard the academic community from crimes and illegalities, this isn't what universities exist to do, nor are they likely to be very good at it. Take a *cause célèbre* from last year. A female student at Birmingham told the university just before finals that a then boyfriend, another student, had raped her two years earlier at her city digs after a drunken party. She demanded safeguards: in this case, measures to exclude the man from anywhere she might be, and assurance that this would be done without identifying her as the source of the complaint against him. The university refused. It understandably declined to adjudicate between the word of two teenagers over alcohol-fogged events off campus a long time ago; it was doubtless also concerned that with nothing proved against him the man had every right not to have his academic life summarily upended. There followed a furore on social media and in the *bien-pensant* press, and – ominously – a rap over the knuckles from Universities UK, the university managers' trade organisation and self-appointed spokesman for the sector. Birmingham had, it was said, failed the complainant. It was its duty to take full responsibility for policing what its students did to one another, on or off campus, with bodies prepared to intervene forcefully and trained to appreciate the clear need for ensuring the university provided a safe space. Yet it is hard not to agree with the university's view (since unfortunately recanted) that this was a matter that it was not equipped to deal with and which the police, with their ability, experience and powers, were.

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Furthermore, it is all very well to talk about the duty to safeguard students as if it was self-evident. You wouldn't want unsafeguarded students, would you? But what is much less obvious that it is the universities on whom this duty ought to be placed. Beyond obvious matters such as ensuring campus buildings are safe and suppressing disruptive activities that make it impossible to study in them, it is rather hard to see a convincing reason for subjecting them to any general welfare duties. However much some parents and politicians might like to think otherwise, universities are not some glorified extension of school serving the useful function of providing simultaneous education, protection and childcare to parents who choose to pack their offspring off there. Students are autonomous adults; regarded as able to make choices (good or bad) and run risks like anyone else. They would certainly not take kindly to attempts by universities to improve their moral well-being or save them from themselves.

The proper analogy to a university is not so much a school as a club: a learning club, if you will, which, in return for a subscription to the running costs, provides its members with an opportunity for scholarship and study. Now, it would be very odd if we expected any other club for adults – a golf club, say, or a reading group – to take steps to protect its members from sexual harassment, racism, micro-aggressions, or whatever. Any suggestion to the contrary would be met with the obvious riposte that that was not what members paid their subscriptions for; misbehaviour by members elsewhere, however grievous, was not a matter for them.

Is there anything wrong with suggesting that exactly the same ought to go for universities? The fees you (or probably your parent) pay goes to give you the benefits of education: lectures, libraries, laboratories, and so on. If you want to complain that you have not been properly protected against some disadvantage or illegality not connected with education, you deserve sympathy. But the remedy is straightforward: you should have, like any other member of the public, to take your chance on whatever civil society has to offer by way of retribution or recompense.

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Celebrating the Pre-Enlightenment

The good old days of disembowling your enemies

JAMES MONTEITH

I had always thought that the Enlightenment was, on balance, a good thing. Despite an overly naïve belief in the powers of the rational mind and a corresponding neglect of the value of tradition, the great revolutionary declarations of the rights of man had much to commend them. Man was indeed born free, not in chains. Liberty was precious. Voltaire's campaign against fundamentalist religious dogma (then represented by the Catholic Church), absolute rule, slavery and torture, and for freedom of speech, even the right to ridicule, was wholly admirable. Kant reinforced it with the idea that we are sovereign rational beings, and should be treated as ends, not as means. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights inscribed it. Civilized people of all political persuasions could at least agree on this.

However, thanks to my recent reading of post-modern anti-foundational academic literature on the subject, I am now coming to see that this view is mistaken. I have, it turns out, merely been peddling the dominant hegemonic neo-colonial Western discourse, which assumes that we are citizens belonging to a political community, specifically a Western-style liberal democracy, endowed with certain inalienable rights on account of our common humanity. The problem with this Enlightenment conception of human rights, which holds all human beings to be equal, is that it emphasises individual rights at the expense of *cultural difference*. It purports to be culture and colour blind, but its imposition of purportedly 'difference-blind' principles is merely a mask for the continued denigration of those cultures and ethnicities that have suffered Western colonial oppression – a mask for the imposition of a white European hegemonic culture.

A recent paper by Michalinos Zembylas, which I came across in a prominent educational journal, typifies this ongoing work of deconstruction in academia. Adopting for the purpose a 'critical hermeneutical approach', Zembylas argues that the dominant hegemonic human rights discourse needs 'rupturing'. Due regard should be paid to 'complex cultural, political and social representations', human rights violations must be seen 'from the perspective of both sides in the conflict', 'socio-historically sensitive understandings' legitimised, and 'critical responsiveness' cultivated towards 'diverse manifestations of human rights'.

High time, then, to remind ourselves of the diversity of cultural norms and practices that existed before the West imposed its hegemony, its conception of the individual, and its nostrums of universal norms, liberty and human rights. For there is no doubt that much *was* lost – and in no arena was more lost than that of the age-old ritual of torture, which characterised almost every pre-Enlightenment society, European included, for the impulse to torture was universal. Although torture continues in societies that have not had Western liberal Enlightenment values imposed on them (theocratic and tribal societies, tyrannies and dictatorships), the adverse publicity generated by reports of international humanitarian organisations, like the UN and Amnesty, is usually sufficient to hide the practices from public view.

To Eurocentric Western minds, the word torture conjures up images of the 'Holy' Inquisition, whose main modes of torture, as it quested to extract confessions and eradicate heresy, were the pulley, the rack, and fire. But this neglects a rich diversity of culturally-embedded and identity-forming torture practices, often raised to the level of exquisite art,

which, if it were not for the imposition of Western Enlightenment values, would still be flourishing today.

Torture played an important role in a range of cultural practices, not only rites of vengeance and punishment, but religious sacrifice and initiation. For example, in his classic history of the subject, George Riley Scott reports that the initiatory rites of the North American Mandan Indians, involved first skewering the flesh of shoulders, arms and legs, and then hauling the initiate up by cords attached to the skewers until he hung suspended above the ground. The initiate's weaponry was then hung from the skewers, and the flesh raised up to eight inches from the surrounding tissue by the extra weight. Blood would stream down from the wounds and the initiate would hang in agony. The practice of female circumcision, or genital mutilation, is still widely practised today. But the equivalent rites for young males could be equally elaborate – and painful. For the Australian aborigines, male initiation involved incising the length of the penis to expose and open the urethra, and then forcing the tissue apart.

However, putting a captive or sacrificial victim to death, by its very nature, afforded the greatest scope for the practice of torture. Father Jean de Brébeuf of the Jesuit mission to the Hurons in Canada was captured by the Iroquois and experienced the elaborate ritual first hand. To begin with, his hands were chopped off. Then his body was pierced with pointed iron instruments, and red-hot tomahawks were suspended around his neck. Then a belt of bark smeared with pitch was tied around his body and set alight. Then burning firebrands were thrust into his mouth and buckets of boiling water thrown over him. His lips were torn off. Pieces of flesh were cut from his body, roasted in the fire, and eaten before his eyes. Finally, for the unfortunate priest was still alive, his feet were amputated, and his scalp torn off.

The Chinese, on the other hand, specialised in the art of 'Death by the Thousand Cuts'. The executioner was provided with a covered basket containing a collection of knives, each of them marked with the name of some portion of the body. He would then draw a knife at random and proceed to cut off the indicated part of the body. Alternatively, a single blade might be used, and the executioner would proceed methodically. First, he would cut off handfuls of flesh. Then, the joints. Then, the nose, ears, toes and fingers. Then the limbs, working inwards from wrists and ankles. Finally, the victim would be stabbed, and his head cut off.

By comparison, the Aztecs adopted a straightforward approach as they sacrificed captives to the sun god. The victim might first have his arms and legs cut off, then his breast slit open, and finally the executioner-priest would hold aloft the still beating heart. Butchers would be on hand to dismember the body, pieces of which would be cooked for later feasting. Though cannibalism does not, strictly speaking, constitute torture, the custom of eating enemies slain in battle deserves honourable mention. The Maoris of old would even take delight in savouring the fleshier morsels – the flesh of women and children was preferred, and the brain above all.

Of course, pre-Enlightenment European society had its own rich repertoire of torture rituals abetted by ingenious torture instruments, ranging from the thumbscrew and torture boot, to a diabolical mechanical figure of the Virgin Mary, whose 'embrace' of the victim inserted into him hundreds of sharp knife blades. The torture of the rats was especially revolting, but perhaps the most terrible punishment was to be drawn and quartered – as in the terrible public spectacle witnessed by Casanova in 1757 when Damien, the would-be assassin of Louis XV, was dismembered by four horses, a procedure that lasted four hours.

And, all this was ended by the culture-blind difference-blind Western Enlightenment ideal of universal human rights. What a loss! However, with the deconstruction of the hegemonical structures of the West, and the restoration of cultural difference and cultural diversity in all its forms, we can perhaps look forward to a resurgence of these venerable traditions.

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The Madness of Socialism

Doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result, is a sign of insanity

JOHN BEVERIDGE

Socialism is madness and socialists are mad. Anyone in the Western world, who wishes to remain sane, needs to get a strong grasp of those propositions. This insanity has held currency among millions, for a century, and emanations are gaining priority among all Western countries. There is a growing need that it be declared for what it is. Einstein famously observed that doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result, is a sign of insanity. Mankind's ability to cope with the vicissitudes of life has been vastly improved by the application of this principle by modern science. Confronted with a problem, the scientific approach is to ask what the answer might be – develop a theory – and devise an experiment, which enables one to see whether the theory succeeds, or fails. Once the answer is established, it is accepted, or rejected, in the knowledge that it will continue to perform, in the same way, thereafter, however often it is applied. If one establishes, for example, that a feather floats on water, but a stone sinks, one knows that this will always be true. Basing life on the premise that stones float, in water, would be to ensure disappointment. This principle is unknown to socialists. They have applied socialism, in real societies, numerous times, always with the same result – disastrous failure. Undeterred, the madmen continue to proclaim that their system works, however many times it is proved to fail.

A consideration of the experiments of socialism takes only a moment, since the results are so clear. They include the first true socialist state, Russia, where Stalin made the lives of the citizens a horror and spread it across central Europe. Then China followed, under Mao, the greatest mass murderer in world history. Pol Pot, in Cambodia, achieved the stupendous task of torturing to death the majority of his people. There have been several others notably in Latin America and Eastern Europe. We have North Korea and Venezuela, as contemporary reminders. There is not one instance of a state thriving under socialism. Contrast the conditions in East Germany with those in West Germany, before reunification. Even when the doctrines of socialism are applied in a Western country, with all the controls against excess, the outcome is always bad. To take England, as an example, every Labour government, from the first, under Ramsay MacDonald, to the most recent, under Gordon Brown, has left office with the national economy in tatters. I will not set out the evidence, because the facts can easily be confirmed.

The essence of the madness of socialists is that they treat their beliefs as quasi religious tenets, which are to be accepted, whatever the evidence that they are wrong, on the facts. The overwhelming evidence that they are wrong makes no difference to them. They believe that people will work for the state as effectively as they will work for themselves and their family. In Russia, under communism, individuals were allowed, for their own benefit, to cultivate only their own gardens, which amounted to about 1 per cent of tilled land, nationally, and that 1 per cent produced about the same amount as the other 99 per cent. Such facts do not deter socialists from preaching nationalisation of industries. They believe that detailed state regulation leads to efficiency, although regulations are now known to stifle enterprise. They believe that – with the exception of Party members, and others who work for the state/ the people – all men deserve about the same degree of financial means. The fact that capitalism has been the sole source of wealth, because entrepreneurs will risk all they have and work all the hours that God gives, to create new vehicles of wealth, passes them by. Socialist states have no Bezos, no Gates, no Rothschild, no Carnegie, and no economic advancement save what they pick up from the West, yet still socialists preach the falsehood that their ways will lead to prosperity for 'the people'.

So, it is easy to see that Socialism has been proved to fail and to identify the principle reasons. Yet, not only is every society around the world burdened by Socialist politicians and supporters, but aspects of Socialist thought have come to general acceptance and, in some areas, dominance, over other thoughts. These can, for practical purposes, be identified under

the heading of 'political correctness'. This term is an example of the quasi-religious approach of socialists. It is not 'political rightness'. It is not founded on being right, but on being correct, a concept which implies the existence of absolute standards, to which all right minded people must conform. The essence of the dogma of this system of thought, is that it is based, not on reality, but on moral rectitude. Thus, if one does not conform, one is not necessarily wrong, but certainly wicked. This underlies all the debate about these so-called PC ideas. People are bullied into acceptance of PC ideas, by the implication that, if they are not supportive, they are morally guilty. In most instances, PC ideas are wrong, often insanely wrong, but, of course, rightness does not enter into the debate. Such ideas are propounded as self evidently to be adopted, in order to conform to correct thinking. Decency requires conformity. Orwell would have recognised the process, immediately. Examples of the insanities committed through PC appear in the national press, almost daily. It is enough for me to take three cases.

1. A few years ago, Brighton and Hove City Council decreed that primary school pupils are to be taught that menstrual periods are not confined to one gender and that 'menstruation must be inclusive of all genders'. It is hard to imagine a more blatant factual falsehood, but, to socialist madmen, the facts are irrelevant. If you immediately assume, as reason would indicate, that this example must be a one off piece of lunacy, you will be disheartened to be told that the British Medical Association has issued advice, to doctors, that they should not use the term 'pregnant women' but the term 'pregnant people', to avoid causing offence to transgender individuals.
2. In February, 2016, a 15 year old pupil at Wildern School, in Southampton, after a classroom discussion on immigration, went on line to look the subject up and, in the process, looked at the UKIP web site. Teachers reported him to the police, on the basis that he raised welfare concerns, by looking at politically incorrect sites. In the mad world of Socialist PC the police did not rebuke the school, for wasting police time, but sent a member of a team specialising in child welfare, who accused the boy of being a UKIP activist and told him that it was 'not right' to look at such material.
3. In March, 2019, a man seeking asylum from the Iranian regime was refused entry on the grounds that his religion was too violent. He was not, as sanity would suppose, a Muslim extremist. He was a Christian. This, despite ours being a Christian country. When he protested this view, he received a reply saying that the Holy Bible was 'filled with imagery of revenge, destruction, death and violence'. Another claimant, from the same country, was told that 'you affirmed, in your asylum interview record that Jesus is your saviour, but then claimed that He would not be able to save you from the Iranian regime. It is therefore considered that you have no conviction in your faith and your belief in Jesus is half-hearted'.

Note that these risible events are, in fact, not funny, because they are examples, not of incompetence, but of insanity. Our officials cannot be relied on to act within the bounds of sanity. Moreover, real people were victims of this behaviour. One might suppose that our most esteemed institutions remain above these damaging perversions of the mental process. Unhappily, this is absolutely not the case. Only the day before I am writing this piece, the *Daily Telegraph* reported the case of a 77 year old peer. I quote: 'In April, he was accused of stopping a woman and telling her she looked beautiful with her hair worn differently from her usual style... he was also accused of stroking a woman's arm for 5 to 10 seconds' and of making a joke that he hoped that a document about the up skirting bill would contain photos. Instead of this trivia being dismissed, as such, the Lords standards committee held a formal hearing and found that he had caused 'harassment'. He lost the Labour Party whip and he has been ordered to undergo 'behavioural coaching'. This in our upper legislative chamber, so what hope, elsewhere? Oxford and Cambridge have become pitifully corrupted by PC, to such an extent that they are traitors to their noble past. If people of the senior generation have fallen so foul of socialism and PC, what is the position of the young, raised in our leftie schools? Since Socialist theory is based on fantasy, not truth, Socialists must either resile from their theory, or disregard the facts. The theory remains intact. They simply disregard the facts. In turn, this means that they cannot listen to accounts of the disparity the existence of which they cannot recognise. This has resulted, among other things, in what has become known as 'no platforming', meaning that speakers who will disagree with Socialist tenets are prevented from addressing audiences. This is justified, by the insane, as necessary to provide 'safe spaces'. This process is most known in our universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, universities as places 'safe' from ideas and debate. Even highly distinguished speakers have been shouted down, mishandled and

driven from the lectern. Sometimes, they had intended to address issues which are especially sensitive to Socialists, such as racial differences, but there are other occasions when a speaker will be disallowed by reason only of his identity, as a recognised disbeliever in certain Socialist tenets.

It is appalling to know that these practices are permitted to flourish in universities, where, if anywhere, different thoughts and opinions should be laid out for debate, and that the Dons often smile on them. The younger generation are under constant indoctrination, which includes attempts to deny them access to material which is opposed to Socialism, such as in the school incident, referred to above. Socialism sucks in the simple minded, devising group loyalty and emotion, by inventing enemies. These, say the Socialists, are evil and 'we' are against them. This is a battle, which we should fight with hatred of the enemies. A decade, or so, ago, the primary gibe was 'fascist'. Even parliamentarians devoted to reasoned debate and without any fascist beliefs whatever, were subject to these gibes, which were never based on reason, just on bare assertion, which it was the moral duty of all decent people to approve. Anti-fascist events were held, usually including violence, fomented by extreme lefties, whose avowed motivation was the overthrow of the present political order. The supposed rightness of opposing fascism justified the violence with which these events were filled. The gibe has become a tool, used by Socialists as an easy weapon, which replaces debate and vilifies the accused, clothing the wielder with the moral cloak of enemy of evil. Currently, the preferred gibe is 'racist'. This has been used to such effect that a whole industry has grown around the notion of the evil of racism. Criminal provisions have been introduced, by Parliament, which indicate that parliamentarians have not only become passive observers of this Socialist pantomime, but active participants in madness. In a 2003 Statute, a new category of crime was ordained, 'hate crime', defined as 'any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on' racial, religious, or sexual characteristics.

Thus, the character of a crime, for which more serious penalties are prescribed, is not dependant on evidence, but on the perception of the victim or 'any other person'. This is unchallengeable and those who may have such perception are unlimited. They could be motivated, confused, defective, the only one out of 50 observers to have such a perception, or not even present at the scene of the offence, but their perception is decisive. This is self evidently grave and misguided, but it was approved by the Nation's leaders, overcome, presumably, by the fervour of anti racist, religious and sexual prejudice.

One area of socialist thought worth a particular comment is 'feminism'. An example of the socialist embrace of victim status. There is a contemporary trend for young women drinking to gross excess, in public. Those who point out that a scantily dressed young woman, staggering along dark streets, helplessly drunk, is at risk of sexual assault, so should take more care, are vilified as denying women the right to dress as they please and that, if a woman, in that situation is raped, the blame lies only with the man. Of course, the man is to blame, but none of the women making this assertion would leave their jewellery around on the streets, on the grounds that, if it is stolen, only the thief is to blame. Recognition of the need to accept reality and to act within its limits is just not part of socialism. According to its theory, women ought to be entitled to behave as they wish, even though nature has prescribed consequences for some actions.

We find the same approach in relation to abortion. The movement for late stage abortion does not recognise that, after enough months into pregnancy embryos are viable humans and sensate, who, in abortions, are cut into pieces and killed, under the claim that women have the right to control their bodies. Every reader will be familiar with accounts of

ludicrous and sad instances where socialist thinking has infected our society. Christians who cannot accept same sex marriage are criminalised. Those who will not convert to the socialist mantra are punished and outcast, in their community. Unbelievers are the butt of malicious disregard.

One example is Lord Pearson, a member of our upper house of Parliament, who is attempting to hold discussion on the effect of Muslims on our society – only discussion, note. He has been shouted down, in the House, and no such discussion has been allowed. This, despite the presence of about 3.5 million Muslims in our Christian country, mostly living in enclaves, dressing in an alien manner, setting up their alien courts, their alien mosques, practising oppression of women, female genital mutilation and harbouring many of their ilk, who wish to destroy our society. At every turn, we experience the effects of this, from security delays, when flying, to bomb and knife attacks and Muslim gangs in our prisons. Yet our Parliament will not discuss any of this. Instead, it is in the process of considering more enactments to eradicate supposed Islamophobia. This is madness, at the heart of our nation. Being gregarious animals, humans are always subject to group think. It is necessary, so that they may cooperate in group survival. Every group has group think and defends it by group pressure to conform. As the needs of a group change, the group thought changes, being the mechanism for the adaptation of the group to its new circumstances.

For example, in times when there was little mixture of different races, within groups, prejudices against those of other races grew up, as a way of defining membership of the group against outsiders, but now there is much mixture of races within groups, such prejudices are a threat to harmony and so have become unacceptable. Thus, typically, group think serves the needs of a group. For present purposes, the group with which we are concerned is the whole of the so-called Western world. There can be no *per se* complaint against Socialism, or PC that they are group think. The complaint is that it they are systems of thought based on the acceptance of theory over reality. As such, they are not only a form of madness, but are deeply damaging to the group which adopts them.

Basing real life on false premises inevitably results in self-harming practices. Problems cannot be eradicated and new ideas not adopted because they cannot be recognised, or spoken of, let alone addressed. For this reason, responsible individuals ought to defy group pressure and point out that the king has no clothes. It has been said that he who has common sense has all the sense there is. Pointing out obvious irrationalities and factual falsehoods ought, one might, wrongly, assume, be an easy path. However, group think topics are protected, in various ways, one being placing them out of bounds. The reaction of the House of Lords to Lord Pearson's unarguably rational suggestion that there should be discussion about Muslims and university no-platforming are examples of this process. There are none so deaf as those who will not hear. Perhaps, the engagement of millions of untrained and ill-educated minds, over the internet, has lowered the level of rational assessment. Whatever the cause, the current thinking will change with changing circumstances, but the inevitability of this is small comfort, when the timing is so uncertain and may well be so far removed. Anyone wishing to tackle the problem must start by accepting a level of unthinking and unreasoning pressure, when they accord rubbish its due name, which can involve working, family and social life. Once that is accepted, they will be able to join the majority, who are not group thinkers, but without being silent, and base their debate on the proposition that sane thinking starts from seeking and recognising reality. They will find the waters well stocked with those with a capacity for rationality and the opportunity for free discussion, the loss of which is the cost paid by those adhering to socialism and PC.

One need not admire Trump, as a man, nor agree with his politics, to learn from the way he reacts to the PC mob. Confront them.

Donald Trump is now an instructive curiosity. Socialists are distraught with hating him because he is immune to the bag of tricks on which they rely and which has worked so well, for them, in every other circumstance. He disregards and dismisses the condemnations which bring other politicians to apologise. He persists in dealing with practicalities and derides their armoury of barbs and allegations. His supporters overlook his numerous remarkable oddities, just for those reasons, which make him a unique figure in world politics. He stands alone, in self-assertion, in the face of group think and this has become a strength, rather than a weakness. One need not admire Trump, as a man, nor agree with his politics, to learn from the way he reacts to the PC mob. Confront them. They do not deserve the high ground they claim, so deny it to them. Remember, the inability to recognise reality is one form of madness.

John Beveridge is a retired QC.

The Labour Party in Defeat

Next stop for Labour the mosque?

Ralph Berry

British politics has been transformed since the election. The Conservative Party, at national and local level, is now purely the instrument of the Prime Minister. For the foreseeable future, it will obey his commands, and the Party is not therefore of great current interest. The Opposition however has been crushed, and is now in a most interesting state as it struggles to rebuild. The first question is the Labour leadership and the successor to Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn is viscerally anti-American and anti-Trump, and refused to meet the President when he visited Britain. The moving spirits of the Labour Party are scarcely less anti-American, since the leadership is avowedly Marxist. Clearly Labour will have to move away from this extreme position, and cannot go on flouting the President of the United States. Beyond the leadership question, which will have to be resolved in the coming months, lie far deeper questions about the identity of the Labour Party.

What is the Labour Party? Until lately, the answer was obvious and unchallengeable. Labour is the party of the white working class. Its roots were authentic, and its performance in elections, local and national, guaranteed a high degree of success against its historic adversary the Conservative Party. Under Tony Blair, Labour swept the board in three general elections. Today, Labour under its leader Jeremy Corbyn has suffered a great defeat, its fourth consecutive defeat in general elections. Yet there are 14 Labour Muslim MPs now, three of them new (as against 5 Conservatives, 2 new). The changes bear close attention.

The 'working classes' are now changed beyond recognition. In the Northern constituencies especially, they were the army that manned the coal mines and factories. The mines are now closed, in part as a response to global warming, and the factories now employ many highly skilled and well-paid operatives. The lower skilled workers are, and feel themselves to be, threatened by migrants who are paid less and drive down the wages of the natives. Yet Government, including Blair's, opened the door to EU migrants and never closed it. This is a long-standing complaint which has now surfaced. It is compounded by an open door to non-EU migrants.

The communiqués from the front after the election of December 12th reveal a staggering defeat. Labour's 'red wall' of seats in the North has been shattered. 24 seats have become Tory for the first time ever, mostly in the North. To a British observer, the list of fortresses fallen to the enemy is astounding. Labour loses Sunderland, Blyth Valley, Bishop Auckland, Great Grimsby, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Rother Valley, Darlington? And Sedgefield, once the devoted seat of Tony Blair? The 24 seats that swung from Labour to the Tories make a total re-configuration of the Northern landscape. These events are ominous for Labour. They mark a meteor

strike on British politics.

However, Labour is not beaten everywhere, far from it. The Labour strongholds of the big cities are unmoved. London is heavily Labour as the big cities always are, and LONDONISTAN, a term proscribed by the authorities and never allowed public usage, remains perfectly apt. Manchester and Birmingham show an all but unbroken front, though one intrepid Tory took a seat from Labour's nine in Birmingham. The big cities are where immigrants have always headed, where they will join family and friends and acquire jobs in ever-expanding local government. They are mainly Muslims and vote Labour. The official estimate is that 85 per cent of Muslims vote Labour; in the 2017 election, just 11 per cent voted Conservative. The grip of the Islamic vote on the electorate has not weakened: Bristol West, with its huge Somalian population, returned Thangam Debbonaire with a vote of 47,000 (62 per cent). For a case history of one constituency, consider Poplar and Limehouse.

London is heavily Labour as the big cities always are, and LONDONISTAN, a term proscribed by the authorities and never allowed public usage, remains perfectly apt.

It is a curious constituency containing Canary Wharf, or City2. The towers of Trebizond pierce the sky, and in them toil the employees of Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and the like. Immense wealth is generated there and expensive nearby apartments, which are virtually gated communities, house many of the workers. Canary Wharf is a ward within the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The population of Tower Hamlets is overwhelmingly of Bangladeshi origin, and this accounted for the ability of its elected Mayor, Mohammad Lutfur Rahman, to survive until 2015. The Government then found him 'personally guilty' of 'illegal or corrupt practices' and removed him from office. This scandal has not affected the voting patterns of Tower Hamlets, and the constituency at large.

The MP for the Parliamentary constituency, Poplar and Limehouse, was for years an Old Labour white man, Jim Fitzpatrick. He stood down for the 2019 election and his place was taken by a young Muslim woman, Apsana Begum, selected from an all-women list and with the backing of Momentum, the radical group. She had worked as an admin officer for the council and is now under a Council investigation over whether she wrongly secured a £330,000 council flat. In the general election she won with a majority of 29,000, yet another instance of local government leading to national selection, and is of the hard left. Apsana Begum is now the first hijab-wearing woman in Parliament, and will be highly visible on the TV screen whatever she has to say.

Poplar and Limehouse illustrates a deeply significant aspect of the sea change in British politics. Muslim voters used to serve as native auxiliaries to the white regiments. There were mutual benefits for Labour: their white candidates were elected to Parliament with heavy migrant support, and the migrants themselves came on board to a brand name of incontestable traditional authority. It is not possible in Britain for an openly religious party to campaign under the name of that religion. When, some years ago, a radical Muslim founded the 'Muslim Parliament', he was swiftly told that there is only one Parliament in this country. The 'Muslim Parliament' still exists, but only as an advisory body to the Muslim Council of Britain, a large umbrella organization, which the authorities consult. It is Labour that has been the vehicle of political advancement. The problem is that Muslim success in taking over Labour has now reached the point when Labour itself is in what may well be a freefall. And that leaves Islam exposed as the prime active force and recruiting sergeant for Labour.

The future is a foreign country. But suppose that Boris Johnson does what he says he will do, and has the power to do, make the North a true power house that will assure many that they did right? The voters left Labour to embrace the Tories. Could this mean that the votes, 'lent' to the Tories, will turn out to be a long-term loan becoming permanent? In that case Labour will be exposed as a front for Muslims, and the party itself forced to reconcile its ancient role with its present structures. It may even have to change its name. In all this the Government will repeat its mantra of 'One Nation', a slogan coined in 1845 by Disraeli and revived in 1950 by a group of progressive Tories. 'One Nation' looks increasingly implausible as a policy for 1950 clapped on to a 2020 reality. The Muslim surge is going to challenge the parameters of politics.

Ralph Berry is a retired academic.

Vietnam

An old enemy rises from the ashes

Catherine Blaiklock

I am in Vietnam – a country in which, forty-five years ago, the Americans killed three million people and maimed millions more, where children are still being born with birth defects from traces of Monsanto's nice little earner Agent Orange, yet where today American citizens are offered preferential visas.

It is not what the Vietnamese government does that is so striking – governments do all sorts of strange things for strange reasons, it is the people in the street, the paddy fields and the villages that matter. Even the old and the maimed who lived through one of the most terrible wars in modern history (a war including that with France that went on for 10,000 days or thirty years), welcome with warm smiles and exquisite politeness, the children of their enemies who shot, bombed and murdered them. Some nations and people never forget and want revenge forever, not in Vietnam where every family lost relatives and the old still remember the horror.

But Vietnam is much more than smiles – it has a winner's vigour and vitality. It feels like a country going somewhere, full of energy but not in a Notting Hill Carnival way. Like the Chinese and most Asian countries, the Vietnamese do not see diversity as a strength but a weakness; they do not want different groups fighting each other over petty racial, social and religious differences. They are not fighting culture wars but an economic one – and like China, they are going to slaughter the debt-ridden West.

The French, who ruled Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos as three contiguous countries in Indochina, used to say, 'The Vietnamese grow the rice, the Cambodians watch the rice and the Laotians listen to the rice.' Grow rice the Vietnamese do. Not only do they feed 97 million people in a land area the size of Britain (some of it very mountainous) but Vietnam is also the world's third largest rice exporter. Their rice production has increased 400 per cent in forty years. (Britain imports 80 per cent of its food, even carrots.)

The Vietnamese eat wonderful fresh, healthy food, full of colourful vegetables and fragrant herbs. Hot, cheap food is sold on every corner and the markets brim with home-grown produce. They have the lowest obesity rate in the world; supposedly 1 per cent of the population is obese, but after a month of walking, while fat Brits, Aussies and Americans abound, I have yet to see a single fat Vietnamese adult. (62 per cent of British adults are either obese or overweight). The fitness of a nation is a poignant symbol of its spiritual health.

On paper Vietnam has a per capita income 28 times (2,800 per cent) smaller than America's but their life expectancy is unbelievably the same at an average of 78.5 years. (Males and females combined). The Vietnamese spend £166 on healthcare every year, the Americans £8,600 with the same result.

Have no doubt that Vietnam is still poor, but its economic growth is extraordinary. In purchasing power parity terms (PPP), Vietnam has raised its income from $1,500 to $6,000 in thirty years from a starting point where the entire country was in ruins and its population maimed, starving or injured. It grew over 10 per cent last year alone. It is a funny setup for what is purportedly a communist state. Entrepreneurs, the self-employed and free market traders are everywhere. Thousands of people are dollar if not dong (VMD the national currency) millionaires and a growing number are worth over fifty million US dollars.

Economic growth and money does not only define a country. It is crime, rudeness, violence, petty theft and behaviour. There is very little crime in Vietnam – no tattoos, nose earrings, hippy clothing, disrespect to older people, political polarisation, knife crime, vandalism or graffiti. The Vietnamese are not only hard working but bright and value education highly; 50 per cent of the entire population, an astonishing fifty million people, are learning English.

This is not to idealise the place. The major urban cities have severe air quality problems associated with rampant construction, the population is ageing rapidly and inequality increasing. Poverty in the countryside is severe and Vietnam still suffers a major brain drain.

But herein lies an extraordinary paradox. Vietnamese TV recently ran a television competition where the winners were sent to Australia to study. The idea was that these bright, young people would return to their country to help with its development. All twelve winners never returned.

The reason these graduates did not return was money. They will earn multiples more in dollar terms in Australia. Vietnam, like China, deliberately keeps its currency very weak, so that it can export vast quantities of goods competitively, import very little except basic raw materials and accumulate both huge trade surpluses and vast quantities of foreign exchange reserves – $70 billion and growing at the last count. The result is that salaries are very low when translated into dollar terms.

Economic growth and money does not only define a country. It is crime, rudeness, violence, petty theft and behaviour.

Annual GDP per capita in Vietnam is about $2500 annually. That would put Vietnam on a par with Chad. But you can see that Vietnam is not Chad the second you walk out of one of its gleaming new airports and see well dressed, well fed people on the street. Prices are ridiculously low. Even in tourist bars a beer costs 50 pence ($0.66 cents). At 6 pence a unit electricity is some of the cheapest in the world. In Germany it is 28 pence per unit. You can buy a dress for £1.50 ($2) or live in a modern apartment in the capital city for a few hundred dollars a month.

A super weak currency also has another interesting effect. Salvatore Babones writing in *Forbes* in an article entitled *Vietnam Is Following The Asian Tiger Currency Formula For Rapid Economic Growth* (15 Jan 2018) observed

> *A stable but consistently undervalued currency has the extra bonus that it acts like a pro-poor progressive income tax. It penalizes the rich people who disproportionately buy imported goods while sparing the poor, whose consumption consists almost entirely of local products like food and shelter.*

Many African countries in comparison keep their currencies far too strong in order that their megalomaniac rulers and élites can import vast quantities of luxuries while further impoverishing their countries and their poor. Currency black markets are rampant in most African countries.

These Asian countries keep their currencies weak by pegging their currencies to the dollar, by fixing them too low and applying strict banking and regulatory rules to keep them low. If there is pressure for a currency to rise, they sell it in vast quantities on the international money markets in exchange for dollars, creating yet more dollar and foreign currency reserves for themselves.

Thus Vietnam, like China, is storing vast amounts of wealth by not letting its citizens spend too much while looking to the future. This is in complete contrast to the West that imports everything from jeans to cars, eats, spends, doesn't save, prints vast quantities of money and accumulates unpayable debts.

The second reason why these graduates do not come back, apart the rich money pickings to be had in the west, is they have advanced technical skills that are in high demand in the west but are in copious supply at home. For example, China produces 4.6 million STEM graduates a year compared to 500,000 in America. On a *per capita* basis, both China and Vietnam graduate as least three times as many STEM graduates per head of population as Britain and America.

The contrast with British people could not be greater.

Just imagine if all our young spent their time learning languages, economically useful subjects or hugely challenging STEM subjects, not feminism or media studies, and didn't spend hours a day complaining on twitter about some woke infringement, racism or 'toxic white males'. Nor would the brightest of our young find they are denied places in Oxford or Cambridge because the latter had been ordered to take people based on their skin colour or their parent's occupation rather than on the merits of the individual students themselves. Already we are being forced to hire graduates from the East because we don't have enough of our own. The West is living on borrowed economic and social time whilst the East is storing up vast reserves of both financial and human capital for the future. Colonialism will go into reverse and we will become colonies of the east.

Horace Greeley, an American newspaper editor and publisher who was the founder and editor of the *New York Tribune*, among the great newspapers of its time, once remarked:

> *Washington is not a place to live in. The rents are high, the food is bad, the dust is disgusting and the morals are deplorable. Go West, young man, go West and grow up with the country.*

The long-term future, as in Greeley's day, is now not in the old economic-debt-ridden heartlands of the West but in East Asia. Get your children to learn Mandarin or Vietamese and be prepared to move East.

Catherine Blaiklock founded and named the Brexit Party.

Ireland Falls in Love with Islam

D C Kohn

Dublin's metropolitan élite – politicians, the commentariat and academics – insist there are certain things that cannot be said. One is that the nationhood and sovereignty of the Irish people proclaimed in 1916 was forfeited when the republic joined the embryonic European Union in 1973; another, consequently, is that in voting to leave the EU, the British or, more precisely, the English had resolved to reclaim the nationhood and sovereignty that had been surrendered in 1973 by Ted Heath, and therefore are patently insane. Here's another one: Ireland's growing Muslim population, derived chiefly from Middle Eastern and African migrants of one kind or another, could in time become ahem… let us be as careful as possible so as not to take the time of the hate speech police – a problem. Ireland, you see, is a thoroughly modern European country in which the Roman Catholic church no longer counts for too much, abortion and same sex marriages are legal, and the current prime minister – Leo Varadkar, the openly gay son of migrants from India, has for the best part of three years been the EU's glam poster boy for its Make Brexit As Difficult As Possible project.

Talking about the migrant, er, thing was the offence committed at the fag-end of last year by Verona Murphy, a farmer's daughter and single mother who had made something of her life, at 39, getting a BA in Law after four years at night school, starting her own trucking business and becoming president of the Irish Road Haulage Association. She was just the sort of business-first, get-up-go woman Fine Gael, the just-about governing party, needed. Leo endorsed gushingly her candidacy for a parliamentary by-election. Her campaign collapsed when she talked about the migrant, er, matter.

Some very young children, she said, might have been 'manipulated' by ISIS, which might be a 'big part' of Ireland's migrant population. Some asylum seekers might need to be 're-programmed'. Did Ireland, she asked, have 'to wait to have a London Bridge incident on Wexford Bridge?' Her road haulage work meant she knew about migrants trying to get into the country, and she had been at MI5 and Interpol security briefings.

Was she thanked for voicing her concerns? Of course not. What a daft question. She was shot at from all sides, including her own. Her comments were 'profoundly ignorant' and 'profoundly wrong'. This was not the sort of get-up-and-go-ness the profoundly disapproving prime minister wanted. Her remarks, he said, were 'hurtful to some of our migrant communities'. The grovelling apology she offered was rejected, she was thrown off the party ticket, and Leo said he was pleased she hadn't been elected because she 'unfortunately does harbour these views towards migrants'. Suggesting – not knowing when to stop – 'that migration might result in terrorist attacks in Ireland … that's just not factual, and is just really inflammatory, I think'. Still thinking, apparently, he thought this 'kind of commentary really feeds into the kind of racist and xenophobic views that unfortunately are harboured by a lot of people, or at least some people, in our society'. Open discussion, then, about the republic's safety, was scorned by the elected official ultimately responsible for security, as incendiary and prejudiced.

Ms Murphy was not alone in Ireland last year in ignoring the rule that politicians may talk only about diversity and inclusivity. An independent MP complained that the country's justice department without any consultation had decided to build a centre for refugees in a rural area, and wanted a guarantee that they would be 'screened well'. Two other independents voiced fears that Ireland was 'losing its culture' to African migrants who were 'sponging off the system' while 'our own people are hungry in the street'. Immigrants to countries such as Australia have to learn the culture before they're allowed to settle there. Again, such discourse is trashed as dangerous.

The mainstream media plays its part in this conspiracy of silence. As the New Year dawned, life in a West Dublin street was enlivened by combat outside a hotel. Film of it swirled around the anti-social media for some days. That most of the participants were not Irish natives was clear. The newspapers reported that there had been five arrests after a 'serious public order incident', but no details of the ethnicities of those involved were given. Perhaps they hadn't seen the film?

Ireland has its own version of Britain's Shamima Begum difficulty, the difference being that if the lady in question is allowed to return with her daughter from Syria to the old country, she risks being arrested and charged with a terrorist offence: being a member of ISIS.

Lisa Smith had been a private in Ireland's army. She converted to Islam, travelled to Syria, where some years on she was arrested by the US troops who were closing down the caliphate. She'd married a British jihadi – now dead. Now out on bail, she denies being an ISIS member and says she's never possessed a gun or committed a crime. Her lawyer wants the charge dropped, citing lack of evidence. Perhaps she never had a Daesh membership card.

If prosecutors do push the case to a trial, it'll be one from which Dublin's Metropolitan Élite might want to turn a blind eye. Unfortunately for the DME, the imported Islamic terror threat will be raised again by the 'inflammatory' Ms Murphy, who planned to stand as an independent in the general election Mr Varadkar had been forced to call for February 8, following the collapse of the flaky coalition that's kept him in office, and in the EU's good books, for two-and-a-half undistinguished years. Ms Bailey will be able to point to the Global Terrorism Index published by the Institute for Economics and Peace. It places Ireland tenth out of 36 European countries in a global index of countries affected by terrorism. Whatever else this institute might be, it's safe to assume it can't easily be trashed as racist and xenophobic.

D C Kohn is a journalist.

France

In a country where 50 per cent pay no income tax, who is going to fund the Yellow Vests' demands?

THEODORE DALRYMPLE

There was a time when, if you were in Bolivia for even a brief period, you would live through a *coup d'état* or an attempted *coup d'état*, or at least hear rumours of a forthcoming *coup d'état*. *Coups d'état*, in fact, were to Bolivia what sudden showers are to April – or strikes by public employees are to France.

The latter often have a theatrical aspect, being without real bitterness or even without anything recognisable as a cause, other than a desire for an extra holiday. It is merely time for a strike – by teachers, or pilots, or railwaymen – because there hasn't been one for a while. This is not to say that they do not cause inconvenience: I was once stranded in Port-au-Prince because Air France went on strike for a few days. All the same, I prefer Air France when it works, as it mainly does, to British Airways.

The latest waves of strikes in France are not so innocuous. There is bitterness in them, for they are clearly about something important. For the outsider, this something is clear and obvious: it is that certain workers, particularly railwaymen (or is it railwaypersons?) want to preserve their privileges. They want to continue to be able to retire on generous pensions at an average age of 52 years and 6 months, which means that, with an average life expectancy at that age of over 30 years, many at their death will have been retired longer than they worked. The government wants to reform the system of pensions to make it both more equitable and, ultimately, more affordable, but it is far easier to grant privileges than to withdraw them, as all governments have found.

The French National Railway Company currently employs about 500,000 people, but it has about 1,100,000 pensioners on its books to provide for. The current employees' contributions are supposed to fund past employees' pensions, which might once have been sustainable when retirees were public-spirited enough to die soon after their retirement, if they ever reached it, but this is no longer the case, far from it. The pension payments probably exceed the total current wage bill of the SNCF, so that if current employees paid for the pensions of past workers, they would receive not a single centime for their work. Thus, the rest of the population must pay the major part of the railwaymen's pensions through taxation.

No doubt there was once a reason, in the days of steam engines, for the early retirement age of at least some railwaymen. Stoking giant steam engines must have been exhausting, dirty and unhealthy work. But the days of such work are long gone and most of the jobs on the railway are no more unpleasant or hazardous than many other jobs, which do not entitle anyone to early retirement on a generous pension.

This all seems perfectly obvious, to an outsider, and no doubt to many of the French. But there is a surprising level of support for the strikes among the public, at least if polls are to be believed (which, of course, they may not be). Why?

President Macron, who always said that he intended to reform the pension system, is unpopular because of his style. The man who helps us in our garden in France calls him Napoleon IV. Macron certainly does not have the common touch; to the contrary, he has that rare ability, not very useful to a politician in a democracy, to antagonise or alienate even those who agree with him.

Nevertheless, independent of the president's personality, it is so obvious that some reform must take place that one wonders how so many people seem not to be able to see it. I will quote only two examples. A young woman of my acquaintance, highly educated, managed to get herself arrested during one of the demonstrations against the proposed reforms. She was not a railwaywoman herself: who did she think was going to pay for the continuation of the railwaymen's privileges? But this was simply not a question for her.

An article in *Libération*, a newspaper read mainly by aging bourgeois bohemians, written by a university teacher of philosophy in Bordeaux, managed to discuss the reforms and the strikes without mentioning the demographic or actuarial situation, not even to deny that they were important, talking only of the dangers of neo-liberalism and current society's materialistic overemphasis on the importance of work at the expense of other aspects of human existence. In essence, what she was saying was that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

This is all very well, and I am myself no believer in

consumption as being the be-all and end-all of human life. But there is no getting around the problem that if Jack wants to play *and* be handsomely remunerated for doing so, there will be other Jacks who will have to work hard to supply him with his needs. If social justice means anything, which perhaps is doubtful, it cannot possibly mean this.

Insofar as supporters of the strikes deign to notice the economic problem at all, they think that it could, and ought to be, solved by taxing the rich. France is less unequal economically than most western countries, but still fifty per cent of adults pay no income tax at all and one per cent pay 22 per cent of all the income tax paid. Wealth taxes, which have huge public support, might be disagreeable to the rich, driving them out or causing them to indulge in complex subterfuge, but they do not generally fill the coffers of the state for very long, just as killing the livestock in Cuba after the revolution allowed people to eat meat for a time, soon followed by sixty years of shortage.

The great French economist of the nineteenth century, Frédéric Bastiat, drew attention to the difference between what is seen and what is not seen, that is to say that any policy has consequences that are not immediately obvious but are consequences nonetheless. In addition, there is the difference between what is accorded importance and what is not. For example, France is said to have the lowest rate of poverty among the elderly in the developed world (though the measurement of poverty is usually intellectually dishonest and is actually a measure of inequality rather than poverty in the sense of absolute deprivation). The comfort of the elderly in France is visible, the cost to the country as a whole is hidden and inferred rather than observed. That is one of the reasons for the resistance to even the slightest change, for all and any change is regarded as the thin end of the wedge leading to the total destruction of the current system whose visible aspects work so well.

As with the Soviet Union the real puzzle was not why it produced so little but why it produced anything at all, even to the extent that it did, so the puzzle with France is not why France is an economic laggard, but why it is as prosperous as it is, in many respects superior to Britain. But that is for another time.

Theodore Dalrymple's latest book is In Praise of Folly, *(Gibson Square).*

Letter from America

Cromwell's Puritans conquer America

Mark Mantel

When I drove across the country last Autumn, across Red state and Blue, I noticed that it was usually the more progressive states that were the most intolerant of man's little frailties. Wherever progressivism reigns, for instance, you can't smoke (or vape) within 30 feet of an entranceway. And if that 30 feet should lead you into the domain of another entranceway, you'll need to cross the road to have a puff, rain or shine. If you disregard the injunction (in the spirit of civil disobedience), the liberals will angrily pass by your white wafts of smoke, covering their beaks and snouts, in various attitudes of exaggerated horror.

I know that correlation does not prove causation. It may be that some third factor like economic development causes both liberalism and greater restrictions on the free pursuit of vices. But I don't think so. No other than the liberals themselves are doing it. Anecdotal evidence and empirical observation both absolutely confirm my pre-conceived notions.

The urge to ban things has gotten so over-mighty that it no longer seeks justification through its handmaiden: Science. For instance, Science (I think) has proven that second-hand smoke veritably threatens life and limb. And so, you can't find an isolated hillock in a public park and smoke. Fair enough. But then, without a shred of Science, the prohibition was gradually broadened to include all 'tobacco products'. For a time, this did not affect me, since it would only extend the fiat to chewing tobacco, which I have never done. A man spitting in a saucer is, of course, an ugly thing to behold, and even I might regulate it on aesthetic grounds. But Beauty is not a quality our angry little municipal governments, always loaded with leftist levellers, take to account. No, they rather maintained that Science proved second-hand smoke is harmful to others, and so all tobacco is

clearly included.

It was around this time that I started to vape. Vaping, everyone knows, creates no smoke and is not a tobacco product. There is no conclusive reason to suppose it harms self or others. There may be intuitions, but until very recently, an intuition was not enough to warrant state-sponsored action. And even our eager municipal legislatures and lord protectors, severe and implacable since Calvinist days and the witch trials, grudgingly assented. Or so I thought. But now they've tossed aside all restraint, all pretense of liberality, to reveal the brute round-headedness of their forbears. England only had this problem in the inter-regnum days, and everyone was happy when the merry kings came trotting back. In America, it is the permanent state of things, however thinly or thickly disguised.

There has, however, been a significant change of personnel when it comes to our puritan inheritance. It used to be that the killjoys were often of solemn Scottish Presbyterian stock, fire-eating haters of free will, the bastard children of Duns Scotus. But these days, they are folks buttressed by the Four Horsemen: Marx, Freud, Darwin and Bentham. What remains constant, however, is that the new prohibitionists are grounded in the very same national instinct, scandalized whenever someone, somewhere, may be having a good time.

But the reality is that we live in Cromwellian times, and the forbidding God of predestination is replaced by the logic of Leftist historic determinism.

And things are getting bad.

There is now even a growing movement to banish the Poppy Seed, believe it or not. I'm told it is possible, in theory, to make a tea from untreated poppy seeds that Baudelaire or Coleridge wouldn't have scorned. However, it takes pounds of pods and herculean labors to get a strong brew, and only a truly depraved heart would ever bother. No matter. A few teenage boys perished in the unholy effort to extract the sour sap, and now their parents are crusading madly against the *Papaver somniferum* in its entirety. And it's the liberal lawmakers, naturally, who are leading the charge to ban the harvesting or import of the seeds, be they gray, blue or black. We have an 'Opioid Crisis,' after all.

The problem here is that there are already hardly enough constables to make a dent in the heroin or meth markets. Do we really need a separate Poppy Seed Task Force raiding near-eastern grocers or policing the morphine content of our muffins? Are poppy seed addicts causing the gangland violence in our slums? And what do the half-dozen overdoses signify about the real danger of the infernal pellets? I suspect one could find a half-dozen cases of water-poisoning out there, but we are not going to drain Lake Michigan in retaliation. Or are we?

I could continue the catalogue of proposed interdicts *ad nauseum:* It is no accident that some of our states are 'Commonwealths.' (Massachusetts, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Virginia). My point is that the seeming chasm between puritanism and progressivism is illusory. If one looks a little deeper at the roots of political puritanism one finds an uncanny similitude to the rhetoric of Marxism. For instance, centuries before the Stalinist purges, puritanism gave the world 'Pride's Purge,' declaring the sufficiency of the Commons, casting out the Lords and monarchy, and calling itself a 'Free State', a rump parliament for the 'good of the people'. Sound familiar? Never mind that this free state consisted of whole counties without delegates in the Rump. Never mind that this merciless oligarchy levied taxes as handsomely as the late king. And never mind that, like the Russian regicide, though at first the sky reigned with pamphlets and demands for socialist democracy (not an anachronism), very soon the new government decided that censorship of press and pulpit was just the thing.

One pamphleteer hit the mark: 'We were ruled before by King, Lords and Commons, now by General, Court Martial, and commons; and we pray you, what is the difference?' The Levellers and Diggers, many of whom crossed the sea to America, wanted a society of no buying and selling, no rich or poor, no lawyers, marriage to be a civil ceremony, divorce to be free. But naturally, some 'centralized authority' was needed. Indeed, anyone who chances to compare the decision and speed of Cromwell with Vladimir Ilyich Lenin immediately notices the impatient revolutionary kinship (except Cromwell took sick more easily when things got bad).

In the affairs of men, there is rarely something totally new under the sun, and our modern happenings are no exception. Many would suppose we dwell in strange new days because the surface accoutrements of life vary so markedly from all that came before. And the special ills of our time proffer the pretext for special prescriptions. It is a simplistic, linear view of Time we are asked to swallow whole. But the reality is that we live in Cromwellian times, and the forbidding God of predestination is replaced by the logic of Leftist historic determinism. So perhaps the remedy ought to be similar too? America has no Charles to be perched back on a throne. But if we can import Levellers and Diggers, we can also welcome D H Lawrence and Dryden, as antidotes to ourselves.

Mark Mantel is a lawyer from Richmond, Virginia.

Australia

Fire Down Under

Daryl McCann

The news from Australia is bleak. I am not only speaking of the fires that devastated parts of the country over the Antipodean summer. The world has already been amply informed that, during the 2019-20 bushfire season, at least 32 people lost their lives, more than 1,000 homes were destroyed, and some one billion wild animals were killed, not including 'frogs and insects' as the good people at *Wikipedia.org* are keen to point out. The only winner to emerge from the smoky ruins was the religion of Catastrophic Anthropogenic Global Warming (CAGW). What has been lost in the great fires, along with all the horror and heartbreak, is the truth.

We might start with media operators such as the BBC and the *Guardian* newspaper, both easily accessible in Australia. Their reports were often hysterical, even apocalyptical, and almost never offered any historical perspective. It became obvious that many overseas media organisations were not simply reporting on our admittedly catastrophic 2019-20 bushfire season but using our misfortune to make the case that, on account of CAGW, the world as a whole was beginning to fry.

Our bushfires were certainly calamitous, more so than what occurs in an average summer. The destruction and suffering have been so acute in numerous regional communities that, even now, ordinary Australians will allow an extra dollar to be added to their shopping bill for the victims of the fires. The national government, which has made much of balancing the budget in recent years, has put no limits on how much money it will divert to communities that were ravaged by the fires. On this, at least, all Australians are agreed.

None of this, however, should allow us to lose all perspective on what has happened. The 2019-20 fires were catastrophic, but they were not our worst. In 2009, for instance, 173 people lost their lives and more than 2,000 homes were destroyed in Victoria alone. Summers always bring bushfires in the wake. A eucalypt after a hot spell, even of the shortest duration, can be an incendiary device ready to explode. Starkly put, there have more than 800 recorded deaths resulting from bushfires since the commencement of European settlement on this continent.

Australians, for the most part, chose to live outside of 'fire zones' even though these designated areas have great charm in the cooler seasons, being thinly populated, heavily wooded and possessing a wonderland of exotic fauna. Our own home, in the foothills of the sylvan Mt Lofty Ranges, lies a kilometre or so beneath the nominated fire zone. House prices are mostly cheaper up there than on the safe suburban plains of Adelaide, but there is a reason for that. On February 16, 1983, known in South Australia as Ash Wednesday, dozens of people lost their lives in those ranges.

We do not underplay the terror and destruction of the 2019-20 bushfire season to state the obvious truth: perilous fires, along with cruel draughts and cataclysmic floods, are part of the challenges of making your life in Australia. Noted Australian writer Dorothy Mackellar made this very same point in her poem *My Country*, composed in 1904 and published in the London *Spectator* in 1908: 'For flood and fire and famine, /She pays us back threefold'. It is literally the nature of things for there to be raging bushfires in Australia, although not usually as calamitous as they were this year.

The idea promulgated by the media that Australia, its territory close to the size of the United States, almost burnt down during the 2019-20 bushfires is absurd. Only the tiniest percentage of Australians, most of whom live in large and medium urban centres, were ever worried about losing their homes, let alone their lives. Terrible fires did sweep through Kangaroo Island's eastern bushland and two people, heartbreakingly, died as a consequence. This was the pattern in South Australia and, allowing for the fact the fires hit New South Wales far worse, that was essentially the overall pattern of events. Australia as a whole did not go up in smoke even if many regional districts were visited by hellfire.

You could have been an international tourist travelling about vast tracts of our continent-nation without the slightest risk of being incinerated. Tell that to the BBC. Tourism Australia is now advising that the overseas media coverage of the bushfires has already cost Australia's tourism industry $2 billion and a further $5 billion is likely to be lost. Australians are

now being encouraged to forgo their overseas holidays and, as they say, go see Australia.

Prime Minister Morrison fared poorly during the bushfire emergency, some of this was his own fault but he was also the victim of CAGW hysteria, which irrationally blamed the bushfires on his support for an enormous new coalmining project in Queensland. Morrison certainly got off on the wrong foot when he was tardy returning from a family holiday in Hawaii once the bushfires began to intensify. He only made things worse when, on a flying visit to Kangaroo Island, he expressed thankfulness that at least nobody on the island had died in the fires. Wrong. But none of this was his real crime.

The fury of the Green-Left Alliance was illustrated by Lenore Taylor, editor of the *Guardian Australia*. She openly argued that parliamentary democracy be suspended in the Commonwealth of Australia because ordinary people, or deplorables if you like, cannot be permitted to have a say in who runs our country: 'So that means it's time to think of ways around the federal Coalition's intransigence, because those deniers will never be swayed, and we can't allow them to dictate our future.'

The fury of the Green-Left Alliance was illustrated by Lenore Taylor, editor of the Guardian Australia. She openly argued that parliamentary democracy be suspended in the Commonwealth of Australia because ordinary people, ... cannot be permitted to have a say in who runs our country

The new Australian Labor Party (ALP) leader, Anthony Albanese, has seen his popularity greatly increase during the bushfire season, not the least reason being that he was not overseas on a family holiday at the time the blazes turned especially ugly. He also benefited from not actually blaming Scott Morrison for the fires. This made him seem, at least to those who had not become hysterical at the height of the national emergency, that he might be a reasonable person, despite being on the left of the leftist ALP. In the wake of Labor's massive defeat at the May 18, 2019, federal election, he repositioned his party to be in favour of continuing coal mining.

Albanese masterminded this rightward tilt because coal mining is an industry critical to Australia's economy, and the ALP's opposition to a giant new coal-mine in Queensland probably won Scott Morrison the unwinnable election. Right now, then, the Coalition government is struggling in the polls and the ALP is surging. One problem is that Albanese's flexible position on coal-mining is not going to be sustainable as the CAGW firebrands in his party recalibrate in the aftermath of the 2019-20 bushfires. Yes, the fanatics in their ranks destroyed the ALP's chances at the 2019 election but saving the planet from incineration is more than wealth creation for Australians. In the end, 2022 might turn out to be a case of *déjà vu*.

Prime Minister Morrison has begun to regain his footing after a disastrous summer on the PR front. At times it seemed as if he could not visit a regional district or town affected by the fire without some local bellowing out for the benefit of the television cameras, 'We don't want your type around here, mate!' or 'Why don't ya back to Hawaii where ya belong?' or 'You're the bastard who gave us these fires in the first place!'

For weeks any type of counter-argument rarely got a hearing. Only the occasional conservative journal mentioned the scientifically verified account of the Indian Ocean Dipole, the unpredictable fluctuation of sea-surface temperatures to the west of our continent that triggered an unusually harsh heatwave here in December. You also had to look carefully to find any mention that the fires on Kangaroo Island were sparked by a freakish case of dry lightning. And it came as genuine surprise to many Australians, including me, when it was eventually reported that hundreds of firebugs throughout south-eastern Australia had been arrested and charged with arson. The only explanation our commentators and celebrities were prepared to entertain was CAGW.

Prime Minister Morrison, at last, began to find his footing again. He suddenly and very pointedly announced his government's intention to introduce legislation that would, for the first time, regulate backburning, tree-felling, and the removal of hazardous undergrowth, customary Australian practices that have been curtailed in many regions thanks to emigratory zealots from cities who seek to be 'at one with nature' and decry the use of chainsaws, controlled fires and any other 'assault' on our sacred bushland. Scott Morrison, by announcing his initiative, exposed an under-reported aspect of our recent bushfires, one that you might not have seen on the BBC or read in the *Guardian*.

Many properties went up in smoke not due to CAGW but because the proponents of CAGW and sundry enviro-causes have used their growing clout in regional councils to outlaw traditional fire-prevention practices. The terrible irony might turn out to be this: the political ideology that has benefited the most from the 2019-20 Australian bushfires, the creed of the Green-Left alliance, was the major anthropogenic factor in the magnitude of our bushfires.

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Yearning to be Free

Our unexpected allies in the EU

Mark Griffith

There are two reasons why the extraordinary 15-month-long protests by the 'yellow-jackets' still shaking France have been given so little space in Britain. The BBC and our mainly pro-EU press hardly notice France's chaos. Likewise we hear nothing about the mounting angst, bordering now on exasperation, among German industrial exporters. They see three years swaggering arrogance from EU negotiators about to destroy their relationships with longstanding British customers. In Britain this is hardly reported.

One reason is obvious: nothing must be allowed to disturb the UK media consensus that everything in the European Union is going wonderfully, because of course 2016's Brexit vote was nothing but racist resentment from fat Northerners with tattoos. Anything contradicting the pro-Remain news agenda must be muffled or ignored.

The second reason is more subtle. It's tempting to see EU mismanagement and dishonesty as Franco-German mismanagement and dishonesty, because it certainly is Paris and Bonn/Berlin which have driven the federation process for almost three-quarters of a century.

It's easy to forget that ordinary Frenchmen and Germans, along with other Europeans, are as much the victims of those two countries' élites as we are.

Not only do everyday Europeans bear us no ill will, but they loathe characters like Barnier, Verhofstadt, Ursula von der Leyen more than most of us can imagine. Phlegmatic Britons badly overestimate how democratic our Continental neighbour nations are, and are hardly aware of the deep frustration most Europeans in those nations feel with their own governments. In fact, many Europeans have supported the EEC/EC/EU not out of enthusiasm for the federal project but in a spirit of vast despairing cynicism at the national politics of their home country. This is a typical sentiment for example in Italy, one of the big three of the founding six EEC countries in 1957. Decades ago, Italian businessmen would make remarks to British journalists like 'I am a Venetian first, a European second, and an Italian third.' (Quoted in a 1980s *Economist* survey of Italy.)

Besides not being a glowing advertisement for an earlier phase of European federation (Italian unification, or the Risorgimento, of the 1850s and 1860s), that remark casts a terrible shadow over the present too. In phrasings like this sophisticated Italians often explain they would prefer to live under EU levels of corruption and bureaucracy, though bad, because Italy's national levels of corruption and bureaucracy are even worse. Integrating under the Brussels diktat is a kind of self-hating self-colonisation for whole swathes of Europe.

Members of the six-year-old peaceful nationalist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) have been standing up in Germany's Parliament asking why Britain must be bullied and humiliated in the Brexit talks. This is almost completely unreported by the UK's slavishly pro-Brussels media. In both Germany and Britain, the smear-phrase 'far right' seems enough to make the AfD unmentionable, as if any attempt to slow or halt the EU juggernaut is automatically Nazi. At the same time desperate French provincials have been getting beaten up and shot at by policemen for over a solid year, again almost invisibly to the trough-snuffling BBC. Yet they have not given up or been bought off. France's 'yellow jackets' seem utterly incensed, beyond any thought of compromise after decades of contempt from Paris, Strasbourg, Luxembourg, and Brussels.

We hardly know anything of this heroic tenacity from low-paid rural workers in France. These long-suffering people have endured over forty years of high unemployment and low growth caused by the currency alignment that created the euro, not to mention other harmful EU policies. We underestimate at our peril the paysans whose patience has snapped after half a century of grinding abuse from Paris and the Euroblob. Ordinary Germans have been slightly less harmed by the destructive tariffs, the recessionary single currency, the general stupidity of the EU committee caste, but they're tiring of the lies and arrogance as well. The growing tetchiness, now turning into anger, from German manufacturing firms watching euro-mandarins trash their sales contracts with Britain's engineering sector should not be minimised.

Many Italians have been loudly and eloquently supportive of UK euro-scepticism for years now. This often surprises travelling Britons. For example some of those holidaying the week after Britain's 2016 June referendum were bemused if a bottle of wine arrived at their table from some random well-wisher in the restaurants of Venice, Florence, Milan. A glass might be raised in salute across the room by a distant diner – sometimes with an appreciative cry of 'Brexit!' The spirit of the greeting was not 'Good riddance', but rather 'You English are standing up against the bastards again. Bravo!'

These people are our natural allies against the EU behemoth. Many have suffered as much from the EEC/EC/EU's high-handed dishonesty as we have. We must not neglect them.

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A Lawyer's Feast

How much do *you* pay towards the escalating cost of Medical Litigation?

BERENICE LANGDON

I am a bit surprised by the A&E discharge letter. It says 'RE Mrs Jane. Query spinal cord damage. Refer back to GP to arrange URGENT scan.' Last time I looked in a medical textbook, spinal cord compression was regarded as a clinical emergency. Compress your spinal cord and you can end up doubly incontinent and in a wheelchair for life. It can happen enormously quickly, even in the little time it takes me to pick up a telephone and ask for an ambulance to blue light her back to hospital.

The patient, Mrs Jane, an elderly lady, is sitting in front of me, awkwardly, tearfully.

'A *burning* pain in my back, doctor.' She can still walk but not properly, she has numbness around her bottom. When I tap her knees with my hammer, they don't bounce properly but stay solidly on the couch like lumps of pudding. What the hell is she doing back here in my surgery?

I telephone the on-call neurosurgeons (who are also 'surprised' at the discharge letter) and send her straight back to A&E. What if I hadn't? What if Mrs Jane hadn't come in? What if I hadn't examined her and what if the on-call surgeon wasn't alert?

They say that medicine is like layers of Swiss cheese. An error, like a hole in the cheese, will usually get picked up at the next layer, the next consultation. In this instance I was the next layer in the cheese. But sometimes all the holes line up and there is a major error. When this occurs, well, quite often nothing happens. Patients gets better by themselves. A missed result can cause no harm. In some instances, a patient may not even be aware of what has happened before it is fixed. Sometimes a patient is aware but understands that 'people make mistakes'. And sometimes a patient really does just need an apology.

The NHS is always striving to avoid errors; auditing new treatments, measuring its death rates. But there will always be errors no matter how hard we strive. And sometimes when all the holes in the Swiss cheese line up serious harm *is* the result.

Missing spinal nerve damage or *cauda equina* (Latin for the *Horse's Tail*, a group of nerves emerging from the bottom of the spine that send and receive messages from your legs, feet and pelvic organs) is one of *the* most common examples of medical negligence, accounting for 13 per cent of the highest claims of all, it's always popping up. Every time I read the medical protection journal's examples of recent cases, each carefully chosen to illustrate an important learning point, I am filled with a sense of doom. 'GP failed to document.' 'Dr A failed to examine Mrs X's reflexes.' 'Dr B reviewed and failed to refer even though Mrs X said the pain was very severe.' 'Severe *cauda equina* ensued.'

And finally, just to exacerbate my sense of failure on behalf of my profession and to expiate that repetitive thought (*there but for the grace of God go I)* the finishing sentence; 'settled for a substantial sum'.

'Settled for a substantial sum,' what does that mean? (and of course, I am sure the patient deserves it as now they can't walk, are dead etc). It can mean millions.

But there are financial horrors ahead. The rate of suing for negligence has increased dramatically, the already substantial costs of medical protection have doubled in just a few years. The number of claims has also had an impact on ordinary medical practice, making it more 'defensive'; doctors ordering more tests to protect themselves, which in turn, drives up costs and causes harm to patients.

To exacerbate things even more, in 2017 the Lord Chancellor judged it was fair to change the personal injury discount rate from 2.5 per cent to -0.75 per cent. This had the result of significantly increasing payouts to claimants even further, actually tripling the sums involved on the basis of loss of future earnings, meaning that instead of a payout of £3.8 million as in a recent case, there was now a payout of £9.3 million. As a result of a stroke of the Lord Chancellors pen, because *he* thought it fairer, all of us paying national insurance and contributing to NHS costs, have had to

pay for this; pound by slowly creeping pound.

Last year the sum of £2.3 billion was taken out of our total NHS budget of £129 billion to pay for negligence costs, but the sum is set to rise even further, some sources saying £83 billion is closer to the mark that will need to be ear-marked to pay for future costs. And if the NHS is put under greater strain and waiting lists get longer, will patients then claim for harm received from delayed surgery?

At present the cost of negligence payouts is £80 per year for every tax-paying man and woman in the country. Not a lot at first glance, but if you compare this to the cost of a nurse's salary, it would pay the salaries of 80,000 nurses a year. Perhaps you think you can bear the cost of £80 per year. But does it still sound right if I tell you that in 61 per cent of cases the lawyers earnt more than the claimants; 37 per cent of that £2.3 billion sum goes not to that deserving patient but to the patient's lawyer?

Lawyers glibly advise that the NHS needs to commit fewer errors to solve the problem but the NHS says no-win no-fee lawyers are making the situation worse.

What is the answer to these rising costs? Can we afford the present cost of negligence? Legal reforms are a possibility and those proposed by the Medical Protection Society include a limit on future care costs, a limit on future loss of earnings and most importantly, fixed recoverable costs to stop lawyers charging disproportionate legal fees. In 2019 the discount rate was re-evaluated and changed to -0.25 per cent, better but still significantly higher than in the past.

Emma Hallinan, Director of Claims at the Medical Protection Society, said:

> *It is important that there is reasonable compensation for patients harmed following clinical negligence, but a balance must be struck against society's ability to pay. If the current trend continues the balance will tip too far and the cost risks becoming unsustainable for the NHS and ultimately for society.*
>
> *This is without doubt a difficult debate to have, but difficult decisions are made about spending in healthcare every day and we have reached a point where the amount society pays for clinical negligence must be one of them.*
>
> *We believe whole system legal reform is needed.*

We all need to think very carefully about this difficult debate and about what we want the NHS budget to be spent on. Do we want it spent on negligence cases with escalating lifetime costs? Or should it be spent on NHS care for us all; prompt surgery for hips and other non-urgent operations, proper social care in the community, state-of-the-art hospice care (because we are all going to need *that* one day), and of course, A&E doctors who know a *cauda equina* when they see one. Doctors who have the time and resources to send Mrs Jane home, properly assessed, with a surprisingly good discharge letter. Or better still; a letter expressing routinely excellent care, and no surprises at all.

Berenice Langdon is GP and author of Learning Microbiology Through Clinical Consultation *OUP.*

First Do No Harm

The sex change scandal

HEATHER OLLERENSHAW

I recently witnessed the first-hand testimonies from young women speaking out about sex change regret. What was meant to be an open meeting had to be held in semi-secrecy to evade harassment by transactivists thugs, who, if they have not already persuaded the owners of a venue to cancel, harass members of audiences by making them run a gamut of noisy pickets at the entrance then follow it up by banging on the windows during the meeting.

Despite this threat, the event was a sell-out, with two hundred women and men coming to hear a panel of experts and 'detransitioned' young women speak about this emerging medical horror story: the physical and psychological aftermath of having to face a lifetime of living in a sterile, defeminised and permanently medicalized body.

Four women were seated on the stage; small, nervous and obviously unused to the limelight, and as they passed the microphone between them, telling their stories to a room full of strangers the bleak reality of the intimate damage that has been done to them, to admit their error, often after years of telling those around them they were transgender, and believing it so intensely.

They looked and sounded like teenage boys, not women in their early twenties. Their bodies were the result of an adolescence of being given puberty blockers,

testosterone and surgery, yet women they were; now on the other side of their transgender journeys, compelled to speak out, whatever the personal risk. The first woman, short haired and hiding under loose clothing, took the microphone

> *I am Ellie, 23, I transitioned age twenty, and I regret all of it.*

The crowd applauded. Ellie began testosterone at sixteen and surgery at eighteen, then had a double mastectomy, hysterectomy and ovariectomy, all by the age of twenty.

Livia spoke:

> *I had a double mastectomy and a hysterectomy, and ovariectomy... I developed anorexia when I was 15. I'm recovered now but I still struggle with thoughts sometimes. It's just so scary to me to realise how similar my anorexic thoughts were to my thoughts about my female body. When I was 16, I was very severely underweight to the point of nearly dying, and I got forced into treatment by my parents, I was so dismissive of my life and in many ways that's how I thought about my body… It's just exactly the same, and I often wonder why nobody realised that, no professional... no doctor I talked to about getting surgery. I wish someone would have been there to tell me not to get a hysterectomy at 21.*

She continued,

> *It's incredibly scary to me that we are having these invasive surgeries. Like, let's not fool ourselves mastectomies are tough... hysterectomies are brutal, on the female body. And we're not even like expected to mourn over lost body parts because obviously, we hate them. Obviously, we should be happy. You're being encouraged to plan the next surgery. It's just crazy to me now.*

As a teenager, she found it difficult to accept her body and sexual feelings and began looking for answers online. It is there she found a wealth of information in trans communities that augmented her newfound idea that she was a male trapped in a female body. She became convinced surgery was the only way forward, a conviction backed up by the medical industry itself, which appears to deny, although their spokeswomen say it is not true, treatment for gender dysphoria other than affirmation and surgery.

The other women had similar stories; all but one having undergone invasive surgery, and all realising too late that their problems lay elsewhere – they were lesbians; and/or they had anorexia, and where they had once bought into a belief that promised surgical transformation, their words now were angry and stripped of clinical facade.

'Why did they allow it?' asked Livia 'This is not a sex change, this is castration. My body is not healthy anymore.'

What is leading young people to take such drastic measures against their own bodies, and why is it allowed so freely?

Since 2012, a 4000 per cent rise in school girls identifying as trans, far outstripping their male counterparts, has led to the Tavistock, the NHS's only gender identity clinic, seeing up to forty children a week, some as young as three.

About 800 children are currently on puberty blockers in the UK, despite the long-term side effects being unknown. Earlier last year, five clinicians from the Tavistock clinic resigned over concerns that children were over-diagnosed with gender dysphoria. At the same time, critics allege, other causes were overlooked – they were often gay, autistic, even suspected victims of sexual abuse. At present it would appear that the only currently accepted treatment for gender dysphoria is medicalisation and surgery. This has led to accusations that any child presenting as trans is much less likely to be offered non-invasive interventions such as counselling, therapy, or just waiting to see if they change their minds as 80 per cent of children with gender dysphoria do so when allowed to go through natural puberty

Yet this scandal continues, with doctors' leaders being too frightened to speak out, and the Care Quality Commission giving the Tavistock Clinic a 'good' rating. Has the Commission heard evidence from patients like those at the meeting I have described here? And surely they must have read the frequent and damning exposures of the transgender scandal by *The Times*.

And where is the General Medical Council in all this? Have they not heard of the first rule of medicine? 'First do no harm.' If there is no harm let us hear the evidence.

Heather Ollerenshaw is a journalist.

Your Computer Will See You Now

With artificial intelligence taking over the NHS is it worth sending your son or daughter to medical school?

FRANCIS HALLINAN

It takes years and immense cost to train a human radiologist. Now a computer programme has been developed that is better than two radiologists at diagnosing breast cancer. It can replace both, never sleeps, requires no pay, can be mass produced and learns as it goes along. In the not too distant future will we need doctors at all? This development should give ambitious mothers pause for thought before sending their sons or daughters to medical school.

'Ah,' say fine arts graduates, classical Tripos squatters, litterateurs and other arty know-alls with a wink, 'Medicine is an art not a science. It's all very well for a computer to read tens of thousands of digital photographs but I wouldn't want my GP to be replaced by a computer.' When was the last time one of these critics landed in an aircraft in a gale? Who landed the plane, a machine or a human? Almost certainly a machine. Airlines don't risk $25 million-dollar aircraft on fallible humans. If you had the choice which would you choose, pilot or machine?

Governments think the same way. Given the acute shortage of GPs and the astronomical cost of their training – half a million pounds per doctor – grossly inflated by a ridiculously over long training scheme cooked up a self-important Royal College of General Practitioners – politicians are looking for ways of replacing them. Which is why online GP services are looked on with such favour, and given huge cash subsidies, by the Department of Health. Computer 'doctors' use an online question and answer algorithm to spot patients who are in need of an urgent consultation with a GP, either over the phone or in person. Such machines however are crude in comparison with what lies ahead.

Enter data mining and the universal algorithm. Computers, by means of millions of silica switches called transistors, reason in a series of logical steps. They do this by employing two numbers, 1 and 0. No 1 means the switch is open, 0 it is shut. Imagine asking a computer which bus to take, a No 78 or a No 3, depending on the weather. The computer will ask you a series of questions. If it is raining and you are not in a hurry the switch, 'get the 78', will open. If it is dry and you are not in a hurry, switch 78 will close and switch 'get the number 3' will open. Whether it is raining or you are in a hurry or not depends on a set of open and closed switches coming before the steps leading to a choice of the No 78 or No 3. What time you left the house, the day of the week and so in an infinite regress until you come to a human programmer.

'Aha!' people say, 'A human programmer, so it comes back to humans after all? True but once the general framework of a problem is set by humans, computers can programme themselves and build on it. However, using computers to programme computers with all medical knowledge is an immense task and has limits. A different approach is to reverse the question, and ask how many people take the No 79 or the No 3 bus and subject the results to statistical analysis and data mining.

Google Translate is an excellent example of statistical analysis followed by data mining. The fact you can chat in Polish on it, a language you know not a word of, using a mobile phone is because machines harvest the word forms and patterns of one language, subject them to statistical analysis then compare them with similar forms and patterns in another language.

The aim of medical data mining is to create a universal health algorithm that 'knows' everything about everything and everybody to create a machine that appears to reason like a human doctor. It will know a lot about a lot of things and will be able to absorb your answers into its database – it will learn as it works. What one machine learns all other machines do instantaneously. If the local computer breaks down the data still exists in the cloud. This is in contrast to humans who pass a limited amount of their knowledge to a few offspring who take years to learn it – but often only hours to forget. 'The Cloud' lives for ever and never forgets.

It is 2030. 'William Harvey' the UK universal medical algorithm, popularly known as 'Harvey', has surveyed the generality of how the English patients react to disease. It knows that a certain Mrs Smith lives in an area of the country where patients are slow to go to the doctor when they have serious symptoms. Harvey also possesses a copy of Mrs Smith's DNA and knows she is at risk of breast cancer. It also knows how

long she will have to wait to see her medical counsellor (there are no GPs) and the length of the waiting list for mammograms at the local hospital. It also knows that two consultants will be away on holiday next month, the list is endless. Harvey doesn't have to be reminded of Mrs Smith's problems, it knows every case history in the country and will alert patients when needed. It will read Mrs Smith's mammogram when she has it and issue instructions for her treatment. Mrs Smith will be encouraged to co-operate with the national social credit programme because under tax legislation early reporting of your symptoms to your local clinic will gain you some relief on your tax payments. Harvey will always show a friendly face. American researchers are busy designing online avatars; electronic programmes that simulate the face created from data-mining a huge number of our expressions which will give the machine a simulated humanity no human possesses. Even in hospital, while robots will still need paramedics to assist them in surgical operations, it is hard to see specialties such as medicine, neurology, or paediatrics that depend only on knowledge surviving.

How will patients adapt? When patients are asked if they would prefer to be treated by a robot or a human those over 55 generally say they would prefer a human doctor, younger patients, the younger ones more so, express increasing confidence in machines. They reason that if a computer can fly an airliner why can't a machine diagnose your illness?

This move from professionalism to total access poses problems for doctors. The first is a loss of expertise, the richer the country the fewer doctors will be needed, and the less they will learn, while doctors in poor countries will still have plenty of patients lacking the means or education to use online medical programmes. It will be a choice between being paid well but falling behind or being paid almost nothing and gaining clinical experience.

Manufacturers make a great thing of computers freeing humans of routine tasks so the latter can concentrate more on patient care. In reality it will be less patient care as the machines take over. To an unemployed doctor this will sound suspiciously like whistling past an (empty) graveyard, unless, in a nightmare of climate change activism, there is a universal failure of the electricity supply.

Licensing may be the profession's only defence. If doctors, along with lawyers, (the latter stand to lose a huge chunk of the £80 billion bill they have racked up so far out of medical litigation) can persuade governments that everything a machine does will have to be certified and checked by a qualified doctor, the two professions will be able to hold back this revolution. But for how long? Crossrail, the rail tunnel under London, was due to open in 2008 until Health and Safety stepped in and insisted that a million certificates of safety (the actual figure) will have to be issued before a single passenger boards a train. In consequence the original bill for this marvel of engineering has doubled and there is still doubt if the system will open three years late. Computer companies are taking note of this disaster and may not want to tender. You may still be seeing your GP in 2030.

Francis Hallinan is a doctor

Nursing

Why do today's nurses look like members of a punk band?

ANONYMOUS

Florence Nightingale's vision of the ideal nurse was, naturally, female but also 'well-bred'. In other words, middle class, at least. She also was not in favour of the registration of nurses; they would be 'trained' by doctors and do what doctors told them. There was no need for further recognition or standards. In the first few decades following her death, registration was introduced. But, for a long time the 'breeding' of nurses was not in doubt and those ladies in my own family – working class as it was – who became nurses had 'breeding' knocked into them. They spoke differently from the rest of us and I am sure Florence would have been pleased. I cannot be the first to ask: 'what would Florence be thinking now?'.

Next time you are in a British hospital ward as a professional, a patient or a visitor, take some time to compare the nurses with the doctors. Generally, the doctors – male and female – are fit looking, slim and basically healthy. The same applies to the therapists (physiotherapists, dieticians, speech and language and clinical psychologists). The nurses on the other hand, not helped by their appalling 'potato sack' uniforms, are generally overweight, unfit and unhealthy looking. Moreover, they may be adorned – male and female

alike – with luridly dyed hair, manifest tattoos and evidence of piercings – some in places most of us could not conceive of being pierced. I cannot be alone in feeling reluctant to ask for assistance or hesitating to make a complaint. Admittedly, I am being judgemental and, specifically, judging by appearance but when I see a member of the armed forces, a member of a cabin crew or my dentist, I don't expect to be confronted by an overweight, multi-coloured, metallic monstrosity. I expect some adherence to a dress code and a modicum of decorum regarding bodily adornment. So, why do I not see this among nurses?

I have seen evidence of the above in hospitals and in the university where I teach. Sadly, I can usually spot a group of nursing students a long way off across the campus. In addition to the above traits, there is usually a plume of smoke rising above them. Something I cannot recall seeing in a group of medical students or, for that matter, a group of clinical psychologists. I know they are nursing students as they are required to wear their uniforms even when attending lectures, so I am in no doubt about who they are.

My observation has been triangulated by more than one senior university officer at more than one university following several graduations. 'Why are the nurses so obese?' has been raised and, given their role as health professionals, it is very hard to know how to respond. It is also impossible to defend the nurses as those of us processing at the graduation can feel the vibrations as a stream of overweight nurses, many resembling nothing less than members of a late 1980s punk band in appearance, cross the stage to receive their degree certificates. This motley and garishly coloured crew would instil fear into the heart of even the bravest soul. Yet, they are in the process of becoming 'health professionals'.

At my present university a recent Chancellor asked the dean of nursing the above question about the preponderance of over-sized nurses following a graduation. The dean of nursing decided that something had to be done. The local Army Reserve Unit was called in to be present on the arrival of our new intake of nursing students in the hope that recruiting them into the local medical squadron would lead to greater levels of fitness. Sadly, the initiative failed, and the reason was that most of those showing an interest were outside – ie above – the army requirements for body mass index, a measure of the ratio of body weight to height. They were overweight and to join they would, simply, have to lose weight. As far as I am aware none did.

Few formal studies of nurses and obesity have been conducted – but some have. Mostly they look at attitudes towards their body weight and health and provided evidence that nurses are, indeed, larger than the average member of the population. Of particular concern other studies have shown that nurses, generally, do not consider themselves health role models. This is despite an emphasis in nursing curricula on preventive health and health promotion. Nurses seem to think that they can dispense health advice without themselves appearing to follow that advice. Nobody expects nurses to be super-athletes, but obesity and the smell of smoke are impossible to hide and that surely matters if you are dispensing advice on diet or smoking cessation. I know doctors who smoke and more who have never seen the inside of a gym since school; yet, there is something qualitatively – and quantitatively – different about them. The only possible conclusion is class: doctors are more middle class than nurses or, to account for exceptions, more doctors are middle class than nurses.

There is absolutely no reason, of course, why a nurse should be from any particular social class and we must face the fact that most medical programmes could be filled ten times over – such is the popularity of medicine and the competition for places. Thus, there is a tendency for the best-heeled, from the fee-paying schools and those from more 'pushy' parental (often medical) backgrounds to end up in medical school. It is worth noting that nursing programmes are also always over-subscribed and that in my own university nursing requires the highest educational tariff for entry, next to medicine. Nursing is, however, easier to get into as annual intakes in any university are in the hundreds compared with much smaller medical intakes. Thus, the demographic is very different: far more predominantly female, older and working class.

Nothing would please me more than to see more people from working class backgrounds enter medicine, provided they are appropriately academically qualified. Likewise, it does not bother me at all what class background a nurse is from but I cannot help feeling that a significant injection of more nursing students from middle class backgrounds may have a positive effect on nursing education and dilute, at least, the appearance that nursing is for people who do not care how they look or how healthy they appear. That, at least, would increase my confidence in the nursing profession and convince me that, if they cared about their own appearance and apparent state of health, they may also care about mine.

Readers are invited to contribute to **Letters to the Editor**, either on our web site or by email or post.

Is Society Ready for Science?

Brian Ridley

It seems that science, not content with its invention of the worldwide web, is keen to go further and apply its models to society. Surely it is the Second Coming! And we wonder, with Yates, what beast slouches towards Bethlehem to be born. No doubt a new field – socio-physics – will be fun to create. There is certainly a host of scientific concepts ripe to provide metaphors that might be relevant. It might be worthwhile to consider a few of them.

We, in society, are a mix of bold and timid. The bold has no problem with the power provided by science. Foul-ups occur, but their consequences can be corrected. If a thing can be done, do it. Look at the advantage to the USA from fracking. The timid are terrified. They wish for a safe world, a world of sweetness and light, to live in a fair, just and caring society. They shudder at the thought of fracking, at the thought of genetically-modified anything, chlorinated chicken, nuclear power. Tennyson's red in tooth and claw has nothing to do with what society is about. In short, they want to live in a Utopia, long-lasting for their children to grow up in.

Unfortunately, the idea of Utopia has never had a good press, and, as a long-lasting Utopia, science will have none of it. Nothing in the real world is long-lasting, change is endemic. True, scientific models are full of the idea of a steady state. In the science of thermodynamics, we come across the idea of thermodynamic equilibrium, a system, roughly speaking, in which this is always balanced by that. Such a system never truly exists for long. It merely provides a kicking off point for a discussion of the effects of change. Here is the first input from science – no social structure lasts forever.

Another element of thermodynamics with interesting social relevance is the concept of entropy, the measure of disorder. Its importance is enshrined as the statistical basis of the second law of thermodynamics – whatever happens in the world, entropy either increases or stays the same; it never decreases. It was the ignorance of this law by the humanist coterie that caused such despair in C P Snow in the 1960s and his claim for there to be Two Cultures. One, possibly mischievous, application is in the field of politics and the governance of states, particularly the difference between a dictatorial or communist regime and its opposite – the liberal, *laissez-faire* state. The former is tightly ordered – the state decides everything, and entropy is correspondingly low. In the latter, individuals can do what they like (within reason), and entropy is high. Change has to be factored in – bad weather, shortages, sudden enmity, whatever. Change fuels disorder and increases entropy. In the well-ordered state with its low entropy, change becomes noticeable, whereas in the liberal state, already high in entropy, the effect of change will be less noticeable. In so far as change fuels instability, one may conclude that the liberal state is likely to be the more stable.

For the same reason, we might conclude that a first-past-the-post democracy is less stable than a democracy involving proportional representation. The latter, being less definitive, with coalitions replacing the main parties, will have a higher entropy, and therefore be more stable. But stability is not the only desirable quality. Another factor, this time from the study of evolution, is the phenomenon of saltation (Latin *saltus* jump). Traditional Darwinism regards evolution as a gradual process, but has difficulty in accounting for the appearance of a new species. The heretical idea of saltation, very much associated with the maverick cosmologist Fred Hoyle, goes some way to resolve the difficult problem. Returning to our two versions of democracy, we note that proportional representation can only produce gradual change, whereas a first-past-the-post election can give rise to a significant majority and a saltation – and get something done.

Speaking of Fred Hoyle reminds me that the phenomenon of saltation did not appeal to his inner cosmologist. He it was who coined the phrase The Big Bang in mockery of those who believed that the observed expansion of the universe meant that the universe started with an immense explosion. His preference was for a steady-state universe with continuous creation of matter, or more in the way of a cyclical universe, Big Bang followed by Big Crunch followed by Big Bang.

Science may have lots to say, but society can tell science a thing or two. For instance, determinism has never been a factor, unlike classical mechanics. Any laws are bound to be statistical, which means the concept of probability is central. Not surprising that quantum physics has come around to the same view. The idea of complementarity, so revolutionary in quantum physics, is so commonplace it is hardly worth thinking about. Communism and liberalism are complementary in that establishing one drives out the other. On the other hand, the science of phase change (first define phase in society) and that of instability would seem to be promising candidates. The instabilities I am familiar with are related to electric currents and something called negative differential resistance. All that is needed here is to translate negative resistance as temptation, and the field is clear.

Science has been amazingly prolific in ideas and concepts that describe how the universe works. It would be remarkable if none of those ideas and concepts were found to be inapplicable to social life. The beast that slouches its way to Bethlehem to be born may not turn out to be the terrifying creature as first appeared.

Brian Ridley is a Fellow of the Royal Society.

Letters to the Editor

Winter 2109: *Grassed up on the NHS*, Berenice Langdon

Dr Berenice Langdon's piece on cannabis in the NHS is excellent and informative. Far from being a 'soft' drug and miracle medicine, cannabis is a prime factor in countless cases of mental illness, suicide and psychopathic violence. Its alleged 'medicinal' properties are quite clearly being used as a red herring to soften attitudes to the pleasure drug. I am pleased that sensible people like Dr Langdon have urged patience ('We should not rush in to prescribe cannabis simply because other countries have done') until we have all the necessary information, particularly regarding cannabidiol (CBD), which is claimed as a miracle cure for all sorts of ailments, including cancer.

The billionaire Big Dope lobby, which has now infected our political and media classes, couldn't care less about the tiny number of severely ill children who may or may not benefit from CBD. The real money is in the pleasure drug, which they came close to legalising last year through now-departed Liberal Democrat shill Sir Norman Lamb. They will, though, come again. If we can rubbish their 'medicinal' propaganda once and for all they may yet be defeated, and scuttle off back to the Brave New World of North America.

Ross Grainger

***Salisbury Review* Web Site 2020**

Dear Sir
The death of Roger Scruton was a real stomach-gutting shock. A unique, truly great Englishman. There was a small – yet significant – coincidence in our political trajectories, his justifiably major and mine comparatively minuscule: we got an early stimulus from finding Oswald Spengler's magnum opus in our respective grammar school libraries. What a sad way to go! What a loss for his family – and our civilization!

David Ashton

It's a pity Roger Scruton has left us. But his memory lives on. Without his liberation of hearts and minds in the Czech Capital, the Czech population might still be downtrodden by popular misconceptions.

Straker

Winter 2019 *How Woke was Jesus?* John Priestley

How Woke was Jesus? Priestley writes about 'biblical' Christians when he really means Fundamentalist Christians – those who believe everything in the Bible to be the absolute word of God (despite numerous contradictions.) They ignore the sections on slavery (seen to be a good thing AT THE TIME), what you can or cannot eat, (which we now ignore), the position of women in society…etc. etc. He states that 'faithful biblical Christians are not rejecting them (transgendered and homosexual people) but only those of their activities which are manifestly unchristian.' Really? Are they? Has they even bothered to read the word of Jesus as in the Gospels? 'the Christian faith has a very definite content which is set out plainly for us in the words of scripture.' Clearly it's not that obvious, otherwise we wouldn't be having the arguments between the misguided fundamentalists and the modernists who wish to see sensible interpretation of the scripture in the light of 2020. How can Priestly write 'trans-gendering cannot possibly be included in any form of Christianity … for it is against both Scripture and Reason.' Alas, Mr Priestley, they are against neither. If you continue to think so, tell me what you think a good price would be for my daughter when I sell her into slavery? (Exodus 21 7,) exactly how should I kill my neighbour who works on the Sabbath? (Exodus 35, 2) is touching the skin of a dead pig still likely to make me unclean? (Lev 11, 6-8) And many, many more examples. Perhaps such an article is an attempt to justify a deep rooted hatred of the LGBT community? I expect better in such a serious journal.

Peter Atkins

Peter. Slavery (like the status of women) is a baffling issue in the ancient world and it is possible that our image of slavery from the US South distorts the old reality. It might have amounted in some cases to something akin to C19th employment in mills and mines. One of Pompeii's best homes was owned by former slaves and others prospered: what we now have as public-service professionals – medics and teachers – were often slaves. Your quotes are from the OT not the NT which is silent on slavery.
On the trans business – while one can accept that there might be aberrant psycho-biologies which some will say are best treated as illnesses, others not, the bullying that is taking place is another matter. The Human Rights ideology is weak here: how are the rights of a man-to-woman balanced against the rights of a born-woman in female sports and spaces? We need recourse to notions of justice and charity (in St Paul's sense 1 Cor 13). The trans ideologues take it for granted that their interests trump all others and no politician dares challenge them. A cynic might say that those men/women who compete in female sports show, by their arrogance, that they are still men all right.

Michael McManus

Conservative Classic – 77

Alan Sokal's Hoax on the Academic Left

Niall McCrae

Transgressing the boundaries: towards a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity

Social Text

In his book *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* in 1985, Roger Scruton systematically debunked the post-modern ideology that had captured the social sciences. But this verbose missive was not for the ordinary reader, and its inconvenient truth was ignored by the academic orthodoxy. The spread of cultural Marxism in our high seats of learning went on, unabated by rational challenge. Social studies have degenerated into pseudoscience. Activists eschew fact in favour of chosen narrative; they start with results and work backwards to find data to fit. But these social justice warriors don't stop at the boundaries of their own discipline. Sweeping attacks on 'hard science' dismiss the product of centuries of genius and painstaking observation. A little knowledge is dangerous for cynics who misinterpret technical concepts of relativity, uncertainty and chaos to propose that nothing is absolutely true or predictable.

Dismayed by the postmodern assault on reason, in 1996 physicist Alan Sokal wrote a hoax paper on 'a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity'. This was published by the journal *Social Text*, fooling the editor as a sophisticated emancipatory critique of Newtonian and Einsteinian physics:

> *It has become increasingly apparent that physical 'reality', no less than social 'reality', is at bottom a social and linguistic construct, that scientific 'knowledge', far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies and power relations of the culture that produced it, that the truth claims of science are inherently theory-laden and self-referential, and consequently, that the discourse of the scientific community, for all its undeniable value, cannot assert a privileged epistemological status with respect to counter-hegemonic narrative emanating from dissident or marginalized communities.*

Such verbiage obviously impressed peer reviewers. Like George Orwell, Sokal was a man of the Left who contributed more to the conservative cause than he would have intended. After revealing his spoof, Sokal spoke at the Socialist Scholars Conference in New York on the folly of denying objective reality. How can scholars speak the truth, if they invalidate the very concept of truth? Post-modern relativism is a dead end. In the past, the Left used rationalism and empirical enquiry against the obscurantism of religion and insular tradition. But from the 1960s onwards, science was reappraised as a system of patriarchal and neo-colonial oppression. The Marxist march through the corridors of academe had begun with the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, and continued by Parisian Left Bank philosophers: deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, psychobabbler Jacques Lacan and the 'knowledge is power' cynicism of Michel Foucault. Such anti-science ideology culminated in the identity politics that has turned universities into *madrassas* of progressive dogma.

Science is a human enterprise and thus prone to human flaws. It's easy to find prejudiced attitudes among the giants of scientific discovery, but as Sokal explained, critics mistakenly interpret past notions of the inferiority of women or black people as proof that science itself, rather than the scientists and their social context, is at fault. Deconstructing the work of mostly white male scientists needs more than a radical agenda, or preposterous theories such as 'feminist fluid mechanics'. Idealist scholars complain of reductionism, while making blunt generalisations about men striving for mastery over nature and women being somehow tuned to the ethereal cycles of Mother Earth.

Research and teaching positions in social science departments are exploited for political purpose. Having undermined concrete fact, 'experts' can present their biased conjecture as legitimate knowledge. Writing in the 1990s, Sokal referred to the alarm over teenage pregnancy, despite data showing that the rate had fallen since the 1950s. Today, it's a mental health crisis in younger people, and catastrophising about climate change. Contrary evidence is barred by group-think, which controls research priorities, funding, publication and publicity. Going with the flow is rewarded.

Thomas Kuhn, a science philosopher, explained that science progresses not in a linear fashion but by a series of revolutions. Great force is needed to disrupt the established order and its assumptions. The heliocentric hypothesis of Copernicus was ignored

for decades before it was incontestably confirmed by Galileo's telescope. The academic world was not ready for Sokal's hoax, which was destined to be merely a footnote in the annals of epistemology. However, a trio of sceptics has revived his mission against the post-modern corruption of science.

In 2017 and 2018 Peter Boghossian, James Lindsay and Helen Pluckrose got a series of bogus papers published in the journals of various 'grievance studies'. One paper explained the penis as a social construct; the second revealed rape culture in dog parks; the third argued that men could quell their transphobia by anally penetrating themselves with sex toys, and the fourth was a translation of *Mein Kampf* with feminist buzz words. Other submissions were awaiting publication or review before the authors were unmasked. Amidst an academic backlash, Portland State University began disciplinary proceedings against Boghossian for unethical practice.

The real ethical problem is about academic disciplines that produce fake research and charge student fees on a false prospectus. Boghossian, Lindsay and Pluckrose emphasised their aim of exposing the damage that post-modern ideology causes to egalitarian political projects. They too were of liberal-left orientation. Sokal was careful to describe himself as a scientist who is left-wing, not a 'left-wing scientist'. Political beliefs are inevitably an influence on career choice and research interests, but the rules of science must be followed: methodological rigour, credible evidence and replicability.

To prevent further harm to the reputation of social science, and to academe generally, universities must be more open to new ideas. A political closed shop has detracted from intellectual endeavour and contributed to loss of faith in 'experts'. Conformity is bad enough, but worse when students and scholars must follow ideas that are intuitively absurd or divisive, such as transgenderism and decolonising the curriculum. Perhaps ridicule is the best medicine for this madness, and we should thank Sokal for showing the way.

Niall McCrae is a Senior Lecturer at Kings College, London

Roy Kerridge

Fifty years ago I used to read a comic strip entitled Ali Baba and the Potty Thieves. Drawn by the incomparable Ken Reid the story was set in Bagdad and was introduced each week by Ali himself, a good looking eastern lad. He began each episode with the phrase: Greeting, infidels! Can you imagine such a thing being allowed today?

Nevertheless, my poor mother's need for carers as she approaches her hundredth birthday has brought exotic beings to our door, who cheerfully regard us as infidels. I had long seen Somali ladies in ones and twos drifting up and down the streets of my London neighbourhood, usually covered in long black robes with a round smiling cut out face attached. Now I know that almost all of them, bottom of the racial 'pecking order', are employed as carers. Enormously cheerful, these carers take caring very seriously, abiding strictly by their agency training, where dummies are used in place of old ladies. It takes two such carers to wash and dress an old lady, one on each side of the bed, often shouting high pitched Somali gossip over the patient's head. Notwithstanding these faults and a few others, such as rare inter-carer fights when tempers rise, I am filled with admiration for these stalwart ladies. Far from feeling humble, they almost swagger with good-humoured self-importance, only deferring reluctantly to District Nurses. Once inside the house, they remove their outer robes, to reveal peacock clothing beneath, heads always covered. They work with immense skill and often grow very fond of their patients.

'You can't come in, I'm not dressed!' one of them shrilled on one occasion. She meant that some of the hair on her head was visible, the sight of which might endanger my soul, were it not doomed already.

In the early days of our Somali carers, some of them regretted that our family were bound for hell because of our infidelity. Tentatively, they tried to induce us to become Moslems. As time went by, contact with West African and West Indian carers seemed to make them more broad-minded. 'I do hope we will be able to meet one day at the fence between Moslem and Christian heaven,' I have heard.

West Indian and Christian African carers are often surprised at the pleasant company provided by Moslem Somali women. Religious arguments never take place, even though most 'infidels' seem to believe that Moslems worship Mohammed. It appears to me that the Prophet is venerated almost as God by Moslems, while Christians often regard Jesus as more a Prophet than a God. Far from being oppressed by their menfolk, these jolly and sometimes bawdy-minded women are often divorced or separated from their first husbands, engaged to Somali boyfriends or similarly emancipated. Sometimes a husband has kicked a carer wife out, and equally often the reverse. According to my mother all the Somali carers have suffered barbarous mutilations. They defend such practices stoutly, saying 'It is most pleasing to Allah'. None of them would welcome feminist interference with their way of life. My favourite carer is an exception to the noisily cheerful rule. This is Mona, a tall serious lady with a pale compassionate face, like that of an unusually holy nun. I noticed one day that her arms and hands were brown and her face pale only because it was thickly powdered. Mona was probably an Anglicised version of a Somali name like Fatima. Mona grew quietly devoted to my mother. She moves at a slower and more dignified pace than the average rumbustious carer, always very considerate and with the appearance of feeling and thinking deeply.

'I live with my daughter who is at school. I hope and pray that she can go to Oxford', she once told me.

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Talking of mothers, I have concluded that motherly love is the original Love, appearing in humble members of Creation such as scorpions. Baby scorpions ride on their mother's back and she takes good care that none fall off. Supposing that Creation appears in the Biblical and indeed Darwinian sequence, romantic love is not encountered until we reach birds. Mating instinct is not romantic love as many a soldier or sailor will tell you.

Letters to the *Daily Mail* show me that some parents are heartbroken when their children go to University, others quite pleased and some delighted. It seems to me to be strange and frightening to see so many people disappear into the unsupervised melting pot that is 'Uni'. Each goes in as one, and comes out as two. What parent can guess at the type of 'partner' who one day must be welcomed in the family? It was safer in Polytechnic days when the student lived at home during term time.

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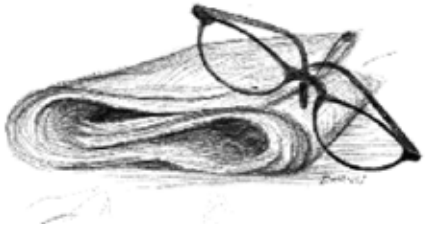
From mothers, my train of thought has led me to class, since 'Uni' seems built on hopes of 'upward mobility'.

I should be sorry to lose the English 'class system', based as it seems to be on the medieval trilogy of peasants, clergy and barons. It has always been easier for peasants to become clergy than to become barons, the latter step remaining an impossibility. Though no longer literally 'clergy', the English upper middle class are strong on their modern ideas of morality, ideas which are steadily growing more nonsensical. The most superstitious medieval Catholic had more sense than to grow obsessed with 'climate change' or 'gender issues'.

What are the hopes and fears of our twenty-first century class Trilogy? Once the average working class couple hoped that all their sons would learn Trades. Though linked to the wish for more money, the belief in Trade went together with praiseworthy ideas of hard work and craftsmanship. Nowadays the future seems to lie in crime or 'Uni' and money alone is hoped for. The middle classes appear to admire brain above all and the upper classes admire physical courage in war or sport, as the ultimate virtue. I know nothing of physical courage but the admiration for brains is deeply flawed. Only official brains sems to be admired as standardised by the government examination system. That is the only brain that brings in money. Upper class people ought to be exempt from worrying about money and the tax authorities should take note of this.

A strange relic of medieval peasantry remains in the working man – a strong fear of wolves. When wolves escaped from a Wildlife park in Wales, few of the villagers dared to go out until the menace had passed. These were American timber wolves which seldom attack humans. In parts of the USA where these animals are protected, people are similarly afraid to venture out on foot. When the gun-free Yellowstone Park was created, the conservationists took it for granted that their first task must be to exterminate wolves. Since the park has now re-introduced wolves, 'blue collar' Americans have ceased to visit in any numbers. In Europe, wolves have re-colonised many of their ancient territories, helped by EU inspired re-introductions. In the nineteenth century, almost the same thing happened, as Russian wolves followed Napoleon's army back to France. Wolves have now returned to France and Belgium but presumably will not be able to enter the Channel Tunnel.



Reputations - 63

Boris Johnson

Alistair Miller

Boris Johnson excites strong reactions. He has been accused of being 'a charlatan', 'a demagogue' and 'a pathological liar' – and this was by his erstwhile political ally, Dominic Grieve. Even his friend and biographer, Andrew Gimson, once noted, in exasperation, that Boris 'is a cad, no gentleman, a selfish bastard: an unscrupulous, unreliable, self-serving adventurer'. To his opponents, Johnson verges on the unspeakable. Polly Toynbee in the *Guardian* was hardly able to contain her rage at his election victory. Johnson was, she screamed, a 'sociopathic, narcissistic, glutton for power', 'reckless in everything but personal ambition', 'unfit in every way for any kind of office'. Yet to those who have worked under him, Boris Johnson inspires loyalty and affection for his affable good humour, warmth and lack of pompousness, admiration for his flashing wit and intellect, and exasperation at his unreliability, his seeming inability or unwillingness to curb his appetitive desires.

Many have written him off as a buffoon, a shameless self-publicist. But as Andrew Marr observes of Johnson, in a surprisingly perceptive article in the *New Statesman*, 'he has spent his whole life disarming rivals and opponents'; if he were really 'a buffoon', he would not have led the Leave campaign to victory nor won a stunning electoral victory. He has, continues Marr, all the negative qualities 'so fruitlessly advertised by his opponents' combined with 'charm, charisma, manic energy and ferocious determination'. He is, in short, 'a truly formidable political leader'. Andrew Gimson writes in similar vein that Boris has never grown out of his childhood ambition to be 'the world king'; he has simply 'learned to conceal it'. He was not born 'to ease and comfort, but to wage a ceaseless struggle for supremacy'.

Have we elected a megalomaniac, albeit charming and charismatic, to the office of prime minister? Who is the real Boris Johnson?

We can I think learn much from Johnson's study of his hero Churchill's leadership qualities. *The Churchill Factor: How One Man Made History* is a magnificent vindication of Churchill in an age of debunking of our national heroes – but also reveals much of Johnson's own character. Johnson makes a compelling argument that had there been no Churchill in that cabinet room on 28 May 1940 to face down the defeatist Halifax, to insist that Britain must fight on alone against Hitler, and to impose his view through sheer force of will, then there is every likelihood that Western civilization as we know it would have fallen. But just as striking is Johnson's gleeful description of Churchill's ignominious political pedigree up to that date. For in May 1940, when he became prime minister, most Tories – his own colleagues – regarded him, and with some justification, as 'an opportunist, a turncoat, a blowhard, an egotist, a rotter, a bounder, a cad, and on several well-attested occasions, a downright drunk'. Rab Butler, then a junior minister, summed up the general feeling when he remarked, 'The good clean tradition of English politics has been sold to the greatest adventurer of modern political history'.

The secret to understanding Churchill the politician, argues Johnson, is that he regarded himself as 'incarnating the will of the nation'. Although he had a 'semi-ideology' to go with this – 'a leftish Toryism: imperialist, romantic, but on the side of the working man' – he regarded himself as above the petty tribal loyalties of party politics. Of course, none of this would have been possible without a monstrous ego. And along with this went the legendary Churchillian qualities: the gambler's temperament, the Homeric lust for glory, the recklessness, the desire for self-projection, the taste for life's luxuries, the compulsion to work, the irreverent sense of humour. Above all, he possessed immense physical bravery and moral courage – just the qualities needed in 1940. Churchill was also a phenomenally successful writer and journalist, who wrote with 'a rich and rollicking readability', a master orator, who crafted some of the greatest speeches of all time. He was impossibly self-centred and demanding of those who worked under him, but at the same time warm-hearted and caring – which earned him their loyalty and devotion. Nor did he bear grudges. In sum, writes Johnson, 'he had what

the Greeks called *megalopsychia* – greatness of soul'.

Reading Johnson's extensive catalogue of Churchill's virtues and vices, one begins to wonder whether Johnson is not describing himself, such is the insight and empathy he shows for his subject. Boris Johnson is certainly not Churchill, and he would be the last to claim that he is. Few lead their country to victory. But the similarities are striking. Will Boris Johnson, like Churchill, prove to be the man of the hour?

In only a few months, he has already achieved what many people thought impossible: the renegotiation of the withdrawal agreement, combined with the parliamentary majority he needs to vote it through, courtesy of a stunning electoral victory. But beyond the platitudinous slogan 'global Britain', what is Boris's post-Brexit vision?

Johnson has been criticised often enough for lacking principles. But Andrew Gimson writes that not having an explicit doctrine enables Boris to 'express the public mood before the public even knows what its mood is'; this is not so much opportunism as 'pragmatic adventurism'. And perhaps the best Tories are, after all, those who see politics as a concrete activity embodying instinctive modes of thought, not a utopian quest to put into effect abstract principles. Besides, there are things he cares deeply about. His early school experiences have made him firmly opposed to capital punishment. As a classicist, he believes in liberal education, that education is an end-in-itself, not a factor in some 'dreary utilitarian calculus'. Above all, he believes in freedom: the freedom to live one's life to the full and 'celebrate innocent pleasures', to express one's mind, utter heresies and – like Voltaire – ridicule religious dogma. He believes with the ancient Greeks that 'man is the measure of all things', and he believes in the Western humanistic civilization that is the legacy of classical Greece and Rome. He is an unashamed elitist who is by nature fiercely competitive, but he believes the great-souled man should be magnanimous and share his riches.

Since he wrote for the *Daily Telegraph* from Brussels, Johnson has been a euro-sceptic, but he loves Europe and its civilisation, for he was partly educated there and is multi-lingual. In his book *The Dream of Rome* he described how the Empire assimilated all races, ethnicities and religions and that 'it created 'a single political culture and sense of identity'. His dream is of a 'huge and peaceable unity of races and nations' – a union, moreover, that if extended to include Turkey (from where his great-grandfather came), could reconcile Islam and Christianity 'around the shores of the Mediterranean'. Johnson admits that this will not be achieved in our lifetimes. The unity that was Rome was largely the achievement of Augustus and comprised a semi-divine emperor at its centre with 'the face of every citizen turned like a sunflower' towards him. That is unlikely to be replicated today – at least, not unless Boris can take on the role. The dream certainly cannot be achieved by pompous unelected bureaucrats busily trying to eliminate national differences and abolishing the British sausage.

Johnson is scathing about those who would re-create 'Little England', who speak of 'common values' and 'European-ness', and who would thereby exclude Muslims by virtue of their 'alien' culture. But he overlooks that unlike Roman civilization, English civilization was rooted in place and a sense of home. Our liberties are rooted in the Common Law, the law of the land. And our values are informed by classical civilization – but filtered through Christianity. Johnson's contempt for the early Christians whose virtues of 'patience and pusillanimity', of 'abstinence and charity', usurped the 'active' virtues of the pagan Romans is thinly disguised. He speaks of 'gangs of monks', puritan killjoys, ravaging ancient monuments. But what Christianity provided, Sir Richard Livingstone reminds us, was an alternative to the classical aristocracy of natural endowments, 'a new humanism, a new conception of the supreme ἀρετή within the reach of every human being', not merely a leisured elite. There was a superior virtue to reason, and this was love. Our freedom is not the leisured freedom of the aristocrat or libertine but is conditional on our accepting that we are morally equal – that we are called to love our neighbour.

As he negotiates our post-Brexit future, and brings to bear the magnanimous cosmopolitan spirit of the great-souled man, it will be tempting for Boris Johnson to forget the little platoons, the ordinary folk, the little Englanders, whose attachments, affections, loyalties, pastimes and common decencies are more localised than his. But he should remember that the election was won, not because of the attractions of global liberalism or dreams of a new imperium, but because millions thought that Boris, with his rumbustious good humour, optimism and unashamed patriotism, was essentially one of them. W S Gilbert sums it up perfectly:

For he might have been a Roosian,
A French, or Turk, or Proosian,
Or perhaps Itali-an!
But in spite of all temptations
To belong to other nations,
He remains an Englishman!

Alistair Miller is a teacher.

Eternal Life

Peter Mullen

Throughout Lent I am more heavily bombarded than usual with spiritual advice – or is it propaganda? Here's a selection: 'Help lighten our load on the planet…defrost your fridge and find out how climate change affects poorer people…help stop global climate change…recycle your rubbish…' (Actually, quite a lot of rubbish is being recycled here). 'Save trees…use both sides of the paper.' For what purpose?

While all this cajolery has been going on, I am identified as belonging to a group described as 'extremists.' Professor David Martin once said to me over a nice lunch in Smithfield, 'What some of my people want to know is whether Peter Mullen is a fundamentalist.' I replied, 'Yes, I don't mind that ascription one bit – for some things must be regarded as fundamental: that is basic and formative.' I prefer to look for these basics in the words of Scripture and the doctrines of the Creed rather than in the fissiparous systems of what generally goes under the heading of Liberal Theology. What is this liberalism?

Traces of it can be found in ancient and patristic times, but in its essentials, if indeed it can be said to hold *anything* as essential, it is a product of the 18th century Enlightenment. It is based on Reason with a capital 'R' and the main characteristic of the Enlightenment was to be anti-metaphysical. In one of his most dazzling boisterous outbursts, David Hume, the philosopher to whom Samuel Johnson always referred affectionately as Davy, declared:

> *Let us ask of any volume of divinity or school metaphysics: does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.*

Well, that paragraph itself contains neither abstract nor experimental reasoning, so we had best take Davy's advice and cast it too to the flames too.

Even at the time this Enlightenment philosophy was debunked – quite spectacularly by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's criticisms were subsequently refined and made even more telling by R G Collingwood (1889-1943) who pointed out that there is nothing weird or occult about metaphysics: it is simply a matter of holding 'absolute presuppositions.' And, everyone holds absolute presuppositions – even Enlightenment philosophers such as Hume. They couldn't even begin to philosophise without them. Or, as I said at the start, *something* has to be regarded as fundamental.

Such logical scruples never troubled the Enlightenment philosophers and they didn't trouble the theologians who followed their new dogmas either. So church-people of the time were told they could not believe in miraculous occurrences. Debunking became the pastime of the age, which has never lost its popularity. For example, Schleiermacher (1768-1834) reduced religion to 'a matter of feeling or dependency.' But dependency on *what*, or more properly *whom* if there's no metaphysical reality?

Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) said religious faith is essentially morality and we must discount the supernatural narrative in which it is traditionally couched. Adolf Harnack went even further and spoke of 'the essence' of Christianity: a flavourless essence without the Virgin Birth and without the Blessed Trinity. A critic remarked of Adolf that, 'He looked into the very depths and merely saw his own face looking back at him.' That's the way it is alike with Enlightenment men and modern liberal theologians.

John Hick (1922-2012) denied the Incarnation. David Jenkins (1925-2016), Bishop of Durham, a genial and likeable man who one evening came to my Yorkshire vicarage and ate five packets of crisps before dinner, famously mocked fundamental Christians as those who, he claimed, believed the Resurrection to be 'a conjuring trick with bones.' Harvey Cox (1929) came right out with it and insisted that secular reality is all there is. Rowan Williams went a long way down the same dead end as Cox when, in his final sermon as Archbishop of Canterbury, he said, 'The church has a lot of catching up to do with secular mores.'

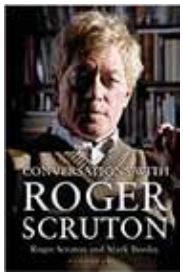
I would rather trust St Paul who told us straight, 'Be ye not conformed to *this* world' (Romans 12:2). And why not? Because for secularists, *this* world is all that there is.

'Liberal Christianity is the god that failed.' Karl Barth got Liberal Christianity bang-to-rights when he described it as: 'The mouthpiece for the post-Christian intelligentsia of European society, a kind of quasi-religion for scholarly non-believers.'

Of Barth's *Romans* which was published the same year the First World War began, Alec Vidler (1899-1991) said this book that'…fell like a bomb on the playground of the liberal theologians.' My old college principal remarked, 'There weren't even enough of them to fill a playground.' There are more than enough today, and of the wrong sort, which is why the church throughout Europe has come to be an endangered species.

Pope Pius XII said of the Protestant Karl Barth: 'He was the greatest theologian since St Thomas Aquinas.'

ARTS AND BOOKS



Valiant for Truth

Peter Mullen

Conversations with Roger Scruton, Roger Scruton and Mark Dooley, Bloomsbury, 2016, £16.99.

Roger Scruton was the founding editor of *The Salisbury Review* for which he was in trouble from the start. As he said:

> *Here an article appeared challenging the fashionable pieties concerning multicultural education. Its author was Ray Honeyford, whose experience and education made it impossible for him to believe the nonsense put out by the Commission for Racial Equality, a government quango which survives by discovering racial conflicts where no one had previously noticed them.*

As editor of *SR*, Scruton suffered similar torrents of vilification, abuse and death-threats to those of Honeyford himself. This was not the only battle in which Scruton participated as the underdog against the overwhelming forces of irrationality and prejudice. Around that time, the phrase 'political correctness' first made its appearance in public life. PC is a polite, dainty expression for something much uglier and nastier: institutional censorship and repression on a totalitarian scale. Multiculturalism is one of its sacred cows, but it is not the only one. There is a whole field full of them: feminism, bullying trades-unionism, jargonising leftism practised by such as Eric Hobsbawm and Christopher Hitchens, and the gobbledegook of Deconstruction presided over by Jacques Derrida whose chief contribution to literary criticism was 'Words don't have meanings and the writer doesn't exist.' Add to this the whole dustcart of cultural refuse by which we are asked – nay, compelled on pain of excommunication from the realm of public discourse – to accept such as Pink Floyd and Bob Dylan as the equals, if not the superiors, of Bach and Mozart, and to regard the fakes and frauds whose atrocities litter Tate Modern as being on a par with Titian and Rembrandt.

Roger Scruton had been pilloried all his life by the lumpen intelligentsia who comprise this PC establishment. I was present on one occasion when Scruton had been invited to give an address in the City of York, but he was shouted down by the assembled rabble. Worse followed as I heard some of these thugs – mainly students from the 'university' – threaten to 'get him' on his way back to his digs. The irony of this scenario approaches hyperbole: for Scruton had come to talk about freedom of speech.

As a critic, Scruton is up there with Matthew Arnold, T S Eliot and F R Leavis. But the consort of criticism is creativity and Scruton possessed this in spades. There is the word 'polymath,' and I wonder if there is the word 'omnimath'? Was there nothing to which this man could not turn his hand? He was one of the foremost philosophers of our time, a novelist, a journalist, an expert on architecture, a versatile musician and composer, a qualified lawyer, the author of more than fifty books – and he was a countryman and oenophile who rode to hounds. A score of magazine articles would not do justice to his achievements, so I shall have to content myself with a few samples of his art and style to give an inkling of his depth and range.

First then, his demolition of the all-pervading heresy of scientism:

'This arises when people take hold of fragments of science and rewrite the questions that trouble them in the language of these fragments. They then assume they have found a solution. A very obvious example is 'neurobabble' which takes hold of the embryonic scientific theory of the workings of the nervous system and uses it to describe the questions of consciousness and human action.' Of course it is nonsense to think that neurons and axons and electrical circuits in the brain are what determine our motives and make all our choices for us. But, despite its preposterousness, neurobabble remains orthodoxy even when its incoherence and futility have been clearly pointed out.

Roger Scruton had been a university teacher for most of his life, and here he gives us his digest on modern educational practices:

> *These destroy the effect of education by making it relevant. Replace pure by applied mathematics, logic by computer programming, architecture by engineering, history by sociology: the result will be a new generation of well-informed philistines, whose charmlessness will undo every advantage which their learning might otherwise have conferred.*

As we have noticed, the universities too have become part of the ubiquitous narrow-minded censoriousness. It's no surprise then to find that Scruton did not find life easy in these decayed establishments: 'When I arrived at Birkbeck, my first impression was that my colleagues

had made a terrible mistake in choosing me and were already regretting what they had done. There was a pronounced hostility in the air. When I had applied for the job, I learned they had approached Bernard Williams for a reference. He had, in effect, said, "This guy is good at the subject, but he's a repulsive conservative." So I didn't feel very welcome among people who had never met a conservative before, and who peered at me round the door of my office in order to ascertain whether I was doing the strange things that conservatives do – like boiling babies in test-tubes or marching up and down making Nazi salutes.'

He added: 'The view of people like my parents was what's the point of studying Greek and Latin? All my subsequent thoughts about education have been an answer to that question. I was from an early age a convert to the view that the only really useful subjects are studies of the useless.'

Finally, the possibility of transcendence:

> *In the religious experience, the opposition between the aesthetic and the ethical is transcended and reconciled, since that is what the encounter with the sacred ultimately is – a fusing of the experience of beauty with the sense of moral order.*

Aged seventy-five, how did Roger Scruton contemplate what life was for him personally? He gave his own poignant answer to the ultimate question: 'The health fanatics who have poisoned all our natural enjoyments ought, in my view, to be rounded up and locked together in a place where they can bore one another rigid with their futile nostrums for eternal life. The rest of us should live out our days in a chain of linked symposia in which the catalyst is wine, the means conversation and the goal a serene acceptance of our lot and a determination not to outstay our welcome.'

The Soong Sisters

Anthony Daniels

Big Sister, Little Sister, Red Sister: Three Women at the Heart of Twentieth-Century China, Jung Chang, Cape, 2019, £25.00.

Whether or not Robert Michels' iron law of oligarchy be true, it is surely remarkable that three sisters of the Soong family should have exerted so much power and influence for so long in a country as vast and populous as China. In this highly readable and absorbing book, Jung Chang gives us a triple biography of the Soong sisters, one of whom was married to a financier and Prime Minister of Nationalist China, one married Sun Yat-sen (later becoming titular deputy Chairman in the People's Republic to Mao Tse-tung), and one married Chiang Kai-shek.

The Soong family was of recent prominence. The patriarch, Soong Charlie, was born into a peasant family in Hainan, but moved to America where he converted to Methodism. A man of great charm and determination, he found generous patrons, attended what became Duke University and when he returned to China made an immense fortune from banking and the printing of Bibles. Deeply impressed by his experiences in America, he was determined to give all his children – three sons and three daughters – an American education. They became as much American as Chinese, more fluent in English than in their mother tongue.

The eldest, Ei-ling married H H Kung, a vain and self-important man, whom she helped to a great fortune as a financier, and who was long Chiang Kai-shek's chief minister. The second, Ching-ling, married Sun Yat-sen, the republican agitator and very briefly president of China. After Sun's death she became a supporter of the communists, to whom she was of great propagandistic use and value, and was allowed to live in a Peking mansion after Mao's accession to power. The third, May-ling, who was sent to America aged nine, married Chiang Kai-shek and died in New York aged 105, having lived there for thirty years after Chiang's death, in almost pharaonic luxury. The sisters had been very close in childhood, but politics divided them as it divided the country. The Red Sister, Ching-ling, died aged 88 having long lost all contact with her sisters.

They lived through unimaginably varied and dangerous experiences, especially Red and Little Sister. Red Sister, for example, had lived in Stalin's Moscow for a time, so was fully aware of communism's tendency to totalitarianism, and also Berlin, where she witnessed the rise of Nazism. She lived through the Great Leap Forward and its associated famine, and the Great Cultural Revolution, from which she emerged frightened but unscathed, but she seemed never to have regretted her political choice merely on account of the tens of millions of deaths for which Mao was ultimately responsible. In any case, her choice was irrevocable, at least if she wished to remain alive; whether, in the privacy of her own mind, she recognised the extent of the evil she had supported, encouraged and to a small extent helped bring about, must forever remain unknown.

May-ling knew both triumph, as when she addressed

Congress in 1943 and received a long standing ovation, and humiliation, as when she had to negotiate her husband's release from captivity by a dissident warlord, and when she lived through the complete defeat of the Nationalists by the Communists six years after her address to Congress.

No one could accuse the author, Jung Chang, of partiality to Mao and the communists, but the portraits she paints of both Sun Yat-sen, who was deified both by the nationalists and the communists, and of Chiang Kai-shek are equally damning. Sun Yat-sen is depicted as an egotistical incompetent without any discernible positive qualities, so intent on personal power that he was quite willing to sell his country down to the river to attain it. Jung Chang does not accept the traditional historiography of China, according to which the country was sunk in a kind of lethargic decadence until the revolution of 1911 and the institution of the republic in 1912. On the contrary, she claims, it was moving quite fast towards a constitutional monarchy that was fast modernising, economically as well. Sun Yat-sen's constant intrigues held back development and led to many years of violent instability that produced untold suffering.

Chiang Kai-shek was a bullying and murderous paranoid bungler, who neither had good judgment himself nor recognised it in others. Trusting no one, he could take no advice; his character was such that he encouraged people to betray him because for him loyalty did not exist. He was devoid of economic or social ideas other than anti-communism, and his determination to achieve power by overthrowing a relatively legitimate government, solely from ambition, was catastrophic for the whole population.

The only person to emerge from these pages with great credit is Chiang's son by a first marriage, Chiang Ching-kuo. Having been sent to the Soviet Union to study in 1925, at a time when his father pretended to be well disposed to the Soviet Union, he was held hostage there for twelve years, suffering severe hardship. Perhaps this had a beneficial effect on his character, for when subsequently he succeeded his father to the presidency of Taiwan, he lived modestly, relaxed the Koumintang's dictatorship, encouraged youth to study abroad and transformed the country into a flourishing economic power.

The three sisters navigated the stormy waters of Chinese politics with great skill and determination. Each of them died in her bed at an advanced age. Only one of them, Ei-ling, had children, their childlessness being a matter of deep regret to the others. Their Christianity was very important to two of them, Ei-ling and May-ling, though it seemed perfectly compatible with earthly ruthlessness.

Jung Chang, author of the best-selling *Wild Swans* (at least 20 million copies sold), and co-author with her husband of a similarly best-selling damning biography of Mao, is an excellent storyteller. Once picked up, her book is not easily put down. It relates intrigue of great complexity with Dumas-like panache. But one does sometimes wonder whether figures such as Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek can have been as entirely lacking in any kind of ability as they are portrayed here.

A War to End All Wars

Brian Eassty

Staring At God, Britain in the Great War, Simon Heffer, Random House, 2019, £30.

Here, after the final curtain has fallen on the last commemorative production of *Journey's End*, is Simon Heffer's magnificent account of the Great War, part of an ambitious project to tell the story of how Britain was transformed between 1838 and 1939. He has previously taken us through the Victoria era in *High Minds* and up to 1914 in *The Age of Decadence.*

Staring At God is not a military history but a social and political one, for Heffer rarely takes us on the battlefield. His story takes place in Westminster and Whitehall and in homes up and down the land. His source material includes, along with the memoirs and biographies of all the significant political and military figures of the era, the reflections of figures of a less exalted status, which shows us how the war was experienced by the mass of the population. The diary of Andrew Clark, an Essex clergyman, provides a fascinating perspective on the huge loss of life at the Battle of the Somme. Clark remarks that a local department store had told him that 'the mourning orders during the last three months had been overwhelming. They cannot get in materials fast enough to meet the demand.' There is a poignancy about the public learning the catastrophic truth in such ways when the government were being secretive about the casualty figures.

Most of the book though is the story of the two very different men who faced the dreadful task of getting the country through this ordeal – Asquith, indecisive but decent, and Lloyd George, forceful but utterly untrustworthy.

Asquith, despite having already been at the helm through a number of crises, was inclined to let the job

of Prime Minister compete with distractions, not only his pathetic obsession with Venetia Stanley to whom he wrote as often as four times a day, sometimes during Cabinet meetings. His method of dealing with stress was to retreat to the library or the bridge table and turn to the bottle. His management style could be described as recreational rather than businesslike for the meetings he chaired had no agenda and rambled with no decisions being made. In an effort to develop a more focused approach, he would attempt to set up smaller working parties but would then be talked into including so many of the people who had been left out that they became as large as the committees they had replaced.

If Lloyd George was more of a dictator, as Heffer labels him, then perhaps a more dictatorial approach was what was needed after Asquith's drift. Lloyd George's most frequent failing was an inability to accept responsibility for anything that had gone wrong. In this he was a much more modern politician than Asquith and Heffer provides frequent examples of the contortions the Welsh Wizard was prepared to perform to avoid blame. A story he tells at length is that of General Maurice who, incensed by Lloyd George's lies about the strength of the army in France and fearful of the effect on morale, decided to become what today would be called a whistle-blower and write to the newspapers, accusing the Prime Minister of dishonesty. After a damage limitation exercise which involved his secretary and confidante Frances Stevenson burning a 'smoking gun' document, Lloyd George's speech in the Commons ('Was it not his business to come to me…. He might have put it quite nicely….I say that I have been treated unfairly') reminds us that it is not only contemporary politicians who use manipulative offence-taking for political advantage.

Lord Stamfordham is a figure who comes out of this saga with more credit. The King's private secretary, described by Heffer as 'crusty, loyal and powerful', carried out his duties with a calm concentration and foresight, qualities lacking in the elected government. Forgotten now, he was responsible for a substantial footnote in history. When the King, embarrassed by his Saxe-Coburg relatives, the Duke of Cumberland a vocal supporter of the Kaiser and the Duke of Albany actually leading German troops, and worried by the overthrow of his cousin Tsar Nicholas, decided that the Saxe-Coburg and Gotha name would have to go, Stamfordham, having heard that Edward III was known as Edward of Windsor, renamed the dynasty. (Other possibilities were Fitzroy and the awful Tudor-Stuart). It was fortunate that the name change came before the Gotha fixed wing bombers did too much damage to the South Coast. For all that this was total war, the King felt a personal family sentiment. He writes in his diary of the Armistice: 'Wonderful day, the greatest in the history of our country' only to add 'William arrived in Holland yesterday', marking the Kaiser's exile with touching bathos.

As on other occasions when the government's attention should have been focused on mainland Europe, Ireland proved a distraction. Heffer shows that concentrating on Home Rule all through the summer of 1914 meant that Asquith and his Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey were unable to see how much the consequences of the assassination in Sarajevo required urgent attention.. However, they could have been forgiven for thinking that they had successfully kicked the problem closer to home into touch before the Easter Rising put it abruptly back on the agenda. Heffer devotes a chapter to this one event, showing how Britain managed to destroy the chances of a peaceful settlement in Ireland for generations by managing to play the soft cop and the hard cop at the wrong time. When warned that the Volunteers were drilling with serious intent, the British in Dublin Castle thought that it was all rather amusing and nothing to be unduly concerned about. After the Easter Rising had fizzled out with the German reinforcements the rebels naively expected failing to appear, most Irish people viewed the event as an embarrassment. The British then chose to punish the rebel leaders with such brutality that the ill feeling destroyed the chances of the moderate constitutional Nationalists and gave Sinn Fein the upper hand for years to come. After this, even to consider conscription in Ireland showed that the British were still unable to take the temperature of the Irish political scene. As Lloyd George was warned, it would have taken three armies to recruit one. At the subsequent election, Sinn Fein took 68 per cent of the vote outside Ulster and 73 of the 105 Irish seats. The Nationalists through no fault of their own were left with six.

Conscription of any kind was anathema to a Liberal of the non-interventionist tradition like Asquith and he spent vast amounts of time in arguing about it and trying to avoid its introduction. But war is a very statist activity. Heffer is right to quote A J P Taylor's famous description of what changed in 1914. 'Until August 1914 a sensible, law-abiding Englishman could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state beyond the post office and the policeman.' But if Lloyd George were to keep his election promises of 'Better housing and better social conditions' state intervention was here to stay. Some decried it. When the council house building programme was announced, Colonel Josiah Wedgwood warned against the state undertaking the 'building trade on unsound, uneconomic lines' and

building houses for 'charity rents'. Similarly a bill to expand and improve state education was denounced in the House of Commons as 'a very large advance towards the Socialist theory that children belong to the State'. But many more were aware that the alternative to these moderate measures was Bolshevism.

The Treaty of Versailles was signed on the 28th June 1919, the fifth anniversary of Gavrilo Princip throwing his bomb in Sarajevo, a centenary that was perhaps overlooked last year. As Lloyd George celebrated in Paris and crowds gathered outside Buckingham Palace, one of the most significant crises in our history came to an end. The government's new challenges could be seen: in Ireland, in India where the Amritsar Massacre had just taken place and in Glasgow and other centres of industry where industrial unrest had never quite gone away during the war, and returned with renewed vigour – ample material there for the fourth volume of Heffer's series to be as fascinating as the third.

Get Digging

Celia Haddon

An Economic History of the English Garden, Roderick Floud, Allen Lane, 2019, £25.

Since the Adam and Eve gardening has always had a reputation for being innocent enjoyment, even though not everything in the garden is rosy. Horticultural historians have charted the beauties of garden design and heavily illustrated books have lingered in the gardens of the wealthy. Now at last Roderick Floud has taken a long look at the fundamentals of good gardening. It's not taste, or artistic design, or even copious amounts of manure. It is money. Not just the private money of rich landowners or kings but money from the state has subsidised the great English gardens. When the twelfth Earl of Kent was building the gardens at Wrest Park in Bedfordshire, the cost of erecting terraces, walls, gates, and planting trees and shrubs came to £6.8 million in today's money. The Earl, described as 'very insignificant' by historians, had prudently married not just one heiress but after her death, a second one. Even so, his gardening activities were subsidised by government money. He was paid £14m over six years, the salary for being Lord Chamberlain, a post he probably gained by bribery.

Roderick Loud calculates the price of land, garden workers, and plants by changing the historical price to a modern one. Most garden historians, if they mention the vulgar topic of cash at all, tell us the contemporary sums paid out, then in brackets add its modern equivalent calculated from the retail price index. This book reverses the practice, putting the modern money equivalent first, and the historical price in brackets. Moreover, the modern equivalent is calculated from average earnings, a method that the author maintains is more accurate.

The sums paid out for a great garden were staggering even though labour was absurdly cheap. A labourer's family earned 400 times less than the average income of £11.9m of a noble family, a gap far bigger than the difference between rich and poor today. The capital expenditure on Wrest Park from 1660-1760 was about £40m, *excluding* yearly maintenance and labour costs, for example. Competition for the latest fashionable plant fuelled high prices. These could cost three or four figure sums. For example, a 25-foot tulip tree for his new garden in Carlton House cost the Prince of Wales £38,120 in 1734.

The wealthy, then as now, competed for the best house and garden, so garden designers, unlike the labourers they hired, made very good money. At the height of his career from 1762-1779, Capability Brown had an annual income above £20m though like today's freelancers his income fluctuated, and he needed always to have big reserves to cover his earth moving, lake building and landscaping activities. Finally, he too benefitted from public money, being appointed royal gardener at Hampton Court at a regular salary £2.1m a year with a free house thrown in.

Lower down the social scale were the nurserymen. During the Season, when rich aristocrats came up to London from their country estates, the nurserymen were poised for their orders. Plantsmen wearing top hats and tailcoats, would escort the rich round huge displays of flowering plants and offer tea in the hope of delivering large numbers of trees and plants to the gardens of the country estates later in the autumn. There was one snag – the rich were slow to pay. (*Plus ca change*…) After his death, one nurseryman was owed £628,000 of which 43 per cent was unlikely to be recovered. Interestingly, the money spent on these gardens resulted in technical inventions that could be and were adapted to more important uses later on. Our modern central heating grew from the heating required for greenhouses and conservatories. Notable was the Great Stove at Chatsworth that required 300 tons of coal a year to keep alive the exotic plants inside.

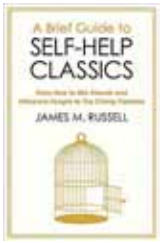
The earlier garden canals in the seventeenth century were the precursors of Britain's canal system, requiring not just digging out but also devising a reliable supply of water. These garden canals and fountains, therefore, needed the invention of new technology.

The first working steam engine, as early as 1699, was an 'engine to raise water by fire,' which, with some improvements by later engineers, was installed in the Duke of Chandois's garden in 1729 under the banqueting house, to power a fountain 'continguous thereto in a very delightful manner'. The use of sheet glass for greenhouses, invented at the end of the seventeenth century, grew into Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace of l851 and eventually begot the Shard building in London. Lawns prompted the search for power tools. Grass had to be scythed by hand until a Mr Edwin Budding in l830 invented the lawnmower. This early machine cost the equivalent of £8000 and needed two men and a horse to operate it. The horse, led by one of the men, had to wear leather boots so as not to cut up the turf while the second man pushed from behind. The first powered lawnmowers were steam engines but by 1900 there were petrol versions.

An Economic History of the English Garden is not just about the gardens of the rich. Roderick Floud tracks the gardens in cities and those of the later suburbs. A proposal for an eighteenth century large town garden, about 3,3000 square feet, suggested it should contain 42 poplar trees, an almond tree, two rhododendrons and about 20 roses, four loads of gravel and ten of mould. This with 36 perennials, seeds for annuals and plentiful bulbs would cost £25,290 without adding the cost of labour. Although this seems an enormous sum, those who have redesigned a large garden from scratch including trees, paving and turf, will know that it is not necessarily an exaggeration.

Floud also destroys the myth of the healthy farm worker, growing his fruit and veg in the cottage garden. Only one third of agricultural labourers in the eighteenth century had a garden. The other two thirds, unable to grow anything edible, had to buy their food, which included only a very small proportion of vegetables, from shops or pedlars. Potatoes and veg made up only 2.6 per cent of spending by these families in the south of England. Then as now most of their money went on bread, flour, meat, beer, and dairy foods. The proportion of farm workers with gardens or allotments only grew in the nineteenth century, because the Victorians wanted to keep men out of the pub during their leisure hours.

Grounded in the hard information derived from statistics and costs, this book acts as a corrective to many less hard-nosed garden books. It is properly, though unobtrusively, referenced and indexed. The translation into present monetary values allows an entirely new look at the gardens of the past. This is a really worthwhile and long overdue contribution to gardening history and the book should be in every horticultural library. It is also a good read for the intellectual gardener.



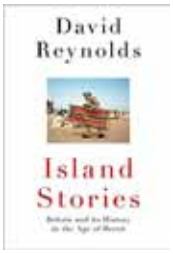
Help Yourself

Niall McCrae

A Brief Guide to Self-Help Classics, James M Russell, Robinson, 2019, £12.99.

Can we be masters of our own fate? Stoic philosophers asserted individual responsibility as the key that unlocks the door to change. While you cannot control events, you can control your response to events. The New Thought movement emerged in the nineteenth century, placing mind over matter; a pioneering text was Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859), with its message of perseverance. Today, there is a massive market in guides to self-improvement. In a compilation of 67 books, James Russell makes sense of this myriad literature. Most of the titles are widely known, and some are deeply embedded in our culture: *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, for example. I was surprised by how much I was aware of these books without reading them. A Cambridge philosophy graduate, Russell has written numerous brief guides, and he is adept at distilling core messages, finding recurrent themes and scrutinising dubious claims. A common idea of self-help is to fulfil our hidden or hindered potential, as conveyed by Norman Vincent Peale's classic *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952). If you want something, you must strive for it, believing that you can get it. If you fail, you didn't try hard enough or you didn't read the book properly. Don't rely on others, as Dale Carnegie advised in *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936): 'People are not interested in you. They are not interested in me. They are interested in themselves – morning, noon and after dinner.' Respectively, negative attitudes produce negative outcomes. Correcting faulty beliefs is the *modus operandi* of cognitive behaviour therapy, which is based on Stoic principles. CBT may be found too simplistic or confronting by some people, but Russ Harris' *The Happiness Trap* (2008) is a popular guide to acceptance and commitment therapy: stop fixating on problems, be realistic, and focus on your true values. Thought processes may be carefully trained, but as we cannot completely suppress our volatile amygdala and the fight or flight instinct, we are all susceptible to rage. Russell omits any books on anger management, but covers the fashion for mindfulness and tuning out of the stress of modern, internet-frazzled life. Darwinian theory, Cartesian rationalism and the Freudian *psyche* underlie the dichotomies presented by self-help authors: thinking

versus impulse, cerebral versus limbic system, and human versus chimp. Although not always recognised, the books follow a well-trodden path of *Cogito ergo sum*, evolution of the brain, and the 'id' and 'ego'. But some books are simply bunkum. Russell ridicules *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne (2006), promoted by Oprah Winfrey and one of the biggest-selling self-help books ever: 'If you want to read a single title that summarises the worst traits of the self-help publishing movement, *The Secret* is ideal. It has farcical historical justifications, a ludicrously simplistic positivity message, some questionable interpretations of that message, and very little substance'. Wrapped in a cover suggesting a '*Da Vinci Code*-style occult mystery', it continues to outsell more rational and helpful competitors (the paradox of something being 'secret' when openly available didn't deter publishers from ubiquitous titles such as 'The Secret History of…'). But evidence and reason seem to have limited influence when troubled people seek support or solace. A major segment of the self-help market is for women. Robin Norwood's *Women Who Love Too Much* (1985) alerted exasperated wives to a tendency to try to fix their flawed partners, often due to their childhood experience of dysfunctional family relationships. This opened the floodgates, and soon books emerged for men too. Predictably, Russell is harsher on his own sex. In a post-industrial and emancipatory society, traditionally-minded men feel harangued by feminists and persistently abused in the media (eg 'pale, male and stale'). Robert Glover's *No More Mr Nice Guy* (2003) is unfairly accused by Russell of encouraging male supremacists and bitter resentment of gender equality. An engaging and mostly balanced critic, Russell indulges in some Trump-bashing here and there, and he has an irritating habit of telling readers to be offended, rather than letting them decide for themselves. It is not beyond people's capacity to allow for the context in which authors of past decades saw social relations. Overall, however, this is a splendid collation, and it stimulated my interest in a previously avoided aisle of the bookshop.



National Identity Crisis

Alistair Miller

Island Stories: Britain and its History in the Age of Brexit, David Reynolds, William Collins, 2019, £16.99.

Island Stories is academia's latest contribution to the work of debunking traditional 'Whiggish' notions of our history, a counterblast to the idea that British history can be read as a single continuous narrative about a single people, the English, whose peculiar characteristics or 'spirit' has marked them out for an exceptional destiny – a notion echoed today by Brexit-supporting conservative politicians who envisage a unique world role for 'global Britain' outside the EU. The title is an ironic reference to Henrietta Marshall's stirring *Our Island Story* of 1905, recently re-issued by the *Telegraph* and praised by David Cameron, who one imagines reading it to his children at bedtime. For David Reynolds, our history consists rather of a plurality of conflicting narratives. Our past is 'intricately storied'. We are not a unitary Protestant island but 'a historically conflicted archipelago comprising more than 6000 islands'. The post-Brexit challenge is therefore not to take refuge in 'our finest hour' or 'the cult of Churchill', or in imperial delusions of grandeur, but to negotiate a new identity reflecting the reality of Britain today.

It would be tempting for Brexit-leaning conservatives to dismiss Reynolds' book out of hand, but it turns out to be surprisingly informative and often illuminating. I thought the historical account of our relations with continental Europe and latterly the EU particularly well drawn. Though Reynolds' account of our empire is a catalogue of sins, as current orthodoxy demands – read Niall Ferguson's *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* for a more balanced and sympathetic view, which considers the counterfactuals – there is much that is salutary for those who would romanticise our imperial past or, like Andrew Roberts, would reassert 'global Britain' in the form of the Anglosphere, a Churchillian federation of the English-speaking peoples.

Reynolds reminds us that the empire was essentially an exercise in commercial exploitation backed by military power. It is startling to read that the Indian army, which represented half of Britain's peacetime military strength, was paid for out of Indian tax revenues, leading Lord Salisbury to remark that India was 'an English barrack in Oriental seas from which we may draw any number of troops without paying for them' – hardly a ringing endorsement of Britain's civilizing mission. When we agreed to pay for the use of the Indian army, from 1939, the result was a debt to India equivalent to one fifth of Britain's GDP. Tory Brexiteers' extolling of free trade is in direct line of descent from Cobden's belief that free trade is both a commercial and moral imperative, the key to bringing about social progress and world peace. But, of course, it all depends on whose terms trade is conducted. As Palmerston observed, trade 'ought not to be enforced

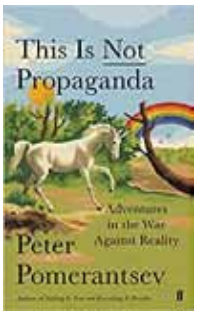
by cannon balls' but it may often 'be unattainable without the protection of physical force'.

For Reynolds, the larger lesson of our history is that even when it was a maritime power, 'Britain had repeatedly needed to play a full part in continental politics'; it could never stand apart. Before the Fall of France in 1940, there was a widespread belief that Britain and France needed to forge a much closer relationship. Churchill spoke of a unity that was 'indissoluble' while a *Times* leader spoke of 'ever closer union'. The French collapse changed the whole direction of British foreign policy and gave birth to 'the special relationship' with America. It also fostered the unfortunate 'iconography' of Britain standing alone – to the White Cliffs of Dover and Vera Lynn. Our subsequent failure 'to play a decisive part in the formative years of European integration' proved a costly mistake. As for the Union, Reynolds echoes Linda Colley in arguing that the United Kingdom is 'substantially the result of luck, accident and, above all, multiple wars'. Although the British empire and two world wars provided a unifying force, it was inevitable in the post-war period that things would unravel.

Island Stories is as remarkable for what it omits as what it contains. Reynolds does not realize that Brexit was motivated partly by a preference for parliamentary democracy over continental bureaucracy, and partly by a desire to preserve our cultural identity in the face of mass immigration. He speaks of freedom as 'an ideology' which served commercial ends. But liberal individualism also constitutes a great political and philosophical tradition, one which we bequeathed to America. Predictably, Reynolds dismisses concerns about immigration as motivated by racism. There is no acknowledgement that our national culture, or cultures, might be relevant to our national identity, or worth preserving, or even exist.

Reynolds writes that our history is not a timeless lump of heritage to be cherished and preserved, but 'an ongoing project of making and remaking'. In one sense this is true, but as Arthur Bryant once remarked, a people that loses its past has no future. Reynolds notes that many non-white Britons 'have developed their own sense of roots and identity – redefining to some degree what it means to be 'British''. But what remains of white Britons' sense of roots and identity after Reynolds' work of deconstruction is passed over in silence. Reynolds' one reference to specifically English culture and identity concerns Enoch Powell's address to the Royal Society of St George in 1961. Powell argued that the years of empire were merely an interruption in a longer domestic tradition, continuous and unbroken; that the wanderer had returned home to rediscover 'England itself'. Reynolds lambasts Powell's vision as 'fanciful and fallacious', a vision of England that excludes other races. But it is only the ideology of multiculturalism, the dogma to which Reynolds is in thrall, that has prevented assimilation of newcomers into the host culture, specifically into English culture and civilization, in the post-war period.

No wonder millions of us voted for Brexit.



Here be Monsters

Martin Dewhirst

This is not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality, Peter Pomerantsev, Faber & Faber, 2019, £14.99.

The consensus view is that the Cold War began shortly after the Third Reich went out with a bang in 1945 and ended shortly after the USSR imploded with a whimper in 1991. Only a tiny number of rather obtuse observers believe that the real Cold War began immediately after the illegal Bolshevik coup d'état in Petrograd in 1917 and will continue (after a short break in the early 1990s) at least as long as an unrepentant KGB officer remains in power as the top man in the Kremlin in Moscow. The sudden switch there from building State Socialism to building State Capitalism is less significant than those who think that economics is more important than politics realise.

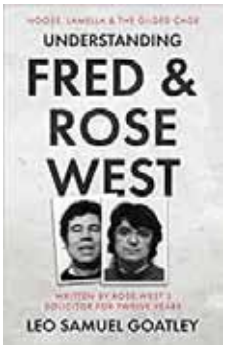
Peter Pomerantsev agrees with the majority view that there is no longer a Cold War, but the three-letter noun in his subtitle makes it clear that he at least realises that we are still, or again, living in a war situation and not merely participating in a 'war on poverty'. Those who insist that the Cold War is over still haven't come up with a punchy phrase to replace it with, though it has to be conceded that the digital revolution really has resulted in a qualitatively different, indeed unprecedented, social and political worldwide situation. I initially thought, when reading the first sentence in Part 3 of his new book ('Today, talk of cold war has been replaced with discussion of information war') that Pomerantsev might have cracked that problem, but I quickly realised that he hasn't. His father, Igor, has worked both for the American 'Radio Liberty' and for the Russian Service of the BBC as, from time to time, have I, and we both know how meticulous their editors and controllers

have been (at least since 1957) and still are in avoiding factual mistakes and misleading generalisations. How different from many of the programmes and articles put out these days by RT (the former 'Russia Today') and 'Sputnik'! Of course, some Western individuals, and also groups, also disseminate knowingly false statements and assertions – this is one important characteristic shared by Putin and Trump, but to claim that East and West are equally guilty would be absurd. Surely it would be better to talk about a 'disinformation war' than an 'information war'? Pomerantsev implies as much on the first page of his Part 4. Putin 'wasn't so much lying in the sense of trying to replace one reality with another as saying that facts don't matter', whereas Trump 'is famous for having no discernible notion of what truth or facts are, yet this has in no way been a barrier to his success'. As the inside flap suggests, 'truth has been turned on its head'. But there is no group in Russia as powerful as the American fact-checking agency PolitiFact, according to which 76 per cent of Trump's 'statements in the 2016 presidential election were "mostly false" or downright untrue, compared to 27 per cent for his rival'. We just don't know what the figure for Putin would be.

One linguistic problem arises from the widespread reluctance to distinguish clearly between 'misinformation' (misleading people unintentionally) and 'disinformation' (deliberately misleading people). Another problem, not mentioned explicitly here by Pomerantsev, is caused by the fact that Russian has two words for 'truth' and two words for 'lies'. My impression is that many, perhaps even most, Russians prefer pravda to istina (the latter is used to translate truth in the Russian bible), and do not always distinguish clearly between lozh' and vranyo (though Pomerantsev does suggest that there is a real difference between lying (serious) and fibbing (forgiveable). This only adds to the problems of functioning in a 'post-truth' world.

This very important and very depressing book suggests that the notion of inevitable 'progress' is shakier than ever, although the author doesn't add to the gloom by writing about Global Warming or suggesting that the naive concept of the 'End of History' may come true in a sense very different from its original meaning. Could we really experience the End of Everything? He writes that now, 'all versions of the future are unpromising' and that 'the great ideas that had powered collective notions of progress [are] dead'

The author takes us on a tour to the Philippines, Russia (its IRA – the Internet Research Agency, a 'troll farm' – strikes me as no less dangerous than the Irish Republican Army was, partly because 'lies are not illegal', Serbia (reverse-engineering to bring down one dictator can later be misused to strengthen a different dictator), Mexico, Estonia, Ukraine, Syria, Munich, Sheffield (a Muslim brought up there), back to Mexico and Russia (meeting the notorious Gleb Pavlovsky), South Kensington, Westminster, and then to China, Chernivtsi (are you sure which country it is currently located in?), and ending up in North London. He digresses from time to time, but perhaps these are not self-indulgent digressions to tell us something about himself and his remarkable family. En route, he also quotes the Russian-American philologist Svetlana Boym: 'The twentieth century began with utopia and ended with nostalgia'. She contrasts healthy 'reflective' nostalgia and harmful 'restorative' nostalgia. The latter, she claims, strives to rebuild lost homelands and relinquishes critical thinking in favour of emotional bonding. Her conclusion: 'Unreflective nostalgia can breed monsters'. Something for readers of this magazine to think about?



The Gloucester Murders

Jan Davies

Understanding Fred and Rose West, Leo Samuel Goatley, Kibworth, Leics., 2019, £8.30.

Defence solicitors are used to dealing with numerous cases proceeding through courts at the same time. But every now and then rarely, fortunately, for their sanity, a client comes to them whose case takes over their professional life almost completely for months, sometimes even years. Leo Goatley was the solicitor who acted for Rose West, accused of 10 murders and 4 rapes. He represented her from July 1992 through to her trial at Winchester Crown Court in 1995, then at the appeal in 1996 and in her application to the Criminal Cases Review Commission in 2001. In the Crown Court she was convicted by a jury of the murder of ten young women: Fred West committed suicide in 1995 before the trial.

Most criminal defence solicitors understand only too well how one case can extract every resource of time and emotional energy. I have been working in the criminal justice system since 1983 and I know that ideally, a case should not be totally absorbing, but most of us have had the experience of being

taken over by having to live another person's mind. I can recall the last murder case I dealt with only too well, the strange three days I spent in a police station and the following months of trying to piece together what had happened in another person's life. We have most of us been there at some time. So when Leo Goatley was speaking at the annual conference of the Criminal Law Solicitors' Association (CLSA) back in November he was speaking to a sympathetic audience. The CLSA annual conference, once described by its chairman as 'an annual booze and a whinge' is always a representative gathering of criminal hacks from all over the country.

The involvement of the police began in August 1992 when some children told a patrolling policeman that one of their friends, Louise, a thirteen-year-old girl, was being abused by her father. A search warrant was obtained and Rose was arrested and subsequently Fred, who was working as a builder, was arrested at his place of work. The children were placed by social services away from home. Leo Goatley received a call from the Duty Solicitor Call Centre (the call centre is responsible for contacting solicitors to attend police stations to represent detainees who do not have their own solicitor). The criminal case collapsed when the children refused to give evidence and when it emerged that they had been making unauthorized visits home. Likewise the care proceedings concerning the children were withdrawn but the allegations were too serious to be forgotten. It was said that their eldest daughter, Heather, was buried in the back garden. Rose maintained that Heather had left home, that she had been a difficult child, a lesbian in the days when this was not widely acceptable, and that Rose had been glad when she left but like any good mother she had given her some money. Fred, at an early stage in the investigation, admitted committing three murders but expressly exonerated Rose, saying she had known nothing about what he had done. Rose made no admissions so had to be granted bail.

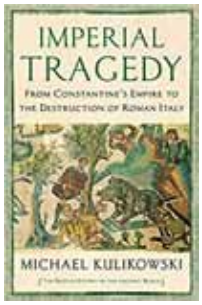
There was then a media storm. I have some experience of what this can be like. There was 'prurient and salacious reporting' feeding the public appetite for gruesome details. One journalist provided school pupils with eggs to throw at the prison van. The British public does not always agree with the presumption of innocence. It is always distressing to see a mob trying to pursue a prison van when it arrives at court with a defendant.

There is a great deal of detail in Goatley's book about the individual murders and rapes. Goatley gives a meticulous account of the circumstances that led to the death of each of the victims. He describes his client giving evidence as '…a seasoned whore, brazen and proficient in the art of lying'. Having hoodwinked men over many years, she believed she could set her own rules when she was in the witness box, ignored the advice she had received to give short answers and criticised those who had given evidence, including Anne-Marie, Fred's daughter and Rose's step-daughter.

This case is well-known among defence practitioners for the prosecution's use of the appropriate adult. Whenever the police have reason to suspect that a detainee who is to be interviewed has mental health problems or is likely to be in any way vulnerable under interrogation, they should arrange for an 'appropriate adult' to attend. For detainees aged 17 and under this person will most usually be a parent. For adult detainees it may be a social or mental health worker or someone who has volunteered to do this kind of work. Controversially, any conversation the appropriate adult may have with the detainee is not privileged. The detainee will have the impression that a conversation with the appropriate adult is confidential, but it is not. This was not widely understood until the West trial. In this particular case the appropriate adult was asked why she had maintained contact with Fred when he was remanded in prison, and a letter from the *Daily Mirror* was produced offering her a fee of £7,500 to write a book, with a further £100,000 to be paid on publication.

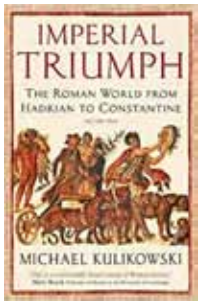
I became more than a little uneasy reading some of what Goatley says about contact with his client. He describes his visit to the cells after the verdict – often a difficult visit after a trial – and how he found her 'inconsolable, shocked and weeping' like never before. But she did not affirm her innocence, whereas he would have expected someone so condemned of such a dreadful catalogue of killing to at least want to utter a plaintive statement of their innocence. While I would agree that often I have had to listen to repeated protestations of innocence after conviction, I would not be writing any account of such a conversation in any publication. Confidential conversations with my clients stay confidential, and while I can understand Goatley's wish to share all the details of this profoundly distressing case, I found some of his disclosures disturbing.

This is an interesting book, written in language accessible to non-lawyers. It seeks to answer the question 'why', but mankind has been struggling with explaining the problem of the origin of evil for centuries and no answer can be definitive.



Decline and Fall

Alexander Adams



Michael Kulikowski, **Imperial Tragedy: From Constantine's Empire to the Destruction of Roman Italy, AD 363-568**, Profile, 2019, £25, is Professor Michael Kulikowski's conclusion of the history begun with **Imperial Triumph: The Roman World from Hadrian to Constantine, AD 138-363,** Profile, 2016, £12.99.

The first book begins with the death of Hadrian and takes us through to the death of Julius. The second follows the histories of the bifurcated empire up to the death of Byzantine Emperor Justinian I.

Imperial Triumph starts in the little documented reign of Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161), after the eventful reign of conqueror, traveller and latter-day tyrant Hadrian. There was the megalomaniac bloodthirsty Commodus (not too dissimilar to his portrayal in the film *Gladiator*), who shot off the heads of ostriches in the gladiatorial arena and renamed Rome after himself. Caracalla murdered his brother and many relatives to become emperor, and went on to engage in a hugely expensive building spree. His extravagant gesture of extending citizenship to almost every inhabitant of the Roman provinces might have been intended to curry favour; its result was to enfranchise the populace and outlaw foreign customs. This would have far-reaching consequences, not least when Christianity was adopted in AD 312. The culture of Rome was perforce the culture of the empire.

In this period the outposts of Rome became increasingly influential through the prominence of foreign generals and statesmen who sometimes rose as high as emperor. On multiple occasions emperors, both actual and aspirant, had to dash from far-flung provinces to win over the senate and populace of Rome. In later years, a number of emperors never even visited Rome during their reigns. There were co-emperors and (later) an era of a system of four simultaneous rulers. Some reigns lasted only days; the year 238 saw no less than six emperors.

Kulikowski takes the side of revisionist historians who have contested the crisis status accorded to the years of 235-285, when the title of emperor was fought for constantly, the currency was debased and parts of the empire suffered military attrition by foreign tribes and empires. History became a dense tangle of competing claimants from governors and generals, few of them residents of Rome. Henceforth, rulers would no longer be Roman senators dependent upon factional support within Rome but foreign-born career soldiers in command of armies. Kulikowski believes the instability began with the murder of Caracalla in 217 and that the much of the economic and social structure of Rome and its empire remained relatively stable during this period of purported crisis. The case made is reasonable and ultimately it is one of emphasis and interpretation.

One part of this re-examination is looking at Rome not merely as a Mediterranean society but as a Eurasian one, coming into conflict with more Easterly nations in the Caucasus following the collapse of the Parthian Empire (in Iran, Mesopotamia and the East Arabian coast) in 224, fractured by internal revolt. Kulikowski chooses to view this period in Roman history through a Eurasian lens, explaining the politics of the Parthian-Persian transition.

Imperial Tragedy opens in the aftermath of Julian's reign in which that emperor had attempted to restore pagan cults. By this time Christianity was too widespread at all social levels to be suppressed and Julian's efforts failed. The significance of this date is the advent of a formal division of the empire into a Latin-speaking West and the Greek-speaking East. From the period of Constantine onwards, emperors would be – on a semi-permanent basis – resident at Constantinople, a suitable base from which to conduct campaigns on the Eastern border. By 363, the military, economic and administrative demands of the empire had become too great for unified rule. The intellectual and cultural centre shifted to Constantinople, which proved to be stronger, richer and more defensible than Rome.

The history of Rome is rich and eventful, so there is never a dull page in these books. Roman civilisation was so complex, various and long-lasting – and we are so well informed about it – that we are forever encountering parallels with our own societies. One example is Diocletian's Edict on Maximum Prices – a futile attempt to price limit everyday goods at unreasonably low prices. It was apparently an effort to control the economy centrally and reduce the government's costs. It destabilised the economy, led to violence and inflation and was rescinded within a year, never having been universally enforced. Another example is the Council of Nicaea of 325, held between theologians and bishops including Emperor Constantine, which resulted in the government of Rome taking a set view on Christian doctrine and having to enforce not conformity of practice but conformity of

belief. This is a critical watershed because it meant that law became a matter not only of regulating action but also of conscience – something difficult to ascertain and impossible to control – and which has since become central to authoritarian theology and governance. No longer was one free to think whatever one wished, as long as public deference to custom was observed. From this time onwards, an individual could be persecuted, punished and executed for actual or purported belief. Much of late imperial history is tied into theological disputes within the Christian church.

Political division and military incompetence allowed a renegade sometime ally of Rome, Alaric the Goth, to besiege and sack the Eternal City in 410. He had been demanding payment for his troops. A relatively modest amount of treasure and grain would have saved the city the loss of much more in this humiliating defeat. At the same time, administrators in Britain were petitioning for military assistance to counter Irish and Pictish raiding. The refusal to send aid meant the effective end for Roman Britain and the beginning of the Dark Ages. The two weakened empires were unable to defend themselves and were reduced to paying off Goths and Huns to prevent invasion. Rich but feeble, the empires lacked martial fortitude and unity of polity, at a time when barbarian tribes applied the Roman lessons of centralised command and tactical acumen. Vandal occupation of North Africa (in 442) entailed that Rome no longer had access to vital tax and food imports. In the West, a blur of undistinguished junior generals became emperors in short reigns until 476, when Emperor Romulus was deposed. Alternative dates for the end of the Western Empire have been used – simply demonstrating that Rome's empire disintegrated rather than imploded, with no firm end point unarguable.

Kulikowski generally does not define common terms nor include a glossary. Terms such as consul, proconsul, emperor, caesar, augustus and other titles are not explained for lay readers, though the rest of the narrative is well suited for non-experts and academics (or students) seeking a brisk overview. On the other hand, a chapter is devoted to the bureaucratic changes to the imperial administration in the period of Diocletian and Constantine, which explains many of the social changes to Roman life in the period 293-337.

This highly readable, integrated narration of the later Roman Empire – with plentiful maps and extensive commentaries for colour plates – makes an excellent overview of the period.

FILM

Little Women

Director, Greta Gerwig

Jane Kelly

The film begins with ambitious Jo March, large and red nosed in the book, played here by fine boned Saorise Ronan with her hair a bit messy, offering her fiction to a ruthless male publisher.

'It's too long,' says the bewhiskered white patriarch. 'People want to be amused, not preached at.'

If only the film's writer/director Greta Gerwig had taken his advice; unlikely as in her universe men are beings to avoid rather than heed.

Little Women, published in 1868,was a novel extolling Christian piety and easy enough to turn into a film of secular virtue-signalling. Alcott let her characters live, for they were distinct individuals with flaws and varied motivations. Here the director won't let them be anything other than vectors for her own WOKE opinions on women. The previous five film versions of *Little Women* were just family entertainment; this one is determined to tell you what to think, using the March girls to do it.

In Meg, the unassuming elder sister, played rather unconvincingly by Emma Watson, we see that all marriages end in disappointment as her husband can barely support her. They quarrel using acrimony not in Alcott's sequel, the unfortunately named *Good Wives*. In that Meg was happy enough with piety and genteel poverty but Gerwig will not have that. Amy, played by Florence Pugh, is better used than in some of the earlier versions: the passive Joan Bennet who was pregnant in the role in 1933, or the winsome Elizabeth Taylor in 1949. She is full of energy, but it's a drawback that she looks about thirty with a gravel voice. Because of her maturity it's embarrassing when she is caned in school. She is also Gerwig's chief symbol of deliberately thwarted female talent; like Jo the writer, she is an artist of talent, 'unable to make a living', shut out from 'The house of genius' by cruel men. She has to represent, as one enthusiastic American reviewer put it: 'women's lack of civil rights, the legal constraints placed on women by marriage, the narrow range of options that American society offered to women at the time, the obstacles faced then (as now) by women in the arts.'

Alcott's Amy was based on her younger sister May who studied at the School of Fine Arts in Boston and in Paris, London and Rome, exhibiting widely. She taught an early form of art therapy in a lunatic asylum and was an influential teacher admired by John Ruskin. Hardly a life shut out. She also worked from life models, unusual for women at that time, so it was ironic when

the film shows her in Paris, copying Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* with the nude figures missing. American audiences now are apparently more prudish than the French of the 1860s.

The film is impressively constructed with a constant chopping back and forth in time. The scenes showing Beth recovering from illness in Jo's memory as she faces the reality of her death are effective and touching, but the underlying problem Gerwig has is her lack of feeling for the historic past, seeing it simply as a nasty place where women were mistreated.

In New York Jo meets Professor Bhaer, in the book an elderly, ugly, paternalistic German, here played by handsome Frenchman Louis Garrel. Alcott's Bhaer tried to stop Jo writing commercial rubbish rather than worthwhile fiction. Gerwig told an interviewer that she 'could not love a man who criticised her like that,' so here he gives his disapproval couched in affirmations worthy of a primary school teacher. He also says, 'Shakespeare was the greatest poet who ever lived because he smuggled his poetry in popular works,' comparing him to a mother who uses trickery to get her unwilling children to eat vegetables. At a stroke Gerwig has traduced Shakespeare, Alcott and the literary culture of past centuries when audiences were often happy to make an effort, or even brought learning with them. The costumes are spot on but she doesn't recognise qualitative differences in the past or have respect for them.

Crinkly Laura Dern, who has had recent success in the film *Marriage Story*, is good as Marmee. Rather than just a coping maternal figure she's shown suffering because her husband has gone off to war leaving her alone. But it's outrageous that she should be given Gerwig's words: 'I've spent the whole of my life ashamed of my country,' to which a black woman replies, 'You still should be.'

It is hardly possible to imagine an American saying that in the 19th century, or many apart from passionate Trump haters saying it now. But this isn't a film about then, it's all about now, and ideas the March girls didn't hold, and didn't need.

IN SHORT

A Game of Birds and Wolves, Simon Parkin, Sceptre, 2020, £20.

This book is the astonishing story of the crucial part played in World War II by the Western Approaches Tactical Unit, WATU for short, a small flock of Wrens, aged between seventeen and twenty-one, in the Battle of the North Atlantic. They succeeded in providing the key to the ending of the U-boats' deadly threat to the merchant convoys in the north Atlantic which alone could save Britain from starvation.

The work of the Wrens, none of whom had ever been to sea, was played out on a giant grid on the floor of a large room in Derby House, Liverpool, while the bombs rained down outside. It consisted of war games which plotted the course and positions of U-boats, through information received via the Enigma Machine at Bletchley which decoded instructions given to the German fleet. Admiral Doenitz, himself a dedicated U-boat commander, was promoted by Hitler to command the entire German Navy, and persuaded him to concentrate on building more U-boats in spite of desperate competition from the needs of the German armies under what proved eventually to be fatal pressure on the Russian front.

Parkin, an expert in war games and their technology explains the details of the work at Derby House, the crucial significance of which became clear from its results. Senior naval officers were called in to observe the games – the young Prince Philip was a junior observer – and were astonished at having to learn lessons from girls hardly out of their teens, who delivered the goods after a minimum of training. There were several visits from Churchill, who always loved new techniques, and one from the King, himself a sailor, at a time when morale could be shaken by the appalling losses being suffered by the merchant convoys from America. The King pointed to the remains of a game on the floor at Derby House and observed 'this is the key to the battle of the Atlantic'.

The final confrontation with a 'wolf pack' of thirty U-boats, as exciting as any fictional thriller, came in May 1943 in a battle in which five of them were definitely sunk, and two or three more 'missing, presumed lost'. It was reported as *Die Katastrophie.* In July alone 43 U-boats were sunk, and the wolf pack system was called off. Those in charge of Britain's food supplies could breathe again.

Many books have covered the war in the Atlantic, including a recent one by David Dimbleby, but they barely mention the WATU, and pay little or no tribute to the work of the indispensable Wrens.

Till then, they were often treated as underlings, often employed on menial tasks. Agnes Hardie, a Labour Party stalwart, declared that 'War is not a woman's job. They share the bearing and sharing of children, and should be exempt from war.' Just how lucky we were that her edict, however well meant, was not followed, this excellent story proves beyond a doubt. It is hardly surprising that the film rights to the book have been quickly snapped up by Stephen Spielberg.

John Jolliffe

Space to Create. A Writer's view of the Housing Crisis, Ben Irvine, Oldspeak Publishing, www.benirvine.co.uk, 2018, £6.99.

Roger Scruton would have called this little book 'a good whinge'; it is an engaging story of how and why Ben Irvine, a young Cambridge philosophy graduate, had to buy a house in a former mining village in Durham because of the housing shortage in the South East. He had a succession of temporary jobs like teaching and food delivery because he was an aspirant writer. His first book *Einstein and the Art of Mindful Cycling* arose from his magazine *Cycle Lifestyle* aimed at potential cyclists.

Along the way his difficulties about finding a home changed his whole outlook, bringing a rejection of the stale liberal values, which have infected the establishment and especially the young. His socialism gradually evaporated, especially when he started reading books by Scruton, Dalrymple and Pinker; I like his description of socialists as 'philosophical hypochondriacs with a political streak'. As his sister remarked, good home life, personal relationships and work should be a recipe for a happy life but for Irvine all three went wrong. Living with parents can only be a temporary solution for however much you love your family, it produces tensions. Shared houses have even more drawbacks: difficult landlords, difficult co-tenants with fixed opinions like one landlord's girlfriend who reduced everything to the concept of race. He made the mistake of being too friendly with one landlady who gave him a low rent in return for companionship, but was cut short by a philosophical conversation which enraged her because she didn't believe in original sin: 'you horrible little bastard, get out of my house'. The dialogue which led up to this outburst is philosophically didactic and dramatic although Irvine admits that he is difficult too, for he was a 'a twitching bundle of nerves' because of his problems.

If food or water were like the housing shortage, an emergency would have been declared. The crisis is mainly caused by the effects of our huge population increase which both Conservative and Labour politicians refuse to discuss. The annual net migration in 1998 soared above 100,000 and then stayed above that figure for two decades, peaking at 336,000 in 2015. We should have built twenty new cities to keep pace. Instead house building has declined and the cardinal economic law of supply and demand ignored. Another culprit is the planning system, dating from the post-war socialist reforms when slums which could have been rescued were bulldozed and replaced by ugly towers in the sky, physically and spiritually destroying communities. Other problems include the 'green belt', and the growth in welfare benefits, particularly the local housing allowance which lets an Afghan family live in a London mansion for £3,000 a week of public money.

We must have a proper national debate; silencing the truth about population growth and other urgent problems illustrates Einstein's definition of insanity: 'doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result'. If Boris Johnson shirks these problems at the eleventh hour we are finished.

Merrie Cave

The

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The
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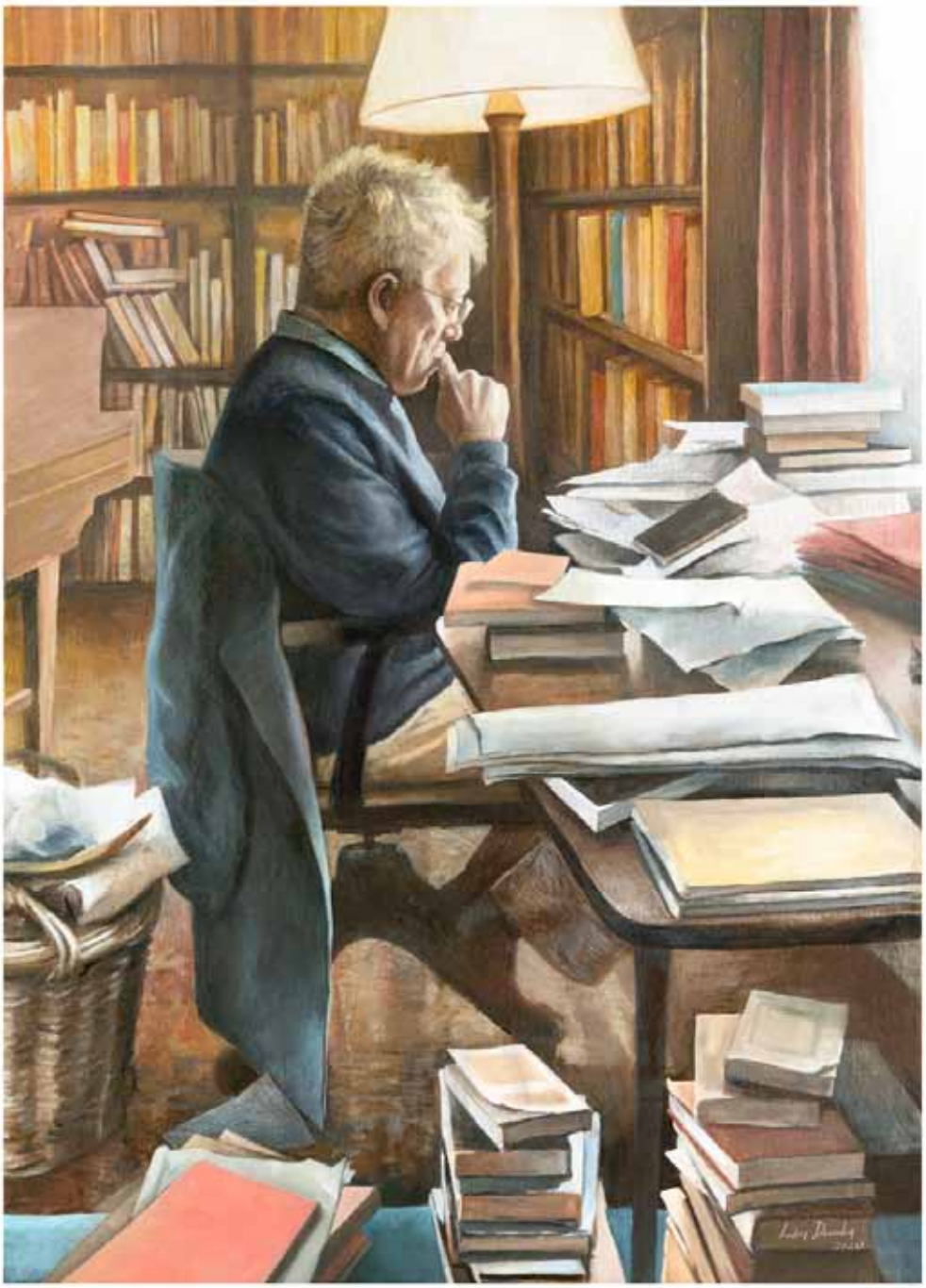
The Conservative Philosopher Sir Roger Scruton

at his desk

Lindsey Dearnley



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