The

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Absolutely the wrong opinion on everything

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The BBC has just appointed its fourth Muslim editor of religious broadcasting Aleem Maqbool. Of the last people in charge of religious broadcasting plus a commissioning editor, three were Muslims and one came from a Muslim family. This is in a country where 59 per cent of the population say they are Christians.

It means that 'difficult' news stories about the continuing mass slaughter of Christians by Islamist fanatics in the Middle East, or Islam's teaching on homosexuality, that it is against the will of God and merits death, will never be discussed on the BBC. Instead, a sanitised version of the faith will be offered; that Muslims are just like us – peaceful people going about their lives while worshiping their particular God. Most of them are, but when Islamist fanatics kill Christians difficult questions such as whether the killers draw any justification from the Koran and what Muslims are doing about it will not be merely downplayed, they will not be asked.

It is an example of the moral control of TV; a control that extends far beyond Islam. Until very recently the public found racially mixed marriages and partnerships difficult to accept. On no authority TV chiefs set out to change it. The most adverts of couples now show those of different race, the male partner usually being black. The message? Mixed marriages are normal, good and we should all aspire to them. Gay couples are also being normalised, and, it can't be long off, so will transgender partnerships. A good thing you may say, and you may be right, it's wrong to ignore minorities, but what does this message say about the huge majority of white men – or women? Do we exist?

It was during the Covid Pandemic we first became aware of the expertise available to authority and business when they want to persuade people unconsciously to change their minds without them knowing they have. To sell its vaccine policy, the government set up what it described as *An Independent Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B) SPI-B to provide behavioural science advice aimed at anticipating and helping people adhere to interventions recommended by medical or epidemiological experts*. In short 'planned news'. Did you know of its existence?

White males alternating with white females still deliver the news but they are giving way to young women, both black and white, then black men, followed by mixed race, often gay males. Sports news, once the exclusive province of white males, is now delivered by women. If an expert has to be interviewed, a woman is preferred, especially if she has the title 'professor'. It emphasises the progress women have made in academia. If an engineer is wanted, a woman in a hard hat signifies the virtues of independence from motherhood.

Politicians understand they no longer appear on TV merely to defend government policy but have to set it in this moral agenda. Interviewers will set trap questions for them to test their soundness on gay issues, female rights, equality, climate change, race and immigration. On railways for example it might be how many female high speed train drivers are there and can they declare their sexuality. A slip of the tongue, an off the cuff remark, worse a joke, means the end of your career.

Until the late 19th century and a little way into the 20th, we went to church to learn how to behave. Now we switch on our TVs to learn of the new sin of racism, the superiority of women over men, the guilt of the white man, the sacred nature of homosexuality, and the tragedy of the transgender martyrs. Sinners are routinely paraded on set, and to the distant howls of Twitter, tarred, feathered and exiled. More powerful than any church, with an altar in every home, the main stream media, sold out to government and Big Pharma, grows more corrupt and lying by the day. It surely awaits its own horrendous nemesis, a right-wing fanatic backed by a population who have become sick of unpalatable messages stuffed down their throats. Who says the Devil does not go up and down the earth seeking whom he may devour?

Why You can't see your GP, Immigration and the NHS

ANON

Thirty years ago I started working as a GP in a South Coast town. Much has changed since then, just as it has in many other parts of the country. Only now, having relinquished my registration and having left the system am I able to talk about what I have seen over the years.

The effects of immigration were felt gradually at first, accelerating exponentially and involving ever more varied nationalities appearing on our patient registers until 30 years on, appointment lists on a given day could have more non-British names on them than British ones.

Alerts now pop up on the computer screen when viewing the records of any young female patient saying 'Insert smart card to activate the National Female Genital Mutilation warning system' something that could never have been imagined years ago. The alerts of course pop up without any reference to the nationality or ethnicity of the patient. Funny how there is no alert to activate the non-existent 'Grooming gang victim warning system'.

It was the Romanians who stood out at first, booking many 'urgent' appointments to see the doctors; what did the urgent problem often turn out to be? They wanted the doctors to write to the council asking them to supply them with a larger house. Knowing full well that a Romanian with 5 children who had just arrived in the UK would be jumped in front of a local person with 2 children, let alone the knowledge that many local people had medical need of these precious appointment slots, it was difficult to keep my thoughts to myself during such encounters.

As for single local men, many with significant health problems, they didn't stand a hope of getting housed by the council and they knew it, some living in their cars on the sea front, others in tents in scrubland behind the beaches where dinghies now land disgorging their new arrivals who will of course be instantly given warm accommodation and food.

You are an unemployable Romanian who has just arrived in the UK last week with a child or elderly relative who has a complicated disease that needs referral to London specialists and multiple expensive appointments? Of course you are welcome here no questions asked. A letter to the council asking for an especially big adapted house to help you cope with looking after them, of course! (Invariably they would be allocated a house by the council 'on the basis of need' that a local applicant could only dream of). You are an unemployable African just arrived in the UK who has HIV, and you require expensive treatment including multiple referrals to London specialists with transport provided to the appointments, yes sure, all are welcome to this country, help yourselves to whatever we offer especially 'our' NHS.

Yes, the EU allowed freedom of movement for sure. Remember how it was sold, freedom of movement so that, for example, German or French people could work here and we could work there. I can recall only ever seeing one one such gainfully employed French patient in my entire career, to counter the very many unemployed or minimally employed Romanians and other Eastern Europeans who turned up with long lists of demands, both medical and social. Apparently it was 'cultural' that the Romanians all demanded and usually got specialist hospital referrals for even minor problems, rather than to take the word of what a GP said.

Then there was language, many an appointment had to be given by reception to callers who rang the surgery not able to speak English, simply because they could not be understood on the telephone, the only way to find out if their problem merited one of our precious appointments being to give them one. Once they turned up, one often had to turn on the speaker phone option and ring 'language line' a NHS interpretation service that doubled the length of a consultation; interpreters for 240 languages can be provided it is proudly claimed on the website. Goodness knows how much this costs the NHS, it certainly provides a nice little earner for the various people, presumably immigrants themselves, who it employs to speak the 240 languages. What other country I wonder provides a 'free' interpretation

service in its health system for 240 different languages?

Even with interpreters the language issue can still make consultations almost impossible. One time I carried out consultation only to find 20 Minutes in, that the person who I thought had been the patient was in fact referring to his relative siting across the room, meaning I had to effectively start all over again. I dared to express my frustration at all the time wasted by this in writing, which led me to be disciplined and 'sent for training' for my sins.

Some useful insights come though, from being privy to the inside world of the new arrivals. Visiting their houses, one might as well have been abroad, the television is tuned to a foreign station speaking a foreign language, as are all in the house which is often decorated with strange exotic artefacts. I was also able to hear first-hand how racism is allowed if it is the 'correct' direction, for example a casual comment from an 'Asian' (in the British not US sense of the word) to me about how he had attempted to obtain a medicine he shouldn't have been allowed to have from a pharmacist, he expressed extreme surprise that 'the pharmacist was Asian but he still wouldn't let me have it' which I felt said more about how things work in the real world that any politician could have done.

Then there are the potentially harmful issues, such as the British patients who came to see me after their hospital appointments who said they couldn't understand what the (non-native English speaking) hospital doctor was saying, and the times I had telephoned the hospital doctors myself about my patients and had the same problem.

We should be training many more of our own doctors and nurses not relying on those from overseas, many coming from countries who need their services more than we do. I had the annual alumni magazine last month from my old University, it listed this year's new students, I was sad to see that only less than half the names on the list had 'English' names. It seems the natives are outnumbered in the medical schools now as well as in their capital city.

As I write this, dinghies full of new arrivals land almost daily. Each of the new 'children' landing ends up with social workers and a 'team' looking after them and gets a lengthy multi-disciplinary assessment taking many hours. I was frequently seeing 20–30-page reports from health examinations of newly arrived 'children' in which there was a list of things for the GP and social workers to do. Not just fast tracks to healthcare but it was also insisted upon that they see a dentist for regular check-ups. Health advantages and extra care the average British child could only dream of.

Of course, the changes have not all been down to immigration. Don't even get me started on the issues of a patient coming in saying they believed they were the wrong gender. Woe betide anyone who dared to suggest to such a patient that they might be mistaken, that was definitely a no no. It was a quite a while before the computer systems caught up with the fact that 'men' might need cervical smears or be pregnant, leading to much confusion and possible risks to health for the sake of political correctness.

So, the end? I had had enough and made what in retrospect was a very well-timed decision to quit just two months before anyone had ever heard of Wuhan and its virology institute. When the calls for help from the retired came, I thought I would volunteer to help with vaccinations, only to be met by a requirement to do 22 training courses before I could be considered, amongst which were 'courses' on 'Diversity and Equality' and 'Preventing Radicalisation'. Some of the questions in the 'exams' required to pass these courses were astounding even to me; For example to pass the multiple choice online exams I would have to have said that if a midwife was visiting the house of a new mother and saw a 'right wing political party leaflet' on the living room table she ought to report it to social services or her manager so that action could be taken, or that a 'right wing extremist' was far more likely to blow up a pop concert than a follower of Islam, or that it was only because of racist abuse directed against him that a follower of Islam might wish to cause harm to others. Quite what all this had to do with giving a COVID immunisation I didn't quite know, so instead of giving the 'wrong' answers to the exams I contributed to the cause by doing admin work for my old and other surgeries instead.

As for the coastal town? It is now less and less the town I knew, not a London or Birmingham yet, but in due course it will be. As I write this, I am now in another town hundreds of miles away which is still, for the moment, 'British', it will not remain so for long so I am enjoying it while it still is. Does any politician ever mention that the NHS isn't coping because it was never envisaged it would have to deal with so many incoming people? Of course not, but this is the never to be spoken of reality 'on the ground'.

Anon

One Nation

Ralph Berry

Thesis: 'One Nation', the poster-value of the Conservative Party, has come under growing pressure of recent years and is now buckling under the strain. Originally devised by Disraeli, 'One Nation' was re-launched by a group of progressive Tory MPs in 1950. Generally reckoned as the most talented intake of its era, they included Reginald Maudling, Enoch Powell, Iain Macleod, and Edward Heath. In a society that had fought and won the war, they recommended policies of social cohesion based on the social revolution of Labour's victory of 1945.

But that was before the great immigration waves that came to Britain after 1950. Front-line politicians seldom invoke the term: perhaps the last was Theresa May, who in her first speech as Prime Minister (2016) spoke of herself as 'a one-nation conservative'. 'One Nation' remains embedded in the official doctrine of the Conservative Party, in a country that is now nothing like as homogeneous as in the past. The old doctrine has to compete implausibly with new values, 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity', before which all parties genuflect.

The political reality today is the unbreakable alliance of Labour and the Muslim vote. The big city vote goes regularly to Labour, and two of its manifestations are noteworthy. Bristol West in the general election of 2019 recorded a vote of 47,028, the biggest vote in any constituency. The population of Bristol West is heavily, densely Somalian, and its MP, Thangham Debbonaire, was returned with a majority of over 28,000. What immortal hand or eye plucked the teeming masses from Africa's shores and resettled them in the no less teeming shores of Bristol West? That constituency is hardly a showcase of traditional British values. It is vehemently opposed to Brexit; the referendum vote in 2016 went overwhelmingly to Remain, the largest such vote in the country. Bristol is famous for its passionate remembrance of the slave trade, and a statue of a past notable finished up in the harbour under the approving gaze of the police. They were against the slave trade too.

Until the general election of 2010 Tower Hamlets was represented by an elderly white man. On his retirement, his place was filled by a council officer Apsana Begum. She survived an investigation into whether she had wrongly acquired a council flat worth £330,000, and was cleared of housing fraud. The population of Tower Hamlets is overwhelmingly Bangladeshi and its voting record is implacably Labour; they gave unwavering support to Mohammad Lutfur Rahman, the Council leader. In 2015 he was found by the Election Court to be 'personally guilty' of 'illegal or corrupt practices' and was removed from office. The Muslim vote goes 85 per cent to Labour, and no change can be expected there. That same vote is largely 'wasted', since it piles up huge majorities in the big cities. However, the question looms of the continued allegiance of the white working class to Labour. We do not know if the 'red wall' of ex-Labour constituencies that went over to the Tories in the 2019 general election is a permanent feature of the scene, but it remains a strong, perhaps urgent possibility. In which case Labour would become effectively known and branded as the Muslim Party, with political consequences beyond calculation.

The electoral map is being redrawn, and this corresponds to other realities. 'Sharia is inevitable' said Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury. He does not suggest a fight to the death for the Anglican Church, and nor do its current leaders. Then there is the identity of the churches themselves. 'The conversion of churches into mosques, potentially a radical reconfiguring of our urban geography, has yet to receive any serious attention.' (Tanjil Rashid, 'Common Prayer', *Spectator* 11 December 2021) With the electoral map changes are now coming to the architectural landscape.

The State, whose guiding hand can be seen in many apparently innocent ways, is responsible for the distortions of State control as seen in TV ads. A viewer who knew nothing else might leap – athletically – to the conclusion that the British population was composed 50 per cent of mixed race, since they dominate the scenes of married couples and social groups. All are happy and genial. The playbook takes its inspiration directly from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), in which children are instructed through sleep teaching, or 'hypnopedia'. For Huxley and his era the prime lesson was 'Elementary Class Consciousness'. The thrust of hypnopedia has now been transferred to TV ads, which have a comparable effect on the mind with their primitive account of society. Today's ads reverse the Huxley message, for they portray a total

absence of class consciousness. In our age, social class is visible only in the repeat TV dramas of the past (*Poirot, Rumpole of the Bailey,* the earlier not the later P D James) and sitcoms such as *To The Manor Born* (impossible today). This is now evident in the politically correct TV ads which have taken over the small screen.

They come at a cost. A notable feature is the dearth of great TV ads, which are well remembered. Ridley Scott's career was launched with his 'Boy on a Bike' Hovis ad. The wit of the Cinzano ads, with Joan Collins and Leonard Rossiter, has no parallel today, nor has 'Just one Cornetto!' Great ads, which often had a class context, have been driven out by an insipid devotion to the nuclear mixed race family, which is now the approved commercial model. By definition, this approach excludes social class, as does the Estuary English of the speakers. Nothing today lingers in the memory – it might offend someone in our ultra-sensitive land, hence our wearing of moral eye-shades. Britain is a country swimming in sensitivity, drowning in sensitivity.

But we are where we are. The Government, assuming the regalia of the State, strives to make us believe that we are all one people. We are not. I do not expect the 2021 Census to throw much light upon the national predicament; the Government well understands that the Census must serve the purpose of the Censor, which is to withhold information. It will be most interesting to find the answer to the Census question, 'Do you consider yourself to be British or English?' The future will belong to the recognition of hard facts, and the social adjustments that are necessary. We cannot 'follow an antique drum'. Once a serviceable bromide, 'One Nation' is now an oxymoron.

Ralph Berry was a University lecturer who has written widely on Shakespeare and the theatre.

Putin the Terrible versus Biden the Weak

ALISTAIR MILLER

I once shared an evening in a flat in Prague with an old Russian lady. Her father-in-law was Stalin's foreign minister Litvinov. I asked her what Stalin was like. She replied that he had one leg shorter than the other, and a great sense of humour. And that was that. But it was when we got onto literature that the connection was made. I had just been reading Chekhov's short stories (the old Constance Garnett translation) and of course she knew them all. Suddenly we inhabited the same human space, and national differences were dissolved.

Vladimir Putin is not a nice man. But it is fatuous to judge Russian leaders by the standards of Western liberalism. Better to judge Russia's latest strongman by comparison with Stalin, Lenin, the Tsars, Peter the Great, and Catherine the Great. Compared with Ivan the Terrible, Putin would surely rank as a pussycat. But whatever we think of Putin, we should remember that Putin is not Russia, and Russia is more than Putin. Above all, we should remember that Russians regard themselves as a great nation destined for great things, every much as the Americans, or the Chinese, or the French, or, once upon a time, the British.

True, Russia is an economic basket case, with a GDP less than Britain's. But is GDP the sole measure of a country's power or greatness? The fact remains that, judged by land mass, population, and natural resources, Russia is Europe's dominant power. It is also Europe's dominant military power, with a stockpile of 1600 nuclear warheads and the means to deliver them. Militarily speaking, it is Western Europe that is the basket case.

Moreover, are we so sure that the process of civilizational deconstruction now underway in the Western liberal democracies, led by America, and fuelled by mass immigration, is indicative of the superiority of our system? The paradox of liberalism is that it contains the seeds of its own destruction. Fixated by the need to welcome 'the other', denuded of the values and shared loyalties that would give it a sense of purpose, liberal societies disintegrate into an indulgent amoebic mush spiced up with digital media and pornography.

Some of us perhaps even share a secret admiration for Putin – his patriotism, his love of his own country and its Christian civilization, his sense of history and destiny, his traditional values – as we self-immolate our own nation and its culture on the altar of transgendered multiculturalism. We must not go too far down this line of thought. Hitler and Stalin were also men of destiny. But take away a nation's sense of self-belief and what is left? As the historian Arthur Bryant once wrote, 'A nation that loses its past has no future. For men's deepest desires spring from their own inherited experience.'

We might even wonder whether it is Russia, not America, that is now the guardian of Western civilization. Russia produced Stalin, but it also produced the Russian novel and the Russian ballet, the greatest pianists and chess grand masters. Chess is the national pastime. Educated Russians read literature – like my old Russian companion. How do Americans spend their day? Perhaps, faced with the threats of China and militant Islam, we would do better to consider the Russians our natural allies.

Unfortunately, for Ukrainians, Putin's peculiar sense of Russia's destiny includes the Ukraine. In his essay *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, Putin argues that Russia and the Ukraine share the same 'historical and spiritual space'; that the Russians and Ukrainians are, in fact, one people. This space is no less than Mother Russia. For Russians, Kiev remains the 'mother of Russian cities', founded by the semi-mythical Prince Oleg, the Russian equivalent of King Arthur. It is also the cradle of Russian Orthodox Christianity, where Vladimir, Grand Prince of Kiev, was baptised a Christian by missionaries from Constantinople.

However, with Russia poised to invade the Ukraine, all our thoughts must be with the people of the Ukraine preparing to defend their homeland. Putin's pretext for invasion (that various staged explosions in the East, and the staged bussing out of a few hundred civilians to Russia, all detailed in advance by American intelligence, constitute Ukrainian aggression) reminds us of Hitler's pretext for invading Poland in 1939, when German soldiers dressed in Polish uniforms crossed the border in front of conveniently located German film cameras. Just as Hitler accused the Poles of ethnic cleansing of Germans living in Poland, Putin accuses the Ukrainians of genocide against ethnic Russians. It is crude beyond belief.

The Ukrainians themselves have little reason to love the Russians who, courtesy of Stalin, inflicted a real genocide on them in the form of the Holodomor, the terrible famine of 1932-3, in which an estimated 10 million are thought to have perished, directly and indirectly.

Nevertheless, there is a Russian side to the story. The Ukraine is not just 'a faraway country of which we know nothing'. Its history and culture are inextricably bound up with those of Russia. Kiev is the spiritual home of Russian orthodox Christianity, the mother city of the Eastern Slavs, founded by the semi-mythical Prince Oleg. Like most Russians, Putin himself believes that the Russians and Ukrainians are one people sharing the same 'historical and spiritual space', the motherland, the 'Mother Russia' beloved of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

Like it or not, the Russians are suspicious of the West. However unjustified, they fear encirclement and they fear NATO. Perhaps it is the legacy of the Cold War. Perhaps Germany's murderous invasion of Russia in 1941, which lives on in the Russian psyche, has something to do with it.

For all these reasons, the prospect of NATO expanding to incorporate the Ukraine, with American missiles stationed right on the Russian border, is the ultimate provocation. The equivalent would be something like the people of Hawaii or a Spanish-speaking majority in Texas declaring independence and then opting to form a military alliance with Russia. The stationing of Russian missiles in Cuba, just off the American coast, would, one suspects, go down no better with the Americans now than it did in 1962.

Of course, it is Russian aggression. Equally, we asked for it. The tragic victims are the Ukrainians.

Alistair Miller is a teacher.

No better than wearing a rabbit's foot around your neck?

Bernard Reed

Madrid, Autumn 2021. First business trip in months. Coffee *al fresco*. I see an imposing nun ushering a line of schoolchildren. Unlike device-distracted English children, they were silent and orderly. As they drew closer, it hit me. Each was muzzled with a grey mask. 'Another example of Covid insanity'. Adults had smothered their giggly, care-free childhood believing it could tackle virus spread. 'Never in Britain', I thought.

Yet in January 2022, the Department for Education ordered a back-to-school bonus for children in England: facemasks for the classroom. In theory they were optional, but thanks to Covid diktats being met with robotic compliance, guidance quickly gains the effect of law. Like many of the Government's Covid-decisions, the D of E's policy lacked any supporting quality evidence. We can hope all Covid restrictions will fall by the wayside as claimed. But we owe it to our children to ensure no Government can ever again act in this irrational and harmful way.

Prevailing opinion tells us there is scientific consensus: that face coverings are effective at slowing the rate of transmission. Not so; despite Number 10's much-repeated and dishonestly simplistic 'following the science' slogan. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) admits there is no evidence of indiscriminate masking preventing infection. Early on, public health officials also told us masks were of little benefit – and may well increase transmission. Yet laws mandating their use followed: first on public transport and then in various indoor settings. The type of mask was not specified: any material would do. Failure to comply could see you fined.

Had there been a breakthrough study? Was the original long-established position now contradicted? Not at all. Rather, policymakers were attracted by another purpose. The WHO's Director General said mask wearing sent a powerful message that we're 'all in this together'. Not so much curbing transmission, as a tool for controlling public behaviour. State-endorsed collectivism. *Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz*: the common, before the individual, good. The mid-twentieth Century shows us where this can lead.

Given the opaque practices of SAGE, we may never know the true reason behind the U-turn on masks. But they have had a major psychological effect on society. Many now don a mask with the same unconscious programming that leads them to click on a seatbelt. But whereas one saves lives, the other is akin to carrying around a severed rabbit's foot in the hope of winning the lottery. Without strict conditions on type and use, masks are no more than a talisman.

In the report setting out the evidence for the D of E's policy, a compelling introduction articulated how masks could curb infection in schools. But the body of the report makes clear this was gilding the lily. Their own observational studies found no statistical difference in absenteeism in schools with mask mandates, versus those without. Yet the authors gleefully asserted that masks 'can be a visible outward signal of safety behaviour and a reminder' of virus risks.

The policy targeted a section of society, children, at infinitesimal risk from Covid. Most children experience no symptoms and for those that do, they are mild. Any intervention that interferes with children's lives, particularly their education, must be viewed in this context.

Masks have been shown to affect children's health, cognition, alertness and wellbeing adversely. Children exempt from mask-wearing can also suffer psychological implications; such is the proselytising environment that schools have become in pushing insistence on their use. This is to say nothing of the difficulties for children with disabilities and special educational needs; not least for lip-readers.

Many teachers considered masks to be an 'important safety measure'. Teaching unions have been vocal critics of the Government's pandemic handling, suggesting its members are at extreme risk given their close contact with children. Yet

teachers are no more vulnerable than any other workers. Children are not super-spreaders. Yet unions doggedly pressed for harsher measures, including closing schools, or in union Newspeak: 'engines for virus transmission'.

Not since the Second World War has education been so disrupted. Children have been forced to stay at home, denied sports and play, and to face online learning isolated from their friends. Exams have been severely disrupted, hampering prospects for both higher education and employment. Many children endured lockdowns in overcrowded households where stressed parents battled with their own pandemic challenges, while providing what care and attention they could. For some vulnerable children, whose only source of a nutritious meal and responsible adult care is school, life must have been almost unbearable.

During one lockdown, a British children's hospital saw a fifteen-fold increase in incidents of suspected abusive head trauma. Another study found students made little or no progress while learning from home. Learning losses were most pronounced in students from disadvantaged homes. Physical and sexual abuse, obesity, drug and alcohol misuse, depression and suicide are all preventable maladies that have increased among children during Covid. The impact on our youth will be long-term, for some, lifelong.

The view is growing, and held also by reputable (though scandalously censored) scientists, that history will judge the UK's handling of this pandemic as one of the greatest public health policy disasters of all time. Elected politicians have abrogated much responsibility to unelected, myopic technocrats. Illogical and harmful policies have been implemented merely for political, point-scoring appeasement. This has come at huge cost to society, most notably, to our children. Children have the right to learn, to socialise, to run free without being muzzled and smothered. It is the job of their elders to protect that right.

It must never be allowed to happen again.

Bernard Reed is a risk management consultant.

The village, the dear old inn, so ancient, clean and free from sin

Bill Hartley

The heating oil at the pub ran out several weeks ago. According to the licensee it's either oil or beer; he can't afford both. Apparently, his credit isn't so good. The regulars suspect that having got away with it thus far he assumes they'll survive until the spring. Alternative heating consists of an open fire fuelled by whatever a local joiner drops off, augmented by an electric radiator. The latter is the sort of device where 'radiator' means the heat can only be felt about six inches from the source.

Peruse the leisure supplement of a weekend newspaper and there are often features about cosy country pubs. The descriptions will be familiar: thatched roof – stone built – whitewashed walls. The featured establishment often comes with a picture depicting a cosy bar or dining room, with a sample menu prepared by an 'award winning' chef. Elsewhere the reality can be somewhat different. In this small corner of North Yorkshire and South Durham, nine pubs have closed within the last decade, all within a ten-minute

drive of the place mentioned above. Covid has pushed some over the edge but there are other factors at work.

The pub of which I write was originally a tied house run by husband-and-wife tenants. Those with a long memory will recall that it was the government of John Major which set out to 'reform' the licensed trade and caused breweries to sell off some of their properties. Many including this one were bought up by Pubcos, memorably described in the financial press as 'property companies which sell beer'. There has been no investment for years, which is immediately apparent on entering the place. It's a time capsule whose last makeover can be dated by the fireplace, which is of a rough stone design popular in the '70s and influenced by the ranch house from the TV show *Bonanza*. Since then, it seems even a change of décor would have been considered an extravagance by the company. On one occasion the landlady notified the owners that the roof needed attention. A few days later two men turned up and asked if she had a ladder.

Following the death of her husband the place became less of a business, more a way of life for the landlady. Some weeks she wasn't even able to draw a wage from the place. Then after her demise it briefly fell into the hands of a character that specialised in taking on failing pubs to squeeze out what he could. He put a couple of bar staff in the place but otherwise remained invisible. Then the arrival of bailiffs explained everything.

That might have been it, the final stage before the windows were boarded up but step forward an unlikely saviour in the form of a Polish man, who had left his homeland some years ago to work in the hotel trade. He doesn't actually live in the pub; instead, he has a cottage nearby. This has prompted much speculation among the locals about the state of the tenant accommodation. No-one has actually ventured upstairs to check and potential buyers stopped coming round a long time ago. Rather mysteriously the Pubco seems to have given up on trying to sell the place. There may be some impediments; for example, those with a detailed knowledge of the building would say that an obvious drawback is a cellar prone to flooding in wet weather. Like the roof, this was reported to the company during the landlady's lifetime. Rather than trying to resolve the problem their response was to install a pump, designed to start automatically when the water rose to a certain level, except it didn't always work. Imagine a seventy something woman with a torch, descending into a dark cellar to reconnect a hose to the pump, which was sometimes her task after a heavy downpour. Interestingly it does seem to have been a concern of sorts for the owners. The last time a workman entered the building it was to attach a padlock and hasp to the cellar door. Out of sight out of mind seems to be their preferred solution; as if a potential buyer wouldn't ask what was on the other side.

The viability of some village pubs has been a problem for years. Part of this is the changing demographics. Here commuters and retirees make up the bulk of the population. Neither group uses the pub. Consequently, the regulars consist of a small group of working-class drinkers, providing a shrinking redoubt for all that is politically incorrect. Anyone with a tendency to feel 'unsafe' would be advised to keep clear. About the only thing which prompts hostility is to say something favourable about Russia within the hearing of the licensee. Naturally this is done deliberately to provoke a response. Customers stand with empty glasses until he has finished a tirade. The assorted roofers, lorry drivers and plumbers have learnt a great deal about Eastern European affairs, whether they want to or not.

Gradually the pub has evolved into a sort of unofficial collective with the licensee doing the paperwork and, when he has the money, ordering the beer. Others step in using their skills to keep the place functioning. A plumber might carry out urgent remedial work in the toilets; the aforementioned joiner provides fuel and others, unsolicited advice. On one occasion this went too far when a customer in the plant hire business became rather patronising. The licensee lost patience and pointed out that he possessed a master's degree from the University of Szczecin. In an instant he was identified as the best educated person in the pub.

What was once the hub of a community now clings on as an outpost for the residual working class clientele. The place is viewed with indifference by the majority who mostly seem to live their lives behind closed doors. It's likely the decline will be permanent and if so then the next step is likely to be an application to remove the license, followed by sale as a private house. Closures in the district will then have reached double figures.

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The Pope's Pet Hates

Mary Sydney

A Catholic friend said she wouldn't allow her children to have pets as they might 'distract their affection away from people'. I disagreed but recognised that she was expressing a cultural view. I'd noticed that in Catholic and Orthodox countries people seemed friendlier to each other, but not so good with animals. In Spain I attended a bull fight which made me feel sick, in Ireland I saw dogs tied up outside in freezing rain. In 2004 at the time of the Olympics in Athens I participated in a demonstration outside the Greek embassy in London, after stray animals in Syntagma Square were poisoned because the Greeks believed that visitors wouldn't want to see them. It was tourists who'd been keeping them alive.

I waasn't surprised by the recent comments from Argentinian Pope Francis. In 2014 he told an Italian newspaper that people were favouring 'easier bonds' with pets rather than forming the more complex bonds needed with children. Perhaps this is a criticism of current levels of maturity. He castigated 'selfish' couples who 'substitute dogs for children', who, he said, were 'taking away our humanity'. That could be a reference to the declining western birth-rate. He mentioned the amount spent on petfood, £2.9 billion in the UK alone, rather than on hungry children. The pet care industry is worth £8 billion, up from £2.9 billion in 2005. Half of that is in medical bills, pet insurance is now almost mandatory as vets start to rival dentists, energy providers and lawyers for greed. The rather inappropriately named Francis makes some valid points, but what he really wants to say about modern life remains strangely nebulous, perhaps because he is also a committed socialist.

His 2013 apostolic letter attacked the idea that reducing tax on high earners can stimulate investment as a 'crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralised workings of the prevailing economic system'. His plea for reduced capitalism called for 'structural transformation' that would 'restore to the poor what belongs to them', apparently without economic growth; the great conundrum of socialism everywhere. His 2015 encyclical implied that wealth creation automatically meant oppression of the poor.

His suspicion of pets has a long pedigree on the hard-left. In the 1950s Chairman Mao declared them a bourgeois affectation that used up food and medicine while peasants starved. I heard variations of that argument when I was a left-wing student. Dogs were banned in Beijing until 1990. By 2021 a million were registered by members of the burgeoning middle-class who want a dog along with their car and flat screen TV, but a recent message in *The People's Daily* stated that unlike decadent Westerners, Chinese people had only ever kept dogs for hunting or as food. It decried the 'dog infestation' in cities. In Beijing there's a new ban on dogs taller than fourteen inches, whilst in Shanghai, if a neighbour decides they don't like your mutt it can be removed by the state. A notice has been posted around high-rise blocks warning: 'Deal with it on your own, or else the committee will organize people to enter your home and club the dog to death'. During the Russian revolution, a mainly rural population didn't keep pets but the type of urbanites who did were exterminated or left. When I lived in communist Poland in the 1970s, I never saw any pet food for sale.

The Pope is also a bit of a tree if not a dog hugger; recently attacking, the 'Mentality of profit at any price

with no concern for the destruction of nature'. Many climate activists do not like pets either. They may have a point about agricultural land twice the size of the UK now being used globally to produce cat food. In 1975, philosopher Peter Singer coined the term 'Animal Liberation', for a social movement that proposes to free animals from human oppression. That's now an umbrella term for 'animal welfare', 'animal rights', and 'animal abolitionism'. The first promotes what activists see as a 'paternalistic' model of human-animal affairs; that people owe a duty of kindness to animals even if they still kill them for food. Will Kymlicka and Sue Donaldson argued in their 2011 book *Zoopolis*, that domestic and semi-wild animals such as squirrels and raccoons should be granted limited citizenship rights in order to ensure their well-being. The result would be a cooperative community ensuring that all creatures perform fulfilling work with adequate leisure time for self-development. 'Abolitionism' means the end of all ownership of animals for food, clothing, medical research, transplants, guide-dogs and pets. That believes that if animals are bred to be dependent on humans the relationship is flawed because of the difference in power. In a sort of Stockholm syndrome, animals are forced to love their owners in order to get affection and food, neglecting their animal nature to do so. Given a vote on it, as they soon might be, your cat would rather be out in the cold desperately hunting for a rodent lunch and squirrels would prefer to reject all those seductive bird-feeders, if that meant parity of power.

That view is shared by the animal rights activist groups such as PETA who oppose keeping pets. Their website states that companion animals lead, 'Lives restricted to human homes where they must obey commands and can only eat, drink and even urinate when humans allow them to'. Its list of common 'mistreatments' includes 'scolding any creature to get off the furniture or hurry up on its walk'. They seem to have missed many pets' ability to be completely deaf to their owners; particularly, 'get off the sofa, come in', and 'please eat that up'.

The Pope is chiefly interesting for what he didn't say. He could have genuinely supported the family by emphasising Christian marriage, even the responsibility of men to support their children. That is almost unthinkable in this woke climate; amongst the constant reports about food banks, with mothers claiming to go hungry rather than their offspring, reporters never ask, where is the father of those children?

The term 'mother' once sacred in the image of Mary, is being gradually replaced by 'care-giver'. The Biden administration, great fans of this pope, recently tried to replace, 'Mothers' with 'Birthing People', in their maternal health guidance. Francis could have commented on the deleterious effect of radical feminism on children put into nurseries while their mothers work full time. It's a socialist shibboleth that women must work, even in boring, mundane jobs. If a Pope suggested that women who want to, could be paid to stay at home with their little ones, he would probably be called a 'fascist'.

The left is suspicious of the family particularly because of the bond between mother and child. Francis might have asserted the effects of 'Attachment Disorder', adult insecurity and mental illness, caused by separating infants from their mothers, established by psychologists John Bowlby after he studied children in nurseries during the war, by David Winnicott and Harry Harlow in the US who observed monkeys and primates. Their ideas are now rejected by sociologists and 'feminist scholars', as inherently conservative.

A 2013 feature in *The Guardian* stated that 'Parenting manuals based on Bowlby's work prioritise the bond between mother and child, side-line the father and keep women away from work.' It explained that 'Widespread criticism of attachment theory is that it constructs biological imperatives and is "politically retrograde".' A pope doctrinally bound to biological determinism as he officially is, might favour theories which, as *The Guardian* piece put it, 'Presented the image of 'The natural' to circumscribe the structures of society and particularly the position of women in relation to children.' Nebulous remarks about pets are easier and safer for him to dish out than any real scrutiny of what is going wrong with the modern family. As a socialist he's trapped by a contempt for the family based on what is seen as its unequal 'power relationships', based on biology, a science which is now highly contentious, and the old requirement on men to provide and women to spend at least five years focussed on their infant.

The lack of the initial strong maternal bond may be a key to why so many people now grow up unable to form close relations with other humans and lack the emotional resilience, the Pope recognises, needed to tackle complex adult relationships such as being parents. We are all sad, lonely children now, needing our teddy bears and our puppy for comfort. If he really wants to change that, he must either speak out for the Christian family and motherhood as we once knew it, or stick with the Left. He can't do both.

Mary Sydney is a social commentator.

NIGEL!

Catherine Blaiklock

Love him or hate him, everyone knows who 'that' Nigel is – and yet Nigel has never even been an MP – not for want of trying. The establishment hates him, they wish he were dead or never existed.

'Nice' respectable people (that includes most 'right on' MPs from all the major parties) think of Farage as beyond the pale – an awful, nasty man – as bad as that obnoxious rude American one with the orange hair – not the sort of people you would have for dinner. Wrong class, vulgar, like Arthur Daley out of *Minder*. Something about Nigel and Trump, and for that matter, even Boris a bit, drives civil servants, academics, council office workers and left-wing students completely mad. Yet Nigel, Donald and Boris are not from council estates or working class – Nigel: Major public school, respectable upper middle class, Trump: millionaire family, Boris: Eton and Oxford – but, having the common touch, they are all equally at home on a council estate or a back street pub as at a posh dinner party. For this they are seen as highly dangerous – they refuse to go along with the petit bourgeois values of the socialist intelligentsia.

The journalist Tanya Gold, writing in *Unherd* (which is supposed to represent unheard voices but last week sneered at them) wrote about UKIP's 2004 conference: 'We laughed at their clothing and their speech and their manners. We printed the laughter in newspapers and we congratulated ourselves on the quality of our satire. All the correspondence laughed.'

It is this common touch possessed by those who don't share the pretentious opinions of BBC commentators on diversity and inclusiveness, that appeals to the 'ordinary people' of Britain who wish to live in a country that is recognisably theirs, which is the reason why Nigel Farage won two European elections, gained hundreds of local and county council seats and saw many of his candidates elected to the Welsh assembly. Gaining the trust of the 'little' people, means hard and unremitting work.

Nigel spent twenty-five years working to take Britain out of the European Union and finally with Brexit he achieved it – although the establishment would not accept the result and is still plotting to take us back in through other means: their fury at the little people, the ordinary voters who took us out is still incandescent. Dominic Cummings who arrived right at the end to help with the referendum claims Farage lost five percent of the votes – he forgets that it was Nigel working for nearly three decades tirelessly in church halls and back rooms that got the other 45 per cent of votes.

Michael Crick (who is generally considered a liberal) has just written what appears to be an unauthorised biography of Farage. He has, for someone without access to the subject, got Nigel's character about right. Is Farage a horrible man? No, in his previous job running a metal trading company Farage was liked by everyone and was funny, polite and jovial. Inside politics however Nigel has had to be ruthless in his choice of fellow party members, getting rid of anybody who would open him to attack on the grounds of racism, or any of the other 'isms and phobias' in the left-wing armoury of denunciations that can in a single word destroy a lifetime of hard political work.

Crick's book called *One Party After Another* is a fair, dense and incredibly well researched work by a writer sympathetic to Nigel – but never once does he ever go into why politically someone like Nigel ever existed or why there was a need for him. The book has no historic or demographic context. At 550 pages, there is no mention of the monumental cultural and economic changes made to a society by the introduction of some twenty million foreign migrants in just a few decades.

I was part of the story – I founded and set up the Brexit Party and was also UKIP's economic spokesman and worked with Nigel. Firstly, Nigel was absolutely and still is, unique: He wasn't one in a million as someone said, he was one in a hundred million. Many have tried, including myself, to change the politics that cripple our country, most have had little or no impact – and, even if they have, only a few benefit and seldom for long. For example, there has been much talk on and off of improving the lot of white working-class boys, committees have looked into it, educational reforms have been advanced, but if you are white and working class in multicultural Britain, you are as doomed as the dodo.

Boris, born with a silver spoon in his mouth and an entire political party machine behind him could not have done what Nigel did. Thatcher was unique and very tough – she was similarly disparaged by the grandees for being a grocer's daughter from the sticks – but her reforms have stuck although the establishment still works to undermine them, but what of Starmer, Tice, Kinnock, May – who will even remember their grey names in a few years? Batten (Gerard), Fox

(Claire) and Fox (Lawrence) – who are they?

Farage is different, which is why the snobbish establishment, who see him as a political Anti-Christ come to destroy their comfortable world of ruthless middle-class opportunism, hate and fear him. They froth at the mouth at the very mention of his name. Their eyes bulge. They sneer. They spit invective and call him the most insulting names possible. That most 'educated elite' publication, *The Times Literary Supplement* entitled their review of Crick's book, *When Nigel met Enoch* – meaning in translation that Farage is nasty, evil and racist. The sub title was 'British Nationalism and Neo Fascism' presumably implying that any form of patriotism will lead to millions of immigrants being gassed to death.

Which is why the civil service and particularly the leadership of both Conservative and Labour parties will not recognise that Farage is the voice of tens of millions – both working class Red Wall voters and ordinary middle England. The most obvious example of this was when Nigel met the newly elected Trump before any other western leader – let alone minions from the Foreign Office. With Farage having unique access to the most important leader in the world in advance of any world leader, you would have thought the Foreign Office would want to know what was said? No – they didn't even acknowledge the meeting took place. Instead, they had to wait weeks for The Donald to meet grey Theresa May who he disliked intensely. That didn't matter. For petty snobs, even the grand ones at the Foreign Office, Britain's interests are secondary to making sure the 'ordinary' people of Britain do not get above themselves. The red wall, middle England and even some ethnic minorities who do not want a clogged, crime ridden country are all beyond the pale. To hammer the message home a Marxist from the Brexit party, Claire Fox, was sent to the House of Lords whilst Farage did not even get an invitation to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party along with people who set up cat rescue charities

Nigel, unsurprisingly was very hurt. He should not have been surprised. The establishment is never going to listen to the likes of him, to do so would be to listen to the people. What are their worries? Grooming gangs, beheadings in the street by Islamists, stabbings, drug dealing, illegal migrants getting a million pounds in benefits – it isn't the people who do the murder and raping who are castigated – no, the real villains are those who point such things out. Farage is one of those people. As Orwell said, good becomes bad, bad becomes good.

Every society has its witches to be silenced at all costs: Churchill in 1938, Solzhenitsyn in Stalin's Russia, Poland's Lech Walesa. Churchill was labelled a warmonger, Solzhenitsyn exiled, Walesa denounced as a political deviant. All three appeared on the political stage when their respective establishments were leading their countries to destruction. Our word for witches in the 21st century is 'racist'. Once you are labelled a racist publicly, there is no redemption. You are a bad person. Farage is the new Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer. If 'they' could legally burn him at the stake, they would.

You have to wonder what happens next.

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Australia: Banging up a Nation

Daryl McCann

An image that sticks in my mind is police helicopter, search light ablaze, sweeping over the lower socio-economic suburbs of western Sydney to enforce a nightly curfew during a lockdown. Australia, which had mostly turned itself into a virus-free Hermit Kingdom through 2020, took on a different feel in 2021. A roll back of Covid-19 restrictions is now underway in Australia, but there was a time when some feared we were on the verge of metamorphosing into a medico-tyrannical state. Is there some other way to contain a pandemic?

Mark Woolhouse, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh, argues our reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic: 'We were mesmerised by the once-in-a-century scale of the emergency and succeeded in making a crisis worse. In short, we panicked.' Lockdowns in the United Kingdom followed a different rhythm from those in Australia, or in America, New Zealand and Canada for that matter, but they all had more in common with each other than with the far less strict emergency conditions introduced in Sweden. The time has come, as the pandemic finally begins to recede, thanks to the advent of the Omicron variant much more so than the efficacy of lockdowns, social

distancing, vaccination, mask-wearing and all the other accoutrements of the Age of Covid, to re-assess the success or otherwise of the lockdown strategy.

Woolhouse, in *The Year the World Went Mad: A Scientific Memoir* (2022), makes the important point that the lockdown as we experienced it during the pandemic would not have been a feasible strategy even a few decades ago. Before the advent of our digital age, he notes, a protracted lockdown would have risked starving the population and provoking a revolution of sorts. Now many can work from home, with food and other necessities of life sourced from online services while a virtual education can be provided to (most) schoolchildren. All of this might be doable but not necessarily agreeable. Woolhouse writes of the long-term damage likely to have been inflicted on the younger generation in the UK: 'We did serious harm to our children and young adults who were robbed of their education, jobs and normal existence, as well as suffering damage to their future prospects, while they were left to inherit a record-breaking mountain of public debts.'

Ann Hollands, Australia's National Children's Commissioner, has spoken of implications for mental health amongst young Victorians: 'We have seen over the last two years of the pandemic that whilst schools have been closed in some locations for very extended periods, I think in Victoria kids lost something like 200 days of school, that is associated with some major health effects and I'm talking major health effects here.' Our school days, as Hollands reminds us, are as much about socialisation as education, and faces on the screen are not the same as a real faces or real people, whatever the Mark Zuckerbergs of the world would have us believe. In many of the more socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Australia, the UK, America and so on, young people have been prematurely and permanently removed from institutionalised education.

Woolhouse gives the British example of Michael Gove who, during a No 10 briefing back in March 2020, warned the SARS-CoV-2 did not discriminate: 'Everyone is at risk.' On the contrary, as Woolhouse points out, the virus turns out to be decidedly discriminatory: 'People over 75 are an astonishing 10,000 times more at risk than those who are under 15.' The inequitable nature of Covid-19 was confirmed by none other than Rochelle Walensky, director of America's Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in January 2022. Walensky disclosed that 75 percent of Covid-19 deaths occurred among those with four or more comorbidities. As conservative pundit Roger L Simon wryly noted: 'Four or more? What would the percentage have been for those with a mere two comorbidities? Eighty-five? Ninety-five? Ninety-eight? For that, we all had to be injected, masked up, locked down, and isolated for two years.' Simon added a final barb: 'But worst of all by far is what we have done to America's children as a result. The past two years – and continuing now in many venues – have been the worst case of child abuse in human history.'

In America, at least, the pro-lockdown sentiment gained a political dimension after President Trump began agitating for an end to the country-wide state lockdowns that had ensued from his declaration of a national emergency on March 13, 2020, which in turn had followed the WHO's (belated) declaration of a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. In less than three weeks, though, Trump was calling for America to 'reopen' on April 12, Easter Sunday, with 'packed churches'. When Easter arrived, and Covid deaths continued to rise at an alarming rate, the mainstream media derided Trump as out of touch with reality, a typical headline on April 11 reading: 'No more talk of packed churches, Trump acknowledges no gatherings for Easter.'

The assumption of many was that Trump, as a billionaire property developer, had to be in the pocket of business and preferenced profit over people. In other words, better people died of Covid-19 than the economy suffer, and he does not win the vote on Election Day in November 2020. A flaw in this reasoning is that business in the modern era be divided into two entirely different categories: local companies and transnational corporations such as Jeff Bezos' Amazon.com Inc. In the case of the latter, and here we could add Google, Apple, Meta and Microsoft, long-term lockdowns were a boon and not a bust. It was local hairdressers, restauranteurs, newsagents, shopkeepers *ad infinitum* bankrupted by stringent lockdowns, not the transnational E-commerce companies or government agencies. We might add here the unstoppable rise of future inflation produced by governments strangling small businesses only to put everyone on a life-support system by printing stacks of money followed by a whole lot more when that ran out.

Three prominent medical scientists, Sunetra Gupta, professor of theoretical epidemiology at Oxford University, Jay Bhattacharya, professor of medicine at Stanford University and Martin Kulldorf, professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, attempted to warn the world of the dangers of lockdown in the so-called 'The Great Barrington Declaration' (GBD) which has now attracted some 920,000 additional signatories. The GBD called for those least susceptible to being hospitalised by Covid-19 to get on with their normal life while taking, of course, whatever personal safety precautions they deemed necessary

amid the pandemic. For the vulnerable, on the other hand, a society's resources could be marshalled to provide *Focused Protection*. An eminently reasonable idea, you might think, given discriminatory nature of Covid-19. In the UK, as one example, 40 per cent of total Covid deaths occurred old-age nursing homes – some 'focused protection' on that front might have been invaluable.

But, apart from Sweden and some local exceptions like Texas and Florida, it was not to be. We now know, thanks to an FOIA request, that Francis Collins, director of America's National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Tony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) that two of the most powerful public health officials in the world were set against a non-lockdown strategy. Wrote Collins to Fauci on October 8, 2020: 'There needs to be a quick and devastating published take down of its premises. I don't see anything like that on line yet – is it underway?' We see here a striking gap between medical science and politicised science. On the release of this memo in late 2021, Collins – by then the *former* director of the NIH – doubled down on his 'fringe epidemiologists' jibe despite the absurdity of the insult.

One way to reconcile Collins' puerile *ad hominem* attack with Francis Collins the renowned geneticist who led the Human Genome Project and won the Templeton Prize in 2020 is to factor in the warping effect of becoming an all-powerful modern-day technocrat, of succumbing to the bureaucrat's chief anti-democratic vices of authoritarianism, safetyism and paternalism. In Sweden, where there are still restrictions on restaurant hours and attendance caps for indoor venues, there has at least been an attempt over the past two years to avoid protracted and comprehensive lockdowns, out of respect for human rights and protecting the economy if nothing else. Although the cumulative death rate of Covid-19 in Sweden is slightly lower than in the UK, there are probably too many confounding variables to draw any conclusions from that. Australia, for example, has had a very low Covid mortality rate because we – like Taiwan, New Zealand and so on – enjoy the advantage of our geographical isolation.

What we might say about the Swedish model, as exemplified by state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell, is that at least there were no nightly curfews or police helicopters swooping overhead in search of citizens-cum-fugitives. Tegnell has all along advocated 'having a conversation with the public, putting a lot of trust in the public and giving a little responsibility to individuals'. Something to reflect on before SARS-CoV-3 does the rounds.

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Fleeing Back to Kim Jong Un

Frank Haviland

It would take a heart of stone not to sympathise with the plight of North Korean defectors, desperately fleeing the world's most totalitarian dictatorship across the border into the prosperous, free South. They leave behind everything they know: their families, their friends, and however harsh, a sense of home that the North provides; all for the unknown promise of milk and honey.

The journey alone is a do-or-die affair; particularly if one chooses the direct route across the DMZ (de-militarised zone), rather than going up through China. Defectors must scale the 3M barbed-wire fence, dodge the landmines for two and a half miles, not to mention the soldiers who will shoot them on sight, and hope that those watching the security cameras have had a heavy lunch, a big ask in the North, where malnutrition is the norm. It is a risk many end up regretting.

My wife, who is Korean, has actually been to the North, way back in 2003 when relations between the two countries were better. In those days, South Korean multinationals like Hyundai were organising entertainment events in the North's capital, Pyongyang, and she spent the best part of a week there, working as a celebrity stylist.

The picture she paints is bleak. Before embarking, she was given a two-hour training course on how to behave in the North. She was advised not to leave the hotel, which sold 10-year-old snacks; to be extremely careful in what she said (western words are a red flag), and essentially, not to talk to anyone.

Upon arrival at the border, she was transported on an old bus, along roads without asphalt or concrete.

She described the capital as an odd contrast between the relative opulence of old Mercedes cars and Sanyo radios, and the grinding poverty of most of the North's 26 million people. The people, she notes, are a little thin, dressed in *hamboks* (traditional Korean dress) or working clothes, and completely devoid of enthusiasm in their work, not much of a surprise, when the government simply takes everything you make.

But it was her overall sense of the place which is so sad: she tells me that the buildings have no colour, just an ash grey colour apparently is generally reserved for *Dear Leader*, and that an overwhelming sense of despair is palpable.

So the case of Kim Woo-joo, who defected from the North 14 months ago is nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing that is, until he decided to make the reverse journey last month, and return to his homeland. On the surface, this may appear borderline insane. Kim will knowingly face possible incarceration, torture and even death – and that's assuming he survives the journey. And yet, he is one of a growing number of North Korean defectors who have become disillusioned with life in the South. An estimated 18 per cent of current defectors want to go home. How can this be?

One of the major factors which contributes to an unhappy life for North Koreans, is ironically their *improved* financial situation. While the government subsidies in Korea are nothing like those offered by Britain; in a low-tax country like South Korea where the welfare state is almost an unknown quantity, they are extremely generous. Yet, it is the *relative* situation which seems crucial – back home, everyone is equally poor; in South Korea, defectors feel exclusively poor.

Another major issue is the treatment they receive in South Korea. Upon arrival, they are faced with a 3-month debrief/re-education programme; initially to determine whether or not they are spies, and instruction on how to adjust to life in a free society. This is no simple task. Even the most successful North Koreans talk bitterly about the problems adjusting to a ragingly competitive nation, when your life has always been run by the state. The language too, takes years to fully master, being as it is littered with western influence (*Konglish*) and dialects which are almost impossible for North Koreans to understand.

Perhaps worst of all, is the overwhelming sense of isolation that North Koreans often feel. Kim for instance, was a gymnast back home, but a night-time cleaner in the South, where he had no friends. For all their many virtues, and I mean that sincerely, South Koreans can be brutally honest. I have been in restaurants before where the waitress will struggle with the order, and my colleagues would comment rather too loudly as she leaves, 'she's from North Korea'.

One of the things it takes a long time to realise as a foreigner in South Korea, is that no matter who you are or where you come from, you are a second-class citizen. It's a subtle distinction, but over time it grinds on you. I don't just mean that in a practical sense: you can't vote, you get no furlough during the pandemic, and the police won't respond to you properly. I mean in a more emotional sense: Koreans call their homeland *Our Country* – there was a time when that phrase spoke for North Koreans too, but I believe that time has passed.

It is perhaps for these three reasons that life for North Korean defectors is so miserable, even in a free country. Their income is way below that of South Koreans. They have high rates of unemployment, alcoholism and depression (47 per cent report experiencing mental anguish). South Korea already has a high suicide rate, but for North Korean defectors, it accounts for 15 per cent of deaths, three times the national average.

One of the saddest things I noticed when researching this piece, is the clear generational shift which has taken place. While my middle-aged friends and colleagues are still very sympathetic to defectors, that sympathy has not filtered down to millennials. Those my age still have strong connections with family members who remember the war, but the young do not. Despite the fact that defectors number a few hundred per year, the young increasingly view them as tax thieves, usurping the jobs and opportunities which ought rightfully to be theirs.

Back in the 1980's defectors were welcomed with fanfare in South Korea. Famous cases, like that of Kim Man Cheol, a doctor who escaped North Korea with a family of 11, were something to celebrate. But now, the situation is less fanfare and more caution. One issue, is the growing concern of North Korean spies, who are undoubtedly a genuine feature of the landscape. These fears have not been helped by the recent case of Chun Hye-sung (or Im Ji Hyun, as she was known in South Korea).

Chun became a celebrity in the South in 2017, and was a regular feature of talk shows, until she suddenly disappeared back home. Many South Koreans believe she simply ran up debts and fled, or was a spy. Alternative reports are that she was abducted by North Korean authorities. In actual fact, she may just have been homesick. According to her boyfriend, she fully intended to return home, cutting her hair short (a clear sign of intent) before disappearing.

Cases like Chun's, highlight the extreme complexities of life in South Korea for defectors. And because of each nation's propaganda machines working full-blast, gauging what is truly going on is a minefield. Double defectors are paraded by North Korean television as

the ultimate coup – 'Look how good your life is when you don't have any choice' it seems to say. On the other hand, South Korea quite understandably needs to protect its citizens from possible northern interference, but is also desperate to save face. The government's estimate of a mere 30 double defectors for instance, is a ludicrous understatement.

The great tragedy for North Korean defectors, is that life back home for some *may* actually be better. The choice between North and South is not quite *Scylla and Charybdis*, but a rock and a hard place, certainly. The harsh reality for defectors, is that they face a life oscillating between mistrust, resentment as a tax burden, and indifference. South Koreans do not have hearts of stone, but there is of course only so much they can do to assimilate those who are now, almost 70 years on from the Korean War, genuinely from a foreign country.

My own take, for what it's worth, is that there is some truth in the hackneyed 'home is where the heart is'. No matter how awful we all need somewhere to belong to, and we get no choice where that place is. For many defectors, South Korea simply does not fulfil that sense of belonging.

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Toppling the West

James Monteith

The acquittal in January of four young whites charged with criminal damage for their part in the toppling of the statue of slaver Edward Colston in Bristol provoked predictable responses. On the one side, it was argued that Colston was a mass murderer guilty of historic crimes; on the other, that history cannot be re-written and mob rule should not prevail. But all seemed agreed that the statue was 'offensive' to our modern sensibilities, which are humanitarian and multicultural, and that some form of mitigating action would have been necessary – if not demolition, then at least the addition of a sanitizing plaque, or the removal of the statue from public view. Yet the silent majority knows that much more is at stake here than merely a statue.

The four defendants were acquitted because they argued it was the City of Bristol that was at fault for its 'indecent display' of a statue celebrating a mass murderer. It was the Colston four who 'were on the right side of history'. But by what divine authority do we arrogate to ourselves the right to sit in judgement on history as if our generation was unique in having escaped its determining forces?

In 1931, Herbert Butterfield changed the course of modern historiography with a slim volume, little more than a monograph, entitled *The Whig Interpretation of History*. The essence of his argument was that instead of trying to make sense of the past on its own terms through a combination of scholarly research and imaginative sympathy, modern historians (that is, English historians in protestant libertarian 'Whig' tradition) regarded the present as the summit of all human achievement, and the past as an inexorable process of progression towards it. In place of the true historian's love of the past 'for its own sake', his desire 'to discern the inner relations of a world so different from our own', was substituted a fervent love of the present, the fountainhead of all value and morality, and the desire to pronounce judgement and pass sentence on those who inhabited the past. The baleful result was 'the verdict of history'.

Whig history reached its apogee in Victorian England with Macaulay, who regarded the England of his day as the culmination of historical and moral progress. In his *History of England*, Macaulay argued that the Glorious Revolution ushered in 'a liberty of discussion and of individual action never before known' along with 'a prosperity of which the annals of human affairs had furnished no example', not to mention an empire of unparalleled splendour. The recent history of our country, he went on, 'is eminently the history of physical, or moral, and of intellectual improvement'. Minor details such as the slums, factories, and workhouses, the child labourers, the condition of the poor and destitute, which so offend our modern sensibilities, and horrified Engels and Disraeli even then, did not disturb the grand narrative.

G M Trevelyan, Arthur Bryant and A L Rowse carried on the Whig tradition of English exceptionalism, as it is now termed, into the early post-war period. Writing in 1943, and buoyed up by wartime patriotic spirit, Rowse concluded his *The Spirit of English History*

with the rousing words, 'The long record of English history has been fortunate beyond belief: the greater the duty that rests upon every Englishman to see that the future is not unworthy of the past.' But little was he to know that within a generation, English history, culture and civilization would be savaged by a new intellectual establishment, immersed in the fashionable post-modern post-Marxist deconstructionist teachings of Derrida, Foucault, and the like, and that a compliant political class would parrot the mantras of social justice, multiculturalism, diversity, inclusion, 'white privilege' and 'black victimhood'.

In one sense, post-Marxist historiography represents no more than the institution of a new grand narrative. For the statue breakers of Bristol, and those who would justify their actions, the inhabitants of twenty-first century Britain are once again situated at a pinnacle of progress, enlightenment, and infallibility, from which they can issue verdicts on the inhabitants of past ages, who stand condemned of being 'racist', 'sexist', and 'homophobic'. The unparalleled social, cultural, and moral achievements of modern Britain, and of modern liberalism, speak for themselves: conceptual art, care homes where the elderly are drugged into oblivion, abortion on demand, grooming gangs, cancel culture, campus safe spaces, militant atheism, diversity quotas, single-parent families, drowning migrants, the Millennium Dome, rap, county lines, online pornography, sexting, social media, gaming, recreational drugs, sports utility vehicles, gender reassignment surgery, and Red Bull energy drinks.

But the post-Marxist grand narrative is a far more pernicious proposition than any framed by previous generations. No doubt the Whig grand narrative, in which the Protestants were always on the side of progress – of individualism, capitalism, and liberty – was suspiciously one-sided. Perhaps Whig history delivered 'from above' did serve establishment interests. Whether Whig historians should be considered lesser historians for also being patriots is a moot point. But the likes of Macaulay, Trevelyan, Bryant and Rowse never subscribed to such fashionable nonsense as this: that the descendants of those wronged in the past should be regarded as 'historic victims' of injustice, or that ethnic disparities constitute *prima facie* evidence of discrimination, or that slavery was uniquely devised and practised by Europeans, or that all cultures are equal, or that the success and prosperity of the West was founded on the slave trade. Above all, they never held that those who express unorthodox views or offend the sensibilities of those who subscribe to current orthodoxy should be prosecuted for committing 'hate crime'. Macaulay was surely right when he identified our freedom and liberty – of action, speech, and thought – as sacrosanct. And J S Mill's classic justification of freedom of speech, in his 1859 essay 'On Liberty' remains definitive. Nobody, argued Mill, should have their opinions censored, however objectionable those opinions to the rest of us, because nobody is infallible, and 'all silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility'.

Why, then, should we be offended by the statue of a seventeenth-century slave trader? It would be difficult to identify any historical figure prior to the late eighteenth-century, of any culture or ethnicity, who was not implicated in slavery in one form or another. Slavery was the norm throughout human history until the Europeans abolished it. Africans were enslaved by Europeans, by Arabs, and by other Africans. Europeans were enslaved – the so-called 'white slaves' – in their millions by Arab slave traders. Colston's contemporary Samuel Pepys recounts in his diary meeting two sea captains in a London tavern in 1661. Both had been enslaved and ransomed. Pepys was so horrified at the cruelties they had endured in Algiers that he went to bed that night with 'his head aching'. But this did not stop him investing in the Royal African Company, whose business was transporting slaves from Africa to the Caribbean. What distinguishes Colston is, not that he was involved in the transatlantic slave trade, but that he was, by the standards of his own age, a great philanthropist, the greatest Bristol has ever known – which is why he was commemorated by a statue.

No, Colston's historic offence is not that he was a slaver. It is that he is Western, European, male, and white. Those who would deconstruct our history and our culture in the name of multi-culture, diversity, and inclusion, are not motivated by a desire for 'social justice', any more than they care that Africans today are still enslaved by Arabs. They are motivated by a much stronger impulse: resentment. They resent the West for its power, its success, its wealth, and its superior civilization. And the liberal establishment which connives with them in their work of deconstruction is motivated by an equally strong impulse: the desire to maintain its status, wealth, and privilege, at all costs, by signalling its virtue.

It is an unholy alliance. For if we allow the statue of Colston to go, our history goes with it, and we can say goodbye to Western civilization in these islands.

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Universities: Monuments of Ageless Intellect?

Brian Ridley

Everybody knows what universities are for, but the answer depends on whom you ask. They are generally thought of as a good thing, part of the cultural life of the nation. Imagine not having any. Wouldn't the country be globally embarrassed? Or would it be regarded as imaginatively progressive? Universities, after all, are expensive. And the taxpayer is the one with the money, and, in a democracy the one with a vote. So, any worries about the existence of universities could be solved by a referendum, or by edict in less civilised societies. Somehow, I can't see either ever happening. That is because universities are in that category of human life that involves basic needs – health, food, freedom, curiosity and much else. Getting rid of universities would be like getting rid of the NHS.

Universities are for lots of things. Ask a teenager at one of them and the answer is likely to extol the freedom and novelty of living away from home, along with happily postponing of any decision about earning a living. It is also a time to make new friends, adding to, or replacing old school friends, who have moved on in a different tack.

However, universities are not for everyone. Indeed, it is remarkable that they continue to exist in a political climate that worships equality. Look at what happened to Grammar Schools. Universities are fundamentally elitist, as the students soon find out from tasks set by their tutors. Things abstract begin to rule over things concrete. Not only things abstract but, sometimes, subtle nuances, especially in that popular subject, English. Discuss, write on both sides of the paper. A country needs people who can think in terms of abstractions and nuances.

Of the disciplines taught at university; science, mathematics, medicine and law are generally seen to be useful, and worth the taxpayer's money. Other topics have a more ambiguous appeal – the social sciences, the humanities, and what have attracted the label 'Micky Mouse' courses. Social science is a misnomer; it is not a science. Imagine trying to apply scientific methods to sociology, government and economics. In this year's experiment we will transport all immigrants back to where they came from and monitor racial abuse at football matches, and measure any change. No way! The knowledge that can be taught in those disciplines is essentially descriptive, but whose ideas and abstractions are derived from opinion. Something of the same applies to all the humanities; history, philosophy literature. Surely, everything that could be said in these fields has already been said by now. Books, novels, poetry, are all available. Who needs a course? Criticisms of this sort reveal a breath-taking lack of imagination and gross underestimation of what the intellect is about. There are no conclusions; there is no end to speculation about the human condition. Why would anyone think otherwise? Nevertheless, denigrations of this sort have imperilled the uniqueness of universities. It is just easier to see the universities as businesses that have to continually justify their existence. But universities, like museums and art galleries, are cultural treasures, not businesses.

The universities themselves have a charge to answer. They have abandoned the lofty ideals of Cardinal Newman about what a university should be about. As the name implies, education should be universal in character, and certainly including theology. The latter discipline is not as fashionable as it once was, when universities were first invented. Nowadays, universities have sold out to its critics. But, in spite of becoming businesses, or possibly because of that, the attempt at universality survives in an attempt to attract customers. Vice-Chancellors now see themselves as Chief Executive Officers running a business, and pay themselves accordingly. The need for there to be some quantitative measure of success is blithely accepted, even if it makes no academic sense. The assessment of research via the Research Assessment Exercise is a case in point. The quality of research can be assessed, only by peers, not bureaucrats. Now there are league tables. Is my university in the Premier League, or the Championship, or even in the Vanarama National Football League?

The inexorable conversion of universities into state-run businesses means that there is a requirement for academics with management skills, who are sensitive to vocal consumer preferences., and do not confuse scholarship with being successful. Practices of this sort have nothing to do with what universities are about. Apart from providing an advanced and valuable

education, universities remind us not to neglect (to quote Yeats) 'monuments of ageless intellect'. That is what universities are for. I believe that there will always be enough academics that admire that ageless intellect, whatever the topic, and to delight in bringing it to the attention of the young.

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Abolish Juries?

Andrew Tettenborn

Three juries have spoken. *The Colston Four*, leaders of the mob that last year forcibly pulled down a statue in Bristol because they didn't like it while police looked on to avoid causing offence, didn't commit criminal damage. And two groups of activists who a year earlier deliberately immobilised vast numbers of ordinary workers, many of whom could ill afford missing work, by gluing themselves to the Docklands line – call them the *Canary Wharf Six* and *the Shadwell Three*, even though it doesn't quite have the same cachet, were not guilty of obstructing the railway.

That's fine: however perverse the juries that cleared these defendants, they are entitled to say they were innocent, and there's no purpose served by contradicting them, even if you think they weren't. Juries have the last word in acquitting. This has been true since the time of Charles II; witness a case of 1670 where the Recorder of London was smartly rapped over the knuckles when he told a jury to think again or be punished after it had acquitted a number of the religious awkward squad, including William Penn, who would go on to found Pennsylvania, on charges of holding an illegal prayer meeting.

Of course you can always express your views in other ways. Acquittal or no acquittal, you might think the former group a bunch of bigoted bullies with roughly the same degree of respect for the democratic process as the Red Guards or the Blackshirts when they didn't get their way. The latter you might equally characterise as self-righteous solipsists who don't really care about the little people provided that they can get our attention whether we like it or not.

More serious matters are at stake here. Might these two verdicts suggest a need to get rid of juries or at least curb their use? It's easy to see this episode as embodying a straightforward left-right issue: the left cheering the vindication of the jury as the ultimate protector of radicals falling foul of a vindictive establishment, and the right riposting that if jury-persons can't be relied on to convict those who forcibly bring transport to a standstill or play fast and loose with others' property, then something is seriously amiss.

Faced with this, if you are a conservative your first instinct might be to say that the sooner the institution is suppressed the better. Perhaps indeed you could – admittedly a bit incongruously – join forces in this respect with a number of academics, a class not known for its sympathy with the right, who have taken a principled, if coldly logical, view of the whole matter. Juries, say such people, are unscientific, swayed by emotion and folk belief, often wrong in finding and evaluating the facts, and beg for wholesale suppression and replacement by professionals. Add in, on the part of the right, a propensity to be motivated by misguided politics, and the potential for a tactical alliance looks promising.

But this would be unwise. There remains a respectable rightist case for jury trial as a protection for the individual. Think, for example, charges relating to some trumpery disclosure said to be covered by official secrets law, or to alleged hate speech, or against a person lashing out against a burglar in order to protect his property. Indeed, perhaps surprisingly, progressives have their own problems with juries who can't be trusted to convict, most notably in the controversial area of sexual offences and rape.

Equally, however, leaving things just as they are is also dangerous. Juries are no longer the genteelly bourgeois bodies they were until the 1950s. Whether we like it or not, the urban politicised panel, all too easily moved by emotional suasion and impassioned pleas from progressive publicists, is here to stay. In the light of this, it would be complacent to dismiss the verdicts in the Colston and Docklands cases as one-offs. There is a serious danger that we will see many more cases where the authorities' ability to use the criminal law to curb potentially damaging protest is severely curtailed in any case where the cause at issue is hip or fashionable.

There is a case for a more surgical strike. By all means keep the absolute right to jury trial in the case of offences whose definition raises nuanced issues over which people legitimately disagree. This will cover most serious offences. Offences against the person, for instance, from murder to assault occasioning bodily harm, frequently raise issues of self-defence or defence of property, or of precisely what harm a defendant intended when he lashed out. Again, in theft or fraud the same goes for whether a defendant was dishonest; and in sexual offences, for precisely what was consented to and how the defendant saw the matter of consent. So too, as long as we have hate speech offences it is important to have a safeguard making it very difficult for the authorities to suppress speech which hurts the highly sensitive but that many ordinary people think ought not to land you in the nick; something the right to jury trial provides in spades.

Criminal damage and obstructing railways aren't very nuanced offences in this sense. It is true that in theory they are subject to general criminal law defences such as lawful excuse or necessity; but in most cases these are rightly seen as peripheral. Unlike the crimes we mentioned in the previous paragraph, offences like these are aimed at curbing those who deliberately disrupt others' right to live their lives in an unobstructed way and keep their property unscathed. They do not, and should not, typically involve wide questions of evaluation. That is no doubt why other similar forms of disruption and antisocial conduct, such as wilfully obstructing the highway or invading the wrong part of an airport, may carry noticeable penalties but are still triable only summarily.

If this is right, then the right of anyone accused of criminal damage or obstructing railways to demand an appearance before a jury increasingly looks like an anomaly. With criminal damage we must tread carefully. As regards its more serious manifestations, such as arson or damage done with intent to endanger life, these rightly carry heavy sentences of imprisonment, and it would be politically impossible and legally awkward to get rid of the right to trial by jury. But there is much to be said for having a simple offence of criminal damage, triable only summarily, where no aggravation exists. And the same goes even more strongly for the offence of obstructing a railway, which one suspects only carries a right to trial by jury at all because it is a relic of antique legislation (the Malicious Damage Act 1861) passed 160 years ago in rather different circumstances.

Trial by jury does matter, but it is not the only thing that matters. The defence of people's right to live their lives free of the actions of self-righteous mobs, and the defence of the physical products of liberal western civilisation, are even more important. In so far as juries are increasingly likely to condone the actions of those who set no store by the former and harbour a grudge against the latter, then when push comes to shove, we must be prepared to take steps to clip their wings.

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I had that Macron in the back of my cab

Edward Theberton

A policeman's lot is not a happy one, and neither is a Paris taxi-driver's, at least if my latest conversation with one is anything to go by – and it was fairly typical of this genre of communication.

Having turned out early on a Sunday morning, he said, I was, at 11 o'clock, his first fare of the day. The complaints started a couple of hundred yards into our journey. The road ahead was occupied by a flea-market, so we had to turn down a side street. A couple of hundred yards down this was a sign saying 'Road blocked'. No explanation for this was visible or offered, though there was a man in uniform waving cars down yet another side-street.

'This city is becoming unbearable,' he said. 'Even on a Sunday morning there are obstructions everywhere.'

Then we emerged into a larger thoroughfare. Traffic there was slowed because it was now a one-lane one-way street with a very wide lane for bicycles.

'A bicycle every three days,' said the driver, which was something of an exaggeration because we did pass one in about four or five minutes – but only one.

'These bicycle lanes are everywhere,' he said. 'The rue de Rivoli to the Concorde now takes an hour.'

I thought of what a barrister once said to me when I complained that I had been waiting around for three days outside court to give my expert evidence in a

murder trial.

'What are you complaining of?' he asked. 'The meter's still ticking.'

But the taxi-driver's heartfelt complaint was significant, a refutation of the *homo economicus* beloved of certain economists, according to which people are motivated only by material advantage. This driver, and others I have encountered, would rather have earned his money by taking two people to their destinations rather than be stuck in a traffic jam with just one, even if the monetary reward were the same. It matters *how* one earns one's living as well as *how much* one earns.

Then came his diatribe against cameras and the injustices and absurdities to which they gave rise. They had been installed at every major road junction and even some minor ones. If, for example, he went even a few centimetres over where he was supposed to stop at a red light, he was fined. By contrast, bus drivers were not, nor were jay-walkers, at one of whom he pointed with a finger trembling with rage. Furthermore, he had been fined 135 Euros for having dropped off a client in front of a station.

'Where was I supposed to drop him?' he said. 'I'm a taxi-driver. I was there for two minutes for us to collect his luggage from the boot. I hadn't stopped to visit a friend or do my shopping. I'm providing a public service.'

He pointed out the cameras *en route* and to warnings against infringements. There were indeed many of them, every few yards. The cameras were discreet, but they were there. The driver admitted that they had advantages. If someone committed a robbery, he could be followed all the way home, at least in theory. I doubted whether he would be in practice, or if found would have very much to fear from the criminal justice system. But really the cameras were one more way of collecting tax, with the added advantage that they made everyone's life a misery.

Then he complained of the deterioration in behaviour of the population. Everyone was quick to anger and aggression was commonplace. Only the day before there had been a video posted on the Internet showing a driver of a car in Paris smashing the driver's window of a bus and then climbing into the bus to attack the driver. This kind of episode was now commonplace, almost routine.

'I don't know why I continue in this job,' said the driver. I thought there was true despair in his voice.

'Perhaps you should retire,' I suggested. After all, he could have been no more than a few years from retirement.

'I can't,' he said. 'I have to earn money. Anyway, I won't make it to retirement, I'll have a stroke or a heart attack first.'

I confess that this did not seem altogether unlikely, at least if it is true that personality type and state of mind affect the likelihood of suffering either a heart attack or a stroke.

'Then you should retire while you can. But what would you do?'

'I would do like everyone else: I would take money from the government and make a bit extra by trafficking. The government doesn't want people to make an honest living.'

Life in Paris, he said, was becoming more and more difficult, unbearable in fact. Whose fault was it, I asked? That of the mayor? Anne Hidalgo, elected with fewer than 20 per cent of the eligible votes, clearly took her election as a democratic mandate for radical change, for example by making life as difficult as possible for drivers.

'I don't call her Hidalgo,' he said. 'I call her Hidaldingue' (Hildalcrazy).

Taxi drivers are by nature complainers. I don't remember one of them anywhere in the world telling me that all was going well in his country and that he had never been so happy and contented. Moreover, as they themselves readily admit, the French are what Boris Johnson would not doubt call *world class* complainers. They have communicated this characteristic very successfully to immigrants of North African origin, as many taxi-drivers in Paris are. For the French, nothing ever is ever going well, except in retrospect, and all is for the worst, even as life on its surface seems to go on pleasantly enough and everyone seems to be enjoying himself.

But all the same there was in the bitterness of this man's complaint an unmistakable air of sincerity. His complaints were not merely formulaic and his anger and frustration were real, not that mere sincerity by itself justifies complaint. It pointed to something beyond itself, and not merely to the sorrows of Parisian taxi-drivers.

Notwithstanding the recent Covid pandemic, we are in most respects the most fortunate generation that has ever lived. We live longer, with less physical suffering, than any previous generation. Accidents are less frequent than ever before and when we do fall ill there is incomparably more effective treatment available. Our range of our consumables and entertainments would make Louis XIV gasp with astonishment. Nor can we claim to be more or worse oppressed than any previous generation, notwithstanding the efforts of the politically correct. We do not (yet) fear the midnight knock on the door.

And yet I think that many people, perhaps most, would not dismiss the complaints of the Parisian

taxi driver as being a mere quirk of his rancorous or dyspeptic character. We all know, or at least sense, what he means when he says that life is becoming intolerable. Somehow technical sophistication has failed to translate into the better quality of life that technophiles would have predicted. Wondrously sophisticated technologies of surveillance do not make us feel more secure but rather make us feel more anxious. Far from opening up the world to us, the new technologies seem to imprison us. We live in a world of passwords and pin numbers and security checks, as if we were constantly in danger or imminently under attack. Safe and secure as never before, yet we are anxious, bullied and badgered by the very authorities that claims to be acting in our interest. We are all Parisian taxi-drivers now.

Edward Theberton is a writer.

How Famous Paintings become Giant Banknotes

MARK GRIFFITH

The covid-19 pandemic brought a number of usually quiet lobbies into the limelight. These lobbies include groups that want to see travel restricted, and freedom in general reduced. Mark Carney, one-time Bank of England governor, has said that 'rigid' restrictions on liberty will become necessary. They also include suggestions that cash should be phased out, censorship normalised, privacy lessened. These desires, and others, hitched a ride on the latest respiratory disease from China.

In some ways, changes being advocated to money are the most interesting of these.

The phasing out of paper and metal cash in favour of digital payments is carefully couched as convenience, the inevitable march forward of technical progress. The idea that banks and governments would like to inspect every transaction, and ultimately control dissidents' every mouthful, is played down.

Mentions of how criminals like the anonymity of cash are dropped in to smear what used to be our normal experience of money: the old fallacy that 'those who have nothing to hide have nothing to fear'. Western state officials drool for the kind of powers Chinese apparatchiks have. In China state bureaucrats have already decreed entire cities off the map of cash, forcing every single person there to buy every bottle of water off a telephone or digital card whose payment facility can be switched off remotely like a tap, if and when the authorities choose. A *Guardian* journalist visiting a Chinese coastal city of over a million people four years ago couldn't buy anything in any shop until his local hosts lent him a phone.

Yet the same people championing digital payments in conventional fiat money monopolised by governments become oddly Luddite when they criticise 'cryptocurrencies', themselves digital currencies living on computers.

So paper cash is old-fashioned, clumsy, even physically germ-laden this amazing argument was tried early in the covid-19 scare, yet crypto like BitCoin, DogeCoin, Ethereum, Monero *et al* are too computerish and digital. Defenders of national monopoly banks maintaining uncontested control of money both want digital payments to wipe out notes and coins and want new currencies based on digital payments to be tightly regulated. That is, controlled by the same finance ministries who have been mismanaging our money now for over a century.

What these people dislike about both paper currency bills and crypto, is that both provide some protection and privacy for ordinary people. At least some measure of protection against having their savings remotely revalued, spied on, confiscated, taxed by the descendants of the state authorities which effectively nationalised currencies issued across Europe in the late 17th century, and early 18th century, tightening their grip in the decades ever since. The global ban on physical bearer bonds, paper documents which until quite recently were legally carried across borders in any briefcase in favour of having all bonds electronically tracked and overseen by an office in Paris is a foretaste. This is what they

want to do to cash as well as to the experimental new instruments called cryptocurrencies.

One of the hardest things to explain to my high-net-worth clients whose own wealth seems to them as solid as mountains is the extent to which markets depend on trust, authentication, and reputation. Nothing is really worth anything unless other people are willing to exchange stuff for that product, but this is a strangely elusive, slippery insight for non-economists. National fiat currencies are trusted because we believe nations are trustworthy entities.

Many economists support the idea that currencies should always be controlled by political blocs. They know which expenses-paid weekend parties they want to be invited to. One interpretation of economics currently popular with leftists, called variously 'chartalism' and 'modern monetary theory', says that what gives a circulating currency its real value is that the government in power accepts it for payment of taxes.

An anecdote popular with economics lecturers has either a British or American battleship in World War II needing fruit and vegetables from an Indian Ocean island. They find the tribesmen uninterested in anything they offer as payment. The story goes that the naval vessel eventually paid in brightly-coloured paper notes – the fake money in a Monopoly boardgame the sailors had on board, with the toy money later being found still happily circulating on the remote island decades later. This tale suggests money need have no intrinsic value, that it's a label provided by an outside authority.

It fits the chartalist view of how economies work, where money is a tool handed down and controlled by governments. Classical economists, though, disagree.

For example, during the last thirty years in Somalia, a cruelly divided society ruled by local warlords rather than a state apparatus, transferrable minutes on mobile phones spontaneously became a currency. Telephone minutes have intrinsic value (unlike Monopoly notes from a boardgame on a battleship). No Somali authority decreed them a currency.

These are the two extremes. Conventional central bankers like Mark Carney see state control as vital. They see unregulated use by non-bankers whether suitcases of banknotes, trade in crypto, or paper bearer bonds, as harmful. Classical economists and libertarians say the opposite: money belongs outside state structures too.

Ultimately, the libertarians are right: examples abound of ungoverned zones adopting some commodity as a makeshift currency. In many wars, cigarettes spontaneously become currencies. Unopened packs are big-denomination notes, individual cigarettes the small change, and unopened soft packs more valuable than hard packs. Little-known collectors' items like baseball cards, some worth thousands of dollars for a single item, already generate their own spontaneously-organised supporting industry of graders, valuers, authenticators. Value comes from acceptance by traders in the market, not certification by a central government body.

Indeed, while conventional bankers think removing high-value currency bills pushes criminals into digital payments, actual criminals are streets ahead. Art historians have specialisms and will tell you, if you protect their names, of mysterious invitations to Caribbean islands. Some nights in a luxury hotel with good food, and a well-paid evening at the local marina on someone's yacht professionally valuing Degas charcoal sketches or Leonardo pen drawings. The yacht owners often seem slightly unlikely art collectors, with one or two improbably beautiful girls tucked away below deck.

Once there, our bespectacled art-history academic is paid to check for forgery and possible provenance. This is not the art world as such. These are high-value currency notes, effectively hundred-thousand-pound banknotes. Stolen artworks, usually drawings by established masters rather than bulkier, more fragile, paintings, are used by drug gangs and weapons dealers as a form of cash. Authentication is done by flying in one of the handful of accepted authorities on that particular artist.

Although they talk up controlling crime, those attacking both cash and crypto are mainly interested in bullying ordinary law-abiding people like us. Cash powerfully serves real people. Likewise, crypto-currencies, despite at this stage their wild swings in value and apparent complexity, are the biggest step forward in finance in three centuries. They revive private currencies and are the biggest threat to state monopolies in money since the 17th century.

Savers should educate themselves into them carefully, but decisively, making greater use of both.

Mark Griffith runs a weblog at http://www.otherlanguages.org. *He is currently making a documentary film asking: Do fewer people now read books? If so, does it matter?*

LBGTQ+M

Mark Mantel

When we're born, a doctor usually says that we're male or female based on what our bodies look like. Most people who were labeled male at birth turn out to actually identify as men, and most people who were labeled female at birth grow up to be women. But some people's gender identity – their innate knowledge of who they are – is different from what was initially expected when they were born. Most of these people describe themselves as ***transgender****.*

National Centre for Tramsgender Equality

It's high time I came out of the closet: I am a Mongolian trapped in a White Man's body. Born in Russia I have known this ever since I first heard how our mighty horsemen, my ancestors, swept across the hoof-trodden steppe and raided Christendom and so-called Holy Russia. You can laugh if you like. But we all know perfectly well that race is a fluid construct. It doesn't matter a whit what my DNA says. The essential thing is that nobody knows my innards but me. Even the great metaphysician Schopenhauer taught that everyone has a direct knowledge of himself that is totally outside the world of science and causality. So, all the labs in the world and all their cognitive methods can't access the slightest scrap of my interior life. That is how things stand.

Genghis Khan

Now, some of you may think I don't even look Mongolian. But that objection doesn't count. I alone know full well that I only want mare's milk and not cow's milk. I can't stand cow's milk. So how can some bespectacled lab tech prove anything? Besides, I know a plastic surgeon who can fix me right up. He offers a package deal and can brush my skin with a pinch of yellow. He can even tighten my eyes a notch or two and give me the jet-black hair that is the real me. Sorry, but I can't go on living a lie.

I went over all this with my therapist and he says I have Racial Dysphoria and I need to make 'the change' soon to be an authentic person. He even called it a 'Race Affirmation' surgery because it isn't even a change at all. I agree!

Some people say I don't need to go all out. They think I can just have a Mongolianian barbecue once a week and be done. But people are ignorant. The real problem is that other marginalised individuals have activists raising awareness left and right. They lobby the legislators and get film stars on their side and scribble confessional verse. Everything is made easy for them. But I am alone. I do have one fellow who was formally Swedish and is now fully Ethiopian but he is not much help.

Anyway, my name is no longer Mark. I am now Muqali Xanadu. I will be terribly offended if you utter my false name. Indeed, I have even cooled relations with my Mom since she keeps slipping up. I never wanted or chose the name Mark. And I won't have my autonomy violated by her again. This is no longer the age of mimesis. She needs to wake up!

Yes, I will insist on all my rights henceforward. If I get into a bar brawl and someone knocks my nose, I won't stand for it. The bigot will go down for a Hate Crime. There may not be many of us Mongolians riding around, but that doesn't mean I can't get the same government spoils as any other victim. If anything, I should get more than others!

What you must understand is that the history of our oppression is very little known. Did you know, for instance, that the Roman general Stilicho impaled two of us? Yes! The two young men were in his army and they killed another Mongolian while drunk. Among us, you must pay blood money if you kill someone, but not if you did it drunk. But Stilicho imposed his Roman law because he thought drunkenness made things worse not better. I won't get into it all. Some liars

claim they were Huns and not real Mongolians. Just remember one thing: Mongolians gave you the stirrup and are thus the basis of your entire civilisation. The Arabs may have given you Aristotle but what good did he ever do you? Just gave you a bunch of Scholasticism that led to Nominalism that led to Terry Eagleton. No, the stirrups are what did you right and don't forget it.

DNA never had a thing to do with being Mongolian. When we swept out of the chalky shrub over a place, we took a lot of tribes along. We were a real confederation of mixed blood. It was like a damn Andalusian paradise out there on the wormwood scrub of the steppe. The whole binary view that you got to be this race or that it doesn't work with us. A Viking-Mongolian or a Mexican- Mongolian is just as right as a Mongolian-Mongolian.

And I don't want to hear about what's happening in every cell of my body. I already know every cell of my body. They are each and all thoroughly Mongolian right down to their glorious nuclei!

Anyway, now my task is to get in on the + part of the LBGTQ+ thing. You probably wouldn't think, at first blush, that I am that sort of victim but I very much am. You see, it is a historical fact that a real Mongolian man must kidnap his wife to earn a rightful claim over her. It is true that for a very brief time, our elders tried to do away with this venerable practice. It was the wives and not the husbands that recoiled from this silly innovation. They didn't respect their new husbands at all and even felt cheated. It took the gallantry right out of everything. Anyway, everyone realized very soon that we absolutely had to go back to our prelapsarian way. So, now do you not readily see that I must get my + badge without delay?

I am not saying I am just like the others in that community. Do the others always agree about everything? For the longest time, the Ls and the Gs couldn't bear one another. And even now half of the Ls don't even believe the Ts have full ontological standing. One letter believes in total biological determinism. The other letter won't even hear of biology. So, if they can all put their differences aside why not include me?

How does one even apply? Do I just show up to a parade and march with the others? Or is there a clubhouse where I must run errands and be a lackey until they decide? It's all just really befuddling. All I can say is that nobody who has not had this exact albatross upon his neck could ever possibly know what it's like. And above all: everyone must always remember that I did not *choose* to be a Mongolian!

Who knows who they will let in? Would they let in a sect of eunuchs for Christ? Or how about a big pasha with ten wives? Honestly, I am a bit worried. I feel maybe I won't be enough transgressive to make the cut. Maybe I need to take up their tone and style more? Well, if I fail, I will go back to the whittle-wattle of my homeland and watch the silver fish leap. But I will not fail. I must take heart! Wish me luck!

(If you have been affected by this article and have similar concerns, perhaps you are Chinese trapped in a Ghanese body, our team of race dysphoria counsellors are waiting to hear from you. Ed)

Mark Mantel is a lawyer

Charles the Third

Jane Kelly

Seeing Prince Charles' lugubrious Hanoverian face on TV recently, I wondered for the first time, if going on with a monarchy is a good idea, after all, what is left for him to rule over, hardly anything recognisable as the nation to which his mother dedicated her life in 1953.

The particular difference between then, a nation with its own culture, traditions and history and now, when all that is being disbarred, was evident as I read the latest news from the National Portrait Gallery. Set back from Trafalgar Square, with narrow rather cosy Edwardian revolving door where it was easy to picture people from the past such as Virginia Woolf and George Orwell squeezing through, the entrance led to a tower like place, where you could begin at the top with our early rulers, and descend, passing all the significant faces of our island story, to the ground floor and the 20th century – as it was when I first visited aged nineteen. It was a fantastic place for a history lover as well as any one interested in portrait painting and literature. I remember standing before the portrait of George Eliot and my then boyfriend saying, 'He was an odd-looking chap'. Such were the joys. It boasts one of the best portraits of Churchill, by Sickert who obviously

loathed him, awkward domestic pictures of the Royal family, the allied line up for the Versailles settlement, with politicians cut out and stuck in as events changed, and all of Bloomsbury.

It closed in 2020 for its 'Inspiring People' development, which will replace the front portico with a, 'More welcoming visitor entrance,' and present images for a much wider public. Just who they are is clear from its current on-line shows: An on-line photo shows a black family sitting happily opposite a large painting of some obscure Stuarts. The page declares: 'This week, we're celebrating #LGBTHM.' There's a grainy photo of someone who published an anonymous lesbian novel in 1949. They also advertise a show of work by 'Gluck' a 20th century painter who wanted 'no prefix or suffix. Proof that gender has infinite variety.' Portrait of the Day is good old Oscar. As they put it, 'Wilde's wit and bravery to defy social norms as a gay man in the 19th century makes him an amazing icon for #LGBTQ+history month.'

The faces of Charles' ancestors are not being advertised. At the exhibition of Hogarth's painting down the road at Tate Britain, the whole of British history is up for smashing to pieces, as he is reviled not just for sitting on, 'racist' mahogany furniture, but for being white and living in the 18th century. The attitude of that show's curators and numerous 'commentators' was summed up in the writing beside a painting showing a lady sipping China tea from a delicate bowl, by Prof Chi-Ming Yang, who now lives safely in America and studies 'Asian art in the world of Atlantic slavery'.

Her current book on 'Global chinoiserie' studies the connected histories of race and colour through the lens of the China trade and the transatlantic slave trade. She says the gently satirical painting shows how, 'Dissolute White (*sic*) people correspond with shiny objects in the scene of domestic disarray. However indirectly, in this painting the atrocities of Atlantic investments are invoked in relation to expenditure on Asian luxury goods – overall a picture of white degeneracy.'

That is one of the kinder comments on the paintings which all apparently show scenes of slavery, (the curators believe that we had slaves on mainland Britain) or male oppression and attempted rape. Our history is now a thing so scandalously wicked and depraved that it cannot be seen studied or viewed without warning notices, which were also there on the walls.

Unlike the school children who waved flags when Elizabeth II ascended the throne, today's youngsters are well informed about the evils of their past and the burden of guilt they must, if unfortunately white skinned, always carry. Last year, pupils from Welbeck Primary School in Nottingham wrote letters to Boris, calling on him to resign as an unworthy hypocrite. The head, Rebecca Gittins said it had been part of an exercise in letter writing and 'critical thinking'. The government has just issued warnings to teachers about 'maintaining a balance' in lessons about the detested British Empire, and the portrayal of 'contentious' historical figures.

Since the 1990s education seems to have been increasingly influenced by the ideas of Marxists such as Walter Benjamin, who wrote that, 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'. That idea has become a commonplace of critical theory, even though he was vague about the nature of the barbarism. Today the word signifies slavery, class exploitation or any other brutal system of social domination, usually blamed on the west. Benjamin's idea of History, which is now integral to schools and universities, was that there is no such thing as past, present and future, instead a binary structure of now and not-now. Not-now such as Hogarth or Churchill's time, being a blend of past and future. We once used to place past before now, and future, after, but according to Benjamin and other critical theorists it would make more moral sense and help to inculcate radical change, if past and future changed places, or at least became indistinguishable. He also pointed out that History, if it can be studied at all, is a dialogue, a dialectic where we in the now, know more than those in the past, and must challenge them with what we now know.

Charles will not be able to rule a country which has a past, apparently his coronation service will reflect this, being multi-cultural and all faiths rather than Christian. Since the 1950s religion has died for most of the indigenous people, replaced by worship of the NHS as the last bastion of strength and support after all other hierarchies have been flattened. He will rule over a country of cities split between wealthy urban elites, many of them foreign, and poor migrants. Suburbs and market towns will be dominated by middle-class vegans and climate change activists, many fleeing from London. He probably won't be troubled by what is now termed the 'white' working-class. They've lost their voice almost entirely and have less representation and attention spent on their needs than in May 1926, a month after the Queen was born, when Battersea Power station had to be manned by soldiers to protect it against supposed Bolshevik strikers.

It might be best to give up on the monarchy and start again with what we now have, and what that is, needs an entirely new name.

Jane Kelly was a social editor for the Daily Mail.

Rap Music – Pop goes the Amygdala

Theodore Dalrymple

The only article of mine that has ever caused anything like a furore, and by now I must have written thousands, was one I wrote for a Belgian newspaper, Flemish to be precise. There were hundreds of angry responses, if not more, and surprisingly enough from young people – surprising because we are told that the young no longer read newspapers. Perhaps they heard about my article some other way. In any case, I usually write with such moderation that even those who disagree with me manage to control their outrage. What produced this storm of fury? In my article I suggested that pop music was responsible for much misery in the world and was in fact an important cause of crime. I was being slightly tongue in cheek, of course, but perhaps the irony was lost in the translation, either verbal or cultural. Besides, there was an element of truth in what I said. So angry a response naturally led me to suppose that I had touched a raw nerve and that the anger aroused was in part a subliminal acceptance that what I said was true. No one is angrier than the justly accused.

I pointed to several strands of evidence, none of them conclusive, of course, but which were suggestive. In the prison in which I worked, for example, there was a prison officer – they don't like being called warders any more, of Jamaican origin, a man who was universally popular and respected, who discovered that the music which was played on the prison wing of which he had charge influenced the behaviour of the inmates very greatly. If they played, or were allowed to play, the music of their choice, which was mainly savage and brutal, they grew agitated and aggressive; but if, on the contrary, they were played baroque music, they calmed down and violent incidents became far fewer. Henceforth, he discouraged music of the agitating kind and promoted its opposite. I mention his Jamaican origin because it could not be said that he was culturally pre-programmed to make such a discovery.

Discoveries such as his are often made by other people at the same time, without there having been any contact between them. There was a custody sergeant at a police station which I had regularly to visit at night after the arrest of a real or putative lunatic, and he – the custody sergeant – had come to a similar conclusion about the folk who temporarily were his wards. He preferred Brahms to baroque but observed a similar effect. He operated a strictly No Rap Music policy, and it worked.

The agitating quality of so much contemporary pop music is clear from the way young men drive when their cars throb with it. They go into a trance-like state and, already inclined by their age to think themselves invulnerable to accident and death, they drive as if to mow down multitudes in a crowded street. Their music precedes them like a cold front on a weather map, first apprehended by a rhythmic vibration through the ground, to be succeeded after they have passed by the boom of an incessant bass. Of course, there is the question of the direction of causation: do they play this music because they are inclined to, and like, agitation, or are they agitated because they play this music? But whatever the answer, it is obvious that such music is inimical to reflection and thought. It is not such as can be played at any level except *fortissimo*, nor is it such that one can simply listen to it in a quiet and contemplative fashion. It frequently breathes and appeals to a hatred of the world. It celebrates, and encourages, ugliness, physical and spiritual.

Of all the genres and subtypes – *Grime*, *Garage* and so forth, names redolent of inversion of the value placed on beauty and ugliness, the latter inherently more democratic because so easy of achievement, the worst is Rap. Whenever I hear it – and no one, alas, can evade it entirely in a modern town or city – I recall those lessons in physiology in which an electrode was placed in the amygdala of a cat's brain that, when a current passed through it, evoked a rage reaction in the cat without any other stimulus, rage devoid of reason. Insensate anger is what Rap evokes, and the resort to insensate anger is hardly conducive to refined behaviour. It is perhaps not surprising that the careers of several famous Rap 'artists' have been terminated by murder.

Anger can be its own reward, as honest reflection will reveal to anyone who has enjoyed righteous indignation; it easily persuades one that what one does is right *because* one is angry – generously angry, in one's own estimation, against some injustice in the world. I do not mean to imply, of course, that there are no such injustices. The state of anger is pleasant

once it detaches from an immediately exciting cause and attaches only to generalities. People who would never normally throw a brick through a window will do it in the name of a cause with a sense of their own moral grandeur, failing to recognise their own pleasure in destructiveness and in the tinkling sound of broken glass. Rap induces, or at least appeals to, such a state of such self-righteous moral libertinism.

The lyrics of Rap often express violent sentiments without ironic distance, almost triumphantly. No authority is recognised other than that of the singer, no blessing is counted. There is no consolation in it, no tenderness. Rap appeals to a crude Nietzschean drive to power, to a vicious daydream of the impotent. And once engaged on such a path, there is a tendency to a vicious cycle of extremity.

The popular music of no other region of the earth is as crude, ugly or brutal as ours. Of course, this does not mean that ours is the most brutal region of the earth, far from it; music is obviously not the sole determinant of conduct. But the quality of our lives and interactions is coarsened by its prevalence: it maddens and, when played loudly is an exercise of power over others. I knew of more than one case of murder or attempted murder motivated by the frustrated desire to escape this incessant music.

The young Belgians were infuriated by my remarks, far beyond any mere disagreement over a theoretical question. It was not that they pointed to weaknesses in my argument, which I confess are many because speculations of this kind are not susceptible of final proof – correlation not being causation, for example.

My attack on pop music, particularly on its omnipresence, was experienced as an attack on a whole way of life, a whole scale of values, a worldview, not just as a matter of taste, as for example would be a preference for Velasquez over Murillo. The vehemence of the response was reminiscent of that of a rigid religious believer the tenets of whose religion are questioned from a point of view that he suspects to be rational. Indeed, more than one response suggested that I should be silenced, that I had gone beyond the permissible, that criticism of pop music was for young people what criticism of the person of Mohammed is for many Moslems.

Theodore Dalrymple's latest book is In Praise of Folly*, Gibson Square, 2019, £9.99.*

Oh Canada!

JOHANNES KARL OTTO DANNESKIOLD-SAMSOE

Last week thousands of Canadians stood on the side of the road, in sub zero temperatures, staring into the cold abyss of tundra – waiting, hoping, that their boys, the so called deplorables, the detestable soot filled faces of the untouchables would emerge before dusk; they watched the foggy horizon intently, conspicuously, with waving flags and prepared foods, hoping to catch a glimpse of truck lights and the men in their overalls and wellingtons, sitting behind their wheel with their bad knees and aching backs, with the windows rolled down, with pumped fists, while steering to their glorious destination – not to drop off foods or luxuries, but to deliver Canada from a Neo-Marxist despot. They wondered, with bated breath, if those western cowboys and rugged individualists would stay true to their word. Would they turn back? Did they have the fortitude to go on?

Just when hope seemed forlorn, thousands of blue-collar men working the oil fields of north-west Canada emerged from the darkness. On that gloomy horizon, their lights were a beacon of hope, a reminder, if not a historical promise, that good men, real men, would still rise to the occasion, unabated, undaunted, and willing to do whatever it takes to secure liberty. Their horns symbolized hope. Not that 'all-talk-no-action' hope you get from equivocating political quacks, but that calm unbending will that exists only in men of action. No words and no promises were necessary. You knew everything would be okay. Hell, they even looked the part. Big beards and big muscles, just like you've read in the history books. The reckoning had finally come. The arrogant socialist academics and their collectivist utopian peddlers had finally met their match. There was a palpable change in the air. You

could breathe again.

The political class and their propaganda outlets called them 'bigots and terrorists', and warned that they might 'rape your daughters'. They were painted as shameful, disgraceful deplorables, crazed lunatics, and a 'fringe minority' with 'unacceptable views'. In lieu of meeting with these men, Trudeau, the boy in parliament grabbed his wig and scurried to his bunker. Instead of listening and compromising, the leader of a democratic nation chose to run from his own people.

At night, while he tosses and turns, Trudeau dreams of big beards and disgruntled faces; he wonders why these unrefined behemoths won't just return to that backward place of North-West Canada. Don't these pesky losers have oil to drill, or a puck to swing at?

The Ottawa elitists complain that the incessant horns are a nuisance. The left wing *Washington Post* called for the Prime Minister to 'confront them'. But will the gutless boy dare cross that Rubicon?

Does anyone else find it strange that the elites of Ottawa are more worried about honking horns than freedom of speech, or bodily autonomy? Does anyone find it rather bizarre that Canadian politicians are more worried about virtue signalling their respect for Chinese New Year than spending time with the hundreds of thousands of citizens parked right outside their building?

Over the last thirty years we've seen our heartlands and downtown's gutted by big box stores and the oligopolies that own them. We've seen the rise of supranational institutions, one of which is managed by a Marxist in Brussels named Klaus Schwab who, apparently, claims 'you'll own nothing and like it'. Incidentally, is anyone surprised that he has an uncanny resemblance to Darth Vader?

Each year unelected bureaucrats in Ottawa, Washington and Brussels obtain more power at the expense of the local community. Can someone please tell me the point of voting for a representative, when that representative has to yield to an institutional apparatchik? Why do Truckers have to drive three thousand kilometres to get anything accomplished?

These new age petty tyrants seek to regulate our speech. They omit important data, and cancel those who refuse to comply with their dogma. They fund the majority of academic studies, and mount vehement attacks on academics who publish independent studies contrary to their opinion. They tell us when and how we can worship our god. They shut down our businesses with the stroke of a pen. They close the borders and prohibit our travel. They call science 'anti-science', and 'anti-science' science. They tell us to choose between a job and a jab. And like all tyrants, they call for higher taxes to pay for their lavish spending.

In every city, in a hundred different countries, thousands of truckers should join them.

Hold the line...

This article was originally published in the American Thinker.

The EU gives British Science the cold shoulder

Iain Salisbury

Given the then proximity of Christmas and the rise of the omicron variant, few will have paid much attention to a December 22nd BBC News report about another spat with the EU. It may be over by the time you read this but the dispute itself tells us much about what to expect from the European Commission and the advisability, or otherwise, of Britain attempting any kind of collaboration.

Horizon Europe is the Commission's flagship funding programme for research and innovation, running from 2021 to 2027, with a budget of just under a hundred billion euros. British participation was confirmed in December 2020 and it had seemed one of the least controversial parts of the Brexit Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Chancellor Rishi Sunak has allocated nearly seven billion pounds to cover the British contribution until 2025. But because the people of Ulster have an appetite for English sausages, British projects have gone unfunded and British scientists unpaid. Although little could be less relevant to science policy than the wretched Northern Ireland Protocol, 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed', means that billion-euro initiatives are being held hostage over the tiniest chipolata.

Last November, after nearly a year of obstruction on the part of the Commission, the European research and innovation community finally lost patience and issued a statement endorsed by more than a thousand universities, fifty-six academies of science and several thousand of the Continent's most distinguished researchers, urging the EU to finalise British participation immediately. It stated that: 'Further delays or even non-association would result in a missed opportunity and a major weakening of our collective research strength and competitiveness,' Professor Kurt Deketelaere, Secretary General of the League of European Research Universities, wrote: 'A further delay [in UK association] simply for political reasons is unacceptable.'

However, Ursula von der Leyen and her cronies remain obdurate. Any failure to kowtow to every last one of their dictats must be punished, irrespective of the damage that might do to Europe's own interests. At the very least, this suggests that committing to projects under the purview of such a body is to hoist one's own sword of Damocles above one's head.

As I write, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has just advised that the Northern Ireland dispute could be resolved in the near future. We've heard it before. Whatever the outcome, I suggest that there are lessons here for our long-term relationship with what we may regard as a not altogether friendly power. A power, moreover, that has an erratic, incompetent, and unaccountable leadership.

Indeed, Professor Deketelaere goes on to suggest that the squabble is sending a discouraging message to other potential collaborators. Unfortunately, he's left it a tad late to warn that the Commission's bizarre values and priorities are very much to the detriment of the European people. Recep Erdogan's human rights record has proved no barrier to Turkey becoming an associate member of *Horizon Europe*, together with such science superpowers Kosovo and Ukraine, but Switzerland is barred.

Back in 1992, Swiss voters declined to join what was then the European Economic Community. After seven years talks aimed at achieving a greater level of harmonisation were abandoned last summer. More than 120 arrangements had been agreed but the insatiate cormorant of Brussels remained unsatisfied. Despite their experience with advanced and large-scale science projects, from medicine to nuclear physics, Swiss scientists and engineers are also out in the cold.

Will the people of Europe come to regret the intellectual capacity that their lords and masters are discarding so casually? Well, Switzerland has

two universities in the world's top fifty. That may not seem impressive when viewed from this side of the Channel. Britain has eight with four in London alone, but the whole of the EU can only muster half a dozen. Moreover, EHL Zurich is rated at 15 while Europe's finest, LMU Munich, comes in at 32. This puts it behind Edinburgh, LSE, UCL, Imperial College, Cambridge, and, at number one, Oxford.

Back in 1966, I joined the first group to read physics at the then brand-new University of Warwick and, I'm delighted to say, in half a century it has already reached number 78 in the rankings. This is well ahead of France's celebrated Sorbonne, which clocks-in at 88. Italy's top University, Bologna, was founded in 1088 and has taken nearly a millennium to reach 178 while Spain barely makes it into the top 200, with Barcelona at 193. Incidentally, those tempted to write-off the United States should note that, including three in Canada, North America accounts for more than half of the world's top fifty seats of learning. Much innovation happens outside universities, of course, but Professor Deketelaere and his colleagues certainly have good reason for concern.

What might Britain be missing? While the programme includes some well-found scientific institutions which I would be loath for us to abandon, for the most part these Euro-initiatives have been massively bureaucratic money-pits that have diverted funds from dozens, perhaps hundreds, of domestic projects. I say 'initiatives' because *Horizon Europe* is far from the first and it is possible now to gauge their effectiveness. In their present form, they began in Lisbon, a few years before Prime Minister Gordon Brown skulked around the city hoping nobody back home would notice him signing-away our birth right with the eponymous treaty.

The so-called 'Lisbon Strategy' was originally set out by the European Council in March 2000. It was intended to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' by 2010. None of these goals was achieved. It was superseded by *Horizon 2020*, a 10-year programme proposed by what had become the European Commission for 'the advancement of the economy of the European Union'. It aimed at 'smart, sustainable, inclusive growth' with greater coordination of national and European policy. Since then, the number of EU companies in the world's top forty has gone from ten to two, with none in the first thirty. Now we have *Horizon Europe* to 'bolster European champions', whatever they are. Once again, 'The strategic planning process will focus in particular on the global challenges and European industrial competitiveness.' There is no record that Einstein actually did say that insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly while expecting a different result, as is often attributed, but the Commission is clearly at a loss for ideas. In this instance, it doesn't take a Nobel Laureate to recognise a fiscal black-hole.

Sending billions to the Byzantine bureaucracy of Brussels, which can then be withheld on a whim, is clearly untenable and non-association would appear to be Britain's best option. In the fullness of time, it may be possible to negotiate collaboration on a case-by-case basis. When it comes to advanced pure science, such as astronomical observatories, there are plenty of projects outside Europe that would welcome UK participation. *Horizon Europe's* half-baked industrial policy, having failed repeatedly in the past, holds few attractions now. It is a curious 'champion' that needs constant 'bolstering' from the taxpayer. In these days of low interest rates there is no shortage of cash for plausible investments while a new generation of venture capitalists is happy to pursue even the most far-fetched ideas, from quantum computing to landing on Mars. As a physicist, I still find it hard to imagine how fusion power could be a commercial proposition but several private projects are underway. British and European firms should be encouraged to compete for investment and market-share rather than for rent-seeking government handouts.

History furnishes some lessons. In the 1980s many in America became alarmed at Japanese success with the MSX personal computer system. They were excellent machines – I owned one myself. Naturally there were calls for the US government to fund domestic competitors such as Apple, whose fortunes back then seemed to be on the wane. However, President Regan felt that there was little prospect of politicians and civil servants second-guessing the market so the late Steve Jobs was left to his own devices. I doubt that any committee of government bureaucrats would have come up with the iPhone.

Iain Salisbury is a retired physicist.

Family Values

Roger Watson

I have a large family of four boys and four girls all born by the same wife. This has been the best outcome of my forty-year marriage and the fortunate conflation of fertility, fecundity and Roman Catholicism. Others are not so lucky and many struggle to have children; something unimaginable to my wife and me. Others still eschew their marital duty to have children, sacrificing their biological ability to have them on the altars of career, lifestyle and body image. A more recent phenomenon is that of deliberately limiting family size, sometimes to childlessness, in pursuit of 'zero carbon', 'saving the planet', or 'cutting carbon dioxide emissions'. This has a name, and it is 'eco-anxiety'. But the problem with eco-anxiety is that there is no point in saving the planet if there is nobody left to inherit it.

Many developed countries, including several supposedly 'Catholic' countries such as Italy and Spain have stagnant or minus population growth. Undoubtedly, they will be congratulated for their restraint by the likes of Greta Thunberg and HRH The Prince of Wales, but it is obvious that in the medium to long term this is unsustainable. Who will do the work that fuels the economy and who will do the work of looking after the aged millennials who have chosen the childless path? What will happen to these countries socially and culturally?

We do not have to look far beyond the shores of my own country, at the time of writing still the United Kingdom, to see what can happen. Our population is growing but it is not thanks to the conjugal activities of the 'indigenous' British, not all of whom are white. Long-established immigrants from former Commonwealth countries have also been infected with the Malthusian bug. We are importing people from other parts of the world at an incredible rate, some legally but thousands illegally.

They largely do the jobs that we do not want to do and do them for less pay than we consider worthwhile. These are the menial jobs and include staffing the 'open all hours' shops which we British seem too lazy to run or working in care homes which would cease to exist without them. We are utterly dependent on them. In my hometown in the earliest days of the pandemic, Asian and other immigrant shops were virtually the only ones open. At the end of Ramadan, on the feast of Eid, it is almost impossible to find a taxi. These incidents clearly exemplify our dependence on immigrant labour.

In many towns there is an identifiable community who are 'not like us' with their own industry of small shops and food outlets. They do not look like us or dress like us, which is neither here nor there. We tolerate them because they are so often doing what we do not want to do. But they do not think like us and the have larger families than we do, which is another factor contributing to our population growth. These people, largely from culturally Islamic countries, have a well-developed work ethic, strong family values and little regard for the 'first world problems' of the British chattering classes. They have large families because they consider it a duty and see the inherent value in it. I admire them greatly, but it does not take a swivel-eyed racist to wonder what we are doing to ourselves and what this will lead to. We also need to consider what the solution could be.

It is an exaggeration to say that we are being overrun by Muslims or specific racial groups across the United Kingdom. They remain in the minority in the United Kingdom. However, it does not feel like that for some people whose localities have been altered almost beyond recognition by Halal shops, Arabic restaurants and mosques and where it is almost impossible for long-standing local people to find employment. We will not send these people back to where they came from. The truth is we need them and very possibly exploit them in return for residency in our country while, at the same time, driving down wages and making jobs hard to get or not worth the bother for our own low qualified school leavers. Hard working these immigrant communities may be but they put increasing pressure on our health services, social services and educational provision. In some areas they outcompete children from local families for places in schools. Often, they are given preferential access to school places and in some Catholic schools, places for children of Catholic families are made harder to obtain due to their allocation to, especially female, Islamic children even if they do not subscribe to the school's religion.

So, our burgeoning ethnic minority communities will not be deported. I would not advocate that they are. They will continue to breed rapidly until they become enculturated, indeed some may become inculturated,

and wealthy. Prosperity, ironically, is a most effective contraceptive. Meantime, if we British do not avert our gaze from the religions of climate change, personal prosperity and whatever other motives people have for restricting family size, then we will need to import more immigrants to do what we need to keep our society running. Concomitantly we will continue losing out on the benefits of being British that our parents and grandparents fought, died and worked for with nobody to blame but ourselves.

Meantime, thousands more Christian churches will close as these cannot be sustained while our own culture will continue to become further displaced from its Judeo-Christian roots. The growing number of mosques is witness to the Christian religion being all but gone from public and private life. There is also an increasingly militant voice from the Islamic community which leads to the defenestration and, in some countries, death of those who criticise Islam or disrespect The Prophet. Meantime Christianity is mocked with impunity. Nature abhors a vacuum. If we continue to leave growth in family size to our immigrant communities then the peal of Church bells will soon be replaced entirely by the call to prayer.

Roger Watson is a writer and retired academic

The freedom that knowing how thick you are bestows

Don Beech

The demand for equality is now the most persistent theme in the liberal left's attempts to transform contemporary Britain in favour of plural identities, social inclusion and a big caring state. It might not even be too much of a stretch to say the positive value placed on equality has managed to crystallise enough moral weight to help redeem uncaring, wicked conservatives of their sins – on condition they successfully implement the one-nation levelling-up agenda promised to voters in the 2019 General Election. As things stand, there's a widely held determination from far-left to centre-right, that the march of equality through Britain's institutions shouldn't be allowed to falter; as pressure to implement the egalitarian promise underlying the Conservatives' spectacular victories in the May 2021 local elections seems to confirm.

There are many dimensions to equality, and fidelity to a singular catch-all principle is problematic. Questions are rightly raised against claims to *equality of outcome* which only those on the hard left could possibly believe desirable and deliverable; for instance, in the form of an unearned universal basic income which has been repeatedly advanced by the Trotskyite journalist Paul Mason and others of his kind. Yet for most reasonable people, equality means *de facto* a situation in which *opportunity* exists to compete for the good things in life, (economic prosperity, good health, peace of mind, offered by the society to which they give allegiance, feel they belong and enjoy a sense of entitlement in return. So as in Britain the legitimacy and practicality of any claim to equality of opportunity emerges necessarily from education, shouldn't we all support it? Under pressure of relentless international economic competition, doesn't everybody benefit when education fits us *all* to contribute *all* our talents to the fields of endeavour to which they are best suited? It's not the Middle Ages; our lives are no longer scripted by birth.

In many ways they still are. Birth still really matters when it comes to accessing life chances; and because every thinking person knows it, it follows that being an absolute term, the offer of equality *of anything at all* must by designation raise questions of integrity. After all, who believes that even the most monstrous social engineering project imaginable could equalise a whole population's start in life, even just educationally? Isn't it obvious that any educational 'starting-line' as it actually exists, constitutes manifold points of departure decided by manifold levels of social privilege? So taken at face value, equality of opportunity is at best a noble lie, and at worst mockery of those who fall for it. But even if that's true (which I don't think it is) it still shouldn't detract from the vital role it plays in creating the wealth of our nation.

By the 1970's, the premierships of Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher had confirmed that elite equality of opportunity in the form of a grammar school education had come of age in the party's power structure; and that advancement was no longer decided necessarily by informal patrician discussions out on the grouse moors. After all, what was the tripartite system, grammar, technical, secondary modern, as it emerged from the Butler Education Act of 1944, if not a recognition that

the extension of equality of opportunity was a good thing for the power and efficiency of the modern nation state; especially as by then there was an urgent need to rebuild Britain after a war. Yet by the late 1960's tripartism had been abandoned by the socialists' in favour of the non-elitist comprehensive system designed by Shirley Williams and Tony Crosland to deliver equality of opportunity to all; a disaster which transfigured the grammar school's elitist/individualistic variety of equality of opportunity into an egalitarian/collectivist form, promising, rashly some might say, that nobody would be 'left behind' and opening the way to around fifty per cent of all Britain's school children attending university.

Yet by the early-1960's, Conservative one-nation reformer Iain Macleod (1913-1970) had unambiguously confirmed the rationality of elite equality of opportunity when, against the socialist current, he boldly made the case that far from being a bad thing, 'young people should have *more* equal opportunities for proving themselves unequal'; thus ratifying the function of grammar schools in prising open a chance for society to pillage the untapped intellectual capital of the lower regions of Britain's class structure, expressly to feed the ever-growing administrative and commercial bureaucracy demanded by the post war national recovery.

Hence between 1948 and the late 1960's and, drawn from all social classes, around 12-15 per cent of British children attended grammar schools; whilst it certainly extended elitist opportunity to those who started out at the bottom, its benefits still went overwhelmingly to the children of less well-off middle-class parents – and so wasn't as radical as it might have seemed at the time. Yet Macleod's proposition was, at least in my experience of grammar school, an accurate representation of what actually went on there. Needless to say, there were losers like me who, for many years were left bereft of intellectual and social self-confidence.

It's hard to believe now, but sixty years ago I attended a primary school in East London built close to the busy A13 trunk road and about half a mile from the Ford Motor Company's blast furnace; most days I watched from my desk as it lit up the sky and showered our school with its toxic dust. It was John Evelyn sucking up to Charles II in his *Fumifugium* (1661) who first recommended moving London's industries 'five or six miles' to the east to improve central London's air quality; and although you would think that all the social reform in the intervening three hundred years might have tempered this kind of contempt for East Londoners' health, obviously you would be wrong! But for me it didn't really matter for much longer because, as if by a miracle, and despite probably having been poisoned by the Ford Motor Company, I managed to pass the 11-plus exam and, at least during the day, found myself in quiet leafy suburbs as far removed as I could imagine from the industrial garbage tip I grew up in. I discovered that some folk even owned the beautiful (to me anyway) houses they lived in.

However, it didn't take me long to realise how much 'cleverer' than me many of the other baby boomers were. They quickly grasped the horrors of advanced mathematics and Newtonian mechanics, whereas my talents were strictly limited to arts subjects such as English and History. Sociologists will offer the usual lefty excuses for my failure, inappropriate socialisation resulting in poor concentration. I'm now fully prepared to admit the simple and perhaps more fundamental truth that in terms of number and especially Newtonian mechanics, *I was, and remain, a bit dim*; or in James Clerk Maxwell's formulation in his *Science and Free Will* (1870) the unfortunate bearer of the wrong 'little gemmule (chromosomes) which makes us philosophers or idiots'.

Yet, even if elite equality of opportunity didn't immediately work for me, it was nonetheless an instructive failure in two key senses. Firstly, as a warning to others: to members of certain ethnic minorities, and to working-class populations who had their expectations of equality rashly oversold to them not only by liberal left 'wokeness' but also by Boris Johnson. I further advise them that the fruits of equal opportunity won't necessarily make them feel good about themselves, raise their self-esteem or deliver them from the racist evil and class oppression which apparently stalk the land; in other words, save them from falling into lives of despair, unemployment, crime and soul-crushing toil in supermarkets and call centres. However, secondly on a positive personal note, within fifteen or so years of leaving, the *self-knowledge* recommended so long ago by Socrates which my grammar school experience gave me, finally surfaced, brought me to my senses, and saved me from the abyss which would have awaited me in a life of numbers, formulae, and rules and regulations; from the fate of becoming the accountant, solicitor, bank manager and high-status bureaucrat which befell most of my cleverer contemporaries. Instead, my impossible struggle with Isaac Newton taught me to be myself, know my weaknesses, limit my ambitions and avoid the dangers of hubris; and in so doing ultimately helped me find a place, if not exactly within the walls of the Celestial City, then at least where I felt I belonged; kind of.

Surrounded by some marvellous (and not so marvellous) students, I spent the rest of my working life doing what I could to convince them that it's not only 'number and quantity people' who matter, but also folk more at home with ideas and creativity. Ultimately, if elite equality of opportunity *finds us out* it's because in a society like ours this kind of exposure to reality is its most substantive, positive function. Of course, unlike those on the liberal left, most proper conservatives already know this.

Don Beech is a retired teacher.

There is only one man who can defeat Boris Johnson

Mario Laghos

Boris Johnson is the most indomitable political of our generation. His triptych of Triumph; twice elected to the London mayoralty, Brexit, and his 2019 landslide constitute a historic feat. And since that general election victory, Boris had been riding high, until recently. His poll lead, which was once larger than the one Thatcher enjoyed after winning the Falklands war, has been inverted to a ten-point deficit. Few could argue with a straight face that this reversal of fortunes could be attributed to Sir Keir Starmer. Bruising local election results which saw the Tories take Teesside with over seventy per cent of the vote demonstrated that the electorate's appetite ends where Labour policies begin, and since that time, not a lot, if anything, has changed on their part. To paraphrase Churchill, the only opposition Boris faces, has been the opposition of events. And when it comes to handling events, the buck stops with the PM.

The UK's Covid response was nothing short of a disaster. Not all of that was the fault of Boris, structural weaknesses in our chemicals and manufacturing industries meant we simply could not manufacture the PPE or tests of our German counterparts in the early stages. The scientific advice, which wrongly argued border closures would not help, compounded the problem. Though mistakes were made by the government, the good that they did, namely the vaccine procurement and the furlough scheme kept the public onside. Despite a catastrophic death toll, a breakdown of law and order amid the BLM protests, and the embryonic stages of what has now become a full-blown migrant crisis, voters were happy enough with the Prime Minister to award him a stonking victory in the safe Labour seat of Hartlepool. But through the course of this crisis, during which many were generous enough to award the government the benefit of the doubt, Boris squandered goodwill and political capital in equal measure, as frivolously as a Test and Trace contract.

Tory sleaze dogged the fag end of the Major premiership in the way that decadence defines the end of empires. Few if any parties can be in power for eighteen years before complacency and corruption send the pendulum of public opinion swinging back the other way. This kind of slow collapse can be priced into the cost of longevity for any regime. But there is no excuse for Tory sleaze to be a wart on this fresh incumbent government. This new Tory intake heralded the steering of the party into an entirely different course from the one that Cameron had plotted, and was energetically focussed around the rejuvenation and opportunity for renewal offered by Brexit. Its ranks are bolstered by MPs from Wales, the Midlands and the North East, many of whom come from working-class backgrounds. And yet, having not learned from the Cummings affair, Boris chased bad money with good, sticking his neck on the line for Owen Patterson, who showed his appreciation by promptly resigning as an MP, leaving the PM with egg on his face and Parliament furious. The attempt to rejig the rules to protect a mate is perhaps the most serious of Boris's self-inflicted wounds, and has done the most to derail his own momentum. The resulting shambles have been so embarrassing to the PM, that even Starmer has been able to make hay out of it.

There has also been a screeching handbrake turn, carried out by the Prime Minister, away from the patriotic localist agenda promised in 2019, toward the

unadulterated embrace of globalism. Naturally, climate change took the stage with COP26 being hosted in Glasgow, but Boris is pursuing the green agenda to distraction. While we might expect a Conservative government with an eighty-seat majority to be leading on law and order, border control, military might, or social issues, this one can't stop banging on about climate change. And the rhetoric is just the tip of the iceberg which show few signs of melting. This government's 'green' policies, like burning trees instead of coal in British power stations, banning fracking, importing coal rather than mining it, and paying homeowners to replace their boilers with heat pumps, together make a recipe for energy dependency, high costs to consumers, and a succession of firms lining up to go bust.

All of this needs more taxpayers cash to help those who, because of these batty policies, struggle to heat their own homes. This winter fuel crisis isn't the result of some act of God, or a natural catastrophe, but the inevitable consequence of jettisoning strategic thinking to court the middle class Green vote. Boris was elected to take back control, but spends much of his Premiership trying to tell China and Russia how to manage their energy supplies. Which, from their point of view, would be like Zimbabwe lecturing us on agrarian matters. If not for these failings, the Downing Street parties would likely have dissolved as tears in the rain, but because of the pile of straws of Boris's making, the camel's back now threatens to break.

The Devil's advocate would argue that Boris has had a tough time of it. He stepped up to the plate to get Brexit done, and he did, only to be shellacked by Covid, chaos in Afghanistan, and an illegal migration crisis. It might be that Boris is a good times Prime Minister, and is in that sense, the true heir to Blair. But any Prime Minister worth his salt must be able to deal with those damnable challenges to their leadership, what Macmillan branded as 'events, dear boy, events'. And Boris has had the majority, the mandate and the mood of the country to see these events through a damn sight better than he has, and judging by his increasingly crestfallen stupor he is as keenly aware of that fact than anyone. We have a Conservative party elected on the basis of levelling up, and getting Brexit done, and with the latter firmly in the bag, it's time to get serious about seeing through the former. But first, Boris must straighten out the only person capable of hamstringing that ambition, himself.

Mario Laghos is a political analyst and the editor of Just Debate.

Conservative Classic – 84

The Death of Humane Medicine and the Rise of Coercive Healthism, Petr Skrabanek, Social Affairs Unit, 1994

Anthony Daniels

Medical care has become ever more impersonal: I can name my doctor's practice, but not my doctor. To get an appointment with a doctor I must undergo interrogation or vetting by a receptionist to whom I must confide my woes and exaggerate my symptoms, like a child trying to attract its mother's attention. If I am lucky enough to be granted a consultation, it will probably be with one whom I have never seen before who will appear more interested in his computer screen than in me. I feel as if I fall somewhere between a physiological preparation and a statistic.

And this transformation was before the changes wrought by Covid! But the frequent inhumanity of our system would not have surprised Petr Skrabanek, a maverick Czech doctor who, when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, happened to be in Ireland with his wife, and who decided to remain. He requalified as a doctor in Ireland, became a noted pharmacologist and then an even more noted commentator on the general state of medicine. He was one of the few contributors to *The Lancet* whose contributions were witty and ironic rather than po-faced. A man of polymathic culture, speaking several languages, he became a recognised authority on the works of James Joyce. Alas, he died at the early age

alleviate that suffering. Skrabanek did not deny a proper role for public medicine, for example in immunisation programmes or meat inspection. But he was deeply concerned by what might be called the risk-factorisation of medicine, according to which people are increasingly treated by doctors not for some disease of which they complain, but for the risk of developing a disease at some time in the future based upon some demographic feature or other. Increasingly, you do not go to the doctor; the doctor comes to you.

The logic of this kind of medicine is as follows – I caricature, but not by very much. The consumption of some food or drink or other is statistically associated with either a high or a low rate of a certain disease, whereupon the public is enjoined or badgered into abjuring or consuming more of it. The statistical findings may be very uncertain, indeed subsequently misleading or even the reverse of the truth, but in the meantime millions of people have been made anxious and those who suffer from the disease made to feel they brought it on themselves because they failed to heed the latest medical directives. Financial incentives are given to doctors to ensure that the population complies with the latest, but continually shifting, guidance. The doctor ceases to be an advisor to his patient; he is the executor of government orders.

This is bad enough, says Skrabanek, but given that health authorities are inclined to see health in WHO terms, it is not just the absence of disease or infirmity but the positive presence of complete physical, mental and social well-being. There is clearly scope for health promotion to become the justification of a totalitarian regime that rules our everyday life down to its smallest detail – for our own good, of course. For who could possibly be against improved health for everyone?

This type of medicine is also always killjoy. It is like the mother who tells the maid to find out what the children are doing and tell them to stop it – whatever it is that they are doing. That the preservation of health is not the only desideratum of human existence is almost always overlooked by the Savonarolas of public health. In many years of reading medical literature, I do not recall ever having read that many people *enjoy* smoking and find that it improves the quality of their lives. I detest the habit, but do not suggest that the benefits of smoking outweigh the harms that it does, but double-entry book-keeping should by now have reached the medical profession. Life is not a prolonged medical procedure, vital as medicine is in many circumstances.

Skrabanek was himself one-sided, but he was reacting to the dangerous one-sidedness that he saw in the medical profession and the various public health bureaucracies. He was against dictatorship, whether of the Politburo or the Ministry of Health, and he expressed his opposition with scathing wit that is still a pleasure to read. His tract has never been more pertinent than now, more than a quarter of a century after its publication.

ARTS AND BOOKS

The Art of the Manuscript

John Jolliffe

Hidden Hands. The lives of manuscripts and their makers, Mary Wellesley, Quercus, 2021, £16.54.

Mary Wellesley begins her excellent book with those manuscripts which only came to light centuries after they were created. Perhaps the most sensational is the *St. Cuthbert Gospel*, made at Lindisfarne in the seventh century but only discovered when the Saint's tomb was opened at Durham in 1104. Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, printed by Caxton in 1485, only reappeared at Winchester in 1934; and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which is the first known piece of autobiography written in English, was discovered accidentally, also in 1934, by an assistant keeper at the V & A while playing ping-pong.

She sensibly constructs her book in five chief sections, covering Patrons, Artists, Authors, and the Scribes who sometimes corrected or added to the authors' works, which often contained no title or other background details. Her earliest, and most important example is Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* completed in 731, the masterpiece of the Father of English History. Also described is the exceptional interest in theology shown at first by Henry VIII in his early attempts to follow in the footsteps of King David in the Bible, and how pride and greed later turned him into a rapacious and occasionally murderous monster. She also explains that unlike the principal examples just mentioned, many other mediaeval manuscripts were collections of poems, fables, musical and other texts, 'more like bookshelves than books'. They might be in Latin, or an early form of English, or in Anglo-Norman French, as in 'ice cumence le Ysope' (here begins the Aesop.) This quotation, and others, will be helpful in showing strong similarities with modern English, and in making them more accessible and enjoyable for readers of today. She is also interesting on Chaucer, and mentions that of the nearly 500 'human life' records of him that survive, not one gives him the title of poet or links him with any kind of poetic activity. Instead, they record him as an industrious servant of the Crown on public business. A Welsh female poet is also introduced, the somewhat startling Gwerful Machain, who addressed one of her poems to her own private parts. The illustrations are beautifully reproduced on coated paper instead of the usual imperfect smudges on the printed page, which has been the debased practice of most English publishers since the 1970s, following the worst habits of the Americans. Here the amazing multi-coloured originals are so well reproduced that they convey a more lively idea of the contents than any accompanying text, however felicitous, can ever do. Why on earth can this fine example not be followed by the publishers of other books which cry out for proper illustrations? How the early artists coped with the freezing cold and the long hours of winter darkness at Lindisfarne and elsewhere is a complete mystery. But Wellesley has done a wonderful job in bringing to life these treasures, which till now have been mostly only known to specialists, and can now be more widely enjoyed. The book ends with an apt phrase, 'the privilege of perpetuity', conferred on books by their authors, 'where readers may find the dead as if they were alive'. The author has worked in the department of manuscripts at the British Library, and this has perfectly qualified her for the task she has triumphantly achieved. As well as the glorious illustrations there are no less than twenty-seven pages of bibliography for those who wish to carry their studies further. They will not be disappointed.

A Ragged Collage of two lives

Jane Kelly

Sybil & Cyril. Cutting Through Time, Jenny Uglow, Faber, 2021, £20.

In 1921, architect Cyril Power, 49, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, stopped in the street in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, to offer advice to a local girl trying to sketch one of the complex gabled houses.

Sybil Andrews, 24, didn't object to his, 'Mansplaining', and within a year he had abandoned his career, his wife and four children, and left for London to start an impoverished student life with Sybil. She was pug-nosed and pugnacious, he mercurial, sensitive and prone to obsessions. Together they formed an unlikely alternative to the artists in the Bloomsbury Group, using humble linocuts to describe the modern age.

Their influences were German Expressionism and Italian Futurism, but a more friendly, democratic art for English people, the type who were, 'determinedly, doggedly normal', living in small, uncluttered modern homes where form followed function. They were cheap, only two or three guineas at most. Jenny Uglow's parents owned *The Eight*, by Cyril and *Bringing in the Boat*, by Sybil, a wedding present from her father's best man. She walked past them, 'Without a thought for years', before becoming curious about the couple who had made them.

Cyril loved early church architecture but Sybil, who had been a welder in the Great War, working on Sopwith biplanes, dragged him into the 20th century with its new velocity and mechanised movement. Their prints, often vividly coloured, are full of 'spare curves', and 'shark-fin shadows', focussing on ordinary people in dynamic motion; helmeted dirt track riders, footballers, skaters, tennis players, men with sledgehammers or steering farm horses. Sybil's figures are 'robustly physical'. She had no time for prettiness; 'The curve of the movement, the curve of the machine, the curve of their arms', she wrote in relation to *Sledgehammers*, 'It's the *action* I am always looking for.' Later as a, 'patient but exacting' teacher she told her students about the 'violence' needed for effective creativity. Cyril's best work shows the London Underground in a rhythmic composition, with a narrowing perspective, the train rushing from the tunnel. 'Its red carriages seem to fan out toward the viewer.' There's always an element of danger as a subtext; escalators, lifts and staircases loom and threaten to swallow the trapped commuters. Their work is tiny, A4 at biggest. Cyril's *The Merry-go-round* and vivacious swirl of *'Appy 'Ampstead* burst from confined, compressed space, which adds to their sense of claustrophobia and unease.

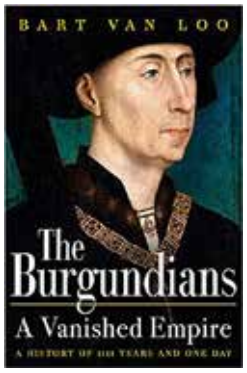
The couple were taught this new art by Claude Flight, who had spent time with the Italian Futurists and pioneered the lino technique in Britain from 1919. The three of them opened the Grosvenor School of Art, in Pimlico, in 1925, to teach it to a wider circle. Flight said anyone could try making a linocut, 'The best cutting tool was an old umbrella spoke' and the best method was to rub the back of the paper with a toothbrush. But to do it well took a lot of skill. Sybil saw the need for students to draw well, and always referred to 'carving' rather than 'cutting'.

In its detail the book could almost be a manual on etching and dry-point with their elaborate processes, but for the private lives of Sybil and Cyril the author had only fragments to work with, 'A ragged collage of two lives': sketchbooks, appointments diaries, scrapbooks stuffed with cuttings and photos. Their letters to one another were all destroyed. Despite this, Uglow deftly follows the journey of two artists whose prints summed up the dizzying mood and unease of the late 1920s and early 1930s, while at the same time they looked back, to a dream of pre-industrial English life. She had her own brilliant historical sense to fall back on, providing vivid description of life in a market-town like Bury during the Great War, with its merchants, farmers, solicitors and auctioneers having to cope with a Zeppelin raid. She has a novelist's eye for the cultural optimism of life in London between the wars; electronic billboards and speeding traffic in Piccadilly, John Gielgud at the Old Vic, for 4d, standing at the back, Sybil Thorndike in St Joan, free lectures at the Royal Academy and the British Museum. Sybil and her friends also spent time reading and writing poetry, baking, making jam, studying local history, walking, camping, singing folk music and playing recorders.

Flight hoped that the humble lino-cut would, 'Dispel the scorn for the new.' Perhaps they did; by 1935 public excitement about them was over. Surrealism was the new thing. Salvador Dali gave a lecture in London in a diving suit, and then came abstract art. But the influence of the Grosvenor School had spread to America, China, and Sybil had wealthy clients among the Jewish community in Alexandria. As war approached, she and Cyril both turned more to religious themes and she decided to leave the whirling energy of London for a cottage in Hampshire. That was really the end of their twenty-year partnership; he was teaching evening classes in Putney and when war came, he worked in a blitz rescue squad in Wandsworth, which took nearly a thousand bombs between 1940 and 1941. She worked in Hythe, making gun boats. In August 1943, aged forty-six, she met 'craggily handsome' widower Walter Morgan, 48, who had lost his left arm at Passchendaele. He used his hook as a carpenter and to play the cornet. In October she packed aging Cyril off to his wife in New Maldon, where after fifteen years absence, she took him back apparently without a word of reproach. He wrote down the date and time of Sybil's marriage, 6th Nov 1943, 4.30pm, in his sketch book, adding that he was, 'In agony.' He made no more linocuts but, perhaps as a metaphor for himself, started drawing the ruined remains of London. Sybil and Walter, after a honey-moon at Stonehenge, emigrated to Canada where she became an esteemed

'Canadian' artist and teacher.

Like the work of Sybil and Cyril, the book comes at you at odd angles; Uglow notices the oddest detail, that a building Cyril constructed in Dieppe in the early 20th century, was later bombed flat by his son as an RAF pilot. It's impossible to read her without becoming better informed on many topics. She's even given us a new word, 'Strepitus', meaning, 'Great noise'. It's also a delight that she still writes in English rather than American, increasingly rare in publishing now, although she does have some transatlantic usage; 'Museum' instead of 'Gallery', 'Immigration', instead of 'Emigration', and there are some annoying nods towards Woke; a reference to, 'Blackamoor Jazz bands', is termed, 'Sinister.' The 1924 British Empire Exhibition gets chided for its racial stereotypes and use of the now contested word, 'Primitive'. Happily, she lets the even more contested Eric Gill off without criticism. No craven publishing fad has diminished Uglow's dazzling writerly skill and power to educated and entertain.



Arbiters of Medieval Taste

Virginia Bainbridge

The Burgundians: A Vanished Empire, Bart Van Loo, Head of Zeus, 2021, £18.47.

Bart Van Loo, showman, story-teller and prize-winning author has written a stunning epic. *The Burgundians* ranges over more than a thousand years of European history and is as rich in colour as a Van Eyck painting or an Arras tapestry. At its heart is the tale of the Dukes of Burgundy, the romantically-named Philip the Bold, John the Fearless, Philip the Good and Charles the Bold. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries this cadet branch of the French royal family ruled over the turbulent cities and states of the Low Countries, present-day Belgium and the Netherlands. It is easily forgotten that the Dukes held the balance of power between England and France in the Hundred Years' War. Van Loo writes in the *Belles Lettres* tradition of narrative history, far more satisfying to the general reader than fragmented Post-Modernism. He rejects the trend of our a-historical culture where social media propels us headlong into the future with barely time to scan the present, let alone explore the past.

The lands ruled by the Dukes of Burgundy lie on the fault-line between French and German-speaking power-blocks, and have been a locus of European instability and warfare over many centuries. Van Loo begins his story deep in the past, when the movement of Germanic tribes and their leaders began the gradual evolution of the French province of Burgundy. By accidents of marriage and inheritance Philip the Bold also became ruler of the Low Countries in 1363, through his wife Margaret of Male, Countess of Flanders.

By the thirteenth century the movement of goods and people along the River Rhine and its tributaries had made Flanders the leading duchy in the Low Countries. The region was the northern powerhouse of Europe, balancing the economic might of the Italian city states in the south and funding the less famous Northern Renaissance. The cloth industry of its cities, notably Bruges and Ghent the economic engines of Flanders, created great wealth for urban elites and their rulers. There was, however, chronic instability as business leaders and workforces alike responded to economic fluctuations. In Ghent, textile merchants Jacob Van Artevelde and his son Philip led popular uprisings against their feudal overlords.

Taxation brought the Burgundian Dukes fabulous wealth and they put down insurrections with terrible ferocity. This wealth brought about the final extraordinary flowering of medieval chivalry at their dazzling court. Van Loo expertly demonstrates how the culture it funded was another weapon in the ducal armoury, no less aware of the power of spectacle than social influencers like the Kardashian family today. Philip the Good founded his own Order of Chivalry, the Order of the Golden Fleece, emulating the French Order of the Star and the English Order of the Garter. Burgundian court ritual, involving strict precedence of personnel, exquisite clothing, food and manners, was copied throughout Western Europe before France took over as arbiter of international taste. Displays exhibited at the Dukes' joyous entries into their cities, their weddings and funerals, reached their peak in Philip the Good's *Feast of the Pheasant* at Lille in 1454. Like all such events it was a mix of high art generated by court artists and kitsch, lofty mythological themes and birds baked into pies, mechanical automatons and naked statues spouting wine. The events were recorded by court chroniclers Jean Froissart and others, whose jewel-like manuscript illustrations are widely reproduced, and brilliantly mined by modern chroniclers from Johan Huizinga

in his *Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924), to Bart Van Loo himself.

Chivalry underpinned the constant warfare between rulers of the states of the Low Countries in this time. Van Loo skilfully interweaves threads of economic, political and cultural history into one rich picture to explain how these states were gradually united under the Burgundian Dukes. Chivalric display and family dynamics hid the dull but exacting standards of Burgundian administration. Centuries of war, diplomacy and posturing culminated in the first meeting of the States General under Philip the Good in 1464. In the 'Seventeen States' lay the origins of modern Belgium and the Netherlands. The story of the Burgundian Dukes was appropriated as one of the foundation myths of the Belgian nation in the decades after it was established in 1830.

Readers of Bart Van Loo's dramatic one-volume panorama might wish to re-evaluate the assumption that the history of Europe is one of progress, unification and modernisation. This survey of more than a thousand years shows that the tectonic plates of international politics shift along existing lines and repeat old patterns. The region of Burgundy and the states of the Low Countries emerged from Dark Age empires. While the Franco-Burgundian dynasty died out, it ceded leadership of Europe to a new empire on which the sun never set. Van Loo closes his story with Charles V, the last Burgundian and ruler of the Holy Roman Empire encompassing the states of the Low Countries, Germany, Spain and the New World. We might also ponder how Belgium, the victim of bitter modern battles from Waterloo to two World Wars, became once again an arbiter of power within the European Union.

The Burgundians is a retort to the old challenge to name five famous Belgians, excluding fictional characters. They are all here, men and women of ducal and royal families, artists of the Northern Renaissance Claus Sluyter, the Van Eyck brothers, Hans Memling and Rogier Van Der Weyden, precursors to Holbein and Van Dyck, the bureaucrats whose faces they brought to life Chancellor Rollin, Louis de Gruuthuse and Desiderius Erasmus, and proto-democratic rebels the Van Arteveldes. Van Loo's excellent survey is book-ended by epics of similar scale: Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror: the Calamitous 14th Century* (1978), and Simon Schama's *The Embarrassment of Riches: an Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (1987). His book encourages readers who have done no more than pass through Belgium to visit one of its great cities, to savour their history, artistic and architectural achievements and sample their culinary delights.

Healing the Soil

Celia Haddon

The soil will save us. How scientists, farmers, and foodies are healing the soil to save the planet, Kristin Ohlson, Rodale, £14.49.

'The answer lies in the soil,' used to be the catchphrase of fictional gardening character, Arthur Fallowfield, in the BBC radio series *Beyond Our Ken*. Now it seems that the environmental lobby has caught up with the humorous rural tones of Kenneth Williams. Soil is a carbon catcher, according to Kristin Ohlson's book. Soil can save us from climate change.

Kristin Ohlson doesn't claim to be a soil expert. Instead, she has written a book about those pioneers that believe the soil itself can reverse global warming by locking away carbon. Human agriculture robs the soil of that carbon each time the earth is ploughed, whether by horses, oxen or huge prairie ploughs. The carbon is exposed to the air, turns into carbon dioxide and moves into the atmosphere where it becomes a greenhouse gas. It in turn increases how much energy from the sun reaches our planet resulting in global warming. Organic farming enthusiasts believe they can reduce this process, perhaps even reverse it, by taking carbon dioxide out of the air and locking it away in the soil.

Traditional agriculture used to put back some carbon into the soil by planting not just corn, but legume crops like beans, clover or alfalfa whose root nodules put nitrogen into the soil and increased the organic matter. In traditional mixed farming the straw from a corn crop was used to bed down animals and then put back as manure on to the field before ploughing. Other fertilising methods were to turn farm animals out on the fields after harvest to dung on the ground or to grow a quick 'cover crop' like mustard to be mulched into the ground. As every allotment gardener knows, you must feed the soil to get better fertility and to do this you need to dig back in compost and organic waste.

Modern farmers add chemicals, not compost or manure to their soil. A certain amount of crop rotation still occurs, but the straw from the corn crop, or indeed any organic matter, is rarely if ever put back into the soil as manure. You would have thought that

after the Dust Bowl in the l930s when huge clouds of topsoil billowed off the agricultural ground of Texas and Oklahoma, that farmers in the USA would have learned their lesson. But apart from planting shelter belts of trees, they merely increased irrigation from underground wells to prevent drought and added chemical fertilisers to the soil.

Modern agriculture takes away from the soil and gives nothing back. Artificial fertilisers work well to increase crop yields but they don't increase the health of the soil. Instead, with wholesale use of pesticides, they leach into rivers and water supplies contaminating these with metals like lead, mercury and cadmium. The soil becomes depleted of the organic matter which will lock away carbon.

Ohlsen covers this topic by interviewing the main American players in the organic soil world, telling us not only about their work but trying to paint a picture of the men themselves. She starts with Rattan Lal, a respected scientist specialising in soil management. Son of a poor farmer in what is now Pakistan, he went to an American university on a scholarship and has written 22 books and 919 journal articles on the topic of soil health. He believes that good soil practices would reverse global warming, not just reduce it – a claim that is still not entirely accepted by other scientists and is far from accepted in farming practice.

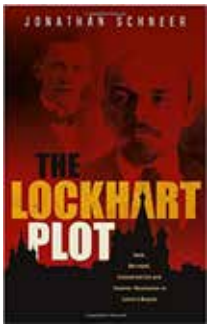
She also interviews organic enthusiasts with a less scientific background, like Abe Collins of Vermont. During her visit he was spraying unwanted skim milk and liquified fish onto his soil to feed its microbes. She tells us a lot of folksy detail about Abe but fails to question him on why catching fish, transporting it inland, liquifying it and then using it as manure should be in any way an ecologically sound idea. Her lack of critical questioning about organic methods is a weakness in this book.

The underground life in the soil, the living network of tiny beings, forms the most interesting chapter. A teaspoonful of healthy soil has about 75,000 bacteria, 25,000 fungi, 1000 protozoa and a 100 different nematode worms, according to one estimate. Plant roots can go down as far as 200 feet and even lawn grass roots can descend down to 15 feet. Various microbes bring nutrients to the roots of plants. They take up minerals from the silt, which pass through bacteria that are eaten by nematodes and next eaten by tiny invertebrate animals and excreted near plant roots. Only after this whole process has taken place can a plant root absorb the minerals.

It's a complex environment under our feet. Individual plant species each need a particular mix of microorganisms at their roots and these microorganisms need differing temperatures and water availability. They are also crucial for helping the soil retain water. Bacteria use a glue from plant sugars to stick themselves to particles of clay or silt or sand in order to stop themselves being washed away. These particles form into little clusters that make space for oxygen and water in the soil, keeping the water available for all the life forms below ground. This protects the soil not only against drought but also against flooding. And just as plants retain carbon in their bodies, so do these tiny organisms, locking it into the soil itself.

So could we save the planet from global warming by locking carbon into the soil by organic farming methods? A series of interviews about organic pioneers is not enough to convince me and I found the folksy detail distracting. I don't want or need to know that Peter Donovan, conductor of the Soil Carbon Challenge, has 'the gravity of a surgeon but one who cuts his own hair.' Nor do I wish to know about the author's difficulty in driving on the left during her trip to Australia.

Irritatingly, Ohlson gives references for each chapter but doesn't link each reference to her text, so that it is impossible to check claims without having to work your way through every reference. Its main value, therefore, as a book is the insight into the organic farming movement and those individuals trying to change American farming methods. But if the answer to global warming lies in the soil, we need to know more about the serious evidence and less about these personalities.



Nipping Bolshevism in the bud

Martin Dewhirst

The Lockhart Plot: Love, Betrayal, Assassination and Counter-Revolution in Lenin's Russia, Jonathan Schneer, OUP, Oxford, 2020, £17.99.

At least a few 'Russia experts' have just begun (I am writing this in January, 2022) to question whether two interlinked assumptions, taken for granted by most people, are, or ever were, correct.

The first assumption is that the Cold War began only in (about) 1946 and ended, rather than was suspended for a few years) in 1991, when the sudden switch in Russia from state socialism to state capitalism got under

way. The second assumption is that Russia since then has become 'post-Soviet', rather than 'neo-Soviet', misunderstanding the significance and implications that it's now the various secret and security services, headed for over two decades by KGB officer Putin, rather than Communist Party officials, which are formulating the Russian Federation's domestic and foreign policies. These services, still thinking and behaving in a very 'Soviet' way, have only recently been investigated by a handful of serious researchers.

For some historians a no less interesting problem is not whether the 'Cold War' has or has not ended, but whether or not it began long before 1946. Was the key turning-point in January 1918, when the Bolsheviks forcibly and illegally closed down the Constituent Assembly, in which, after remarkably free elections, they formed only a minority? True, they shared power for a few months with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, not with the hated Mensheviks, of course, but that ended shortly after the murder of the German Ambassador to Russia, Count von Mirbach. For the next 70 years, Russia and, from 1922 onwards, the USSR was a one-Party state, with the Communists still sometimes claiming to be Social-Democrats. Could this have been prevented, or was it inevitable?

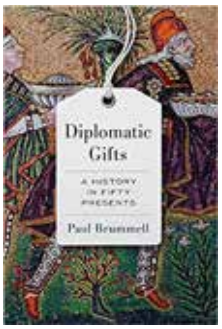
Not many non-Russians in 1918 sensed the danger of what was happening and tried to stop it. One of the few was Robert Hamilton Bruce Lockhart (1887-1970), who had been the UK's Vice Consul in Moscow from 1912 to 1917. He is now the flawed hero of Jonathan Schneer's generally excellent and very timely book, which takes its readers from early 1918 to the end of that year, when the Civil War, (which may have caused more Russian deaths than the First World War had done, was well underway.

Lockhart played perhaps the key role in this attempt to nip Bolshevik power in the bud, whether despite, or because earlier he had been rather favourably inclined towards Lenin, Trotsky and Dzerzhinsky, who at least had clear and firm ideas about what needed to be done if they were to stay in power. 'Thus the former champion of cooperation with Bolshevism and opponent of any Allied landings in Russia at all, came first to advocate landing with Bolshevik permission, then to landing without it, and finally to landing in concert with anti-Bolsheviks who aimed at counter-revolution.'

In disrupting this Plot, the key role was played by Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Cheka, who *separately* infiltrated *two* of his agents into the Plotters' circle, each of whom was convinced that the other was a *genuinely* anti-Bolshevik conspirator and reported back to Dzerzhinsky accordingly, presumably to his well-concealed amusement. (Do read chapter 11 at least twice) This is *very* important, because it probably led to *Operation Trust* (*Trest*) (see Chapter 17), which later fooled many genuinely anti-Soviet emigrants in the 1920s into believing that 'Soviet power' in Russia was much weaker than it really was and could be overturned if they helped these phony dissidents more actively. I would add that this game may still be continuing today.

The Plot was a disastrous and probably counterproductive failure. 'Lockhart and his colleagues hoped their plot would represent a turning point in Russian, and even world history, but it was a turning point that failed to turn. [...] History is not unknowable, except while it is being made.' However, Lockhart and his colleagues had the consolation that they had at least *tried*. This is another indication of the importance of getting the *timing* right. Was the Plot set in motion too soon or too late? Would it have failed whenever the active stage was reached?

This monograph was deservedly one of the six (out, I was told, of about 40 books submitted) that were shortlisted for last year's annual Pushkin House Prize, awarded to the author of the most impressive recently published book in English about Russia. It wasn't the winner, but it is very well worth buying and reading. If there is a second edition, it would be helpful if the publishers added a list of the most important 1918 dates – exactly when, for instance, the Bolsheviks ended their coalition with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries and Russia became a one-Party state. Which, in essence, if not formally, it still is today.



Ferrero Rocher for the Ambassador

Alexander Adams

Diplomatic Gifts: A History in Fifty Presents, Paul Brummell, Hurst, January 2022, £25.

'It was the run up to Christmas in 1948. Sir Oliver Franks, the British ambassador to Washington, was interrupted by his secretary, who informed him that the local radio station had called to ask what he would like for Christmas. Franks, a man of frugal tastes, thought long and hard before replying. That Christmas Eve, the radio station put out a special holiday broadcast of the Christmas gifts requested by ambassadors accredited to the United States. The French ambassador had

asked for world peace. The Soviet ambassador had requested freedom for those enslaved by imperialism. The British ambassador had asked for a small box of crystallised fruit.'

Paul Brummell, ambassador to Latvia and a former British diplomat who was previously posted to Romania and Central Asia, has written a history of diplomatic gifts from ancient times up to today. *Diplomatic Gifts* is a collection of entertaining stories about diplomacy and some of the great figures of history. Brummell notes that gifts fall into different categories and perform varied functions. Some are to cement relationships or to assert status, some are propitiatory, others are made in expectation of material gain. Diplomatic gift exchanges can be elaborate as those in the Trobriand Islands, off New Guinea, which involve ceremonies days long including a mass audience. Others can be remotely transmitted by intermediaries. Portraits of monarchs were good diplomatic gifts because they could not be easily liquidated or monetised and reminded the owner of their bond to the donor. To achieve parity, governments and monarchs, unwilling to be seen as parsimonious or less wealthy compared to the other party, were forced into lavish displays.

The author has selected 50 gifts that give us snapshots of international history, world culture and the art of diplomacy. *Diplomatic Gifts: A History in Fifty Presents* starts in c 1353 BC, with a gift of two gold-plated statues from Pharaoh Akhenaten to a king of a neighbouring region, and ends in 2014, with a contemporary print by artist Ed Ruscha, given by President Obama to Prime Minister Tony Abbott of Australia. The introduction outlines the history and functions of gift giving between nations and tribes. Each entry is illustrated and consists about five to seven pages, wherein the author describes the gift and gives context.

The gifts themselves are various. They range from precious artefacts, art and ceremonial clothing to spices, animals and slaves. Some of the described gifts are now lost (Akhenaten's statues), dead (various exotic beasts, eunuchs) or potentially apocryphal the Greeks leaving a giant horse for the Trojans. The gift of a mechanical pipe organ from Constantine V, Emperor of the Byzantine Empire to Pépin III, King of the Franks, demonstrates the technological superiority of the giver. This organ became an object of wonder when it was given in 757 AD and reintroduced the lost technology of the Romans to the territory of the former North-Western fringes of the former Roman Empire, igniting a tradition of instrumental ecclesiastical music in Europe. A 1613 gift of a telescope from James I to the retired Shōgun of Japan was intended to demonstrate Britain's potential as a favoured trader with Japan. Porcelain from Meissen told recipients of the ingenuity and scientific attainment of the Saxons, who had wrested from China the long-secret formula of china.

The author explains that the term 'white elephant' refers to the elephants received by kings of distant lands; or rather, the phrase refers to the onerous burden of feeding and housing these gifts. The white elephant given to Pope Leo X was seen as particularly excessive and ridiculous and cited by Martin Luther as an example of a worldly luxury accrued by the Church. Passing on gifts is a practice as old as gifting giving. When this happens with diplomatic treasures, the next recipient attains an indirect connection to the original donor. The rhinoceros received by Manuel I of Portugal, originally from the Sultan of Gujarat – incidentally the subject of a celebrated print by Albrecht Dürer – that drowned at sea whilst being sent to Pope Leo X, was part of a chain of diplomatic re-gifting.

Some gifts proved troublesome. The ancient obelisk given by the pasha of Egypt to Napoleon – after he had asked for it – was donated in 1798, when the French conquered Egypt. However, the pasha had no way of transporting such a huge monument, so he left it for the French to collect. They could not make arrangements until 1831 and it took a full two years for the dismantled obelisk to reach the French capital from Luxor, plus another year before it was erected. Another troublesome gift may be an entire stadium donated by China to the Dominican Republic. As part of China's strategy of ensnaring foreign nations in deals that compromise the nation's elite ability to act against the interests of China, such infrastructure deals embed Chinese power within the very framework of small nations.

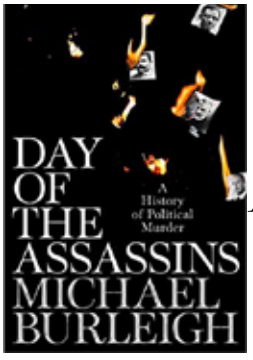
Gifts such as spices or silks came from lands that produced such items or at least had access to them, and were given to rulers of lands where such materials were rare and highly desired. They were perfect gifts because they gave to the rulers materials that were either inaccessible or expensive. Edible gifts were perfect for consumption in high-status banquets and for entertaining distinguished guests. Other perishable and short-lived gifts include the annual presentation of a bowl of shamrocks by Irish diplomats or politicians to the President of the USA; this ceremony of gift-giving of purely symbolic value established the precedent of an annual audience with the world's most powerful politician.

Presentation of gifts demonstrates the values of peoples and elites. Giving fragments of the True Cross cemented the pre-eminence of the Byzantine Empire, among Christian nations, as defender of Christendom. In 1353, under the Ottoman suzerainty, Mamluks, enslaved soldiers, were ideal gifts for the Sultan of

Egypt. War booty formed the basis of the art collection given to the Duke of Wellington by Fernando VII. Wellington had taken it from the baggage train of the fleeing Joseph Bonaparte, the French-appointed king of conquered Spain. Once he had the collection to paintings appraised in London, Wellington realised the value of the Velázquezes and Titians. He very decently offered to return the paintings to Madrid but the newly restored Spanish King Fernando graciously allowed Wellington to keep the art as an act of gratitude for freeing Spain from the yoke of French subjugation. Perhaps he expected such a response.

The most famous lost diplomatic gift is the Amber Room, given by Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia to Peter the Great of Russia in 1716. This magnificent baroque masterpiece was crafted from amber and was considered as one of the great interiors of the world, a marvel of delicacy and opulence. The room was installed in a palace near St. Petersburg. In 1941, the invading German army dismantled the Amber Room, with instructions to return this treasure as reappropriated national heritage. Installed in Königsberg Castle, the Amber Room was apparently destroyed by Soviet bombing in 1944. Despite the wild fancies of treasure hunters and cultural sleuths, there seems y little doubt that the panels were destroyed either in the bombing or in an attempt to remove them during the devastating ending to the war. A replica was created by the Russians, which was unveiled in 2003.

The selection is broad in range, including obscure artefacts as well as iconic ones, such as the Statue of Liberty. Apart from the unwelcome American neologism of 'to gift' as a verb, Brummell's prose is clear and understated, wry in tone. The book is largely and mercifully free of the retrospective moralising that scars so many recent books.



A Dictionary of Killers

Anthony Daniels

Day of the Assassins: A History of Political Murder, Michael Burleigh, Picador, £25.00.

I don't think I've ever met anyone uninterested in murder, so it would be rather surprising if there were many who found political assassination a dull subject. But there are intrinsic problems with tackling its history that this book does not quite overcome.

Michael Burleigh has written magisterial books on the frightful history of involuntary so-called euthanasia in Germany from 1900 to the end of the Second World War, the Third Reich and murderous political ideologies as substitutes for religion. It pains me to say that the current book is nothing like as good, which is, perhaps, a way of saying that I was disappointed.

I expected it to be a little like F Tennyson Jesse's *Murder and Its Motives*, providing a typology of assassinations, assassins and assassinated. It does nothing of the kind, but contains neither criteria of inclusion nor exclusion, and therefore gives the impression of being a kind of anthology of assassinations. An anthologist is open to the criticism that he has not included the reader's favourites, in my case those of James Hadfield who shot at George III in 1800 and at his trial was declared insane; or Edward Oxford who in 1840 tried to assassinate Queen Victoria and, after a period spent as a criminal lunatic, eventually became a respectable citizen of Melbourne, writing a book about the city; or Daniel M'Naghten who, believing that the Tory Party was persecuting him, tried in 1843 to shoot Sir Robert Peel, killing his secretary Edward Drummond instead. It was argued at the time that it was Drummond's medical treatment that killed him, not M'Naghten's bullet, and whose case formed the basis of the M'Naghten Rules, the legal definition of insanity as a defence that was used for more than a century in most English-speaking jurisdictions. Felice Orsini, the Italian anarchist with connections to English radicals, whose attempt to assassinate Napoleon III in 1858 killed eight people, and who later, after his release, fought in the Battle of Little Big Horn; or Vera Zasulich who tried in 1878 to assassinate General Trepov, the head of the St Petersburg police, and was acquitted at her trial because Trepov was not a very nice man, an acquittal that proved disastrous in the long run for Russia. Chares Guiteau who disgruntled at his lack of advancement, assassinated President Garfield soon after the commencement of his term of office and was executed despite clear signs of madness, probably the result of tertiary syphilis. None of these gets a mention.

Burleigh's book concentrates much more on the use of assassination as a matter of policy by modern states than on interesting figures like those above. Many states have felt constrained to eliminate their enemies by resort to murder, while rarely admitting it. There is a kind of freemasonry among political leaders, even those who are bitterly opposed to one another so that there is a general agreement among them that, while civilians are fair game, political leaders should be

inviolate. It sets a dangerous precedent for a leader to order the murder of another.

Many of Burleigh's accounts of assassination plots by states are detailed enough to be confusing, but not detailed enough to give us much sense of the character of their participants. They thus fall between two stools. One is in the end not sure what conclusion to draw, except that many politicians are unscrupulous scoundrels and human beings, or perhaps I should say *some* human beings, are capable of any degree of betrayal and depravity. I think we already knew that.

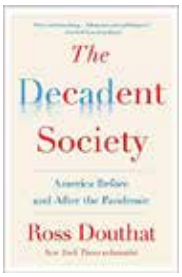
The author's particular *bêtes noires* as far as state assassinations are concerned appear to be the United States and Israel. Certainly, it seems to have been almost as dangerous, if you were a dictator, to have been an ally of the United States as to have been an enemy of it. Once you have served your term, you are dispensable. But Burleigh, in his denunciations of Israel, makes no allowances that its enemies are intent on wiping it off the map, if necessary by means of genocide. This, I suspect, would conduce to a certain ruthlessness in anyone's own defence.

The question naturally arises as to whether assassination by states ever does any good, even from their own purely utilitarian standpoint which may be grossly immoral. The overthrow and assassination of Ngo Din Diem, in which the CIA was deeply implicated, was not followed by a solution to their problem in South Vietnam, for example. But it seems obvious that if Hitler had been assassinated in 1933, say, or in 1936, the world would have been saved a lot of trouble and tens of millions of lives saved, though if he had been assassinated then, no one would have known just how much death and destruction had been prevented. The surmise also depends on the assumption that, with Hitler gone, Nazism would have collapsed as a movement. A counterfactual of such a kind can never be conclusively proved, though common sense would suggest that no one could have replaced Hitler.

Did Stalin gain very much from the murder of Trotsky? The latter would have continued writing his anti-Stalin tracts, but by 1940 communist factions were so deeply dug into their respective ideological trenches that it is unlikely that anything more that Trotsky would have written could seriously have threatened or damaged Stalin. Perhaps the murder served to demonstrate the long arm of the NKVD as a warning to other exiles. But for someone like Stalin, murder was its own reward.

Then there are enigmatic assassinations, for example that of Olaf Palme in 1986, which remains unsolved to this day, though the Swedish police have closed the case by declaring it solved to their own satisfaction. No one has ever claimed responsibility for it, apart from the 140 lunatics who have confessed to it, and no motive has ever been established, though plenty have been suggested.

Perhaps political assassinations are too varied in motive, method and circumstances to be the subject of a coherent history, but everyone will find much interesting information in this potpourri of a book.



Decline and Stagnation

James Monkton

The Decadent Society: America Before and After the Pandemic, Ross Douthat, Avid Reader Press, 2021, £10.99.

Works on the decline and decadence of society have been a mainstay of publishing for centuries, preceding Gibbon by some margin. The Decadent Society by Ross Douthat is a little different in that it takes an alternative perspective of what societal decadence means: nothing too fruity or insalubrious, or, indeed, dramatic; rather it is defined by stagnation, or the absence of progress. In particular, it focuses on the stagnation of the last two generations. This he explains convincingly for economics: wages for most people have indeed remained stagnant while the super-rich become the super-duper-rich, but less so for technological innovation, which requires further discussion.

Douthat is quick to announce that this is not an original book; as befitting for a high-profile journalist, it is more an intelligent synthesis of studies carried out by others. His quiet conservatism runs throughout, as he observes the moribundity around him. He recognises the limits of perpetual economic growth, but acknowledges that his Panglossian advice to 'bust or weaken the new monopolies' and to 'roll back the various elite privileges' 'may be insufficient to the problem's scale'. I'll say: those elites are not going to loosen their grip as if by a Damascene conversion. He identifies the weight of ageing demographics, the overhang of debt, the constraints of education, the restrictions imposed by the environment and our period of technological stagnation as being the main causes of our current malaise. But only on the debt issue does his conservatism come through strongly. Thus, on education, he rightly identifies the limited scope for further 'credentialism' (pieces of paper stating one's

educational attainments) but fails to follow up with a full discussion of the need for fewer media and gender studies graduates and more skilled workers. Reducing managerial jobs created for the former and having a workforce performing productive tasks may be another way out of stagnation.

Douthat is enamoured with the idea of technical progress forging a way out of society's inertia. On fundamental aspects, he perceptively points out how the world still looks much the same as it did forty years ago and even longer: where are the great advances in transport, working conditions, daily life and culture (music, film, literature)? For Douthat, it only seems as if we are living in a time of 'constant acceleration, of vertiginous change'. He quotes the Silicon Valley tycoon Peter Thiel: 'We were promised flying cars. We got 140 characters.' That is true, but are flying cars really any more useful than Twitter? Douthat rightly observes that 'we used to go to the moon', but now we just 'communicate faster, chatter more, snap more selfies'. While he is very aware of the shallowness of the internet, he still possibly underestimates its likely long-term and deleterious effects on society.

For a conservative he is hell-bent on rapid technological change, but at least he wants this change to be meaningful to improve society's lot, rather than merely to serve infantilising entertainment and escapism. And he is assuredly right that in medicine and science, 'rich countries spend more and more on research to diminishing returns'. A global pandemic and the global environmental 'emergency' might suspiciously be seen as ways to keep funds pouring into the pharmaceutical and scientific communities. In fact, as PhD students looking for an original subject know, new knowledge everywhere has to be mined from deeper and more inaccessible seams. Douthat ominously warns that 'the great surge of innovation in recent Western history' may be 'the historical anomaly'.

On demographics, his conclusions are correct in that an ageing population is more risk averse – older people want to hang on to what they have for their remaining years, not put their assets in possible jeopardy through seeking ever-higher returns on their investments. But his plea for increased reproduction to a maintenance level is at odds with his environmentalism: he is seemingly unaware of green religiosity having a Cathar-like influence on people who will not have children in order 'to save the planet' (for whom – or what – one wonders). This is also sometimes a self-serving excuse for consumerist solipsism. Douthat does point out, however, that society and economics make traditional family-raising harder, with all sorts of detrimental outcomes, such as loneliness in old age and that 'the personal disappointments that come with unfulfilled childbearing aspirations are probably an under-appreciated aspect of late-middle-aged unhappiness today'.

Douthat sees society succumbing ever more to an unthinking, 'comfortable numbness' of conformity, as predicted by Aldous Huxley in Brave New World. The 'pink police state' will uphold the civil liberties of personal security (being 'safe'), consumption and pleasure, while letting slide those of religion, privacy and free speech. This stagnation is sustainable but deeply grievous to the human condition. He looks toward the heavens for hope, in both religious and technological terms, seeing the populating of other planets as a way to dismiss our decadence. I am not sure how the extreme Darwinism of a hostile planet would improve rather than aggravate human nature.

Douthat is a rare bird: a Christian conservative columnist on that influential organ of liberalism, The New York Times. His is a rather small-c conservatism: he never misses a chance to lay into Trump and all his evil works, even though Trump was surely a wake-up blast against the convenient stagnation of established political leadership and institutional sclerosis that Douthat criticises in his book; but he does unfashionably take Obama to task for letting things slide on his watch. Throughout the book he generally makes a measured case for a gentle conservative approach to righting society's wrongs and shaking it up from its torpor. But for many on the right (and left), society is too far gone for such irenic solutions: sadly, the extremism of woke tyranny and elitist oligarchy will not be so much as scratched on the surface by polite disagreements. Direct, robust engagement and harsh exposure of liberal-progressive hypocrisy are necessary if some sort of sane equilibrium is to be restored. Otherwise, it is a matter of waiting patiently for the current dystopia to worsen further and, hopefully, burn itself out.

Nonetheless, this a thoughtful and thought-provoking book, useful for its soft-conservative summary of our modern-day ills. It engages readers intelligently in an ongoing debate and forces them to think about numerous fundamental issues – many more than have been discussed here.

Covid 19: Beijing's bioweapon?

Roger Watson

Viral: The Search for the Origin of Covid-19, Alina Chan & Matt Ridley, Fourth Estate, 2021, £20.00

This book is the result of a collaboration between a young Singaporean molecular biologist (Chan) working in Canada and a seasoned British campaigner (Ridley). Their mutual search for the origins of the virus that causes Covid-19 brought them together in a skilful combination of Chan's detailed knowledge of the latest methods in viral nucleotide sequencing. A nucleotide may be considered as one word in a vast list of instructions for building living things written by DNA's 64 letter alphabet.

Ridley has an eye for a good story and his ability to write a compelling tale. They did not uncover the sequence for Covid19; that was down to a series of internet sleuths some of whom had no subject specific expertise, but they synthesised them to bring us the story so far. Much has been written about the book and many interviews have been conducted so we know, from the outset, that we do not know what the origins of Covid-19 are. But in trying to find out we learn a great deal about the broken state of modern science.

Ridley is remarkable in the Covid-19 debate in having changed his mind and done so publicly about the possible origins of the virus. He initially joined in the opprobrium for those labelled conspiracy theorists and cranks for daring to suggest that there was any level of deliberate manufacture of the Covid-19 virus far less any suggestion that this could have been a laboratory leak, deliberate of accidental, from a laboratory in Mainland China. But this is how modern science seems to work and it has been exemplified repeatedly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Science is far less a relentless search for the truth than a movement where consensus overrides evidence and, at all costs, nothing must be said to upset the Chinese government. This is no exaggeration; read *Viral* and you will see that this was what happened.

The scales fell from Ridley's eyes when it became clear that the Chinese government was not telling the truth and that Chinese scientists were lying about what they knew regarding the nucleotide sequence of Covid-19. Moreover, the lies emanating from China were propped up by the World Health Organisation, essentially a Chinese outpost in Geneva, and by a host of North American scientists whose links to China and, specifically, to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan were not initially declared.

Frankly, while topped and tailed with some eminently readable chapters, most of which could stand alone as newspaper columns, the book is quite hard going in places. I have a PhD in biochemistry but must admit to finding the lines dancing on the page as he was confronted with yet another list of viral sequences, acronyms and what seemed like a view of China from an aerial satellite as we were transported several times from bat caves in Hunan Province back to Wuhan and then to other parts of China including Hong Kong. Bats have long been known to harbour coronaviruses (the class of virus causing Covid-19) and following the 2003 SARS outbreak in Guangdong Province and its spread over the region and beyond the search has been on for the likely source. It is highly possible that the original SARS virus jumped species.

So far there is no convincing evidence that SARS-CoV-2 (the official name of the Covid-19 causing virus) made such a jump. But in the vast bank of viral sequences generated in the hunt for coronaviruses that could infect humans there is one with a remarkably similar sequence to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This fact only emerged after the pandemic had been declared and the custodians of the sequence databases did not make life easy for anyone hunting the origins of Covid-19 by removing the database from the Internet on occasions. Then the Chinese scientist who was aware of the similar sequence eked out the information across several presentations until the 'gotcha' moment when the similarity was spotted by those with eyes to see. The obfuscation in the face of a potentially lethal pandemic leaves the reader with an impression that the Chinese are a very strange bunch.

But even this is not the virus that causes Covid-19. That has a specific nucleotide fingerprint in it referred to as a 'furin cleavage site'. A furin cleavage site is a chemical key that opens the door to the cell allowing the virus to enter. Not any old key. Imagine your front door has nine mortice locks, three of which have to be opened from the inside.

This is important as it is this site that gives the Covid-19 virus its remarkable ability, much more so than the original SARS virus, to infect its hosts. The existence of this specific site raised speculation about whether the virus was manufactured as this site is not known to exist in nature. Whether this was deliberately inserted as part of a dangerous 'gain of function' study (I mean – why would you?) is not known. If it was then, remarkably, nobody in China has yet put their hand up to it. But then would you put your hand up to creating, even accidently, the equivalent of a self programming

autonomous bioweapon that killed millions?

So, what about all the other nonsense we were sold about the origins of Covid-19? I think we can dismiss Chinese accusations that it came from the United States as propaganda. Likewise, speculation that it came from another part of Asia in frozen food seems unlikely given that Wuhan and only Wuhan was the origin of the pandemic. The wet market hypothesis wasted weeks of scientists' time and only after repeated anal and nasal swabbing of strange beasts – bats, civets and pangolins (all consumed in China) led nowhere did the spotlight seriously turn to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. This possibility was investigated by the World Health Organisation with the full misdirection of the Chinese government. Remarkably they found nothing.

Even without the hunt for viruses, comparisons of sequences and eliminating animals as a source, there is a compelling case for the Wuhan Institute of Virology as the source of Covid-19. The search for bat viruses took place thousands of miles from Hubei province where Wuhan is located; China's premier virology institute is in Wuhan where samples are transported for analysis; there were no other outbreaks before this and people in areas where bats excrement is harvested probably have antibodies to coronaviruses; not the case in Wuhan. So, if anything the Sars Covid virus was confined to the Wuhan laboratory until it leaked out by accident. Moreover, the existence of poor biohazard procedures in Chinese laboratories such as scientists selling off wild animals that had been used for research for food and that dangerous viral and bacteriological leaks are not unknown, even in the United States where biohazard procedures are tight, makes the case for a viral leak in Wuhan highly circumstantial at least and worthy of investigation.

The book currently has an epilogue indicating, possibly more in hope than expectation, that the truth will out. The Chinese scientific community is not watertight and sensitive information has leaked before. However, given the Chinese government's predilection for dishonesty and the loss of face (*mianzi*) that owning up to being the source of a world pandemic would entail, I imagine that the lives of scientists at the Wuhan Institute of Virology are now a miserable existence of surveillance and threats. If the truth ever does come out, I will be very surprised.

Nailing Tory Jelly to the Red Wall

Brian Eassty

Beyond The Red Wall, Deborah Mattinson, Biteback, 2021, £16.99.

It is a brave author who would attempt to describe the UK political scene at a time when it is rather like trying to nail jelly to a wall. Deborah Mattinson has long been an observer of psephological trends but even she is confounded by the volatility of the British electorate. Publication of *Beyond The Red Wall* was delayed by several months, so that she could add another chapter on how the pandemic, and particularly the Barnard Castle affair, has shaped the views of her red wall focus groups.

A writer for a quarterly publication, reviewing Mattinson's book in late January, can only sympathise. Writing at a time when the Prime Minister has just been subjected to the traditional Leo Amery *coup de grace* 'In the name of God, go!' from an erstwhile ally envisage this book's central character might be an irrelevance by the time this review lands on its readers' doormats.

Yet it is impossible to discuss the vast transformation in political allegiance which has taken place in the red wall seats of the Midlands and the North of England, many of which had been loyal to the Labour Party since their creation, without acknowledging the role played in it by Boris Johnson. Despite representing a party largely seen by red wall voters as 'posh and uncaring', they have nonetheless found his optimism and patriotism hard to resist. If his own party found it had no choice but to remove him, it would represent the worst squandering of a political advantage in living memory, as it is unlikely that any successor could do as well in those areas.

Mattinson visits three of the constituencies which changed drastically and speaks to groups of voters. Of the three, only Stoke Central can claim never to have returned a Conservative MP. Both Hyndburn and Darlington fell to the Thatcher landslides of the 1980s, the latter being the scene of the early successes of Theresa May's Defence Secretary, Michael Fallon. There would have been a folk memory of people changing their political allegiances which would not have happened in Grimsby or Redcar where you could find people who could justifiably claim to have crossed a political Rubicon.

One cannot fault Mattinson's attention to detail when it comes to asking what her respondents want from their politicians. Like all political researchers, she is aware of the chaotic background noise against which ordinary voters develop their views – one senses that the woman

she quotes who thought Nigel Farage was a Liberal Democrat was not uniquely off target – but she is astute at pulling out the attitudes of voters which could shape policy. She finds that her focus groups want to see some clear evidence of 'levelling up' if they are to support this government again. This is not surprising, as changing allegiance was driven by bitterness at Labour's neglect. Mattinson discerns a scepticism about whether this can be done simply by growing the cake so everyone can have a bigger slice. They believe that the only way the north can have more is if the south has less, rather worrying for a government that has found it harder to hold on to Chesham and Amersham than it has to gain Hartlepool.

Many of the voters Mattinson speaks to see this as basic fairness. They look at the industrial heritage of their areas in the potteries of Stoke, the brickworks of Hyndburn and the railways of Darlington and ask why they saw nothing of the wealth that their areas generated. The government began to remedy this. We are told several times about the regeneration of Darlington Station which Rishi Sunak announced in his first budget in 2020 but the focus groups are pessimistic about whether there will be many more projects like this given the go ahead while the country recovers from the pandemic.

However it would not cost much to improve people's lives: Mattinson hears most about the depressing look of the high street, the lack of leisure facilities for young people and poor transport links. All these could be remedied for a fraction of the cost of HS2, Westminster's gift to the north for which it is likely to receive little gratitude. Improved rail links to London are of little use to people who will go there only once or twice in their lives. More useful would be improvements to the line from Hyndburn to Manchester, a journey of twenty-five miles which currently takes a barely creditable hour and twenty minutes.

Mattinson speaks to people who live only a few streets away from all their family and friends in a community that seems as closely knit as the fictional one in *Coronation Street*. Such people have very local interests. She introduces us to one woman in Darlington who ran a successful campaign to save the area library. She faced obstruction both from the local Labour MP and the Labour council. When the prospective Conservative candidate became interested, she started to make progress. If the government could understand the modest needs of people in these communities, it would benefit their electoral chances more than throwing money at legacy-assuring infrastructure projects.

Immigration remains a concern to red wall voters. Mattinson still comes across voters prepared to talk about 'being overrun by immigrants on the take, claiming benefits and sending them home'. Of course only anecdotal evidence is provided but, repackaged as 'lived experience', such evidence must surely be more respectable these days. The culture wars have flared up so recently that they are not mentioned in this book but one can imagine how the voter quoted above would react to her child coming home from school and telling her she had white privilege. Critical Race Theory could be a vote winner for the Conservatives, as it has been for some Republican governors in America.

Patriotism might also be a bigger vote winner than some metropolitan thinkers would believe. Far from viewing Churchill as a racist war criminal, red wall voters still revere him and, when asked to name their ideal leader, can think of no other name nearly sixty years after his death. Mattinson even found some prepared to credit him with the creation of the NHS. A canny Labour leader would steer well clear of statue toppling. It remains to be seen if Keir Starmer's left wing will allow him to be that leader.

Mattinson is not a good writer and would have benefitted from an editor who could have prevented her repeating the same material so often. We are told more than once that Sara Britcliffe MP for Hyndburn made history by being the first member to deliver her maiden speech online during lockdown and we revisit the campaign to save Darlington library several times. Reading this book at times seems like being on a carousel. It is not a long book but a tighter control of material could have made it even shorter.

Mattinson has done most of her research work for the Labour Party but she is laudably non-partisan here. She gives five pieces of advice for a Labour leader who wants to take back the Red wall and five pieces of advice to help the Conservative Party keep it. It is reassuring to see that she has consulted James Kangasoorium, the Conservative Party analyst credited with coining the term Red wall to help this even-handedness.

Perhaps they would agree that the most important aim for either party is to listen to Red wall voters and not make them feel ignored. It was one of Boris Johnson's remarkable achievements to make them believe he was the politician to do this, overcoming disadvantages from his old Etonian background. Even his buffoonery which makes the metropolitan elite cringe is viewed as part of this appeal, helping him to be seen as 'down to earth'. 'Boris has de-snobbified the Tories', as one voter puts it, it remains to be seen if that will survive partygate when there is little else in the media. If it leaves behind an image of entitled Bullingdon revellers drinking and leaving a mess for working people to clear up, Boris may find the Red wall is reassembled as swiftly as he demolished it.

IN SHORT

Kiss Myself Goodbye, Ferdinand Mount, Blooomsbury, 2021, £10.99.

Some years ago, I read one of Ferdinand Mount's many impressive books: *the Subversive family:* how the family was often a defence against the power of the state. Now he has written an extraordinary story about members of his own, half detective with Mount as the sleuth, interspersed with glimpses of the social history of the first half of the twentieth century.

Because of his asthma Mount spent many school holidays with his uncle, Greig Mount and Aunt Betty who insisted on being called Unca and Munca after Beatrix Potter's mice. Unlike the other Mounts they were very well off and as well as renting posh houses in the Home Counties and on the Sussex coast, they had a permanent suite at Claridges which they called the pub. A Rolls with a chauffeur would glide them between their dwellings while they mixed with film stars and generally kept raffish company, again quite unlike the other Mounts. Greig Mount had a shoe firm business, Lennards, but when he grew up Ferdinand often pondered how they financed such a lush life style.

There was always an air of mystery about Munca. In 1942 she went to Cornwall and came back with a baby Georgie which she claimed as her own, but this seemed unlikely. Ferdinand was good friends with his cousin and angry when Munca stopped her marrying David Dimbleby; a birth certificate would have revealed that she was adopted. Her life was ruined by Munca's meddling in her subsequent love affairs and not until she was fifty did she see her birth certificate.

When Ferdinand was eight he was practising cricket indoors and hit a screen. He confessed that 'the wind blew over and it hit the screen', she didn't get angry but smiled a smile not entirely friendly but full of all the experience in the world. I think what the smile said was welcome to the great brotherhood of liars. Mount's researches into uncovering the truth about Munca's many lives 'was painful but he didn't expect how gay the lies would be'. He laboured persistently in Record offices mainly in Sheffield, Leeds and Marylebone where she had lived, but her constant changes of Christian names made it difficult. Munca and her elder sister were born and brought up in a dreary part of Sheffield, now a miserable post-industrial nowhere place. She certainly wasn't the daughter of John Anthony Baring of New York but of John Macduff of Brightside Sheffield whose life was one of grinding poverty. Her supposed brother was really her illegitimate son and she contracted three bigamous marriages but married Greig Mount in church, which would have horrified Ferdinand's uncle, a Canon who officiated.

The most exciting chapter comes at the end of the book when Mount finds out where all the money appeared from such impoverished beginnings, a denouement not unlike *Bleak House*. There were many ambitious girls wishing to better themselves from a poor background, but they didn't lie to this extent. It is good that sexual morality has changed. In the fifties and later, girls were sent away and lies were told about the reason, while adoptions were often forced. Those people who couldn't get divorced often had to change their names by deed poll; Judges nowadays take a more tolerant view of bigamy as well.

Sylvia Wood

Perfect Pitch 100 pieces of Classical Music to bring Joy, Tears, Solace Empathy, Inspiration, Tim Bouverie Short Books, 2021 £9.99.

This delightful book is a judicious compilation of 100 masterpieces with a concise and instructive preface larded with amusing anecdotes about the great composers. Tim Bouverie is neither a musician nor musicologist but has always loved listening to music since he was a child. The

book came about almost by accident during the lockdown, when he sent a piece of music with its introduction to his circle of friends, and a diversion turned into a book.

His collection is a very personal choice but he includes the sort of music which most amateur and professional musicians like playing. I loved it because he included the kind of pieces which bring tears like Strauss's *Four last Songs*, *Dido's Lament* (Dido and Aeneas), for me the most magnificent Aria in English music and Bach's *Brandenburg concertos* which bring joy. He is not so keen on modern composers: Britten doesn't appear but I was surprised not to see Vaughan Williams although he includes a Shostakovich Symphony. Louise Farrenc was an excellent introduction: her husband was a professional flautist who encouraged her in her career, one of many unjustly forgotten composers both male and female. Radio 3 has certainly made the effort to play from some of their forgotten works particularly in the *Breakfast Programme*.

'The perfect gift for anyone asking the question: How do I get into classical music?' This comment is optimistic. Fine for someone who has been cradled in music or benefited from a school which emphasized it, but in recent decades music has perforce been competing with many other lessons which many of us find superfluous and even dangerous. The education tsars deem music a luxury not a necessity, but it is just as important as literature or art. Every child before he drowns in a sea of pop should learn notation and, if possible, an instrument; even for a little while the experience will expand his horizons. The Incorporated Society of Musicians reported that music education 'was suffering an unprecedented crisis for singing and instrumental lessons had stopped in a third of primary schools and a quarter of secondary schools.' Musicians should be worried about the decline of music in schools. I attend some chamber music concerts (world class) on Sunday mornings where most of the audience are over sixty and beyond from a city with two universities. Will there be sufficient audiences in the future?

Merrie Cave

The

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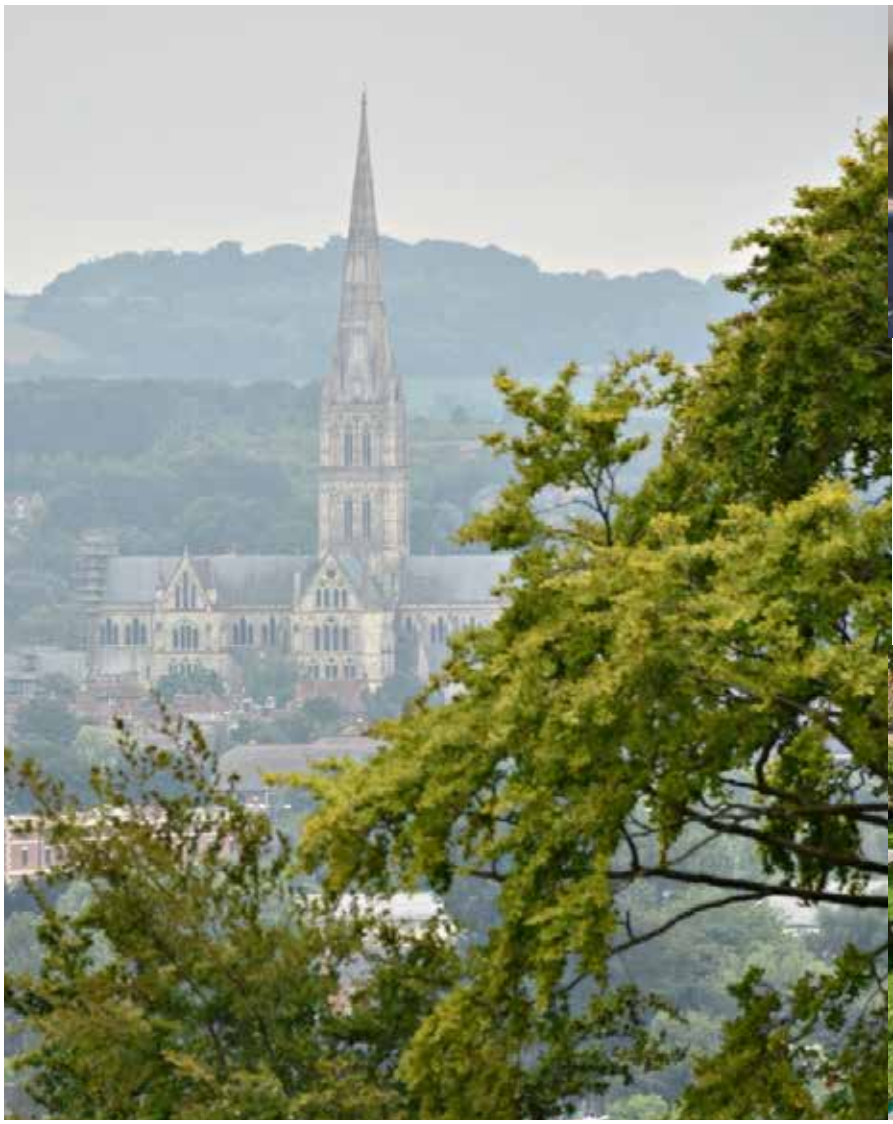

> I feel extremely energized and inspired after this week. I have to say it was rather surreal to step out in the real world again after spending an entire week in an intellectual paradise.

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