

The
Salisbury
Review

The quarterly magazine of conservative thought



The Third Marquess of Salisbury
1830-1903

Conservatism and Populism

Daryl McCann

Reverse Imperialism

Driss Ghali

Is British Conservatism Dead?

Ferenc Hörcher

The Chagos Capitulation

William Clouston

The Steel Seismometer

Andrey Sapozhnikov

Shadows on the Wannsee

Sean McGlynn





The
*Salisbury
Review*

Editor: Alistair Miller
Managing Editor: Andrea Downing
Founding Editor: Sir Roger Scruton

PO Box 81, Shefford, Beds, SG17 9AP

Tel: 01462 234279

E-mail: info@salisburyreview.co.uk

Web site: <http://www.salisburyreview.com>

Articles

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 3 | Editorial | 27 | Letter from Illiberal Budapest
<i>Gavin Duncan</i> |
| 4 | Conservatism and Modern-day Populism
<i>Daryl McCann</i> | 29 | A Trip to the Whitechapel
<i>James Monteith</i> |
| 6 | Reverse Imperialism: the South Strikes Back
<i>Driss Ghali</i> | 32 | Conservative Classic
Roger Scruton's Culture Counts
<i>J R Donner</i> |
| 9 | Is British Conservatism Dead?
<i>Ferenc Hörcher</i> | 34 | Eternal Life
<i>Rod Hacking</i> |
| 12 | Anti-colonial Ideology – the Real Driver of the Chagos Capitulation
<i>William Clouston</i> | | |
| 14 | The Steel Seismometer
<i>Andrey Sapozhnikov</i> | | |
| 18 | The Human Rights Balloon
<i>Andrew Tettenborn</i> | | |
| 19 | Moral Vandalism
<i>Theodore Dalrymple</i> | | |
| 21 | Metro Rulers
<i>Bill Hartley</i> | | |
| 23 | Shadows on the Shore of Wannsee
<i>Sean McGlynn</i> | | |
| 25 | Letter from America
<i>Erich Prince</i> | | |

Art and Books

- | | |
|----|---|
| 36 | Alistair Miller
<i>Illiberal Conservatism</i> |
| 39 | Sean McGlynn
<i>An Explosion of Colour</i> |
| 41 | Celia Haddon
<i>Nasal Gymnastics</i> |
| 42 | J R Donner
<i>California Blue</i> |

From the Archive

- | | |
|----|--|
| 44 | Burke's Relevance Today
<i>Roger Scruton</i> |
|----|--|

The World Turned Upside Down

The speech of Vice President Vance to last week's Munich Security Conference has left the EU's ruling elite, along with its mainstream media, in a state of shock. But if Vance's speech, which centred on the threat mass immigration poses to our shared Western values, was greeted by delegates with a stunned silence, this only showed that the bolt hit its target. For he was merely saying what the people of Europe already know: that instead of responding to the democratic will of its peoples, the EU's technocratic elite promotes fashionable universalist liberal ideals – open borders, mass immigration (or 'population replacement'), multiculturalism, and endlessly multiplied human rights – and silences dissenters by branding them 'racist'. Which explains why there has been a seismic shift in European politics to the right and 'far right'. Europe's dependence on American protection against Russia, cruelly exposed by the tragedy of Ukraine, merely highlights the inherent contradictions in this soft progressive liberalism.

But what sort of conservatism is heralded by Donald Trump's second coming? Both Vance and Musk, who are Trump's main standard bearers, are fighting valiantly for free speech and against woke. But their political visions offer a striking contrast. On the one hand, there is Vance's vision of the strong republican nation state, in which the democratic will and the interests of the people (including the abandoned white working-class Vance depicted in *Hillbilly Elegy*) take priority, foreign trade is conducted in the national interest, and global capital, including Big Tech, is kept on a firm leash – a return to an older form of conservatism. On the other, there is Musk's vision of the techno-capitalist state, where power is handed to innovative global techno-capitalists like himself, everything is left to market forces, the

state is run as a corporate business, and wealth is concentrated in the hands of the new meritocratic elite – a vision that is neoliberal and libertarian.

Hayek would, one suspects, have approved of Musk's libertarian instincts; but is the belief that society is nothing but a collection of individuals each endowed with the inalienable right to pursue his self-interest conservative? In *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism*, Joel Kotkin painted a grim picture of the future that awaits us at the hands of techno-capitalists, who provide for our every need in a digital algorithmic world, a future that has more in common with the total surveillance society being created by the Chinese than with classical notions of the liberty of the individual. Moreover, Musk's vision of free speech has a decidedly authoritarian air, as Nigel Farage discovered when he dared to differ from Musk over Tommy Robinson.

Meanwhile, in Britain, the right's reaction to the prevalent soft liberal-conservatism that has dominated the official Conservative Party, and that saw it destroyed in the election, has mostly taken the form of demanding a return to Thatcherite liberalism tempered by a dose of social conservatism. Kemi Badenoch's recent speech to the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship conference was admirable in its all-out assault on woke and its uncompromising defence of free speech. Conservatives, she argued, were 'the guardians of Western Civilization'. But she went on to equate the culture of the West with 'classical liberal' values of free markets, free speech, free enterprise, free trade, tolerance, democracy and the rule of law.

These values are fine so far as they go, but for genuine conservatives, the classical liberal individualism of Locke and Mill is not enough. For conservatives, we are *also* the beneficiaries of a social and cultural inheritance, a distinct

national culture, whose values are – or used to be – mediated through custom, tradition, established practices and institutions, and through education; and it is through our initiation into this inheritance that our higher values are formed and shaped. We learn, in Michael Oakeshott’s memorable words, ‘to recognise ourselves in the mirror of this civilization’. For Roger Scruton, the founding editor of this magazine, conservatism revolved, not

around markets, not even our individual liberties, vital though these are, but around our sense of belonging to a community, and the reciprocal relations, local attachments, loyalties and mutual affections that sustain it.

Time will tell whether events in America herald a resurgence of conservatism or of global neoliberalism; a renaissance of Western civilization – or its final disintegration.

Conservatism and Modern-day Populism

Daryl McCann

In America, at least, Trump’s version of populism has crushed the modern-day Left and its progressivism. Woke is dead. The Democratic Party might eventually make itself relevant again by relearning to love their homeland. In the meantime, I suggest, principled conservatives owe it to posterity – and Western civilisation – to provide something of a critique of populism, be it American, German, Italian, Hungarian or even British. Philosophical conservatives need to sort out not only what they dislike about conservatism but what they have in common. Whither conservatism?

In the first instance, at least, let us rule out the British Conservative Party in its current state as being *conservative* in any useful sense. Let the Cameron-May-Johnson-Truss-Sunak era (2010-24) speak for itself. To borrow from Hayek’s ‘Why I Am Not a Conservative’ (1960), the best that might be said about these Tories is that they did not quicken the pace towards despotism. The worst is that they did. The title of Niall Gooch’s article in *UnHerd* magazine tells us a lot about the spinelessness of the Conservative Party: ‘Jailing Brits for Facebook posts isn’t justice.’ Yes, Sunak’s Tories were already out of power for a month when 53-year-old Julie Sweeney, the primary carer for her invalid husband, who lived

‘a quiet sheltered life in Cheshire’ and was ‘kind and compassionate’, found herself sentenced to 15 months in jail. Her crime? A silly one-off comment in Facebook about blowing up a mosque, a quip she quickly regretted and deleted. But the tyranny of Keir’s administration, along with all those woke judges and policemen involved in that case and so many others, would not have happened without fourteen years of Tory cravenness.

The British Conservative Party had fourteen years in government to save the United Kingdom from the curse of multiculturalism and indiscriminate and illegal immigration. As Sir Roger Scruton opined, a multiethnic UK might be a fine thing but multiculturalism, too often a euphemism for multi-civilisationism, is a recipe for disaster. Multiculturalism, argued Scruton, constitutes a dangerous fraud because it universalises religions and customs that resist universalism. Jonathon Portes, journalist for the *Guardian*, claimed at the time of Roger’s death in 2020, that ‘Scruton’s brand of conservatism gave a licence to bigotry’. This comment says more about Portes than it does about Scruton, who abhorred bigotry and was a student of Islamic culture. Moreover, it conflates nativism (love of the local) with xenophobia (fear of the foreign).

It is true that a common feature of populism,

sweeping much of the West, is that the everyday citizens of a Western nation-state, be it America, Germany, Italy, Hungary or the UK, love their respective homeland – Scruton called it ‘oikophilia’ – in much the same way they love their family. There is, as Portes would remind us, a prejudice in this, but it is the prejudice of saving your child before rescuing the children of strangers in a burning building. Think about it. How terrible, from the perspective of your offspring, if you failed to think their survival was your priority – even if you could have saved more lives prioritising the children of strangers. How against ‘the natural order of things’, as one of writer Stephen Adly Guirgis’s characters opines: ‘No parent should have to bury a child ... On the day of my son’s birth, I was infused with a love beyond all measure and understanding.’

Enlightened patriotism – the interchangeable love for your homeland and the love of home and family – is to the populist a matter of sacredness. The ultimate loyalty of MAGA is always going to be about home and the homeland. Nevertheless, Americans are extraordinarily welcoming to (legal) newcomers; the one demand made of the newbie is to put America first, a sentiment Donald Trump has employed for his political ascent. Mass immigration into the United States traditionally came under the auspices of ‘the Great American Melting Pot’ – join us here in the Land of Opportunity but first leave behind your ancient grudges. Roman Catholic? Fine. Sectarianism? Not so much. Muslim – yes. Sharia Law – no thanks. William Tyler Page’s famous American Creed (1917) is less about assimilation than integration. The same applies, in one way or another, to every nation-state in the West: we all have our own specifics, our own history and heritage, and yet we share a comparable conservative-versus-libertarian dynamic because of our Christian *and* democratic inheritance.

The heart of the West is a respect for all things local (the physical) balanced by the universalism of democracy with its respect for the conscience of the individual (the spirit). Accordingly, as Scruton notes in *The Uses of Pessimism* (2010), life in a Western society offers the prospect of a post-tribalism that ‘confers security and

freedom in exchange for consent – an order not of submission but of settlement.’ It is about the peaceable cohabitation of strangers. The admission price to this Western-style modernity – ‘societies of rational beings, bound to each other by accountability, friendship and respect’ – is a renunciation of fanaticism, be it religious, ethno-nationalist, ideological or otherwise. Neo-racist progressives, trapped inside the bubble of latter-day tribalism, projected onto Donald Trump a racism he does not possess. Consider these words from Trump’s first Inauguration Address: ‘It’s time to remember the old wisdom our soldiers will never forget, that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots.’ Leftists have a propensity for demonising populist leaders as racists. In the case of America, at any rate, Trump’s appeal to Hispanics, Asians, Jews, Arabs and black males on November 5, 2025, put to rest that lie once and for all.

If Trump could be said to have a tribe, it is the nation-state of America – only America is a constitutional republic that prioritises the rights of the individual as per the First Amendment. Before he died in 2020, the urbane Roger Scruton was no die-hard apologist for the rumbunctious Donald Trump. He did, however, expound in *Conservatism* (2017) on certain traditional conservative precepts that overlapped with Trumpism – ‘the defence of the homeland, the maintenance of national borders, and the unity and integrity of the nation.’ Scruton, in short, tacitly supported Trump 1.0’s America First agenda on the grounds that ‘governments are elected by a specific people in a specific place.’ I cannot but help think that Trump 2.0’s war on radical transgenderism, the 1619 Project, radical Islamic terrorism and wokism would, as a whole, have also met his approval.

And yet there is, unquestionably, a xenophobic strain within *all* the Western populist movements. Marine Le Pen’s has valiantly attempted to purge her National Rally of past associations with racism, to ‘de-demonise’ her movement. And yet the party’s National Front origins linger. As Farage once remarked: ‘I have never said anything negative about Marine Le Pen; I have never said anything positive about the National Rally.’ MAGA, with its libertarian-conservative

roots, is less prone to xenophobia and racism than some of its European counterparts, and yet a leading light in the movement, Steve Bannon, has spoken of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger as one of his great influences. No doubt Heidegger's discursiveness on 'organic-ness' and 'rootedness in the earth' caught Bannon's attention, seeming to speak, albeit in a pretentious and often incomprehensible way, about the merits of nationalism. Still, Heidegger, as we all know, failed to connect his 'organic-ness' or localism with the universalism of democracy. Though Heidegger rejected Hitler's enthusiasm for technology – re-industrialisation, the autobahn, the V1 and V2 rockets, and so forth – he did not protest Germany's transition from democracy to dictatorship. Heidegger, bluntly put, remained a tribalist to the end.

Contrariwise, Nigel Farage continues to

promote enlightened – that is, democratic – patriotism. On the one hand, he has been forthright in his criticism of the cover-up that accompanied the Rotherham 'grooming' scandal, despite Labour disparaging him as an Islamophobe. On the other, he continues to fiercely oppose 'bigots' and 'extremists' joining his party. Consequently, Reform UK is today not only outdoing the Tories in the latest polling but even Labour. One option, still rejected by Kemi Badenoch, is that her well-heeled if hapless party amalgamates with blue-collar Reform – as happened in Canada – to unseat Keir's disastrous government at the next general election. That would, if nothing else, force well-to-do Conservatives to sort out what they have in common with modern-day populists. Maybe it is more than they imagine.

Daryl McCann is an Australian Journalist.

Reverse Imperialism: the South Strikes Back

Driss Ghali

Trump talks rudely to the Mexican authorities. It is not pretty but the man has a point: Mexican nationals living in America send back over \$69 billion each year to their relatives in Mexico, while the cartels kill tens of thousands of Americans through fentanyl and other drugs smuggled across the southern border. If we stick to strict logic, the oppressor here is not living in the North, he is living down South, taking advantage of mass immigration. Of course, the Mexicans are not the only ones to play at this geopolitical game. Virtually all the countries of the former Third World are now involved in what is both a business and a new form of colonization. The Western elites have connived at it. The one exception is called Donald Trump.

Each year, immigrants send over \$600 billion

to their home countries. Africa alone gets \$100 billion, of which Nigeria has the lion's share, at over \$20 billion. Morocco, my home country, gets more money from its remittances than it does from tourism – more than \$11 billion last year. This is more than half of the revenues it gets from agriculture, an activity that employs over a third of its workforce. Think about it. Without having to put in a single day's work, Morocco gets \$11 billion from immigration, guaranteed year after year. Astonishing! It is as if Morocco had discovered a vast new reserve of oil and gold combined. No need to drill or to refine; just convince your population to leave the country – which is super easy, as a cocktail of incompetence and despair already drives millions of young people from their homeland. Provoking

the required emigration requires no effort and no investment: bad governance does the job. And whenever a migrant makes his way to France or Spain – Bingo! The money starts flowing to his family via Western Union, whether from his work or from social assistance.

It is a shame that no prominent economist has framed the debate in these terms. Bad governance is profitable – very profitable – to the elites of the South. Morocco, however, is only a small player in this game. Other former colonies are winning the global remittance championship year after year: the Philippines (\$40 billion in 2023), Egypt (\$32 billion in 2022), Pakistan (\$30 billion in 2024), and Nigeria (\$20 billion in 2022). In Senegal, remittances amount to no less than ten per cent of its GDP. Why reform institutions, why improve productivity, why improve the quality of leadership, when bad governance delivers vast and unconditional international money transfers, free of auditing by the IMF or the World Bank?

From France alone, more than \$10 billion is sent annually to Africa and the Arab World. Some of this money is generated by economic activity, both formal and informal – the rest by illicit activity and fraud. Charles Prat, a French judge, calculates the level of social benefit fraud relating to migrants and French nationals born abroad to be over \$40 billion a year. This would buy the French Navy an aircraft carrier every year. A significant part of this bleeding is accounted for by some two million foreign-born ‘ghosts’ who are entitled to receive social benefits in France – retirement pensions, housing allowance, unemployment benefits and health insurance. Some live in France, others overseas. Algeria, for example, has the dubious distinction of hosting a record number of one-hundred-year-old men and women receiving a French pension. Some are probably dead but their sons forgot to mention it to the French *Sécurité Sociale*. When AGIRC-ARRCO, a French pension fund, commissioned an audit into a thousand Algerian beneficiaries living in Algeria, it only managed to contact half of them; the others were missing in action while still cashing their cheques.

Nevertheless, this dirty money represents a credible alternative to governmental and non-

governmental humanitarian relief. Unlike development assistance programs, the migrant remittances are bureaucracy-free. No nepotism, no corruption, no political interference affects the stream of money. It lands directly in the pockets – or more accurately, the cell phones – of the people who most need it, whether to buy food, or to renovate their homes, or even build new ones. Some use it to pay their tuition fees, and all contribute to the public good in the form of sales taxes revenues each time they visit their local convenience store. In fact, this is probably one of the best and most enduring assistance plans ever devised. No white saviour is needed, no expats, no consultants; instead, black helps black, Arab helps Arab, and Latino helps Latino.

The drug is so good that countries have been addicted to it for years. Algeria is fighting like a lion any French politician who suggests tearing down a bilateral treaty signed in 1968 facilitating the entry and residence of Algerian nationals in France. For without the remittances of these nationals, Algeria would be forced to reform – or else face turmoil and revolution.

Transformational reform might seem a good idea, but unfortunately it requires an educated elite, and much of that elite has also emigrated north. For immigration is not limited to the poor and illiterate. The hospitals of Paris are manned and sometimes managed by eminent doctors from Africa and the Arab World. Engineers, businessmen, lawyers, IT specialists, bankers – they all settle in places like Dubai and Singapore. It is not poverty they are escaping, but suffocation. For it is systemic corruption and mismanagement that have prevented them from flourishing back home, from innovating and realising their potential. They move north in search of an ethical ecosystem where the good guys are rewarded and the bad boys are deterred. They are ‘ethical refugees’.

However, what ought to be a tragedy does not cause the ruling elites to lose any sleep, for the brain drain is easily compensated by the consultancy inflow. Complex projects, strategic planning, change management are all taken care of by the likes of McKinsey and Deloitte. There

is an abundance of value-added know-how in the world; one need only launch an RFP and pay the subsequent bills. China, Turkey and even France are compensating for the brain drain by building and maintaining infrastructure across Africa. Algerian highways, for example, have been taken care of by Chinese contractors. And overall, it is less expensive to pay a Chinese company in euros to build a railway than to have it built by one's own nationals, because when one's own nationals are engineers and project managers, they bring with them political and ethical requirements that are hard to meet. An engineer will request good schools for his kids, aspire to democracy, and challenge corruption. A Turkish one, by contrast, will do his job, send his bill, and keep his mouth shut.

In the West, the *crème de la crème* of the South's elite seldom uses its liberty to denounce bad governance in its countries of origin. Instead, its members get involved in the host country's artistic and political scenes and declare themselves to be victims. Those who do feel gratitude are deterred from voicing it by loudmouth compatriots who accuse them of being 'native informants'. As for the South's lumpenproletariat, youngsters full of rage and testosterone head north every day. Instead of raiding the presidential palaces in Algiers and Conakry, hordes of young males raid the city centres of Milan, Cologne and Nantes. Sending their *masses dangereuses* overseas is a blessing for the South's ruling elites. Their unruly masses cause problems elsewhere and whenever they are caught committing crimes, they merely have to say they are victims of racism. Their home countries refuse to take them back, use red tape to slow deportations, and invoke sovereignty to ensure the North is awash with convicted criminals roaming its streets and harming its population.

This is double Bingo for the failed elites of Africa, the Arab World and Latin America – but double tragedy for its peoples. In the South, the export of their good elites damages the prospects of the wider population; while in the North, people merely feel they are being invaded. They are forced to watch the colonization of their country and remain silent, because if they object, they are accused of being 'racist' by their own ruling elites.

In fact, their ruling elites are even more cynical than those of the South. Because the newcomers are used to derelict schools and hospitals at home, they are easy to please, and happy to accept the minimum standard, or worse. They tolerate a twelve-hour wait in the emergency department of a hospital that would drive a Frenchman crazy. The same applies for public services and political participation. They don't care about the rise in inequality because they come from countries deprived of a proper middle class. They are fine with a world composed of oligarchs and the wretched, a world where the rich buy allegiance not by setting a virtuous example but through the crumbs they hand out.

The globalists of the Left call this progress. A more accurate term would be retroaction.

Any alternative to this nightmare would entail a total reset of the North-South relationship – a relationship that ought to centre on the interests of the mass of the population, both North and South, not minister to the greed of the elites. The first step would be to assess relations on a bilateral basis, founding them on an honest appraisal of the monetary flows between countries North and South. In other words, how many billions of dollars does Algeria extract from France, net, every year? Honest relationships must be founded on facts, not propaganda. The second step would be to build long-term partnerships where immigration is converted into a genuine opportunity, by facilitating easier legal entry for the good migrants, and faster deportation for the bad ones.

In addition, there must be a radically new approach to diasporas. Host countries have the fundamental right to monitor diasporas and to ensure that they do not become fifth columns in their own backyards. The good migrants must be integrated; the bad migrants – the ethnic gangs, the Salafists etc – who prefer invasion to integration, must be neutralized, politically and morally.

However, this necessitates a political revolution. The twenty-first century will be the Century of Identity. All political thinking must recognise that the preservation of identity precedes human rights, because the man who forgets who he is forfeits

his self-respect. Besides, if France becomes a subsidiary of Algeria or Mali, the latter will lose a prosperous and friendly partner. The dissolution of identity is a lose-lose game. The preservation of identity is a fundamental human right. The peoples of the North are entitled to it just as much as the peoples of the South.

Driss Ghali is a Franco-Moroccan writer now living in Sao Paulo, Brazil. His recent books include A Counter-History of French Colonization (Vauban Books) and L'identité d'abord : Lettre ouverte d'un immigré aux Français qui ne veulent pas disparaître (L'artilleur).

Is British Conservatism Dead?

A Scrutonian Elegy for England from Central Europe

Ferenc Hörcher

Sir Roger Scruton always had a keen interest and a deep knowledge of politics and history in Central Europe. He had a special relationship to this part of the world. Yet he was even more an old-fashioned patriot, 'a born Englishman' he called himself, engaged in the affairs of his country, Britain, and even more, England. However, he was not very optimistic about the present – even less about the future. His pessimism was expressed in *England: An Elegy* (2001), and more recently in *Where We Are: The State of Britain Now* (2018). In the prelude to the latter, we read: 'This short book is a personal response to the Brexit decision, but not an argument for it ... the question that I address is how our national sovereignty should be conceived in order to bring the 'leavers' and the 'remainers' together.' We can suppose, therefore, that Scruton would be profoundly concerned about the fall of the Tory party following an ugly period of futile struggle and inevitable failure. What follows is a Scrutonian enquiry into the state of the Conservative movement in Britain from a perspective that is both Central European and Anglophile.

If we want to make sense of what is happening in British politics, we must start with Brexit, an historic event with profound consequences, both for Britain and Europe. From the British perspective, the country's lost sovereignty was restored at a

stroke. To be sure, it was also an indictment of the European political elite, which is why it was so difficult for the two sides to agree the terms of the separation. But from a Central European perspective, and especially a Central European Conservative perspective, Britain's departure was a great loss, as earlier it was an important counterbalance to the leftist, woke and centralising agenda of the Brussels elites.

Of course, the Tory party also had to pay the price of separation, and it did so in two ways.

First, it led to the immediate fall of the prime minister David Cameron, who made the tactical mistake of calling a referendum. Whereas Cameron saw the referendum as a means of reaffirming his own political agenda, the electorate saw it as a means of winning back autonomy. And because Brexit was realised against the will of the incumbent Tory prime minister along with most of his government and party, subsequent Tory governments, including four consecutive prime ministers, were unable to capitalize on it. Second, subsequent Tory governments struggled exclusively, and largely in vain, to pacify the markets, appease the losers, or Remainers, and generally soften the immediate consequences of Brexit for the public. To be sure, history did not make it easy for them: the financial crisis, the Covid pandemic, and Russia's attack on

Ukraine all worked against them. But they failed to implement the austerity measures necessary to balance the budget, and they forgot about their own conservative agenda, instead seeking to placate the ever more strident left-liberal demands of political correctness. True, the American Republican leadership and elite had also lost its way until Trump's stormy arrival. Yet the British Tories' failure to capitalize on Brexit destroyed any possibility of maintaining their broad voter base, and most importantly, of satisfying the traditionalists who form the core of their support.

The Tories, then, have paid a heavy price for Brexit, not least in the form of the rise of their alter-ego, Nigel Farage, and his parties – first UKIP, then Reform. Farage, a self-made man who was able to turn the tables on his opponents, challenges the whole of the British political establishment. He introduced a new style of politics – single issue, and single personality – that is only possible in the digital age of social media. Farage belongs to a new breed of politicians whose main advantage is that they are sensitive to public opinion as transmitted by social media and can shape public discourse by stirring up scandal. His skills are drawn from the world of commercial marketing, and from market gurus and image makers who utilise the tricks and techniques made possible by the new technologies to service the needs of cultural heroes, film stars and pop icons. Key to his success is the ability to capture the attention of the media and set the agenda. However, there is a price to pay for this brand of popular politics. If one is driven by every abrupt change in the public's perception of reality, little can remain of a principle-driven political credo. Farage had to choose the single issue he was to pursue with great care to maintain his popular appeal, and colour his palette with rhetoric, uncivil behaviour and buffoonery.

It was in this spirit that Boris Johnson, the Tory party's daredevil, took Farage on. Johnson had all the education and experience, the skills and

preparation, to set serious political goals and work towards achieving them. Instead, he chose to win the popularity contest. And this required him to turn his back on traditional Tory priorities, even a Tory agenda, and instead to position himself in the middle, and appropriate the agenda of his rivals. The result of this careless political edginess was that he soon fell out of favour with his own party, and that Farage is now playing to win the Conservative vote, bolstered by the support of growing numbers of Tory deserters.

To be sure, the populist takeover on the right is a European, even a global phenomenon. Everywhere, the same populist advance threatens the elites of the mainstream parties, together with the ideology mongers and their friends in the mainstream media. There can be no doubt: they are so successful because woke ideology mongers overstepped the mark.

The purpose of ideology ought to be to unite the camp behind the front line of politics. However, the cultural cold war has separated the elite from the mass of the voting public to such an extent that no representative of the incumbent elite can emerge victorious. This is the moment when the populist leader can seize political power, which is precisely what happened in the United States with the election of President Trump for a second term. The question was not really whether Biden, Harris or Trump was the better candidate – though, of course, the question was on the agenda. The decisive issue was that the Biden administration substituted politics with woke ideology and culture war battles, which resulted in a dramatic loss of support even among core Democratic voters.

In Britain, the Tory defeat is certainly an opportunity to change its player line-up for the democratic reality show. But more importantly, it is an opportunity to recharge intellectual batteries: specifically, to develop a strategy that meets the urgent needs of the wider political community



without alienating its own electorate, by encouraging citizens to identify with at least some of its objectives while making the necessary sacrifices in other areas. In what follows, I shall identify some key guiding principles for a conservative party in the late modern Western world, by drawing on the rich tapestry of political and intellectual thought bequeathed by Scruton.

Populism plays on the gut reaction of the electorate against its elites – mostly, but not exclusively, against the political leaders of the respective regimes and their weapon bearers. However, the result could all too easily be another elite ‘sitting on the necks of the electorate’, who also need to be fattened up. That is why the conservatism that Scruton advocates is aimed not at helping into power a better elite but at fostering local autonomy. It is localist, not nationalist. This is captured in one of Scruton’s most original ideas, the concept of oikophilia, according to which man is a being who cannot live without attachments. But how do we define what are healthy human attachments? For Scruton, our major affinity is for the place we call home, which includes its natural and architectural environment, as well as those who live there, including family and neighbours. However, the area a person can emotionally connect to cannot be too large: it is *your* farm, *your* village, the district where *you* live. The circle of people that you are emotionally attached to is necessarily also limited: beyond your family and neighbours, this might include school, church, pub, club, working place or sports team.

Scruton also emphasises that the locality to which we belong was there before us and will remain there after we die. Our relationship to our locality is therefore also one of stewardship or trust, not merely of Lockean property: we must take care of it so that we can pass it on in full bloom to the next generation. Here, Scruton’s conservatism becomes more explicit, building as it does on Burke. For Scruton, the ‘core of conservative thinking’ rests on three principles or ideas: ‘respect for the dead, the ‘little platoon’, and the voice of tradition’. There can be no conservative revival in Britain today without a return to these core conservative ideas.

The reason that Edmund Burke and Roger Scruton were among the most widely known

conservative intellectuals of their age, and remain influential today, is, I would suggest, that they possessed an almost instinctive awareness of the political situation and what it requires. The name for this awareness is ‘practical wisdom’, or more specifically, ‘political wisdom’, which, in the form of the cardinal virtue *prudentia*, played a crucial role in Edmund Burke’s thinking. Practical wisdom (also termed ‘practical judgement’, ‘prudence’ or ‘*phronesis*’) is a cardinal virtue, in part intellectual, in part moral – which is why intellectuals who want to comment on, or participate in, politics first need to acquire the necessary experience and practice. For without experience, the virtue cannot be exercised. So, while Burke sharpened his political judgement in parliamentary debates and in his publications, Scruton gained first-hand experience in Central Europe of the reality of totalitarian rule, and he tried his hand at practical politics by serving as the founding editor of *The Salisbury Review*. He also arranged in-person platforms where intellectuals could meet and discuss the pressing issues of the day, which is how the Salisbury Group and the Conservative Philosophy Group emerged.

Taken together, Burke and Scruton provide an exemplary model of what a conservative intellectual should be like. Without the work done by conservative intellectuals, there can be no conservatism. The one thing that can be said in favour of liberal, socialist and nationalist intellectuals is that they ‘did their homework’. For politics is more than mere technology: it requires vision and ideas – ideas that can excite people’s imaginations and fuel their passions. On the other hand, conservative intellectuals must remain loyal to traditions and be personally modest in their political ambitions. They must be active in civil society and support political debate from the outside, but never trespass on, or demand participation in, decision-making processes. This was the theme of Nigel Biggar’s recent Peter Toon Memorial Lecture entitled *The Spirit of Truth: The Call to Intellectual Public Service* – namely, that British conservatism needs some public service from conservative intellectuals and thinkers. And this, we might say, is the message of Scruton – himself an unwanted British conservative intellectual. That conservative intellectuals must do their homework

if conservatism is to survive, let alone flourish.

But there is more to it than that. The problem is this: culture is upstream from politics, and religion is upstream from culture. The truth of these claims was exemplified in Scruton's own life. First, he tried his hand at thinking about politics, then he climbed to the heights of aesthetics, and finally he set off, steeply upwards, on the path towards God. This would be a powerful strategy for British conservatism, but it would require the Tory party to engage in deep introspection, starting with political ideas, but going on to reflect on the fundamental cultural issues of the day. Moreover, the practical wisdom needed to face the great challenges of the twenty-first century can only be developed, I would argue, if founded on an appreciation of the cultural heritage and moral foundations of Christianity. The challenges posed by demography,

migration, climate change and the technological paradigm shift can only be met by conservatives who have regained their intellectual confidence by reappropriating their own cultural heritage and religious traditions. For if we give up celebrating the cultural and religious achievements of earlier generations, all in the name of multiculturalism, we give up the social cohesion and solidarity essential for the survival of any political community.

Without this soul searching, and the spiritual renewal that could follow from it, British conservatism is dead.

Ferenc Hörcher is a Hungarian political philosopher and head of the Research Institute of Politics and Government in Budapest. His books include A Political Philosophy of Conservatism and Art and Politics in Roger Scruton's Conservative Philosophy.

Anti-colonial Ideology - the Real Driver of the Chagos Capitulation

William Clouston

Why would the British government cede its sovereign territory to a foreign state just because that foreign state claimed it? And why would it agree to give away billions of pounds for doing so? These are the perplexing questions facing us after Keir Starmer's Labour government agreed to pass the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) – which contains the Chagos Islands and the UK/US military base at Diego Garcia – to Mauritius. The government has justified its capitulation on the supposedly high ground of international law. This is false. The real reason is Labour's anti-colonial ideology.

British sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago was established in 1814 and has continued uninterrupted until the present day. The government of Mauritius, a state some 1,200 miles to the southwest, has laid claim to the territory,

partly on the grounds of its previous connection as a component of a unified imperial department under both French and British control. After gaining its independence from Britain in 1968, Mauritius ramped up its claims to the Chagos Islands in the 1980s. After much agitation in February 2019, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion calling for the islands to be given to Mauritius, and later that year the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a similar decision.

In 2022, the Tories foolishly started to negotiate details of the transfer of the territory and Labour has now finalised it. Those defending this course of action will say it was inevitable. In fact, all the British government needed to do was to resist, retain possession of the BIOT, and carry on. In international relations, the reality of power is decisive. Weakness, on the other hand, will be

exploited – and the reason for our government’s weakness is ideology.

Keir Starmer and his Foreign Secretary David Lammy share the standard progressive anti-colonial mindset. I suspect that neither of these men regard Britain’s ownership of the Chagos Islands with any pride and regard giving them away as a final act of decolonisation atonement for the imperial sins of the past. Starmer is certainly a post-national leader who would be content to entrust Britain’s vital interests to majority vote by international organisations – such is his ideological attachment to liberal legalism. Lammy, a self-described Caribbean, passionately supports punitive large-scale reparations despite the absence of any financial case to support them. Both are dangerous leaders for Britain to have, and there appears to be no limit to their altruism to our competitors and international opponents.

Keir Starmer claimed in Parliament, without a shred of embarrassment, that his deal with Mauritius secured the future of the Diego Garcia base via a new 99-year lease. The nonsensical nature of giving something away only to lease it back at huge expense did not seem to occur to the Prime Minister. Nor did the irony of his pomposity in conspicuously supporting Ukrainian sovereignty while ceding British sovereignty elsewhere. In an increasingly hostile, unstable and multipolar world, the loss of the BIOT is a gross strategic blunder. The loss of control of the territorial waters which surround Diego Garcia to China-aligned Mauritius could render the military base useless. In these circumstances, there may be no point in paying any rent for the base or, indeed, having it at all. We can also expect the BIOT’s status as a Marine Protected Area – which secures its unique aquatic coral environment – to be threatened by fishing rights granted by its new owner.

The historical roots of anti-colonialism and legal activism via international bodies run deep. There have been decades of claims against various European powers – such as Portugal, France and the UK – which commenced almost as soon as the United Nations was established after the Second World War. The UN, due to its inevitable

composition of collected despots, tyrants and totalitarian third world states, has an anti-Western disposition. Over the years, this in-built bias gives rise to flagrant double standards in decision making and only a fool would pretend these bodies put international law above politics. Revealingly, China’s Xue Hanqin, one of the ICJ judges who ruled against Britain on the Chagos Islands, backed Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Sovereignty, it seems, depends on whose sovereignty we are talking about. The mistake naive progressives make is to take these decisions in good faith and at face value. They are nothing of the sort. The Portuguese diplomat Franco Nogueira, Salazar’s implacable foreign minister in the 1960s, understood the real hypocrisy of anti-Western claimants in the UN, noting, ‘*They invoke Western principles against the West while considering themselves free from conformity to them.*’

It is a curious feature of UN anti-colonialism in that its accusations perennially focus on faraway lands held by European powers rather than contiguous imperial domains. I wonder why? In the 1960s, President Kennedy backed anti-colonial forces throughout Africa against his NATO ally Portugal. It didn’t occur to Kennedy that Salazar’s claim to the Portuguese Ultramar was civilisational, based on hundreds of years of possession, and arguably stronger than, say, the United States’ comparatively recent consumption of territories such as Utah or Arizona. The difference is contiguity. Somehow, relics of the imperial age such as Goa or the Chagos Islands, which are held by European states, are regarded in the UN General Assembly as illegitimate.

There is one further on-going problem. Starmer’s weakness over Chagos is bound to invite future claims, both territorial and financial. If over 200 years of possession and sovereignty can be blithely conceded to a small state like Mauritius, doesn’t it encourage Spain’s claim over Gibraltar and Argentina’s ambitions over The Falkland Islands? It does, and further, it sends a signal to those like Mia Mottley, prime minister of Barbados, who has made the preposterous claim that Britain owes her state £3.9 trillion in reparations. Alarmingly, officials from David Lammy’s Foreign Office have confirmed that Britain will enter into talks on such

reparations – despite the irrefutable fact that black populations in the Caribbean are demonstrably more prosperous today than those in uncolonised West Africa. It is a legitimate question to ask whose side the Foreign Secretary is on.

The Chagos capitulation does not augur well. Unless Britain finds leadership prepared to stand up to the spurious and opportunistic financial and

territorial claims of grievance-based activism, the British people can expect to be burdened with further giveaways in the future – with the added difficulty that we can't afford it.

The root of the problem is not law but ideology.

William Clouston is the leader of the SDP.

The Steel Seismometer

Andrey Sapozhnikov

It is quite unusual for the first room in a writer's house museum to greet visitors with a scathing pamphlet. Carefully exhibited behind the glass, it opens with the bold claim that the mere mention of the house's former resident triggers 'German schizophrenia'. A small plaque beside it records the writer's reaction in 1968 upon learning that thirty thousand copies of this lampoon were to be printed: 'Perhaps in fifty years, this will become a bibliophile rarity. I picked peas in the garden for soup with dumplings.'

However, the choice of the exhibition's curators is understandable – few details capture Ernst Jünger's view of reality more precisely than this dumpling entry. In the same year and in the same diary, another striking note appears. During a visit to Rome, Jünger read a newspaper report about a professor at the University of Turin who had slit his wrists and thrown himself out of a window, driven to despair by the insults of his students: 'Not a tragedy', wrote Jünger, 'as the conflict could have been resolved in various ways – ignored, for instance; or could even have been turned into a joke.'

This cold detachment, made him a frequent target of harsh criticism. The German writer and concentration camp survivor Axel Eggebrecht accused him of a 'sterile contempt for humanity'. Meanwhile, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre declared that he 'hated him not as a German, but as an aristocrat', apparently seeing Jünger as a figure straight out of Thackeray – cynical and indifferent to worldly struggles. In reality, of course, the son of a pharmacist had little to do with the aristocracy.

Jünger is the ultimate antagonist of his compatriot Erich Maria Remarque, who also fought in the First World War, spent just over a month on the battlefield, and created what is probably the most famous anti-war novel in the history of world literature: *All Quiet on the Western Front*. This stands in stark contrast to *Storm of Steel*, whose author volunteered for the front at the age of 19, endured the entire war, and was wounded 14 times. For Jünger, however, war was not a catastrophe that inspired Hemingway-esque pacifist pathos but an inherent aspect of human nature – an intense, exhilarating form of existence that Europeans, cushioned by the prosperity of the

pre-war decades, had forgotten.

This is probably Jünger's most famous book and one of the few of his works to have been translated into English. It has found many admirers, from André Gide ('the finest book on war that I know: utterly honest, truthful, in good faith') to Remarque ('pleasantly objective, serious, strong and powerful'), and even Joseph Goebbels, who called it 'the gospel of war'. Such a range of reactions – and from such diverse figures – stems from Jünger's deliberate avoidance of overt judgment or lyrical digression. He depicted the horrors of a soldier's life with detachment and firsthand knowledge, seeing himself, as he put it, as a seismometer. And seismometers, as we know, are not to be blamed for earthquakes.

If one were to undertake the non-trivial task of defining Ernst Jünger's political views, two major obstacles would arise. First, the subject of this analysis is a man who lived an extraordinarily long and eventful life, born in the German Empire and passing away in the Federal Republic of Germany at the age of 102. Second, he proclaimed the principle that 'to interpret oneself is to sink below one's level'.

The most controversial chapter in Jünger's biography relates to the period when he deviated from this principle and aligned himself with a political movement: National Socialism. In the late 1920s, he actively contributed articles to the Nazi Party newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, expressing support for the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) as the only political force engaged in a 'real struggle'. Adolf Hitler himself is known to have admired Jünger's work and in 1926 received a signed copy of *Fire and Blood* from the writer. The Nazi leader then extended an invitation to meet in person, but the meeting never took place – something Jünger would later recall

with relief: 'That was the last thing I needed.'

During this period, Jünger made many of the statements that would later earn him the label *umstrittenen* – meaning controversial or dubious in German. Decades later, in the 1980s, a scandal erupted in Germany when he was awarded the prestigious Goethe Prize, with protesters from the left-liberal Green Party denouncing him as an 'ideological pioneer of fascism'. It is this young Jünger of the 1920s who would go on to become a favourite among radicals in Russia; and to this day, he remains highly regarded by members of the National Bolshevik Party, including one of its founders, the philosopher Alexander Dugin, a figure closely associated with Vladimir Putin. A collection of Jünger's essays also occupied a place on the bookshelf in the office of Vladislav Surkov, one of the chief architects of Putinism.

However, it would be a gross oversimplification to classify Ernst Jünger as a National Socialist, if only because, in 1927, he refused to join the NSDAP – 'I consider it more worthwhile to write a single verse than to represent sixty thousand idiots in parliament' – and began criticising Hitler's associates in the liberal press. In 1944, Jünger was even investigated by the Nazis for possible links to the conspirators of the 20 July plot; and in 1939, following the publication of his allegorical tale *On the Marble Cliffs*, which depicted a despot expanding his power by exploiting a cultural crisis, Goebbels and Reichsleiter Philipp Bouhler called for his arrest. 'Leave Jünger alone', Hitler reportedly replied.

This act of dictatorial mercy reminded me of a remark attributed to Joseph Stalin upon seeing the poet Boris Pasternak's name on a list of 'enemies of the people' marked for arrest: 'Don't touch this celestial.' Celestial is also an apt description of Jünger, whose every

engagement with politics seemed like a quest for situational allies capable of realising his intricate, often utopian ideas. Paradoxically, despite his advocacy of a society founded on military discipline and dictatorship, in essays such as *Total Mobilization* and *The Worker* – where he foresaw the dissolution of the individual amid technological triumph – Jünger could, in many ways, be seen as a radical individualist.

From 1951 until his death, Jünger lived in Wilflingen, a rural town in southern Germany that still remains a pastoral idyll, seemingly untouched by the outside world. There, he immersed himself in literary pursuits, experimented with LSD alongside its discoverer, Albert Hofmann, and expanded his extensive bugs collection, while occasionally hosting journalists and high-profile guests such as François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl. In 1987, an interviewer from *Der Spiegel* visited him and asked, ‘How do you see moving from a bad present to a beautiful future if you allow yourself to dream of utopias?’

After the Second World War, much of which he spent in Paris as a military censor, mingling with the French bohemian and resistance circles (an experience that resulted in the brilliant diaries *A German Officer in Occupied Paris*), Jünger increasingly turned towards utopianism. This tendency in his work had already emerged in 1938 with *The Adventurous Heart*, a collection of short surrealist stories rich in metaphors and abstract imagery, and it later culminated in the epic novels *Eumeswil* and *Heliopolis*. All these works have been translated into English.

It could be said that Jünger embodied the concept of the ‘Anarch’, which he described in such detail in *Eumeswil*. For him, it represented the highest degree of personal freedom: an ‘Anarch’ is not indifferent, but he independently determines what to engage with,

effectively ‘driving society out of himself’. He never took the world fully seriously, which may explain Jünger’s coldness when describing the suffering of others – as with the news story about the professor from Turin, or his reaction to the order to attend the execution of a deserter, as recounted in his Parisian diaries. Initially, he considered avoiding it by reporting in sick, but as Jünger admitted, ‘It was exaggerated curiosity that was the deciding factor. I have seen many people die, but never at a predetermined moment.’

In the novels of his utopian cycle, Jünger expresses an increasingly evident sympathy for the stance of the solitary observer – one who seeks beauty in the ordinary rather than attempting to reshape the world according to his ideological principles. One of the most striking passages in *Heliopolis* is devoted to a discussion of happiness, which, according to one of the characters, lies in the harmony we experience with the things around us – the simpler these things are, the ‘purer and lighter the chord’. He then recounts a parable about a man who, following a strange operation on his eyes, begins to perceive the world with an impressive sharpness and clarity, only to find himself unprepared for such an ‘appeal to the higher forces’.

Until old age, Jünger remained a staunch critic of liberal democracy, which he had found repugnant since the Weimar Republic. He saw it as a system that constrained freedom with primitive frameworks and stifled the German genius, which, in his view, demanded strict order to fully realise itself. Yet the collapse of his dreams of a conservative revolution, and even the four-year publishing ban imposed on him by the British occupying forces after the war, did not turn him into a resentful revanchist. On the contrary, he spent the rest of his life immersed in study, writing and extensive travel, ultimately becoming a living classic – one whom Helmut Kohl would

describe as ‘one of the few great living writers in our country’.

This is the respect owed to a man who was never a prisoner of his own ideas or public opinion. As a child, Jünger changed schools 11 times before running away from home as a gymnasium student to join the French Foreign Legion, only to escape from a training camp in Algeria and flee to Morocco. In 1932, he walked out of a speech by Goebbels, despite being given a place of honour in the audience, and a year later, he rejected an offer to join the Nazi-aligned Academy of Fine Arts.

And it is difficult to fault Jünger for not using his influence more openly to denounce the Hitler regime. Reflecting on his tacit refusal to join the Academy of Fine Arts, he remarked: ‘Of course, everyone thinks that such a young man should have written “I want nothing to do with you pigs.” And then the young man would have been happily sent to a concentration camp the next day.’

This is where Jünger’s conservatism comes to the fore. Unlike his interviewer, he was not concerned with how immersion in utopias might shape the future. In his novels, he increasingly portrayed politics as an inherently immoral pursuit. ‘I no longer take part in politics; I am moving away from it. My bridge between the present and the future is meditation. If you were not here now, I would probably be meditating,’ he told *Der Spiegel*. For Jünger, political regimes and national leaders were fleeting phenomena, unworthy of being taken too seriously – so much so that he once remarked he would be happy ‘if this wreck [the Federal Republic of Germany] lasts for at least half of its course while I am alive’.

That is why Jünger remains worth reading today. While many intellectuals sought to provide clear answers to the infinitely complex questions of the universe – like Virginia Woolf

in *Three Guineas* – he offered a radically different perspective. One far more concerned with the art of bookbinding and the depiction of natural landscapes than with dictators and political parties – beautiful things so often overlooked in times of upheaval.

Perhaps this is the ‘German schizophrenia’ that the authors of that very lampoon referred to, but sometimes it is worth listening to schizophrenics. Because where everyone else saw the Rome of 1968 consumed by left-wing student protests, the ‘schizophrenic’ Jünger saw a young Italian woman reading Petrarch’s poetry on a bus: ‘A reader of the kind poets wish for themselves: when the bus stopped, she would tap out time with her delicate fingers on the back of the seat.’

Andrey Sapozhnikov is a Russian journalist based in Baden-Württemberg, Germany.



‘He’s still getting over Trump’s 2016 election...’

The Human Rights Balloon

Andrew Tettenborn

The public face of an institution can often belie the way it works in practice. A case in point, worth a closer glance than it normally gets, is the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

The official line could not be more unexceptionable. In 1949, Europe, sickened by the dark history of Nazism and Fascism, produced a European Convention on Human Rights, or ECHR, to prevent any repetition. The scheme of the Convention was generally to leave democratic governments to go as their electors wished, but to list some rights – seen as so important that states that infringed them put themselves beyond the pale of civilisation – as sacrosanct. The most important of these were the rights to life, freedom from torture, personal freedom, privacy and freedom from surveillance, together with freedom of religion and speech. And now, the story continues, we have the European Court of Human Rights, set up in Strasbourg under the auspices of the Council of Europe, to protect us by deciding in an authoritative and impartial way, by reference to the terms of the Convention, whether a state has overstepped the mark.

What's not to like? More than you think. Put bluntly, the court does not adhere scrupulously to the terms of the Convention in reaching its decisions; at times, far from leaving democratic governments to go their own way, it aims at the imposition of European uniformity; and its impartiality is sometimes highly doubtful – at least in the sense that most people view the matter. These are serious charges, but I think they are justified.

Take the first, the terms of the ECHR. To read them one might think that they were limited, targeting deliberate and extreme government brutality and repression, whether by state murder, torture, random midnight searches, silencing of the opposition press, officially sponsored religious

persecution, or whatever. And, indeed, this once was how the Convention was applied. But no longer: the wording remains the same, but its interpretation has expanded beyond recognition. This is for two reasons. One is that the court has become instinctively more politically activist. The other is that the same court has fashioned a doctrine that the Convention is a 'living instrument' – that is, that the rights are to be interpreted in a progressive way as the European liberal *Zeitgeist* moves forward. Hence, under the right to life, the state must take steps to guard against death from other causes, even suicide; and it must at times positively protect against torture or brutalisation by others. Meanwhile, the right to privacy and family life has ballooned to such an extent that it now limits the state's right to deport criminals who have formed relationships, requires the state to suppress a good deal of reporting on the activities of celebrities, and even at times extends to granting environmental rights.

Furthermore, the scope left to states to go their own way is also withering. The ECHR now rules on the boundary between privacy and free speech, and much of the law of asylum. And there is an insidious doctrine of 'consensus', which means that once there is a majority view within European states, the ECHR is more likely to be interpreted to require outliers to conform, as has happened in cases such as the status of illegitimate children, and may well happen, once a consensus grows, on matters of great delicacy such as gay marriage and gender reassignment.

As for impartiality, the evidence is more circumstantial. But there are clear indications from its judgements that in interpreting and developing the ECHR, the Strasbourg court has clear political preferences. It favours liberal consensus over populism, extensive state intervention over individualism, privacy and community relations over free speech, and, despite the absence of any

provision directly mandating this, the imposition of equality, even when social institutions pull the other way.

Does this matter? Yes – and for at least two reasons. One is that the ECHR as presently interpreted is nothing like the ECHR we signed in 1950, and which, its proponents never cease to tell us, we helped to draft. From its beginnings as a last-resort backstop against serious state malpractice, the Strasbourg court has by slow degrees morphed itself into a kind of constitutional and civil rights watchdog with a distinctly progressive agenda. This isn't what we signed up to, and we have every right to say that we now want to think again about the institution we joined.

The second is that the Court, in its relentless expansion of the reach of human rights law, is increasingly compromising democracy. The expectation that European states will abide by

the ECHR's requirements regardless of what their electorates may think, is all very well for the kind of extreme state wrongdoing envisaged in 1950 – state murder and the like; but not with the expanded rights that the Court now extracts from the Convention. For example, preventing the government from deporting foreign criminals who would face mistreatment at home, or have put down roots here, may be a good thing – as may limiting a tabloid's freedom to report on the activities of a celebrity when the latter's right to privacy is infringed. But should these rights be regarded as immune from the democratic process? One doubts it. Once we go beyond the bedrock of rights that no civilised state can infringe, the only legitimate basis for constitutional rights is the electorate of the state concerned. It is no-one else's business.

Andrew Tettenborn is a writer and professor of commercial law.

Moral Vandalism

Theodore Dalrymple

A general practitioner, Dr Patrick Hart, has just been given a 12-month prison sentence, which in fact is a 6-month prison sentence (I will not comment on the way in which judges now mislead the public by passing prison sentences which do not mean what they say), for criminal damage.

Dr Hart, a member of *Just Stop Oil*, smashed the glass of sixteen petrol pumps at an M25 service station in the summer of 2022. He took a special hammer for breaking glass with him to do so, so his act was premeditated. Convinced of his own courage and virtue, he said the following: 'I damaged the petrol pump screens as an act of care, because in times of great peril a caring person has to stand up for what is right. My actions have already cost me greatly.'

His act was courageous, all right: most people, certainly not of his social class, standing or economic position, would do what he did. But courage is not self-justifying: many courageous

acts – bank robbery, for example (if you could find a branch that is still open) – are not to be praised simply because they are courageous. Nor does the fact that someone pays dear for an act have a bearing on the goodness of what he did. That Gaddafi paid with his life for his career does not in any way extenuate his dictatorship or the evil that he committed. In like fashion, the fact that Dr Hart has already paid dearly for his actions is irrelevant to the moral assessment of them: his was an appeal to the grossest sentimentality rather alarming in a person of his education.

There are three main questions to be answered about Dr Hart's actions. The first is whether the basis upon which he acted is in fact correct; the second is whether his action will result in an amelioration of the problem identified; and the third is whether a man with a very strong point of view automatically has the right to break the law – that is, whether a society can continue to prosper if every man is his own Luther.

Dr Hart acted on the supposition that there is global warming, that such warming will soon be catastrophic for humanity, and that it is substantially caused by the continued use of fossil fuels. Therefore, in the name of future humanity, it is imperative that we stop using fossil fuels immediately, and it is morally justified to do anything to bring that end about.

Let us leave aside the question of whether global warming *is* caused by the use of fossil fuels. But it surely should have crossed Dr Hart's mind that the country in which he lives, the United Kingdom, is responsible for about one per cent of the carbon emissions in the world. On the fairly safe assumption that it will not again become the workshop of the world, what the United Kingdom does with regard to fossil fuels matters not a jot or tittle to the fate of the world as a whole. The idea that it might act as a moral example to the world is preposterous in its self-delusion, and the notion that, as a result of our moral example, China might stop burning coal to generate the electricity necessary to manufacture giant windmills is so naïve that any normal person would guffaw at it.

One might, rhetorically, accuse Dr Hart of wishing African children to have to work in the most abominable conditions to mine the rare earth metals necessary to make the batteries that fuel electric cars. Furthermore, one might accuse him of wishing further poverty on the poorest people of his own country, who will have to pay for the economic consequences of not using fossil fuel and may have to go cold as a result (and excess cold is already responsible for far more deaths in our country than excessive heat). One might accuse him, even worse, of trying to starve people: for if one just stopped oil, one would also stop distribution of food. No one, in addition, will bother to produce what cannot be distributed, so famine will stalk the land. Of the national strategic question, I will not speak: to a citizen of the world such as Dr Hart, such a question would be beyond contempt. We must all pull together, he would say – as we have so conspicuously done throughout human history.

Any extreme action, normally accounted criminal, in so ambiguous a situation is, in fact, criminal plain and simple. Nor should we forget that vandalism has its pleasures, and there is no

reason to think that the middle-classes, to which Dr Hart belongs, are immune to them.

I rather doubt that Dr Hart paused very long to consider what would happen if everybody with an important cause thought that he had the right to behave as he did. Like every other citizen, of course, he has the right to protest, but that right is limited by the rights of others, including to their property. I do not have the right continually to inconvenience my neighbour because I have a cause that I consider vital.

It might be said that there have been many times in history when laws have been broken in a good cause, which is perfectly true. But there have been as many times when laws have been broken in very bad causes, indeed in the worst possible causes. It is impossible to establish with perfect accuracy when exactly laws may rightly be broken, for a lawful society is better than a lawless one, even when some of its laws are unjust. Some laws are so patently unjust that it is right to break them; in apartheid South Africa, I did not consider it was wrong for me to walk where I was not permitted to do so, or travel on a bus against the law. My willingness to break such laws was limited only by fear or cowardice, and I did so only to a minor degree.

Willingness to break the law in pursuit of an end should depend on the importance of that end, properly and calmly considered, and the proximity of the action of breaking the law to the amelioration of the situation. Where vandalism cannot be expected to bring about any change – except, perhaps, increased and costly surveillance and security – it remains what it is, vandalism pure and simple.

Perhaps in the back of Dr Hart's mind was the thought that, whatever they do, people such as he are not sent to prison, which as a sociological generalisation might well be true, and is a reproach to our system of criminal justice. After all, he meant well, at least in his own estimation, even if in fact what he did was to reduce slightly the level of trust in our society. Broken petrol pumps, if not prevented, will have the same effect as broken windows.

Theodore Dalrymple is a retired prison doctor and renowned essayist. His most recent book is Nothing but Wickedness: Idleness, Madness and the Culture of Decline (Gibson Square Books).

Metro Rulers

Bill Hartley

One thing local government is good at is blaming central government for its failures. This usually takes the form of claiming that it is not being given enough money. There is, however, a group of people in local government who seem impervious to financial stringency. These are the senior executives, many of whom are better paid than cabinet ministers. Local government lifers are a transient bunch, building their careers as they move around the country. They have successfully bamboozled councillors into defending their generous salaries by claiming that without such remuneration they would go elsewhere, such is the demand for their services. But what they seem conspicuously to lack is any local knowledge or local loyalty. The results can be seen in the mismanagement and decline of our towns and cities, particularly the metropolitan districts, which lack any obvious geographical cohesion.

The Local Government Act of 1972 brought into being the metropolitan district councils, an exciting new development that heralded the rise of senior management and its wages. Previously, for good or ill, local government had been local. Now it would be run by chief executives in the manner of colonial proconsuls, remote from the satellite towns they managed. Backing them up would be a team of senior officers, creating an enormous wage bill. Together they would sail serenely onwards, unaffected by cutbacks and economies down the line.

Despite claiming to bring a wealth of experience to their fiefdoms, the experience of the North of England has been that the only thing senior management is good at is managing decline. There are some exceptions – for example, Sunderland and Middlesbrough, where the energy and pride of local people has been harnessed by local

leaders committed to serving their communities. But elsewhere, what stands out is an abject failure of senior management to recognise what is going on within their localities, gather the necessary economic intelligence, and respond proactively. The default position is to assess the damage once it has been done and then beg for additional funding from central government to fix the problem. Subsequent decision making takes the form of projects which have failure written all over them and merely create a new set of problems. Local people who might better perceive the risks are ignored.

The City of Wakefield provides a good example. When it was created, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council (MDC) absorbed several smaller towns. One of these is the former mining town of Castleford, known locally as Cas Vegas due to the profusion of downmarket bookmakers and bingo halls – a good indicator of an economic downturn. These places take root in low rent areas and extract money from those who can least afford to lose it. With the collieries gone, the power stations they fed went too, but the economic impact seems to have passed unnoticed by the council. In 2018, the *Wakefield Express* noted that Castleford had been voted tenth on the list of ‘The Worst Places in Britain to Live’. Not content with this, in 2022, Castleford also made it onto the list of the most crime-ridden places in Britain – impressive for a town with a population of only 44,000. The council’s response was to close the community centre – one of those vanity projects they dream up in town halls and then abandon when it turns out to be unaffordable. Previously, they had shut the swimming pool. This is a common pattern, as we shall see. Rather than work towards building communities, metro councils actively undermine them.

A good indicator that creative thinking is dead may be found on council websites. Ideally, these should provide directions for gaining access to services. Instead, the Wakefield MDC website diverts attention from its shortcomings by offering patronising advice about how to survive cold weather or hot weather. On the jobs page, they recently advertised for a coordinator to run a supervised tooth-brushing campaign for children. Presiding over all this are no less than twenty-two ‘service directors’ accountable to the chief officer. Most of us can figure out what a chief legal officer might do, or a finance director, but a service director for ‘street scene and climate change’ leaves us mystified. Except that a post like that pays a minimum of £90,000 per annum. Lambeth has a senior officer responsible for ‘decarbonisation and climate change’ on £140,000 per annum. And there is a similarly well-remunerated post in Wakefield for ‘strategy improvement and intelligence’ – although there is not much sign of that in Wakefield’s once prosperous city centre, now a vista of boarded up shop windows, street drinkers and beggars. To be fair, the council has tried to arrest the decline. They remodelled the market, which one resident described as now resembling a bike shed, and they pedestrianised what had once been a main shopping thoroughfare, the surface of which is already crumbling and uneven. The officer with overall charge of this is on £173,000 a year.

Over in nearby Kirklees, an anonymous agglomeration of previously unconnected towns, the story is much the same. Here, a total of ten towns have been grouped together around Huddersfield. Like Wakefield, this is traditional Labour territory. When the council sought to discover what were the main local concerns, a certain section of the population mentioned Gaza. Which no doubt explains why Kirklees has a foreign policy and demands that Israel allows aid into Gaza and declares a ceasefire. Indeed, the Kirklees MDC senior management chart is astonishing in its size and scope. Beneath the chief executive are four executive directors and sixteen service directors presiding over no less than fifty-four departmental heads. Swimming in this vast executive ocean are a head of transformation

and culture change, a head of communities, and a head of data and insight. But this did not stop the council from closing Cleckheaton town hall, an important community hub, to the dismay of the local community. Nor from ‘pausing’ maintenance on a bowling green in Huddersfield that had been going since 1927 without notice or consultation. It later cited ‘financial difficulties’ as the reason. But back when local government was on a more modest level, such leisure facilities were the bread-and-butter activities of a council. Now they are seen as disposable.

Perhaps the worst example is another of Kirklees’ satellites, the town of Dewsbury. It is a microcosm of all that is bad about local metro government. Once the place had gone into what appears to be irretrievable decline, a ‘blueprint’ was produced by the local council, which took the form of a Disneyesque video showing how the town ‘might’ change in the next ten years and asking the question ‘How do we make Dewsbury a destination town?’ Unfortunately, the answer is ‘You probably cannot’ because nearby Leeds already fulfils this role. The Kirklees solution is first to plan for lots of green spaces, but it seems to have escaped their notice that these require expensive maintenance, without which they soon look as if someone had been staging a litter festival. Dewsbury’s sports centre has been closed and even Mecca Bingo has fled the town, which suggests that Dewsbury will struggle to be a destination for anything. That said, the council has high hopes that a revamped Victorian shopping arcade will turn things around.

In Rotherham, to the south, things are if anything even worse. In 2022, an article in the *Star* listed it as the country’s ‘unhappiest place to live’, with Rotherham coming in 211th on the Happy Home index, a measure of community spirit and sense of belonging. Of course, the child sex abuse scandal can have done little for the town’s sense of community cohesion. But, undeterred by the 2015 Casey Report’s findings that there had been ‘a complete failure of political and officer leadership’ and that ‘poor governance is deeply seated throughout the council’, Rotherham Council has gone on to launch its £47 million Forge Island Masterplan to regenerate the town centre by

making it a leisure destination. Unfortunately, the planned restaurants and food outlets have pulled out of the project, jeopardising its financial viability. All that is left is a white elephant.

Anyone who has a passing acquaintance with West and South Yorkshire will have noticed the flight from the towns. Those who can afford it prefer to live in new housing developments grafted onto villages. Here they are insulated from the neglect of the towns and have little reason to visit them. There are shopping centres and other locations to provide an alternative. Despite this, the metro councils seem to think that throwing public money at vanity projects will make a

difference. It is a great pity they did not act earlier to address the underlying issues.

A White Paper published in December 2024 proposes significant changes to local government. The opening up of senior management posts to talented outsiders should help, particularly if they can demonstrate some local knowledge. The abolition of a host of pointless and expensive managerial posts would also help. But what is needed above all is a senior management that serves local needs – not itself.

Bill Hartley is a social historian.

Shadows on the Shore of Wannsee

Sean McGlynn

Twenty minutes southwest of Berlin's Hauptbahnhof central station, and just ten minutes northeast of Potsdam on the same line, lies Wannsee. Here, two lakes, the larger of which is one square mile, offer Berliners delightful walks and a large sandy beach for day trips from the capital, an attraction fully enjoyed for over a century since the completion of the huge lido complex there. Richer commuters reside here. Around the shore of the lake are elegant small palaces and grand villas built in traditional Teutonic architectural style. It is two of these villas that recently brought me there.

The first is the infamous Wannsee villa, named not for its size but for its place in history. Here, on 20 January 1942, top Nazi officials met to settle the Final Solution once and for all. Under the always

sinister gaze of Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Reich Security Main Office and as murderous a Nazi as one could encounter, the fifteen officials, who included Adolf Eichmann, planned the

complete destruction of Europe's Jews. By the time of the conference, the Holocaust of bullets was already well under way in Russia and Central Europe; the Holocaust of the gas chambers was now about to begin. The result was six million men, women and children being murdered. Had the war not been ended in 1945 by the sacrifice of

the Allied forces, this number would have been considerably higher.

The magnificent villa which hosted the conference is now a museum. It was built in Italian country house style by an industrialist in 1914 on the eve of another apocalypse. By 1941,



it had come into the hands of the SS as a luxurious guest house and meeting centre for its members. Elegant, airy and light, and backing onto the lake, it was an idyllic place for a combination of business and pleasure for those higher up in the Nazi hierarchy. Here, in the large dining area, the fifteen officials quickly and efficiently carried out their remit: Hermann Göring's authorisation to plan comprehensive genocide. Well-fed and lubricated by fine wines, they turned their minds to annihilation. Eight attendees held doctorates, some of these being among the eight lawyers present. This was a task to be undertaken by bright minds and experts in legal matters; it was going to be carried out with efficiency and plausible acquiescence to the law. This latter aspect is important: the legal justification and process of the Holocaust made it more palatable to the law-abiding German people. The minutes of the meeting – the Wannsee Protocol – record the shameful day of infamy.

Sobering as it is to walk in the same intimate rooms as the monsters who put their names to one of mankind's most disgraceful documents, the gardens to the front and back of the villa are perhaps even more chilling. Outside, the villa has hardly changed since the meeting; there is little of the museum to be found here. With its associations, the garden can hardly be considered pleasant, but it must have felt that way to the guests at the villa – indeed, it would have been part of the attraction. Across the lake, a long low line indicates the lido and the bathing beaches, places that had long since been forbidden to Berlin's Jews by 1942.

Just as I was leaving, teachers led a large group of older German teenagers into the house for a history lesson. As is the wont of teenagers, there was plenty of jollity and laughter among some of them.

The other villa of my planned visit is barely three minutes' walk down the road. Less grand but more homely, this was the summer home of the famous German artist Max Liebermann (1847-1935). It, too, is a museum (since 2006), but one celebrating art, not commemorating genocide. Liebermann commissioned an eminent architect to build the house for him in 1910, close in both

time and position to the Wannsee villa. The artist called his new residence his 'little castle on the lake'. The picturesque house includes, in his studio and other rooms, some dozens of his paintings of varying quality, from excellent to lacklustre; more accomplished pieces are to be found in Berlin's Alte Nationalgalerie. (Unfortunately, when I was there, much of the villa's space was appropriated by an exhibition of Dora Hitz's rather dreary works.) The delightful house is made more so by a lovely café, with a spacious room looking onto the lawn and lake, and by the gardens – pretty in winter, but which must be beautiful in spring and summer – to the front and back. It was a sweet relief to come here after the oppressive atmosphere of its sinister neighbour.

But there was no escaping the shadow of Wannsee. Here, too, the realm of art was tainted by the pervasiveness of Nazi evil. Liebermann was a Jew. Despite being fully embedded in the German establishment – he painted President Paul von Hindenburg, the Prussian Academy of Arts, of which he was a member, honoured him on his fiftieth birthday, and Berlin made him an honorary citizen on his eightieth – his art, hardly radical or degenerate in any shape or form, was proscribed when the Nazis came to power. He withdrew to the battered ramparts of his little castle and died abandoned by friends and associates in the art world.

Worse was to come for his widow, Martha. The Nazis seized the villa and most of her money. In March 1943, she faced deportation to the hellhole of Theresienstadt. On the eve of her departure, she took her own life. She was 85.

In these two handsome villas neighbouring each other on Wannsee's agreeable shore, we encounter the juxtaposition of sheer evil and beautiful, soul-enriching art. This says something profound about people, power and culture; but what, apart from the cohabitation of extremes, I am not entirely sure.

Sean McGlynn is a historian, writer and university lecturer.

Letter from America

Erich Prince

In the time since his election to the presidency in November, President Donald Trump's approval rating has continued to climb, with a recent CBS News poll finding that 53% of Americans approve of how Trump is handling the early days of his presidency. The policies he is pursuing remain largely popular, and most Americans appear to appreciate that there is little daylight between what he promised on the campaign trail and what he is actually doing once in office. This is in contrast to the first time around when – his base aside – most of the American electorate viewed Trump unfavourably, making him the least popular incoming president in modern political history. This turnaround is a testament, yes, to gross mismanagement on the part of the Biden administration, but one also wonders if something of a cultural shift is finally at hand. Perhaps those who had argued amid the Great Awakening that the pendulum was unlikely to swing back from the cultural dominance of the Left were being unduly pessimistic.

This victory felt different from the start. I recall being on a college campus when Trump won the first time. I remember the shrieking students, the comfort animals, the endless tears and hysteria that went on for months, arguably in muted form for eight years, until Tuesday, November 5, 2024. Walking the campus of Haverford College the day after the race was called, it appeared to be business as usual: students rushing to class, headphones on, nothing obviously amiss. It was much the same

driving through Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's most Democratic county, the next day: Everyone just going about their business. Protests, at least until recently, have been minimal. Even the Trump signs in the Philadelphia suburbs, where I live, have been largely spared the vandalism they typically received in past election cycles.

I think this is owed almost entirely to the President sweeping all seven swing states and winning the popular vote. No Republican had won an outright majority of votes nationally since George W Bush in 2004. And, of those swing states, Nevada had eluded Republican presidential candidates cycle after cycle for two decades, but Trump won the Western state with 50.6% of the vote. Illinois was closer to flipping red than Texas was to turning

blue. It appears, fortunately, that most Americans actually don't think hiring decisions should be made on the basis of race or that just about anyone should be allowed to walk into the United States and do as they please.

The congratulations weren't tepid or begrudging this time. Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, wrote: 'Congratulations President Trump on your victory!' Jeff Bezos joined him: 'Big congratulations to our 45th and now 47th President on an extraordinary political comeback and decisive victory.' Mark Zuckerberg, once the tech bro liberal par excellence, posted a photograph beside his wife, Priscilla Chan, in a tuxedo on inauguration day captioned: 'Optimistic and celebrating'. All the while, companies have been racing to scrap their



diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

One friend of mine who would never dream of voting for Trump remarked the day after, 'It's probably for the best,' and even Democratic donors in my social circles seem much less upset than expected, almost as if they are contented with a Trump victory but just didn't want to do the dirty work of having had to vote for it. All of this would have been unthinkable a few years ago.

Of course, when a candidate wins, as the saying goes, everything he does is genius, and vice versa if he should lose. But I am glad the Trump campaign didn't listen to me or to the conventional wisdom of electioneering: I would have told him to pick Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin over his ideologically kindred soul J D Vance. I would have pleaded with him not to campaign in New Mexico, a state he was very unlikely to win, just days before the election. I would have told him not to waste time in New York state rallying at Madison Square Garden when he should have been in Michigan or Arizona that day instead. But Trump must have known he was in good shape in the swing states, and winning the popular vote was essential, forever quieting those critics who would again and again proclaim: 'Most Americans don't want you.' He also wanted to hand pick his successor: the Junior Senator from Ohio and a champion of a natalist-informed conservative populism.

Trumpism, based on the exit polls, is now the party of Hispanic men, white men, and white women. Trump won Muslim-majority Dearborn, Michigan; successfully reached out to young voters by making the rounds on the podcast circuit; and achieved considerable gains with Jewish voters. (Despite improving his performance among black men, black voters have not *yet* largely come into the fold.) Patrick Deneen's long-standing dream of a multi-racial working-class coalition committed to conservatism seems within grasp. But in a way, why wouldn't it? No matter one's colour or creed, the policies championed by the Biden administration were unlikely to help you. The Democrats – these past four years – have been the party of inflation, an open border (and the tragedies that have accompanied this), an inept

withdrawal from Afghanistan, and turning a blind eye to urban crime. Two thirds of voters believed the United States was on the wrong path, and President Joe Biden's approval rating often hung below 40 percent.

But Trump's victory was still far from assured: Harris enjoyed a staggering campaign finance advantage, as well as the unquestioning support of nearly the entire mainstream media and all of polite society. For this reason, I give much credit to voters, particularly younger ones, who were able to look past decades of inculcation of left-of-centre values and opt for the Republican candidate, who has been vilified around the clock for nearly a decade.

Had he lost, Trump's 2016 victory would have been considered a fluke, the result of record votes for third party candidates and the unique unlikability of Hillary Clinton. His four years in office would have been considered a 'brief interregnum from the dominance of the Left', a blip in the continuity of Obama and his heirs. Obama – rather than Trump – would have been the man who defined American politics in the 21st century.

But he won, and with the popular vote. On his coattails, the Republican Party, which he has completely remade, retook the Senate and held its majority in the House of Representatives. Democrats are already showing some willingness to work with Republicans as we saw with the Laken Riley Act, a sharp departure from his first term. With control of both houses of Congress and the presidency, it will be difficult to deflect blame if the Trump administration falters on key priorities.

Already, different factions of his coalition are doing battle – mostly notably conservative populists in the mould of Steve Bannon and the Silicon Valley contingent led by Elon Musk. But this is to be expected. It is easy when not in power to criticize everything that goes on, but once one wins, he has to actually govern, and that requires making difficult decisions that will almost certainly upset at least a portion of his voters and supporters. It also remains possible that Trump will overread his mandate or take things too far

when it comes to his tariff plans, foreign affairs proposals, or reducing the scope and size of the federal workforce. One ought to not forget that Biden was elected as a moderate but then became deeply unpopular – at least in part – when trying to do more than voters asked of him. There is a lesson there. But, at least so far, voters remain sympathetic to Trump’s concerns about the federal bureaucracy and are willing to give him leeway to solve the illegal immigration crisis as he sees fit.

Another reason for optimism about Trump’s second term is that he appears to have learned about Washington, D C, how it functions, and how it can trip up a newcomer committed to disrupting the status quo. He has said so himself, and, this time around, he has nominated a slate of cabinet officials that are his ideological kin, unlike last

time when some of his personnel decisions were at odds with his professed political philosophy.

There is still much work to do before reaching the ‘golden age of America’ that Trump promised in his inaugural address. But he has already done something essential: Saved a teetering United States from a Kamala Harris presidency and all that would have likely followed from that: an amnesty for illegal immigrants, the further prosecution of political opponents, and an endless siege on anything remotely resembling traditionalism in America. George Will used to tell his children: ‘It’s a free country. Mondale lost.’ Similarly, we can say now: ‘We’ve been granted a second chance. Harris lost.’

Erich Prince is editor-in-chief at Merion West, an American website dealing in politics and the arts.

Letter from Illiberal Budapest

Gavin Duncan

Spring has sprung, and with slightly depressing regularity, here in Budapest we find that we’re unable to escape the dark days of the Second World War. Typically, this isn’t something we want, but, like everything else in Hungary, the turbulent history of the twentieth century seems categorically determined never to release us from its slaving maw. A tiny minority are preparing to commemorate the ‘Day of Honour’, a last-ditch attempt by German and Hungarian soldiers to escape the Soviet army who had surrounded the Buda Castle.

The fifty-day siege of Budapest, which lasted from December 1944 to February 1945, was one of the bloodiest and most savage of the war, a combined German and Hungarian force holding out against the Red Army. After a partially

successful breakout of soldiers and civilians from the Buda or Castle area on 11 February, the last defenders surrendered on 13 February 1945. Some 38,000 civilians died, many of starvation and disease, but also including upwards of 10,000 Jews executed by the then-ruling ultra-nationalist and antisemitic ‘Arrow Cross Party’, whose leaders were later tried for war crimes. The end of the siege was followed by the mass rape of Hungarian women and girls by Red Army soldiers and the deportation to Russia for forced labour of some 600,000 Hungarians, comprising POWs and civilians, including all Hungarians with German names, over a third of whom were never to return. The joys of Stalinist communism still awaited.

Neither side emerges with much ‘honour’ from the siege. Nevertheless, the commemoration,

a fringe event that most Hungarians are hardly aware of, acts like an electromagnet to Antifa, the self-appointed scourge of the far-right across the globe.

To Antifa, the political world is viewed strictly in black and white, divided into socialists (good) – and national socialists, or fascists (naturally, bad). For if the general public were to be made aware of the similarities of the two ideologies, then years of propaganda and Che Guevara T-shirts would have been wasted, people would realise that left-wing regimes are equally as evil as right-wing regimes, and there would likely be a global reassessment of the truth behind politics.

The problem is that with their brute force tactics, Antifa merely reduce themselves to the level of those they claim to hate. Antifa have long since lost any moral high ground they may have had as more and more people have concluded, based on the historical evidence, that you'd be hard pressed to slide a cigarette paper between representatives of the far-left and the far-right. and in Budapest, in 2023, Antifa's involvement in trying to punish those who it suspected of sympathising with the German and Hungarian soldiers in 1945 took a rather dark turn when a group of Antifa activists travelled to Budapest with the sole intention of physically attacking those who chose to commemorate the Day of Honour. Violent, armed attacks were seen as the appropriate lot of those whose opinions differed from those of Antifa.

The violence meted out to those they deemed to be supportive of the Day of Honour, and therefore guilty of belonging to the 'far-right' was, so far as Hungarians were concerned, nothing short of shocking. For, unable to understand Hungarian, and therefore unable to ascertain with any degree of certainty who supported what, why and when, the Antifa activists settled on a rather more primitive means of identifying their foes. Following the (self-defined) logic that right-wing supporters have always favoured big 'bovver' boots, the Antifa members settled on this method of identifying those they considered to be neo-Nazis.

What they failed to take into consideration is the rather obvious fact that big boots can never

be considered an *exclusive* indicator of a person's political beliefs. Surely construction workers, farmers, security guards and others attracted to 'ruffy-tuffy' fashion are just as likely to slip their feet into 'bovver' boots as neo-Nazis, aren't they? If that reasoning weren't enough, I might suggest that Antifa members cast their eyes over their fellow bruisers in black. Anytime I've seen images of confirmed Antifa members, big, black boots appear to be absolutely *de rigueur*.

Anyway, most of those who were attacked had nothing to do with the commemoration. These were just ordinary folk going about their business, attacked, without warning, by people armed with telescopic metal batons and the like. In contrast to the UK, where knives are illegal in theory but rarely in practice, in Hungary, these batons are illegal in both theory and practice. Even the police must make a formal request to the Ministry of the Interior if they want to arm themselves with them – the granting of the request depending on the degree of terrorism threat at the time.

However, the arrest of Antifa members who travelled to Hungary with the explicit intent of causing bodily harm led to a shameful episode which has repercussions far beyond the original commemoration. Of the Antifa members who were identified and arrested by the police, one Ilaria Salis, an Italian national, became a *cause célèbre*.

Salis, in her whimsical, Antifa, girlish way, opted not for a telescopic baton, but a mini claw hammer – something which would fit a woman's hand, but still render a person insensible with ease. She was arrested and placed in custody to await trial. The crimes she was involved in, the violent attacks on unsuspecting Hungarians and foreigners, which left six people severely injured and three people with minor injuries, were judged severe enough for prosecutors to request that she be detained for eleven years in a maximum-security prison and then deported and banned from re-entering Hungary.

That, however, is not how things played out. Always ready to poke its nose in where it is neither required nor desired, along came the EU and its interfering minions. Salis's father toured

Brussels, where he was received by all those who disapprove of Hungary. The efforts of Salis's father snowballed to such an extent that the Italians began to complain about the treatment that Salis was subjected to in Hungary. Then, when they saw Salis brought to court in shackles, it was all too much – and the Italian Green and Left Alliance hit on the perfect solution in registering her as a candidate for the upcoming European Parliament elections.

Yes, the EU – that bastion of impartiality, that bastion of fairness, that *bastioni* where corruption dare not enter, the black hole which sucks away all that is wrong – decided to interfere with a nation state's sovereign judicial process and enable someone charged with causing grievous bodily harm to be registered as a candidate for the European Parliament.

The rest is history. The Italians, buoyed by the fact that they had succeeded in getting the EU to act in the most morally repugnant way possible, rallied the troops around Salis and she was duly elected to the European Parliament with full immunity from prosecution. Salis was released from custody and now sits in a comfy seat on the gravy train that is the European Parliament.

So long as the European Parliament rides

roughshod over the rules and morals that apply in its member states, there will ever be a wedge between it and the peoples of Europe. With the British government reportedly seeking a rapprochement with the EU, the British people should remember that the EU's motto – 'Do as I say, not as I do' – still applies; that the EU exists to interfere in the domestic affairs of its member states; and that unless they want to be punished, member states should above all never listen to the voice of their people, as Britain did when it left the EU.

Hungarians will remember for a long time this same EU that enabled a woman who travelled to Budapest to smash a stranger's head in with a mini-hammer, which was bought for the purpose, to obtain for herself a 'get-out-of-jail-free card' and a seat on the EU gravy train. The EU remains a deeply disturbing institution. But we can't go through life concentrating solely on the negatives. Spring approaches, shorts and short-sleeves beckon. And, barring surprised attacks by the Antifa loonies – this February's Day of Honour commemoration, in fact, passed off without incident – life in Hungary is good.

Gavin Duncan is a British writer based in Budapest.

A Trip to the Whitechapel

James Monteith

The Whitechapel Gallery has long had a reputation for being more than a mere gallery where passive spectators view works of art. It is a 'radical and participative space', a 'forum for resistance', a force for promoting 'artistic solidarities'. Instead of aesthetic appreciation, it prioritises 'ironic resonances', 'inherited traumas', 'fruitful incoherences', 'negotiated territories', and a 'holistic' approach. A far cry from the antediluvian days I remember as a prospective art student in the 1980s when framed oil paintings –

albeit by Howard Hodgkin, when I was last there – were hung on its walls, and sculptures mounted on pedestals.

The exhibition I saw was devoted to the gallery's youth collective, 'Duchamp & Sons' (a curiously gendered title for this beacon of LGBTQ rights), which brings together young people from East London and guest artists to 'amplify their critical and creative voices', and display 'creative resilience'. One wall of this disruptive space was covered with their work, but amid the slogans,

reflections and extensive annotations, presumably penned by the group's 'curator', there was precious little in the way of actual *art*. Perhaps this was because, as one member had put it, 'rest is resistance', or another, 'we are a conceptual collaborative'. A popular slogan was 'We are the past, we are the present, we are the future', a sentiment that neatly combines self-obsession and cultural amnesia. Another wall displayed words on blocks that one could creatively re-arrange. The top line read 'passionate as found authenticity open if to a diversity'. One longed to replace these, while no-one was looking, with substitute blocks named 'technique', 'tradition', 'discipline', 'mastery', 'apprenticeship' and 'culture' – and watch the looks of puzzlement build. Or liven things up with a pair of blocks entitled 'far' and 'right'.

Outside were some comfortable looking sofas and cushions. I was tempted to sit down and stretch out but was unsure whether this space was participative or whether it formed part of the exhibition. A neighbouring space, obviously discursive, contained a bookcase stacked with provocatively juxtaposed reference books, which visitors were invited to browse. Titles that caught my eye included *The Vegan Book of Permaculture*, *Farming While Black*, *Life is More Important than Art* (an odd title to find in an art gallery), *A Fruitful Incoherence*, *Making Love Revolutionary*, and *You Can't Kill Snow White*. Determined to participate, I sat on a chair and flicked through a guide to 'myth busting' in education, I was intrigued to learn that carpet time, that staple of the nurturing infant classroom, was an example of 'mass organisation and control', the teacher sitting on an 'adult-sized chair' while the children are forced to sit on the carpet. Foucault and Bourdieu were, of course, the theorists cited. The author then suggested that instead of having to put their hands up – another form of control and, therefore, oppression – children should themselves choose when to talk in the classroom. It was good to see that the fashionable pedagogies of the 1970s, which we thought had been binned long ago, are still alive here in Whitechapel.

After a visit to the gents, a liminal space in the basement, I took refuge in the bookshop and discovered an impressively comprehensive

collection of counter-cultural classics – Marx and Sartre rubbing shoulders with Edward Said, Andy Warhol and Susan 'The white race *is* the cancer of human history' Sontag. *Against Ageism: A Queer Manifesto* caught my eye, as did *The Black Technical Object: On Machine Learning and the Aspiration of Black Being* (subject: 'the abstruse nature of machine learning, mathematics, and the deep incursion of racial hierarchy'), copies of which were piled high on a separate table. A man called to the girl behind the counter from outside the shop, an imperious voice bearing the unmistakable imprint of bourgeois liberal privilege and entitlement, to ask whether he could purchase a copy of the book on 'Derek Jarman's house' – Prospect Cottage in Dungeness (residencies are available for those committed 'to resuscitate and ensure the continued vibrational existence of a living battery') – that was displayed in the window. Thankfully for the girl, the book was available.

Yet I did, in the end, find some art – in the form of a revolving stand of greetings cards decorated with, among others, the German Expressionists. One of them was a striking work by Marianne von Werefkin, an artist new to me, depicting audience members in silhouette watching a performance at the puppet theatre. It crossed my mind that the postcard-sized reproduction of this one work had more artistic merit and aesthetic value than all the other exhibits in the gallery combined. Though, in fairness to the Gallery, some of the exhibition rooms were closed. Their major exhibition of the work of Donald Rodney, which addresses 'timely issues around Blackness, masculinity and British colonial history' will open shortly. And one must always tread carefully here. The German Expressionists were persecuted in their time by the Nazis, who organised a 'Degenerate Art Exhibition' in Munich to display their works for public ridicule. My problem is that there is nothing in the Whitechapel that one could conceivably ridicule. Art in the aesthetic sense of the term, that is, *art*, has disappeared from the scene altogether.

Yet for all the propaganda, the incessant social justice Newspeak – the gallery is a veritable shrine to diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion, a temple of woke, all maintained at public expense – one

is struck that the gallery's clientele is almost exclusively white and privileged. The only black presence was that of the security guard, who looked painfully forlorn among the righteous bourgeois liberals, the Bobos, couples with identically cropped grey hair, men with scarfs and formidably intellectual-looking women, many of whom, one suspects, are employed in the upper echelons of East London's vibrant academic institutions. Even the girls serving in the café were white. Where was the diversity? Where were the oppressed, marginalised and excluded? Not a specimen in sight.

Could it be that the East End's vibrant new population, whose diversity the gallery relentlessly celebrates, has a severely restricted interest in conceptual art, gender fluidity, homosexuality and transgenderism? Could it be, in fact, that local Muslims – the nearby East London Mosque is one of the largest in Europe, complete with call to prayer five times a day – regard LGBTQ not

as a cause for celebration but rather as corrupt and sinful, a grotesque manifestation of Western decadence? One imagines that in a future caliphate of East London, the Whitechapel Gallery will serve a rather different role. It will display the degenerate art of the West, with LGBTQ accorded pride of place. The contents of the bookshop will be publicly burned. The clientele will have long fled.

However, I can thoroughly recommend the café – or *caffè*, as it is styled. With its chic art-deco-style interior, unobtrusive jazz music, friendly service, excellent coffee and boutique homemade food – the ciabatta sandwich and freshly baked focaccia come highly recommended – all that is needed to complete the ambiance of this intersectional space is some suitable 'wall art'. Then one could bypass the gallery altogether.

James Monteith is a writer based in London.

Announcement

After over 30 years Merrie Cave is retiring through old age, and a long connexion with the Review will be severed. She became Managing Editor in 1989 and with Andrea Downing, now our Managing Editor, also ran the Claridge Press while Robin (Cave) looked after the finances. In the new century Merrie confined her labours to the Review section but continued to sub-edit the magazine She held social events from her house in London to promote the magazine and encourage new writers. As she said financial rewards were slight but wonderful friendships among subscribers and contributors more than compensated.

Her commitment and generosity both personal and professional have in all that time been unflinching. Without her the magazine would never have survived its changes of editorship and other upsets. We wish her a long and happy retirement; she will be sorely missed.

Conservative Classic

Roger Scruton's *Culture Counts: Faith and Feeling in a World Besieged*

J R Donner

For Sir Roger Scruton, one of the great achievements of Western civilization is the concept of citizenship – the effort to legitimize secular law through the consent of those who must obey it. Citizenship creates a relationship among strangers, a collective apartness in which fulfilment and meaning are confined to the private sphere. However, it can only endure if future generations can find a sense of meaning, identity, and belonging; and for Scruton, the only source through which this can be obtained is culture. In *Culture Counts* (2007), Scruton explores the contemporary crisis of Western identity and considers how our culture can be protected in the face of radical Islam, multiculturalism, and a counterculture that favours deconstruction over preservation, and repudiation over reverence.

In contrast to Oswald Spengler, who argued in *The Decline of the West* that the West transitioned from a rich cultural existence before the French Revolution to a lifeless civilization after, Scruton believes that Enlightenment events like the American Revolution, centred on democratic principles, law and liberty, succeeded in expanding Western ideals into a global context. And it was through the transmission of Western 'high culture', the intellectual and artistic heritage central to Western identity, that our civilization achieved self-consciousness, and that its ideals found expression in a worldview.

However, not all cultures reach the same artistic and intellectual levels. Scruton compares the Lascaux cave paintings, which represent the achievements of a Stone Age civilization, with the complex and enduring achievements of Greek art and literature. Engaging with masterpieces by

Dante, Shakespeare, Bach, and Mozart, helps us refine and deepen our emotional understanding, transcend personal desires and concerns, and recognize intrinsic values beyond our immediate needs. By preserving cultural traditions for future generations, we provide them with a framework for learning, and we share the wisdom we have gained from the works that define who we are.

High culture has often been rejected by radicals and liberals who regard it as reducible to technology, science, and anything that mimics progress. But its defence is crucial, for although it is created by elites, it resonates with universally human emotions and opens people's hearts and minds. It serves as a repository of moral knowledge and a shared vision of dignity; science and technology may offer progress, but they cannot replace the moral grounding that culture provides. And it is vital for a sense of belonging

Shaped by a fusion of Christianity and Roman law, Western culture evolved through the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, spreading globally through colonialism and trade. But despite its fluid and dynamic nature, and its capacity to absorb influences from around the world, including Islam, the exercise of critical judgment has enabled it to retain a canon of enduring works that have withstood the test of time. And it is this continual process of criticism and renewal that has enabled Western high culture to attain its universal standing.

Aesthetic judgment, the process that determines what is worth preserving, is central to culture. For Scruton, a good analogy is provided by humour, because it necessitates judgment and requires

sensory engagement and intellectual reflection. As well as being a critical tool for evaluating cultural and moral norms, laughter serves as a social bond, for to agree in laughter is to agree in judgment. Likewise, our aesthetic engagement with art helps us to explore moral and existential questions through the eyes of others, enriching our lives both intellectually and emotionally.

Culture is closely connected to leisure – indeed, it originated with a leisured class. But leisure here has the meaning accorded it by Aristotle, for whom it is the highest purpose of work, as it allows for essential contemplation; and also by Schiller, for whom play is a form of aesthetic freedom, allowing us to engage with beauty and make aesthetic judgments. By contrast, modern leisure, which takes the form of mass entertainment, like television, tends toward the shallow and morally questionable. Some forms of entertainment, like sports, retain a ritualistic and communal quality, and religious rituals and festivals can affirm the importance of rest and spiritual renewal; but Scruton questions whether the latter is sufficient for culture to survive.

Of course, culture must also be taught, and Scruton is critical of the modern view of education as primarily serving students' immediate interests and practical needs. True education should concentrate on transmitting enduring knowledge across generations, thereby preparing students for a deeper and more meaningful engagement with the world, not on making subjects 'relevant' or teaching practical skills. It must be grounded in the foundational works of the Western canon because unlike contemporary works, these that have undergone a rigorous evaluative process. Unfortunately, modern education tends to prioritize what is fashionable over what has stood the test of time.

Education is also vital for helping us master our emotions and cultivate moral understanding. Knowing what to feel – for example, how to grieve – is as important as knowing how to act. Aristotle's habituation of the virtues entails feeling the right emotions at the right time and in the right measure. Imagination and empathy, nurtured through art, stories, and rituals, foster emotional

growth. Culture alone does not guarantee moral behaviour, or the habituation of virtue, but it does play a crucial role in enriching our understanding of virtue, and in cultivating the emotional wisdom that sustains humanity's higher moral aspirations.

For Scruton, responsibility for the degradation of our culture lies with the 'culture of repudiation' – a countercultural tendency that deconstructs Western culture without offering a constructive alternative. Postmodern academics, influenced by Foucault and Derrida, reject the Enlightenment belief that there are universal truths founded on reason and that institutions such as the family have objective worth, instead claiming that all truth is shaped by power, and Western achievements are merely the product of 'dead white European males'. The paradox, however, is that 'anti-colonial' critiques of Western culture are contingent on the very Western values they purport to reject, since these critiques arrogate to themselves the status of objective judgments founded on rational argument. However, this does not prevent the proponents of cultural relativism from attempting to stifle all dissent from what is now the accepted orthodoxy in academia.

To sum up, *Culture Counts* calls for a rejection of modernist ideologies that degrade our cultural landscape by viewing art and literature as marketable consumer goods, and a return to classical traditions that view them as achievements of intrinsic value. For if objective aesthetic and moral judgments are banished in favour of relativism, the result is the erosion of shared values and societal chaos. After all, if everything is to be considered equal, which means equally degraded, what is the need for value? History shows that cultures that have lost their sense of self-belief inevitably falter and die. The challenge for the West is to safeguard its cultural foundations – moral, intellectual and aesthetic – and thereby provide its citizens, otherwise detached and isolated, with a sense of purpose, meaning and belonging.

J R Donner is a young writer and PhD student at Oxford, specialising in political philosophy.

Eternal Life

Rod Hacking

It was about six years ago that our daughters and I realised that my wife was having memory problems. The doctor sent her for a brain scan and as a result she received a diagnosis of dementia. It is a terminal illness, though it can last a very long time, and is a story of mental decline demanding much patience and understanding. It has now reached the stage when nothing, not even the contents of the last five minutes, can be recalled; and although some carers claim that sufferers can remember things from long past, in the case of my wife, that is not so.

Being a twenty-four seven carer is extremely demanding, though love and affection would never allow me to abandon someone to whom I made solemn vows almost fifty years ago. The good thing is that my wife is capable of being entirely in the present with those who come to see her, though usually she cannot recall a single thing about the visitor or the visit after the visitor has departed. I recall John Bayley reporting that the illness reduced his wife, the philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch, to watching Teletubbies on TV. From my own experience, this comes as no surprise.

Living alongside dementia is teaching me that institutions can also suffer from this debilitating condition, none more so than the Church of England, into which I was ordained far back in 1976. I recognised the earliest signs of the condition in the publication that year of 'Christian Believing', a report produced by the Doctrine Commission, an assemblage of the leading Anglican theological minds of the time. To the consternation of the two Archbishops and the General Synod, the Commission could not agree what believing amounted to, and concluded, in effect, that they were in favour of goodness and against badness.

In the late 1980s and early '90s, I was vice principal of the largest training course and college for those preparing for ordination, my speciality being the tutoring of Christian doctrine. I understood this to mean what Saint Vincent of Lérins, in the year 454, described as 'that which has been believed everywhere, always, by all' – the Vincentian Canon. However, I discovered it was very hard work convincing candidates that the past matters. So, as an aid, I used a digital clock with each hour representing 100 years. The Christian era began at 12 midnight. The New Testament did not exist until 3:40 am, Saint Athanasius having settled the matter in a Paschal letter of 381, two years after the final form of the Creed was agreed. By 4:30 am, the substance of the Faith was in place. The Western and Eastern churches went their separate ways at 10:30 am (the year 1054), the Western church having added a new clause to the Creed, which the Eastern church rejected. And it was only at 3.10 pm that Luther set in motion the Protestant Reformation, and at 3.30 pm that the Church of England came into being, thanks to Henry VIII's divorce of Catherine of Aragon. In other words, fifteen hours – or 1500 years – had passed before there was a single Protestant on the scene. This changed everything, and there has been a proliferation of Protestant sects since then, each claiming to preach the true way. We are now at 9.15 pm.

Last year, in a letter to a close friend, King Charles revealed that he believes that the Western churches cannot compare in depth to the Eastern Orthodox church. Most people, and probably most clergy, would have little idea to what he was referring. But the Eastern churches have maintained the faith and their means of expressing it unchanged since 4:30 am. The Western church, by contrast, lives only in the present, desperate to appear up-to-date and reflect the latest worldviews,

disregarding the lived experience of men and women of faith in centuries past.

A visit to an Orthodox Church would take many by surprise. For a start, there is nowhere to sit, as everyone stands for the celebration of the Liturgy – which, given this can last up to two hours, requires a considerable effort of will. The sheer number of icons on display is remarkable. Icons serve several purposes. One is to remind us that we are never alone as we rejoice in the salvation we have received from Christ. Another is to encourage us to follow the saints' example of holiness. Orthodox Christians approach an icon with reverence and kiss it to express their love for the saint. At the front of the church is a wide screen, the iconostasis, adorned with larger icons of the Saviour and the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is regarded by the Orthodox Church as the 'God-bearer', or Mother of God. Behind the iconostasis lies the altar, where the action of the Liturgy takes place.

Sadly, the Russian Orthodox Church is in a state of servile obedience to Putin, but it survived Stalin, and one day it will recover. It is reported that the fastest growing churches in North America are Orthodox. There are Orthodox churches in this country too. They were originally founded to serve immigrants from the East, but several Orthodox communities have been established in more recent times, often by former Anglican priests who want to hold fast to the faith that has been passed down from the apostles.

It was W R Inge, Dean of St Paul's from 1911 to 1934, who warned that those who marry the spirit of the age will soon be widowed, and sadly this is exemplified by the Church of England, which has a wonderful capacity to jump on the bandwagon just as everyone else is getting off. Many fine priests have left the Church of England, some to be ordained in the Orthodox faith, others as Catholic priests, despite even, in some cases, their being married. Repelled by the religion of woke, which resembles a river that has disowned the streams that brought it into being, they seek to return to communities that treasure the past.

I care about the Church of England – at least I care about the Church of Richard Hooker,

Lancelot Andrewes and George Herbert. But as with dementia, whose symptoms are that one lives solely in the present, I fear that things can only get worse. It is hard living with dementia in the home; it is equally difficult living with it in the Church.

Rod Hacking is a retired priest. His latest novel is The Waiting Room.

Thank you for all your support that has enabled us to return to the printed magazine which we all know and love.

Without your support we could not have done it.

I have received so many wonderful messages from you which has made me realise how important our magazine is to so many people.

Please spread the word among your friends and help us to increase our circulation back to the good old days.

Andrea Downing

Arts and Books



Illiberal Conservatism

Alistair Miller

Against Liberalism: Society Is Not a Market, Alain de Benoist, Middle Europe Books, 2024, £23.

Alain de Benoist is the leading figure of the French New Right, a movement characterised as ‘far right’ by mainstream progressive liberals, and Wikipedia, but which even the most cursory acquaintance reveals to be highly eclectic, drawing as it does on traditions ranging from pre-war German revolutionary conservatism to the Marxist critique of capitalism. The hallmark of the New Right is an implacable opposition to progressive liberalism. It rejects the ‘market society’, which makes a fetish of productivity and growth, and destroys our sense of the common good. And it regards liberal democracy as a caricature of true democracy, a means of enabling a caste of professional politicians and technocrats to exercise power over a passive population.

This might explain why the New Right is regarded as beyond the pale by mainstream liberal conservatives, wedded as they are to the established dogmas of liberal individualism; and also, perhaps, why the only blurb on the cover of de Benoist’s new book, handsomely produced by Middle Europe Books of Budapest, is from the founder of *The Scorpion*, a magazine with an unsavoury penchant for subject matter relating to race and IQ, eugenics, Nietzsche, and the Third Reich. This is doubly unfortunate, first because the notion that there exist superior and inferior races is comprehensively rejected by de Benoist,

and second because *Against Liberalism* is a *tour de force*, a devastating assault on progressive liberalism and all that it entails, executed with forensic precision and profound scholarship. As such, it ought to be essential reading for anyone interested in conservatism.

Critiques of liberalism already feature in Anglophone political philosophy. The most prominent exponents are the ‘communitarians’ (Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer are the most notable) who argue that since man can only ever be conceived as a social being raised in a community, it is meaningless to consider the individual as a being endowed with transcendent universal rights enjoying a merely contractual relation with society – the ‘social contract’. But either they write from a perspective that is broadly within the Anglophone tradition of capitalistic liberal individualism, or they take refuge, like MacIntyre, in a nostalgic vision of pre-Enlightenment religious communities. De Benoist, by contrast, is rooted in a continental tradition of political philosophy that is inherently suspicious of both liberalism and capitalism; and therein lies the force and interest of his work to Anglophone readers.

De Benoist has no time for the finer distinctions and conceptual confusions that inevitably arise when the term ‘liberalism’ is deployed. For him, liberalism is at heart a doctrine, an ideology, at once philosophical, political, and social. It is founded on ‘an anthropology essentially based on individualism and economism’, and it is this ‘anthropological error’ at the heart of liberalism that de Benoist seeks to critically analyse in this book.

Although liberalism is not synonymous with modernity, out of it flows nearly everything that is most detestable about the modern world: the religion of the rights of man, disposable goods and planned obsolescence, work reduced to labour, alienation and loneliness, conditioning through advertising, the tyranny of fashion, the judicializing

of everything, social control, political correctness, the disintegration of communities, open borders and mass immigration, globalisation, rampant consumerism, ecological destruction, extreme economic inequalities, the crisis of democracy, the emergence of ‘contemporary art’ – to name but a few. Moreover, as pre-liberal social and cultural bonds are undermined, as individual rights are multiplied and society fragments – inevitable developments in a market society – the liberal democracies are rendered incapable of collective political action or of defending themselves on the world stage. De Benoist doubtless puts the worst possible construction on liberalism and its deleterious effects. But when one considers the current state of the Western liberal democracies, the least one can say is that his arguments are frighteningly plausible.

For de Benoist, the foundational premise of liberalism, and prime cause of all that has gone wrong, is the celebrated Enlightenment conception of man as bearer of ‘fundamental individual and inalienable rights’, who owes nothing to society, culture, or history, but whose right to freely pursue his own best interest arises from ‘the mere fact of his existence’. Society is thereby rendered ‘a society of individuals’, an ‘aggregate of private interests’, a ‘civil society’ whose legitimacy is based exclusively on law.

The establishment of a peaceable civil society in which the rights of the individual are guaranteed by the rule of law would seem, on the face of it, a notable and precious achievement – indeed, many conservatives would consider it the crowning glory of the West. But much else follows from the dogma of the sovereign individual. First, the individual endowed with inalienable rights, ‘the right to have rights’, owes, by definition, nothing to society. Although he is bound by formal legal rules and obligations, he is free to follow his preferences and live the life he chooses, however selfish or degrading, so long as he does not infringe the right of others to do the same. The deleterious result is that any notion of a *political community*, in which citizens are obliged to participate *qua* citizens and to which they bear allegiance, is eliminated, along with any notion of the common good, or of higher values and ethical principles, that might inform

that community.

Liberals like to flatter themselves that liberal man has been emancipated and possesses *autonomy*, the dead hand of custom giving way to the light of reason. But for de Benoist, true autonomy and true freedom do not consist in ‘cutting oneself off from one’s peers’, but ‘in the capacity to think and act on one’s own without eliminating all relation to others’. The liberty enjoyed by liberal man is not autonomy, but *independence*; and this independence, this freedom from social obligations or responsibilities, inevitably degenerates into ‘the interaction of egoisms’, ‘mimetic rivalry’, and ‘the desire to eliminate competition’.

The liberty de Benoist is after is Benjamin Constant’s ‘liberty of the Ancients’. Not ‘the right to free myself from public life’, but ‘the ability to participate in public life’. In this republican tradition, political life and participative democracy take precedence over the rights of the individual because the freedom of the individual is contingent on the freedom of a people. True democracy is not a crowd of ‘spectators who vote’, but the exercise of a people’s collective will. In any case, the unconditional freedom of the individual is a very thin form of freedom. The effect of emancipating the individual from all contingent forms of belonging and identity, from all social, cultural and historical forms of determination, is merely to empty him of ‘his inmost humanity’, and deny him any concrete or meaningful form of being in the world. He is reduced to a mere bundle of instincts and appetitive desires.

The corollary of the society of individuals is, of course, the market society – the society where man ceases to be a person and becomes an economic agent. Liberal man’s ‘limitlessness of desire’ and ‘maximisation of self-interest’ finds its perfect expression in the endless accumulation of goods, capital, and profits – an obsession with growth, productivity, and technical progress. But although economic man’s endless pursuit of accumulation, his ‘permanent dissatisfaction’, is a good recipe for wealth creation, it is unlikely to bring happiness. Traditional societies, by contrast, were never defined by economic activity, and such economic activity as did take place usually

took the form of reciprocity and gifting, not the exchange of commodities in the marketplace.

Two other consequences follow from the inalienable rights dogma. The first is ‘the principle of equal liberty’. Since all individuals are entitled to equal treatment under the law, their rights conferred by virtue of their very existence, none may be excluded or afforded preferential treatment on account of their contingent identities or ‘forms of belonging’. They are rendered abstract individuals and are, in effect, interchangeable. This universalism manifests itself in a rejection of hereditary elites and a preference for open borders and free movement. The result is *laissez faire*, *laissez passer* – the free circulation of labour and capital necessary for global markets to function efficiently. Nations and peoples are dissolved, and liberal democratic states rendered politically impotent and defenceless.

The second is that since the status of individuals arises solely from inalienable rights guaranteed by law, all other characteristics – social, cultural, sexual – are rendered contingent and incidental. Emancipated from all moral norms and social conventions, the individual is left to construct his identity from scratch. Political liberalism thereby evolves into social liberalism. Indeed, for Jean-Claude Michéa, there exists ‘a profound unity’ of the various forms of liberalism – economic, political, social and cultural. This explains the apparent paradox that the postmodern counterculture of the Left, which seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination, and whose concern for ‘the excluded’ has displaced its former concern for the worker, has progressed in tandem with neo-liberal globalist capitalism. For both share an interest in promoting the decomposition of traditional social norms and the erosion of traditional forms of belonging. The result is ‘the great ideological osmosis of a financial Right that has betrayed the nation and a ‘permissive’ Left that has betrayed the people’.

De Benoist is predictably scathing about ‘conservative liberals’ who advocate economic liberalism while attempting to defend traditional social and cultural values, for it is precisely the liberal economic order, founded as it is on the

ideals of mobility, flexibility, open borders, and ‘generalized nomadism’, that erodes the basis of these traditional values. How, asks de Benoist, can one defend ‘the identity of peoples or nations’ while considering these as ‘nothing more than aggregates of separate individuals’? Any genuine form of conservatism defends ‘the existence of a certain number of anthropological constants that liberalism automatically deconstructs the moment it ceases to consider man a social and political being by nature’. But at least Roger Scruton, who ‘wants to consider himself both conservative and liberal’, and who is cited several times, recognises the paradox. De Benoist quotes him thus:

... the individual does not exist independently from a social body, and when economic liberties are exalted like a new form of religion, they increasingly threaten the social bonds and thereby the individual’s own existence.

Special wrath, however, is reserved for Hayek, whose depiction of the unfettered market as the most perfect embodiment of human progress is subjected to an extended and savage critique. For Hayek, the modern market forms ‘a spontaneous’ social and economic order that ‘no human will can reproduce or surpass’; indeed, any attempt to interfere with it, to institute social or economic reform, will only produce negative results. But Hayek’s insistence that because the market is an impersonal self-regulating system, its results cannot be ‘unjust’ or in need of correction – people only have themselves to blame if they lose the game – is characterised by de Benoist as ‘a naked apology of success’, a reprehensible ‘indifference to human unhappiness’. The liberty of the individual is only of value only in so far as it promotes the efficient functioning of the market; and democracy is only permissible so long as liberal principles go unquestioned, which reduces it to ‘an affair of impersonal rules and formal procedures without content’. As for customs and traditions, these only have value insofar as they constitute ‘prerational regulations’ that favoured the emergence of the market and progress toward modernity. Any tradition running in the contrary direction, anything smacking of organic society, or of the common good, or social value, or ‘shared symbolic imagination’, will be steamrolled.

What is to be done? De Benoist is at pains to insist that he is not opposed to the market or to economic activity *per se* – only when the values of the market usurp a community’s social and cultural values and undermine the common good. It is therefore the role of the state to ensure that the market is kept firmly in its place. But nor does he support a bureaucratic, therapeutic welfare state that ‘mothers its citizens and deprives them of responsibility’. The answer, then, lies not in opposing the public to the private, the state to the market, but in fostering participative democracy and locally organised citizen initiatives, founded on notions of municipality, mutuality, solidarity, and, above all, reciprocity.

It is unfortunate that de Benoist’s rejection of Christianity – on the grounds that its legacy of individualism, universalism, and egalitarianism has played a major role in the development of liberalism – prevents him from seeing that Catholic social teaching, as embodied in *Rerum Novarum*, has much to offer, founded as it is on notions of reciprocity, participation, the dignity of work, the family, and our social responsibilities. An obscure chapter detailing ‘critical value theory’, which will be opaque to all but the most ardent students of Marxist economic theory, adds little to the argument. It would have been better if the author had provided some practical examples of alternative forms of economic organisation – such as those developed by Ivan Illich in his depiction of a ‘convivial society’, whose institutions and tools are designed to prioritise use values over exchange values and foster organic forms of community.

Conservatives raised in the broad liberal tradition will be uneasy about De Benoist’s apparent devaluation of our individual liberties, private property, the rule of law, representative government, parliamentary democracy, and even our Judaeo-Christian roots. His praise for Viktor Orbán and Hungary’s experiment in ‘illiberal democracy’ is unqualified. But when the soul of a people is extinguished, its voice silenced, its history and its culture sacrificed on the altar of diversity and inclusion, talk of our liberal traditions begins to ring hollow.



An Explosion of Colour

Sean McGlynn

Maurice de Vlaminck: Modern Art Rebel, Roland Mönig *et al.*, Museum Barberini/Prestel, 2024, £40.

A recent visit to a Parisian art bookshop saw the shelves and displays heavy with a vast range of works on artists ranging from the very familiar to the barely known. But not one was to be found on the French artist Maurice de Vlaminck. This is a striking omission given the painter’s influence and prolific output.

The lack of literature on Vlaminck in English, especially with good-quality copies of his paintings, has also been woeful. Thus, this rare new book translated into English is to be warmly welcomed – all the more for having better reproductions than most exhibition catalogues these days, with the brushstrokes and high density of painting clearly visible. This is the book of a major retrospective of Vlaminck’s works held in Germany, the country’s first posthumous exhibition of the artist. The show was initially hosted at the wonderful Museum Barberini in Potsdam between September and January, before moving on to the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal, near Düsseldorf, from February to May this year. Having twice visited the Potsdam exhibition, which displayed over seventy of Vlaminck’s paintings, I can testify to the thrilling effect of his greatly under-appreciated art in one of the most enthralling shows that I have ever attended.

Vlaminck (1876-1958) was unconventional even by artistic standards. He had little more than rudimentary artistic training, variously earning a living as a violinist, cyclist and even as a boxer; as the book makes clear, he took pride in being ardently anti-academic and an ‘ostentatious autodidact’. Being something of an outsider, even though accepted by the post-Impressionist

movement of *avant-garde* Fauvism, may have made Vlaminck a touch sensitive over his abilities and professional standing. He contested the title of ‘Father of Fauvism’ with Henri Matisse, and perhaps it was his sense of insecurity that led him to proclaim his own greatness – he is described as being ‘quite taken with himself’. In reality, he was not always sharply original; but he was a magical mimic, absorbing the influences of other artists (although largely denying this) and taking their styles to further extremes, which he ‘translated into his own idiom with gestural brushwork and brilliant colours’. The greatest of these influences were Van Gogh, whom he declared he ‘loved more than my own father’, and Cézanne. These inspirations can be seen everywhere in his work, not least in *The Wheat Field* (c. 1906), which is clearly influenced by Van Gogh, and in *Still Life* (1907), which is clearly influenced by Cézanne. Matisse and Picasso were also in his eyeline. The styles of all these artists he made his own, but often going beyond the originals through his creative reinterpretations. It was his boldness in *outrance* that contributes to his own personal greatness as an artist.

The book’s essays, by various contributors, sensibly guide us, largely chronologically, through the stages of Vlaminck’s career. Arguably his greatest works, certainly his most striking, were early on when he proved himself a pioneer of Fauvism, a French movement most active from around 1904 to 1908, and so called due to its wildness; its adherents were known as Fauves (‘the wild ones’) and their works were deplored by critics as ‘splotch painting’. Bold, disassociated primary colours were favoured, with shapes often heavily delineated with black contours. Vlaminck considered himself the most extreme proponent of the movement, applying paint directly from the tube onto the canvas in dense lumps of impasto. He went far beyond Van Gogh in his ‘impetuous strokes’, his ‘expressive application of paint’ and ‘vehemence’, orchestrating ‘a symphony of pure colours and savage, strongly textured strokes’. He was the most intense of them all. This makes his work more exciting and striking, showing a full commitment to the new style. His self-assessment as ‘a tender barbarian, filled with violence’ is

fairly apt.

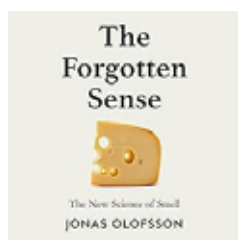
The death of Cézanne in 1906 created enormous, fresh enthusiasm in France for the post-Impressionists’ work; and Vlaminck, as ever, was ready to jump on the bandwagon. From 1907, ‘after exploring [Fauvism’s] full potential for several years, he felt he had reached his limits’, worrying that he had achieved ‘the maximum degree of intensity’. As a result, his ‘palette became much darker and his volume much more geometric with far less impasto’ and with increased glazing. Proto-Cubism and then more fully realised Braqueian-Cubism frequently emerged in Vlaminck’s work, culminating in an unsatisfactory experimentation with Picasso’s style, something Vlaminck swiftly appreciated as not worth pursuing; he rightly considered Cubism an inhuman and mechanical formula. As with all his mimicry, this was executed with supreme finesse, even if the results are not, perhaps, as aesthetically pleasing as his more vibrant early work. His homages to Cézanne are the best of this *oeuvre*, escalating the older artist’s colour to superb effect. Two chapters of the book wonderfully rectify the complaint that ‘seldom ... has Vlaminck’s interest in Paul Cézanne been investigated’.

Utterly demoralised by the carnage of World War One, Vlaminck entered a lengthy period of quietude, but his last decade saw a flurry of output. Again, he adapted to new styles of post-war art with echoes of Late Impressionism; but his gloomy, ominous landscapes still capture and reflect his debt to his greatest hero, Van Gogh, to whom he was once again paying tribute. Even though these works are a clear expression of his decline in imagination, there is no doubting their proficiency and skill.

Such is Vlaminck’s propensity for imitation, it is hard to agree with the book’s subtitle that he was a ‘modern art rebel’. He was never really the ‘born revolutionary’ he claimed to be. However, the book is right to emphasise his ‘role as a pioneer and innovator in light of the significance of colour as an expressive means’; Vlaminck was the *non plus ultra* of the Fauves. He would have been pleased to see the book’s chapter titles and subheadings, such as ‘Conquest of Colour’,

‘Anarchical and Anarchistic’, ‘Explosive Visual Spaces’, ‘The Expressive Power of Pure Colour’, ‘Violent Desire’ and the like.

His lack of popular fame today is probably due to the absence of any totemic pieces of work which can be readily identified as his masterpieces. But that lack in no way undermines his considerable achievements, as this excellent and long overdue book so ably demonstrates. It is both a joy to read and to own.



Nasal Gymnastics

Celia Haddon

The Forgotten Sense: The New Science of Smell, Jonas Olofsson, William Collins, 2025, £18.99.

How sensitive is the human nose? Many of us, me included, believe that our sense of smell is poor compared to that of other animals. Yet apparently, we humans can smell odours more competently than rats, spider monkeys and vampire bats. The only animal of those tested whose sense of smell is better than ours is the dog – though the cat, which has not been tested, might also have a better sense of smell than we do.

We can even use our noses to track like bloodhounds do. A neuroscientist at the University of California (where else?) got his students to smell their way along a trail of chocolate in the grass of the University’s lawns. Down on their hands and knees, twenty-one of the thirty-two human bloodhounds finished the ten-metre trail all the way to the chocolate prey. And those who practised daily became faster and better at choccy trail hunting.

Yet the myth that animals have a better sense of smell than we do has held sway for centuries, ever since Aristotle made this inaccurate claim. Maybe this is because our sense of smell became less important to us when we started to use our eyes to read. Yet in antiquity, scent was valued as an

offering to the gods (incense is still used in some Christian churches) and physicians would smell body odour and taste urine to make a diagnosis. Moreover, for hundreds of years, doctors believed that diseases were spread by scents – the miasma theory – and would carry pleasant smelling herbs to sniff as a way of protecting themselves.

Later scientists decided that, because we were so intelligent, we did not need good noses. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, the first-ever brain researcher, Paul Broca, claimed that the human olfactory bulb, where smells are registered in the brain, had receded to make way for our clever frontal lobes. And Sigmund Freud believed that we should suppress our sense of smell because it was just an animal-like urge. Nowadays, with our mobile phones and TV, our sense of smell has become even less important in our lives. That is, until we lose it altogether.

Jonas Olofsson, the author of this book and a professor of psychology at Stockholm University, had been quietly researching the sense of smell in humans for twenty or so years when the Covid pandemic suddenly made his research horribly relevant. While those who caught Covid usually lost their sense of smell merely for a few days or weeks, those who suffered long Covid continued without a sense of smell sometimes for years. He started writing this book after getting imploring emails from these unfortunates asking him to help them regain their sense of smell.

The most immediate effect of having no sense of smell is that all food tastes like cardboard. That is because smell and taste are so closely linked together in our experience. As we chew food, odours are released in our mouths and travel out with our breath through the nose. The flavour of food is experienced as a taste, but if you hold your nose and chew, you will find that any taste is degraded. So much so, that students could not distinguish between ketchup and mustard when they wore a nose clip.

Olofsson’s science of smell is producing some fascinating possibilities, now that we know that the sense of smell varies between individuals. Research suggests that some people may overeat because their sense of smell, intertwined with their

tastebuds, is particularly sensitive to calorie-laden foods, making them crave more food. Conflicting research suggests just the reverse: that fatties eat more because they have a poor sense of smell, which means they don't know when to stop.

Most of us don't notice the ordinary daily smells around us, not because we have a poor sense of smell, but because our brain switches off our sensitivity to these background odours. For the brain's role in smelling is as important as the role of the nose itself. The brain sets expectations of what a scent will be like even before the odour molecules reach the nose, and it is the brain which will classify a scent as pleasant or disgusting.

Why does a particular smell trigger childhood memories? Olofsson and his colleagues are studying this and, so far, have not come up with a definite answer. But there is a clue, perhaps, in the way the human foetus in the womb can smell the food that the mother is eating. After birth, those early foetal memories will influence what foods appeal to the child. Childhood memories may also associate a particular smell with happiness. To me as an adult, pig dung smells pleasant rather than disgusting, because I spent many happy hours playing with baby pigs in the pigsty on our family farm.

This link between childhood and smells in later life can help food companies make huge profits. We love comfort food because it was familiar to us in childhood. Children who have Big Macs with fries will come back to McDonald's as adults and their expectations of a good time will be fulfilled by the same predictable meal. No wonder McDonald's sometimes has 'Kids Eat Free' offers. Coca-Cola, on the other hand, lost a lot of money when they launched New Coke, claiming it tasted better than the familiar drink. Perhaps it did, but regular drinkers wanted the old familiar taste from their childhood.

For those who have lost their sense of smell after Covid, there is hope. Olofsson recommends smell training which he sometimes calls 'smell gymnastics'. You fill four jam jars with different fragranced items – like lemon, eucalyptus, rose and clove – and sniff these daily several times for four months, changing the scents to get variety.

More details are available from the Stockholm University website (www.smelltrainingapp.com), which will use your results for research. There is even an olfactory device called Exerscent, designed like a computer game, to make scent testing at home less boring.

This relatively short book written by a true expert is full of amazing facts like this. The author even suggests that those with a strong craving for chocolate should try spending five minutes sniffing finely chopped-up chocolate pieces. After this, the urge to eat the whole bar is reduced. Your sense of smell has tricked your brain into no longer wanting it. I tried this and, alas, it does not work for me – perhaps because my sense of smell needs some gymnastic workouts.



California Blue

J R Donner

As Goes California: My Mission to Rescue the Golden State and Save the Nation, Larry Elder, Bombardier Books, £15.56.

When Republicans criticize Democrats, they tend to rely on superficial terms that only fuel their opponents' rhetoric: 'woke agenda,' 'progressive politics,' 'liberal management,' and 'Democratic establishment,' to name but a few. However, although these might serve to critique specific policies or characterize opposing candidates, they rarely succeed in encapsulating the work of an entire state or its government, particularly one like California. As the state faces massive wildfires, political commentator and former gubernatorial candidate Larry Elder provides us with an analysis of California's decline under progressive governance that is more thoughtful and perceptive, and that serves as a wider warning for the nation.

Elder challenged Newsom in the gubernatorial recall election of 2021, which was sparked

by widespread dissatisfaction with Newsom's handling of Covid-19 along with broader issues like economic decline, failing education, and an exodus of businesses. Despite facing bureaucratic challenges and media misrepresentation, including a hostile altercation after an egg was thrown at him, Elder fought a strong campaign. But he could not match Newsom's seemingly unlimited donor base or his celebrity backing, which included endorsements from former President Barack Obama and Hollywood A-listers. Nor was he helped by the media's focus on his race rather than his qualification for the job.

In his latest book, Elder argues that California, once a beacon of prosperity, has been poorly managed under progressive leadership, leaving it not only tarnished but at risk of irreversible damage. Moreover, these problems are not isolated to California but reflect broader progressive policies that have alienated moderate voters across the political spectrum. In cities ranging from Chicago and Detroit to Baltimore, Democratic control has led to crime surges, corruption, and failing education systems. Even centrist Democrats are increasingly now casting their votes for the Republican Party.

Elder pins the blame squarely on California's Governor Gavin Newsom and argues that the state's problems stem from poor governance rather than external forces. Escalating crime rates, homelessness, public education failures, and the high cost of living are all consequences of decades-long Democratic policies. Reforms to the criminal justice system, such as a reduction in sentencing enhancements and the early release of thousands of felons, have increased violence, especially in marginalized communities. Progressive policies such as Proposition 47, which decriminalized thefts of up to \$950, have further increased crime and lawlessness. Meanwhile, Newsom's support for expanding abortion rights and his instigation of a task force studying reparations are emblematic of California's divorce from mainstream opinion. California's draconian Covid-19 lockdown measures, which included extended school closures, mask mandates, and vaccine requirements, come in for special criticism; Newsom, meanwhile, was caught dining

with his family at a French restaurant.

Such policies have succeeded only in alienating voters, and along with high taxes and excessive regulations, have caused many to flee the state. Indeed, since it was co-opted by the Democrats, California has experienced a dramatic decrease in population, resulting in the loss of a congressional seat. The rising number of departures has led to a chronic shortage of U-Haul trucks, as one-way rentals out of the State reach record levels, further emphasizing the growing dissatisfaction with California's current conditions. Elder presents the personal testimonies of some of the many forced to leave California.

Elder challenges the Democratic Party's monopoly over Black voters, rejecting the notion that race should determine political identity or that political discourse should be racialized. Black Americans should instead consider a wider range of political perspectives. He challenges the lazy stereotype that underachievement in minority communities is due to low self-esteem or systemic racism, arguing that practical factors such as completing school, avoiding early parenthood, and maintaining a job are more significant determinants of success. And he stresses the importance of personal responsibility and financial stability, which are achieved through discipline, not by invoking systemic racism. Elder has been criticized by Black media figures for opposing reparations, but he thinks that conservative economic policies are far more beneficial for Black Americans, because they encourage them to be active participants in the marketplace. The growing influence of Black conservatives like Elder within the Republican Party is highly significant.

Elder critiques the low expectations and lack of academic rigour in inner-city schools, noting that students often receive diplomas without being adequately prepared for employment. He criticises Newsom's policies, particularly his refusal of school choice, which though it benefits teacher unions, disproportionately harms underserved communities and the prospects of Black Californians, who are deprived of educational alternatives.

However, for Elder, the ultimate source of America's problems is the breakdown of the family. He notes that since the establishment of the welfare state in the early 1960s, politicians have incentivized women to 'marry the government' and men to abandon their moral and fiscal responsibilities. This has led to more and more children being born out of wedlock and raised without authority figures in the home. Public institutions are then expected to provide for their every need, while those who strive to keep as much of their hard-earned money as possible are vilified. Elder credits his own success to an unwavering work ethic, tenacity, and the principles instilled in him by his parents, which shaped

his character. More than anything, his mother's confidence and humour, and his father's discipline and perseverance, were the factors enabling him to navigate life's challenges and find success.

The alternative offered by Elder is centred on limited government, fewer regulations, school choice, strong borders, and peace through strength as opposed to strength through peace. Personal responsibility and community well-being must take priority over government intervention. As more and more Californians tire of dealing with the high cost of housing, rampant homelessness, crime, and their inability to keep their own hard-earned money, support for Elder's alternative can only grow.

From the Archive

Burke's Relevance Today

Roger Scruton

In this article, published in The Salisbury Review in 2002, Scruton provides an enthralling personal account of his intellectual journey: from his student days in Paris, where he witnessed first-hand the riots of May 1968, through his experience of British academia, notably at Birkbeck College, and of dissident life in Czechoslovakia under communism, to the mature political philosophy that made him the leading conservative thinker of his generation. But it was Scruton's reading of Edmund Burke that proved a revelation, and Burke's defence of custom, tradition and prejudice that revealed 'with the utmost clarity' everything that was wrong with the left's religion of reason.

I was brought up at a time when half the English people voted Conservative at national elections and almost all English intellectuals regarded the term 'conservative' as a term of abuse. To be a conservative, I was told, was to be on the side of age against youth, the past against the future, authority against innovation, the 'structures' against spontaneity and life. It was enough to understand this to recognise that one had no choice, as a free-thinking intellectual, save to reject conservatism. The choice remaining was between reform and revolution. Do we improve society bit by bit, or do we rub it out and start again?

On the whole my contemporaries favoured the second option, and it was when witnessing what this meant, in May 1968 in Paris, that I discovered my vocation.

In the narrow street below my window the students were shouting and smashing. The plate-glass windows of the shops appeared to step back, shudder for a second, and then give up the ghost, as the reflections suddenly left them and they slid in jagged fragments to the ground. Cars rose into the air and landed on their sides, their juices flowing from unseen wounds. The air was filled with triumphant shouts, as one by one lamp-posts and bollards were uprooted and piled

on the tarmac, to form a barricade against the next van-load of policemen.

The van – known then as a *panier de salade* on account of the wire mesh that covered its windows – came cautiously round the corner from the Rue Descartes, jerked to a halt, and disgorged a score of frightened policemen. They were greeted by flying cobble-stones and several of them fell. One rolled over on the ground clutching his face, from which the blood streamed through tightly clenched fingers. There was an exultant shout, the injured policeman was helped into the van, and the students ran off down a side-street, sneering at the *cochons* and throwing Parthian cobbles as they went.

That evening a friend came round: she had been all day on the barricades with a troupe of theatre people, under the captainship of Armand Gatti. She was very excited by the events, which Gatti, a follower of Antonin Artaud, had taught her to regard as the high point of situationist theatre – the artistic transfiguration of an absurdity which is the day-to-day meaning of bourgeois life. Great victories had been scored: policemen injured, cars set alight, slogans chanted, graffiti daubed. The bourgeoisie were on the run and soon the Old Fascist and his regime would be begging for mercy.

The Old Fascist was de Gaulle, whose *Mémoires de Guerre* I had been reading that day. The *Mémoires* begin with a striking sentence ‘*Toute ma vie, je me suis fait une certaine idée de la France*’ – a sentence so alike in its rhythm and so contrary in its direction to that equally striking sentence which begins *La Recherche du Temps perdu*: ‘*Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure*’. How amazing it had been, to discover a politician who begins his self-vindication by suggesting something – and something so deeply hidden behind the bold mask of his words! I had been equally struck by the description of the state funeral for Valéry – de Gaulle’s first public gesture on liberating Paris – since it too suggested priorities unimaginable in an English politician. The image of the cortège, as it took its way to the cathedral of Notre Dame, the proud general first among the mourners, and here and there a German sniper still looking down from the rooftops, had made a vivid impression on me. I irresistibly compared the two bird’s-eye views of Paris, that of the sniper, and my own on to the riots in the *quartier latin*. They were related as yes and no, the affirmation and denial of a national idea. According to the Gaullist vision, a nation is defined not by institutions or borders but by language, religion

and high culture; in times of turmoil and conquest, it is those spiritual things that must be protected and reaffirmed. The funeral for Valéry followed naturally from this way of seeing things. And I associated the France of de Gaulle with Valéry’s *Cimetière marin* – that haunting invocation of the dead which conveyed to me, much more profoundly than any politician’s words or gestures, the true meaning of a national idea.

Of course I was naive – as naive as my friend. But the ensuing argument is one to which I have often returned in my thoughts. What, I asked, do you propose to put in the place of this ‘bourgeoisie’ whom you so despise, and to whom you owe the freedom and prosperity that enable you to play on your toy barricades? What vision of France and its culture compels you? And are you prepared to die for your beliefs, or merely to put others at risk in order to display them? I was obnoxiously pompous: but for the first time in my life I had felt a surge of political anger, finding myself on the other side of the barricades from all the people I knew.

She replied with a book: Foucault’s *Les mots et les choses*, the bible of the *soixante-huitards*, the text which seemed to justify every form of transgression, by showing that obedience is merely defeat. It is an artful book, composed with a satanic mendacity, selectively appropriating facts in order to show that culture and knowledge are nothing but the ‘discourses’ of power. The book is not a work of philosophy but an exercise in rhetoric. Its goal is subversion, not truth, and it is careful to argue – by the old nominalist sleight of hand that was surely invented by the Father of Lies – that ‘truth’ requires inverted commas, that it changes from epoch to epoch, and is tied to the form of consciousness, the ‘episteme’, imposed by the class which profits from its propagation. The revolutionary spirit, which searches the world for things to hate, has found in Foucault a new literary formula. Look everywhere for power, he tells his readers, and you will find it. Where there is power there is oppression. And where there is oppression there is the right to destroy. In the street below my window was the translation of that message into deeds.

My friend is now a good bourgeoisie like the rest of them. Armand Gatti is forgotten; and the works of Antonin Artaud have a quaint and dépassé air. The French intellectuals have turned their back on ’68, and the late Louis Pauwels, the greatest of their post-war novelists, has, in *Les Ophélins*, written the damning obituary of their adolescent rage. And Foucault? He is dead from AIDS, the result of sprees in the bath-

houses of San Francisco, visited during well-funded tours as an intellectual celebrity. But his books are on university reading lists all over Europe and America. His vision of European culture as the institutionalised form of oppressive power is taught everywhere as gospel, to students who have neither the culture nor the religion to resist it. Only in France is he widely regarded as a fraud.

By 1971, when I moved from Cambridge to a permanent lectureship at Birkbeck College, London, I had become a conservative. So far as I could discover there was only one other conservative at Birkbeck, and that was Nunzia – Maria Annunziata – the Neapolitan lady who served meals in the Senior Common Room and who cocked a snook at the lecturers by plastering her counter with kitschy photos of the Pope.

One of those lecturers, towards whom Nunzia conceived a particular antipathy, was Eric Hobsbawm, the lionised historian of the Industrial Revolution, whose Marxist vision of our country is now the orthodoxy taught in British schools. Hobsbawm came as a refugee to Britain, bringing with him the Marxist commitment and Communist Party membership that he retained until he could retain it no longer – the Party, to his chagrin, having dissolved itself in embarrassment at the lies that could no longer be repeated. No doubt in recognition of this heroic career, Hobsbawm was rewarded, at Mr Blair's behest, with the second highest award that the Queen can bestow – that of 'Companion of Honour'. This little story is of enormous significance to a British conservative. For it is a symptom and a symbol of what has happened to our intellectual life since the sixties. We should ponder the extraordinary fact that Oxford University, which granted an honorary degree to Bill Clinton on the grounds that he had once hung around its precincts, refused the same honour to Margaret Thatcher, its most distinguished post-war graduate, and Britain's first woman Prime Minister. We should ponder some of the other recipients of honorary degrees from British academic institutions – Robert Mugabe, for example, or the late Mrs Ceausescu – or count (on the fingers of one hand) the number of conservatives who are elected to the British Academy.

Suffice it to say that I found myself, on arrival in Birkbeck College, at the heart of the left establishment which governed British scholarship. Birkbeck College had grown from the Mechanics Institution founded by George Birkbeck in 1823, and was devoted to the education of people in full-time employment. It was connected to the socialist idealists of the Workers'

Education Association, and had links of a tenacious but undiscoverable kind to the Labour Party. My failure to conceal my conservative beliefs was both noticed and disapproved of, and I began to think that I should look for another career.

Because of Birkbeck's mission, as a centre of adult education, lectures began at 6 p.m. and the days were nominally free. I used my mornings to study for the Bar: my intention was to embark on a career which gave no advantage to utopians and malcontents. In fact I never practised at the Bar and received from my studies only an intellectual benefit – though a benefit for which I have always been profoundly grateful. Law is constrained at every point by reality, and utopian visions have no place in it. Moreover the common law of England is proof that there is a real distinction between legitimate and illegitimate power, that power can exist without oppression, and that authority is a living force in human conduct. English law, I discovered, is the answer to Foucault.

Inspired by my new studies I began to search for a conservative philosophy. In America this search could be conducted in a university. American departments of Political Science encourage their students to read Montesquieu, Burke, Tocqueville and the Founding Fathers. Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin and others have grafted the metaphysical conservatism of Central Europe on to native American roots, forming effective and durable schools of political thought. American intellectual life benefits from American patriotism, which has made it possible to defend American customs and institutions without fear of being laughed to scorn. It has benefited too from the Cold War, which sharpened native wits against the Marxist enemy, in a way that they were never sharpened in Europe: the whole-sale conversion of the social democratic Jewish intelligentsia of New York to the cause of neo-conservatism is a case in point. In 1970's Britain, conservative philosophy was the preoccupation of a few half-mad recluses. Searching the library of my college I found Marx, Lenin and Mao, but no Strauss, Voegelin, Hayek or Friedman. I found every variety of socialist monthly, weekly or quarterly, but not a single journal that confessed to being conservative.

The view has for a long time prevailed in England, that conservatism is simply no longer available – even if it ever has been really available to an intelligent person – as a social and political creed. Maybe, if you are an aristocrat or a child of wealthy and settled parents, you might inherit conservative beliefs, in the way that you might inherit a speech impediment or

a Habsburg jaw. But you couldn't possibly acquire them – certainly not by any process of rational enquiry or serious thought. And yet there I was, in the early 1970s, fresh from the shock of 1968, and from the countervailing shock of legal studies, with a fully articulate set of conservative beliefs. Where could I look for the people who shared them, for the thinkers who had spelled them out at proper length, for the social, economic and political theory that would give them force and authority sufficient to argue them in the forum of academic opinion?

To my rescue came Burke. Although not widely read at the time in our universities, he had not been dismissed as stupid, reactionary or absurd. He was simply irrelevant, of interest largely because he got everything wrong about the French Revolution and therefore could be studied as illustrating an episode in intellectual pathology. Students were still permitted to read him, usually in conjunction with the immeasurably less interesting Tom Paine, and from time to time you heard tell of a 'Burkean' philosophy, which was one strand within nineteenth-century British conservatism.

Burke was of additional interest to me on account of the intellectual path that he had trod. His first work, like mine, was in aesthetics. And although I didn't find much of philosophical significance in his *Essay on the Sublime and the Beautiful*, I could see that, in the right cultural climate, it would convey a powerful sense of the meaning of aesthetic judgement and of its indispensable place in our lives. I suppose that, in so far as I had received any intimations of my future career as an intellectual pariah, it was through my early reactions to modern architecture, and to the desecration of my childhood landscape by the faceless boxes of suburbia. I learned as a teenager that aesthetic judgement matters, that it is not merely a subjective opinion, unargued because unarguable, and of no significance to anyone besides oneself. I saw – though I did not have the philosophy to justify this – that aesthetic judgement lays a claim upon the world, that it issues from a deep social imperative, and that it matters to us in just the way that other people matter to us, when we strive to live with them in a community. And, so it seemed to me, the aesthetics of modernism, with its denial of the past, its vandalism of the landscape and townscape, and its attempt to purge the world of history, was also a denial of community, home and settlement. Modernism in architecture was an attempt to remake the world as though it contained nothing save atomic individuals, disinfected of the past, and living like ants within their metallic and

functional shells.

Like Burke, therefore, I made the passage from aesthetics to conservative politics with no sense of intellectual incongruity, believing that, in each case, I was in search of a lost experience of home. And I suppose that, underlying that sense of loss is the permanent belief that what has been lost can also be recaptured – not necessarily as it was when it first slipped from our grasp, but as it will be when consciously regained and remodelled, to reward us for all the toil of separation through which we are condemned by our original transgression. That belief is the romantic core of conservatism, as you find it – very differently expressed – in Burke and Hegel and also in T S Eliot, whose poetry was the greatest influence on me during my teenage years.

When I first read Burke's account of the French Revolution I was inclined to accept, since I knew no other, the liberal humanist view of the Revolution as a triumph of freedom over oppression, a liberation of a people from the yoke of absolute power. Although there were excesses – and no honest historian had ever denied this – the official humanist view was that they should be seen in retrospect as the birth-pangs of a new order, which would offer a model of popular sovereignty to the world. I therefore assumed that Burke's early doubts – expressed, remember, when the Revolution was in its very first infancy, and the King had not yet been executed nor the Terror begun – were simply alarmist reactions to an ill-understood event. What interested me in the *Reflections* was the positive political philosophy, distinguished from all the leftist literature that was currently à la mode, by its absolute concreteness, and its close reading of the human psyche in its ordinary, and unexalted forms. Burke was not writing about socialism, but about revolution. Nevertheless he persuaded me that the utopian promises of socialism go hand in hand with a wholly abstract vision of the human mind – a geometrical version of our mental processes which has only the vaguest relation to the thought and feelings by which real human beings live. He persuaded me that societies are not and cannot be organised according to a plan or a goal, that there is no direction to history, and no such thing as moral or spiritual progress. Most of all he emphasised that the new forms of politics, which hope to organize society around the rational pursuit of liberty, equality, fraternity or their modernist equivalents, are actually forms of militant irrationality. There is no way in which people can collectively pursue liberty, equality and fraternity, not only because those things

are lamentably under-described and merely abstractly defined, but also because collective reason doesn't work that way. People reason collectively towards a common goal only in times of emergency – when there is a threat to be vanquished, or a conquest to be achieved. Even then, they need organisation, hierarchy and a structure of command if they are to pursue their goal effectively. Nevertheless, a form of collective rationality does emerge in these cases, and its popular name is war. Moreover – and here is the corollary that came home to me with a shock of recognition – any attempt to organise society according to this kind of rationality would involve exactly the same conditions: the declaration of war against some real or imagined enemy. Hence the strident and militant language of the socialist literature – the hate-filled, purpose-filled, bourgeois-baiting prose, one example of which had been offered to me in 1968, as the final vindication of the violence beneath my attic window, but other examples of which, starting with the *Communist Manifesto*, were the basic diet of political studies in my university. The literature of left-wing political science is a literature of conflict, in which the main variables are those identified by Lenin: 'Kto? Kogo?' – 'Who? Whom?'

The opening sentence of De Gaulle's memoirs is framed in the language of love, about an object of love – and I had spontaneously resonated to this in the years of the student 'struggle'. De Gaulle's allusion to Proust is to a masterly evocation of maternal love, and to a dim premonition of its loss.

Three other arguments of Burke's made a comparable impression. The first was the defence of authority and obedience. Far from being the evil and obnoxious thing that my contemporaries held it to be, authority was, for Burke, the root of political order. Society, he argued, is not held together by the abstract rights of the citizen, as the French Revolutionaries supposed. It is held together by authority – by which is meant the right to obedience, rather than the mere power to compel it. And obedience, in its turn, is the prime virtue of political beings, the disposition which makes it possible to govern them, and without which societies crumble into 'the dust and powder of individuality'. Those thoughts seemed as obvious to me as they were shocking to my contemporaries. In effect Burke was upholding the old view of man in society, as subject of a sovereign, against the new view of him, as citizen of a state. And what struck me vividly was that, in defending this old view, Burke demonstrated that it was a far more effective guarantee

of the liberties of the individual than the new idea, which was founded in the promise of those very liberties, only abstractly, universally and therefore unrealistically defined. Real freedom, concrete freedom, the freedom that can actually be defined, claimed and granted, was not the opposite of obedience but its other side. The abstract, unreal freedom of the liberal intellect was really nothing more than childish disobedience, amplified into anarchy. Those ideas exhilarated me, since they made sense of what I had seen in 1968. But when I expressed them, in a book published in 1979 as *The Meaning of Conservatism*, I blighted what remained of my academic career.

The second argument of Burke's that impressed me was the subtle defence of tradition, prejudice and custom, against the enlightened plans of the reformers. This defence engaged, once again, with my study of aesthetics. Already as a schoolboy I had encountered the elaborate defence of artistic and literary tradition given by Eliot and F R Leavis. I had been struck by Eliot's essay entitled *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, in which tradition is represented as a constantly evolving, yet continuous thing, which is remade with every addition to it, and which adapts the past to the present and the present to the past. This conception, which seemed to make sense of Eliot's kind of modernism (a modernism that is the polar opposite of that which has prevailed in architecture), also rescued the study of the past, and made my own love of the classics in art, literature and music into a valid part of my psyche as a modern human being. Burke's defence of tradition seemed to translate this very concept into the world of politics, and to make respect for custom, establishment, and settled communal ways, into a political virtue, rather than a sign, as my contemporaries mostly believed, of complacency. And Burke's provocative defence, in this connection, of 'Prejudice' by which he meant the set of beliefs and ideas that arise instinctively in social beings, and which reflect the root experiences of social life – was a revelation of something that until then I had entirely overlooked. Burke brought home to me that our most necessary beliefs may be both unjustified and unjustifiable from our own perspective, and that the attempt to justify them will lead merely to their loss. Replacing them with the abstract rational systems of the philosophers, we may think ourselves more rational and better equipped for life in the modern world. But in fact we are less well equipped, and our new beliefs are far less justified, for the very reason that they are justified by ourselves. The real justification for a prejudice is the one which justifies

it as a prejudice, rather than as a rational conclusion of an argument. In other words, it is a justification that cannot be conducted from our own perspective, but only from outside, as it were, as an anthropologist might justify the customs and rituals of an alien tribe.

An example will illustrate the point: the prejudices surrounding sexual relations. These vary from society to society; but until recently they have had a common feature, which is that people distinguish seemingly from unseemly conduct, abhor explicit sexual display, and require modesty in women and chivalry in men, in the negotiations that precede sexual union. There are very good anthropological reasons for this, in terms of the long-term stability of sexual relations, and the commitment that is necessary if children are to be inducted into society. But these are not the reasons that motivate the traditional conduct of men and women. This conduct is guided by deep and immovable prejudice, in which outrage, shame and honour are the ultimate grounds. The sexual liberator has no difficulty in showing that those motives are irrational, in the sense of being founded on no reasoned justification available to the person whose motives they are. And he may propose sexual liberation as a rational alternative, a code of conduct that is rational from the first-person viewpoint, since it derives a complete code of practice from a transparently reasonable aim, which is sexual pleasure.

This substitution of reason for prejudice has indeed occurred. And the result is exactly as Burke would have anticipated. Not merely a breakdown in trust between the sexes, but a faltering in the reproductive process – a failing and enfeebled commitment of parents, not merely to each other, but also to their offspring. At the same time, individual feelings, which were shored up and fulfilled by the traditional prejudices, are left exposed and unprotected by the skeletal structures of rationality. Hence the extraordinary situation in America, where lawsuits have replaced common courtesy, where post-coital accusations of ‘date-rape’ take the place of pre-coital modesty, and where advances made by the unattractive are routinely penalised as ‘sexual harassment’. This is an example of what happens, when prejudice is wiped away in the name of reason, without regard for the real social function that prejudice alone can fulfil. And indeed, it was partly by reflecting on the disaster of sexual liberation, and the joyless world that it has produced around us, that I came to see the truth of Burke’s otherwise somewhat paradoxical defence of prejudice.

The final argument that impressed me was Burke’s

response to the theory of the social contract. Although society can be seen as a contract, he argued, we must recognise that most parties to the contract are either dead or not yet born. The effect of the contemporary Rousseau-ist ideas of social contract was to place the present members of society in a position of dictatorial dominance over those who went before, and those who came after them. Hence these ideas led directly to the massive squandering of inherited resources at the Revolution, and to the cultural and ecological vandalism that Burke was perhaps the first to recognise as the principal danger of modern politics. In Burke’s eyes the self-righteous contempt for ancestors which characterised the Revolutionaries was also a disinheriting of the unborn. Rightly understood, he argued, society is a partnership between the dead, the living and the unborn, and without what he called the ‘hereditary principle’, according to which rights could be inherited as well as acquired, both the dead and the unborn would be disenfranchised. Indeed, respect for the dead was, in Burke’s view, the only real safeguard that the unborn could obtain, in a world that gave all its privileges to the living. His preferred vision of society was not as a contract, in fact, but as a trust, with the living members as trustees of an inheritance that they must strive to enhance and pass on.

I was more exhilarated by those ideas than by anything else in Burke, since they seemed to explain with the utmost clarity the dim intuitions that I had had in 1968, as I watched the riots from my window and thought of Valéry’s *Le cimetière marin*. In those deft, cool thoughts, Burke summarised all my instinctive doubts about the cry for liberation, all my hesitations about progress and about the unscrupulous belief in the future that has dominated and perverted modern politics. In effect, Burke was joining in the old Platonic cry, for a form of politics that would also be a form of care – ‘care of the soul’, as Plato put it, which would also be a care for absent generations. The graffiti paradoxes of the *soixante-huitards* were the very opposite of this: a kind of adolescent insouciance, a throwing away of all customs, institutions and achievements, for the sake of a momentary exultation which could have no lasting sense save anarchy.

It was not until much later, after my first visit to communist Europe, that I came to understand and sympathise with the negative energy in Burke. I had grasped the positive thesis – the defence of prejudice, tradition and heredity, and of a politics of trusteeship in which the past and the future had equal weight to the present – but I had not grasped the deep negative

thesis, the glimpse into Hell, contained in his vision of the Revolution. As I said I shared the liberal humanist view of the French Revolution, and knew nothing of the facts that decisively refuted that view and which vindicated the argument of Burke's astonishingly prescient essay. My encounter with communism entirely rectified this.

Perhaps the most fascinating and terrifying aspect of communism was its ability to banish truth from human affairs, and to force whole populations to 'live within the lie', as President Havel put it. George Orwell wrote a prophetic and penetrating novel about this; but few Western readers of that novel knew the extent to which its prophecies had come true in Central Europe. To me it was the greatest revelation, when first I travelled to Czechoslovakia in 1979, to come face to face with a situation in which people could, at any moment, be removed from the book of history, in which truth could not be uttered, and in which the Party could decide from day to day not only what would happen tomorrow, but also what had happened today, what had happened yesterday and what had happened before its leaders had been born. This, I realised, was the situation that Burke was describing, to a largely incredulous readership, in 1790. And two hundred years later the situation still existed, and the incredulity along with it.

Until 1979 my knowledge of communism had been entirely theoretical. I did not like what I had read, of course, and was hostile in any case to the socialist ideas of equality and state control, of which I had already seen enough in France and Britain. But I knew nothing of what it is like to live under communism – nothing of the day-to-day humiliation of being a non-person, to whom all avenues of self-expression are closed. As for Czechoslovakia, as it then was, I knew only what I had gleaned from its music – the music of Smetana, Dvorak and Janacek in particular, to all three of whom I owe the greatest of debts for the happiness they have brought me. Of course, I had read Kafka and Hasek – but they belonged to another world, the world of a dying empire, and it was only subsequently that I was able to see that they too were prophets, and that they were describing not the present but the future of their city.

I had been asked to give a talk to a private seminar in Prague. This seminar was organised by Julius Tomin, a Prague philosopher, who had taken advantage of the Helsinki Accords of 1975, which supposedly obliged the Czechoslovak government to uphold freedom of information and the basic rights defined by the UN

Charter. The Helsinki Accords were a farce, used by the Communists to identify potential troublemakers, while presenting a face of civilised government to gullible intellectuals in the West. Nevertheless, I was told that Dr Tomin's seminar met on a regular basis, that I would be welcome to attend it, and that they were indeed expecting me. I arrived at the house, after walking through those silent and deserted streets, in which the few who stood seemed occupied on some dark official business, and in which Party slogans and symbols disfigured every building. The staircase of the apartment building was also deserted. Everywhere the same expectant silence hung in the air, as when an air-raid has been announced, and the town hides from its immanent destruction. Outside the apartment, however, I encountered two policemen, who seized me as I rang the bell and demanded my papers. Dr Tomin came out, and an altercation ensued, during which I was thrown down the stairs. But the argument continued and I was able to push my way past the guard and enter the apartment. I found a room full of people, and the same expectant silence. I realised that there really was going to be an air raid, and that the air-raid was me. In that room was a battered remnant of Prague's intelligentsia – old professors in their shabby waistcoats; long-haired poets; fresh faced students who had been denied admission to university for their parents' political 'crimes'; priests and religious in plain clothes; novelists and theologians; a would-be rabbi, and even a psychoanalyst. And in all of them I saw the same marks of suffering, tempered by hope; and the same eager desire for the sign that someone cared enough to help them. They all belonged, I discovered, to the same profession: that of the stoker. Some stoked boilers in hospitals; others in apartment blocks; one stoked at a railway station, another in a school. Some stoked where there were no boilers to stoke and these imaginary boilers came to be, for me, a fitting symbol of the communist economy.

This was my first encounter with 'dissidents': the people who, to my astonishment, would be the first democratically elected leaders of post-war Czechoslovakia. And I felt towards these people an immediate affinity. Nothing was of such importance for them as the survival of their national culture. Deprived of material and professional advancement, their days were filled with a forced meditation on their country and its past, and on the great Question of Czech History which has preoccupied the Czechs since Palacky's day. They were forbidden to publish; the authorities had concealed their existence from the world and had resolved to remove their traces from

the book of history, Hence the dissidents were acutely conscious of the value of memory. Their lives were an exercise in what Plato calls anamnesis: the bringing to consciousness of forgotten things. Something in me responded to this poignant ambition, and I was at once eager to join with them and make their situation known to the world.

Briefly, I spent the next ten years in daily meditation on communism, on the myths of equality and fraternity that underlay its oppressive routines, just as they had underlain the routines of the French Revolution. And I came to see that Burke's account of the Revolution was not merely a piece of contemporary history. It was like Milton's account of *Paradise Lost* – an exploration of a region of the human psyche: a region that lies always ready to be visited, but from which return is by way of a miracle, to a world whose beauty is thereafter tainted by the memories of Hell. To put it very simply, I had been granted a vision of Satan and his work – the very same vision that had shaken Burke to the depths of his being. And I at last recognised the positive aspect of Burke's philosophy as a response to that vision, as a description of the best that human beings can hope for, and as the sole and sufficient vindication of our

life on earth.

Henceforth I understood conservatism not as a political credo only, but as a lasting vision of human society, one whose truth would always be hard to perceive, harder still to communicate, and hardest of all to act upon. And especially hard is it now, when religious sentiments follow the whims of fashion, when the global economy throws our local loyalties into disarray, and when materialism and luxury deflect the spirit from the proper business of living. But I do not despair, since experience has taught me that men and women can flee from the truth only for so long, that they will always, in the end, be reminded of the permanent values, and that the dreams of liberty, equality and fraternity will excite them only in the short-term.

As to the task of transcribing, into the practice and process of modern politics, the philosophy that Burke made plain to the world, this is perhaps the greatest task that we now confront. I do not despair of it; but the task cannot be described or embraced by a slogan. It requires not a collective change of mind but a collective change of heart

The

Salisbury Review

The quarterly magazine of
conservative thought

Published quarterly in September, December, March & June, volume commencing with September issue.

Annual subscription rates:

UK £45.

Europe £55.

Airmail rest of world: £65,

Digital copy £10 .

Single issues £10+p&p

ISSN: 0265-4881. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or other without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright ©The Salisbury Review

Printed in the UK by The MANSON Group Limited

Typesetting — DASH



Sir Roger Scruton was our Founding Editor.

The Salisbury Review is one of the last independent political magazines of the right. Which is why we are able to write exactly what we think. We have no owner, no interest group telling us what we can or cannot publish, no censor sitting at the editor's elbow telling him to take out unwoke words. We need your support to continue.

The Salisbury Review PO Box 81 Shefford SG17 9AP

Email: info@salisburyreview.co.uk

Tel: 01462 234279