

The  
*Salisbury Review*

*The quarterly magazine of conservative thought*



The Third Marquess of Salisbury  
1830-1903

**Putin's Conservatism / Andrey Sapozhnikov**

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**Freedom to Hate / Alistair Miller**

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**Why the Democrats lost / Daryl McCann**

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**Freedom, Equality and Euthanasia / Laurant Lemasson**

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**How Burke saved the English Dostoevsky / Harry Cummins**

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**Protecting Children / Andrew Tettenborn**

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**Illiberal Budapest / Gavin Duncan**

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**Gifts / Theodore Dalrymple**

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**The Scrutonian Vision: Defining Conservatism in an Age of Ideological Disarray / J R Donner**

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*Salisbury Review*

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# Editorial

There has been so much to criticise about our new Labour government that it is difficult to know where to start. Even before any policy measures were announced, Starmer was embroiled in sleaze, his acceptance of gifts from wealthy donors made even more objectionable by his inability, so characteristic of self-righteous left liberals, to see he had done anything wrong. Since then, we have had raids on private schools, farmers and pensioners, which seem motivated by little more than ideology and vindictiveness, increased employers' national insurance contributions that amount to little more than a stealth tax on ordinary people, and the craven caving in to the demands of militant unions, which will only fuel future industrial action. Yet we ought to remember why we have a Labour government: the Conservatives were deserted by millions of their own voters, who felt their party no longer had any genuinely conservative instincts, and had betrayed them, above all, on immigration.

More worrying than Rachel Reeves' ill-conceived budget is the government's reaction to the riots that followed the appalling Southport knife attack, in which three children were killed and eight others injured, some critically. All governments must act firmly when faced with violence and disorder, but it seemed that people's legitimate concerns about migrant crime, grooming gangs, and having asylum seekers, nearly all single young men, foisted on their deprived communities were being ignored, and that even peaceful protestors were branded far-right extremists. The speed and vigour with which those involved

in the riots were prosecuted was impressive. But the exemplary severity of some of the sentences, sometimes for no more than a tweet posted in the heat of the moment, seemed excessive to many of us, leading to accusations of two-tier policing, even talk of political crimes. People were warned not to speculate about the identity or motives of the Southport knife attacker, because this might inflame the situation, but when it was finally revealed that the perpetrator had possessed an al-Qaeda training manual, and ricin, a biological toxin, they were informed that no motive could be established, and the attack could not be declared 'a terrorist incident'.

Meanwhile, home secretary Yvette Cooper is planning to strengthen hate-crime laws and reintroduce the monitoring of 'non-crime hate incidents' so they can be logged by police. Yet Dawn Butler MP's retweeted post accusing Kemi Badenoch of representing 'white supremacy in a blackface' evoked no response at all from Starmer. As Badenoch subsequently remarked, if a white person had said that they would be in prison.

Yet it is not all bad news. The annihilation of the Conservatives at the general election has forced a dramatic re-alignment of the right in the form of the emergence of Reform UK and the election of Kemi Badenoch as Conservative leader. At last, there is the possibility of a genuinely conservative – that is, a socially and culturally conservative – alternative to Labour.

How the tension between these two forces will play out, and whether it is creative or destructive, remains to be seen. Reform is admirably anti-woke and its manifesto is loaded with bold ideas. But its fiscal



projections are ludicrously optimistic, its candidate selection procedure erratic, and there is no underlying political philosophy. Reform is not a membership organisation like other political parties but a limited company with Nigel Farage the majority shareholder. Farage would, one senses, make a first-rate dictator, but it is difficult to envisage him engaging in cabinet government.

Kemi Badenoch, on the other hand, makes a refreshing change from the bland, career politicians we are usually served. Articulate, feisty, warm, and straightforward, she makes a striking contrast to the legalistic Starmer, whose expressionless mask is frozen in an air of righteous indignation. In an interview

with Tom McTague for *UnHerd* prior to her election as party leader, she cited Roger Scruton, Thomas Sowell, and Jonathn Haidt as influences, which is very encouraging, as is her insistence that it is what she says and does that matters, not the colour of her skin.

Badenoch will need to moderate her combative side as she melds her shadow cabinet team, to listen and conciliate more than perhaps she is used to. And she will need to appeal to the ordinary voter as well as demolish Starmer at the ballot box. But it is early days.

It may be that the election of Starmer and Labour is not such bad news after all.



**The Editorial  
Team and Staff  
of the Salisbury  
Review wish all  
our subscribers a  
Happy and Holy  
Christmas**

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# Putin's Conservative Masquerade

*Andrey Sapozhnikov*

When reflecting on modern Russia, it's worth recalling its political regime's Soviet origins, which are fundamentally at odds with traditionalism.

When I left Russia in 2022 and began travelling the world, I noticed that many foreigners hold a strangely distorted view of the country where I was born and lived for 20 years. I often struggle to even recognise Russia in their descriptions – as if my interlocutors are talking about some alternative 'export' version of it that bears very little resemblance to the actual state of affairs.

In my observations, Russia has two main mythologised images that are widely accepted in different parts of the world. I've often found myself debating the first image with people in India, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, where I've spent nearly a year altogether. In these countries, there is a pervasive belief that modern Russia stands as a selfless opponent of Western neo-colonialism, defending the sovereignty of the Global South within the Ukrainian conflict. Many perceive this situation as a proxy war, where Kremlin confronts NATO's hidden imperialist aspirations.

The second and more sophisticated myth is crafted especially for audiences in the West. It promotes an image of Vladimir Putin as a leading conservative figure and defender of traditional Christian values, boldly challenging what he derisively calls the 'collective West' – namely, the United States, the UK, the EU member states, and their allies. The Kremlin casts these countries as degenerating, weakened

by neoliberalism, multiculturalism, and a departure from their own traditions in favour of a 'new ethic' – a term used to encompass nearly all elements of the left-wing agenda, from feminism to cancel culture.

It hardly seems necessary to explain why the first, 'anti-colonialist' concept has little to do with the reality in which Vladimir Putin is busy recreating the Soviet Empire by annexing Ukrainian territories, actively supporting pro-Kremlin regimes in Belarus and Kazakhstan, and interfering in elections in Georgia and Moldova. This myth appeals largely to less-educated segments of populations in countries distant from the Euro-Atlantic context, where post-colonial grievances continue to play a major role in public discourse.

The narrative of 'Putin-the-traditionalist' is rather more complex. I began meeting it after moving to Western Europe, where I periodically hear praise for the Russian president due to his laws banning 'LGBT propaganda' and his speeches on the importance of family and national values. I understand why such rhetoric resonates here: in many EU countries, there is growing fatigue with social liberalism, which fuels demand for more conservative policies. This also helps explain the success of centre-right and far-right parties in the European Parliament elections in June, along with the increasing influence of so-called national conservatives like Viktor Orbán in Hungary or Robert Fico in Slovakia.

The Kremlin is acutely aware of this trend and is deploying its media arsenal to uphold

the traditionalist myth in the West. This includes extensive disinformation efforts, such as the controversial Doppelgänger campaign, that involves the creation of millions of social media bots and fake websites mimicking major media outlets like *Der Spiegel* and *The Washington Post* to sway public opinion. A logical extension of this myth-making is Vladimir Putin's August decree, stipulating that Russia will grant asylum to citizens of countries that 'impose destructive neoliberal ideological guidelines that contradict Russian spiritual and moral values'.

For Putin, portraying Russia as a conservative stronghold is crucial, as it offers perhaps the most effective – and arguably the only – means of framing the war in Ukraine as a compelled stand against neoliberalism, rather than a blatant act of barbarism. The success of this narrative could affect the West's continued military support for Ukraine as well as the sanction pressure on the Kremlin. And voters in Europe and America should not be fooled by these illusions, mistaking a wolf in sheep's clothing for the last bastion of traditionalism.

Regardless of how much one may agree with Putin's critiques of hyper-liberalism, it is essential to recognise that, within the context of conservative thought, the country he governs embodies one of the worst *modus operandi* imaginable. Rooted in post-truth, it strives to obscure reality, using Orwellian newspeak crafted to mislead the public and turn them into 'useful idiots' – exactly like the Soviet Nomenklatura did. And Sir Roger Scruton was among the few Western intellectuals who, as far back as 2014, soon after the annexation of Crimea, recognised that this was not a conservative reawakening of Russia. It was a reawakening of the Soviet stylebook.

Scruton wrote in his *Forbes* op-ed in March 2014:

*Few of the current generation of West European politicians have had to wrestle with the inner nature of the Soviet Union, or to explore the deep psychology of those like Vladimir Putin and his circle, who were formed as secret police officers under communism. It is the Orwellian aspect of this psychology that seems to me to have eluded our politicians.*

The aspect he mentioned is that truth is our only defence against manipulation, and when truth is confiscated by power, we are helpless. Therefore, the government begins to dictate what is true and what is false in order to justify unpopular decisions to both its citizens and the international community.

Thus, the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan were termed 'fraternal assistance,' the dismantling of independent media in Russia in the early 2000s was framed as a 'economic entities' dispute,' the invasion of Ukraine was designated a 'special military operation,' and the crackdown on dissent and opposition was presented as the protection of traditional moral values. It is no coincidence that this last conservative narrative emerged in Russian political discourse only in 2012.

During his first two presidential terms, Putin was a moderate West-facing neoliberal. He pursued market reforms with the assistance of libertarian economists like Andrey Illarionov, promoted the idea of Russia joining NATO, and did not oppose the alliance's eastward expansion. He also maintained close relationships with Western leaders such as Tony Blair, who now believes that Putin turned into a 'Russian nationalist'

after failing to implement successful reforms.

This is one of those rare instances where one might find reason to agree with Blair. Despite alarm bells ringing as early as the 2000s – such as the infamous Munich speech and the invasion of Georgia – the Kremlin maintained a neoliberal trajectory, peaking after Dmitry Medvedev took power in 2008. A loyal successor to Putin, Medvedev tried to portray himself as a Western-style democrat, often touting slogans of modernization, progress, and freedom. While these claims were rarely backed by action, they inspired hopes among the liberal-minded middle class in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Thus, when Medvedev announced in 2011 that Putin would return to the presidency in 2012, and his party United Russia won the brazenly falsified parliamentary elections, mass protests erupted nationwide.

In six months, Putin managed to suppress the protests and successfully reclaim the presidency, but his approval ratings continued to plummet. It became clear that he could no longer remain the neoliberal he had been throughout the 2000s. The middle class, which he had previously courted, had turned against him and become the main force behind the rallies on Bolotnaya Square. Putin needed a rebranding, and his new administration began to reshape him into a ‘Russian nationalist’ – albeit with a rather peculiar interpretation of the term.

In 2013, Putin defined himself for the first time as a ‘pragmatist with a conservative bent’. It involved a shift away from the middle class and a reorientation towards rural Russians. He adopted what is commonly understood in the West as right-wing populism: he began to combat LGBT rights through repressive legislation and applied Soviet-era labels to the opposition,

such as foreign agents and fifth column. ‘The essence of conservatism is not to hinder progress, but to prevent regression,’ Putin quoted Russian conservative philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev in 2013.

The sad irony is that ‘Putin’s conservatism’ was designed specifically to obstruct any progress for Russia. His ideologists borrow only superficial elements – rhetoric and symbolism – from various conservative movements around the world. This does not alter the essence of the regime; it remains the same reactionary, authoritarian kleptocracy that existed in the USSR. And the sole purpose of its existence is to retain power by any means necessary.

It does not uphold values that any conservative would consider fundamental, like individual liberty or freedom of association. Putin’s Russia is a state where any of Burke’s ‘little platoons’ are viewed as suspicious elements, subject to either nationalization or destruction. The Kremlin does not tolerate independent political parties, nor does it allow NGOs or trade unions that do not coordinate their actions with the authorities. For instance, even charities or doctors’ unions in Russia are labelled as foreign agents, which carries the same stigma as the Soviet-era designation of ‘enemy of the people’ and results in a *de facto* ban on all activities within the country.

The most paradoxical aspect is that the Kremlin successfully frames its attacks on independent citizen initiatives as a struggle for traditional values. This is facilitated by its Soviet-style monopoly on truth and language: critics are portrayed not as free associations but as traitors and foreign agents, accused of using grants from George Soros to undermine Russian traditions from within. This post-truth narrative proves effective, resonating

both with poorly educated rural Russians and with Western audiences who do not delve deeply into local issues.

The Kremlin wants foreigners to see only the attractive tip of the iceberg, portraying Russia as ‘a nation state rooted in traditional values and cultural nationalism, economically and militarily powerful, and determined to defend its interests,’ as Alistair Miller described in his recent article for the *Salisbury Review*, which I found both extremely curious and controversial. Because, after twenty years of living in Russia, I understand what these appealing clichés truly conceal.

In particular, politicians who fervently advocate for traditional values and patriotism but often choose to send their children to live and study in what they mockingly call ‘Gayrope’ – including Putin, whose secret sons (he is officially divorced and prefers to hide his family from the public), according to recent investigations, were born in Switzerland. Beneath the veneer of cultural nationalism associated with ballet and the Bolshoi Theatre lies a repression campaign against some of the nation’s most distinguished contemporary writers, whom the Kremlin literally labels as terrorists, for instance, Boris Akunin. Behind the rhetoric of Christian morality lies the Chechen Republic, which effectively operates under Sharia law and is led by an eccentric dictator who maintains a harem of underage girls and has his personal militants, freely kidnapping individuals from other regions of Russia and threatening to behead them. Notably, Putin’s administration refuses to even comment on such incidents a list of which is endless.

Quoting Scruton again, we can say that Putin perceives the state as a ‘benign father figure’ without whose involvement no issue

can be resolved in the country. However, upon closer examination, this father figure reveals itself to be an ordinary domestic tyrant, who often speaks of his love for family in general terms while simultaneously viewing it as entirely acceptable, in the context of a deep demographic crisis, to destroy Russian families by imprisoning 15-year-old children for distributing opposition leaflets or by mobilising 300,000 ordinary Russian men into a deadly war without clear objectives. This reflects the policy of a radical for whom the end justifies the means, treating the country as a vast resource base to be exploited for personal interests, cynically labelled as national ones.

It also represents the most genuine oikophobia and moral relativism that Putin has inherited from his Soviet predecessors. In 2023, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, stating the Europe’s need for supporting Ukraine, aptly recalled Scruton’s words that ‘the real reason people are conservative is that they are attached to the things they love’. The perverted model of conservatism embodied by Putin is the love of unlimited power, in the name of which any war crime or destruction of institutions can be ideologically justified.

This attitude is completely at odds with both Russian conservative movements, such as Slavophilia, and classical Western conservatism. And it is the duty of every conservative to protect the global right-wing discourse from the influence of former KGB agents who shift between neoliberal and traditionalist masks according to their whims, all while ceremoniously inaugurating Orthodox churches adorned with portraits of Stalin.

*Andrey Sapozhnikov is a Russian journalist.*

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# Why the Democrats Lost

*Daryl McCann*

**K**amala was doing so well! First Team Harris locked down the 1,792 Democrat primary delegates a mere thirty-hours after Biden announced his withdrawal as the party's presidential candidate on July 21. She followed this with a positive performance at the Democratic National Convention, August 19-22, where her candidacy was promoted as 'joyous'. That, at any rate, is how the mainstream media characterised her delivery from the teleprompter.

Next came the second televised presidential debate on September 11. The first one, back in June 28, had been a disaster for the Democrats, with Biden incoherent at times. Because Trump won so handily, enormous pressure came to bear on Biden to step aside. Harris, to the delight of the Democrats, held up well in her debate. Trump, on the other hand, proved his own worst enemy by getting irritated every time she baited him with pre-planned barbs. The polls were up, party donations surged, Hollywood was happy, everything seemingly falling into place for a repeat of 2020.

And why not? On paper, at least, Kamala Harris appeared to be the ideal candidate. Previously the Attorney-General of California (2011-17) and a Senator from California (2017-21), not to mention Vice President of the United States (2021- ), she would be the first woman – and first woman of colour – to occupy the Oval Office were

she to be victorious on November 5. Added to that is her youth, photogenic looks and – okay – joy and hope.

Moreover, Team Harris released several policies that were, shall we say, reminiscent of Trump's agenda – secure the southern border, greenlight fracking in Pennsylvania, no tax on tips and increased child tax credits. She even borrowed Trump's 'common sense solutions' mantra. At the same time, she maintained key progressive positions, especially on the 'reproductive rights' of women, a winning issue for the Democrats at the 2022 mid-term elections. Policy-wise, Harris appeared to have all the bases covered.

However, somewhere along the line the momentum for Team Harris began to plateau before plummeting. Not only did Trump end up winning 312-226 college electoral votes, including all seven of the battleground states, but also the popular vote, 50.5 percent versus 47.9 percent. What went wrong?

Barack Obama, weeks out from Election Days, put it down to misogyny on the part of African-American men: 'You're coming up with all kinds of reasons and excuses, I've got a problem with that...you just aren't feeling the idea of having a woman as president, and you're coming up with other alternatives and other reasons for that.'

Michelle Obama put her own spin on the gender question when she declared, during the campaign, that a vote against Kamala

Harris was a vote against women: ‘I want you to think about which presidential candidate could possibly care more about our reproductive health.’

In the aftermath of Trump’s victory, unsurprisingly, the sexist and/or racist charge became a common refrain amongst Democrat apologists. David Axelrod, the Democrat strategist who sold Obama to the American people as the half-black/half-white Healer-in-Chief, was quick to promote this jaundiced view in his current role as a CNN commentator.

In truth, of course, it is difficult to prove that the American people voted the way they did because of their inherent racism and misogyny. After all, not a small proportion of whites voted for Obama in both 2008 and 2012. Likewise, Hillary Clinton surpassed Donald Trump by almost 3 million in the 2016 popular vote. How do we square all those figures with Axelrod’s contention?

There is also the fact that Latinos, blacks and even Arabs shifted towards the GOP on November 5. If Trump is a racist, as the mainstream media has been insisting since he descended the golden elevator in 2015, then the non-white racial minorities in the United States do not seem to care. In 2016, for instance, Trump attained 8 percent of the African-American vote, in 2020 it was 13 percent, and this year it came close to 20 percent.

A very different explanation for Trump’s popularity is that the politics of identity or wokism which the Democratic Party has embraced over the past two decades or so is waning. Perhaps it reached its apogee in 2018 when none other than Kamala Harris, a member of the Senate Judicial Committee, accused Judge Kavanaugh of an unproven and unprovable four-decades-old alleged sexual crime. She traduced him in front of his family and the whole world on the say-so of an unreliable female witness: ‘I believe her... What has she got to gain?’

In retrospect, at least, we might say that identity politics overreached itself on the matter of transgender rights, especially where it concerns trans-boys in girls’ sports, locker rooms and toilets. There is also the controversial issue of ‘gender-affirming’ treatment for underage children.

Harris, again, proved herself a wokist stalwart when she supported subsidized sex-change operations for incarcerated illegal migrants in California.

Harris, in other words, was an ultra-progressive campaigning for the White House at a time when the politics of identity were on the decline. Trump, conversely, was a tried-and-trusted populist when ordinary American working families – Latino, black and white – were anxious about their economic plight: inflation, gas prices, mortgage rates and the influx of



*Democratic Party Flag variant*

some 10-20 million illegal immigrants who put a downward pressure on wages. Perhaps some of Harris's awkwardness in front of the cameras was due to presenting herself as a populist interested in the price of groceries and in favour of fracking when she has never been anything of the sort.

There is also the possibility that Harris was never a great candidate. The fact she failed to distance herself from Biden, insisting that 'nothing comes to mind' when thinking about how she might have done things differently these past four years, was a serious gaffe. After all, approximately 75 percent of the population believed America was on the wrong track during the Biden years.

Harris's best chance of winning, it seemed, was if Trump undermined himself by being too belligerent or outlandish. Thanks perhaps to Susan Wiley, co-chair of his election operation, Trump remained mostly disciplined through the mammoth campaign. The addition of Elon Musk, J D Vance and RFK Jr to the team also moderated and expanded Trump's appeal. Even Generation Z were to a large extent on board the Trump Train by the end.

The downward trajectory of Kamala Harris can be measured by the change of tone as the weeks progressed. Originally she was touted as 'the voice of a new generation' at the Democratic National Convention, all sweetness and light, a contrast to the grumpy weirdness of the 'Orange Man'. By the end, though, she fell back on the acrimonious hysteria that Trump was a fascist and democracy would disappear if she were not elected president.

For a brief period of time Team Harris believed that a wayward joke by the

comedian Tony Hinchcliffe about Puerto Rico being a 'floating island of garbage' confirmed the wild claim that Trump's rally at Madison Square Gardens echoed a pro-Nazi rally held there in 1939. This, at last, was the October Surprise that would cost Trump the election. Surely no Latinos would now vote for the GOP. Instead, the Hispanic vote for Trump jumped from 27 percent in 2020 to 42 percent on November 5. Who knew Latinos had a sense of humour or that the price of groceries was more important to them than politics of identity?

The real surprise of the campaign was Donald Trump seeming much lighter on his feet at 78 than he had been at 74 or even 70. He took Biden's charge that MAGA supporters were garbage and turned it around by jumping aboard a giant garbage truck for the benefit of the cameras. Sitting up there in the cabin, his neon-coloured work safety jacket on, he declared: 'Two-hundred-and-fifty million Americans are not garbage!' Typically, Trump exaggerated the numbers, 72 million would have been closer to the mark, but the Democrats' October Surprise had not only been upended but reconfigured as a persuasive call to all Trump voters to come out on Election Day, no small thing in a country where only two-thirds of the electorate bother to vote. Trump had surmounted his last challenge, not as disturbing as the lawfare waged against him or the two assassination attempts, but important just the same. And the rest, as they say, is history.

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# Our Freedom to Hate

*Alistair Miller*

In 1946, only a year after the Holocaust, Victor Gollancz, publisher and founder of the Left Book Club, expressed a view that, if expressed today, would cause general outrage. Writing as a socialist and a Jew, he argued in *Our Threatened Values* that fascists, including antisemites, have as much right to freedom of expression as the rest of us – for ‘if you silence fascists for fear that fascism will be established, you have already half established it by the very fact of silencing them’. He went on, ‘to suppress opinion, whether antisemitic or otherwise, is precisely to produce the sort of world in which another six million Jews *will* be massacred’.

Gollancz argues he is merely applying the classical liberal principle of freedom of expression formulated by John Stuart Mill in his celebrated essay *On Liberty*, the one to which appeal must inevitably be made by any educated person who values freedom of speech and opposes censorship: ‘Is it really necessary to state all over again the case for freedom of expression as Mill and Voltaire stated it, or to fight once more, two centuries later, the battle of the Enlightenment?’ He goes on, for simplicity’s sake, to express the argument in religious terms: ‘By suppressing opinion – any opinion, however obviously abominable it may appear – I am assuming God’s prerogative of knowledge and judgment, and am perhaps in consequence murdering the truth.’

Mill’s principle is, or ought to be, supremely compelling, the argument to end

all arguments. Yet only the bravest and most principled proponent of free speech would dare argue now that hate speech in general, and antisemitic hate speech in particular, are legitimate forms of freedom of expression. For would we want to go back to a society in which people can display racist signs and posters, sport swastikas, or parade in Ku Klux Klan regalia? If not, then we must accept that the right to freedom of expression ‘carries responsibilities’ and that we cannot, therefore, be permitted to engage in ‘hate speech’. As for the antisemitic chants and banners that are now the norm on our streets, accusations of two-tier policing of pro-Palestine marches would not arise if racial and religious hatred of *all* kinds were prosecuted – and done so rigorously.

The problem here is that by arguing, for example, that pro-Palestine marches should be more rigorously policed, even banned, on account of their hateful and antisemitic sentiments, conservative commentators like *Telegraph* columnist Allison Pearson leave themselves at the mercy of those who imagine themselves to be victims of racially or religiously aggravated hostility on account of the merest tweet. For if antisemitism is to be proscribed, then in a multicultural society, *all* references to race, nationality, religion and sexuality perceived as insulting, hostile or prejudiced must be proscribed.

Moreover, no amount of enforcement of hate crime legislation, however rigorously applied, will stamp out antisemitism. We

might express our outrage at Stars of David intertwined with swastikas and chants of ‘From the river to the sea’, but according to an ICM poll for Channel 4, whose findings were confirmed by a survey commissioned by the Henry Jackson Society, up to half of all Muslims hold views that fall under the government’s definition of antisemitism. These include believing in ‘the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy’, ‘accusing the Jews ... of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust’, and ‘accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel ... than to the interests of their own nations’ – all of which are officially branded antisemitic, and whose expression is proscribed. And that is before we count the Holocaust deniers in the wider population. According to a survey carried out by Opinion Matters for the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 13 per cent of UK adults believe that the Holocaust either did not take place, or its scale has been exaggerated. That is some 8 million people.

The fundamental objection to any attempt to police hateful thoughts and opinions is that we lose the freedom to express our thoughts and feelings, and to express them in the words that come readily to hand. In his celebrated essay *Politics and the English Language* (1946), George Orwell railed against the jargon and verbiage that debased language and corrupted thought, the political language that made ‘lies sound truthful and murder respectable’. His advice was always ‘to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about’. Ironically, it is now advisable to adopt the wooden jargon, the authorised Newspeak of officials, because the ordinary everyday words and idioms that mean something are too dangerous.

In a world where hate is policed, we are obliged to monitor our every word and

utterance. With self-censorship, there can be no spontaneity. We must be especially wary of strangers, particularly those belonging to another ethnic or religious group, constantly on our guard lest we inadvertently cause offence by using the wrong word. Better to stay silent, keep our distance, or, if possible, avoid them altogether. Instead, we retreat into a world of our own, surrounded by those of our own kind, in self-segregated communities where we can relax and feel at home.

Woe betide anyone who makes a joke referencing group characteristics or engages in playful teasing and good-natured banter. Gags about the Englishman, the Scotsman and the Irishman have long been banished. The names Paddy, Taffy and Jock were once used affectionately by the English to describe the Irish, Welsh and Scots. No longer. As for calling someone a ‘bloody foreigner’ or telling them to ‘go back home’, these were deemed racially abusive in a Law Lords ruling of 2007 arising from a case in which a disabled man crippled with arthritis insulted a group of Spanish women who were obstructing the passage of his wheelchair on the pavement. He was given 80 hours of community service.

Jewish jokes seem to be allowed. But the legendary New York Jewish comedian Jackie Mason would certainly now be banned. In one routine, which lampooned affirmative action, Mason told his London audience that Jews now needed ‘ninety-seven per cent’ to get into law school. For gentiles it was ‘eighty per cent’, Hispanics ‘sixty per cent’ ... and blacks ‘twenty per cent – you’re in’. We laughed at the time, for we recognised the grain of truth. We dare not now. Meanwhile, much-loved comedy programmes are cancelled, and classic

films carry warning notices lest viewers are offended.

Some thoughts are, of course, more dangerous than others. Concerns about immigration, cultural change, migrant crime, and the causes of disparities between different ethnic groups can clearly be construed as hostile to minorities. ‘Cultural nationalism’ is now a marker for extreme right-wing terrorist ideology, according to the government’s Prevent strategy. And a leaked report from the Home Office’s Orwellian-sounding Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) has argued that concerns about mass immigration, the loss of Western culture, two-tier policing, even grooming gangs, are ‘grievance narratives’ promoted by right-wing extremists that are ‘leaking’ into mainstream debates.

By policing hate, then, we are policing thought, and the result is a totalitarian state – precisely the fascist state that Gollancz envisaged would result from attempting to silence fascist opinions. Except that, eighty years on, it is liberal fascism that threatens, with social and cultural conservatism its target.

What of the elephant in the room that is multiculturalism? The argument for freedom of expression is all very well and might have applied in Britain eighty years ago. But can a multicultural society function without the rigorous policing of hate speech? Multicultural societies like Canada, Singapore, and increasingly our own, have instituted draconian censorship regimes because they wish to avert blood on the streets. One need only imagine the consequences of a British equivalent of *Charlie Hebdo* being launched, or a film being released on the model of Monty

Python’s ‘Life of Brian’ that ridiculed the Prophet Muhammed. There would be civil unrest, even civil war, as different ethnic and religious groups battled it out. Yet this may be the price we will have to pay for the reestablishment of a secular liberal society in our country, a free society in which we are again at ease with ourselves, and whose values command our collective loyalty.

Does this mean that we must put up with hateful antisemitic chants and slogans on our streets? Not at all. First, we should as we always have police hateful *behaviour* to others, and that includes behaviour that threatens, harasses, or bullies. So, parading around Brixton in a Ku Klux Klan outfit is clearly inflammatory and potentially threatening, as is parading around Golders Green wearing an SS uniform. Second, it is highly desirable that people are well-mannered and considerate of others; that they exercise ‘courtesy’, the desire to avoid hurting the feelings of others. It is the hallmark of a civilized society. But manners are cultivated through education and good upbringing, not enforced by decree. And they have nothing to do with pandering to those whose heightened sense of victimhood causes them to take offence on account of their race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

The problem is not ‘hate speech’; it is the ideology of multiculturalism and diversity. It is the loss of a common culture, of the shared manners and sensibilities without which secular liberal values are nothing but abstractions, vacuous assertions of ‘British values’. With the new government planning to strengthen hate crime laws and double down on the recording of ‘non-crime hate incidents’, it is vital that all of us who value our freedoms face up to what is at stake.

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# Gifts

## *Theodore Dalrymple*

**M**oral philosophy is like metaphysics: those who think that they can dispense with either of them immediately pass judgments that, whether they know it or not, imply them. The moral philosophy of such persons may be changeable or inconsistent – as it is almost certain to be changeable or inconsistent – but it is always there, like a ghost hovering in the background of an argument.

I had an interesting brief discussion recently with two highly educated persons on the question of whether Keir Starmer was corrupt to have accepted about £100,000 worth of gifts from Lord Alli.

I suspect that my interlocutors were viscerally anti-Tory, and if it had been a prominent Tory politician who had behaved thus, they would have not hesitated in denouncing him as corrupt. But their hostility to Tories was so great – I am morally certain that it preceded rather than followed the gross incompetence and evident incapacity of the last Tory government, that they were prepared, perhaps eager, to extend understanding to the new Prime Minister. Therefore, they found extenuating circumstances, even exculpation, for Sir Keir Starmer's behaviour. I said little in response, because I know from experience that prolonged discussions of such questions is more inclined to generate heat than light, and leave a bitter taste in everyone's mouth.

But I was interested in the arguments of my two interlocutors.

- Starmer's acceptance of the gifts was within the rules
- Everyone in his milieu accepts gifts in like fashion so that he is no worse than anyone else
- Because of the above, he did not realise that he was doing wrong, if indeed he was doing wrong, and therefore was innocent
- The gifts he received were appropriate, and indeed necessary to the work he does, for example he has to dress well and to do so is expensive.
- That even if what he did was wrong, it doesn't matter much anyway.

Let us accept, for the sake of argument, that his acceptance of the gifts was within the rules. If, as a result of this fact, he is exonerated from wrongdoing, it suggests that the rule, whatever it may be, is the sole arbiter of wrongdoing.

Since rules do not make themselves, and must be made by men, this gives to the rule-makers a sovereign power over morality. But this is to grant moral legitimacy to any rules whatever, for example those of an apartheid state. This amounts to rule-worship and does not allow for the possibility that the rules are sometimes wrong. Thus, the Prime Minister might accept gifts from multimillionaires, but the rules in this respect could be wrong.

Rule-worship, of course, has a connection with the second point, that everyone in

a certain social milieu does the same: hundreds of wrongs make a right, or at least excuse an individual wrong. Let us overlook the empirical question of whether everyone in the milieu does the same, besides which there is also the matter of degree, Starmer having accepted the most gifts of anyone in the House of Commons.

That everyone in a certain milieu behaves the same is a very dangerous argument, for a social milieu may become one of theft, robbery and murder. Anyone who reads accounts of the Rwandan genocide, in the marvellous books of the French journalist, Jean Hatzfeldt will learn that massacring neighbours with machetes and appropriating their property became the norm. The perpetrators had more excuse for their actions than the members of parliament, because many of them were under genuine threat of death themselves if they did not participate. I do not think that Parliament is so degraded as that.

The argument that because Starmer was in the milieu in which accepting gifts was normal he did not realise that what he was doing was wrong, and if he did not realise it, it must be clearly proved that, at the time the party accused was labouring under such a defect of reason, that he did not know what he was doing was wrong. I am reminded here of the M'Naghten rules about madness in the legal sense. For a person to be considered legally mad:

*it must be clearly proved that, at the time of the committing of the act, the party accused was labouring under such a defect of reason, from disease of the mind, as not to know the nature and quality of the act; or, if he did know it, that he did not know that he was doing what was wrong.*

Did Sir Keir Starmer not know what he was doing, or that what he was doing was wrong? If the former, there was something wrong with his powers of cognition; if the latter, with his moral sense. Either way, it does not suggest fitness for high office.

As to the fourth suggestion, that the gifts were appropriate because they were essential for his work, I shall overlook the fact that some of them were not. While it is true that his position required him to dress well, and to have as good a vision as possible, it is not true that he had to accept gifts of suits and spectacles, as if he were a pauper. His salary is not, by modern standards, enormous, but it is sufficient to clothe himself and afford eyeglasses.

The fifth argument in his favour, is that, even if accepting the gifts was not wrong, it was not *very* wrong, and therefore did not disqualify him from our regard. After all, we elect politicians, not saints.

Still, the very tawdriness of accepting such gifts is striking. Although worth £100,000 in all, a sum that his government now seems dedicated to preventing anyone from accumulating by honest saving, there is something especially cheap and nasty about accepting gifts of suits and spectacles. Somehow, accepting a bribe of £100,000,000 would have been better than this, because most of us would be tempted to accept it, whereas we could more easily resist a few pairs of specs and tickets to pop concerts.

From the purely political point of view, and disregarding the ethics of it, his acceptance of the gifts was foolish. He must have known that the first question everyone would ask would be 'What was the *quid pro quo* for these gifts?' Even if there was none, few people would believe it in their hearts; and if he didn't realise this, he must lack

a knowledge of human nature. There are an almost infinite number of better objects of charity than Keir Starmer, and the gifts reflect almost as badly on the giver as on the receiver.

Of course, Starmer knew that in a world with a short attention span, the matter of the gifts would be soon forgotten. His calculation might be correct, but it is appallingly cynical.

In the vast category of Starmer's deficiencies, the acceptance of the gifts is relatively unimportant. His appointment alone of David Lammy as Foreign Secretary, is enough to establish his unfitness for public office at any level. But what alarmed me about my conversation with my two interlocutors was their willingness to give him the benefit of the doubt just because he was not a Tory, which makes not being a Tory a kind of *summum bonum*.

But worse still than Starmer's appointment

of a man to the post of Foreign Secretary who, at the age of 42, thought that Henry VII might have been the successor to the throne on the death of Henry VIII, and that the surname of the couple called Pierre and Marie who own the Nobel Prize might have been Antoinette, is the model of the society that Starmer appears to want to create: a population of paupers who survive by the crumbs from the state's table, a relatively well-paid apparatchik class to distribute those crumbs to the paupers, and a *nomenklatura* class consisting of very highly paid political bosses and their bureaucratic hangers-on, with a few licensed magnates besides, who make fortunes by taking advantage of various government subsidies or from the degraded tastes of the pauper class, and who present luxury goods to their political masters and benefactors as and when necessary – all, of course, 'within the rules'.

*Theodore Dalrymple was a psychiatrist.*

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## Freedom, Equality, Euthanasia

*Laurent Lemasson*

**T**he dissolution of the National Assembly by Emmanuel Macron on 9 June had the collateral effect of wiping out all the bills that were being discussed in that assembly. More specifically, the new Assembly that has emerged from the polls on 7 July will have to start the legislative process all over again if it wishes to complete these projects.

This interruption notably concerned a bill that is particularly dear to the heart of those who describe themselves as 'progressives':

the 'end of life' bill. For its promoters, the fundamental aim of this bill was to legalise euthanasia and assisted suicide. (The difference between the two being that, in the first case, it is a doctor or nurse who presses the syringe containing the poison, whereas in the second case it is the patient himself who performs this last gesture.) For many years now, the advocates of euthanasia have been making headway, both in public opinion and within the political parties, and are gradually moving towards their goal.

With the End-of-Life Bill, their goal finally seemed close at hand. So, understandably, they were very dismayed by the dissolution.

But it was clear that the story would not end there and that this halt in the march towards euthanasia was only temporary. Indeed, the new Prime Minister, Michel Barnier, has announced a few days ago that the legislative process should resume at the beginning of 2025. If the legislative process does indeed resume, there is little doubt that this time it will go all the way, and that the supporters of euthanasia will be able to claim victory. French public opinion is overwhelmingly in favour of legalising ‘aid in dying’, and no major political party is openly hostile. Emmanuel Macron, the President of the Republic, has even, with its usual chutzpah, described the bill as a ‘fraternity law’.

In France, it should therefore soon be possible to ask doctors to kill you or demand that they provide you with a painless means of passing from life to death, to the applause of the general public. However, as is so often the case, there will be a deception of the goods: what the general public thinks they have obtained will be quite different from what they will actually get.

Ordinary French people who, when questioned, say they are in favour of euthanasia and assisted suicide, mostly believe that the aim is to relieve the suffering of a few terminally ill people who have little time left to live. They also believe that the law will contain all the necessary precautions to ensure that this medical assassination can only concern this specific category of people.

However, for the activists behind this bill, this is not their ultimate goal, and they will know no truce or rest until their objective

has been achieved, namely assisted suicide on demand, the absolute freedom for the individual to ask a health professional to kill him or her whenever he or she wishes. Those who are opposed to ‘assisted dying’ are sadly mistaken in thinking that listening, sincere compassion and the powerful means available today to relieve pain are the appropriate response to patients who ask to be killed.

This response is undoubtedly relevant at an individual level, and this is indeed the constant and unanimous experience of all those who work in palliative care units: those who arrive in these units asking for their lives to be shortened abandon this request fairly quickly once they are being cared for.

But this approach has no relevance whatsoever for campaigners for the ‘right to die with dignity’, for those who for decades are besieging legislators and relentlessly combing the media to advance their cause, and who are now on the verge of succeeding. What drives them, the passion that possesses them, is not fear but indignation. They are not asking for compassion, for a sympathetic ear, for comfort in the face of pain and death; they are demanding that they be given what they feel is their due. They demand, insistently, even angrily, that their wishes be respected.

There’s no point in explaining to them that the human will is not what they think it is. That we are far less sure of our desires than we sometimes believe; that we are often mistaken about what constitutes our own good; that we often want contradictory things and that we often want one thing and do another: ‘I want and never accomplish/I want, but oh extreme misery/I do not do the good I love/And I do the evil I hate’, as Racine so aptly put it.

For them, man is one and his will is the

core of his being. Man is the animal who wills, the animal who gives himself his own law. The will of the individual is sacred in their eyes, and they defend it fanatically against anything that might undermine it. There is no point in reminding them that almost everyone who asks their doctor to die changes their mind as soon as they are given the time and resources to be listened to and relieved. Such an argument is anathema to them, because it means that we are more or less trying to change the mind of the person asking to die. Doubting their wishes is an insult to their dignity.

Similarly, it is pointless to point out the disastrous collective consequences that can sometimes result from individual choices. There is no point in explaining to them that by changing the law and medical ethics, we are not simply allowing some people who request it to be killed by their doctor, we are also transforming the practice of medicine for everyone and the mores of society as a whole. Such an argument is anathema to them, because it means that the will of the individual is not the alpha and omega when it comes to regulating his or her life.

What worries them, and terrifies them, is not the prospect of suffering, but the prospect of having become so weak and dependent that they can no longer make their own will. What hurts them about death is that it is the absolute limit to our will. So they want to regain control by anticipating death, so that at least it comes when they want it to. Behind the demand for the ‘right to die with dignity’, there is in fact the aspiration for absolute sovereignty of the individual. It’s the same passion that, from the beginning, has been behind the demand for the ‘right to abortion’, which has just been enshrined in our Constitution this spring.

The parallel is illuminating in more ways than one and should give pause to those who are a little uneasy about euthanasia but who are reassured by the many precautions that have been announced, and that will probably be included in the bill that will be adopted.

What did Simone Veil, the French Health Minister, say fifty years ago when she presented to Parliament the bill that was to legalise abortion? That if her proposal allowed for the possibility of terminating a pregnancy, it was ‘in order to control it and, as far as possible, dissuade the woman from using it’. That it was necessary to provide for a procedure that would allow the woman to ‘assess the seriousness of the decision she intends to take’. That abortion should not be covered by social security in order to ‘underline the seriousness of an act that must remain exceptional’. That society ‘tolerates abortion but can neither pay for it nor encourage it’. She also said:

- ‘I am careful not to believe that this is an individual matter concerning only the woman and that the nation is not involved’.
- Consequently, the Veil law legalising abortion contained the following conditions: to have access to an abortion, the woman had to be ‘in distress’ due to her state of pregnancy.
- Parental authorisation was required for minors.
- A mandatory period of reflection of at least 7 days between the two consultations (the first being used to inform the woman of the conditions and risks of the abortion, the second to confirm or deny the initial request for an abortion).
- Compulsory interview with a doctor.

- Abortion was not reimbursed by social security.
- The legal deadline for performing an abortion was 10 weeks of amenorrhoea.

However, not a single one of these initial restrictive conditions remains today. I repeat, not a single one.

- Abolition of parental authorisation for minors (2001);
- Abortion has been 100% reimbursed for all women who have had an abortion since 2013 (and third-party payment has been extended to the entire ‘abortion procedure’ since 2016);
- The condition of ‘distress’ was abolished in 2014;
- The legal deadline was increased to 12 weeks (in 2001) and then to 14 weeks (in 2022). There is now talk of increasing it to 16 weeks;
- Removal of any reflection period between the request for an abortion and its confirmation (2016 and 2022);
- Midwives, and not only doctors, can perform abortions (2016 and 2022).

And note the timing: for twenty-five years the Veil law remained more or less intact, then the ‘relaxations’ multiplied, particularly over the last ten years.

And this is quite understandable. When an act once considered very serious and reprehensible becomes legal, most people keep the old prohibition in the back of their minds, and use the new freedom only with some reluctance. Then, little by little, the habit is acquired, the reluctance disappears, the memory of the old prohibition fades, and not only are people no longer uneasy about using the freedom granted to them by the

law, but they even ask for it to be extended. It’s so nice to be able to do what you want without having to justify it.

In the space of fifty years, abortion has gone from being a serious act that should remain exceptional to a fundamental freedom guaranteed by the Constitution, which means that abortion must now be considered one of the pillars of our republican regime. As one senator said with the utmost seriousness at the time of the vote on the constitutional amendment: ‘the Republic can no longer be the Republic without the right to abortion’.

We can be morally certain that euthanasia will follow the same path as abortion, which itself is not at the end of its journey towards unlimited freedom. The first law to open the door to ‘active assistance in dying’ will, in all likelihood, be bristling with precautions, conditions and solemn declarations about the serious and exceptional nature of killing patients that request it. Then, little by little, and probably quite quickly, these restrictions will be erased one by one or rendered discreetly inoperative, until finally death can be administered as liberally as abortion is today. Let’s just remember that 234,300 abortions were carried out in France in 2022, that’s 641 a day, and yet the only thing that seems to concern the public authorities is that perhaps some women who wanted to have an abortion were unable to do so, and that recourse to abortion should therefore be made even easier.

As Raskolnikov says in *Crime and Punishment*: ‘Man gets used to everything, the beast!’

And he gets used to it even faster than we might think.

*Laurent Lemasson is a French journalist.*

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# The Scrutonian Vision: Defining Conservatism in an Age of Ideological Disarray

*J R Donner*

Defining conservatism is a contentious task, with few agreeing on a universally accepted definition. Intellectual historians often attempt to trace its origins, seeking to recover a ‘pure’ form obscured by historical shifts. In this context, self-proclaimed conservatism becomes even more significant, given the diversity of its interpretations. Perhaps there is no better example of this than the work of Roger Scruton.

Scruton defended his vision of conservatism consistently throughout his career, offering clarity in an era of ideological fragmentation. As A C Grayling put it, ‘Roger Scruton is that rarest of things: a first-rate philosopher who actually has a philosophy.’ In a time when the term ‘conservatism’ is often misused or distorted, reflecting on Scruton’s work offers an opportunity to reassess both the value and the key components of conservatism through one of its most articulate proponents.

So, what then are some of the fundamental aspects of Scrutonian conservatism?

## A Desire to Conserve

Scruton defined conservatism as an innate desire to preserve what is considered good or better than its alternatives – things we trust and cherish (Scruton, 1982, p 90). This desire arises from a sense of familiarity and belonging to a continuous social order that shapes our actions. Such an ‘order’ can take the form of a club, society, community, church, or nation. Ultimately, conservatives are committed to the continuity of their social world, integrating their personal lives with the life of the social order (Scruton, 1980, p 22). Like



functionalist anthropologists, they value the long-term effects of cherished customs and institutions, respecting the wisdom embedded in society’s prejudices. While open to adapt, they resist radical reforms that replace accumulated wisdom – found in art, literature, and norms – with abstract principles.

## A Tradition With Burkean Influence

Scruton’s conservatism emerged from

his intellectual conversion, shaped by his experiences in Eastern Europe and the 1968 protests in France. He believed that both continental Europe and Britain were moving toward a political, economic, and cultural consensus that would expose the West to radical socialist and liberal doctrines. Central to this transformation, Scruton argued, was the erosion of Western institutions and cultural achievements. It was during this period that he found deep inspiration in the works of Edmund Burke.

Throughout his career, Scruton drew on three key arguments from Burke that form the foundation of his conservatism. First, Burke emphasized authority and obedience as central to political order, arguing that society is held together by authority, not abstract rights (Scruton, 2017, p 50). Second, Burke defended tradition and custom against reforms, viewing tradition as a dynamic process that adapts the past to the present (Scruton, 2017, p 48). Third, Burke critiqued Rousseau's social contract theory, seeing society as a trust between the living, the dead, and the unborn, with revolutionaries disinheriting future generations (Scruton, 2017, p 45). Such a sacred trust demanded a sense of duty.

For Scruton, Burke's ideas addressed his doubts about the unchecked drive for liberation and progress that had corrupted modern politics. Conservatism, for Scruton, was not merely about resisting change but about preserving the institutions, practices, and values that ensure society's long-term flourishing. Institutions like schools, churches, and hospitals were founded by past generations for the benefit of future ones.

### **The Relationship Between the Individual and Institutions**

Scruton's conservatism encompasses three key elements: an attitude toward society, an ideal of government, and a political practice, each marked by scepticism toward radical changes, particularly those rooted in socialist and liberal theories of human nature.

At its core, conservatism asserts that society precedes the individual. The individual is shaped by inherited values, customs, and expectations, which together form a coherent social order. Rejecting these values disrupts the social fabric, and when they lose authority, they require renewal or restoration through tradition or natural justice, which grants them universality.

The conservative ideal of government emphasizes the preservation of institutions that embody core values and conventions. Conservatives oppose creating institutions based on abstract principles, favouring those that develop organically from the nation's history and needs. While the state plays a role, its primary function is to protect and uphold moral and social arrangements. The state provides a legal framework that allows civil society to evolve in response to its members' expectations, reconciling social interests with sovereignty and ceremonial authority.

Conservative political practice is pragmatic, focusing on the effective application of beliefs and acknowledging that not all issues have immediate solutions, trusting inherited practices and the rule of law to address them gradually (Scruton, 1982, p 91). Instead of opposing change, conservatives resist radical reforms that disrupt established institutions. They value the stability provided by the law, the family, and the market, believing that change should adapt to, rather than replace, these

traditional structures.

### **Conservative Freedom**

Scruton's view of freedom contrasts with the liberal perspective. For conservatives, freedom is a social goal, not an end in itself, aligned with a structure that defines the individual's purpose (Scruton, 1980, p 19). It serves a broader purpose and requires restrictions to maintain order and protect values. In contrast, liberals treat freedom as an absolute, with restrictions needing justification. Conservatives argue that freedom must be subordinated to a social order that preserves customs and traditions deemed valuable.

Scruton acknowledges the importance of liberalism, particularly natural rights that protect individual sovereignty (Scruton, 2014, p 81), but criticizes how these rights have become declarations and privileges, shifting focus from the state's role in regulating freedom and fostering inequality (Scruton, 2014, p 84). He rejects the liberal notion of the autonomous individual, arguing that freedom and rights depend on tradition and social bonds. For Scruton, societal bonds outweigh individual autonomy, and human conduct cannot rely solely on personal choice.

Freedom is important within a framework of institutional autonomy and norms. Conservatism calls for a state that protects civil society from external threats and internal disorder. The role of the state, in Scruton's view, should be more substantial than classical liberalism allows, yet less intrusive than the demands of socialism (Scruton, 2014, p 92). Freedom is not a license for unchecked desire, but a responsibility rooted in respect for others, ensuring the integrity of home and community.

Scruton's interpretation of Hegel shaped his view of freedom and self-consciousness, which develop through relationships and the mutual recognition of rights and duties. He sees institutions like law, education, and politics as integral to the formation of a fully self-conscious responsible agent in society. For Scruton, conservatives should view freedom not as an abstract right, but as a historical achievement rooted in family, tradition, and civil society, shaped by centuries of civil discipline.

### **A Politically Active Alternative**

Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa's obituary of Scruton, though admiring Scruton's intellect, criticized him for presenting 'a world that never existed, except in the mind of Scruton.' This emphasizes a common critique: that Scruton's idealized tradition often felt out of touch with modern or historical political realities. However, Scruton's conservatism was not merely nostalgic but a politically active philosophy engaging with contemporary issues.

Scruton responded to liberalism, socialism, and environmentalism. He argued that essential truths about nationalism, capitalism, and multiculturalism were embedded within conservatism, and that their distortion by rival ideologies threatened Western society. Without a conservative perspective, they became falsehoods.

Scruton defended nationalism, not as exclusionary, but as a shared identity that fosters civil association. He saw the nation-state as a stabilizing force, built on historical agreements that unite diverse peoples. Nationalism, like a family, allows for disagreements but ultimately seeks unity for the common good (Scruton, 2006, p 15). This form of nationalism is open, tolerant,

and based on secular, rather than religious, ties.

On capitalism, Scruton acknowledged its critiques, particularly its tendency to commodify relationships and create inequalities. Yet, he believed that capitalism's market framework, when grounded in a moral order, facilitated resource distribution and encouraged responsibility. Market freedom, for Scruton, was a means, not an end, and required moral guidance that it could not provide itself to avoid devolving into vice.

Scruton also critiqued multiculturalism, arguing that it was rooted in Enlightenment values such as reason, objectivity, and universal rights. Without these foundations, multiculturalism risks fragmenting into competing identities. Defending multiculturalism meant committing to these core values, not rejecting them.

Regarding internationalism, Scruton critiqued supranational institutions like the European Union, which he saw as a threat to national sovereignty and identity. International relations should be based on the rights, obligations, and voluntary agreements of sovereign states, not the imposition of external authority.

Scruton's environmentalism was similarly locally focused. He rejected global, state-driven solutions, advocating instead for local and national responsibility, fostered by a deep attachment to land and community. Environmental protection required loyalty to one's nation and responsibility for future generations, rather than inefficient global constructs.

In sum, Scruton's conservatism was not a retreat into the past but an active political philosophy, engaging with contemporary debates and offering a counterpoint to

prevailing ideologies. He argued that conservatism could provide a necessary foundation for addressing and adapting to modern political challenges.

### **The Nation-State and Western Heritage**

Scruton was concerned with the trend of weakening government power and socialism's focus on social justice, which he believed destabilized the state. For Scruton, the government's role is not to impose a specific vision of society but to preserve order within a legal framework that respects tradition and customs. The state should serve civil society, not the other way around.

For Scruton, democracies rely on national loyalty to unite the government and citizens. Without a shared national identity, democracy weakens, and political opposition becomes a threat. National loyalty transcends divisions, fostering mutual obligation among citizens. This bond upholds freedoms like worship, speech, and conscience, while ensuring the nation-state remains accountable to its people. For Scruton, national loyalty extends beyond family, religion, or creed, creating a shared obligation grounded in common nationality.

Scruton contrasts Anglo-Saxon conservatism with more centralized European models, highlighting that Anglo-Saxon political traditions are based on a 'common law' system that evolves organically from individual associations, rather than being imposed from above. He sees society as a dynamic web of customs and informal norms, with the government's role being to manage conflict and resolve disputes, not impose order. For Scruton, society is a living network shaped by shared practices and individual experiences, rather than just a set of formal rules.

While liberals see the state as necessary but limited, Scruton argues that conservatives view it as essential for protecting family life, work, and social norms, provided it respects societal customs. For conservatives, institutions gain legitimacy not from top-down policies, but from preserving values that sustain a stable community. The state is an integral part of society, focused on nurturing citizens' well-being through tradition and norms.

### Scrutonian Conservatism

In conclusion, Scruton's conservatism emphasizes the individual's desire to live within a community and the importance of preserving institutions that reflect the compromises and customs of civil society. Conservatives reject institutions based on abstract political theories, favouring those that emerge organically from national needs and traditions. While the state plays a role, it is not central; it maintains sovereignty, provides ceremonial authority, and harmonizes existing social interests. According to Scruton, conservatives recognize the wisdom embedded in long-standing traditions and are hesitant to support radical reforms that could disrupt the balance and stability these foundations provide.

Scrutonian conservatism defends the opportunity to live freely, the security of impartial law, the protection of the environment, the open and inquiring culture fostered by education, and democratic procedures for electing representatives and making laws. Scruton believed these core institutions of the English-speaking world were under threat throughout his career. His approach is pragmatic and local, favouring incremental change over radical reforms,

and trusting that inherited institutions, grounded in the rule of law, offer the most reliable means of addressing societal challenges. While not opposed to change, Scruton argues that loyalty, attachment to land, and community transcend ideological divides and rational self-interest, motivating collective action. His conservatism seeks to preserve the value of what remains of these often-overlooked traditions, serving as a necessary defence of what we have, and not simply of what we've lost.

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# The Battle for the French Republic

*Daniel Escarpit*

On 16 October 2020, Samuel Paty, a teacher of humanities and civics, was decapitated in the street outside his school in Cergy-Pontoise, northwest of Paris, by an Islamist. His offence was to have taught a class on freedom of expression during which he briefly showed on his screen three controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. The last one, by Coco, had been on the front cover of *Charlie Hebdo* the day before ten of its staff were murdered at their editorial meeting back in 2015, with Coco escaping by hiding under a desk.

Paty's murder caused outrage in France comparable to that which followed the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre. Five days later, President Macron awarded Paty a posthumous *Légion d'honneur* at a national memorial ceremony held in the courtyard of the Sorbonne in Paris, into which his coffin was carried, attended by members of his family, former presidents, and the entire government. A letter written by Albert Camus to his first schoolteacher was read out by high school students. Macron declared Paty to be 'the face of the Republic', a 'quiet hero' who embodied its values, and pledged to continue 'the fight for freedom'.

The sentiments were noble, and it was a powerful and fitting tribute. But four years on, the French state, mindful of the need to promote *le vivre-ensemble* – a euphemism for avoiding civil war – continues to turn a blind eye to what is going on daily in French schools, where teachers are fighting a losing battle to save the Republican values of freedom of expression and secularism. Hardly a week passes without a teacher or headteacher being threatened

for asking a Muslim student to remove their head covering on school premises, as French law obliges. Teachers dread teaching civics classes, or the Holocaust (which is now fast disappearing from the curriculum), or even music, art, and swimming classes for fear of offending Muslim students, and ending up like Samuel Paty or Dominique Bernard, the teacher stabbed to death in 2023 by an Islamist in Arras. They routinely self-censor what they teach, or are supposed to teach, for they know that they will receive little support from administrators, who, mindful of their own safety and promotion prospects, prefer 'not to make waves'. A term has even been coined to describe the phenomenon: *pas-de-vaguisme*. Meanwhile, pupils, parents and Islamist agitators who threaten and intimidate them, often by the ordeal of trial by social media, escape prosecution, or if they are prosecuted, are dealt with leniently, because again, no-one wants to 'make waves' by stirring up the hornets' nest.

The principle of secularism or *laïcité*, the separation of Church and State, is enshrined in Article 1 of the Fifth Republic's constitution, which states '*La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale*' – 'The French republic is indivisible, secular, democratic and social'. But it dates back to the 1880s and the Third Republic, when Jules Ferry wrested French education from the grips of the Catholic church and established a system of universal state education teaching Republican values. This was reinforced by the laws of 2004 and 2011, which banned all religious apparel in schools and hospitals, including the niqab

and burqa worn by Muslim women. But it is a brave teacher today who tries to apply the law in France's schools. *Laïcité* requires that pupils are taught Republican values, formed into citizens who value the power of reason over superstition. Civics education therefore has a special place in French education, and it has ever since Jules Ferry instituted the infamous *hussards noirs de la République*, student teachers dressed in long black coats like 'black hussars', to spearhead his reforms. But here again, teachers are fighting a losing battle.

The scale and extent of the problem was laid bare last year by Jean-Pierre Obin in his book *Les profs ont peur*, which documents the retreat of the Republic's schools in the face of Islamism. Social media is utilised by Islamists to target both teachers, who are accused of Islamophobia, and Muslim students who do not conform, especially girls who do not wear Islamic dress, and who are then subjected to *le chantage à la photo* – or 'blackmail by photo'. The consequences of not complying can be severe, as Samara, a 14-year-old Muslim schoolgirl in Montpellier, discovered in April when she was attacked by fellow students and left in a coma for dressing 'in the European style' and wearing make-up. One half of all French teachers now confess to self-censoring what they teach, and two thirds to being scared to teach history or moral and civic education. One in five teachers report being threatened or assaulted by pupils and their parents for reasons 'relating to religion'.

The stories recounted by Obin, all gathered from teachers on the frontline, are shocking. The teacher at a lycée who told the regional president who was visiting her school that she had just taught a lesson on Hitler and Nazism without mentioning the Jews; for, as she explained, she was a woman with children and had no desire to find her car vandalised

'like the last time'. The history teacher who no longer teaches freedom of expression after witnessing a violent outburst in her class concerning Jews and homosexuals (they were 'animals'), and then being personally threatened when she objected; she made a report on the incident but has no idea whether the said pupil was sanctioned. The philosophy teacher at a suburban lycée, who informed a pupil that she was not allowed to wear an abaya and was treated to a chorus of 'Racist! Islamophobe!' from the other pupils, one of whom threatened that his father would 'come in and sort you out'. The music teacher at a majority Muslim school who lamented that it was more and more difficult to get anyone to sing: 'I cannot sing, I am a Muslim'. A class on medieval music brought to a halt when one pupil objected, 'There is no such thing as religious music!' The teacher who played excerpts from Carmen and got into trouble because parents thought the subject matter was 'immodest'. And the art and design teacher at a vocational lycée who has eliminated cartoons and caricatures from her course; she dares not broach the subject. PE teachers who refuse to teach swimming and no longer insist on pupils wearing the prescribed kit for sports. Muslim girls absent altogether from PE lessons. Tables in canteens segregated according to religious affiliation. Halal food as standard. Even the traditional class photograph, which would feature Muslim girls unveiled or uncovered, is now impossible.

As for Samuel Paty, numerous teachers report that they did not dare pay homage to him as they were officially required to do for fear of the reaction of their classes. They had never felt 'so alone', abandoned with no guidance or support to face their pupils. As one humanities teacher put it, the smallest thing 'could trigger a reaction, a conflict, with terrible results', and she did not want to happen to her what

had happened to a colleague in a neighbouring college who had shown her pupils Delacroix's famous painting 'Liberty leading the people', which features a bare-breasted Liberty. The result was that her colleague had been violently assaulted by one of her pupils. A history teacher at a technical lycée prepared to talk to her class about Samuel Paty's murder, something she had been dreading. Immediately there were objections to her use of the term 'Islamist'. Then one pupil said it directly: 'He deserved to be decapitated. In Islam, you do not do what he did, and religious law takes precedence over French law'. The teacher was already traumatised. Now, she was 'defeated'.

For Obin, the picture could not be clearer. Despite stirring public statements from presidents, prime ministers and education ministers that they are committed to defending the values of the Republic, the reality on the ground is that teachers have been left abandoned to 'muddle through' as best they can. In the face of 'militant Islamism', there has been 'a general abdication by the political class'.

The fear of ending up like Samuel Paty is a recurring theme. As I write, eight adults are on trial accused of complicity in Samuel Paty's murder, including the father of the 13-year-old girl who falsely alleged that Paty had told Muslim students to leave the room while he showed 'naked' images of the Prophet Muhammad – she had been excluded from school at the time, and therefore not even present in Paty's class. The father then accused Paty of being a blasphemer and 'a thug' and started a campaign on social media to have him removed, a campaign that culminated in his murder. The trial of the six teenagers accused of slander and pointing out Paty to his killer outside the school took place last autumn, the girl who had lied about Paty's lesson being given a suspended sentence.

Anyone still in doubt about the predicament of French teachers left alone to confront Islamism should read the recently published *Le cours*

*de monsieur Paty* by Mickaëlle Paty, at once a powerful vindication of her brother Samuel and the Republican values he sacrificed his life for, and a savage indictment of the French political class whose cowardice in the face of political Islam left him abandoned to his fate.

Mickaëlle documents in harrowing detail the last eleven days of Samuel's life, from the day he gave his fateful lesson on freedom of expression to his murder. It was a living nightmare, as the false accusation of a girl who was not even present in his lesson unleashed a vicious social media campaign. As things snowballed and the threats multiplied, his name and address publicised, with a Paris mosque, its imam a known fundamentalist, denouncing him on Facebook, Samuel was left isolated, abandoned by his superiors and even his colleagues. Police protection had been requested but was deemed unnecessary by the authorities. Instead of being treated as the victim, he came to be regarded more as the problem. One colleague denounced him for stirring up trouble. And yet all he had done was to fulfil the mission entrusted him by the state using the resources made available by the state (the cartoons were all available on official sites of teacher resources) with enthusiasm, dedication, and good humour – something for which he is affectionately remembered by many of his former students. To this end, Mickaëlle has reproduced in her book his lesson plan, together with the slides he showed his pupils and the tasks they were set, culminating in their drafting a definition of liberty of the press, a fundamental value of the French Republic.

At the official ceremony at the Sorbonne, Mickaëlle and her family were obliged to pass in front of 'the entire political class that has governed us for the past twenty years' as they entered. She made a point of pausing momentarily in front of each one in the hope of 'exchanging a look', of getting

an acknowledgement, but their eyes were fixed, gazing either down at the ground or up towards the sky. It was all too emblematic of their craven abdication of responsibility. Since then, Mickaëlle, an anaesthetic nurse by profession, has campaigned tirelessly to highlight the failure of the French state to protect her brother and to try to get it to acknowledge its dereliction of duty. Her official complaints and attempts to institute proceedings have so far met with ‘absolute silence’. But her campaign to raise awareness of the threat of radical Islam in French schools culminated in the setting up last summer of a Senate committee of enquiry into threats and attacks on teachers. Its report, in March this year, was devastating, concluding that the Republic’s schools were ‘in danger’ and calling for an end to the *pas-de-vaguisme* that has so far characterised official attitudes.

Yet, on the ground, nothing has changed. Only last week, the elder brother of a student at a Paris school, who had posted a message on social media calling for its principal to be ‘burned alive’, was sentenced to a token fine and was asked to complete a citizenship course. The principal had been involved in an altercation with a girl who objected to being asked to remove her veil.

Talk of *le vivre ensemble* and the benefits that mass immigration has brought France is now wearing very thin as France endures an unprecedented wave of drug-related crime, the gangs invariably of North African origin, and a spate of horrific crimes committed by migrants under order of expulsion. The murder in September of young Philippine, a Parisian student, by a 22-year-old Moroccan who had already served five years for raping another student and was under order of expulsion, caused general revulsion. There is also disturbing evidence – largely unreported by the mainstream media – of growing anti-

white racism as ethnic separatism gathers pace and Islamification of urban areas proceeds. This seemed to apply to the horrific murder of young Thomas in the rural village of Crépol in southern France last year, where a village dance was turned into a bloodbath by a knife-wielding gang of North African origin from a nearby town. Several witnesses reported hearing the attackers say they were there to ‘kill the whites’, but the racial aspect of the attack was played down by mainstream media and subsequently by prosecutors.

France faces a fundamental choice. Either it accepts separatism and British-style multiculturalism, ditches its Republican values, and ceases the promotion of a shared culture, history and identity; or it enforces those values and expels those who reject them, just as they reject French culture and the French way of life. The latter would involve a reconquest of its ‘lost territories’, the 751 *zones sensibles* or urban no-go areas it has effectively abandoned to crime, drugs, and Islamism. This could well trigger civil war, which is why Macron and his centrist liberals refuse to go down that path. But to many, the first path merely staves off the inevitable.

However, the French have a long tradition of manning the barricades, rioting, and general civil disobedience. Modern France was born out of revolutionary fervour. Right now, the Fifth Republic is paralysed, presided over by a lame president for whom posturing is a substitute for real action, a technocratic prime minister, and an impotent makeshift government from which the largest single party, the ‘far right’ National Rally, has been excluded for its divisive rhetoric on immigration and Islam. But who is to say that the Sixth Republic, when it rises from the ashes of the Fifth, will not be a very different affair?

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# How Burke Saved the English Dostoevsky

*Harry Cummins*

The poet George Crabbe (1754-1832) was born in Slaughden, a part of Aldeburgh, England, that was obliterated in the 1953 Suffolk floods. He is chiefly known today for the poem ‘Peter Grimes’ from his book *The Borough*. ‘The Borough’ portrayed in the volume is, in fact, ‘Aldborough’, the way its name was spelled at his birth. Crabbe is only really remembered today because another local boy, Benjamin Britten, turned the action of ‘Peter Grimes’ into an opera. The eponymous anti-hero is an Aldeburgh fisherman who kills a number of little boys; his apprentices. Britten was drawn to that sort of tale. After *Peter Grimes*, the opera, was premiered at Sadler’s Wells in 1945, Britten became famous, and so did Aldeburgh, Britten’s home.

The triumph of *Grimes’* successors, meanwhile – among them *Albert Herring* (1947), a Britten opera set in a village on Aldeburgh’s outskirts – elevated the little port to the world stage. The process accelerated when Britten built an opera house in Snape, another nearby village, and created the annual Aldeburgh festival as a platform for his eagerly awaited new work. By Britten’s death in 1976, this pint-sized Hastings had become a British Bayreuth-cum-Provincetown, a hub for the musical and intellectual jet set. And none of it would have happened but for George Crabbe. Strangely, however, this wildly real and original writer – a sort of English Dostoevsky – has never, in modern times, been given his due. Until, I would argue, the emergence of a recent analysis by Frances Gibb, *The Times’* legal editor, a Crabbe enthusiast who has divided

her time between London and Aldeburgh since childhood. Her book, *A Time and a Place: George Crabbe, Aldeburgh and Suffolk*, was published by the venerable Lutterworth Press in 2022.

Gibb observes that Crabbe’s continuing obscurity is somewhat puzzling. His voice is less inhibited, his mentality and material more modern, than those of most pre-20th century versifiers. No other past master needs so little ‘translation’:

*Crabbe’s works were consistently gritty – their depictions of destitution and madness often visceral, in contrast to much of the work of the Romantic poets who were his contemporaries. One critic of the day even described his verse as ‘disgusting’.*

‘Destitution’ and ‘madness’ have long been clichés in modern poetry. They were equally empty concepts for Crabbe’s Romantic peers. For Coleridge, Keats and Shelley, ‘destitution’ and ‘madness’ gave Gothic colour to their poems about politics, or their excursions into mediaeval and Greco-Roman romance. For Crabbe, destitution and madness were lived events. The strain that their poverty imposed on each tipped both his father and his mother into prolonged insanity. His beloved wife, Sarah, suffered a massive bipolar breakdown after five of their seven children died in a row. She remained deranged until her death, 17 years later. Throughout that period, Crabbe was an assiduous nurse and comforter – and her unflinching observer. However outrageous

the events and characters that litter his verse may seem, we now know that Crabbe, like Dostoevsky, invented little: he just related whatever he encountered, troubling or not, in a shockingly unfiltered way. Everybody else who was writing at the time (with the exception of Clare) prettified and censored their work ... Though not for the reasons they censor it today!

Gibb reveals, for instance, that ‘Peter Grimes’ is actually a quite personal MeToo-like denunciation: it is not a disturbing fairytale. It would seem that Crabbe knew as a boy an infamous old Aldeburgh fisherman called Tom Brown who ‘disappeared’ several of his pretty little male helpmates and got away with it. (Serial killers tended to get away with it in the 18th century). As Byron noted of such unrepentant authenticity,

*... Truth sometimes will lend her noblest fires, And decorate the verse herself inspires: This fact in Virtue’s name let Crabbe attest; Though nature’s sternest painter, yet the best.*

George Crabbe was born on Christmas Eve, 1754, into a downwardly mobile family that was trapped in drink and want. Robert Crabbe, his grandfather, had been appointed Aldeburgh’s Collector of Customs in 1732, at a salary of £60 a year. He was even elected the town’s Mayor, or ‘Bailiff’, in 1733. Crabbe’s father, on the other hand, was a wife-beating alcoholic, and, consequently, worked mostly as a warehouseman on Slaughden quay, as did the poet himself from the age of 14. George Crabbe, senior, only earned £10 per annum, a fraction of Robert’s income decades earlier. Raising six children on this sum, including sending the writer to a school ‘of somewhat superior character’ where he learned Latin, reduced the whole family to an appalling state. As a result, shortly after his brief

immersion in ‘the realms of gold ... Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold’, for Crabbe began to write verse at the posh school :

*... the young man, now accustomed to far different pursuits and habits, was obliged to return to the labours of the warehouse on the Slaughden quay ... labours which he abhorred, though in time he became tolerably expert in them, such as piling up butter and cheese’ ... He went ‘sullen and angry to his work’, and ‘violent quarrels ensued between him and his father’.*

The poet escaped to London, where he somehow imagined it would take very little to become rich, or, in his case, to qualify as a doctor, even then a lucrative profession:

*Crabbe’s hope was to walk the hospitals, attend medical lectures and pick up surgical knowledge as cheaply as he could. In reality, he did not have the funds to get by.*

He devoted most of the pittance he had saved to paying ‘resurrectionists’ (grave robbers) to provide him with corpses he could learn anatomy from. Alas, disaster soon struck our hero, as it was wont to do:

*It so happened that his landlady had recently lost one of her children. When she discovered Crabbe had a dead child stowed in his cupboard for the purposes of dissection, she concluded in her grief that it was the body of her own infant. Crabbe, she alleged, had ‘dug up William’ and should be brought before the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House. Luckily for Crabbe, he had not started working on the body and it could be proved not to be the landlady’s William.*

Dodging the gibbet was not the only piece of luck to befall Crabbe at this point. A little earlier, Barham Raymond, a doctor-chemist whom Aldeburgh Parish Council wished to employ to provide the local poor with modestly priced healthcare, turned them down, disgusted at the paltriness of the remuneration. Or, as Gibb puts it,

*Raymond and the parish could not agree on fees for this responsibility and so, in September 1775, the young Crabbe was warmly recommended by his father to take on the job instead, with the stipulation from the Aldeburgh Board of Guardians that he 'be employed to cure the boy Howard of the Itch, and that whenever any of the poor shall have occasion for a surgeon, the overseers shall apply to him for that purpose.' And so Crabbe found himself an apothecary and town surgeon.*

The problem was that, as we have seen, 'Crabbe's qualifications to practice medicine were extremely limited.' Nevertheless, though there was little money to complete his studies even on the cheap by buying the leavings of grave robbers, in Aldeburgh, 'There were opportunities for more practical, visceral experiments in the form of dead dogs thrown up by the sea – apt samples for anatomical research.' Indeed, as Crabbe later boasted: 'I studied the *Materia Medica*, & made some progress in Botany; I dissected dogs and fancied myself an Anatomist, quitting entirely Poetry, Novels and Books of Entertainment.' Unfortunately, canine and human anatomy proved to be less compatible than he expected, because, as we learn,

*The second woman he attended in childbirth died less than a month afterwards ... Nor did the townsfolk have*

*much regard for him, and his passion for botany did not help. He would return from walks with handfuls of plants, which, as they saw it, suggested that 'as Dr Crabbe got his medicines in the ditches, he could have little claim for payment' ... This work in Aldeburgh brought Crabbe almost no income, and it amounted – he later remarked – to 'three years spent in the Misery of a Successful Struggle' ... slowly Crabbe fell into abject poverty not dissimilar to that of his patients.*

The Almighty and opium were probably the two main supports on which Crabbe relied at what must have seemed the crisis point in his struggle to escape his and his family's seemingly inexorable decline. The poet had always been a devout Christian, and we have it on the authority of his son that he was a lifelong laudanum addict, too. If, as Marx said, Christianity is 'the opium of the people', Crabbe was in the habit of making copious appeals to both. He would have had access to opiates from 1771, when he launched his quixotic attempts to qualify as a doctor-chemist, and he would probably not have regarded their use as transgressive, any more than Freud, a century later, would have questioned his reliance on over-the-counter cocaine.

The drug may well have accounted for his verse's exquisitely delirious evocations of abnormal states and people. Crabbe was certainly in an exalted state, spiritual or chemical, when, in December 1779, he was granted an epiphany while gazing into the milky depths of a filthy old Aldeburgh creek called 'the Leech Pond'. He had stumbled upon it while enjoying one of the botanical expeditions that the people of 'the Borough' found so alarming. It suddenly struck the poet

that, having abjectly failed in a conventional career in a backwater on the River Alde, he could lose nothing by returning to London to try to pursue his only real love, literature. And, with the Lord's help, he might even make a living from it. After borrowing five pounds to cover both his journey by sea to the capital and his living expenses, he boarded a sloop on the quay at Slaughden, where his hopes and his humiliation had begun.

Crabbe reached London early in 1780. As soon as he set foot in 'the Great Wen', as William Cobbett called it, Crabbe realized that there might be an interval – no doubt brief – before the nation's grateful readers bought his books in large numbers. He therefore urgently needed a job before even he located a publisher. He obviously did not seek the sort of post he had struggled with in Aldeburgh; he wanted an impressive position that would reflect what he saw as his formidable literary standing. Having read Juvenal, Crabbe knew that, in ancient Rome, nobody had access to either good jobs or the right to publish except by appeal to a ruling class that had reserved every right and privilege to its own use, or to that of its clients. He would also have known that the situation was no different in – to recall another Cobbett coinage – 'the metropolis of the empire'. Like Juvenal, Crabbe would have to find a patron, but he had no links at all with any member of the British elite. His decision to start his job search by asking the Prime Minister, Lord North, for a sinecure was therefore not as outrageous as it may seem. Where else could he begin, when he knew no-one in the upper classes except by repute?

Britain in the 18th century was stratified and obscenely unequal, but, in some ways, it was also remarkably democratic compared with the UK of today. Crabbe simply

presented himself at Lord North's London home, knocked on the door, and the statesman received him personally and heard him out. It is hard to imagine Sir Keir doing the same. Especially given that, though Crabbe had never set eyes on the Prime Minister, he expected his suit and himself to be welcomed like long-lost friends. Crabbe later conceded in a letter that North treated him 'with more attention than I should expect', but he resented the fact that he was shown 'none of that Affability I had been led to hope for'. He had equally high expectations of the sort of job he thought the leader of the country should offer him, requesting that he be made an official 'in any Department that I should be thought qualified for'.

One can well imagine the difficulties North foresaw in identifying such a Department. Crabbe was a 'doctor' whose medical knowledge only really fitted him to treat stray dogs. He had never been to university; indeed, he had not spent very long at school. None of his verse – apart from *Inebriety: a Poem* (1775) – had been published. And yet, when, unsurprisingly, Crabbe's suit was rejected, he was quite vexed, not only because North wrote that he could find him nothing, but because the note with the bad news was so long delayed. It seems not to have occurred to him that North – who in 1780 was grappling with the most critical phase of the American Revolution – might have other things on his mind than Crabbe's job search.

When the statesman turned him down, the poet, nothing abashed, wrote to members of North's cabinet to request the same ample favours. In the note to the Home Secretary, Lord Shelburne, he opined,

*Your Lordship will pardon me the relation of a late and unsuccessful*

*attempt to become useful to myself and the community I live in. Starving as an apothecary, in a little venal borough in Suffolk, it was there suggested to me that Lord North, the present minister, was a man of that liberal disposition, that I might hope success from a representation of my particular circumstances to him ... at length a lingering refusal, brought me by an insolent domestic, determined my suit, and my opinion of his Lordship's private virtues.*

The audacious strategy of traducing the Prime Minister to his underlings bore even less fruit than the appeal to North itself, and, in no time, the £5 he had borrowed for support having all been spent, 'his circumstances', as his son recalled, 'were now, indeed, fearfully critical'. At this point, 'when', as his son notes, 'absolute want stared him in the face', the supplicant decided that, as the Tory government had disdained a priceless jewel like himself, it would be unjust to deny the Whig opposition the chance to snatch so rare, if rough, a diamond from under their noses. In rubbing it clean of its rustic dross like Aladdin's lamp, the Whigs could only gain and the Tories could only lose, and the Tories would deserve it.

The Whig leader to whom Crabbe redirected his suit was Edmund Burke. Later a totemic conservative thinker, Burke was famous in 1780 as a liberal thorn in the side of the North administration that had inexplicably turned its collective back on the Apollo of the Alde. Not only a champion of the oppressed, who excoriated in parliament North's attempts to smother American independence, Burke was also a savant and a man of letters. He was poetic and eloquent, his 'great melody' (as Yeats called it) a potent weapon in his campaigns for American freedom and

Catholic emancipation, especially in his native Ireland.

The tone Crabbe adopted in asking this defender of the underdog for help was different from the one he used in addressing Shelburne, the Cerberus of the status quo. Crabbe was also now much more desperate than when he had approached the Home Secretary. Indeed, the letter that Crabbe left for Burke with a sample of his poems at the MP's Soho home one March night in 1781 was hardly the sort anyone could ignore:

*I will call upon You Sir tomorrow & if I have not the Happiness to obtain Credit with You, I will submit to my Fate: My existence is a Pain to me, & every one near and dear to me are distress'd in my Distresses; ... I have only to hope for a speedy End to a Life so uncompromisingly begun: In which (tho it ought not to be boasted of) I can reap some Consolation from looking to the End of it.*

Crabbe's son remembers that, as soon as Burke read this singular letter:

*He immediately appointed an hour for my father to call upon him at his house in London; and the short interview that ensued, entirely, and forever, changed the nature of his worldly fortunes. He was, in the common phrase, 'a made man'.*

Burke's response to the supplicant differed from that of the Tory cabinet not just because his politics and values were different. Burke being, in a sense, a 'poet' himself, could discern Crabbe's potential. North and his colleagues, who were not alive to art in the same way, could not. As Crabbe, junior, points out, had the manuscript poems that his father left Burke

in March 1781 ‘not possessed the marks of real genius, the applicant would probably have been dismissed with a little pecuniary assistance.’

Burke engaged his friend Samuel Johnson to edit Crabbe’s poems, and the good Doctor rubbed each of these Aldeburgh Aladdin’s lamps clean to release the genie within. In no time, Burke was able to place Crabbe’s works with leading London publishers. *The Library* was issued just a few months later, in July 1781, and *The Village* appeared in 1783. The latter, especially, was commercially and critically successful, but Burke wanted to find Crabbe a salaried post that would enable him to compose his outspoken work at leisure. The poet’s personal devoutness fitted him for a curate’s position in the established church, as did his proficiency in Latin. One obstacle remained, however. Clergymen in the Church of England had to be graduates, and Crabbe had never even matriculated. Even that hurdle was cleared, though, when Burke prevailed on Philip Yonge, the Bishop of Norwich, to ordain the poet once he had successfully negotiated a cultural and theological quiz of Yonge’s own devising. Crabbe passed Yonge’s test with flying colours, and, in December 1781, the Bishop duly received him into the Anglican ministry. Thinking he was doing this son of ‘the Borough’ a kind turn, Dr Yonge then appointed Crabbe as curate to the rector of the beautiful 16th century church of St Peter and St Paul in – of all places – Aldeburgh. After his miraculous apotheosis, it was one of those catastrophes in the wake of victories that had punctuated the poet’s career.

As Frances Gibb points out; ‘Crabbe’s reputation on leaving the town [Aldeburgh] had been low. He had failed at all he had tried, and was not remembered with any great respect or affection by the townsfolk.’ If, as his son boasted, ‘He returned, a man of acknowledged talents; a successful author, patronised and befriended by some of the leading characters

of the kingdom; and a clergyman with every prospect of preferment in the church’, the poet suspected that these laurels would simply provoke even more local resentment. His reception as the curate of the ‘little venal borough’s’ main church soon proved him right. It was not just that, ‘The whisper ran through the town that, a man who had failed in one calling, was not very likely to make a great figure in a new one’. There were some parishioners who were surprised to see an opium addict in the pulpit. Others did not take kindly to having to – literally – hear sermons from an incompetent who had sent certain of the local mothers and infants to the next world while acting as Aldeburgh’s official surgeon. Gibb tells us that, as a result, ‘Crabbe wanted to leave Aldeburgh almost as soon as he had arrived’. Once again, she reveals, Burke was decisive in securing his liberation, after he had asked another of his glittering friends to act as saviour:

*Burke mentioned Crabbe’s case to Charles Manners, the fourth Duke of Rutland, whose chaplain was about to retire. By April 1782, Crabbe had received word from Burke that the Duke would appoint him as his domestic chaplain at Belvoir Castle, in Leicestershire, as soon as he could obtain release from his curacies at Aldeburgh ... Crabbe took up his new position in November that year.*

Thanks to the patronage of the Duke, and later of his widow and son, who had curacies all over England in their gift, Crabbe was able to enjoy the comfortable existence of an Anglican parson for the rest of his life. And he was generally admired by his non-Aldeburghian parishioners. He served not just in Leicestershire, where he was a vicar in various villages as well as the Duke’s chaplain,

but in Lincolnshire and Wiltshire. He even worked as a curate in Great Glemham in the voluptuous green interior of Suffolk, which was deliciously different from the flat, grey coast he had been born on. He returned to Aldeburgh as seldom as possible.

After his poem *The Newspaper* appeared in 1785, Crabbe published no verse for over twenty years, a period which he devoted to his pastoral duties, and to the complex arrangements he had to make arising from the tragic life and death of his wife and five of his seven children. The volumes of poetry that appeared after this interlude – *Poems* (1807), *The Borough* (1810), *Tales* (1812), and *Tales of the Hall* (1819) – were, however, unusually well received, perhaps because they were enriched with a power and maturity born of suffering. The contemporary reviewer Francis Jeffrey defined this quality as ‘an unrivalled and almost magical power of observation’, combined with ‘an anatomy of character and feeling not less exquisite and searching’. *The Borough* went through six editions, *Tales* five, and Crabbe sold *Tales of the Hall* to the publisher John Murray for £3,000 – a staggering reward for a poet at the time, and an advance equivalent to hundreds of thousands today. Curiously, however, these strange, dramatic books do not address, at least directly, the misfortunes of his maturity, like the death of so many of his children, and the living death of his wife. Their constituent poems are almost all set in and around Aldeburgh – a town he had gone to some lengths not to set foot in for decades. The narratives they contain are based on real ‘Borough’ stories and haunting characters from ‘the wild amphibious race’ (as he called the town’s inhabitants) that he remembered from his childhood and youth. Above all, the late, great poems by which Crabbe is known today (to the extent that he is known) ooze with the efflorescence of Aldeburgh’s mudflats, reed beds, and pearly fenland vistas. As E M Forster

wrote:

*Into the work of Crabbe there steals again and again the sea, the flat coast, the local meannesses, and an odour of brine and dirt – tempered occasionally with the scent of flowers.*

Like James Joyce, Crabbe spent most of his life avoiding a place of birth that was also the exclusive source of his inspiration. Gibb quotes ‘The City’ by Constantine Cavafy as a key to the resolution of this paradox. Cavafy is another poet whose entire canon is defined by a single place; in his case, Alexandria, the womb and tomb of the Near Eastern Hellenism of which he was the last celebrant. Unlike the authors of ‘Peter Grimes’ and *Dubliners*, however, Cavafy almost never left the town in which he was born. Cavafy gives the reason for his reluctance to stray in ‘The City’, a poem which is almost as good a description of Crabbe’s odyssey as Frances Gibb’s book:

*You said: ‘I’ll go to another country, go to another shore, find another city better than this one. Whatever I try to do is fated to turn out wrong and my heart lies buried like something dead How long can I let my mind moulder in this place? Wherever I turn, wherever I look, I see the black ruins of my life, here, where I’ve spent so many years, wasted them, destroyed them totally.’ You won’t find a new country, won’t find another shore. This city will always pursue you. You’ll walk the same streets, grow old in the same neighbourhoods, turn grey in these same houses You’ll always end up in this city ...*

*Harry Cummins worked for the British Council.*

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# Protecting Children

*Andrew Tettenborn*

Last month, the government received a peremptory demand for a change in the law to make it a crime for parents in England to smack their children. All in the day's work, you might think. Pressure-groups and cranks with bees in their bonnet are always insisting that the government absolutely has to do this or that, and seeking to bend ministerial ears to that effect – as they have every right to do in a democracy.

Here, however, there's one problem. This particular demand did not come from some private group of progressive parents or a club of children's rights fanatics. It took the form of an official document, and emanated from a person employed by the Department of Education at a salary towards the top of the senior civil service range, with a not inconsiderable staff below her. You read that right: the government (ie the taxpayer) is employing people whose job it is to be activists pressuring elected representatives on highly political matters of social policy. This is wrong.

The department in question is the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England; the demand was made by Commissioner Dame Rachel D'Souza, who heads it. This organisation is an interesting one. It was set up by the Blair government in 2005 as a statutory body which, although funded by the Education Department, is deliberately freed from political control (the term is an 'arm's length' body). It has a general brief to

promote the views and interests of children and advise ministers on their interests, and a duty actively to promote children's rights. In addition, it has a duty to promote the values contained in a remarkably flexible UN treaty, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the UK rather foolishly signed in 1992 but which up until now is not formally part of English law.

It is fair to say that from the beginning the organisation has been in the activist arena. The call for an end to the right of corporal punishment, which has been made by more than one Commissioner, is by no means the first controversial demand to come from it. Successive Commissioners (there have been four to date) have all jumped into the political fray. One or other of them has at one time or another referred to Britain as one of the most child-hostile countries in the world; opposed stop and search; suggested that it was wrong to prosecute the junior thugs who murdered Jamie Bulger; attacked the idea of universal credit; called for the banning of devices to break up gangs of feral youths running amok in the streets; expressed strong views on detention of children suspected of irregular immigration; and supported the substantial weakening of schools' power to exclude rule-breakers.

On one level you can understand the thinking behind the establishment of this body. Children, like the elderly, the sick or the poor, are to some extent the

responsibility of us all and government in particular. If so, just as we have civil service departments responsible for health or pensions, why not also an Office of the Children's Commissioner responsible for promoting the interests of the young?

Actually, this argument is remarkably specious. There are any number of reasons why a free-wheeling office like the Children's Commissioner simply shouldn't exist.

To begin with, it's not the same as the departments dealing with pensions and health. They are headed by government ministers who have to make a political case for measures they favour and take the political flak if they fail to convince. There would be nothing wrong with a politically-accountable Minister for Children in the same position. Indeed, we already have one, or at least the next best thing, in the shape of Janet Daby, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Children and Families. The Children's Commissioner is quite different. She is given a comfortable billet and sizeable staff at the public charge, in practice made irremovable, and given the job of wagging an official finger at elected politicians and telling them what they ought to be doing to benefit children, independently of what voters may think or political exigencies dictate.

It would be rightly seen as unacceptable if the government were repeatedly told officially by an unelected apparatchik that plans hammered out on the political plane would not do because they did not adequately protect pensioners' interests. The same argument goes for children.

The second difficulty with bodies like the Office of the Children's Commissioner is that, for all their ostensible arms-length

status, they politicise the civil service. Whether one likes it or not, questions of what rights we give children are political. Questions such as how we allow parents or schools to discipline the unruly, how much physical control should be exercised over them by the police and the state, what financial support growing children should get, and how they should be punished if they commit heinous crimes, are questions on which the views of voters, and the politicians they elect, vary widely. There is every reason why they should be firmly in the political arena. The idea that we can somehow remove arguments about matters of this sort from the sordid rough-and-tumble of politics arena by appointing someone to pronounce on them from a supposedly neutral viewpoint of sweet reasonableness is hogwash, and thoroughly undemocratic hogwash at that.

Moreover, in practice the politicisation is almost all one way. For one thing, the Commissioner's duty to have regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child hides how that treaty should be interpreted, most of the running is made by the progressive human rights and UN establishments. In other words, there is a leftish, progressive bias built in to the office. Indeed, the subject of physical punishment by parents is a neat example. Nowhere in the Convention is there any prohibition on it: but this has not stopped the UN committee that supervises its implementation from insisting that such a prohibition must be implied and formally demanding that the UK implement it.

It's also worth noting that while the Commissioner's appointment is formally made by the Secretary of State for Education, the process of appointing them is controlled by civil service rules about applications and

interviews. The upper civil service class tends to lean progressive, legalistic and process-obsessed; it is a fair inference that a minister who wished to appoint a children's rights sceptic would quickly be warned that this was very difficult and might lead to litigation or worse.

The difficulties created by bodies such as the Office of the Children's Commissioner are actually just a part of a larger political problem that has been with us for twenty years. As any conservative can confirm, a good deal of constitutional vandalism can be laid at the door of the 1997-2007 Blair government: the emasculation of the hereditary part of the House of Lords, the introduction of a Supreme Court with an unstated expectation of constitutional oversight, and so on. But one of its most successful, if sinister, changes has been the transfer of power away from the House of Commons and the consolidation of the influence of the new administrative class.

Civil Service management has become a power almost unto itself. Non-departmental bodies with almost-governmental functions but no direct political accountability have proliferated. The Office of the Children's Commissioner is one, but there are plenty of others; the Judicial Appointments Commission, the College of Policing and organisations wielding enormous power such as Ofcom. The Equality and Human Rights Commission, another Blair creation, creates similar tensions to the Office of the Children's Commissioner: its function is to act as a kind of paid father-confessor, formally independent yet tasked with the activist function of holding the elected government's feet to the fire over human rights.

None of this makes for decent government.

It amounts to a clog on democracy, not to mention creating an unhealthy increase in governmental powers of patronage. It also tends to set up a self-perpetuating oligarchy of the great and the good at the heart of administration. Those who think in a vaguely progressive way and get on with the new administrative class tend to obtain appointments on public sector bodies, especially those with power but not a great deal of accountability. In turn, they are likely to be asked to be part of the formal appointment committees for other similar bodies, where it is a fair inference that they will tend to appoint people of a similar mindset. And so the carousel whirls merrily on.

A party with a proper eye to conservatism, be it Tory or even possibly Reform, could do much worse than take aim at this quiet progressive takeover. Two particular policies would have a great attraction. One is that as a general rule, any body with governmental functions should be firmly the responsibility of an elected minister, who should have *carte blanche* as to who was on it, and who was appointed to lead it. The second would be a healthy scepticism as to how many of these bodies we need. There are quite enough people and pressure groups seeking to bend government's ear to promote this or that agenda, and moreover for free. Bodies that do much the same thing while charging taxpayers for the privilege of supporting them should be particularly carefully scrutinised over whether they should continue to exist. A long hard look at the Children's Commissioner and the department that person heads might be a very interesting place to start.

*Andrew Tettenborn is a lawyer.*

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# Alena Hromádková (1943-2024)

*Barbara Day*

In the days when Western academics gave secret lectures for the ‘underground university’ in totalitarian Czechoslovakia, they would on their return enthuse over not only the courage of the organisers and the passionate attention of the students, but also over one woman who could engage them in intellectual conversation of the highest order and in perfect English. The academics admired not only her analysis of the situation in the Eastern bloc and her knowledge of Western thought, but also her courage in confronting the oppressive regime.

Alena Hromádková, who died at the age of 80 at Eastertide this year, avidly absorbed every text she could lay her hands on, and relied on visiting experts to provide her with the latest findings in their subject. This capacity for discovery enabled her at the beginning of the 1980s to affiliate to *The Salisbury Review*, and to set about creating a samizdat edition in Czech.<sup>1</sup> (For those who have not yet come across it, ‘samizdat’ is the term for literature which cannot be published officially and so is copied and passed round within closed circles.) Once Alena became involved with the Jan Hus Foundation, it gave her great pleasure to put aside one folder of the laboriously typed script for the editor

himself, Sir Roger Scruton – and especially to converse with him in person when he joined the flow of visiting academics. Alena also wrote for other samizdat journals, and was greatly respected as one of the first signatories of Charter 77, and eventually one of its spokespersons.



Her life was made more difficult by the fact that from 1984 onwards she was, as an ‘organiser of the anti-university’, intensively followed by the secret police, even at the funeral of her mother. Moreover, a microphone was installed in the light fitting of the apartment below hers, so that all her conversations could be recorded. This undoubtedly led to some of the apparent failures of

communication originally attributed to Alena’s unworldliness.

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, Alena became involved in legislating for a new world of education, and in the mid-1990s she founded her own political party, the Democratic Union, in opposition to the economic policy of Prime Minister Václav Klaus, to show people an alternative right-wing principle based on tradition, Christianity, and respect for national movements. Eventually, she returned to teaching, but continued to write.

Alena was one of the most remarkable people I ever met. I first knew her as a colleague in connection with the visits of Western academics to the underground seminars. She soon became a personal friend. This was in spite of, or maybe because of, the fact that her intellect was far more comprehensive and the range of her reading much wider and deeper than mine. I could not even attempt to keep up with her knowledge of political science and sociology and could only sit and listen, venturing a word or two whenever our conversation touched familiar ground – sometimes a word of protest, for I came to realise that with all her logical grasp and ability to analyse political structures and systems, she often failed to see that other approaches or angles of view might be valid. When her view was opposed or resisted, she was bewildered and often deeply wounded.

This, however, did not affect her cooperation with the Jan Hus Educational Foundation. Involved from the beginning, she was a first point of call for nearly all the foreign lecturers visiting Prague. With her excellent English and comprehensive knowledge of politics she made an immediately positive impression, and when the visitors returned home they sang her praises. She was open, generous and kind, and was exceptionally perceptive, but also unworldly, and often unaware of practical realities: for example, on her first (and only) visit to America in the 1990s, she phoned me from Prague airport to say she had not been allowed to board the flight because, although her ticket was in order, she had no visa, as she had not known that such a thing was necessary.

She was happiest when out of reach of the secret police, at her cottage in the Eagle Mountains, bought in the 1970s as a

summer refuge for her mother. Isolated on the hillside with the landscape spread before her, she recovered from the stresses of life in Prague, from which she was separated by three train rides, one bus ride, and a walk of two or three kilometres. I used to spend a few days there with her every summer, days spent picking red currants and cherries in the garden, cooking on the wood-burning stove, and walking in the countryside, and that is how I shall remember her.

<sup>1</sup> In his obituary in *Konzervativní noviny* (online, 4 April 2024), Jan Cholínský writes:

*The samizdat selection from The Salisbury Review edited by Roger Scruton, was and still is the first attempt to understand the (artificially and violently destroyed) way of thinking and behaving, which, by relying on the major social institutions such as the family, school, church, morality and law, and by supporting organic and carefully structured growth from top to bottom and vice versa, had for generations created the prerequisites for the smooth development of civil society.*

*Barbara Day was head of the Jan Hus Foundation.*



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# Letter from Illiberal Budapest

*Gavin Duncan*

**H**ungary: An illiberal country located in Central Europe; known for Goulash, Paprika, Puskás, and Viktor Orbán; less known for opposition parties sponsored by international left-wingers; not known for Goulash really being a soup – you’re thinking of Pörkölt, which is a stew.

*Uborka szезon* – literal translation ‘cucumber season’ – is the Hungarian equivalent of the British ‘silly season’. Now autumn is upon us, and the parliamentarians have returned from holiday, we’re meant to feel reassured that reason has returned to her throne. Unfortunately, here in Budapest, given the Hungarian opposition’s general intellectual capacity, we’ve long been locked into a more-or-less perpetual silly season.

Members of the Hungarian opposition are united by two main characteristics: a desire to outdo others when dreaming up outrageously nefarious anti-Hungarian plots, and a fanatical, visceral hatred of the majority-supported government and *those that support it*. For the Hungarian electorate will insist on returning to parliament a government which recognises that their first duty lies, not with the EU, but the Hungarian nation. You’d have thought that at some point the opposition would discern that in slagging off the government’s supporters they are, in fact, slagging off the electorate. But they have sold their souls to the EU and the neoliberal dream of Hungarian émigré

and billionaire financier, George Soros, whose wide range of interests include, of course, the EU.

The EU and its allies in the mainstream liberal media are so desperate to remove Orbán that they have put their hopes in Péter Magyar, leader of Hungary’s largest opposition party, who they depict as leading a moral crusade against Orbán. Yet in Hungary, Magyar is better known for allegations, currently being investigated by the police, of drunken and disorderly conduct, and of making inappropriate advances towards teenage girls at a Budapest nightclub, together with allegations from his ex-wife, former justice minister Judit Varga, that he physically abused her. Magyar has accused the government of a smear campaign, but his reputation for statesmanship has been somewhat tarnished.

When I first arrived in Hungary, two things quickly struck me: that there was no such thing as economic planning, the done thing being to be make up economic policy on the cuff, forever robbing Péter to pay Pál, as it were; and that the socialists and liberals went out of their way to serve other nations, rather than their own. That all changed in 2010, when Viktor Orbán returned to the hot seat with a bold new plan: to serve the country and govern in the interests of the electorate. Orbán’s governments decided to honour their obligations to the electorate rather than anyone else. It might seem an obvious thing to do, but it was radical

thinking in Hungary at the time. Meanwhile, however, the European Commission under the leadership first of Jean-Claude Juncker and then Ursula von der Leyden was redefining itself, no longer as the guardian of the Treaties, but as a crusading force for the establishment of a European superstate, using tactics akin to those of the infamous East German internal security force, the Stasi.

The inevitable clash ensued, with the EU doing what it could to break the spirit of the Hungarians. Just as they sent in their bullies to punish Britain for daring to democratically decide to leave the club, they tried to punish the Hungarians. The tactics are brutal as they are straightforward: Remove Orbán from government and the coffers will be opened to you. The show trial court cases and ludicrous infringement proceedings will cease and you'll be left in peace.

The strategy had worked in calling Poland to heel, but Hungary is not Poland. And in no area have the Hungarians caused more outrage to their would-be EU masters than in that of illegal migration. Hungary has maintained the same stance since day one: We will not accept illegal migrants. Full stop. As far as the Hungarian government is concerned, illegal migration is potentially the biggest threat to Europe since the Ottoman expansion. Hungarians point out that the migrant crisis which truly exploded

in 2015 is none other than a battle to decide whether Europe can protect the results of its Christian-Judaeo roots against an invading multitude of Muslims. They know what they are talking about for it was the Hungarians who, in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, bore the brunt of the Muslim invasion of Europe, and

who saved Europe by repelling it. To a modern Hungarian, the parallels are depressingly similar, their sense of *déjà vu* compounded by the fact that those in the EU who encourage illegal migration seem wholly unaware of the continent's history and Hungary's part in it. Put simply, we have no desire to be faced with a tidal

wave of young men of fighting age, raised in countries where they've known violence from birth, violence which was inflicted or encouraged by the West, whose goal may be to destroy us from within.

Therefore, having witnessed the inability of the EU to remove unauthorised migrants from its territory, Hungary developed its own rules: that undocumented migrants are to be processed outside of Hungary. Anyone who wants to enter Hungarian territory must apply outside its borders and wait until a decision allowing their entry has been made. Not illogical, and strikingly reminiscent of the rules we all abide by when we travel internationally, namely that we are required to have a valid passport and visa. Yet the result was that the EU fined



Hungary €200 million.

Recent moves by Poland to control illegal migration have, however, evoked a very different response from the EU. Back in 2015 when the EU opened its borders to all and sundry, Poland's prime minister and leading Eurocrat, Donald Tusk, damned anyone who dared voice concern as a racist and a xenophobe, declaring himself a true friend of all migrants. But earlier this year, he executed an astonishing U-turn, stating that given the importance of maintaining national sovereignty – something he had hitherto considered unmentionable – Poland would suspend the right to asylum.

Crikey! Poland? That once conservative country which capitulated in the face of the EU's campaign of harassment and handed over control to the Eurocrats? It seems that the Poles have finally woken up to the damage that unmitigated migration is causing. Tusk himself pointed to the problems that Germany has been struggling with since opening its arms wide to an unending flow of Muslim migrants. Moreover, Tusk stated that he would *demand* that the EU recognise Poland's right to suspend the right to asylum – something that if it had come from Orbán would have prompted howls of anguish. And yet there was no fine, the EU even showing every sympathy for Poland's plight.

What warmed the EU's heart was that Tusk claimed Poland was under attack from a hybrid war organised by Putin and put into effect by his best friend in Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko. Putin was seeking to destabilise the EU by inviting illegal migrants to Russia and Belarus whereupon they were given a cheery wave and pointed in the direction of Poland. Once at the border, they claimed refugee status with the goal of being sent on to Germany to meet up

with their already-established brethren who were enjoying the benefits of Germany's welfare system.

Yet Hungarians have been stuck at the pointy end of the migration crisis since it all started with Angela Merkel's ill-judged summons to all and sundry who fancied a better life paid for by the contributions of others. Hungarians have not received a penny for the border fence they constructed to prevent migrants from entering Europe along one of the most popular routes. And now they face a €200 million fine with an added penalty, for good measure, of €1 million a day until they change their policy.

It is the scandalous double standards that upsets Hungarians the most. The Hungarian language doesn't lend itself to the flowery language of diplomacy that Tusk mastered when president of the European Council. When translated, Hungarian can shock the uninitiated. Hungarians say what they mean. And this is why Tusk himself is so offensive to them. Tusk uses his talent for doublespeak to secure for his country that which the plain-speaking Hungarians are denied.

However, the Hungarians are more than straight-talking; they are stubborn and persistent. The Ottomans occupied Hungary for 150 years, but they failed and left. The Soviets tried to tame the Hungarians and they failed too. Nor are the Hungarians stupid, as the number of Hungarian Nobel Prize winners testifies. My fellow Hungarians know full well that the EU is up to – and we also know cucumbers when we see them. We like the odds and relish the fight. Bring it on.

*Gavin Duncan is a freelance journalist based in Budapest.*

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# Why I am an Anarchist

*Will Franken*

**B**y the time this article is published, the 2024 US Election will be over and Americans, theoretically, will have had their proverbial say. Meanwhile, I will have sat this one out, as I have done with every US election in which I have been eligible to vote, save for my naïve flirtation with American and British politics in 2016, an impetuous decision of wrongheaded proportions I have regretted ever since. Perhaps it would be a grandiose act of self-justification to say that my troublesome political period was at least shorter than John Lennon's foray into radical activism, but there is some comfort to know that others have trod this road before me, be they coming from the left or from the right. 'Tis a far deeper venture to have tried and rejected a way of being than to cling desperately to a lie.' After all, I do not have a career that requires me to play the role of a conservative or a liberal. I am that apolitical mercenary enemy of society the ancients used to call an artist. With indiscriminating disdain, I am free to ridicule the victimhood mentality of those who still trade in identity politics or to lambast the algorithmically inspired persecution complex of faux macho brats whinging about 'cancel culture'.

I was recently asked, in a Radio 4 setting, why it was that I no longer supported Donald Trump or, more accurately, why I no longer cared one way or the other about the

outcome of any election, US or otherwise. My answer is one that I have been repeating for the past four years and has been equally unsatisfactory, I have consistently found, to both sides of the illusory political spectrum, because it is exclusively connected to the global lockdowns of 2020 and all the headline-infested nonsense that followed in their wake – from the rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence to the opportunistic rearming of the Cold War, all buoyed, of course, by the perennial histrionics over climate change.

Far more than Covid-19 ever was, the real sickness eating away at civilisation, a virus that has infected humankind ever since the time of Nimrod, is the corrosive plague of tyranny. Very few individuals are immune from the effects of this global pandemic, especially if they're not part of the colony of political and industrial disease-ridden bats that pollute the marketplace of human affairs. Without the wings of privilege to hold them aloft, many of the impoverished rats that constitute the world's workforce, their savings wiped out and their livelihoods destroyed by any number of purportedly caring experts, now have no greater political interest beyond fleeing the sinking ship of moral decrepitude and brainwashing deceit.

No successful tyranny, of course, can maintain itself indefinitely without first providing a fictitious and colourful veneer of freedom to delude its many victims

that choice still exists, and, to that effect, the internet, with its emotionally retarding emojis and instantaneous access to publication, has proved utterly invaluable. These days, a person can build an entire livelihood, especially online, declaring that Donald Trump is tantamount to Satan incarnate, on the one hand, or that careerist women like Kamala Harris are the source of all worldly evils, on the other; but call attention to the sheer recklessness of allowing a government of any party to declare certain jobs essential and others nonessential and you'll see how quickly the centrist left and the centrist right will unify to socially distance themselves from the real pariahs of planet Earth, the nonpolitical freethinkers. The established political classes, running the entire gamut from fake left to fake right and back again, would rather revel in the falsehoods of their own unquestioning modernity than give the slightest consideration to any individual who did not regard the consensus of the WHO in 2020 as irreproachable gospel.

This notwithstanding, they would also be the last to admit to, or perhaps even recognise, their own dogmatic religiosity. In the cartoonish thinking of entrenched political stooges, be they Labour or Conservative, Republican or Democrat, they are the ones imbued with a cosmopolitan secular wisdom, while anyone still possessing enough healthy cynicism to remember the axiom that politicians are naturally self-seeking liars is portrayed as a toothless hillbilly creationist. It's a lopsided game of marketing rhetoric that anyone possessing the PR capabilities of global leadership is bound to win. There is, though, a consolation prize to be had.

The losers in this schema, that is to say, the oft-touted ninety-nine percent, can always take to social media, doing free work on behalf of Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg, to argue over which stuffed shirt will do the best job at pretending to stick it to the man. For many Americans, incredulously, that remains Donald Trump, even despite the fact that Musk, one of the most recognisable bimbos in technocratic fashion with his airheaded artificial intelligence initiatives, has been recruited as the Republican's most high-profile cheerleader. When a friend to the working man's definition of a small business is a Fortune 500 company, it's time for the working man to look for different friends. These won't, of course, be found in Washington, Number 10, the European Parliament, or the United Nations, but, for a very brief period in 2016, the architects behind Brexit and the team behind Trump managed to con a sizeable number of voters, including, *mea culpa*, yours truly, that anomalies were possible.

Donald Trump's anti-globalist posturing or Boris Johnson's dunderheaded appeal to British national sovereignty seem grossly absurd in the light of the US and UK's acquiescence to the draconian uniformity demanded by UN officials in 2020. If the initial idea behind Brexit was to reject the meddling of unelected European bureaucrats in British affairs, and the motivation for the Make America Great campaign was to 'drain the swamp' in Washington of transnational cronyism, how quickly were both these movements exposed as nothing more than inconsequential, hypocritical jingoism when Johnson and Trump each kowtowed, along with all their ostensible leftist enemies, to the overreactive and

economically devastating globalist injunctions of the WHO.

Despite the evident squeamishness from Republicans, Democrats, Tories, and Labour supporters when I raise the question of the validity of these measures from recent history – perhaps with them imagining, as I explain myself, the sound of duelling banjos or the image of a flat earth – the logic behind my resultant disinterest in contemporary politics is unassailable. Prime ministerial or presidential candidates of any ideological stripe can huff and puff all they want about the preservation of democracy, outline vague schemes to help small businesses flourish, or prattle on about the worth and dignity of the individual worker, but when all of this can be superseded at any time, as it was in 2020, by an unelected global body of computer-modelling mandarins, the irrelevance of national leaders should be nakedly apparent to anyone still possessing a mind, heart, and soul. It doesn't matter where one calls home – Britain, America, France, China, Ukraine or, yes, even Russia. They are each puppet regimes to an unelected globalist superstructure that is equal parts communism and capitalism and one hundred per cent intrusively technocratic, programmatically dictating from on high with fascistic fervour on matters as general as the weather and as particular as individual health.

And yet, in spite of all this obvious chicanery, there seems to be something fatally tethered to the collective human condition that refuses to abandon this rigged game altogether. That is, too many people still believe that if you don't want your freedom threatened by soul-destroying socialism, you can vote for Republicans or Conservatives and if you don't want your freedom threatened by soul-destroying vulture capitalism, you can vote for Democrats or Labour. Never mind the fact that any substantive distinctions between the major political parties of today are virtually non-existent. Labour leader Keir Starmer is robbing old age pensioners of

heating allowances while, across the pond, Democrat and fellow prosecuting attorney Kamala Harris is admitting to owning a gun, with her running mate Tim Walz having recently participated in the aristocratic pastime of a pheasant hunt. Conservatives and Republicans, meanwhile, usually much quicker at sniffing out profit opportunities, have finally latched their lips around the ever-flowing teat of the climate change cash cow while the big bad bully boys of the faux free speech movement are just as ready as those they call snowflakes to boo-hoo when things don't go their way. Facing such an incomprehensible uni-party mishmash, it's impossible anymore to tell who's who and, instead of this being a detriment, it should be an epiphany, an



'oh no! It's the full force of the law!'

instructive reminder that the powers-that-be, first and foremost, are concerned with serving themselves.

In her controversial and most famous novel, 1974's *La Storia*, Italian author Elena Ferrante accurately observes that the well-known immobile principle of historical dynamics is '*agli uni il potere, e agli altri la servitu*' (to some, the power, and to all others, the servitude). Published during the period of modern Italian history known as the 'Years of Lead' (*Anni di piombo*), so-named for the bullets that went flying in the streets between the factions of the far-right and the far-left in a see-sawing tide of political terrorism lasting from 1969 to 1982, Ferrante's prose testament on the foolishness of looking to any movement as a defender of the rights of the ordinary man and woman was intellectually and artistically unfashionable, if not downright heretical, to a zeitgeist that was demanding every day for one to choose a side and stick with it, no matter what the degree of inconsistency or level of bloodshed involved. Nevertheless, Ferrante's assessment of history, what she calls in her subtitle a 'scandal that has endured for ten thousand years', is precisely that the few profit at the expense of the many. Very few authors before or since have been able to encapsulate as well as Ferrante the infantilism of a left-right horizontal outlook. Putting away childish things is synonymous with looking upwards, to all forms of state power, or discerning the common enemy of freedom lurking underneath every party-affiliated mask. In short, the only legitimate adult political doctrine is anarchism.

There was a time in the not-so-distant past when the elites of the world could rely

solely on the storybook mythologies of the divine right of kings or papal infallibility to secure their cherished positions, but those days, of course, are now long gone. In an age characterised by mindless materialism, mental health fetishisation, and computerised conformity, it's no longer possible to coerce populations in significant numbers to die for the bloodline of an inbred sovereign or some obscure canonical point of ecclesiastical law. Hence, the establishment powers have had to be far shrewder in their tactics than they have hitherto been.

For ancient tyrannies to progress to modern tyrannies, an alteration is needed first in their scope. Since individual nationhood has become such a laughable concept, globalism seems, to the untrained eye, a sophisticated alternative. Beyond its dubitable external aesthetic, though, the greatest advantage of controlling populations from a global perspective is that contemporary tyranny becomes, more than any other totalitarian regime of the past, geographically inescapable. Notwithstanding their far-reaching conquests, there still existed, in their day, even if one could not escape and reach them, other places on this planet outside of the Roman, Islamic, or British empires. The up-and-coming Caesars, Mohammads, and Queen Victorias of today, though, wouldn't dare tolerate any missing pieces to the global puzzle. Under the nebulous moniker of industrial progress, futuristic fascists have made their despotism complete, expanding the model of domination beyond the national and into the planetary, with their chief instruments being the global interconnectivity of the

internet and the subsequent intellectual, emotional, and spiritual retardation engendered and, post-2020, accelerated by enforced online living. Bearing this in mind, an easy pivot from here can be made into the other important alteration necessary for the maintenance and promulgation of worldwide proletarian enslavement, which is the phasing out of the alpha dictatorships of monarchy and papacy in favour of the beta fascism of pseudoscientific consensus and technological opportunism

Depressing as it is to observe, contemporary liberals are still more comfortable being humourless prudes, and present-day conservatives flagrantly sexist, racist, and xenophobic, than either would be at raising even the slightest objection to the holy scriptures of science and technology. Sure, the Vatican once amassed an incalculable amount of wealth setting itself up as the earthly interpreter of God's will, but, so the contemporary global propaganda goes, science and technology are purely altruistic pursuits. Pfizer and Microsoft are as humble and poor as St. Francis of Assisi or Mother Teresa and, although he may not have visited the leper colonies like his forebearer Father Damien, former Health Secretary Matt Hancock did take a £320,000 trip to the jungle in 'I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here!'

Four years later, of course, many would be happy to forget the embarrassing predicament in which their adherence to Covid regulations have left them, inadvertently exposing as they did the sheer disingenuousness of many of their stated principles. This aftermath, to be sure, is much more applicable to the nouveau conservatives of the alt-right than any

other political demographic. The nominal left hasn't shaken a proper fist against the state since the days of Abbie Hoffman, but trendsetting traditionalists like misogynist-in-chief Jordan Peterson and free speech huckster Piers Morgan, to name but a few examples, have carved out quite lucrative careers for themselves monetising the 'don't tell me what to do, say, or think' ethos of the reactionary right. Nevertheless, they, just like their pretend liberal counterparts, have infiltrated the minds of the impressionable with all the force of a cult, their unquestioning acolytes naively believing them to be butch bulwarks against sissy censorship. The fact remains, though, that there's true political incorrectness, and then there's schoolyard teasing, and never do the twain meet. In 2024, the quickest way to get censored on mainstream internet platforms is by questioning the legitimacy of climate change policies or Covid regulations. If, on the other hand, you want to present some half-baked thesis on why men represent order and women chaos or whinge about Meghan Markle hypnotising hapless Harry, why, there's always room in cyberspace for that.

Grim though it sounds, only two months into the unprecedented global lockdown, the May 2020 murder of George Floyd was, in fact, a godsend to both polarities of the stultifying spectrum, the free speech phoney and the do-gooder left, as everything once again, as if by magic, went back to race. Suddenly, nobody had to concern themselves with more universal questions such as why conservatives like Donald Trump or Boris Johnson and liberals like Justin Trudeau or Jacinda Ardern were enacting the exact same policies that would lead to the economic

destitution of millions in their respective countries. A lateral argument, from either the pro or con side, on things like Black Lives Matter or, for that matter, the transgender rights and Me Too movements, maintains and reinforces society in all its present algorithmic stupidity, whereas asking if the global lockdowns of 2020 were necessary in the first place is to simultaneously question the nonsensical nature of civilisation itself and all its political, religious, and cultural apparatus. If that's where your head is at after all the behavioural psychology from global, national, and municipal governments in 2020, congratulations. You may not have been left with a pot to piss in, but your capacities for logical thought and emotional intelligence have survived intact.

Unfortunately, though, it wasn't just the pubs and the restaurants so many were salivating to have reopened in 2021, but more so the preexisting inanity of all the pseudo-political discourse that has so obscenely tainted the current millennium. Imagine if either of the most extreme visions of a left-wing or a right-wing takeover being sold to us by media pundits, online commentators, and even brainwashed friends and relatives were to come to pass. In one, you have a continuous Pride parade of mind-numbing hedonism, and in the other you have a sexless procession of robust capitalist robots. Honestly, who in their right mind would want to fight for either outcome?

As misleadingly dangerous as it is, there is one solace to be had from the political playfighting of today, which is that it can occasionally be voyeuristically entertaining, proving an especially fertile ground for the creativity of a Juvenalian satirist like myself. For sheer amusement purposes, I watched the UK prime ministerial debate

in June and the Trump-Harris debate in September and the only thought I remember predominating in my mind on either occasion was how utterly old-fashioned, quaint and tragically hilarious seemed all the blather about democracy. Incredibly, there are an overwhelming number of people who personally lived through the engineered upheavals of 2020 that still think any of this stems from a place of actual sincerity. If one's definition of democracy is limited to a world in which Joe Rogan can interview Donald Trump on Spotify, or Kamala Harris can solicit donations using internet spam, then, yes, the institution is alive and kicking in a vibrant twenty-first century West. Anything is permissible so long as it's understood that the more important existential questions – over who is allowed to go to work, what parts of the human face may be seen, or which hastily produced experimental medicine can unlock the God-given gift of interpersonal contact – stay the prerogatives of an unelected superstate. For that independently-minded remnant who made the greater democratic sacrifice of opting out altogether from any trendy global governmental guidance, as I can avow from personal experience, the road was costly, lonely, and maddening. No political party or cultural movement that ignores this dissenting demographic could possibly provide any succour.

Thankfully, though, I have now learned my lesson. Except for one foolhardy chapter in my life, I have always been an anarchist. In 2016, regrettably, I played in the sandbox with all the other children, only to come out covered in shit.

*Will Franken is a comedian.*

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# The Righteousness of Liberals

*James Monteith*

**K**eir Starmer's acceptance of gifts from wealthy party donors in the run-up to the general election, although not illegal, was clearly ill advised and brought him and his party into disrepute. One MP, Rosie Duffield, even quit the Labour party over it. As well as smacking of corruption, it reeked of hypocrisy, as Sir Keir has prided himself on adopting a high moral tone as leader of the opposition, as when he castigated Boris Johnson and his wife for using donor money to redecorate Number 10 – 'an incredibly serious matter', he pronounced.

Yet Sir Keir genuinely could not see that he had done anything wrong, not even that his actions might be misconstrued. For if one is a progressive left liberal, one's beliefs come ready cloaked in virtue and righteousness. To believe in the coming of the kingdom, where humans will be perfected and all injustice and oppression eliminated, and moreover to be actively involved in the struggle to bring this about, is more than sufficient to confer virtue and set a person on the path to beatification. And so long as one's actions are motivated by these noble ends, one's spirit suffused by the righteous light, almost any personal behaviour in the here and now is justified. It is a case of the end justifying the means, or breaking eggs to make the omelette. So, how dare anyone impute base motives to Sir Keir, a man who has played such a prominent role in

the struggle for social justice, and whose handsome remuneration, first as a QC, later as head of the Crown Prosecution Service and Director of Public Prosecutions, is merely a measure of his contribution.

Conservatives, on the other hand, have traditionally held a very different world view. For them, neither human nature nor society can be perfected, and any attempt to do so will produce not a utopia but a hell on earth, as history amply demonstrates. We should certainly try to make improvements where we can, but the struggle to curb vice and promote virtue, to curb our selfish desires in the interest of the common good, is a never-ending one, because human beings are forever tainted by original sin. That is why customs and traditions, social norms, and religious beliefs play such an important role in holding societies together and keeping individuals on the straight and narrow. As Jonhan Haidt notes in *The Righteous Mind*, his perceptive analysis of how conservatives and liberals come to hold opposite moral standpoints, conservatives see societies as organically evolved communities centred on families and institutions, bound by shared beliefs, values, loyalties and affections – whereas liberals see them as communities of individuals optimised by design, where opportunities for all are equalised.

Conservatives and liberals both want a better world. But it is precisely because they have an acute sense of our limitations

and imperfections, that conservatives are more tolerant of the weaknesses of others, including those whose beliefs and opinions differ from their own. There is even anecdotal evidence that they are more personally generous and considerate of others, and less likely to bear grudges. Left liberals, on the other hand, are notoriously more intolerant than conservatives of friends, partners and family members who hold different viewpoints. Say what you like to a conservative, they might laugh or groan, but they are unlikely to take offence. Do the same to a liberal, and you may well end up being prosecuted for perpetrating a hate crime.

Thomas Sowell argues in *Intellectuals and Society* that it is a case of two conflicting visions of society: the tragic (conservative) vision, according to which the imperfections of society reflect the inherent imperfections of human beings, and the (left liberal) vision of ‘the anointed’, according to which all social problems, inequalities and injustices can be cured by a ‘morally anointed intellectual elite’. For its adherents, the latter vision is inevitably accompanied by the sense that one is on a moral mission, ‘a higher moral plane’, morally superior to ordinary mortals. The unfortunate result is that those who disagree are cast not as opponents to be engaged in debate, but morally

reprehensible defectives, as enemies to be vanquished – as when Hilary Clinton and Joe Biden characterised Trump supporters as ‘deplorables’ and ‘garbage’. Yet, according to empirical studies cited by Sowell, it was American conservatives, not liberals, who donated a higher percentage of their incomes (which were slightly smaller than those of liberals) to philanthropic endeavours, more of their time as volunteers, and even more blood.

The progressive liberal concern for humanity, or ‘the other’, or even ‘the other in his alterity’, is essentially an intellectual abstraction – the property of a system rather than a community of people bound by personal relationships and obligations. Causes of all kinds can inspire acts of self-sacrifice and generosity, as when a benefactor makes a charitable donation, or a freedom fighter sacrifices his life for the greater

good. But it is only those closest to us, our flesh and blood neighbours, who can inspire acts of personal kindness and generosity. And too often, the abstract pursuit of social justice, of equality or equal opportunity, comes at the expense of personal obligations to others – as Karl Marx exemplified in his shabby, immoral treatment of those closest to him. Dostoevsky expressed this memorably in the *Brothers Karamazov* in his anecdote of the doctor who complains,



‘where did you hide your money before voting Labour?’

‘the more I love humanity in general the less I love man in particular’, and conversely, ‘the more I hate men individually the more I love humanity’.

I was often reminded of this on my visits to London’s Institute of Education, a brutalist concrete block in Bloomsbury devoted to the creation of the world commune, the abolition of all forms of oppression, injustice, inequality, and marginality – for ‘abstract people in an abstract world’, as Sowell put it. A powerful sense of virtue and righteousness emanated from its anointed priests as they struggled – intellectually rather than physically – for liberation and social justice against the dark forces of conservatism. Yet personal interactions were curiously lacking in warmth, kindness, and generosity. Anyone late for a seminar was glared at as if they were disturbing a sacred rite. Once or twice, I had a young child in tow and was looked at as if I were a drunkard who had wandered in from the street. Laughter and good humour were also in short supply, no doubt because people were terrified of using ‘the wrong word’ or unwittingly committing a microaggression. The occasional attempts to raise a laugh were puerile. And those in lesser roles seemed to have a sullen or hostile air about them, attributable no doubt to their heightened sense of being an oppressed or marginalised victim. A polite request for a coffee at the shop might be interpreted as an act of capitalistic exploitation. Yet at Buckingham University, independent and conservative leaning, the atmosphere was relaxed, good humoured, and intimate. One felt that one was part of a genuine community, in which everyone – professor, secretary or cleaner – belonged.

Where it all takes a sinister turn is when

left liberals seek to shut down free speech, institute thought crimes by criminalising ‘hate speech’, and cancel their opponents, branding them as racists, fascists, Nazis, Islamophobes, misogynists, reactionaries etc. for daring to express unorthodox or illiberal views. The next five years (if it lasts that long) will be tough going. We will have to bide our time and choose our words with care. Speakeasies, monastic communities and remote islands may be the order of the day for those of us who want to speak our minds. If things get rough, we may even need to act dumb, pretend to be mentally ill. Incriminating books may need to be hidden away and pictures veiled.

But left liberals’ intolerance of others, their smug self-righteousness, is also a rich source of amusement, as they are so easy to wind up. Michel Houellebecq does this brilliantly in his novels, his characters causing outrage by their blissful ignorance of bourgeois liberal sensibilities. The mention of Donald Trump is enough to trigger a seizure. A liberal colleague, unaware of my more robust opinions, confided that since Trump had been elected, she could no longer listen to the news: ‘I cannot bear it ... it’s just like Brexit – all those *stupid* people’. I tried to look sympathetic, and not to laugh. And I cannot wait for Starmer’s visit to Washington, accompanied by David Lammy and Ed Miliband. Lammy, of course, described Trump as ‘a neo-Nazi sociopath’ and ‘a tyrant in a toupee’; but Miliband, not to be outdone, described him as ‘a racist, misogynistic, self-confessed groper’. Starmer looks ill at ease at the best of times. The press conference should be a scream.

*James Monteith is a writer.*

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# Eternal Life

## *Always Christmas and Never Winter*

*Rod Hacking*

In the first of the Narnia Chronicles, C S Lewis wrote of life under the White Witch as ‘always winter and never Christmas’. In the shops, however, it has seemed to be ‘always Christmas and never winter’ since at least September.

In the life of the Christian church, Christmas does not begin until Christmas Day, the day when most people think it has come to an end. Inevitably some churches anticipate the great feast of the Nativity and join in the festivities long before the day itself, putting up Christmas trees and lights, and having their carol services before the day arrives. But it is hard to be too critical. One of my former rural parishes had a tradition that the Christmas Carol Service should only take place after the arrival of Christmastide, which meant that Christmas fell quite flat and hardly anyone came; whereas the other parish in the group held theirs on the Sunday before Christmas and it was always packed out. The Orthodox churches, by contrast, are much stricter in their observation of the period before Christmas, which they call the Nativity Fast. As its name suggests, this is regarded as a period of strict fasting, and in my experience of both Russian and Greek communities, it is taken seriously by clerics and laity alike, lasting six weeks from 15 November.

For most people, Advent means a treat for children, a calendar containing one chocolate for each day – though I once saw an adult version with a small bottle of spirit behind each window. Thirty years ago, each window revealed a biblical quote looking

forward to the celebration of the Incarnation; nowadays, however, most Advent calendars are dissociated altogether from their religious origins and celebrate pop celebrities or football teams. This is also the case for other ‘notable days’ of the year, the result of the Americanisation of our life. Halloween is the worst example with its ‘Trick or Treat’ in which children are encouraged to dress up as devils and make a nuisance of themselves at our front doors. But there is also Father’s Day – other family members also have their days – a complete misunderstanding of the purpose of Mothering Sunday, first by the Americans, and now by the British.

I have been known in my former parishes to scare the living daylight out of a congregation on the Sunday before Advent by loudly exclaiming ‘Wake up!’ at the beginning of my sermon – a reference to J S Bach’s *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, first performed in Leipzig in 1731. The cantata was composed for the 27th Sunday after Trinity, which in the Church of England was always traditionally known as Stir-up Sunday from the opening words of the prayer of the week, or collect, ‘Stir up, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people’, which reminded housewives to make the Christmas pudding and invite all in the house to help stir it.

Sadly, the liturgists decided to abandon the Book of Common Prayer in this regard, replacing it with the Catholic celebration of Christ the King – though they allowed it as an after-communion prayer, or as I would call it, an afterthought. The reality is that our wills

need constant stirring-up to attend to God and to expressions of love to those about us, not just for ‘helping lame dogs over a stile’, as Michael Stancliffe, Dean of Winchester, once put it.

The Prayer Book collects are gems of faith. They derive their name from the fact that they gather the people’s prayers, and because they draw together the Epistle and Gospel for the day. Many we owe to the genius of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, burned at the stake under Queen Mary (they knew how to deal with failed archbishops in those days), some being his own translations from the Latin expressed in prose that has never been bettered.

Advent is a wonderful season and the hymns of the four Sundays contain some of the very best of the year. ‘O Come, O Come, Emmanuel’ has its origins in the days of Charlemagne. According to the Prayer Book, clergy are to pray the collect for Advent Sunday at least twice each day, at Matins and Evensong, in the season leading up to Christmas, but modern services do not make this requirement, which is a great loss.

This year, Advent begins on 1 December and the first chocolate may be eaten, properly this time within the season itself. But few of those indulging, whether children or adults, will ever know what Advent is really all about. In Primary Schools, Christmas will already have arrived and preparations been made for the school nativity play, which mums and grandmas can then take photos of with their phones. I must confess that I have played my part in this, having once had a church school within my purview. Once I had an ox that fainted midperformance. But my favourite nativity play was in Leeds, where Mary turned to Joseph and said, ‘I’m glad you’re here: Jesus has been a right little bugger today’.

In Salisbury, the cathedral keeps its Christmas trees up until 2 February, which

mystifies those who do not know that in the Church calendar, Christmastide lasts until the 40<sup>th</sup> day – the Feast of the Purification of Mary, known commonly as Candlemas. Some take their Christmas decorations down on Boxing Day, and some on 5 January, but it is certain that Easter eggs will be available in the shops on 26 December. Hot cross buns are, of course, on sale all the year round.

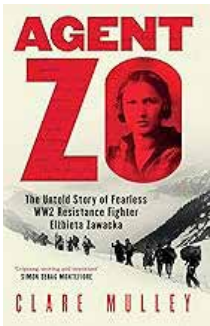
All this presents clergy with a quandary. Do they go along with the secular celebration of Christmas with its climax on Christmas Day, or hold firm to Advent by allowing no flowers in church and certainly no carols in anticipation. On one Christmas Eve I was called early by a family whose baby was dying and I sat with them as she died. Then, minutes before the Midnight Service, with over two hundred gathered for the great celebration, someone arriving at the back of the church had a massive heart attack and died. For the congregation, the wished-for fantasy had suddenly become a reality and I had to change my planned sermon and preach extemporaneously on the birth day of the crucified God. That is why, to this day, I endeavour to keep Advent properly, as a time of preparation and waiting, and I certainly will pray twice a day the Advent collect:

*Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever.*

Rod Hacking’s book *The Waiting Room* is available from Amazon

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## Arts and Books



### Fighting Hitler and Stalin

*Jane Kelly*

**Agent Zo: The Untold Story of Fearless WW2, Resistance Fighter Elzbieta Zawacka** Clare Mulley, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2024, £22.

A map at the start of the book makes you shudder, showing a route taken by ‘Agent Zo’ Elzbieta Zawacka, across occupied Europe to Britain by train, then back to Poland dropped from an RAF Halifax bomber. Her first drop, after training at an airfield outside Manchester, was the only time she felt real fear. If she survived it she knew that the Gestapo were hunting her across occupied Poland. Her younger sister Klara had been arrested a year earlier and vanished, her brother Egon had been transported to Auschwitz, where he would die. She had no idea where her parents were or if they were still alive. ‘Yet,’ as the author says, ‘having started the war digging anti-tank ditches and making petrol bombs to throw at enemy forces in the face of the Soviet advance, she was not about to give up on her mission because of Nazi German terror.’

With extraordinary detail and vivid

historical empathy, Mulley emphasises the bravery and determination of women. ‘Polish women were among the first to take up arms during the Second World War,’ she writes, ‘While women in Britain volunteered on the home front, in Poland that was immediately the front line.’ About 40,000 women would join the Polish Home Army, making it the largest resistance force in occupied Europe. Women could not join armed units but were, ‘perceived as ordinary, modest, properly unnoticed,’ Zo noted, which could be useful, but the lack of official recognition also held them back. She was a ‘born soldier’ but could never officially be one. While serving your country, ‘you have to fight for women’s rights,’ she argued. Writing in 1992 she complained that, ‘Female readers are surprised to find war literature almost completely silent on the participation of women in the underground struggle... a falsification of history.’

This is no woke distortion of history, and not just about setting it straight about the bravery of women; when Zo died in 2009, two months short of a hundred, her life had been at the heart of a century of Polish history. Over 3,000 people paid their respects to her coffin draped in a Polish flag. After 1945 her resistance work had continued defiantly against Russia. She was in the thick of struggling for national identity from start to finish, participating in the ten-day siege of Lwów in 1939 and the 1944 Warsaw Uprising right through to the Solidarity movement of the 1970s.

In the war her main work was in the overseas communication section of the

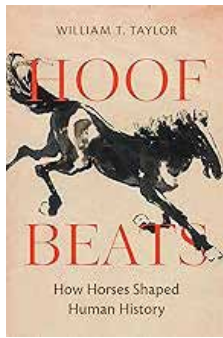
Home Army which meant extensive travel across occupied Europe. For those with a particular interest in that aspect of the war, the story is replete with operational detail. The heroism and tragedy of those involved are deftly woven into the narrative. She also gives vivid accounts of life in wartime Warsaw, London, Paris, and Berlin. The bigger forces shaping the conflict are also well drawn; there's detail on the wartime relationship between the British and Polish governments, as well as the duplicity of the Soviets which Colin Gubbins, head of SOE described as, 'A treachery rarely equalled in history.' The immediacy of the writing is remarkable. As the Red Army advanced through the rubble of Warsaw, after deliberately sitting out the destruction of the city on the other side of the river, it became clear that Poland was going to be abandoned to a second terrible fate.

Many women would have given up but Agent Zo, who became a maths teacher, and her surviving friends spent the next fifty years risking their liberty and their lives again to defend the possibility of Polish freedom, something tasted only briefly between the wars, and to challenge the false propaganda put out by the puppet government in Warsaw lapped up by many on the Left in Britain. Between 1944 and 1956 around 300,000 Poles were arrested; '6,000, including war heroes' like Witold Pilecki who had volunteered to be sent to Auschwitz to try to organise resistance there, were executed. Many people simply 'disappeared;' about 20,000 died in communist prisons up to 1963. In 1951 Zo failed a new teacher's exam, based on Marxist theory, and received a ten-year sentence, suspected for being a spy because of her time in London during the war, commuted to five years after the

death of Stalin. On release she was allowed to work as a nightwatchman. The book includes a photo of a woman doctor, one of Zo's close colleagues, given a twelve-year sentence for, 'Hostility to the regime.' Many people now know little about this and there have always been people willing to deny the facts. The book also describes what it was like to work with Solidarity in the 1970s when the whole Soviet edifice was tottering but hanging onto power.

Zawacka appears as a remarkable and difficult character. She was not impressed with the Polish 'Sixth Bureau' in London, who received secret information from Poland and was so blunt about the way the section was being run, she 'Unwittingly squandered the good will of the men who had held her in awe.' This isn't a feminist hagiography but a fleshed-out biography of a real woman. Mulley's work is accessible and it comes with four pages of photos, including a charming shot of Sue Ryder as a FANY, maps, bibliography, footnotes, an index, and a brilliant concluding essay, her 'Note on Sources' which describes her research and what she saw in current day Poland. It gives a picture of Mulley herself, another determined woman, diligently creating a balanced testimony to commemorate the courageous life of another.





# Humanity's best Friends

*Celia  
Haddon*

**Hoof Beats: How Horses Shaped Human History**, William T Taylor, University of California Press, £25.

We ate horses before we rode them. In Boxgrove, Sussex, a group of early human ancestors ambushed a mare, expertly cut her up, possibly picnicking on slices of warm meat before taking the best of the carcass and hide back to their camp. That was almost half a million years ago. The later *Homo sapiens* in Europe and North America continued to hunt and eat horses until the end of the Ice Age though rapid warming then drove horses in America to extinction. And, of course, eight European countries still do eat horsemeat.

So it was by giving food, clothing and bone tools that horses first shaped human history, the subtitle of *Hoof Beats*. Sheep, goats and cattle were domesticated as food animals well before horses, and horse meat remained a food gained by hunting not farming for a much longer time. Indeed, cattle, not horses, were the first transport animals to pull wheeled carts and donkeys the first choice for carrying loads and perhaps people.

In war, donkeys and onagers became the first animals used for conflict, with a 2,600 BC illustration showing a four-wheeled

donkey cart trampling the enemy under their hooves. It was the invention of the chariot, drawn by two animals and with only two wheels, that drew horses into domestication. Driving wild horses was safer than riding them. They could run faster than donkeys or cattle and unlike donkeys thrived in the colder areas of the Steppes.

The invention of the bit and bridle was the next step towards the modern human horse relationship. Cattle, donkeys and onagers had been driven using a ring in the lip just as bulls today are still handled by a ring in the nose. The bit in the mouth, with a noseband, gave much more control, allowing a driver to slow down or steer the horses with greater effectiveness. Like the invention of the motor car, horse-drawn chariots spread rapidly across Asia and into Europe. Every rich man had to have one and the elite were often buried with their prestige horses and chariots ready for the afterlife. The tomb of Tutankhamun included six imported chariots, tack and even blinkers to stop the horses being distracted from looking towards the side.

In war, chariots provided mobile platforms for throwing weapons and quick transport for fighters. Chariots helped the Hittites to defeat the kingdom of old Babylon and the Hyksos to invade Egypt. The beginnings of Greek civilisation may have begun with chariot-driving peoples invading from Anatolia, and the palace frescos at Mycenae show horses and chariots. Charioteers built new empires and, as the author comments, 'in this way horses helped build the first inklings of a truly globalized world'.

Horse-drawn chariots also found their way on to the Mongolian Steppe, where nomads were already herding flocks of sheep and cattle. To find exactly when horses became

domesticated there, archaeologists had a bit of luck. The retreating snow on a Mongolian mountain revealed a trimmed horse hoof dated around 1,400 BC. The horse culture of the steppes had arrived. Burial mounds included sacrificed horses, the heads with a pair of hooves, and in some sites there were hundreds, even thousands, of these equine tombs. The remains revealed that these horses were still being eaten, because the most succulent bits were missing, but the shape of the skull nasal bones showed that they had been bridled and driven before being sacrificed.

Evidence of riding was next to turn up in the archaeological record when a pair of trousers, reinforced to prevent soreness in the crotch area, were discovered in the desert cemeteries of Western China. There was also something a bit like a saddle pad, as well as balls and sticks that looked as if they might be an ancient version of polo equipment. Then in Mongolia archaeologists found a slightly earlier 112 bronze age carving of a mounted rider. What is now the modern human relationship with horses, one of riding, was finally emerging in the first millennium BC.

Chariots spread among the aristocracy of Shang dynasty China, but it may have been a relative scarcity of ridden horses among the Shang, that allowed the riders of the Zhou culture in the Steppes to topple the Shang and become the longest lasting dynasty of China. The first cavalry unit consisted of a pair of ridden horses, with one rider controlling the horse and the other wielding the weapons. But single riders, both steering and fighting, soon took over, shaping the world's cavalry forces for the next two thousand years.

The early possession of horses may have helped establish a wealthy elite (not unlike

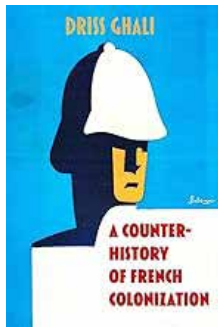
today's racehorse owners and foxhunters) among the Steppe people and a high frequency of women in warrior graves suggested a non-gendered cavalry! Riding kit was being developed on the grasslands too. Horses buried in wealthier tombs had metal snaffle bits, gilded bridles, and exotic headdresses. The males were gelded and there was evidence of veterinary care with the extraction of teeth that might interfere with the bit. Saddles were prevented from slipping by a crupper round the tail and a girth strap on the chest.

But the biggest jump forward in kit was the invention of stirrups. Alexander the Great had ridden Bucephalus without them as he swept across the known world from Greece to India. And when the Parthian cavalry archers defeated the Roman general Crassus in 53 BC, neither side had stirrups. The archers, who perfected the tactic of galloping away only to turn and shoot their arrows as they retreated, had only their thigh muscles to keep them from falling off their horses.

Stirrups first appeared on the buried terracotta models found in Chinese and Korean tombs some four centuries later. But they were not found in pairs. Just a single stirrup appeared on a model horse's left flank, suggesting that these proto-stirrups may have been merely an aid to mounting. It was the discovery of iron stirrups in pairs in a Mongolian tomb around the same date that suggested that stirrups, as we now know them, were an invention by the horsemen of the Steppes.

William T Taylor is well qualified to write this book. He has specialised in equine archaeology at the University of Colorado Museum and has, with the help of others, dug many of the ancient tombs that he describes

in his book. That horses, both collectively and individually, have shaped human history cannot be disputed. They have also had, and perhaps still have, a symbolic importance to humans. Why else would we still be able to gaze at the skeleton of Napoleon's horse, Marengo, in the Army Museum or visit the tomb of Wellington's grey, Copenhagen, at Stratfield Saye?



## To Civilise the Natives

*Alistair  
Miller*

**A Counter-history of French Colonization,**  
Driss Ghali, Vauban Books, 2024, £17.99.

Driss Ghali, the ‘Moroccan Éric Zemmour’, burst onto the French political-literary-media scene last year with his incendiary *Français, ouvrez les yeux !* He was not the first to argue that the combination of mass immigration and Islam would destroy France, but coming from a Muslim of Moroccan origin, his uncompromising stance and outspoken defence of French civilization continue to make waves. His latest book, *A Counter-history of French Colonization*, published in English by Vauban Books, is a worthy and timely follow-up that makes its British counterparts seem tame.

Driss Ghali, a Franco-Moroccan whose great-grandfather fought against the French during their conquest of Morocco, is no

apologist for French colonialism. His aim is merely to offer ‘a dispassionate overview’, to ‘turn the page’, and get on with addressing the challenges of today, foremost among which is to save France from the preachers of colonial repentance and victimhood – those who ‘have never seen a colonist in their lives’ or ‘experienced even a single day of foreign occupation’, yet would destroy France in the name of a half-baked multicultural dream.

Recent years have seen a spate of books that seek to challenge the prevailing narrative that the British empire was the greatest crime in world history – with Niall Ferguson’s *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* and Nigel Biggar’s *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning* prominent among them. The interest of Ghali’s analysis of French colonialism to British readers is threefold. First, the French experience of empire building makes for an illuminating comparison with the British. Second, Ghali’s perspective is invaluable because as a Franco-Moroccan who loves France and yet is also a Sufi Muslim, he is uniquely well placed to rise above the standard victim-oppressor narrative. And third, Ghali’s analysis of the phenomenon of reverse colonization – mass immigration from France’s former African colonies combined with an official doctrine of multiculturalism – is highly pertinent to us in Britain. Indeed, the situation in France provides a foretaste of what may be in store for us here.

Ghali begins by describing what life was like in the Maghreb, the north-western portion of the African continent centred on Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria *before* the French arrived – the essential starting point for any serious analysis. For the Maghreb was no Garden of Eden despoiled by the arrival

of the French; it was ‘a wretched deathtrap’ marred by scandalous poverty, oppression, brutality, and injustice. There were ‘tiny pockets of civilization’ inhabited by scholars and bourgeois, mostly exiles from Andalusia. But for the mass of the population, life was an agony of ‘the most abject backwardness’ and constant torment by ‘scarcity and filth’. People lived in fear of disease, for which there was no cure or treatment. Governance ‘was synonymous with plunder, injustice, and violence’. Security could only be bought by pleasing the *caïd*, the local tribal chief. Tax was merely a form of extortion. Women were merchandise. Highway bandits infested travel routes. Rival tribes struggled incessantly for land. To seize the possessions of others ‘was not a crime, but proof of superiority’. The battle for survival engendered brutality, aggressiveness, and belligerence – a world where there was ‘no place for the kind and decent’, for they would never survive. And all the while, the caravans arrived from the Sahara ‘loaded with human cargo: black children, black females, and black males who had been castrated along the way’. Such was the myth of a lost paradise.

In this tribal society, there could be no progress, development, or improvement. For there was no point in working and accumulating when a more powerful neighbour could seize everything in an instant. People lived from hand to mouth, and warfare was the accepted way of life. And yet, unencumbered by central authority or law enforcement, the individual was free – that is, so long as he was strong, had loyal allies, and could fight. It was, in short, for better or for worse, a world that was ripe for colonization.

The impetus for the French colonization

of Africa, which is the focus of Ghali’s book, was drawn from many sources, including a nostalgia for the lost empire of the *Ancien Régime*. But foremost was the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to Prussia in 1871. France had been ‘amputated’ and desperately needed a means of restoring its pride. It was ironically the republican left who led the way in promoting colonization as a remedy and who outlined its aims: to increase France’s economic power, to remain a great nation on the world stage, and to civilize primitive peoples. France must, in the words of Jules Ferry, ‘spread [her] influence across the world and carry with her wherever she can her language, her mores, her flag, her genius’.

Conquest and subsequent pacification proceeded quickly and efficiently – from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, in the Maghreb, to French West Africa centred on Dakar in Senegal, to French Equatorial Africa centred on Brazzaville in the Congo – aided by a divided tribal opposition. The problem was that there was no plan for what to do after, and no thought had been given to what France’s civilizing mission might entail. Even if there had been a plan, a roadmap, there were minimal resources, capital or human, available to implement and administer it. French industry had little interest in investing in colonies that lacked resources and whose populations were impoverished. And French people had little desire to settle in territories ravaged by disease and scorching climates – the coastal strip of Algeria proving the exception, leading to Algeria becoming France’s only settler colony.

The baleful result in France’s African colonies was a dual or ‘ghetto’ economy: a small and modern European sector complete

with model farms centred on the European quarters of the major city, and a vast rural backwater of subsistence agriculture, poverty and destitution, left largely untouched. Foreign visitors may have been dazzled by the Hanoi Opera House and the Hermitage district in Marrakech, but they never saw ‘the dilapidated native cities’, or the wretched state of the countryside. Even more scandalous was France’s neglect of education, of both the masses and the elites. By the time of independence, the levels of illiteracy were 87 per cent in Morocco and 85 per cent in Algeria – hardly the accomplishment of a civilizing mission.

Yet despite this record of neglect and inaction, there were achievements. If France ‘did not usher the natives into Paradise’, then it did at least ‘extricate millions of them from Hell’. France ended the slave trade, releasing countless captives, slaves and hostages. This, Ghali reminds us, ‘is called progress’ and ‘like it or not, it does honour to the civilizing mission’. It ended corporal punishment and torture – at least in so far as it was practised by the natives. It liberated the Jews. It ended banditry and tribal raids, bringing peace that allowed local trade to thrive. It conferred territorial unity within clear borders, where there had been none – the essential pre-condition for modern statehood and governance. And although resources were severely stretched, France brought clinics, hospitals, laboratories and medical schools where none had existed before. Above all, its doctors invented tropical medicine and waged war on the diseases that afflicted the lives of so many. When Madagascar gained independence in 1960, it was free from plague, cholera, smallpox and typhoid fever.

Ghali does not spare us the grisly crimes

of colonialism. From tortures practised in detention centres in Indochina that ‘make one sick to describe’; to the euphemistically termed *services*, or compulsory labour, which reached a low point in the construction of the Congo-Ocean railway, stretching 600 kilometres from Brazzaville to the Atlantic coast, on which an estimated 20,000 died; to forced labour for private concession holders, who could have you summarily executed, using dynamite, if you failed to meet your target; to the abominable treatment of coolies, slaves in all but name, who were exported from Indochina to plantations in the Pacific. That the worst atrocities were often committed by native auxiliaries does not ‘alleviate French guilt’. The best that can be said is that colonial crimes were no worse than those perpetrated after independence by local rulers against their own people.

Decolonization was for the most part peaceful, almost ‘a formality’, largely because France had little to lose in most of its colonies – indeed, many of its former African colonies willingly chose post-independence collaboration with France, leading to the inauguration of *Françafrique*; but it was bloody in Algeria and Indochina, whose wars of liberation are well documented elsewhere. Ghali merely makes the point that native peoples sided with the French as often as they did with the liberationists, and that in Algeria, the National Liberation Front killed more Muslims than it did Europeans (the ratio was 10 to 1). It was not a case of collaborators versus patriots, for both loved their country and risked their lives to defend it. Both sides engaged in ‘nameless cruelty’, France bringing added shame on itself by abandoning those who had been loyal to its cause – most notably the *harkis* – to their fate.

Ghali argues that ‘by the time peace was signed, all debts had been paid’ and the page ‘should have been turned on the past’. This is what happened in Indochina, which despite the appalling suffering it endured in its colonial wars, first against the French and then the Americans, ‘got down to work instead of worshipping its scars’, advancing and ‘instilling hope in its youth’. Algeria, by contrast, descended into an orgy of resentment directed at its former colonial masters, excusing its own failures, which include squandering its oil wealth, instead of taking responsibility for them.

Indeed, the post-independence story of all France’s former colonial possessions, except possibly for Morocco, is much the same: the failure to reap the rewards of economic progress and modern statehood. For Ghali, it is a case of the return of the old demons: tribalism, gross inequality, endemic corruption, and religious fanaticism. Since the 1970s, ‘Rabat, Algiers, Tunis, Fez, Constantine, and many other cities have become miniature Calcuttas’. The problem is essentially civilizational. French colonialism failed because it failed in ‘moralizing or civilizing the human being by making him more honest, gentler, and more educated’ – it failed, in short, to ‘create a new man’. In Indochina, by contrast, there was a superior bedrock of civilization to draw on.

Does this mean that if France had had the resources and the time, and managed somehow to succeed in its civilizing mission, its colonization of Africa would have been justified? Here, Ghali is ambivalent. On the one hand, he argues that the theft of a people’s sovereignty can never be justified; on the other, that if France had only trained its administrators (assuming the necessary resources, monetary and human, had existed)

to respect local populations, to speak their languages and appreciate their cultures, and to engage as partners in a shared vision to mutual benefit, then things could have been different.

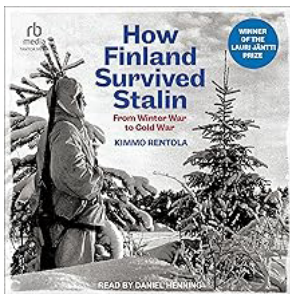
A useful point of reference here for Ghali might have been the late nineteenth-century Meiji restoration in Japan, which it is often argued serves as a model for a country transforming and modernizing itself without the need for colonial oppression or domination. Yet there were two pre-conditions for the social and economic transformation of Japan: the centralised power and authority needed to enforce radical change; and the willingness to import and implement Western political, social and economic ideals. Neither of these is present in Africa. There is the civilizational dilemma.

Ghali concludes by considering the legacy of colonialism in France – the reverse colonization that has taken the form of the mass immigration of millions of Africans, many of whom owe political and cultural allegiance to their countries of origin. Essentially, he argues, there is an unholy alliance between the elites of North and South. The French elite benefits from an influx of cheap labour and the remaking of French society into something ‘half-way between California and India’ – a scam made ‘easier to swallow’ by its promotion of ‘the multicultural dream’, a quasi-religious doctrine that cannot be questioned, and which is fuelled by the supposed need for repentance over colonial crimes. Meanwhile, the elites of the South benefit from an annual tribute in the form of the tens of billions of Euros sent by immigrants to their families back home – money that is sometimes earned, sometimes

paid in benefits, often claimed fraudulently. Moreover, their diasporas' involvement in religious fanaticism and organised crime gives states like Morocco and Algeria growing leverage and sovereignty in France. The result is that it is France and French civilization that are now under mortal threat.

The irony is that it is France's failure to assimilate its immigrants into French culture and civilization, whether by neglect, cowardice, or by deliberate choice of an elite that has sponsored mass immigration, that has allowed this situation to develop. For it was the same failure to win over hearts and minds through education, to assimilate into the dominant culture, that ultimately rendered colonialism hollow and pointless.

The outlook is not good, for when 'civilizations with nothing in common come into contact with one another', the inevitable outcome, unless one colonises the other, is separatism and civil war. But if the colonial guilt trip – the supposed 'duty to repent' that boils down to a 'refusal to forgive' and a wallowing in resentment – can be laid to rest, there is still hope.



## Europe's Bravest Nation?

*Sean  
McGlynn*

**How Finland Survived Stalin: From Winter War to Cold War**, Kimmo Rentola, Yale, £25.

This is a timely book. Finland, sharing a

long border with an aggressive Russia, has cast an anxious look at Putin's invasion of Ukraine and, after decades of studied neutrality, finally joined NATO in 2023; it sees the Russian bear on the rampage once more and hopes to avoid a repeat of its past wars with the superpower. These wars, and the immediate diplomatic tensions with Russia that followed them, form the basis of Kimmo Rentola's *How Finland Survived Stalin: From Winter War to Cold War*, which covers the period 1939-1950.

By 1917, Finland had been in the Russian Empire for over a century. It achieved independence when Russia departed World War One having signed the harsh Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Germany. Stalin wanted it back, and long machinated to reabsorb the country into the *Russkiy mir*. Ever the opportunist, he used the new understanding with Nazi Germany in 1939, through the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, as a green light to invade Finland in November and recover it for Mother Russia. The Finns put on an unexpectedly brave and dogged resistance, resulting in the four-month Winter War. Despite having a population of only four million people, this small Arctic state fought the Russians to a temporary standstill until Stalin deployed nearly half of his army against it. Defeat against such a goliath was inevitable, but Stalin, fearing Anglo-French intervention, agreed to a less than punitive peace. The Russian leader, heeding as ever his own counsel, blundered in thinking that Britain was his greatest foe. Furthermore, Britain and France, prepping during the Phoney War, were not in a position to offer any significant assistance. The Great Leader might have been sly and scheming; he was also his own worst enemy.

While the Finns had to concede substantial

border areas, they avoided occupation and the imposition of a puppet regime. This is a notable achievement. Throughout this period and beyond, there was the usual plethora of useful idiots in the SKD (the Finnish Communist Party) and other fellow travellers, but the government was able to hold firm. The country was ruled by an elected Centre Left coalition at this time; Stalin was surprised that the people, especially its agricultural and working classes, did not welcome revolutionary Soviet emancipation with open arms. Instead, their arms were cocked and loaded. Even the Finnish Communist leader and interior minister dismissed Stalin as ‘a physically stunted tiddler with sloped shoulders’.

Unsurprisingly, when Hitler turned on Stalin in 1941, and with Britain and France now with Russia, the Finns allied with the Germans against the Russians to regain their lost territory. The poor performance of the Red Army in Finland had only encouraged Hitler further in believing that Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia, was a sure-fire thing. For the Finns, this became the Continuation War until 1944. At first, their incursions into Russian territory met with considerable successes, making their way to the siege of Leningrad. When the war turned in favour of the Allies, the Finns had to fight a rearguard action as they retreated, once more losing home ground in the separate armistice they arranged with Russia. Again, the defeat could have been much worse; as Rentola notes, ‘It is an extraordinary fact that, among the capitals of the European nations participating in the Second World War, only three avoided foreign occupation: London, Moscow, and Helsinki’. Elsewhere, the matter of casualties, ‘relatively modest losses’, is

also highlighted: ‘When a foreign historian is informed of the total number of Finnish soldiers killed in the war (a little under 100,000) and asked to guess the civilian death toll, the estimates are invariably in six figures. The correct answer – 2,000 – is difficult to believe, as it is exceptionally low.’ While the Russian losses were much higher, they were proportionately lower, and so easier to absorb. (We are seeing this factor at play in the Russo-Ukrainian grinding slog today.)

Despite the book’s title, there is very little on the actual Russo-Finnish wars themselves: how they were fought, numbers of soldiers involved in different engagements, tactics, weaponry, logistics etc are not afforded any analysis. Instead, the focus is very much on diplomatic and political manoeuvres combined with hefty doses of espionage and intelligence operations. While these offer extremely important insights, especially for Anglophone readers, the lack of a military angle removes not only the bloody drama of the battlefield context – the most urgent context of all and which guided the diplomacy and politics of the conflicts – it also means there is a missed opportunity for a comprehensively authoritative account of the wars being made available to a non-Finnish readership. When the reader tantalizingly learns of the Finns’ fierce resistance near Vyborg constituting ‘the biggest battle ever in northern Europe’, he is left yearning for more. Rentola’s attention and interests are elsewhere, which is the author’s prerogative; it is not for a reviewer to determine the contents of a book. However, his expert coverage would have a greater impact with more space given to the military setting.

Rentola relays with authority the political

and diplomatic thinking of both sides of these conflicts as they unfolded and were settled. This becomes especially involved, and even more complex, in the Cold War phase, when Stalin was eager to gather in Germany's erstwhile allies – Hungary, Romania and Finland – into his orbit. Again, the Finns were defiant. Here, as previously, they were lucky to have as their prime minister and then president, J K Paasikivi, who, even in old age, played a weak hand masterfully and thereby greatly mitigated Finland's losses. Rentola identifies him as one of the main reasons why Finland was 'such a hard nut for Stalin to crack'. There is sagely no opprobrium from Rentola for Paasikivi's 'policy of appeasement': this was necessary because of the outcome of the wars.' Indeed, Paasikivi's pragmatic realism is something we could all do with more of today.

Are there lessons for Ukraine today? The truly heroic Finnish resistance against Russia could only get the Finns so far. The difference today is the nuclear context. One miscalculation could lead to Armageddon in a matter of an hour. As this excellent book repeatedly demonstrates, political and strategic miscalculations always abound in conflict. And they always will.



## A Few Words Before I die

*Mary Sidney*

**Daybreak In Gaza Stories of Palestinian Lives and Culture**, ed by Mahmoud Muna and Matthew Teller, SAQI books. Profits donated to Medical Aid for Palestinians.

The Jewish Museum in Frankfurt has a room with walls lined with postcards. On the front of each, black and white photos of people of all ages. On the back, details of how they died in a concentration camp. I could only read a couple, anymore was too distressing and pointless. What can you do for the dead? This book creates the same sensation about the still living; every chapter detailing a life in anguish, that could end violently at any moment. The preface by Muna and Teller calls it a collection of, 'Gathered, transcribed and translated testimonies,' from Gaza, some face-to-face others on mobiles in the early hours with bombing heard in the background, each a 'snapshot of a single moment,' of trauma. No one knows if the writers have survived.

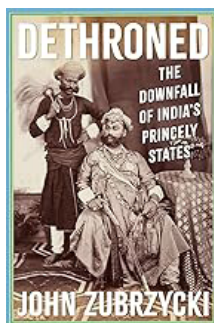
Most of us are astonished to see on the TV news another genocide, committed before the world's press, with impunity, as if the Nazi's Final Solution, Pol Pot, Rwanda, Srebrenica and Darfur were not enough. These sixty-two accounts of on-going murder make this situation even more inexplicable and the reader more helpless. The pages take us into a Hades of random violence: 'I drive to Rafa and see people and fishermen gathering on the shore, the clear water invites those who have no water at home to take a dip and wash. I see dozens wading into the sea with their shower gel and their joy. Suddenly I hear engines. I see two gunboats racing towards the beach. As they approach the fishing boats, they open fire.' In this quagmire people attack and rob each other. 'A friend went to check on his home. He found a group of thieves armed with knives occupying the building. Hunger has pushed people to steal aid from trucks.'

The book offers an insight into Gaza before it became famous for death. Almost unbelievably it was once prosperous, a place

of orchards. The father of one writer became rich there, trading wheat, corn, and oranges to Europe. He became the Gaza agent for Shell and Mobil Oil. All that ended in 1967 when Israeli companies took over and Shell left Gaza. What is now a narrow prison cell was once, 'A frontier zone for all of recorded history'. Five thousand years ago, before the Pyramids, Egyptian travellers built houses there due to the expansionism of Narmer, the first ruler of a unified Egypt. He was known as 'the Catfish King' due to his hieroglyphic. A few centuries later, Hyksos, Canaanite people, moved there dealing in luxury goods and exquisite jewellery, which can be seen in the British Museum. Historian Katherine Pangonis provides a chapter on the history of Gaza's fabrics, heavy linens dyed with indigo and cotton gauze, which may take its name from Gaza. Weaving and Tatrez traditional Palestinian embroidery go back three thousand years, the legacy of women. 'No weavers remain in Gaza,' she writes cryptically.

This book, completed in three months from March to May this year, with editors in Europe and the Middle East, might be essential reading but it's really only half a book. There's no mention of Hamas, the group ruling over Palestinian lives. No one describes the problems of dealing with them or gives any views on a democratic alternative. There's no mention of the Nova Music Festival massacre of October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023 which led to the current disaster. One entry from October 9<sup>th</sup> written by a doctor is just generalised bleak despair. He writes about the ongoing Israeli bombardment as if nothing has changed. 'Unbelievably, my building was one of the only ones to survive the deadly attack on my neighbourhood last night. We do not sleep much. Food has started to run out. We lack phone signal and

electricity and barely speak and interact with each other. We grieve the loss of so many, silently.' It's as if the clouds of dust from Israeli bombardment have blinded everyone.



## Farewell to the Maharajas

*Anthony  
Daniels*

**Dethroned: The Downfall of India's Princely States**, John Zubrzycki, Hurst & Company, £20.

As independence approached, four tenths of India's land surface and a third of its population was ruled by 550 nominally independent princely states, over which Britain had exercised only *paramountcy*, the right to interfere in the event of disorder or gross mismanagement, the latter being defined with cynical flexibility.

Many of the states were tiny, hardly bigger than landholdings, with revenues no greater than an artisan's, but others – such as Kashmir, as large as Britain, and Hyderabad, with 16 million inhabitants – were very substantial. Many of the rulers, but not all, were notorious degenerates who luxuriated unimaginably while their people went hungry. A few ruled their fiefdoms well and even instituted marked progress.

Two or three were viable as totally independent states, though many of the

ruling maharajahs and nawabs dreamed of such total independence. But it was clear to Nehru, to other Indian leaders and to the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, that unless the states acceded to India, the latter would make pre-Napoleonic Germany look like a model of political rationality. In many cases, there would be international borders every few miles, or even less. The map of India would be like a patchwork quilt sewn by a madman.

In this book, the Australian journalist, John Zubrzycki, describes how India was unified (or at least, divided into only two) in a matter of a few weeks before independence. It is extremely well-written, and is a riveting read. Only very occasionally does the author assume more knowledge of Indian affairs than the general reader is likely to have,

The historical subject of the Indian rulers' accession to India (or in 20 cases to Pakistan) is a neglected one, at least by comparison with that of Partition. It was, with two notable exceptions, achieved bloodlessly by the craft and cunning of Vallabhbhai Patel and V.P. Menon, the first the number two in the Indian Congress party and the second the highest ranking Indian civil servant towards the end of the Raj. Mountbatten assisted them in their achievement, and for all his faults deserved much credit for having done so.

As the author makes clear, ideological, juridical or philosophical consistency was not possible in the circumstances, given the political realities. The new independent state (or states, if Pakistan is included) was founded on democratic principles, but there was a limit to how far leaders of the Congress were willing to consult populations about their wishes. The Indians were prepared for a referendum in Hyderabad, where a Moslem

Nizam ruled over a Hindu population, because the population was likely to get the answer right: accession to India. It wanted no such referendum in Kashmir, however, which was ruled by a Sikh Maharajah (who ideally wanted to create a Himalayan Switzerland but in the event would lean much more to India than to Pakistan), though the population was largely Moslem and, if given the chance, would have voted to join Pakistan. By contrast, and in mirror image, Pakistan wanted a referendum in Kashmir but not in Hyderabad.

In the end, neither population was consulted, and the problem, or running sore, of Kashmir exists to this day, more than seventy years later. The result of non-consultation in Hyderabad was happier, because it coincided with the population's wishes, or at any rate did not run completely counter to them. But the Nizam put up some resistance to incorporation into India, which was easily overcome militarily, though followed by the mass slaughter of part of the Moslem population. The precise number killed, possibly with the connivance or even active participation of the Indian army, will never be known, but is thought to have been between 25,000 and 60,000.

The book could easily have descended into a titillating, though inevitably very amusing, catalogue of the bizarre or outrageous sexual and other propensities of the princely rulers, but these are covered with judicious restraint, enough to give the general reader a taste of them, but not enough to distract him from the larger and historically more significant story.

Nevertheless, our natural taste for gossip is satisfied by the pen portraits of some of the rulers. Who can resist stories of twenty-seven Rolls-Royces maintained

by an English engineer, or hounds kept in air-conditioned kennels, or of torrid affairs with American adventuresses? No doubt these would not have amused the subject populations, at any rate if they got to hear of them.

Menon and Patel managed to avert conflict by promising the rulers that, if they acceded to India, only questions of defence, external affairs and communications would be taken over by the central government, and that they would be otherwise as free as they had always been to rule as they chose, and would be allowed to retain certain privileges as well as be paid a privy purse from government funds. Mountbatten knew this to be an unstable arrangement, and the beginning of the end of the princely order, in fact a betrayal of the many promises made by the British decades earlier: but better betrayal than chaos.

Nevertheless, the princes (and princesses) were finally deprived of their money, their prerogatives and their titles only in 1971, under Mrs Gandhi. As is commonly the

way with politicians, she used abstract arguments, popular or populist according to taste, to disembarass herself of difficult or dangerous opponents. Clearly, princely privileges had no place, considered philosophically, in a democracy supposedly devoted to equality; but in fact, after independence many of the more able rulers stood for election, and almost always won, suggesting that their previous rule had not been as entirely repressive or unpopular as democratic politicians supposed, and that their populations retained an affection or respect for them. This, of course, was a message that no democratic politician would like to hear. And one has to admit that the style of some of the princes, at least, was greatly superior to that of modern Indian billionaires, if the grotesquely ugly and vulgar Ambani house in Bombay, which will never excite any affection, is anything to go by.

This is a superb book which, apart from its other merits, exudes a quality that is not common these days: fairmindedness.

*The*  
*Salisbury*  
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“There is a deep human need for beauty, and if you ignore that need in architecture, your buildings will not last, since people will never feel at home in them.”

**Roger Scruton**



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