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No-one likes a critic. Jean Sibelius, confident in the pecking order governing the creative and critical spheres, once quipped: "Pay no attention to what the critics say. Remember, a statue has never been set up in honour of a critic!" Perhaps serenely unconcerned by such lapidary recognition, the critics of the present issue have largely, with two notable exceptions, eschewed the essay form in favour of the review. In so doing, they have evacuated the non-judgmental havens of criticism afforded to them by the Cambridge supervision where they are sheltered from hazarding marks out of ten for a Milton sonnet or one of Kant's critiques, venturing into the more pugilistic arenas of the critic we turn to when deciding whether to bother reading Zizek's latest tome or not. Such a transition does not entirely strip him of the laurels with which Oscar Wilde crowns his aesthetic sage in his dialogue *The Critic as Artist*. Heaven forbid that I group any of our contributors with a *Daily Mail* TV critic or even the Germaine Greer of *Newsnight* review, since the academic critic occupies a seldom-visited, but well-esteemed stop-off point between the cloisters of scholarship and the free-for-all gallery of journalism. Such esteem is well-deserved. At its best, the academic review, endowed with hard-won erudition, but exercised by the need to unravel and size up the author's achievement can dispense with the traps and trappings of impartiality and find itself confronting, squarely and nakedly, not only the author whom it attempts to lay bare, but the reviewer's own physical presence, the presumptions and counter-theories of which he is composed, embarrassingly denuded, his feet firmly on the ground. I hope you too, our readership, happen upon such moments of commitment, when the reviewer becomes the reviewed.

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Christopher Brooke
*Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and
Political Thought from Lipsius to
Rousseau*

Princeton University Press



The legacy of Stoic philosophy in early modern European political thought has been on the agenda of a range of historians for quite some time, making Christopher Brooke's pithy and readable study particularly welcome. Students in Cambridge (at least in the history department) are most likely to have encountered this latent interest in Stoicism in the work of Richard Tuck and Nicholas Phillipson. For Tuck's influential studies of early modern natural law – a foundation for modern theories of rights and the social contract – the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw the emergence of a Stoic-inflected 'New Humanism', arising in parallel with Europe's emerging princely despotisms as a subordinate tendency to an overarching moral scepticism. In Nicholas Phillipson's studies of the thought of Adam Smith, the Stoic virtue of 'self-command' plays an important role in the development of Smith's famous theory of the 'impartial spectator': the internal arbiter of the morality of our actions in relation to others.

The ambiguity suggested by both of these historical roles for Stoicism – as secular exalter and as self-governor – is, for Brooke, what gives it such force as a category for investigation. He opens with the account of the importance of Stoicism to the German neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer, who identified with it as a philosophy of equality, moral autonomy and secular virtue. Important, too, is the work of the German historian Gerhard Oestreich, who saw the emphasis on the quality of self-discipline in the writings of the sixteenth century Dutch humanist Justus Lipsius as a vital conceptual innovation for the ethical foundations of the modern bureaucratized state. The origins of Oestreich's research on Lipsius in a Nazi-era history of militarism have been the cause of much deserved criticism, but Brooke is quick to remind us that variants of this story could also be spun from the historical sociologies of Foucault or Weber. The 'philosophic pride' of the Stoic is the exchange of divine grace for stern self-government and the transcendence of the material. The freedom it brings is unforgiving.

For Christians, and particular St. Augustine and his readers in the rigorist Catholic tradition of seventeenth century France, this exaltation of the moral capacities of postlapsarian humanity was particularly galling. We are familiar, from the works of Noel Malcolm, Jonathan Israel and others, with the suggestion that it was the revival of Epicureanism – the ancient materialist philosophy of atomism and pleasure – that was the most controversial (and hence most 'modern') philosophical move of the later seventeenth century. Brooke's incisive reading of St. Augustine's enraged account of ancient Stoicism in Book 14 of the *City of God* suggests that the latter school had even more subversive potential. 'In this Augustinian schema,' he writes, the pride of the Stoics was 'more thoroughly implicated' in Original Sin than any other kind of human vanity. 'The obvious mistake the Stoics make, from this Christian point of view, is to think that postlapsarian humans can live without being troubled by the disturbances [of worldly passions], and therefore without sin ... this denies human dependence on God.' In the early modern world, Epicureanism and Augustinianism could sit more comfortably together as respectively atheist and theist accounts of man's fallen condition. Stoicism stands apart as an effective denial of the Biblical Fall.

Philosophic Pride does not, however, offer any breathless polemics in favour of a radical reimagining of the invention of a 'modern' secular worldview through the appropriation of Stoic philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These larger frameworks serve only to justify the claim that Stoicism deserves a history, not to suggest that this history is straightforward or decisive. Brooke holds firm in his commitment to the absence of the existence of a systematic body of Stoic doctrine, and is even more nuanced in his treatments of the subtle ways in which the surviving corpus of texts from Cicero, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Plutarch and Epictetus were refracted through the parallel concerns of his broad range of subjects. So, among other things, we are shown a Senecan inflection to Lipsius' reformulation of Machiavelli's prince, which demotes by placing reason of state in the service of the common good, not princely glory; a detailed exploration of the Stoic concept of *oikeiosis* which reformulates Hugo Grotius' approach to the problem of human beings' fitness for society; and a convincing thesis about a Stoic turn in the later political theory of Rousseau, which can be traced back to debates about human nature between Augustinian Catholics, neo-stoic moral

sense theorists and radical Epicureans at the turn of the eighteenth century. Each chapter is prefaced with an extensive historiographical discussion of existing studies on the authors and issues in question.

While Brooke's fair-minded summaries and open acknowledgments of his intellectual debts are praiseworthy, the effect of this last structural decision is to obscure argumentative links between the chapters, and to heighten the tension between the twin aims of *Philosophic Pride*: to tell a story about 'Stoicism', and to subtly reorientate our perceptions of a range of individual authors. Much historiographical discussion could have been profitably placed in footnotes, had the publishers not opted for endnotes instead.

All historical writing involves a tension between argumentatively pleasing schematization of the general and granular exploration of the specific. Brooke leans towards the latter, but then again the readings of the texts he provides are overwhelmingly internal – focused on the detailed nuances of their content and their specific relation with the Stoic corpus. This is rather different to the approach that is stereotypically associated with 'the Cambridge school', which is often described as contextualising beyond canonical sources to expose the loci of political conflict that give rise to a given text or proposition. This is too narrow, and Brooke's focus on the relationship between ancients and moderns has precedents in the extensive engagements of Quentin Skinner and John Pocock with the intellectual worlds of early modern classical education. But it's still hard to place his work within a stylized conception of the 'History of Political Thought' that these authors supposedly epitomise. Political philosophers might mourn the absence of a strong, guiding architectonic. Historians might also want a more unified narrative: it is not entirely clear why Brooke selects the authors he does, even though he makes ample apology for the necessity of selection. They might also want some more concrete historical contexts, either cultural (how did these texts get around? Who read them, and where?) or political (what's this got to do with war, with governments, with rebellions?). But Brooke's work doesn't attempt the taut theoretical shadowboxing of the 'History of Political Thought', always with one eye to the present, nor does it seek to hew to the dominant political and cultural strains in the mainstream of contemporary historiography. Rather, he inhabits an older, looser tradition: the practice of close textual commentary as 'intellectual history'. He has made a significant contribution towards filling in some important lacunae

in our understanding of the relationships between ancient and modern thinking about morality and politics, and intervened deftly in a broad range of interdisciplinary debates on major figures in the history of practical ethics. These are achievements that will ensure this book is welcomed by scholars and general readers with all sorts of investments in his subject matter. They will also enjoy its sincere humanism and remarkable erudition.

Slavoj Žižek

The Year of Dreaming Dangerously

Verso Books



According to Slavoj Žižek, Slovenian 'rockstar' cultural-critic, philosopher and psychoanalyst, 2011 was the 'year of dreaming dangerously' – 'dangerously' because, not only have dreams of revolution and alternatives to capitalism once more become thinkable, but darker, more reactive forces have also been at work. Deploying his formidable theoretical apparatus, Žižek aims to show that there is more in common between Anders Breivik's murderous rampage and the Occupy movement (and DJ David Guetta) than first impressions might suggest.

As always with Žižek's work, there are lingering wafts of *déjà senti*. What he says here about the riots in Britain, about Greece and about the Occupy movement, along with many of his jokes, will immediately be familiar to any reader who has read even a handful of the books and articles in his voluminous bibliography or watched a few YouTube videos of him in manic mode up on stage. And, with that, it's worth saying that once again his prose mirrors his characteristic verbal delivery: at times incredibly boisterous, then almost flat and suppressed; endlessly digressive; Žižek gives the impression of a smart little tyke made garrulous by a cheap orangeade binge, and with all the anticipated side-effects – it's not for everyone.

In a sense, the repetitiveness is forgiveable. His aim is not to treat various subjects individually, instead, but to demonstrate a common 'structure of feeling' between them, to use Raymond Williams' term, a broad shared set of values and perceptions that consciously and unconsciously structures experience and understanding. This he does well, for the most part, though he is arguably at his best when closest to

the ground and furthest from the cerebral delights of pure theory: his assessment of the riots in Britain as “a consumerist carnival of destruction” is particularly apposite; as is his broader diagnosis of the ‘end of history’ ideology that underpins much current thinking about capitalism.

It is when Žižek comes to making positive recommendations, in his concluding chapter, that this book is at its weakest. At first, there are hints of a maturer Marxism that has learned from the theoretical and political excesses and failures of the past century:

[Marx’s] Communism was too futural [‘futural’ as in ‘a continuation of the present’, from the French *futur*]... what Marx conceived as Communism remained an idealized image of capitalism, capitalism without capitalism, that is, expanded self-reproduction without profit and exploitation.

But then we are told that instead of being sure about the exact shape of a future just society, we can be sure only “that the existing system cannot reproduce itself indefinitely” and that the events of a year of once more dreaming dangerously are but “signs from the future”, towards which we can only maintain ‘openness’ and which can act as no more than dim guides, like the beam of some distant lighthouse through the fog. Žižek is not alone in arguing for this minimalist conclusion: Fredric Jameson in his *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) argued that the passage from one social totality to another would be similarly uncertain.

This, however, is a conclusion that might just as easily have been reached by closely following the old

Marxist formula, stated in Marx’s preface to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness”: as we are not yet in communism, we cannot fully, perhaps even at all, see what it will be like when we get there. Žižek, it would seem, as well as telling the same old jokes, is dressing up even older ideas in an imposing new theoretical garb and hoping no-one will look at them closely enough to notice.

In addition to Žižek’s messages from the future, there are surely indications from the present as to what communism might actually be like (if it comes). The anthropologist David Graeber, for one, has stated that “Communism is in a way the basis of all social relations”, if we take Communism to be in broad terms Marx’s imperative “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”. Many social relationships do not have their basis in economic behaviour, that is, in models of reciprocity or exchange: children are rescued from danger and lights for cigarettes are offered, usually, with no immediate concern for rewards or acclaim – we just do these things.

If we are to think a communist future, we must surely consider the simple ways in which ordinary people share and create accord, just as much as reconciling Hegel with Marx with Lacan with Lenin. As Žižek himself says, a “moderate demand can trigger a global transformation”. *May I have a light, then, please?*

Art in Adorno’s Ethical Thought: Negative Utopias in a Wrong Life



"Artworks organised by subjects have the capacity to do, *tant bien que mal*, what a subjectlessly organised society does not allow." Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1970

On May 7, 1963, the German critical philosopher Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno welcomed his audience to a set of lectures on problems of moral philosophy:

“If you go into a moral-philosophical lecture of someone who has written about the right, or, rather, about the wrong life, it would appear obvious that you expect ... to hear something about the right life; that you can immediately take something from this lecture for your own existence, be it for your private or even for your public, that is, the political existence you lead. ... The question about the moral life will indeed be posed. But it will be posed in a form which asks whether such a good or right life is even possible today, or whether we will not have to stick to what I wrote elsewhere; that ‘there is no right life in the wrong’” (*Probleme der Moralphilosophie* 1963).

The work he was referring to was his collection of aphorisms entitled *Minima Moralia; Reflections from the*

Damaged Life (1955). As the title's subversion of Aristotle's *Magna Moralia* and its subtitle suggest, Adorno therein conducts a 'sad science' that upturns Friedrich Nietzsche's ultimately Yes-saying *amor fati* of *The Gay Science* (1882). In one hundred and fifty three essayistic and aphoristic 'pieces' (Stücke), he constructs an ethics that is not an ethics in the classical sense, that is, one which inquires into the conditions and possibilities of a good life. It is, instead, an analysis of the damaged condition of ethics in the face of the human fragility of goodness, and the legacy of the instrumentalised rationality of the failed Enlightenment project. As he puts it, with gratitude and a promise dedicated to colleague and author of *The Eclipse of Reason* (1947) Max Horkheimer: 'the sad science... relates to a sphere which for unthinkable times represented the actual and proper sphere of philosophy... the teaching of the right life. What once meant 'life' to the philosopher has now become the sphere of the private and of consumption... The view on life has turned into an ideology, which lies about the fact that such a life no longer exists.' The study of such a good life, then, would appear to be illusory since the situation we actually face, Adorno and Horkheimer claim in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), is not the promised exit from man's self-imposed immaturity as Kant foresaw it and thereby his entrance into a truly humane state of knowledge, emancipation and daring reflection (encapsulated by Kant's paradigmatic reference *Sapere Aude!*), but a descent into ever new phases of barbarity. The only imperative we can follow, they argue, is one that remembers the atrocities that followed from the rationally executed reason, which submits man and nature to a utilitarian instrumentalism, as exemplified by Auschwitz -- "and California", as Raymond Geuss hastens to add in his essay 'Art and Criticism in Adorno' (2005). Whatever your views on the thirty-first state of America, if we want to investigate the immediate conditions of contemporary life in the middle of the twentieth century, so Adorno assumes, we have to follow and inquire into its alienated form (*Gestalt*), since it is only in this distorted form that life unfolds. What possible paths of action appear sensible and proper to the philosopher under such conditions certainly cannot take the form of yet another propagandist imperative or normative proposition. The only possible reaction to the ideological forms of thought and process caused by commodification and alienation, is a negative analysis of such myths; a mythology that serves as a *mythoclasm*.

Central to a critical theory of society, then, is the criticism of its ideology: an *Ideologiekritik*. The early members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research suggested that such a critical theory would not be characterised by a unified theoretical programme or positivist guide to critical enlightenment. Critical theory, the Institute's second director Horkheimer proclaimed in 1937, does not posit a fundamental distinction between conceptual analysis, the objects and the world, on the one hand, and the agent of analysis on the other. Adorno and the early members of the Frankfurt Institute focused on three interlinked projects, which Geuss elaborates in further detail elsewhere (*The Idea of a Critical Theory*, 1981). First and foremost, members of this early generation of critical researchers argue that a radical critique of society and an analysis of its ideology, an *Ideologiekritik*, are necessarily complementary. Social action cannot be analysed in isolation, but has to include an analysis of its normative and instrumental rationalities. Further, such a form of *Ideologiekritik* is not moralizing. It comprises an analysis of the process of moral justification. It is generative of a particular kind of knowledge about the processes by which we accept or incorporate traditions of thought or action. Lastly, such a critique differs epistemologically and methodologically from positive empiricism insofar as reflexivity about the knowledge it generates is not only part of its method but constitutes itself one of its central aims. Reflection is not just an instrument, but a valid and indispensable condition of inquiry. It is *autotelic* as a purpose in itself, albeit with the potential to go beyond itself. These foundational perspectives onto critical social analysis evoke a nexus of challenges to traditional moral philosophy and social theory.

One of the central challenges to social or moral philosophy is, according to Adorno, that in attempting to answer the fundamental ethical questions 'what shall I do?' or 'how shall I live?' it cannot legitimately fall back onto a constructive virtue or normative Enlightenment ethics anymore. That the moral should be self-evident (*sich von selbst verstehen*) is by no means self-evident. If we accept norms for moral praxis from authority figures, gurus or traditional world-views (*Weltanschauung*), the moments of freedom, happiness, and good life we expect from moral norms will not materialise; in a life dependent on norms and universal imperative, there is no freedom. Since there is also no ethics in such a life, the precondition of ethics is the critique of such a life. Although such thought, by virtue of its suspicion of apparently self-evident moral imperatives, may be seen as external to or outside ethics, for self-critique to have a radical emancipatory cognitive value it

it needs to be internal and thereby subvert its ideological tendency to affirm the *status quo*.

Even if reflecting on such a damaged life implies studying what this condition entails, it also suggests, in turn, what one may do to repair it or what keeps us from doing so under particular circumstances. How, in light of Adorno's construction of an internal critique of affirmative myths, are we to construct a vision of an ethical life? Even if some of the most pathological symptoms of modern society are the result of unreflectively institutionalised Enlightenment rationales, there are a few domains which Adorno thinks escape this tendency. In conversation with Geuss' 'Art and Criticism in Adorno' (*Outside Ethics*, 2005), let me explore how and why Adorno assumes that modern art is the domain, which has most potential to do so.

Radical social critique is predicated on a critique of form. Adorno's writings on aesthetic theory and new music articulate this in the following way: by cultivating a critical autonomy of thought and praxis as well as a radical self-critique through consistent, associative, and arbitrary negation of form, art has the potential to provide *negative utopias*. This was not found in Hegelian and Beethovenian theories and practices of art, which affirm our *Weltanschauung* by referencing seemingly attainable ideals and utopian social forms. One example would be Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, rendered musically in the choral finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony:

Wir betreten feuertrunken, Himmlische, dein Heiligtum! Deine Zauber binden wieder, Was die Mode streng geteilt; Alle Menschen werden Brüder, Wo Dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

(We enter, fire-drunken, Heavenly one, your shrine. Your magic binds again what custom has strictly parted. All men become brothers, where your tender wing lingers).

Adorno saw the epochal shift to a fully radical form of aesthetic in the atonal music of Arnold Schönberg in the early twentieth century, as well as in the plays of Samuel Beckett, which explored man's failure to confront and deal with absurdity. After World War II especially, Adorno posits, certain modern art has turned against its previous ability and tendency to affirm and produce soothing images and coherent works. Productions of fragmented negative utopias in art introduce reflexively grounded negative and subversive attitudes towards the society within which they emerge. A social art tradition, which upholds principles of immanent critique and allows its own transcendence through criticism, thereby prevents its own degeneration into dependent propaganda or propositional art. By virtue of being utopian, even if negatively, art remains incapable of concretising the world it creates. It remains virtual, potential. Nonetheless, it is precisely through its unattainable negativity that art points to the unutterable and thereby the real possibility of utopia. It stands in relation to the present like a promise of a fugitive future. If an art form subverts our expectation of an illusory good life, and if it thereby retains the possibility of pointing to the impossible, it holds within itself the power to transcend the possible and objective. Such artworks behold the power to differ from the present or to point to pathways into social practices that differ from those propagated normally. They can operate, Adorno suggests, in a manner that is negative, dialectic, and utopian. Negative dialectics, then, is the self-consciousness of ideology and delusion (*Negative Dialectics*, 1966). The potential of a modern piece or performance of art to subvert existing forms of life and practices does still not constitute an actual escape from such context. One could say, therefore, that the negative utopias they let us witness are inherently incomplete. As I argued, this observation is does not remain melancholic. The incomplete, unfinished, or even discouraged experience of warm refuge in the experience of an artwork is part of its potential; by turning the gaze and expectation for action back onto its witness, such art inhibits the suspension of thought and incites reflection.

Anybody, not just an anthropologist writing about contemporary performance art in Europe, will recognise the sincere philosophical intensity with which Adorno analyses the critical potential of modern art in its socially and historically specific forms. It is, however, not merely an unease with Adorno's depreciation of popular culture and non-European forms of art which drives me to add an additional concluding paragraph. Another unease derives from Adorno's interventions at the 1955 *Darmstadt Conversation* on theatre. He proposed a mercilessly uncompromising analysis of the bourgeois theatre and opera institutions that supposedly mirror the development of the 'thingification of the bureaucratised society' as a whole. I wonder whether such an uncompromising analysis of critique premised on radical aesthetic differences is not also inhibiting. Adorno's contribution 'Theatre, Opera, Bourgeoisie', described by participants as an analytic bomb dropped

into the discussion, reacted to a heated debate on possibilities of reforming established communal theatres. Adorno's rejection of transmitted bourgeois institutional forms seemed to make it very difficult to imagine how one could continue a constructive conversation on new structural reinventions of the relation between communal theatres and local cultural politics; as exemplified by the Western German *Theater an der Ruhr*, which cooperates with the municipality of Mülheim in the Ruhr area as a common shareholder and partner rather than controlling supervisor while retaining the role of a public city theatre. As Helmut Schäfer, dramaturgist of the *Theater an der Ruhr* put it once, 'one of the most decisive moments of modernity, which is still valid for me now, is how humans interrogate and communicate *content* by relating to *form* in a way that is arbitrarily creative'.

It seems to me that if a propagandist engagement with art eliminates its autonomy by submitting it to an instrumental rationality, a descriptive account of its subversive potential, or 'arbitrarily creative form' would be a step towards avoiding such a risk. The empirical description of instances of active critique and social transformation brought about and experienced by artists and participants would be an enrichment to a philosophical critical theory. Adorno's engagement with art and radical social critique finds a fruitful ground in anthropological discussions of art and aesthetics. As anthropologist Carlo Severi and philosopher Claude Imbert recently pointed out, the study of art necessitates an analysis of the ways in which it comprises information about its own poetics and aesthetics, that is, the means of creation and theory about itself. Since contemporary European art, in particular, is constituted within institutionalised traditions of human practice which change over time, we need to incorporate an analysis of the ideologies and assumptions that motivate such artistic practice into our critical studies of them. I hope that this reading of Adorno pointed to the value in attending anthropologically to the actual and contemporary traditional practices of art in institutions, including their own means of self-critique. An awareness of the potential of certain modern art practices to exhibit and incorporate forms of immanent critique into their form may assist in directing our view onto the possibility of a critique of our own practices and reflections.

Rowan Williams

The Lion's World - A Journey into the Heart of Narnia

SPCK Publishing



J.R.R. Tolkien was a famous and unapologetic critic of his friend C. S. Lewis' Narnia stories. For him, a stickler both for detail and for delicate, beautifully-formed mythology, the universe Lewis created was disappointingly thin, let down by a number of internal inconsistencies and a shameless melange of characters from myriad folk-traditions: fauns, talking mice, mermaids, and even Father Christmas. Readers who approach *A Lion's World* with a similar perspective to Tolkien's will not, I think, be persuaded otherwise. And yet Rowan Williams successfully and deftly explains that Lewis's creation is brilliant by recasting the Narnia books as a set of open-ended narratives which evade easy analysis. These stories are not merely Christian allegories, Williams claims, nor do they comprise a shaky attempt to construct a new, mythic realm. Rather, they are to be respected

Rather, they are to be respected for their power to confront and to unsettle readers, a power due in no small part to their independence from the Christian tradition and from theological convention.

Throughout the first chapter and intermittently thereafter, Williams offers us theories about Lewis' purpose in writing, supported by a vibrant selection of biographical details (can we propose any link between Narnia's White Witch and a particularly ferocious real-life Elizabeth Anscombe?). Furthermore, references to numerous scholars, including Dostoyevsky, G.K. Chesterton, and Isaiah Berlin, appear constantly, and fruitfully so. The real task of *A Lion's World*, however, involves dialogue: rather than simply writing a book about Lewis, our retiring Archbishop means to collaborate with him and to use his Narnia as a catalyst for exploring a series of difficult themes. Indeed, over the course of this tremendously accessible, lucid and refreshingly frank discussion, the reader finds himself challenged by the issues of human freedom, violence, death, and even the question of what it is that is truly 'real'.

Arguably, however, the most powerful conversation in Williams's book is a theological one. In

the third chapter, he describes Lewis' ability to recast the issue of divine transcendence, so that our language about the Otherness of God is defined in terms of the painful nature of encountering divine truth. Indeed, an important way in which Lewis confronts this, suggests Williams, is through his presentation of Aslan as a 'stranger' to us. By depicting the great Lion as a rebel, or as a subversive force who exists outside of the Narnian monarchy, Lewis manifests his conviction that God is the "deadly enemy" of orderliness, whether we take 'orderliness' to refer to established human institutions, to the delusion that a person is in some way capable of exerting control over his or her future, or merely to the set of clichés that people readily adopt as interpretive frameworks for life. In all of these cases, having faith in the divine means exposing oneself to disruption; it means becoming necessarily unsettled in one's hitherto comfortable surroundings.

And yet, Williams also finds it remarkable that it is precisely this portrayal of God (or Aslan) as a 'stranger', which Lewis very nearly allows to collapse his whole account of Christian belief. For as much as the dictum 'God is a mystery' might pretend to promote divine freedom, it is of course true that it can also be implemented by creatures as a tool of control. In the last of Lewis's Narnia books, a talking ape called Shift does this very thing when he dresses his associate (who is a donkey) up as a lion, and uses the apparently 'untameable' nature of this pseudo-Aslan figure to legitimate his dictatorial rule over the beasts and men of an ailing Narnia. Shift's authority comes from 'Aslan', and 'Aslan' is both unpredictable and, in the minds of his subjects, impossible to usurp. In Williams' words:

You could say that the ultimate test of any religious, or indeed, imaginative vision is to see if it can survive the most uncompromisingly cynical, parodic hostile representation of it; this is what Lewis is doing here, and it needs to be taken very seriously.

Williams's depiction of Christianity as an unsafe and uncomfortable adventure, as well as his encouragement that whether one is Christian or not, it is all too easy to navigate the world according to the distorted vision of self-interest, means that *A Lion's World* is a difficult, and sometimes uncomfortable book to read. And yet, it is also deeply satisfying. As Williams portrays it, Lewis' response to ostensible theological helplessness,

the prospect, that is, that 'God' is just a human construct, was not to shut down his outward-focused perspective, or abandon his sense of the religious. Rather, the magic of Narnia is due to Lewis' fervent sense that as much as the world is a potentially harmful or messy place, it is first and foremost a sacramental landscape. In other words, it is a place where what is meagre or mundane (like a wardrobe) can be a point of access to what is wonderful (like a universe of fauns and talking beavers). Essentially, all fans of Narnia can expect to have their childhood impressions refashioned through the fine exposition of this incoming Master of Magdelene College Cambridge.

Christopher Clark *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to war in 1914*

Allen Lane



In 1961 Adolf Eichmann was on trial for his life in Jerusalem and the young West German state, the Federal Republic of Germany, was confronted once again with the most appalling crimes of the Second World War. That very year a book was published which would ignite one of the most serious historical controversies in West German history. The book was Fritz Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, or 'Bid for World Power'. The book accused the German leadership of having willed and deliberately prepared what became the First World War, a view which German historians had been seeking to refute since 1919. Fischer, a professor at Hamburg, worked within the Rankean tradition of German historiography, concentrating on high politics and reading into its machinations a considerable degree of unified intention. A political clique in one capital could will and usher in the great catastrophe. In West Germany, Fischer's book contributed to a deep sense of crisis about the stability and integrity of the Federal Republic. The young state had been deeply shaken in 1962 by the Spiegel Affair, in which the Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, and his defence minister, Franz Josef Strauss, were accused of high-handedness against the free press. By 1964 the West German Foreign Office, alarmed by the tendentious claims made in Fischer's book and the damage it was doing, cut his funding for a trip to the United States organized by the Goethe Institute.

Fischer's argument turned on one incident, crucial in the eyes of a historian who stakes all on the recognizable intentions of high politics, but trivial to more nuanced accounts which seek out the complex web of decision-making and its context. On the morning of Sunday 8th December 1912, the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, opened an emergency meeting with the Chief of the General Staff, General von Moltke, as well as the naval chiefs Tirpitz, Heeringen and Müller, at the royal palace in Berlin. The meeting began with a flurry of angry orders from the Kaiser regarding military preparedness against the Entente and progressed to a discussion of U-Boat construction. This meeting was soon dubbed the 'war council' and became the key moment in Fischer's argument. But the problem with that meeting was that the German Chancellor was not even present and the man taking the minutes, Admiral Müller, said that the results of the meeting amounted to "almost zero". The Kaiser had already lost a great deal of political authority in the wake of the Daily Telegraph Affair of 1908, when some ill-conceived remarks on the Boer War prompted demands from all sides to rein in his bombastic and impulsive temperament.

Christopher Clark's new study is not just a fresh look but a real historiographical landmark. Philosophically, it stands in the best tradition represented by the German historian Thomas Nipperdey, who himself refuted Fischer's war council claims. The philosophical premise of the book is that there is no one trajectory, no single unilinear descent into catastrophe. This is the sum of a few key paradoxes that upsets and overturns the hitherto dominant paradigm of research on this subject. Up to now, historians have focused on the slippery slope, the hardening of the alliance system and of its commitments, the rising tensions and the arms race, especially the naval race between Britain and Germany. In Clark's account, agreements aimed at resolving issues in the colonial world had a cumulative and unintended effect on the European scene. The most important in this sense is the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Britain wanted to keep Russia's hands off Persia and its imperial interests in Asia. Some very revealing comments by British diplomats state quite plainly that they would rather have a hostile Germany than a hostile Russia. Why? Because, as they admit, Germany was not in a position to harm British interests whereas Russia was. Better to ally with Russia and keep your enemies closer. Moreover, Britain was well aware that by 1912 Germany had lost the naval race and could not therefore threaten British interests in Europe.

Another important paradox is that it was precisely the stability of European politics secured by the alliance system that meant policy-makers underestimated the risk of provocative action. This was crucial in the July Crisis, which Clark describes in masterful and arresting detail. A third paradox is that, beneath the surface, the alliance system was actually in some respects fragile and that this fragility prompted greater firmness on the part of governments worried about ending up alone. The weaker they feared an alliance might become, the more bellicose their interaction with their ally. France, for example, frantically poured immense investment into Russia and made sure it was tied to the construction of strategic railways near the German border. This was because the French government was afraid, as was everyone else, that Russia would soon be too economically and militarily strong to need any allies.

This, in turn, is linked to a final paradox. The march to war was initiated by a fragmented and conflicted set of decision-making systems. Factions and personal prejudices, competing centres of power and rivalries over career prospects made it difficult to articulate and read intentions clearly. The opacity of decision-making systems in Europe was compounded by the heightened tension caused by newspapers often acting as the thinly veiled mouthpieces of foreign ministries. Awareness of this fact meant that even when they weren't doing so, their proclamations could still be erroneously attributed to their respective governments. Clark also evokes a fascinating human interest dimension at various points. The Austrian Chief of Staff, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, was convinced the woman he loved would leave her husband and become his partner were he to be a war leader and indeed she eventually did. At every meeting of the Austrian leadership at which he took part, Conrad insisted on war.

But, for all its emphasis on paradox and contingency, Clark's book hinges on a more definite account. This is what he calls the 'Balkan inception scenario,' whereby the French and Russian governments decided that contingencies arising in the Balkans would trigger a *casus foederis*, i.e. activate their alliance. The book begins with a long discussion of Serbian politics, at the start of which is an assassination - not the famed shooting of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria which sparked World War One, but that of the Serbian king. The decision of Russia and France to tie their arrangements to such a volatile region, one with the most active and uncompromising ir-

redentist and expansionist politics in Europe, is the most fateful moment in Chris Clark's story. It was this which, when accepted by Britain, led the Entente to reject the legitimacy of Austrian grievances and to regard Austrian actions as co-ordinated from Berlin. In this story, the elimination of flexibility from

the most unpredictable corner of Europe shifts the burden of blame hitherto often held in the literature by Germany and Austria, towards France and Russia. But, embedded in the paradoxes and the challenge to simplistic narratives of intentionality which are the most striking features of the book, the shift is a subtle one.

The following article was written by the historian Simon Schama in 1968, during his tenure as editor of the *Cambridge Review*

Cambridge Diary



The University Library must have been commissioned by Freud to intimidate Kafka. Every academic year adds some ingenious embellishment to the suffering of its habitués. Patience, already strained by groping backwards up a shelf artfully concealed behind a lift, collapses as a light extinguishes itself unbidden and the fleeting mirage of 566.c. 95.642 disappears forever in the tenebral gloom. The Library is of course bent on a pitiless war against the faintest trace of human self-indulgence (with the exception of slumber which it has publicly encouraged). Twenty minutes before the stipulated closing time, the cow-bell sends laggardly beasts still grazing in the Reading Room from the corral; the stern canteen prohibition expels any unrepentant smokers into chilly exile in an exercise yard in which the declining Van Gogh would have felt entirely at home; there as likely to die of pneumonia as of lung cancer. Mechanical tea may fortify the footsore pilgrim en route from the lonely eminence of North Wing 5 in fruitless pursuit of a periodical consumed by the cavernous appetite of the Binder. Doubtless all these peculiarities serve their purpose. I am left guessing what fiendish refinement may next be devised for our collective agony? What, I wonder, does that thin column of smoke occasionally issuing from the tower signify? Choosing a Librarian-presumptive, Roman-style? Somebody, somewhere, works in mysterious ways.

Robert Skidelsky and Edward
Skidelsky

How Much is Enough? The Love of Money and the Case for the Good Life

Allen Lane



A co-authored book by father and son of the same name presents basic difficulties for the reviewer. Should they be referred to as Skidelsky and Skidelsky? Robert and Edward? The Skidelskys? Sidelski? Borrowing a trope from the tabloid reality show culture they no doubt despise, however, I'll settle for "Redward".

Redward have noticed a problem. Karl Marx, and John Maynard Keynes (at least, in an early and un-

characteristically overly-optimistic set of musings) got it wrong. Technological progress has failed to liberate us from the toils of labour, whilst improvements in material prosperity have not translated into egalitarian goodwill between modern peoples. Neither a revolution (Marx), nor a diffusing of gentlemanly pursuits of structured leisure (early optimistic Keynes) have liberated us from toil. Underpinning this is the fact that human beings strive not only for gain and ease in absolute terms, but for gain and ease understood in relative, positional terms compared to their peers. What drives capitalist societies is the endless pursuit of material goods desired not to free ourselves from toil so that we may flourish, but so that we can compete and compare ourselves favourably with others. We are accordingly *insatiable* in our material wants: always comparing ourselves to those further up the chain, we always want more, and we become neither satiated nor happy. Marx thought such insatiability was produced by capitalism, and would disappear with it. It rather seems to be the other way around: capitalism works because we are insatiable. Redward go so far as to say it is part of

“human nature”.

Redward are horrified by the ethical consequences of such insatiability, mainly understood in terms of individual human happiness as a form of flourishing. Assuring us that there is an “objective” reality regarding what counts as human happiness, the greatest crime of modern consumer-based capitalism is that flourishing is being denied to all people. We’ll come back to how well Redward have identified the exact nature of their anxiety in a moment. First, it is worth pausing to note that they are strikingly undisturbed by what many now think to be the major problem of insatiable capitalist consumption: the rate at which it is consuming finite fossil-fuel resources, turning the planet into an overheating environmental-cum-political pressure cooker. Redward are blasé about climate change: technology will probably fix it, if indeed it is really happening, so what matters most is the ethical offence of consumer capitalism against the flourishing person. The reader may not share their priorities, to say the least.

Redward are, however, completely silent about another threat posed by insatiable capitalism: how it generates potentially devastating international military competition. Although you wouldn’t know it from their book, the problem Redward address was well known to *literally every* political, moral and economic thinker of any note whatsoever in the eighteenth century. David Hume, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kant and especially Adam Smith (and we’ll return to him below) get generally short shrift. Yet these thinkers were animated by precisely the predicament Redward potter around with. Their central fear, however, was that a combination of consumer-driven status economics would get hitched to national political programmes of outward expansion and competition, enabled by the innovation of public finance to pay for standing armies and fund wars on a monstrous scale that would devastate Europe. History indicates that they were close to the mark. Europe may now have been pacified, but the West’s looming confrontation with China indicates that we have not superseded this predicament, only translated it to a global level where the consequences may be even more destructive than the bloodbath of Europe’s twentieth century. None of this gets a look in in Redward’s account, possibly because the eighteenth century thinkers who understood the problem so well are used mainly as props for reinventing a wheel, but this time one with broken spokes.

Consider the one 18th century writer Redward do have time for: Bernard Mandeville. Redward praise Mandeville for realizing that commercial society is driven by the competitive avarice of egoists: “private vices” of greed and competition paradoxically produce the “public benefits” of a prosperous commercial society erected on the mass supply and demand of consumer goods (in Mandeville’s parlance, “luxury”). But Mandeville was a satirist, and the upshot of his case was that human beings could have *either* private virtue and thus national poverty, or private vice and thus national opulence. When Redward praise Mandeville for his honesty, they fail to see that their championing of a prosperous developed society which does away with greed and positional ambition is a “vain Eutopia seated in the brain”. Books like Redward’s are what Mandeville was ridiculing.

Redward are concerned by capitalism because they worry about the tripartite souls of its consumer-citizens. Insatiable capitalism prevents us from being flourishing Aristotelian *eudaimonists*, which Redward believe is “objectively” what a good human life consists in (as confirmed by the pre-modern wisdom of Indian and Chinese philosophies, apparently). Insatiable capitalism must thus be abandoned, and the intervening hand of the state used to direct human beings in how to achieve their “objective” good life. Accordingly, the pursuit of growth – the acme of the goals of a wrong-headed capitalist society – must be dispensed with.

What is so frustrating about Redward’s book is that it focuses on the right issues but assembles them in a muddleheaded way. No right-thinking or decent person should disagree that insatiable capitalist consumer societies can lead to the stifling of human flourishing. (The fact some do deny this is simply proof that the world contains many people who are neither decent nor right-thinking.) Endless toil for the endless pursuit of materially signaled status does not make people happy. But we don’t need some allegedly “objective” theory of human nature to tell us *that*. If somebody hasn’t worked out by even their mid-20s that money alone will not make them happy, neither Redward’s book nor anything else can help them, and certainly not some “objective” truth apparently lost to all modern thinkers except Redward.

On the other hand, whilst money alone is not a sufficient, it is almost always a necessary precondition of happiness. Certainly real human happiness requires the space in which to flourish according to one’s own

choices and ideals (that's true in a basic, non-metaphysical sense, obvious to anybody who has lived as an independent adult). But, in order to do that successfully, one needs material security and prosperity. When there's food on the table and money in the pension pot, one can get on with working out how to be happy, after learning that money alone won't be enough. By contrast, if you're scraping around in the gutter for leftover bits of kebab to survive, happiness will be some way off. It is certainly mad to think that money alone makes you happy. But it's correct to think that having money makes it a lot easier to be happy, insofar as it puts you in control of your life.

It is true that we live in a society that often forgets this, and which forces adults to find it out for themselves, whilst making it harder for them to act upon the finding. Redward may thus appear to have something of a case when they bemoan politicians who focus excessively upon economic growth, apparently above all else. But actually this is not what is really happening. To see this we should get clear on what economic growth is. Growth is the measurement of activity in an economy, usually the supply and demand of goods and services. If the volume of that goes up, there is economic growth. If it goes down, there is economic contraction. Yet because the supply and demand of goods and services is typically achieved by individuals and organizations selling and buying resources or labour, growth and contraction are closely linked to employment. More growth, as a general rule, means more jobs. More jobs, as a general rule, means more money for individuals. If individuals have more money, they can better get on with choosing how to try and be happy against that background. Politicians pursue growth not for its own sake, as though it were some demented irrational ideal they are mysteriously *in hoc* to, but because of the prosperity it is bound up with for ruled populations who in democratic societies demand it as a condition of continued power.

Redward are right to notice that there is no guarantee that growth translates into benefits for working citizen populations. It certainly matters *how* such growth is achieved, and the values of a society that goes along with such growth. But that just means we should aspire – if we share Redward's worries, which are fundamentally the right ones – to a society which achieves growth in a different way to how ours does at present. One which incorporates just the sort of things Redward recommend for saving our souls from insatiable capitalist rapaciousness: state-provi-

sion of a basic income, reduction of advertising, an emphasis on more sustainable consumption patterns, control of the destructive financial sector, pursuit of education as an intrinsic good, and so on.

But what it does not translate into is Redward's claim that we need to abolish the pursuit of growth full-stop. The pursuit of growth, if successful, is what will allow at least some of its beneficiaries to try and secure happiness in conditions of material security. Certainly, it would be good if more people were given this as a real option, and many under current arrangements are denied it by low wages and job insecurity which enable them only to survive but not to flourish. But these nobler goals are something to be pursued alongside the goal of growth, not instead of it.

Unless, that is, one thinks that growth is going to be collectively fatal due to what appears to be a looming environmental catastrophe, and so should be abandoned. Noticing this again puts Redward's priorities under question. But the outright "no-to-growth" response itself leaves us with nothing to aspire to, because it's an automatic dead end in modern political-economic practicability. You can advocate ascetic cave-dwelling, a mandatory diet of nothing but home-grown lettuce, and the outlawing of all transportation except the bicycle. But short of the world-dictatorial powers you'll never have, this is not going to happen, and prosperous free societies will remain married to the engine of climate-change inducing growth. Indeed, imagining a growth-free world that is nonetheless prosperous for its inhabitants, and politically peaceful between the states they inhabit, is another utopia of the brain (albeit at present a remarkably common and widespread one). Growth may well kill us all, but that doesn't change the fact we can't live without it – indeed can't even coherently imagine a world that humans anything like us could exist in without it. To think otherwise is in no small measure a function of a facile misunderstanding of the basic idea of what economic growth is; of how it is that food and material security are provided to us in the west day after day after day.

Redward debar themselves from such reflections because they are primarily focused on saving everyone's soul. It is true that everyone should sympathize with Redward's observation that a society driven by competitive materially-based insatiability puts significant obstacles in the way of human flourishing. If we can reduce those things, so much the better

for all of us. But if one abandons the unsubstantiated (because unsubstantiable) assertion that there is a definite “objective” conception of human flourishing, one likewise abandons Redward’s impetus and justification for believing that the mechanisms of state paternalism must be employed to guide us all to such an end. One can instead get on with trying to sort one’s own life and happiness out, as well as that of one’s nearest and dearest. This may seem unambitious or small-minded. But at least it’s realistic and attainable. If Redward by contrast think that the political and economic trends of the past 30, nay, 250 years are reversible on the basis of some warmed-up Aristotelian pieties, they are truly deluded.

This review may seem unduly hostile. If so that is probably a result of my feeling repeatedly patronized by the authors. Redward write as though they have found the keys to the universe. But on the evidence of this work they are more like the toddler who gets hold of mummy’s key to the patio doors and believes himself master of the house. To make that remark a little more justified, here is a short list of those Redward dismiss as wrong about everything, and, by frequent implication, stupid to boot: economists (*all* of them, except Keynes); every philosopher of the eighteenth century (except Mandeville, and maybe Rousseau); Marxists; environmentalists of all persuasions; all contemporary liberal political philosophers. There are more, but this list gives sufficient impression of the audacity Redward possess in thinking that their snappy little number can out-do many generations of serious thought, which are here either disregarded or caricatured.

Presumably due to their believing they are in possession of an “objective” truth about human flourishing, Redward feel entitled to hand-out pronouncements on everything from taking ecstasy and having chocolate-covered sex to watching pornography – usually to explain why such activities aren’t part of the truly flourishing human life. But the real standard of judgment here isn’t some ‘objective’ truth, but the private prejudices of two members of the upper-middle class public intelligentsia. Which leads to sentences of sometimes astonishingly priggish pomposity. Exhibit A: “For instance, pornography is condemned on the dubious ground that it exploits women or incites men to rape, while its real offence - that of degrading taste and feeling - goes unmentioned”. (Exhibit B, if you’re wondering, is the claim that crack addicts don’t “need” their drug, they just “want it very much”. Doubtless professional neuropsychologists

and addiction experts across the globe are grateful for Redward’s rigorous scientific discovery.) The remark on pornography, it should be noted, comes in the context of claiming that the American liberal philosopher John Rawls established a principle of public political neutrality which now prevents the modern state from affirming true value judgments in its legislation or political pronouncements. A claim of such astonishing implausibility requires both a simultaneous lack of any basic knowledge of Rawls, and an utterly mystifying, because so totally divorced from observable reality, belief in the power his philosophy has had over recent politics.

If there is a master hate-figure in Redward’s book, however, it is Adam Smith. Which is a shame. Not just because what we get here is the standard straw-man caricature of Adam Smith: a two-dimensional apologist for capitalism who bears more resemblance to the frothing right-wing ‘think’tank The Adam Smith Institute than the real historical figure. But mainly because Adam Smith was actually the theorist par excellence of insatiable commercial societies who enhance the material prosperity of their citizenry whilst threatening to turn individuals into mere vehicles for competitive acquisition chasing the rainbow of consumer happiness. It was Smith who wrote:

“This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments”.

Smith understood Redward’s problem far better than they do. For a start, that there was no going back to the ancients, to ‘objective’ notions of happiness that would somehow (and somehow simultaneously) be satisfied by politicians retreating from the task of supplying economic prosperity and instead acting as interventionist sages of philosophic wisdom.

In the final revisions of his works, Smith was moved to pessimism regarding the long-term prospects of societies like ours. Redward feel the same pessimism, but they mishandle its diagnosis, and their cure is an exercise in well-intentioned, but patronizing, philosophic preaching. If it is objected that what is manifestly a work of popular writing should not be held to standards of rigour expected in academia, my reply is that given that Redward want to be taken seriously

by policy-makers, they may be subjected to the most stringent levels of interrogation. I'm afraid they don't hold up well. If they want to see how to do things better, however, they should pay proper attention to the figure whom they've mistakenly taken to be the apostle of all they despise.

Pankaj Mishra

*Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against
the West and the Remaking of Asia*
&

C. A. Bayly

*Recovering Liberties: Indian
Thought in the Age of Liberalism
and Empire*

Allen Lane, Cambridge University Press



It has been rumoured that Li Keqiang, on the cusp of becoming the next Premier of China, has recently suggested that his colleagues in the Politburo read Alexis de Tocqueville's *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Western commentators have leapt at this as a possible insight into what China's new leadership thinks. What does this choice of reading material, an analysis of the causes of the French Revolution by an early nineteenth-century political thinker, tell us about the hopes and fears of China's government? Is this a future global hegemonic power salvaging what it can from the history of the declining Western world, or does it fear leading China to the same fate as France, with an absolutist government mishandling reform and provoking violent revolution?

This conjecture reveals the importance that we are beginning to attach to understanding how the rising powers of the non-European world think about their political destiny. For this reason the publication of Pankaj Mishra's *From the Ruins of Empire* is both timely and welcome. In this compelling and elegantly written intellectual history of Asia's revolt against the West, Mishra makes the bold claim that he will analyse the origin of the ideas 'that now lie behind everything from the Chinese Communist Party to al-Qaeda, from Indian nationalism to the Muslim brotherhood'. It begins with the Battle of Tsushima, a naval encounter in 1905 which saw the Japanese navy

obliterate a Russian fleet. Mishra notes how this victory, the first case of a non-white nation reversing the onslaught of European expansion, sent shock waves throughout the world. Pride at Japan's ability to humiliate a European imperialist power was shared by Gandhi, the future Atatürk, Nehru, Sun Yat-Sen and Mao Zedong. Having quoted their responses to Tsushima however, Mishra swiftly turns his attention elsewhere. Why? Mishra claims that these household names who dominate our picture of Asia's revolt against the West have in fact limited our sense of Asia. In fact many of Asia's more long-lasting political and intellectual tendencies originate in the theories of lesser-known Asian intellectuals.

The two main protagonists of this book, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-97) and Liang Qichao (1873-1929), are figures largely unknown in the West outside specialist historical circles. Al-Afghani was a peripatetic intellectual and polemical journalist whose intellectual heritage has been claimed by everyone from pan-Islamists to left-wing secularists. Hardly a political success in his own time, nonetheless his potent rhetoric, expressing a dual hatred of Western imperialism and the tyrannies of the Muslim world, had a long-lasting and wide appeal. Whilst he has been described as the intellectual godfather of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, the United States also recently paid for the restoration of his tomb in Kabul, with the American ambassador praising him as a champion of 'freedom, reason and scientific inquiry'.

Liang Qichao on the other hand was one of China's foremost intellectuals at the turn of the century, involved in the attempts to reform the late Qing dynasty and witnessing its subsequent collapse into the chaos of early Republican China. Driven by the aim of reversing a century of humiliation at the hands of foreign powers, he wanted China to learn from the successes of other countries. A visit to America in 1903 left him unimpressed at the messiness of American democratic politics. By contrast the more authoritarian Meiji Japan, whose rapid adoption of Western technology paid off at Tsushima, was seen by Liang as a better model for China. Such was his scepticism about democracy, that he thought only after a half century of government-enforced modernisation would China's citizens be ready to read radical thinkers like Rousseau.

Yet whilst Mishra provides an engaging narrative of these figures' lives, his account of their ideas is a rather two-dimensional one. A somewhat exces-

sive focus on the question of how these intellectuals evaluated the West as a model belies the more nuanced and rich thought that these figures offered on a whole range of questions. Vague comparisons of East and West are given undue weight whilst the attempts of Asian and Islamic intellectuals to grapple with the internal social problems of their countries are not explored fully. It is worth remembering that Mishra gained renown for his part in a bruising clash with Niall Ferguson over the merits of empire conducted in the pages of the *London Review of Books*. Yet despite the value of Mishra's intervention in that debate, there is a sense that *From the Ruins of Empire* has been shackled to its parameters and the need to defend his arguments made there. Having proven his capabilities as a polemicist we can perhaps expect more from him as an intellectual historian.

By contrast one of the reasons why Christopher Bayly's *Recovering Liberties* can provide a much richer analysis, is that it does not attempt to engage in the more sterile incarnations of the 'west versus the rest' debate. Bayly claims to have written a socially-rooted intellectual history of his subject: the history of Indian liberal thought in the era of the British Empire. As such, he charts a middle path between an overly rarefied history of ideas and a reductionist socio-economic determinism. Although always mindful of the global intellectual context, Bayly's focus on India brings to the fore the kind of questions only alluded to by Mishra. It was the historian Sunil Khilnani in *The Idea of India* (1997) who made the strongest case for the importance of India as a laboratory for the application of political theories. Democracy has proven itself resilient here in the face of seemingly insurmountable social obstacles. He commanded the world to pay heed to its future development, with 'the future of Western political theory' facing judgement in the successes and disappointments of the non-Western world.

In *Recovering Liberties* Bayly has carried out the difficult task of uncovering an earlier tradition of nineteenth century and early twentieth century Indian liberal thought, when many of the vexed questions that continue to grip contemporary Indian politics were first being formulated. Bayly's focus on liberal thinkers challenges both the Gandhi-centric focus of many Western observers and the undue neglect of India's domestic liberal tradition by Indian historians. Researching this study was no mean feat, given the paucity of isolated canonical texts in Indian political thought.

Bayly locates the foundational moment of Indian liberalism in the turbulent 1820s, with the critique of despotism and call for open government articulated by the Bengali social reformer Rammohan Roy (1772-1833). The development of the various critiques of British rule, the complaint at the 'drain of wealth' from India and the notion of an original democracy pre-dating British rule in the villages of India, are traced over subsequent decades. An important role is given to radical political economists such as Dadhabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), the first Indian to be elected to the House of Commons. Christened 'statistical liberals' by Bayly, this group accumulated empirical statistics, often from British sources, in order to challenge the claims of their imperial overlords. Bayly goes on to demonstrate how Indian liberalism, seemingly swept aside by the new extremist doctrines of twentieth century politics, in fact exerted a wide influence, even over its critics. Not only were the dividing lines separating liberals, Marxists and fascists particularly porous, but Indian liberalism had long distanced itself from laissez-faire economics and had developed a communitarian bent. Of particular interest is the discussion of Dr. Ambedkar (1891-1956), an Untouchable lawyer and student of John Dewey who drafted India's Constitution and advocated the use of radical legal reform and state intervention to bring democratisation not just to India's politics, but to its society as well.

The distance from power found in the state of imperial subjugation can be conducive to abstract political thought. However once the reins of state are passed into native hands, many such theories fail to survive. *Recovering Liberties* ends by asserting the persistence of liberal values in India's vibrant democracy, whereas *From the Ruins of Empire* strikes an unexpectedly sombre note. Describing the assertiveness of Asia's rising powers of today, Mishra argues that the 'revenge of the East' conceals an 'immense intellectual failure', and that there exists 'no convincingly universalist response' to Western ideas of politics and economics. Mishra warns that the emerging world stands to repeat, on a far larger scale, the West's 'tormented' experience of modern development.

With these books heavily focussed on the imperial age, the authors reach their conclusions by leaping to the present day, leaving the intervening history of the post-imperial age evoked rather than explored. This is a pity, as the important concluding assertions are justified by the history of this period. Nonetheless we should remember that these are early days

in the serious study of non-European thought, a subject that needs to develop if intellectual history is to contextualise and enrich our understanding of

the contemporary world. Let us hope that these two important path-breaking works will inspire others to follow in their wake.

Two Boxes and a Pair of Scissors: Plath, Yeats, Pope, Hill



'So many people are shut up tight inside themselves like boxes, yet they would open up, unfolding quite wonderfully, if only you were interested in them.' – Sylvia Plath

'A poem comes right with a click like a closing box' – W.B. Yeats

I want to set before you these two boxes, which at first glance could hardly be more different. Plath's box is the prison of the world's neglect, opening to free the precious, individual soul trapped within. Yeats' box, by contrast, is about the poet's satisfaction in clicking shut their finished poetic artefact, neat, crisp, all in the action of shutting it. Plath's box compacts and contains the wonderful individual; Yeats' marks that individual's delighted manipulation of his object. Plath's image is of a psychological condition, a noun; Yeats' of an aesthetic act, a verb.

But Yeats' box also captures the extent to which this action goes beyond the individual's simple imposition on the world. Although it appears in an account of poetic craftsmanship, it also closes autonomously into its perfection: it 'comes right', which is not to say, and need not mean, that the poet 'makes it right'. This sense that the perfect poem clicks shut of its own volition recurs throughout literature, epitomized perhaps in that 'moving Toyshop', Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. The scissors severing the lock into the stars, from the narrative into isolation, and from its historical context into the aesthetic object of Pope's poem, dance in step with the "scissors" of Pope's constantly opening and closing heroic couplets. In exquisite detail, the couplet-scissors spurred by autonomous 'Fate' attempt three times to cut the lock out from Pope's heroic machinery and authorial comment, before 'sacred hair' and 'the fair head' are finally severed into different lines:

The Peer now spreads the glittering Forfex wide
T'inclose the Lock; now joins it, to divide.
Ev'n then, before the fatal engine clos'd.
A wretched Sylph too fondly interpos'd;
Fate urged the sheers, and cut the Sylph in twain,
(But airy substance soon unites again)
The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever! (*The Rape of the Lock*, Book III.147-154)

For Pope, this kind of verse-as-mechanism, embodied in the clockwork menagerie of Book III, seems to cut the poem free from his agency with a precision worthy of Yeats' closing box. Rhyme, in particular, seems to encourage the poet's sense, in writing, of the poem's rhyme scheme moving it autonomously; of the rhyme's repeated attempts at closure (especially since rhymes are often end-stopped) and the author's reaction, positive or negative, to this pressure towards concision; of rhyme's verbal precision in exactly matching syllables; of its blatant literariness (rhymes catch the ear, are language announcing itself as more than mere transport for meaning); and of an exterior control compelling the poet's thought along. Even at the birth of the English sonnet, we find Wyatt playing on form's mechanisms and the political mechanisms of the Henrician court; the rondo's apparently straight words and the uneasy shifting of meaning, with context, around them ('In Aeternum'; 'Go, Burning Sighs').

Contrast this with the experience of writing, or reading, blank verse: the verse, rather than imposing end-stopped limits to contract thought, draws out the length of the prose sentence and the thinking process; with

no natural terminus, the mind is drawn to interminability; the extending rhythms give the sense of “taking off” into the poem, trance and prophetic flight (or soporific, numbing continuity); the form’s natural continuity suggests a single overriding mind and a continuous extension towards the present and the reader. *Paradise Lost* attains through blank verse a sense of soaring narrative and theological unity, gesturing expansively out across linear history towards the reader. *The Faerie Queene*, by contrast, comes by rhyme to a point-point structure of thought between stanzas, an epic of repeated, discrete departures and returns, and small units bound uncertainly together within an overall meaning, related obliquely to the reader by allegory. So too, these impressions of writing verse, partly determining and partly determined by the literary contexts in which each form has developed, structure Yeats’ image of the box clicking neatly shut. That he and Pope emerge with similar images of neat mechanisms affirms this shared sense of closure, but it also captures the more problematic interrelation of self and world in crafting the poetic object: the form also thinks, and the poet, rather than merely shaping his material, encourages it to assemble in constellation.

So writing verse, and especially rhymed verse, is done in cooperation with the mechanisms of form and of aesthetic completion: that neat, independent force of clicking shut by which the poem is felt to “come right”. The poet negotiates with a force partly beyond him and within the language, autonomously completing itself with the precision of Pope’s pair of scissors. He moves guided by form and aesthetic sense, each a mix of personal taste and the world’s prescriptions, each emerging within the language’s internal limits and patterns rather than the poet’s feelings. Form here is more rigidly Other, often fixed by artistic convention; aesthetic sense, however, bridges language and feeling, activating a feeling of beauty within language.

But both neat, conclusive external forces, the box’s closing mechanism, contrast with a third mode by which language is independent: its complexity, weight and resistance. Geoffrey Hill begins his essay ‘Poetry as Menace and Atonement’ with Yeats’ box, which he aligns with T.S. Eliot’s remark that

When the words are finally arranged in the right way – or in what he comes to accept as the best arrangement he can find – [the poet] may experience a moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution, and of something very near annihilation, which is itself indescribable.

But as Christopher Ricks observes, Eliot’s self-annihilating struggle into words and Yeats’ neat clicking of language into place have less in common than their sense of closure would suggest. Rather than Yeats’ neat verse mechanism, Eliot charts an exhausting personal battle through writing to a religious sense of closure. His process of writing adumbrates Hill’s deeply personal vision of the self’s emergence into a language which is deeply other, ‘not-self’, already densely inhabited by its past usages, discourses, meanings and connotations. Language, too, is ‘Fallen’ because it is inhabited, untrustworthy, resistant, no longer innocent. However, Hill does not exactly confuse Yeats’ and Eliot’s conflicting accounts as Ricks argues. Rather, he puts Eliot and Yeats not side-by-side but overlapping in a redemptive narrative. The poet, like the sinner, struggles through the Eliotic “weight” of language’s alterity and history, towards the final “lightness” of God’s aesthetic grace, which is to capture both Eliot’s self-annihilation and the perfection of Yeats’ closing box. Reading Hill together with Yeats and Pope, there are thus three different alterities in language with which the poet negotiates: first, the force of language’s history and complexity resisting the self’s intrusion; and then the formal and aesthetic forces compelling the language to perfect completion. It is like a chancy, uncertain electrolysis: probing the charge of self through molten, resistant language, he tries to coax it towards the aesthetic and formal reactions which will make it “come right”.

Hill’s pilgrim’s progress forms a cornerstone of his objection to confessional poetry: he moves from the abject self, through wrestling with a linguistic world in which it redeems itself from mere egocentric isolation, towards a God who finally lifts the self out of self through aesthetic grace. Poetry offers the redemption of self through alterity. Yet this image, so distinctively and unmistakably Hill’s, recalls the inalienably personal tone of even his most religiously ascendant or culturally self-dispersing poetry. Yeats’ words’ self-satisfied clicking shut; Eliot’s words’ dry, Nirvanic struggle; Plath’s words’ fragile, childlike unfolding: all testify that the agencies against which and through which the linguistic vessel is crafted are intensely, recognisable personal. Plath’s box contains individuality; Yeats’ image too, perhaps unintentionally, suggests that the aesthetic con-

struct is a container of some atmosphere, personality or experience. We speak of “putting yourself into your writing”, and in writing’s deepest engagement with the not-self, it often represents the writer most unmistakably. For we also say that people’s deeper characters emerge in moments of intensity and strain.

Of course, writing a poem is not remotely like losing a loved one or being placed in some excruciating moral dilemma – and thankfully so. But Pope’s dancing scissors dramatise the difficulty of language’s alterities really excising the author, for in so doing they reveal the author’s wonderful character the more distinctly. Earlier we lined Plath’s box and Yeats’ box up in a narrative: the individual escapes the world’s limits and then expresses herself in language. We have just lined Hill’s struggle and Yeats’ box up in the same sequence. Hill’s struggle and Plath’s, I propose, are not opposites but analogues: though Plath’s words are not explicitly about poetry, both writers saw it as a psychologically necessary engagement with the not-self and the forces of aesthetic and formal grace. Plath charts the opening up of the repressed, damaged individual into the world; Hill the realisation of the already opened, egocentric individual of his theological limits. Hill weights the world and God more highly, but he does that as part of an intensely personal argument and wider sense of telos which Plath does not share. Plath weights the difficulty of opening up the box – an image of escape from enclosure – as part of a disturbed condition which Hill does not share. Plath’s ‘Daddy’ wrestles with language’s and the world’s resistance to self through to a ritualistic formal and aesthetic “grace” in catharsis. ‘Confessional’, in its rich religious connotations, as aptly characterises Hill’s writing as Plath’s, however Hill mistrusts the term.

So putting himself into engagement with the linguistic, formal and aesthetic alterities of Yeats’ poetic box permits the poet to escape from Plath’s limiting box, or Hill’s abject selfhood. It is a paradox. The height of otherness, in these three alterities, is also the height of individuality: the point where, in a highly personal struggle, the poet realises himself in his relation to that otherness.

But it is also striking how the image of the box has such a drastically different meaning for Plath than for Yeats, so that Hill might dismiss Plath’s and commend Yeats’ almost identical image. For Plath, the box crushingly confines the individual; for Yeats, the individual shapes the box in cooperation with its inherent cohesion. The simple concrete noun ‘box’ has very different symbolic contents. Plath’s box resonates with her concerns about the womb, the tomb, and her horrific entrapment after her first attempted suicide in a way that Yeats’ more impersonal sense of the word in relation to the artisan shaping his artefact could never have had. Language bridges the gulf between different perspectives, but its public meaning only skirts the mass of private associations, emotions, experience, and different feelings of consciousness (of the feeling of being you) which inhabits and an individual’s experience of a word. Communication is profoundly fragile act of contact across a gulf of difference.

Thus, although everyday language seems intuitively more communicative and less the individual’s private wrestling with language, the language of poetry can be a more effective means of communicating truly individual experience. ‘Metaphor’, etymologically, stems from “carrying across”. It carries a concept over to the other person by means of another concept: for example, it could convey the quality of a person’s anger by calling it “fiery” to capture its intensity and wildness. Thus the metaphor qualifies the public concept of “anger” and shows the individual quality of this anger. But, in trying to carry across a rich, unique private experience by distorting public language, it necessarily exposes the limits of that language in the first place. An unexpected conjunction of words captures a particular tone for which the straightforward public word may be inadequate, but also increasingly rips the public language apart to get at the private sense.

This, drawing on the resources of prosody, space and a culturally privileged claim to attentive reading, is something poems do richly. Writing is not just an intensely personal, aesthetic engagement with the alterity of language and the world, it is also a profound expression of the extent to which the innermost self is untranslatable. Poetry attempts to bypass language straight to individuality, yet it can only attempt this by means of language. Here, then, is another paradox: poetry shows language’s fullest expressive potential, its greatest aesthetic value, and the individual’s deepest engagement with it, only in the destruction of public language, the admission of language’s inadequacy, and the attempt to bypass it altogether. Poetry is language triumphantly committing suicide in order to really communicate.

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