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With many thanks to Willem de mol Van Otterloo and Johan Orly

Professor George Garnett discusses the Vitality of the Ancient, Pre-Conquest English Constitution…

On 24 September 2019 the Supreme Court handed down a judgment on the recent prorogation of Parliament – more accurately, its purported prorogation, because the judgment pronounced the attempt unlawful, and therefore null. The effect of the judgment was that there had been no prorogation. When Parliament resumed, all record of it was expunged from the Journal of the House of Commons.

When Lady Hale began reading out her summary of the judgment, I was all agog. I soon jumped up and cheered. Many other listeners were doubtless doing likewise, but not, I suspect, for the reason I was.

What suffused me with delight was the very first authority she cited: Sir Edward Coke's report of the so-called *Case of Proclamations*. Sir Edward Coke's stature in terms of English common law is commensurate with that of his contemporary Shakespeare in terms of English literature. In really important cases, lawyers love to invoke Coke as a supreme, incontestable authority. Lady Hale did not draw attention to the fact that the *Case of Proclamations* was not a report on a court case at all, but an opinion solicited from Coke by the Lord Chancellor and other law officers in 1610. The report was not an authority behind which she wanted to delve. English lawyers are very good at reining in any historical curiosity when they need to do so. As far as she and her colleagues were concerned, Coke's report was ultimate and unquestionable.

In the report, Coke records himself as having concluded that 'the King hath no prerogative, but that which the law of the land allows him'. This was relevant to the Supreme Court case in 2019 because the government claimed to be able to prorogue Parliament on the basis of royal prerogative, now exercised on the advice of the monarch's ministers. One of the authorities which Coke says he had invoked in support of his opinion was Sir John Fortescue, a mid-fifteenth-century Chief Justice of the King's Bench, specifically his *De laudibus legum Anglie*. In that work Fortescue had distinguished kings who ruled 'politically and regally' from kings who ruled simply 'regally'. He did so wholly in favour of the former, and to the detriment of the latter. By the former, he meant English kings, by the latter French – remember that he was writing at the end of the Hundred Years War. What he meant was that royal rule was stronger if it was institutionally limited or circumscribed.

He argued that this distinctive characteristic of English kingship had originated historically: the first king of the British, Brutus, a refugee from Troy, had been elected as king by his followers on prescribed terms, specifically that all proposed laws would only be valid if subjects formally assented to them. Fortescue thereby drew on a myth first propagated by Geoffrey on Monmouth, an early-twelfth-century Welsh scholar, or fantasist, author of the first history book which we know to have been written in Oxford. That this myth, like the rest of Geoffrey's supposed work of history, was entirely fabricated did not worry Fortescue three centuries later or Coke half a millennium later. Fortescue's aboriginal British or English constitution had not been compromised by successive conquests – by Romans, Saxons, Danes, or finally Normans, 'whose posterity holds the realm at the present time'. William the Conqueror, like all previous conquerors of Britain had preserved the aboriginal 'political and regal rule'. It remained in force.

This was the interpretation of the ancient constitution implicitly invoked by the Supreme Court in 2019 to justify its nullifying of the supposed prorogation of Parliament. But it was not only the Supreme Court which referred back, albeit obliquely, to the Norman Conquest while nevertheless downplaying it. The purported prorogation had been choreographed by the government to conclude with a State Opening of Parliament on the anniversary of the Battle of Hastings, 14 October 2019. In other words, the government arranged for a new parliamentary session to begin on the nine-hundred-and-fifty-third anniversary of the kingdom's conquest by the Normans. Given that one purpose of the prorogation was widely deemed to be an attempt to prevent any parliamentary scrutiny of the Brexit Bill, then in train, the intended message of the dating was that Britain would in effect be liberated from European bondage on the anniversary of its conquest by Europeans.

Boris Johnson never lets slip on opportunity to allude to the Conquest. On 17 May 2016, during the European Union Referendum Campaign, he accused his Remainer opponents of 'the biggest stitch-up since the Bayeux Tapestry'. Perhaps he was inspired by Nigel Farage, who had been sporting a Bayeux Tapestry tie since the Rochester and Strood by-election in 2014. On 17 September 2018, in the *Daily Telegraph*, Mr Johnson suggested that agreeing to the proposals for a withdrawal agreement recently made at Chequers by the then Prime Minister would have amounted to a craven submission to foreign domination unparalleled 'since 1066'. On 10 September 2019, by now Prime Minister himself, and on the very day when the purported prorogation of Parliament came into effect, he chose to be filmed participating in a lesson at Pimlico Primary School on the subject of Norman Conquest. A voluble member of the class, he revealed himself to be better informed about the details than the other pupils.

The Prime Minister appears to see Brexit as a sort of reversal of the Conquest. The justices of the Supreme Court nullified his prorogation of Parliament partly on the grounds that his deployment of the royal prerogative did not allow him to ignore the law. Coke in the seventeenth century, Fortescue in the fifteenth, and many earlier and later English lawyers (including contemporaries of Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth) all agreed that English law had not been compromised by the Norman Conquest; that with respect to the continuous history of English law, the Conquest was an irrelevance. For the government, the projected Opening of a new session of Parliament on its anniversary would have symbolised that. The United Kingdom would be emancipated from a much more recent subjugation to continental dominion. Both sides in the argument were therefore agreed that the Norman Conquest remained of contemporary resonance, and both were also agreed that 1066 (or in the case of the government, its 1970s reprise) had, or should henceforth have, little effect.

Why did I dance round my living room with glee when I heard the first few sentences of Lady Hale's summary judgment? Because the whole episode showed that the peculiarly persistent English mode of political and legal legitimation by reference to medieval history, and in particular by reference to the central event in that history, is still vital in the twenty-first century. I had just finished a book on the role that the Norman Conquest had played in English historical writing, English law, and English political argument, over the first six centuries after 1066 – a history of the history of the Conquest. Lady Hale confirmed my instinct that a second volume would be needed.

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Willem de Mol van Otterloo reflects on his interview with Professor Boyd Hilton about his book 'A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?'

Boyd Hilton's career, like the period of history he writes about, has been one of progression. Raised and educated in Manchester, he does not think of himself as having been a "very bright or hard-working kid". In fact, without a surprisingly stellar O Level performance, he believes his teachers did not intend for him to stay on at his academically-striving grammar school. This performance perhaps marked a shift in Professor Hilton's interests and prospects. Acquiring a degree of emotional engagement from his father's collection of popular history books, he suddenly emerged in the Sixth Form as a high-flying student of the humanities. Whist his excellence at English and History were indistinguishable, he always knew "history was the one". He sensed that his enjoyment of English derived more from an adolescent pretentiousness in playing with fashionable literary critical ideas, than from engaging emotionally with novels and poems, something that he did not discover until later. Nor does he regret the decision, explaining how whilst English has taken a heavy blow from post-modernism, History has more or less kept on its two feet.

If Professor Hilton's career has been one of progression, this does not exempt it from uncertainty and disappointment. Calling himself an Oxford workaholic (not excluding an occasional beer with his mates), Professor Hilton states how after studying History for three years at New College, he had decided he wanted to become a neurosurgeon. But whilst he had set himself on the neurosurgical life, his desire was not requited and he was unable to get himself accepted to study medicine. He now jestingly acknowledges that his hamfistedness would probably not have made him the most able neurosurgeon. Nevertheless, he persisted in pursuing a medical career, now turning to working in a hospital administration.

However, a year in the academic wilderness taught him that, as well as his unsuitability for the medical profession, he had a longing to get back to History. Returning to Oxford for a D.Phil, he set his sights on understanding the economic policies of the Liberal Tories of the 1820s. In *Corn, Cash and Commerce* (1978), he explored the interplay of economic ideology and policy, how these correlated, and perhaps more importantly, how they did not. In studying the Liberal Tories, he found himself perplexed at points where both 'Liberal' and 'High' Tories appeared to be behaving irrationally when set against his previous conceptions of how they should act. Therefore, he was delighted to find his puzzlement dispelled by reading the sermons of the theologian Thomas Chalmers, which offered an explanation for the gaps in his understanding of the Liberal Tories. The secularity of his original approach to economic policy had ignored the evangelical bent of the period, so epitomised in Chalmers who was both a theologian

and a political economist. Thomas Chalmers almost moved Huskisson, the economic guru of the Liberal Tories, to tears with his *Astronomical Sermons* of 1817. Chalmers appears to have seen the efficacy of bankruptcies as forcing businessmen to adopt the 'preventive or moral check of moderation' to the dangers of financial and commercial speculation, so rampant at the time. Huskisson, Peel and Chalmers saw 'competitive individualism' as a 'scheme of morality'. Business was a moral test, where one had to steer between the Charybdis of excessive avarice and the Scylla of ruinous bankruptcy.

Hilton had found a clue as to how to answer his question, but as the publication of his thesis had already been delayed by technical problems, he did not want to ask the publishers for more time. They agreed to give him ten extra pages at the end of his Ph.D. *Corn, Cash and Commerce,* and so it is that in a brilliant but cursory fashion the final ten pages of *Corn, Cash and Commerce* are utterly incongruent with the rest of the book. Understandably dissatisfied, Hilton now set out to truly understand the spirituality that was largely absent from *Corn, Cash and Commerce*. It was with this purpose that he undertook to write his second book and the one that he is most proud of, *The Age of Atonement.*

In *The Age of Atonement,* Hilton explores the influence of evangelicalism on social and economic policy. In this new work Hilton claimed that the ideology that influenced politicians was profoundly religious in character. Indeed, the argument is convincingly made that postmillenarian evangelical theology contributed more than classical economics or utilitarianism to the new economic policy based on individualism that emerged in Great Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Competing economic philosophies were subsumed into a variety of religious perceptions. He showed that the contraction and expansion of the economy, traditionally analysed in terms of trade cycle theory, was then seen in relation to scheme of providential retribution. Yet, whilst religion certainly influenced economic thinking, this did not mean religious understandings were completely assured. Hilton detects in the evangelical mind of the period 'a persistent oscillation between optimism and pessimism, a constant uncertainty as to whether misery or happiness best testified to God's efficient governance of the moral world'. Better than any other historian, Hilton understands and presents the irony that Britain, at its zenith of expansion and flourishing, was characterised by such uncertainty.

It was after the publishing of *the Age of Atonement,* that he was offered the prospect of writing for the New Oxford History of England series. Intoxicated with the prestige of the first Oxford History of England, Professor Hilton leaped at the offer. The product: *A Mad Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846.*

> 'There was a moral revolution at work, but subliminally. Consequently, it was not until about 1850 that the mad, bad and dangerous people woke up, as it were one morning, to find themselves respectable'

Containing a characteristic mixture of levity and sincerity, it is this concluding remark at the end of the first chapter which best gauges the character of *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People.* Incisive, vivid, eclectically researched and lucidly written, Hilton's book is a *tour de force* in the study of late Georgian and early Victorian England. He

balances a study of policy and politics with an understanding of ideology and attitudes. Somewhat an extension of *An Age of Atonement,* Hilton maintains and convincingly argues his evangelical perspective. Indeed, perhaps one of the most interesting and novel narratives is the relationship between Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism.

One would be making a sound assumption in thinking that a secular philosophy like Utilitarianism would share little ground with religious Evangelicalism. However their similiarities are more striking than their differences. Both Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism believed humans were 'inherently flawed, but capable of being made good'. Thomas Carlyle put it best when he spoke of Bentham's concern for 'man's salvation as a social being'. In practice utilitarians and evangelicals cooperated in policy areas like penal and prison reform, and more seriously in the anti-slavery movement. The evangelical idea of the 'moral government of God' by calculable 'reward and punishment' shares a similar tone as utilitarianism which preached a 'felicific calculus' to determine the happiness gained from particular individual actions.

As expert as his knowledge of the philosophy and religious threads of the period is Professor Hilton's understanding of the high politics. Asked about why Sir Robert Peel repealed the Corn Laws, Hilton makes the argument that Peel was effectively continuing the earlier principles and policy of William Huskisson. Peel, he argues, was less concerned about whether free trade would yield sustained growth than social justice. Perhaps because he came from a manufacturing background in a party of the landed class, he felt all the more sensitive about the Corn Laws' favouritism towards those 'hunting country squires'. Hilton also sides with the common view that the Great Famine in Ireland was the excuse and occasion for repeal rather than its cause.

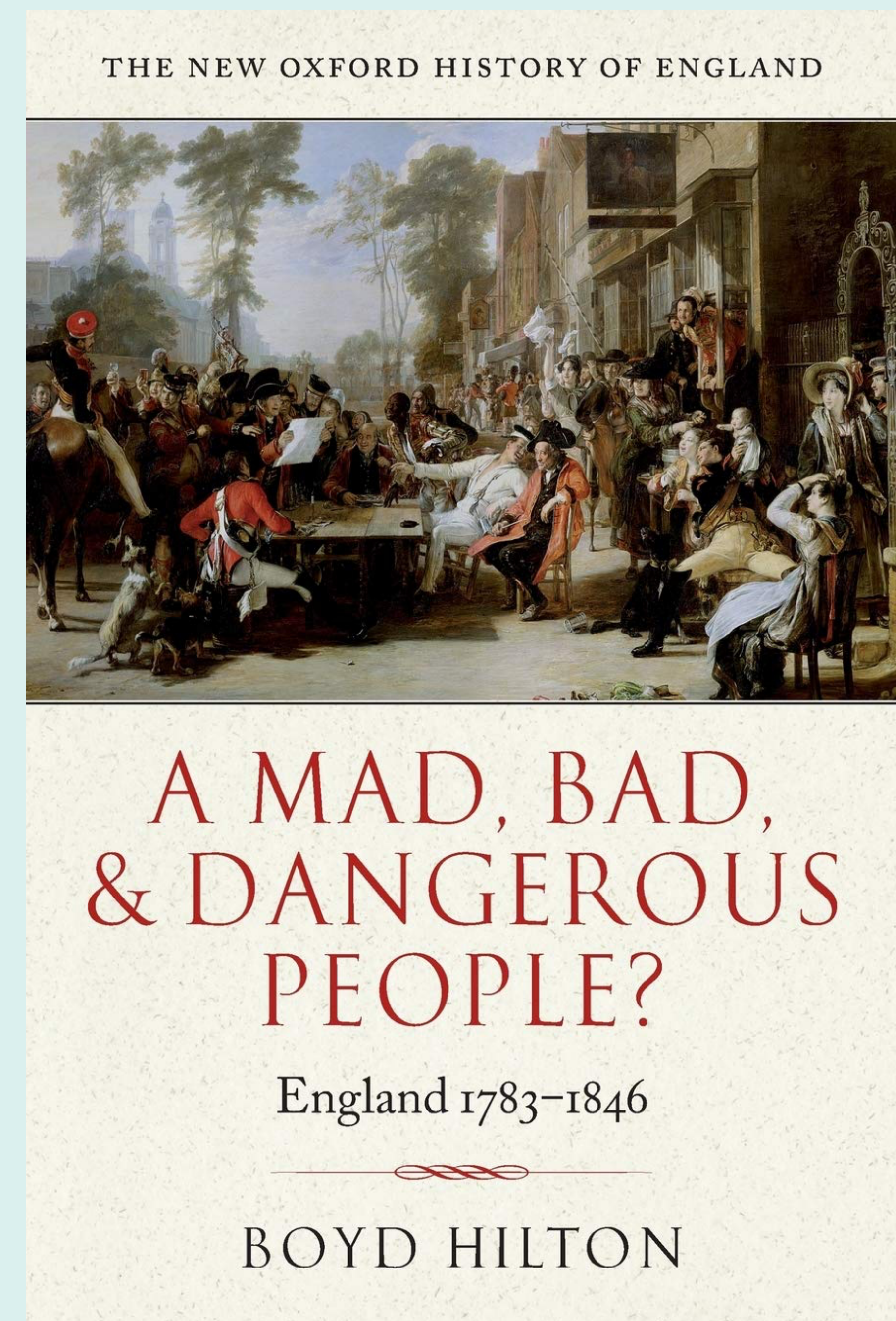
Yet, in the role of Cobden, Hilton takes an unorthodox and thus all the more significant approach. In one of his speeches during the repeal debates, Peel attempted to shift the blame (or hand over the credit) to Richard Cobden, leader of the Anti-Corn Law League, by pointing at him and announcing in Parliament that Cobden was the one who has brought about repeal. This gave Peel the *appearance* of someone who had changed his mind, a view that has held sway among historians in general, but Professor Hilton argues this was a tactical move. Against the background of winning the 1841 general election off the support of the landed gentry, the repeal of the Corn Laws would be a blatant betrayal of those who had elevated him to power in the first place. In the lead up to election he had even indicated that he would not repeal the Corn Laws, whereas the opposition party, the Whigs, had at least indicated they would introduce modifications. By making it *appear* as though he had changed his mind since 1841, Peel hoped the party would not feel he had been lying through his teeth in the election process, and hence hoped to alleviate the extent of betrayal felt by landed Tory backbenchers. Accustomed to Peel's clarity of vision and executive behaviour, the backbenchers were able to see through Peel's dishonesty. In fact, their betrayal and anger spurred on some of the greatest invectives ever heard, espoused by an until-now unknown backbencher, Benjamin Disraeli, condemning 'the huckstering tyranny of the Treasury bench – these political pedlars that bought their party in the cheapest market, and sold us in the dearest'. It is perhaps characteristic of history, that the fall of one great politician in one way marked the rise of another.

But whilst Hilton is brilliant in conveying the gravity and importance of high politics, he can be funny as well, and, even better, funny when he shouldn't be. Talking of Queen Caroline and her procession he writes thus:

> 'There were serious riots as her cortège passed through London, and fatalities at Hyde Park Corner when the Life Guards opened fire on what ministers called the mob, Radicals called the People, and sensible folk were beginning to recognise as simply a crowd.'

His characterisation of established political figures is even more indicative of his colourful wit. Fox, he remarks, was 'swarthy, fat, and (like many fat men in the eighteenth century) irresistible to women' whilst his rival, Pitt, liked 'to order hair shirts but did not wish to wear them' and later on Palmerston 'like many compulsive womanisers … was in most social contexts a man's man'.

Looking back, we should be grateful that Professor Hilton chose a historical path rather than a medical one, as it has gifted us a brilliant historian, in person and on paper.



Purav Menon reviews 'Who Rules the World?' by Noam Chomsky

Chomsky's 2016 historical investigation is scattershot, yet ultimately nuanced, insightful, and disturbing

The "father of modern linguistics", a major figure in analytic philosophy and cognitive science, and an outspoken and often controversial political activist, Noam Chomsky (b. 1928) is nothing if not an intellectual polymath. Having juggled expertise in such a wide number of fields, it is Chomsky's passionate New Left-associated political ideals that come to the forefront in '*Who Rules the World?*', his rigorous 2016 examination of how the United States of America historically pursued inhumane avenues to secure global dominance under the guise of freedom. A collection of loosely related chapters, the book rallies behind one fundamental and markedly relevant theme – the U.S.'s foreign intervention and its consequences. In expertly calling upon and analysing a number of factual historical events over the past century, Chomsky effectively presents the reader with the harrowing reality of the foreign policy of the most powerful country in the world.

The book opens by simply answering the question its title suggests: who does indeed rule the world? To Chomsky, any answer cannot be simple nor definitive. He is, in some ways, correct; as he says himself, "the world is too varied, too complex, for that to be possible." Yet it is not unclear who he really means by the book's title. The front cover is adorned with the stars and stripes. To Chomsky, the United States is "by far the first among unequals". In the introduction, he takes us through his main argument – the United States' repressive foreign policy is, to him, the cause for its diminishing of power since the culmination of the Second World War, and for the majority of global problems. He carries us through a number of different aspects: class war, declining democracy, environmental damage, and nuclear war, and, as to the survival of the world, does not conclude with some sort of faux-optimistic statement intended to instil some sense of happiness in the reader. Instead, he is blunt – "there is not much time".

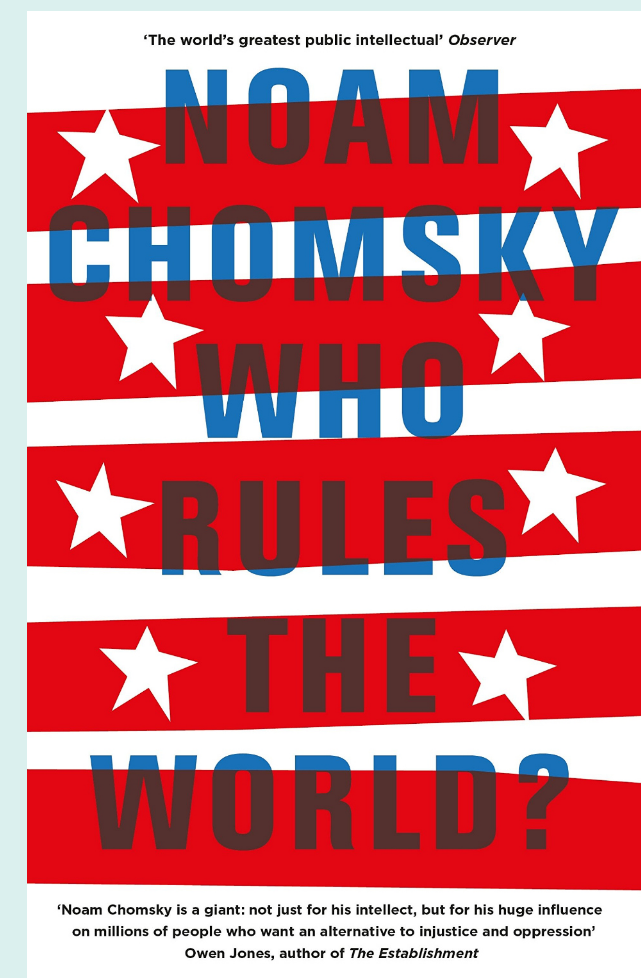
From the very first chapter, titled "The Responsibility of Intellectuals", we can quickly tell this is a Chomsky publication, with Chomsky making use of his extensive background in order to educate us on the concept of "intellectuals" in the modern sense. We are then taken on a grim world tour; we see insights over the creation of modern terrorists and use of torture, a critique of state capitalism and the U.S.'s prioritisation of the corporate sector, and the country's role in exacerbating climate change, amongst others - all packed into a tight 300-page book. Once the book is finished, it feels as if the history of every modern country in the world has been covered in some way or another.

The structure of the book is curious; rather than a fledged-out book with a clear journey, '*Who Rules the World?*' reads more like a collection of loosely related essays on various different topics, all bound together by one central theme. In some ways,

Chomsky's method of zigzagging between various time periods and places in the world is very effective - doing so allows him to present the vast number of ways in which the U.S.'s foreign policy has negatively impacted so many countries across the world, and bringing such a wide array of examples to the forefront of each chapter further legitimises his argument. Nevertheless, his scattershot, unorganised approach to consolidating his views does sometimes make the book difficult to follow. Many of the chapters do seem like a cobbling together of repetitive phrases and tangential digressions, making re-reading required for some sentences. Moreover, his interspersed contextless cherry-picking does make one question the validity of some of his arguments. Be that as it may, the book does function as a good starter for those not familiar with Chomsky's more technical political philosophy.

But what does make the book so successful in the end is Chomsky's ability to be completely, brutally uncompromising in his treatment of the United States. His completely research-based insights on the modern world order are staggering. He does not follow party lines, but presents historical facts as they are. He uses emotionally charged language in order to both convey his sense of despair and to make the reader feel the same. He tears down liberal heroes like Kennedy and Obama as relentlessly as he does Bush and Reagan. But perhaps most importantly, Chomsky's revelatory insights incite the reader to put the book down for some time and research the vast number of historical missteps he has exposed.

'Who Rules the World?' is not a perfect book. It is strongly opinionated, haphazard, and downright confusing at times. But Chomsky's capacity to expose devastating policies undertaken by the U.S. and its leaders throughout history are imperative to understanding the world we live in today. The book may lead to its reader feeling pessimistic over the state of the world – such is the power of his writing – but that is not what he intends. Rather, the work serves not solely as a critique but also as a warning for future global leaders of the consequences that can result due to foreign intervention. It is entirely possible that, if the United States continues along the trajectory Chomsky has described, he will continue to be revered many years from now. "There is not much time", he writes. But we are not out of time quite yet.



Kostantinos Haidas discusses whether films are able to teach us history…

Films have a considerable appeal to many and have the potential to influence our views and understanding of historical events. This influence that films inherently exert can "teach" us in a way that written words cannot. Spoken words, soundtracks and pictures all evoke tone and emotion from us that are unlikely to be created in written word alone, especially in the drone of academic books. Film as a medium not only considers Hollywood blockbusters, but also propaganda films and documentaries and we need to consider the motives behind each piece of film on a case-by-case basis to assess truth embellishment and the potential distortion of past events.

Clearly the biggest revenue generator are motion pictures from Hollywood. One of the biggest challenges these filmmakers face is ensuring they not only create drama but also sustain it throughout the film's duration. A commonly held view is that filmmakers don't need to create "false" drama by adding fictional events and characters as they can utilise music, acting and special effects to enhance the dramatic quality of the picture thereby limiting any mediocre moments. However, the film "Mary, Queen of Scots" has been deemed historically inaccurate by many experts in the subject. The climax of the film is the meeting between Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I which in reality, never happened. This moment could mislead viewers about the nature of the relationship between the two queens. The pair exchanged regular correspondence and the fact that the cousins never met in person precludes the possibility of the intense personal dynamic that is projected onto them by the film. It is much more likely that the queens' attitudes were mainly dictated by changing circumstances. The portrayal of the two as polar opposites – Catholic versus Protestant, adulterer versus Virgin Queen and beautiful heroine versus smallpox-scarred crone – is extreme in itself. Instead, the truth is far more nuanced. Both were fluid in their religious inclinations and Mary's more scandalous reputation was largely fabricated by her enemies, whereas Elizabeth's reign was filled with rumours of her love life. A Hollywood lens reduces representations of Mary and Elizabeth to oversimplified stereotypes.

One could say that the portrayal of gender and race in historical films is problematic as they seem to spotlight special cases and ignore the general situation. For example, Elizabeth I was one of few female monarchs and so the multiple films about her could convince the viewer that the past was not "too sexist" instead of shedding light on the prejudice she faced as Queen of England. Elizabeth's sister has also been branded as

Bloody Mary and a violent despot – despite being no bloodier than her father, Henry VIII. She is not remembered or portrayed as the first woman to rule England who did not simply inherit the throne but instead, she is remembered as a ruthless tyrant. Mary Queen of Scot's failures are more reflective of her situation as a woman and her capability to rule. This idea is not at all demonstrated in films about her. To learn accurate history from films, they must allow the viewer to properly understand the context, the society it is portraying and the problems of the time.

Subconsciously we forget all previous understanding on the topic to fully engage with the experience the film provides. Richard Slotkin, a professor of history at Wesleyan University, said "even when you know something didn't happen, movie photography gives you the illusion that it did". For example, in 'Empire of the Sun" Jim couldn't possibly have witnessed the atomic blast as he was too far away but due to the cinematography and the inclusion of this historic moment, we still believed that he could. Films can and often do distort reality and we are coerced into believing this "new" reality, even when a film that is critically unimpressive and commercially disappointing is released, they are likely to be seen by far more people than are likely to read a factual book on the same subject. Indeed, because of the wider audience that films address, their need to be historically accurate is all the more fundamental.

In some films, there are cases where anachronism is apparent. In the film Dunkirk the wrong type of Spitfire was used, and filmmakers clearly used an "artistic license" to transform key events. The use of "little ships" to evacuate British forces is grossly exaggerated, and the fact that spitfires could not land on beaches rendered the film's "explosive" finale as nothing more than an attempt to maximise its box-office revenues. However, others may say that the essence of the film remains intact and that minor inaccuracies should not discount the historical relevance of the dramatization of those moments in time.

Propaganda films are produced to sway the opinion of the general public in a specific direction. These have proven historically to be very powerful. During the lead up to and duration of the Second World War, Hitler used many forms of propaganda including film-based pieces that led to inconceivable reactions among the German people including "Ich Klage An" in 1941 which succeeded in convincing thousands of Nazi's to agree to a mandate to perform mass execution on people with disabilities and terminal illnesses. There are other examples during this era including the notorious "The Eternal Jew" which despite being felt by Joseph Goebbels (the Minister of propaganda for the Nazis at the time) as being "too pushy" is still circulated as neo-Nazi propaganda today, more than 60 years after its initial release. The main intentions of these films include assisting in acquiring and maintaining power and implementing Nazi policies including the extermination of millions of people in the Holocaust. Clearly without an understanding of the motives behind pieces such as these, it is difficult to ascertain whether any partisanship exists, and therefore how much they can be relied upon.

Documentaries are potentially the most reliable source of film, as they are factual based accounts of events that have occurred. A famous documentary film, "Super-Size Me", depicts what happened to an American man who lived on McDonalds for over a month. By conventional views of history, this is arguably historically irrelevant. However, as eating is a social event in its interaction with others, and a cultural event in the food one eats and how one eats it, its relevance could lie in demonstrating the cultural and social attitudes of the time. Perhaps if this documentary was remade in 20 years' time it would depict a completely different way of eating and there may well be historical relevance, we will have to wait and see.

In conclusion, I would argue that using films is an informative historical teaching tool if used in conjunction with other teaching methods, and not used in isolation. It is important to have a full understanding of any bias behind the production company that has commissioned the film, a full understanding of the main historical events which the film portrays and an understanding of the main motives behind the movie, i.e., whether to create a blockbuster or whether to reflect accurately the events of the time. Historical films are a valid window in to the past but just like a window you can never see the entire world through it.

Clio Grana reviews Marco Polo's 'Travels in the Land of Serpents and Pearls'

"You can take my word for it that this province is the richest and most splendid in the whole world. And I will tell you why..."

From naked armies to lavish jewels and onerous omens, the fearless traveler describes a mystical 13th century India. This short book is a selection taken from Marco Polo's famous "Travels", written after his 24 years in Asia. With the curiosity of a young boy, and a gentleness unrivaled by the explorers he would later inspire, Polo takes the reader to the great province of Maabar: the "best of the Indies". Four humble kings and one great queen rule the five provinces, and Polo describes their customs.

Polo "assures" us everyone in the first province goes around stark naked. Even the king, Sundara Pandya Devar, wears nothing save a collar encrusted with rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and pearls. Polo is confident the value of these jewels far exceeds that of a substantial city, so the total value of all the kingdom's jewels is unfathomable.

Surely a king possessing such wealth must be one who is greedy and exploitative? No, Polo would argue, he is a generous one. Polo marvels at the humility and frugality of the kings. When a king dies, he leaves a great treasure. But his heirs would not touch it for anything in the world. They say: "I have the whole of my father's kingdom and all his subjects; surely, I can find ways to profit from it as my father did". A parallel to modern-day owners of a Patek Phillipe, the kings never touch their treasure but simply look after it for the next generation. They make their fortune independently from their predecessors and this is why they have such a store of treasure. The rubies and sapphires encrusting the king's body have not been inherited, they have been earned.

Humility was a faculty not only possessed by kings. Barons were adamant about sitting on the ground. They believed it more honorable to sit on the ground since "[they] are made of earth and to earth [they] must return". Similarly, the noble Brahmins of the Lar province unashamedly refused to wear clothes "for [they] came into the world naked and unclothed". This will have contrasted with Polo's European views that nobility should always be placed upon the highest seat and clothed in the finest garments. Nevertheless, he didn't "scorn" the practices.

Indeed, Polo is far less judgmental than a reader would expect a 13th century European to be. Italy and India had very little in common; Polo remarks the only beast that could be found in both places was the quail. Nevertheless, he doesn't condemn native people as savages. He is fascinated by their originality and is determined to catalog it as precisely as possible. He whispers, "let me tell you about another of their customs" and delves into descriptions of bathing practices, sensual

dancers, and of how a tarantula's cry can revolutionize commercial affairs. A devout Christian, he seems tolerant of the fact the people do not regard sexual indulgence as a sin, and he does not take it personally that they call sailors "desperados". Of course, it is a possibility that Polo's tolerant writings did not reflect the true opinions of the explorer: he may have been just as critical of esoteric customs as many other Europeans were, and this *selection* of writings may conceal this.

Still, Polo seems to delight in the contrasting customs of Europe and India. The traveler is excited to tell his Venetian friends that the "blackest men here are held in highest regard and considered superior to those who are not so black". He adds, cautiously, that their "gods and idols are black and their devils are white as snow". But he quickly reiterates that he is speaking of "*their* Gods and idols" not the European ones. Polo's precise descriptions of esoteric customs delight the reader. They are different to the somewhat condescending remarks found in the diaries of other explorers. Upon meeting the Arawak "Indians" Columbus gleefully reported: "they would make fine servants…. With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want". Similarly, conquistador Hernan Cortez was all but fascinated by the Aztecs, describing their practice of sacrifice as "horrible, and abominable, and deserving [of] punishment". Polo, it seems, was in a league of his own. Having spent 24 years in Asia, and having worked for the great Kublai Kahn, Polo was less of an unprincipled conqueror and more of an observant diplomat.

Polo marvels at the high standard of justice maintained in each province. In all five, a creditor can get a hold of their debtor by simply drawing a circle around them in the earth. The debtor cannot leave the circle until they have either paid their debt or made a legal pledge to do so. If the debtor leaves the circle without having done so, it is seen as a "violation" of "natural law". Polo is pleased to note that morality is a prominent feature of the culture. Brahmins in the Lar province "would not tell a lie for anything in the world or speak a word that was not true". Brahmins could be trusted to sell foreign traders' goods on their behalf, and deal with them "as carefully as if [they] were acting for [themselves]". Merchants were also treated with "great integrity" in Kayal, the province belonging to the eldest brother. The king personally watched over the interests of the merchants so that they could make "huge business". As a merchant, Polo will have been pleased by a foreigner's ability to flourish even in this distant, mystical land.

"Travels in the Land of Serpents and Pearls" is a vivid introduction to Polo's travels. The diplomat tells the reader of Indian customs with curiosity, not judgement. Most noteworthy are the nobility's humility and the high standard of justice maintained in each province. The traveler paints an idyllic picture of a peaceful land; a world whose introduction will have provoked both bewilderment and admiration.

Patra Urairat talks about 'Los Frikis', the Cuban punks who infected themselves with HIV

Castro's Cuba: the good, the bad and the ugly

To walk through streets of faded paint and crumbling buildings, one can feel the gravitas of a country rippled by revolution on one's shoulders.

"Cuban people are, by nature, full of life and love. Fidel fears many things, and when you fear so much, you cannot love at the same time."

Spiked heads and dripping kohl are torn apart once. Once more, and they cry out.

"He doesn't have a fear of death. No, because he can control the death of many. And he does. What he fears the most is the people themselves. Fidel has a fear of life."

Fidel Castro's Cuba rose on January 1, 1959. Infamous for his stringent policies, Castro has argued that his revolution, which lasted for nearly 50 years, espoused protocols of "humanism" rather than socialism. The regime portrayed something otherwise. The seizure of controlling large estates and the mass nationalisation of industries made the direction of his policies clear: far left.

Thus began the suppression of free press and public protest; the prospect of free elections stifled by tropical Cuban heat. Despite the obvious controversy of his reign, Castro had supporters. A charismatic orator and champion of a nationalist rhetoric, he relinquished the US-Batista stranglehold that propelled upper-class American citizens at the expense of lower-class Cuban ones. He also made significant advancements in education and healthcare.

Still, whilst there was some good, what was bad remains abominably ugly. The reign saw the emanation of the *Special Period*, a period of emergency declared identifying the crisis that followed the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was Cuba's main partner and provided nearly $4.3 billion in subsidies from 1986-1990. As it came undone, as did 35 years of socio-economic development. Resources grew scant; giving rise to the Cuban nickname of the period "*La temporada de vaca flaca*", or "the skinny cow period" in reference to the ingression of food shortages and rationing into daily life. The reign also saw widespread persecution: Cuba Archive President Maria Werlau estimates over 70, 000 deaths of innocents trying to flee slavery under Castro, 1,200 in "extrajudicial assassinations" and thousands more in undocumented casualties.

The Orwellian grip extended far beyond military conflict. Castro subjugated all forms of dissidents, doling out jail sentences and manual labour for seeming "antisocial" in any capacity whatsoever.

Los Frikis: Cuba's punks

To wander through a modern city and see youths sleeping in parks, drug-taking and listening to music would not be a bizarre experience. In Castro's Cuba, though, simply existing differently was a bold statement. The island's "Frikis", or "Freaks" represent a breed of hippy-punk nonconformists that materialised to resemble a subculture that was part political protest, part response to a helpless situation, and part mass hysteria.

They symbolised Cuba's "inactive" youth - the government's greatest fear. They feared a youth grassroots movement, which was exacerbated by a cold-war mindset. With laws providing impunity for human rights violations, complemented by an excessively violent police force, heretics suffered. Western rock music and hippy lifestyle were deemed intentionally subversive to the Cuban ideology. This led to chartered crackdowns, such as the *Unidades Militares para Ayuda a la Producción*6 (reeducation through labour) in the 1960s *and the Ley contra la vagancia* (Law against Idleness) in the 1970s.

1986 marks the year the first HIV case was discovered on the island. Soon after, quarantine centres, *sanatorios*, sprung up across Cuba. Enforced for treatment, they remain what is probably the most controversial practice associated with Cuban healthcare. Between 1986 and 1989, over 75 per cent of the population 15 years of age and older were given tests. Positively tested persons saw their terminal illness furthered by an indefinite loss of freedom.

The rest of the world saw the sanatoriums as prisons in disguise, but the Frikis saw a unique opportunity. In light of the reverse ageism that plagued the 1980s, the youth were desperate to "opt-out" of the collective. They were energised by *jinterismo*, petty crime and their own nihilism; a force aching to be mobilised. Faced between the choice of life under police brutality or in a state-supported clinic where food and drink were free, many Frikis turned to the latter.

Thus, the self-infection began.

"I found a friend who gave me his blood, I extracted it and injected it into me", says Gerson Govea, one of the last surviving punks of the generation.

Turning a blind eye to the death that was slowly surmounting around them, they built communities within - Frikis formed bands, played gigs and spent time with the people they loved.

"When one of us felt alright, another would be in bed sick," he said. *"When they were, it meant they were dying."*

The surface of antiretroviral drugs in 198710 slowed the virus' killer impact. By then, it was much too late for the Frikis. When internment clinics closed in 1994, some had lost limbs, others had lost lives. Govea and his wife still live in what once was the Pinar del Rio sanatorium, filled with posters of punk bands and old memories. The Frikis and their wave of self-infection will always be a ferocious reminder of the brutality of Castro's regime. Pushed into a corner, they turned to the unimaginable to continue existing as a community.

Though outrageously reckless, irresponsible, asinine - the Frikis were an astonishing force to be reckoned with. Their gallant madness will live on in Cuban memory.

Andrew Alam-Nist reviews 'The Shortest History of Germany' by James Hawes

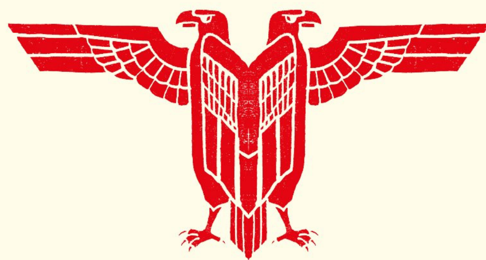
'The Shortest History of Germany' by James Hawes sets itself a wildly ambitious task. In little more than 200 pages, Hawes aims to describe the entire history of what we now call Germany. The book spans from Germany's first recorded history within the Roman Empire to modern Germany and its migrant crisis, concisely and delightfully describing everything in between. This concision defines the core of the book. It does not linger long on any individual topic but instead leaps between topics, within the span of fifty pages moving on from the Roman Empire to the Holy Roman Empire and beyond. At times, this brevity can feel limiting: He covers the entire empire of Charlemagne within the span of about ten pages. However, it is simultaneously one of the books greatest strengths. Within the short length and small word count which Hawes employs, he covers all the major events and most importantly highlights them as points of potential interest. In my view, this book serves best when used as a precursor to further reading. Each chapter and subject should be seen as a prompt for further interest and further exploration.

However, even more engaging than the description of Germany is the analysis Hawes passes alongside it. According to Hawes, several key historical splits can explain the trajectory of historical Germany: the areas which remained behind the Roman Limes *Germanicus* (fortifications intended to keep out German invaders), for instance, overwhelmingly supported the Holy Roman Empire's centralisation under Rome, generally opposed the Protestant reformation, and broadly opposed Nazism within early Germany.

The trends which Hawes identifies within his book continue to be relevant today. Right now, there is a significant divide between the east and west of Germany. A tension which in turn gives rise to far-right leaders within the eastern regions of Germany. At a base level one might assume this is because of the post World War II divide. Hawes argues the roots go far deeper. The divisions between east and west have persisted throughout German history. From the first Roman accounts of the savages beyond the river Elbe through to Teutonic knights, Prussian militarists and Junker elites within eastern Germany, there has always been a split between the eastern parts of Germany and the West.

The analytical points which Hawes argues are illustrated by frequent maps dispersed throughout the book. Hawes's maps cover a range of German topics, from the extent of the Roman empire within Germany to the split of power within the Holy Roman Empire, to Prussian expansion, to modern German voting patterns and help illustrate his points with additional clarity.

Occasionally, the links which Hawes draws up do feel like a bit of a reach. When reading through the book, a lot of the links which he establishes are simply correlative and occasionally seem cherry-picked. Nearly all the overarching meta-points about Germany which he raises are highly contested by historians, and due to the brevity of the work, he does not adequately engage in rebuttal and does not contextualise his work. Nevertheless, the way Hawes brings these splits into the discussion allows the readers themselves to consider how different groups may have influenced modern Germany. This is itself highly valuable. Hawes provides the most rich and vivid account of German history which has ever been created within 200 pages. This is why the Economist magazine justly describes *'The Shortest History of Germany'* as a 'must-read'.



Natasha Hermer reviews the film 'Mangrove'...

Steve McQueen's 2020 film *'Mangrove'* was made as one of a series of films looking at the lives of London's West Indian community from the late sixties to the mid-eighties. Steve McQueen, the Turner-prize winning artist, turned Oscar-winning film-maker picks as his theme a true story of black struggle in '60s Notting Hill, surprisingly one that has never before been told. The film gives a stunning portrayal of the struggle of Notting Hill's West Indian community, centred around the restaurant, 'the Mangrove'. Although the plot revolves around the brutality of the police, the film is uplifting, and McQueen adroitly intersperses scenes of violence and despair with scenes of great hope and a passionate drive to do what is right. Similarly, as much as it is about the discrimination carried out against the West Indian community, the film is a celebration of the West Indian community, and McQueen's long, slow shots of tea in the Mangrove, dancing in the streets and children playing behind the construction of the Westway are evocative of the vibrant life of the black community in 1969 Notting Hill.

The film follows the events that take place after the establishment of the Mangrove restaurant. Shortly after the restaurant's opening, Police Constable Pulley tries to shut it down, despite having no grounds to validate his actions. He and his department relentlessly return to the Mangrove, carrying out violent attacks both in and outside of the restaurant, loosely based on the inaccurate claim that drug abuse, prostitution and illegal gambling are taking place inside. Pulley is highly racist, frequently calling Frank Crichlow, the owner of the restaurant, a 'black bastard', and demanding that the black community who frequent the restaurant 'go back to where they came from'. Whilst similar racist incidents were common at the time, it is uncomfortable to be reminded that scenes of such blatant police brutality are not solely confined to the US, and appear repeatedly in British law enforcement. In response to the persistent police attacks, a peaceful protest is staged. Tragically, but not unexpectedly, police involvement to crush the protest is synonymous with the use of force. Subsequently the protest's leading organisers are wrongly put on trial for incitement to riot, not in a small-scale court of law, but the Old Bailey, the central criminal court of England and Wales, reserved for the trials of crimes of the highest severity, such as murder, rape and terrorism. The nine people tried came to be known as the 'Mangrove Nine', and the remainder of the film, follows their 55-day trial, and their struggle to portray themselves to the predominantly white jury, not as black 'savages', as branded by the prosecution, but innocent people, victims of a corrupt British system. At last, when the Mangrove Nine were each acquitted of the most serious of their charges, it was considered a milestone in British legal history, a demonstration of the power of the black population to challenge and legally triumph over accepted British authority. It also inspires a higher level of confidence in the ability of the jury to see past the prejudiced statements of figures in positions of power, to instead believe in and sympathise with the words of the persecuted. However, the end-screen of the movie,

providing a summary of the events that follow after the film ends, is a bitter re-emphasis that this triumph in itself was not enough. Despite the trial's outcome, throughout the next eighteen years, the restaurant and its owner, continued to be tormented by the police, and Crichlow faced three further criminal trials.

Through placing an equal emphasis on the humanity of the people he depicts by illustrating their everyday life in the community, as well as their united struggle against the racism present in London at the time, McQueen is able to emphasise to his audience, the gravity of the injustices carried out against the black population, by the very people employed by the English state to work for their safety. Yet, despite the film's overall focus on the struggle of the West Indian community, in a powerful scene towards the end of the film, McQueen demonstrates that the importance of the trial of the Mangrove Nine lies beyond the rights of black people, but in protecting the rights of all people under the British justice system. The character of Altheia Jones-LeCointe, one of the Mangrove Nine, and the head of the British Black Panther movement at the time, in persuading her weary counterparts why it is necessary that they do not concede, argues that the trial is about 'the right of anybody, not just us as black people, but the right of anybody to demonstrate'. The eventual victory in the trial is therefore crucial for the maintenance of the right to protest under English law.

From a purely cultural perspective, the film also offers a compelling insight into 1960s Notting Hill. Scenes of children playing in slums, graffitied walls and collapsing houses make up the backdrop for the violence that erupts, a stark contrast to the affluent neighbourhood that it is today. The Notting Hill of the '60s was full of poverty and crime, but as a result, cheap rents allowed Caribbean immigrants of the Windrush generation to settle in the area. These immigrants brought with them a sense of liveliness and community that would come to shape the future character of Notting Hill, starting initially with the establishment of the Notting Hill Carnival, which first took place in 1966.

Interestingly, no memorial to the Mangrove Nine has ever been placed in All Saints Road, the location of the restaurant. This seems surprising given the gravity of the trial. This absence of any commemorative sign or plaque shows how easily events such as this can disappear from public knowledge, despite representing such a landmark in the history of the British legal system. Equally, it makes one query how many other similar events might also have been overlooked. Does this film therefore offer just a glimpse into one battle that makes up the black community's vast and laborious struggle against the antiquated prejudices ingrained within the British justice system?

Nevertheless, *Mangrove* is a powerful portrayal of the fight of the Mangrove Nine for the protection of their rights as British citizens against the racial hatred of the police of the period. McQueen successfully plays upon the viewer's emotional response, skilfully moving the viewer from outrage, to hope, to laughter, whilst offering a tender, slow-moving depiction of Notting Hill in 1969.

Claire Zhao reviews E.H Carr's 'What is History?'

"History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish in the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him."

E.H Carr's historiographical classic *What is History?*, published in 1961, is perhaps no less controversial today than it was 60 years ago – albeit for different reasons. In this book, Carr tackles questions that all historians must grapple with, namely, (i) the relationship between fact and interpretation, (ii) the relationship between the individual and the society in which they live, (iii) the unique position of history within the divide between science and humanities, (iv) contingency and its affect within causation (v) the notion of history as progress and (vi) where the future of history lies.

Carr was not a professional historian in today's sense of the word. He studied Classics and joined the British Foreign Office in 1916. His early writings were on foreign policy rather than historical inquiry. His first major historical work, *A History of Soviet Russia*, was written relatively late in life (1950-1978) and his interest in historiography originated from his time as a Classics student. When studying Herodotus's account of the Persian Wars, he realised that the account was heavily shaped by Herodotus's attitude towards the Peloponnesian War, which was happening at the time of writing. 'This,' Carr wrote, 'was a fascinating revelation, and gave me my first understanding of what history was about.'

What is History? emerged when Carr was asked to deliver a set of the Trevelyan lectures to Cambridge history students in 1961, they were hoping for a talk about Soviet Russia. Instead, Carr sought 'for an opportunity to deliver a broadside on history in general', to answer questions that had been frequently discussed in the highly academic spheres of university History departments and should be shared with the public due to their importance in culture and current affairs. As a prominent journalist, Carr had access to the BBC. Therefore, the lectures were delivered on BBC radio and printed in the BBC's magazine *The Listener*. His intention of securing public attention comes across in the style of the work: witty, incisive and articulate, with references to obscure historical jargon (e.g. Cleopatra's Nose) broken down and analysed for the public as well as for the historian.

In the book, Carr challenges popular academic conceptions of history. He begins the lectures with an analysis on how 'fact' is used by the historian. He argues that there is no such thing as 'objectivity in fact'. The fact that the historian chooses to use a fact implies they are elevating a fact to the status of 'historical fact', showing that, in their biased perspective, this fact is of historical importance: "By and large, the historian

will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation." He therefore carries on to convincingly argue that historians, like historical figures, are products of their own time, and therefore that "The past is intelligible to us only in the light of the present; and we can fully understand the present in light of the past." He shows that, not only is the teleological view of history futile, but the teleological view of historiography too, as the pursuit of objectivity is futile as well. By doing so, he questions and attacks the view that history is outdated and should give way to science. By portraying history as an ever-evolving discipline, he defends the view that the study of history can never 'end'. As culture and society evolves, historians will look upon previous periods with a different outlook, learning more about that period and human nature.

However, taking a revisionist approach to Carr, I can offer refutations – or at least qualifications - of some of his arguments. In particular, I find his adamant dismissal of historical contingency and counter-factual history problematic. Despite significant long-term factors, the course of history can be shaped by events subject to chance. By dismissing this chance, Carr implies that mistakes and failures in history are purely due to human fault and ignorance. Despite Carr's argument, the presence of contingency is a powerful corrective to teleology, something that Carr argues against. His argument is therefore self-defeating to an extent. In addition, Carr implies that fact could only be collected through written documentation and inscription. However, 21st century history is beginning to place more emphasis on non-textual sources, which could possibly challenge the 'history is written by the winners' approach that Carr takes. By limiting sources to written documentation, one eliminates the perspective of those in the past without wealth, status, or education.

In light of these – and many more – critiques and appraisals of Carr's beliefs, works such as *The Practice of History* (G.R. Elton, 1967), *In Defence of History* (Richard J. Evans, 2001) and *What is History Now?* (David Cannadine, 2002) have emerged. These responses are a testament to E.H Carr's influence in historiography. By breaking down the barriers between academic historiography and the public opinion, Carr has brought these discussions into public prominence. *What is History?* is therefore an important and thought-provoking book that should be read and valued by historians and non-historians alike. Carr raises important questions about the writing and perception of history that are still – ever more – relevant today. Understanding historiography provides insights not only into the works of historians themselves, but also into the nature of society, history and humanity.

Clio Grana discusses an Archeological Analysis of British Identity

An archaeological analysis suggests that in the case of Britain, identity was shaped more by outside influences than by the existing local culture. The identity of a people is defined by their traditions and beliefs, and it shapes the way they think about the world. Architecture is also a sign of a people's identity; the shapes and patterns mirror the needs and desires of the people. An archaeological analysis of ancient monuments allows historians to deduce the values and beliefs of certain groups. Seahenge reveals the pagan belief that heaven lay below the earth, a notion that was challenged by pagan Roman settlers. The ancestral sites of Wood and Stone Henge celebrate the circular nature of life, an ideology that wavered after the creation of grid city-scapes. Lastly, the ceremonial site Flag Fen tells historians of spiritual traditions that are very different from those observed today.

Archaeological analysis of a remarkable Druid site reveals ancient British ways of thinking. Druid priests were a central part of ancient Britain, but they held beliefs very different to those observed today. Esoteric circular monuments have been linked to the Druid religion. One of these, found in Norfolk, is known as Seahenge. This monument has an upside-down tree trunk in the middle, pointing towards the center of the earth. The tree was placed so that it seemed to be growing downwards. A startling conclusion can be drawn from Seahenge: ancient heaven was actually underground. Nowadays, heaven is upwards, but it seems that for the native people of Britain, heaven lay below. What factors could have been powerful enough to change the direction of heaven from down to up? One suggestion could be the arrival of the Romans, who in AD 60, attacked Druid priests, bringing an end to the religion. Indeed, by the 1st Century AD, British religious icons included not only pagan Earth Gods, but also the pagan Roman Gods of the sky. At Roman fort Vindolanda, for example, archaeologists unearthed a 200 AD bronze hand attributed to sky-god Jupiter. The Romans, therefore, may have been the first to introduce the notion of the sky as a heavenly place. It is important to note that the Roman suppression of pagan religious groups in AD 60 was an exception, not a rule. The Romans were largely tolerant of other religions and sought to equate their gods with the local population. Nevertheless, their presence marked the beginning of a change in the conceived location of heaven. This is the first archaeological analysis of how British faith was shaped by outside forces.

British architecture and city planning were also shaped by external forces. The circular nature of the ancestral sites of Wood Henge and Stone Henge differs to that of modern buildings. Wood Henge faces the sunrise, and the circular arrangement of soft wooden pillars represents life. Stone Henge, on the other hand, is a burial ground: it faces the sunset and the circular stone pillars represent the body's decay into bone. A ceremonial road connects the two, placing particular importance on the journey from life to death, and back. Moreover, the two sites are in sync with the sun and moon cycles. The use of a circle was prominent and meditative. The circle alluded to planets, and other manifestations of nature, and it was in this way that the pagan Britons were able to connect with their ancestors. The circular shape was a gateway to ancestry, but city-scapes today place less emphasis on this component. Once more, the Romans could provide an explanation for this change in style, and change in mindset. Roman towns were laid out in a grid, and they placed less importance on circular arrangements compared to the ancient Britons. For example, Hadrian's Wall, although magnificent, added some rigidity and separation to the landscape. Furthermore, Roman roads were notoriously straight. Built of stone and wood, the roads added more rigidity to the landscape. Both the Britons and the Romans used the same materials: timber and stone. But at Stone and Wood Henge they were arranged in accordance with the cosmos, whereas the Romans arranged them for the purpose of trade, commute and structure. It can be deduced that Romans placed a higher emphasis on administration, as they sought to develop vast networks of communication and trade. This is a subtle, yet decisive shift in identity, as the societal values changed to become more pragmatic. Archaeologist Francis Pryor is partially correct in saying we look like the "sons and daughters of Rome". Through architecture, the Romans propagated a shift towards pragmatism which is still prominent today. This will have affected British identity and will have, if ever so slightly, turned people's attention away from the land and the cosmos.

The Briton belief in the supernatural was also shaped by outside forces. Ancient religious sites reveal the Briton belief in the supernatural. In East Anglia lies the ancient trackway Flag Fen. Built three and a half thousand years ago, the timber trackway reveals a passage to the afterlife. Over 300 pieces of bronze metalwork have been found here, including swords and daggers. These are virtually unused and simply placed in the ground along the timber trackway. Some archaeologists argue the weapons were deliberately destroyed in an attempt to keep the market values high. However, archaeologist Francis Pryor suggests the metal objects were placed along Flag Fen ceremoniously: the Britons were passing the objects along the timber walkway into another world. This suggests the Britons once believed in supernatural forces which could lead them to the afterlife. These pagan beliefs were revolutionized by outside forces. In particular, they were challenged by Christianity.

Pagan beliefs were in a constant battle with Christianity. In Britain, Christianity has been traced back to Roman traders and artisans who spread the story of Jesus. British pagan faiths did withstand the rule of Rome, and indeed Christianity was still a minor religion after the Romans left Britain in the 4th Century. At this time, pagan shrines were dedicated to both Roman and pagan deities. Such shrines have been found at Jordan Hill and Maiden Castle (both in Dorset) and are evidence that pagan rituals continued. It can be argued that Christianity began to overpower England in 597, when Augustine was famously sent by the pope to King Aethelbert of Kent. His efforts created a strong alliance between Christianity and Kingship. Furthermore, in 1066, the Norman Conquest served to cement the power of the Christian church. William the Conqueror carried out massive monastic projects, building churches and abbeys across the land. These churches became a place for the community to gather, and even acted as schools and marketplaces. This was a significant shift in British identity, as religious sites such as Flag Fen were no longer central to community life, and traditional practices such as the sword ceremonies were being replaced by Christian rituals such as mass. The Church reached into all aspects of British life. Dr. Sarah Foot of Sheffield University argues "the Church regulated lives by controlling what people did during the day and what they did in bed". The arrival of Christianity in Britain was caused by external entities such as the Normans and the Romans, resulting in a subsequent fading of pagan practices. It is important to note this change was not forced upon the Britons, but occurred gradually. Today, Christianity remains the prominent religion, with 60% of the population of England and Wales identifying as Christian. The influence of pagan traditions upon modern culture is scarce, suggesting it was external forces that moulded British identity.

External customs and traditions have made a clearer mark on British identity than ancient British practices have. Identity is the way we are in touch with the past and the present; it is how we celebrate mysteries, and how we practice our faith. Archaeological analysis reveals British ancestral identity was left scathed by external forces. Flag Fen was home to pagan ceremonies that were gradually replaced upon the arrival of the Normans and Romans. Similarly, the circular nature of Stone and Wood Henge shows the sites were a gateway to ancestry and symbolized continuity, but Roman grid-like city-scapes added more rigidity to the landscape and foreshadowed a change in mentality. Lastly, Seahenge reveals the pagan belief that heaven lay below, a notion that was challenged by Roman pagan settlers. The essence of British identity, therefore, was defined by its settlers, not by its ancestry.

Martha Carus Bird reviews Chernobyl by Sehii Plokhy

“Whatever you say, we are no ordinary enterprise. God forbid that we suffer any serious mishap – I’m afraid that not only Ukraine but the Union as a whole would not be able to deal with such a disaster.”

So foretold Bruikhanov, director of the Chernobyl nuclear plant, in early 1986. His words serve as a chilling reminder of the extraordinary consequences that resulted from the explosion of Reactor No. 4 in the early hours of the 26th April, 1986. Serhii Plokhy in his 2018 book, ‘*Chernobyl*’, aimed to finally shed light on the events at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, taking its history right up to the 2017 addition of a protective shelter which encompassed the radioactive remains of the collapsed, ‘idiot-proof’ reactor.

It does appear that recently the world has gone Chernobyl mad, with countless documentaries, TV series, films (all with varying degrees of success). But, until Plokhy wrote this thorough account in 2018, there was yet to exist a rigorous retelling of the fateful forty seconds which changed Soviet, and perhaps world, history. The book is pure detail: from eyewitness accounts to official statistics, it is endlessly meticulous and comprehensive. One would presume that because of the intricacies contained in these pages, the writing would verge on the denser side, but this is not the case. The book is not just a case study of statistics, or a flood of information: it is a memorial of the many lives lost to and impacted by the nuclear disaster. The narrative voice is immensely humane; the account is sprinkled with personal details of the workmen implicated, anecdotes of young children playing in the radioactive streets of Prypiat unawares the next morning, and families’ reactions to the loss of loved ones. The author brings all these characters to life and induces a real sense of pity for all.

The recount does not start in Chernobyl, or even in the USSR; instead, it begins in Sweden, 1,500 kilometres away from the nuclear plant, on April 28th, 1986. Gamma radiation levels there were thirty to forty percent higher than the norm. Right from the off, Plokhy reminds his audience just how international and far-reaching the consequences of this disaster were. The bulk of the novel details the background to, and events of, the early hours of the 26th April, 1986, where a test was taking place to investigate the prolonged cooling-time of the reactor following a machine shut-down. The account goes back to 1964, and the Soviet commission of the nuclear plant at Chernobyl (chosen because of its ideal geographical location, far from large towns, and for its soil), the fateful reactor-type switch (from VVERs to RBMKs, the latter being untested and much less safe), the extreme pressure on ministers to overfulfil their energy quotas. Even the basic construction of the reactor was faulty: there was no concrete shelter around the reactor, which the regulations required. Essentially, Plokhy constructs a recipe for disaster, the reader ultimately being unsurprised (not just because they know their nuclear history) of its consequences. To top it all off, the

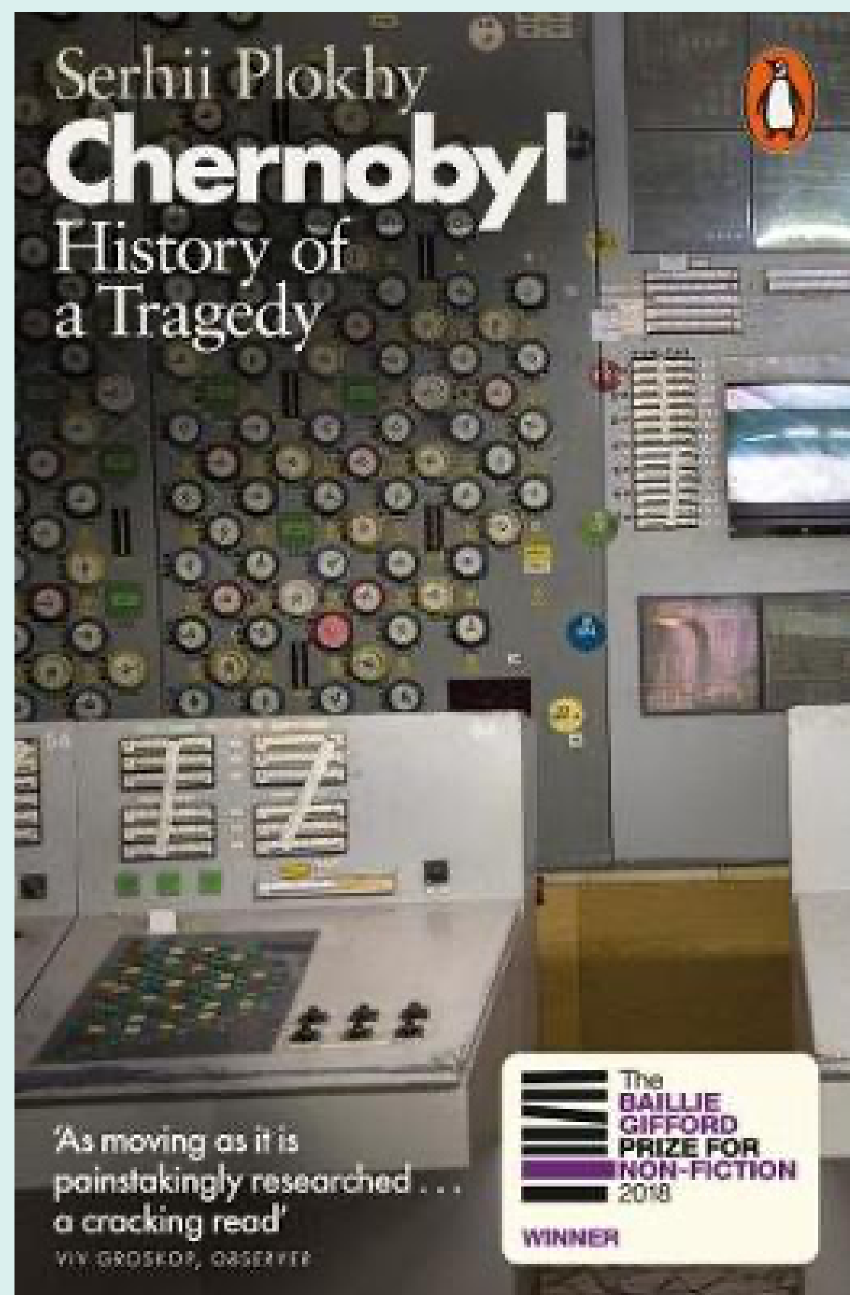
test had been pushed back from its allotted timings earlier in the day, and instead the inexperienced night shift workers were left in charge of managing the test, which had a minute possibility of an uncontrolled nuclear chain reaction. Indeed, too minute for anyone to ever think it may have been a likelihood. How wrong they were. 01:23:04 am, the start of the test; forty seconds later, the biological shield had been thrown off the top of the reactor, the moderator core had soared into the air, and the reactor’s graphite had caught fire. This was definitely not supposed to have happened.

‘*Chernobyl*’ then goes on to relay the media cover-up of these events, and how normal life continued for the next day or so (on April 27th, there were seven weddings in the town). The dosimeters at the reactor were only giving a reading of 1,000 microroentgens per second (75 roentgens was the maximum total adult dose according to Soviet regulations), and hence many did not see the need for panic. But, these low statistics were only delivered because the dosimeters had a threshold of 1,000 microroentgens: changing detectors would have meant facing up to the reality of the situation. Plokhy explains the evacuation of Prypiat the following day, April 27th, and the establishment of the 30km Exclusion Zone in the following weeks. Ultimately, the tale remains one of governmental incompetence, media silence and an inability to face up to the harsh reality. All were, and remain to be, immensely consequential: one hundred died as a direct result of the explosion, there have been a predicted 16,000 further indirect casualties, and thousands suffered the trauma of leaving their homes as they were forced to evacuate nearby towns.

Plokhy’s case study finishes by discussing the numerous long-term consequences of the nuclear meltdown. The impact on international relations with other countries, the global mistrust of Soviet-state media, the rise of eco-nationalism in Soviet states: these are but to name a few of the most significant ramifications that Plokhy details. Chernobyl was key in ‘awakening’ Ukrainian society, and provided dissidents with a lynchpin from which to unite. It was crucial in forming Independence activists’ manifestos: Soviet mismanagement of nuclear reactors was shown to be symbolic of Russian incompetence and disregard for Ukraine. It fuelled anti-nuclear sentiment across the Union too: by 1989, pro-Independence protestors would hold banners associating national liberation with nuclear safety. From the embryonic stages of modern day, independent Ukraine, it is not hard to see just how formative the 26th April was in creating the most liberal Soviet state. Five percent of the annual budget went to funding projects dealing with the consequences of the disaster; 3.3 million Ukrainians were instantly categorised as ‘sufferers’ from Chernobyl and thus were cared for out of the social welfare budget (this was at a time of severe economic depression and high unemployment too). Descriptions of these massive, international repercussions are peppered by small-scale, individual stories: of the story behind the fiery prose ‘*The Madonna of Chernobyl*’ (1988), and the guilt-induced suicide of Legasov, one of the Soviet ministers involved in rectifying the mess following the reactor meltdown. However, the end of the book strayed further and further away from its

core content: no longer was the book about the plant or the explosion, it was about the breakup of the USSR and the Rukh (the movement founded to promote Ukrainian Independence). Obviously, this was all fascinating information, but one did struggle to see its explicit relation to Chernobyl.

Plokhy is right, in that this is the 'History of a Tragedy' (so the tagline to the book goes): it is a deeply emotive exploration of the impacts - big and small, long-term and short-term - of the meltdown of the No. 4 Reactor of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. It details thoroughly the immense incompetence of some officials in dealing with the disaster, and constantly leaves the reader asking 'What if?': what if the VVER reactor had never been switched out for the RBMK style? What if officials had evacuated Chernobyl faster? And after all these 'What if?'s, there remains innumerable unsettling questions: who would be alive today? What would the world be like?



Flora Prideaux reviews 'Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World' by Jack Weatherford

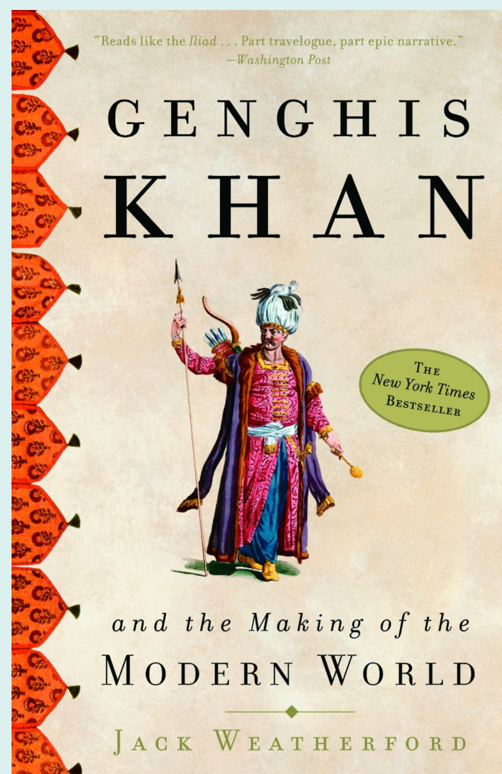
In "Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World", Jack Weatherford delivers a newfound narrative of the Mongolian Empire and Genghis Khan, one of great genius, utility, order and multiculturalism. It lies in direct antithesis to the prevailing Western perception of Genghis Khan, one of a barbaric and bloodthirsty conqueror, arguing that this view is not only outdated and ethnocentric but that it is simply a product of Enlightenment propaganda. Weatherford tells the story of Genghis Khan's life, from the young boy Temujin, struggling to survive on the Mongolian Steppe, to becoming the Great Khaan and conquering most of Eurasia, and then goes on to explore how this legacy has percolated and shaped the modern world.

The book is divided into three parts, the rise of Genghis within Mongolia and his mastery over the steppe tribes, his invasion and occupation of most of Eurasia entailing the latter part of his life as well as his sons and grandsons, and lastly his remaining legacy and the rise and fall of Mongolian power in the 13th century. Weatherford doesn't shy away from the brutality of the history: the Mongolian Empire subjugated most of the Eurasian landmass in just four decades, mainly through brute force. The torture, mass-murder and plunder of the Mongolians is undifferentiated from what the rest of 'civilised' society was doing at the time. But despite this, the overwhelming narrative is of the positive multiculturalism and progress that the Mongolian Empire achieved through the spread of technology and trade which he argues ultimately culminated in the Renaissance and the Modern Age.

He focuses at length on what differentiated the Mongolian Empire from others, in an attempt to understand why it was quite so prosperous and reaches the answer that the multiculturalism and tolerance of the Mongolians allowed them to breach the barriers of nations. He explores this through three major facets, religion, administration and trade. Although Genghis Khan had his own religion of the 'eternal blue sky', the Mongolian steppes were full of a multitude of religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, and he explores what he suggests is the first society in the world to have protected this religious freedom. He goes on to suggest that the use of administration was used to break down cultural, ethnic and religious barriers but that the Mongolian Empire didn't try and stamp their culture and rules onto others, unlike previous emperors and empires. Lastly, he argues that the Mongolian global perspective allowed them to see patterns of supply and demand and to look past national barriers in an undocumented way, and that they harnessed these ideas to encourage global trade routes.

Although Weatherford argues eloquently, with a strong historical evidential foundation, he could have been much clearer about the direct impacts on the modern day of the Mongolian Empires, as opposed to an argument simply based on the continuation of royal lineage. The third section of the book largely ends at the Renaissance, rather than continuing the argument of cultural influence into the modern age. He could also further explore the dichotomy between different cultural retellings of the Mongolian Empire and explore the legacy of the Mongolians within its conquered peoples today, such as China and Turkey. Although it is clear that the Mongolian Empire had a significant global impact, it isn't clear to me however why they alone are responsible for large cultural changes such as the Renaissance, as opposed to an amalgamation of other factors such as the Crusades, Global Exploration and the Black Death; and Weatherford fails to acknowledge the placement of the Mongolian Empire within broader global trends. Weatherford also doesn't relate much to the predecessors of the Mongolian Empire, and the legacy that they were stepping into. The Persian Empire of Antiquity was originally a collection of steppe tribes, and they ran their extensive empire with similar principles to the Mongolians such as multiculturalism and religious freedom. It would also have been interesting to explore in greater depth the downfall of the Mongolian Empire culturally and its retreat from multiculturalism into peoples of a single ethnicity, religion and culture.

Nonetheless, Weatherford offers a gripping account of this brilliant and fascinating man and his Empire, offering not just a de-ethnocentric perspective by excluding cultural bias, but presenting an enthralling global viewpoint of trends that created the modern world. Weatherford's mastery and deep understanding of the material, coupled with unique personal insights and a confident dive into the complex and brutal story makes for a thrilling, insightful, and perceptive historical read.



Aman Arya discusses Solzhenitsyn

"It was not, however, a personal meeting with you that was announced to me (by a telephone call from an adviser, Mr. (Richard) Pipes), but a luncheon including emigre politicians. From the same sources the press publicized that it is to be a luncheon for "Soviet dissidents. But a writer and an artist belongs neither to the first group nor to the second in the Russian mind."-Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

In the above quote Solzhenitsyn is refusing an invitation by President Reagan because he does not wish for his character to be perceived as that of the "dissidents", and instead for he and his writings to be considered on artistic merit. Unfortunately, Solzhenitsyn's writings make it extremely difficult to disentangle the two characters, and in many cases, Solzhenitsyn drove himself to being considered as a highly political figure. So, for the purposes of this article, I aim to outline the complexly threaded frame of his deeply nuanced and contradictory philosophy, as well as its effects on both Russian and Western politics in the present day. Most of all I want to consider whether truth, religion and patriotism can coexist.

First I'll give a brief biography. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was a soldier in the red army, before being sentenced to a labor camp in Ekstabuz (1945) for eight years after writing a private letter that was critical of Stalin. It is during this time he converts to Christianity and eschews his communist beliefs. After this he is released and rehabilitated in 1956, becoming a Maths and English teacher, and beginning work on semi-autobiographical novels including" a day in the life of Ivan Denisovich" and "cancer ward". He begins amassing an underground readership culminating in his winning the Nobel prize for literature in 1970 and being exiled in 1974 after his 3 volume masterwork "the Gulag Archipelago" was published abroad. However, cracks had already begun to form in his reputation as an anti-totalitarian liberal rebel, as in 1973 he wrote "the letter to the Soviet Leaders" which was less liberal and more Christian than his audience expected, his reputation was later cemented as a curmudgeonly conservative in 1978 with his highly controversial Harvard address in which he criticized the surplus of freedom "tilting in the direction of evil", the fickleness of the press "conditioned by the fashion of the day" and the dangers of western relativism. Since then, he has been subject to accusations of antisemitism, (due to his books 200 years together and august 1914), tsarist idealism and nationalism. In April 2008, he praised Vladimir Putin stating that under Putin "Russia was rediscovering what it meant to be Russian," he had this interview shortly before his death that August.

One point of clarity with which I can centre this discussion is Solzhenitsyn's emphatic devotion to truth; he begins the Harvard address stating 'that truth eludes us if we do not concentrate our attention totally on its pursuit." This is complicated by his firm belief in a set of fundamental truths and his suspicion of ideas or historical events challenging them. A notable example being his denial of the Holodomor genocide in Ukraine proclaiming it to be a "loopy fable" made up by

anti-Russian Westerners and Ukrainian rebels, for the reason that he believed in a pan-Slavic "Russian spirit" that must unite. In that same address he says repeatedly that countries' development should not be measured by the "Western yardstick" and that the West should not continue in its "absurd project to impose democracy around the world", yet he calls for western intervention in Korea and Vietnam. He believes that some cultures and countries should have different paths and that these should be based in some spirituality, so he makes exceptions of communist countries' natural development due to their lack of spirituality and his distaste for the godless modern age. If Solzhenitsyn's conviction that the natural development of countries must remain in line with tradition and national identity is challenged by progress or the ideological freedom of the Ukrainian people, progress (and potentially the truth in the case of Holodomor) is the thing that takes a backseat. Yet Solzhenitsyn was impatient towards accusations that he was a nationalist, stating in his reply to Reagan that he is " not a nationalist but a patriot", complaining about how the press had described him. Yet when his ideas about countries and peoples intrinsically needing different forms of government depending on national identity are put into practice ,it begins to appear racial.

Some have accused Solzhenistsyn of racism stemming from his treatment of Ukraine and of the Jews. His belief in the pan-Slavic state draws together a set of countries (including Ukraine) based on "tradition", yet some interpret it to be based on race, as is clear from who he excludes. In *200 Years Together* (a book about Jewish people in Russia) he makes clear divisions between "we" the Russian people, and them (the Jews), without extending the same courteous separation to Ukrainians, taking great pains to forgive the Russian people for historic oppression of the Jews; any word of empathy for the Jews comes from blaming them for the Communist Revolution while also forgiving them for it. Solzhenitsyn does make efforts to cross the divide through compassion for Jews (as an ethnic group), yet fails to eschew the anti-Semitic myth that Jews where responsible for the Communist Revolution, as he describes in his book *August 19th: the Assassination of Stolypin* which implies that the assassination by a Jew was ethnically motivated. Professor Richard Pipes praises Solzhenitsyn's attempt to show empathy for both sides, but is critical of Solzhenitsyn, as he interprets that Solzhenitsyn is saying that Bogrov (the Jewish assassin) thought "Stolypin is reviving Russia, therefore, it's bad for the Jews." Solzhenitsyn's favorable views of Stolypin and the tsar also tie into his religion.

"if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened."-Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Solzhenitsyn's views on religion, especially in the above quote, warrant closer examination, particularly if we are to understand his relationships with western values and the accusation that he idealized the Tsarist age. The deposition of the tsar (a physical representation of God) represented forgetting God, potentially causing Solzhenitsyn to harken back to the Godlier time of the tsar. However, Solzhenitsyn shows little indication of glorifying monarchical systems, except for his valuing of the stability that is lost in a full democracy, as he criticizes ". . . that turbulent 'democracy run riot' in which once every four years the politicians, and indeed the entire country, nearly kill themselves over an election, trying to gratify the masses?" in the Harvard address. The turbulence of western freedoms, he believes, would be tempered by solid religion as it would salve what he saw as pluralism and the worship of rights over responsibilities, saying in the essay *Our Pluralists* "their thousand-fold clamor will not be about the people's needs … not about the responsibilities and obligations of each person, but about rights, rights, rights." This belief in responsibilities over rights leads to criticism: fellow Soviet defector Andrei Sinyavsky assailed Solzhenitsyn for positioning himself as a prophet of "God's truth", pointing out that that same belief was aligned with Soviet rhetoric about responsibility. His criticism of western democratic structures led to an onslaught of criticism, my favorite being a particularly comic article in 1974 by William Safire called "Aleks, Baby" which satirizes his iconoclasm and aloofness when dealing with American values. Despite his staunch Christianity, he did, to his credit, leave room for ideological competition, as in another quote from his letter to Soviet leaders he says to "allow competition on an equal and honorable basis . . . among all ideological and moral currents, in particular among all religions" while maintaining that Christianity is "the only living spiritual force capable of undertaking the spiritual healing of Russia." It can also be seen in his speeches in both the Templeton and Harvard address that he believes strongly in the open and free discussion of ideas, with the caveat that it is directed purely towards truth. He ends the Harvard dress with an uncharacteristically optimistic piece of rhetoric, looking towards an enlightenment akin to that of Nietzsche's Übermensch yet humbled by God, saying:

"if the world has not come to its end, it has approached a major turn in history, equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. It will exact from us a spiritual upsurge: We shall have to rise to a new height of vision, to a new level of life where our physical nature will not be cursed as in the Middle Ages, but, even more importantly, our spiritual being will not be trampled upon as in the Modern era.

This ascension will be similar to climbing onto the next anthropologic stage. No one on earth has any other way left but -- upward."

Solzhenitsyn's unique brand of philosophy escapes the left right dichotomy, instead seeking something truly higher; he was a revolutionary who hates radicals and subversives, while having radical convictions. This eclectic brand of thought has resulted in a similarly eclectic catalogue of admirers (generally on the right): David Duke, who during his tenure as head of the Ku Klux Klan misquoted Solzhenitsyn on several occasions around antisemitism, recent public intellectual Professor Jordan Peterson, who cites him as a major influence, and Putin, who just last Christmas unveiled a statue of Solzhenitsyn in central Moscow. An argument could be made that Solzhenitsyn's legacy has been cemented as that of a conservative icon, and truth teller against the evils of communism, while tragically it seems that Solzhenitsyn's greatest and most impassioned critique and description of Stalinist oppression in the gulag is being trampled on. In the push for Russian pride, Stalin's image as the cruel dictator Solzhenitsyn revealed to us has been rehabilitated into that of the war hero. In polls taken by the Levada center last year Stalin's approval rating was at a record high of 70% in Russia, while the awareness of the crimes within Gulag among Russians has plummeted. Would Solzhenitsyn have paid the price of truth for patriotism? Perhaps Putin "rediscovering what it meant to be Russian" requires a few lies along the way.