

# THE NEW STATESMAN

New Times New Thinking | 14-20 January 2022 | £4.99 | [newstatesman.com](http://newstatesman.com)

## The age of economic rage

How the middle-class revolt is spreading across the world. By Jeremy Cliffe



**Notes on a scandal**  
Philip Collins on the  
No 10 lockdown parties

**Trolling JK Rowling**  
Rachel Cunliffe on why  
the witch-hunt must end

**No-vaxx Djokovic**  
How governments should  
treat the unvaccinated



# Invest in good company

## abrdn Investment Trusts

We believe there's no substitute for getting to know your investments first hand. That's why we look to analyse and speak to companies intensively before we invest in their shares and while we hold them.

Focusing on first-hand company research requires a lot of time and resources. But it's just one of the ways we aim to seek out the best investment opportunities on your behalf.

Please remember, the value of shares and the income from them can go down as well as up and you may get back less than the amount invested.

Request a brochure: 0808 500 4000



# The great unvaxxed

As the world emerges haltingly from the Covid-19 pandemic, a new divide is disrupting society: that between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated. The former enjoy far greater protection against the virus and its variants and are significantly less likely to require health and hospital care. As governments bear the cost of new waves of infections, how and whether they should punish the unjabbed has become a defining policy question.

In Australia, the world tennis number one Novak Djokovic has been embroiled in a struggle with the authorities over whether his refusal to be vaccinated means he is ineligible to play in the Australian Open, one of the four tennis majors. Such clashes will become commonplace as other elite athletes adopt a similar stance.

It is not only Australia – Mr Djokovic spent five nights in a detention hotel after he arrived in the country – which has taken an uncompromising approach. The French president, Emmanuel Macron, has expressed the wish to “piss off” the unvaccinated. His government plans to ban millions of people who remain unjabbed from restaurants, cafés, cinemas and theatres (at present a negative Covid-19 test result is sufficient). “An irresponsible person is no longer a citizen,” Mr Macron declared.

Across Europe, such restrictions are increasingly common. Last November Austria imposed a lockdown on 1.6 million unvaccinated adults, and its leaders plan to make vaccines mandatory from next month, with fines of up to €3,600 for those who refuse to comply. Italy has made vaccination compulsory for all citizens aged over 50. Perhaps most radically, Singapore has announced that people who are “unvaccinated by choice” will be required to pay for their own healthcare.

By comparison, the UK’s position appears relatively modest. For entry to nightclubs and large venues, citizens must now prove either that they have received two jabs or that they have recently tested negative for Covid (around 9 per cent, or five million people, remain unvaccinated in the UK). More contentious, however, is the planned introduction of mandatory vaccination for all front-line NHS staff in April.



**Faced with the challenge of the unvaccinated, governments should seek to persuade citizens of the benefits, not condemn or insult them**

On 7 January, as Louise Perry writes on page 9, Sajid Javid, the Health Secretary, was challenged by Steve James, an unvaccinated consultant anaesthetist at King’s College Hospital, London, who claimed that “the science is not strong enough” to justify the government’s policy. As many as 100,000 NHS staff remain unjabbed, creating the conditions for a new crisis. The government has estimated that as many as 73,000 people may leave the service rather than comply. Chris Hopson, the chief executive of NHS Providers, has warned that entire units of hospitals may have to close “in extreme circumstances”.

In the UK, as elsewhere, the data is unambiguously in favour of vaccination. An unvaccinated 50-year-old who has Covid-19 is around five times more likely to be hospitalised than a vaccinated one. After much initial scare-mongering (including, ironically, by Mr Macron), the AstraZeneca vaccine and others have been shown to be safe for the overwhelming majority of patients. Such findings prompted Tony Blair to declare that, “If you’re not vaccinated and you’re eligible, you’re not just irresponsible, you’re an idiot.” But insults merely embolden conspiracy theorists and extremists.

Faced with the challenge of the unvaccinated, governments should seek to persuade, rather than condemn. Poorer households and ethnic minorities – groups that have an understandable mistrust of state institutions – are among those least likely to have received a vaccine. This is symptomatic not of mass ignorance, or malice, but of a deeper social disconnection. After a decade of austerity and harsh welfare and immigration policies, far too many people only encounter the state in a hostile form.

A noble example was provided by Dr Azhar Farooqi, a Leicester-based GP, who discovered that hundreds of his highest-risk patients were refusing to be vaccinated. He responded by tirelessly phoning each one to discover why – and 70 per cent went on to book an appointment. In a digital age, we too easily forget the value of human contact. If governments truly wish to persuade those who reject bureaucratic overtures and are sceptical of state dictats on vaccines, they should understand a little more and condemn a little less in this time of pandemic. ●

# At Facebook, we're collaborating with UK partners to reduce COVID-19 misinformation.

The pandemic has reinforced the importance of collaboration. We're continuing our work with governments, not-for-profit organisations, and researchers globally to support the pandemic response and reduce the spread of COVID-19 misinformation, including:

- Partnering with 35 fact-checking organisations covering 26 languages, such as Full Fact in the UK
- Displaying warning screens to highlight possibly incorrect COVID-19 content

Learn more about our global partnerships and find helpful resources at [about.fb.com/actions/uk](https://about.fb.com/actions/uk)

FACEBOOK



# IN THIS ISSUE

21

## Morality and the virus

Kat Rosenfield on the shame of catching Covid

22

## The squeezed middle

Jeremy Cliffe on the global living standards crisis

28

## Destined for war?

What the Thucydides Trap gets wrong about China

30

## Bad science, worse politics

Why the government must be held to account

38

## Twenty-first century leviathan

How Thomas Hobbes shapes modern politics

44

## Dear David

Deborah Levy writes a 75th birthday letter to Bowie

57

## Surprised by joy

Tracey Thorn on birdwatching



Rage against the machine: why the middle classes are revolting



The Thucydides Trap



A message to you, Ziggy

# MORE IN THIS ISSUE

## Up front

- 3 Leader
- 19 Correspondence

## The Notebook

- 9 Louise Perry on vaccine scepticism
- 11 Tom Harwood writes this week's Diary
- 12 Sophie McBain meets the comedian Angie Belcher
- 14 In the picture

## Columns

- 17 Philip Collins on the No 10 lockdown party
- 20 Bruno Maçães on the end of youth rebellion
- 21 Kat Rosenfield on Covid and moral panic
- 27 Helen Thompson on Boris Johnson's rule-breaking
- 34 Rachel Cunliffe writes in defence of JK Rowling

## Features

- 22 Jeremy Cliffe on the global revolt of the middle classes
- 28 Lawrence Freedman on the flaws of the Thucydides Trap
- 30 Philip Ball on bad science and the pandemic

## The Critics: Books

- 36 Henry Marsh on *Recovery* by Gavin Francis
- 38 Jan-Werner Müller on *Confronting Leviathan* by David Runciman
- 40 The NS Poem: "Golden Apple" by Nisha Bhakoo
- 41 Megan Nolan on *Something Out of Place* by Eimear McBride
- 42 Ellen Peirson-Hagger on *To Paradise* by Hanya Yanagihara
- 43 Reviewed in Short

## The Critics: Arts

- 44 Deborah Levy writes a letter to David Bowie
- 46 Michael Prodger on Victor Hugo's landscapes
- 48 Music: Simon Heffer on the British Library's Beethoven exhibition
- 51 Film: Ryan Gilbey on *Cow*
- 52 TV: Rachel Cooke on *Rules of the Game*
- 53 Radio: Anna Leszkiewicz on *Sweet Bobby*

## The Back Pages

- 55 Food: Felicity Cloake
- 57 Off the Record: Tracey Thorn
- 59 Down and Out: Nicholas Lezard
- 61 Crosswords and Subscriber of the Week
- 62 The NS Q&A: Winnie Byanyima

Subscribe  
from  
**£1**  
a week

Subscribe to the New Statesman from just **£1 a week**. Turn to page 63 for more about the offer, or go to: [newstatesman.com/subscribe](http://newstatesman.com/subscribe)

Just £119.99 for a one-year print subscription – even cheaper for students! Subscription enquiries: [subscriptions@newstatesman.co.uk](mailto:subscriptions@newstatesman.co.uk) 0808 284 9422

THE NEW STATESMAN

Standard House, 12-13 Essex Street, London WC2R 3AA. Tel 020 7936 6400

**Editor-in-chief** Jason Cowley  
**Chief Executive** Ken Appiah  
**Global Head of Sales** Phil Davison  
**Events Director** Sara Donaldson  
**Marketing Manager** Alfred Jahn

Cover illustration Klawe Rzczy

New Statesman Vol 151, No 5651 / ISSN 1364-7431 / USPS 382260

## Outside the box **By Becky Barnicoat**



**CHARLES  
STANLEY**▲  
*Wealth Managers*



# Be More Conscious.

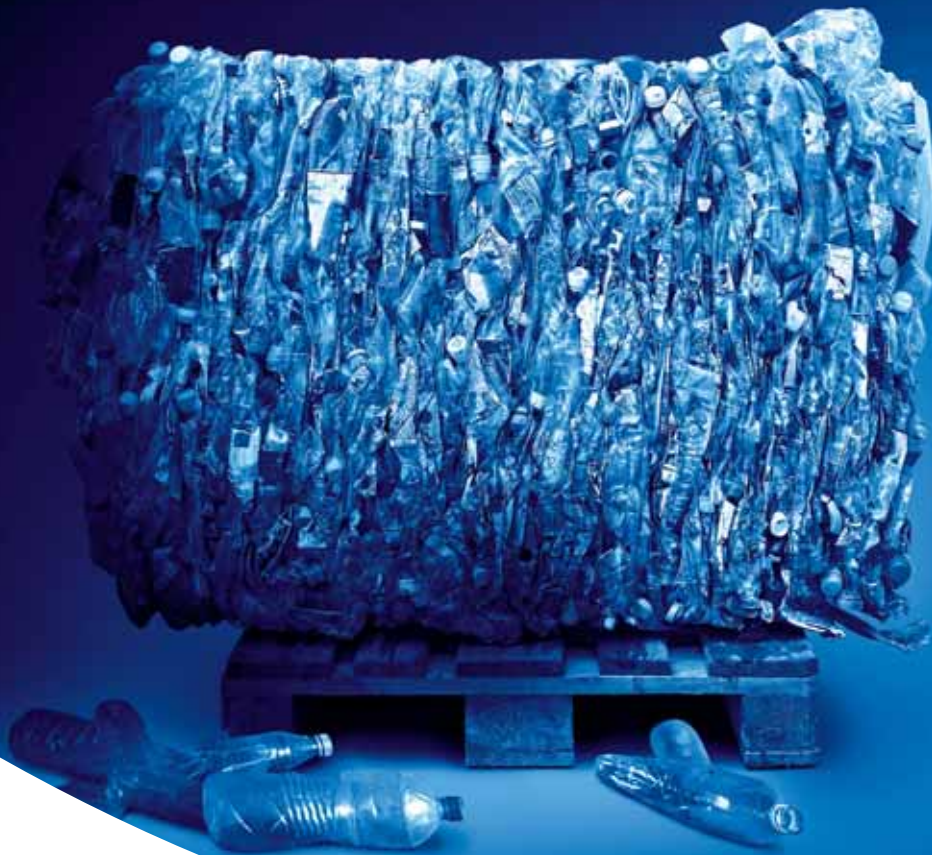
We've all experienced a lot of change recently. Your lifestyle may have changed, and with it your priorities and aspirations for the future. Perhaps you've become more aware of your impact on the environment. You may have become more conscious of how you spend and save, the impact this has on future generations, and the legacy you seek to leave behind.

No matter what stage of life you or your finances are at, we're here to help you make the right financial decisions to build a better future for yourself, your family and your world.

**Find out how our financial experts can help  
you be more conscious.**

Scan the QR code to download your free guide to  
responsible investing, or call 020 4502 3008





# SUSTAIN. ABILITY.



## JUPITER GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE EQUITIES FUND

Transformational businesses, with the right mindset and imagination, can lead the transition to a more sustainable world economy. With over three decades of combined ESG investment experience, our global sustainable equities team believes that companies that balance the interests of the planet, people and profit are the most sustainable in the long term. We have dedicated our careers to identifying businesses with a demonstrable commitment to supporting this transition to a brighter future. We call this human advantage 'the value of active minds'. Visit [jupiteram.com](https://www.jupiteram.com)

As with all investing, your capital is at risk.



**This advert is for informational purposes only and is not investment advice.** We recommend you discuss any investment decisions with a financial adviser, particularly if you are unsure whether an investment is suitable. The Key Investor Information Document, Supplementary Information Document and Scheme Particulars are available from Jupiter on request. Jupiter Unit Trust Managers Limited, registered address: The Zig Zag Building, 70 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6SQ is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. JAM001957-002-0421



# THE NOTEBOOK



Message from above: the stars of Netflix's *Don't Look Up*, which satirises our "shrug it off" approach to the climate crisis

## Newsmaker

Do vaccine sceptics  
deserve a voice?

By Louise Perry

The big Netflix hit over Christmas was *Don't Look Up*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence as astronomers who discover that a comet is on track to destroy the Earth.

A Trumpian US president, played by Meryl Streep, refuses to take their warnings seriously, a disregard shared by a media class obsessed with celebrity trivia and a population stupefied into inaction.

Few viewers will have missed the film's political message. The comet, of course, represents climate change. And, suggests the film-maker Adam McKay, the flailing response of the *Don't Look Up* characters is similar to our collective flailing right now, when confronted with an emerging global catastrophe.

What I disliked about this otherwise engaging film is its representation of scientific and political disagreement. It understands the failure to act on the climate crisis to be a result not of genuine difficulty but of malicious stupidity. The Trumpian president's supporters are portrayed as bovine, refusing to

◀ acknowledge the threat of the comet, even when it becomes visible in the sky. “Don’t look up” is the slogan they mindlessly chant, while the good guys respond with “listen to the goddamn qualified scientists”.

The problem is the “goddamn qualified scientists” do not all agree with one another. Some are in denial for personal reasons, while others are in the pocket of big business. Those warning against the comet form a minority within this fictional scientific community.

On this point, the *Don’t Look Up* narrative diverges from the reality of climate science: Nasa calculates 97 per cent of publishing climate scientists agree the planet is warming as a consequence of human behaviour. But on other questions, there is significantly more debate within the scientific community, and the facile directive to “follow the science” – popular among politicians during the Covid-19 pandemic – cannot help us.

What “follow the science” really means is “follow the current scientific consensus”. But the consensus often changes. This will be apparent to any parent who pays attention to public health messaging. The infamous example is the guidance on thalidomide – the morning sickness drug that caused defects in an estimated 10,000 babies born in the 1950s and 1960s – but there are many other instances of inconsistent messaging: should babies be laid to sleep on their backs or their fronts? Should peanuts be fed to infants before the age of one, or should they be withheld until the age of three? The answers to both of these questions have varied within my lifetime, as the scientific consensus has shifted and with it official policy.

Which brings me to the confrontation on 7 January between the Health Secretary Sajid Javid and Steve

**An anti-vaxx consultant anaesthetist is unlikely to be “too stupid” to understand the science**

James, a consultant anaesthetist at King’s College Hospital (KCH) in London. Javid asked staff on the ward how they felt about new rules, which come into effect in April, that will require all front-line NHS workers in England to have a Covid vaccination or else be moved to another role. Ten per cent of KCH staff are unvaccinated and thus risk losing their jobs. While his colleagues shuffled their feet and Javid glowered at him, James expressed his objections to the policy: “I’ve had Covid at some point. I’ve got antibodies. I’ve been working on a Covid ICU since the beginning. I’ve not had a vaccination. I do not want to have a vaccination.”

Is James too stupid to understand “the science”? That seems unlikely, given his medical expertise. Rather, he disputes the evidential basis of the policy, pointing out to Javid that the vaccines do seem to cut the risk of transmission, but not for long. What’s more, some studies suggest natural immunity is as effective as vaccination in protecting against both transmission and severe illness. Vaccines are highly effective, but the scientific community is not agreed on the necessity of jabbing the young and healthy, or those who have recovered from the disease. And although James and his fellow sceptics may prove to be mistaken, they cannot be dismissed as simply stupid or malicious.

Official policy on mask-wearing has been reversed since the start of the pandemic, when we were advised masks were unnecessary. We now know there is little need to decontaminate surfaces, as we were once told to, since Covid rarely spreads through them. The scientific consensus on the virus and its transmission has changed, and it will almost certainly change again.

Sometimes “the science” gets it terribly wrong. In a devastating essay published last year in the US online magazine *Tablet*, the novelist and essayist Ann Bauer described the torment suffered by her autistic son Andrew, who died aged 28, apparently by suicide, having grown “tired of being controlled by the fickle tzars of autism”. From the mid-1950s, the “refrigerator-mother” theory of autism was popularised, which understood the condition to be caused by a lack of maternal affection. Some autistic children were removed from the care of loving families and placed in foster homes, despite the screaming protestations of mothers condemned as “refrigerators”. Then the scientific consensus around the causes of autism shifted; it shifted again, and again. As Bauer writes:

Each new wave was certain: the approaches to autism that had come before were barbaric and uninformed, but this most recent breakthrough was the one clear truth. Science had spoken.

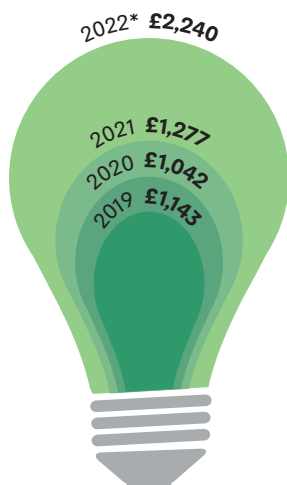
Having witnessed the sometimes cruel treatment of autistic individuals and their families in the name of “science”, Bauer admits to a certain cynicism. “I have been through this before,” she writes of the medical merry-go-round we are all now on. The scientific method demands debate, dissent and revision; “follow the science” implies certainty. Until it changes. ●

*Philip Ball writes on bad science on page 30*

## Chart of the Week

### How UK energy bills will surge this year

The default tariff price cap each winter from 2019-22



Source: Ofgem + Cornwall Insight analysis

\*2022 figures are forecasts. Figures in £ per annum, based on direct debit payment prices

---

# The Diary

---

## Taking on the right over the trans debate, falling for the Twitter trap, and Macron's winning populism

By Tom Harwood

As the Christmas cheer fades and the bleak reality of winter sets in, politics has reverted to type. The most staggering aspect of parliament's first week back was just how "normal" it felt. After six years of extraordinary once-in-a-generation political crises, bread and butter politics (in England at least) has returned. Energy security. Inflation. And the dreaded culture war.

So oddly normal was the first full week of the new year that you could have been forgiven for confusing it with pre-2015 politics. A Tory prime minister once again taking a battering from his right, a cost-of-living-crisis once again on voters' lips, and a slightly nasal Labour leader once again enjoying a lead in the polls.

### How to lose friends

A friend asked me if I had deliberately set out to lose friends and alienate people. It was said in good humour but I can see why – irritating my conservative following with what some might call a progressive (I prefer individualist) stance on trans rights, and antagonising the left by defending the excellent advice of *Love Island's* Molly-Mae Hague, who told young people to work hard and believe in themselves.

I like to think I have been fairly ideologically consistent with these stances, despite aligning with different tribes on each one. Besides, chasing constant approval from the wildly unrepresentative and highly charged denizens of Twitter or YouTube is a dangerous approach to take. It breeds brainless hot takes and pushes people to the extremes. Some Tory thinkers are in danger of falling into the same trap as the Corbynite left: thinking that lots of retweets from angry people online is a successful electoral strategy.



In reality, excluding trans people from public provisions is wildly unpopular

There are some Tories in parliament, although as far as I understand it not in No 10, who think they have struck electoral gold by going after trans rights. They need to spend less time online and more time looking at the real-world data. Misgendering and excluding trans people from public provisions are, in reality, wildly unpopular – not that you would know if you rely heavily on social media. There is nothing healthier than challenging misconception, consensus or conspiracy from your own tribe. And, as a former prime minister once said: "Britain and Twitter are not the same thing."

### Picking up populism

On the topic of ideological consistency, it is striking how modern political tribes are so often inconsistent. It was entertaining to witness Nigel Farage wade into the Djokovic row and come down hard against Australia's border policy, and to see Labour demand a Brexit-enabled tax cut (by suspending VAT on energy bills).

On Covid, some so-called populist politicians have jumped on the least popular causes imaginable. Anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine stances are shared by a vanishingly small proportion of the electorate. It is hard to think of less fertile ground for populist-style politics.

Emmanuel Macron, by contrast, the anti-populist seemingly crafted in a laboratory churning out liberal technocrats, has delivered a barnstormingly populist (almost Trump-esque) pledge to "piss off" the unvaccinated. His poll ratings have, of course, subsequently risen.

### Sheepish Sturgeon

I was shocked by the attitude of Nicola Sturgeon towards the *Scottish Daily Mail* political editor Mike Blackley, in a video that resurfaced this week. When Blackley asked the First Minister in December if she could do anything to help the staffing crises across various industries – by reducing the self-isolation period, for example – Sturgeon fired back with ill-judged sarcasm, saying, "Yeah, because that'd really help because that would spread infections even further and that would not be doing any favours to businesses."

This juvenile exchange reappeared because, on 5 January, Sturgeon sheepishly U-turned, announcing that she would indeed reduce the self-isolation period for those who test positive for Covid. While everyone has bad and irritable days, is it too much to ask that more politicians prioritise politeness?

### The myth of levelling up

This government has staked its reputation on "levelling up" but as of yet has offered no clues as to what those words actually mean. No MP I have spoken to has been able to define it. Those that think they can rarely make it past bland platitudes.

Is levelling up a Macmillanite vision of economic redistribution towards left-behind communities, or a supercharged Singapore-style pro-growth agenda? With no driving principle, no distinctive policy agenda – and no willingness to weather the slightest criticism – Boris Johnson's government risks becoming an administration adrift. ●



---

## Encounter

---

### Comedy on the NHS Angie Belcher on why we should prescribe laughter By Sophie McBain

When Angie Belcher is teaching comedy, her students often worry that they don't know how to write jokes. But you don't make people laugh just because you can land a funny punchline, Belcher always tells them. The first step to becoming a comedian is self-awareness: Who are you? What do you want to say about the world? "Comedy is a political act. Even if you're not a political comedian, people will ascribe politics to you," she told me, when we spoke via Zoom. "I'm always saying to people: the more authentic and vulnerable you are on stage, the closer your audience feels to you. The closer they feel to you, the more believable you are. And the more believable you are, the funnier you are."

Belcher is 46, blonde and energetic; ask her how she is, and she'll usually answer, "peachy, thanks!" She is the comedian-in-residence at Bristol University, a published poet and comedy performer, and has been teaching stand-up for over 15 years. She often teaches university students, theatre companies or corporate clients but is now opening up her courses to less privileged groups. She believes comedy can change the world. Belcher says she's witnessed how learning stand-up changes people: her students often gain in confidence and self-understanding. There are parallels between the psychotherapeutic process and comedy

GARETH IWAN JONES

writing: both can be about reframing your personal narrative. Comedy can act like armour; the right joke can defang a horrible situation. She explains how telling your story on stage is a way of claiming ownership of it, of saying: "I decide what my story is, and I've decided to be the hero of it."

From this month, GPs in Bristol will be able to prescribe Belcher's six-week comedy course to patients who are struggling with trauma. Her first series, which has 15 participants and is being run in partnership with the Bristol Wellspring Settlement Social Prescribing Team, started on 13 January. By the end of the course, it's hoped that participants will be able to perform five minutes of stand-up based on their own life. She's also working with a suicide prevention charity that sees the course as a good way to help young men open up about their feelings, and with another charity to teach comedy to those in recovery from addiction.

Belcher is often struck by people's ability – and need – to find humour in the most painful or desperate circumstances. She had recently received an email from someone who was the victim of medical malpractice and now required a stoma. This person wrote of how important it was at support groups to be able to laugh together. Joking was a way of talking about the problem and breaking the taboo.

Of course, being able to find the funny side can take time. Belcher often spoke on stage about her mother's dementia, but when her mother died in July it took four months before she could talk about her again. Crying in class is to be expected, crying on stage is not a good idea. "You don't want your audience to pity you – you want them to feel like they're on the same journey with you," she said. "It's about deciding you're now strong enough to say the words: 'This happened. It was awful. However, a really funny thing happened at the funeral...'"

Her latest initiative was mocked everywhere you would expect it to be: "Comedy classes on the NHS? You're having a laugh... and the joke is on us," the columnist Richard Littlejohn wrote in the *Daily Mail*. "I don't give a shit to be honest with you Sophie, I know what I'm doing works," Belcher told me. "But when you're reading those pieces, sometimes you can have a bit of a dark moment."

In fact, the courses are not funded by the NHS (Belcher has an Arts Council grant), and they are intended to complement rather than replace traditional talking therapies. Belcher has a master's degree in psychology, and will be evaluating the impact of the course with input from social workers. She hopes, if she can prove its effectiveness, to roll the course out more widely, and to work the results into a PhD thesis: "I would quite like to be called Dr Angela Belcher!"

Often, Belcher will invite her students to define their personal struggle: what is the thing you grapple with every day, she asks them. What is it about being bipolar, or having PTSD, or being vegan, that is hard for you? One struggle she often returns to in her writing is her working-class background; her feeling of being an outsider in her middle-class, academic

circles. Belcher grew up on a council estate in West Bromwich in the West Midlands, one of the most deprived towns in the country. She watched a lot of comedy on TV, but the idea of pursuing a career as a comedian still seemed laughably unrealistic. She loved watching Lenny Henry, who hails from Dudley, only a few miles away. Even then, she felt inspired by how he mined his background as a working-class, black man from the West Midlands, for jokes. Belcher found out that Henry's comedy hero was Eddie Murphy, so she started watching him too, and then when she found out Murphy's hero was Richard Pryor she developed a lifetime love for the American stand-up. That's another comedy tip: study your heroes' heroes.

Belcher has a three-year-old son and remembers struggling with her change in status as a new mother. "When you become a mum, people think you're not a useful person in society anymore," she said. She remembers attending a joyless mother-and-baby session in a draughty church, where she was given a "Bourbon biscuit, but no cup of tea, in case I dropped it" and thinking: "I used to go to gigs and to the theatre, what's happened to me?" It gave her the inspiration to set up Aftermirth, a daytime comedy club in Bristol that parents can attend with their babies (she suggests a cut-off age of 18 months, after which the babies are more likely to pick up swear words). She advises the comedians who come to perform not to hold back. These mothers have been through "nine months of obesity, three days of unbearable pain and a lifetime of looking after this thing. Do not censor yourself! You're doing them a disservice if you do not give them your best swearing and mature, edgy material!" she tells them. Last year she also became a comedian-in-residence for Can't Sit Still, a theatre company working with mothers who have postnatal depression.

Comedy is an act of generosity, Belcher believes. "Often, what stand-up comedians do is they give themselves. They hold themselves up to be vulnerable so that it can be OK for other people to be vulnerable." One thing she teaches her students is how to bring out their "inner comedian" in stressful moments. The inner comedian, instead of closing down or getting angry, seeks playfulness and connection with others. Belcher uses the technique herself, noticing when her anxiety or discomfort brings her back to an "inner bullied teenager", and then consciously changing her responses.

She'd recently had her Covid vaccine in a shopping centre and felt awful sitting in a Perspex booth awaiting a jab while passing shoppers stared at her. The bullied teenager felt scared and exposed; the mature comedian turned to the man in the adjacent booth and said: "Cor, doesn't it feel like you're in [Channel 4 dating show] *Naked Attraction*?" The tension was broken. "My inner comedian can bring joy and love and playfulness. She has a much better time. She creates connections for people so that, hopefully, she can save a life," Belcher said. She thinks your inner comedian can too. ●

**"Comedy is a political act. Even if you're not a political comedian, people will still ascribe politics to you"**





## In the picture

Palaeontologists have finished uncovering a 10 metre-long ichthyosaur skeleton at Rutland Water Nature Reserve. The fossilised “sea dragon”, which was first discovered in February 2021, is believed to be around 180 million years old, and is the largest UK example of a marine predator that existed during the time of the dinosaurs.

Photograph by  
Matthew Power



+44 (0)208 057 2001  
info@vintageacquisitions.com



PREMIUM-GRADE SCOTCH WHISKY

# CASK WHISKY OWNERSHIP

‘A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY’

An essential guide into **cask scotch whisky** purchase and what it could mean long-term for you, your children and grandchildren.

- ✓ Access to award-winning distilleries
- ✓ Fully licensed by HMRC
- ✓ Simplified process. We handle everything on your behalf
- ✓ Stockists of a wide range of casks to suit all budgets
- ✓ All purchased casks are stored, inspected and insured under bond
- ✓ Choice of 6 flexible exit strategies
- ✓ Capital Gains Tax free\*
- ✓ Can be classed as a ‘gift’ and therefore used as part of an estate planning strategy\*

Scan the QR Code to download your free copy of our Whisky Ownership Guide

or visit [www.vintageacquisitions.com/whisky-cask-ownership](http://www.vintageacquisitions.com/whisky-cask-ownership)

\*Vintage Acquisitions always recommend that you seek independent legal and financial advice prior to purchasing.





# PHILIP COLLINS



## Politics

### Lockdown drinks could spell the end for a Prime Minister running out of lives

Consider the cunning plan. A Prime Minister who is a stranger to the truth needs help to complete a madcap adventure – let’s call it Brexit – which, in part for his own political advantage, he has decided to make the cause of his career. Knowing himself well enough to understand that he cannot concentrate on anything long enough to absorb the detail, he enlists the help of a cavalier so notorious and so temperamental that a previous prime minister had intervened to have him sacked. What could possibly go wrong? Well, just about everything – and now that cavalier, Dominic Cummings, is close to bringing down the unfit leader he unaccountably helped to build up.

It is now clear, thanks in part to the constantly giving gift of Cummings’s blog, that on 20 May 2020 in the Downing Street rose garden there was a party to which about 100 people had been invited by Martin Reynolds, the principal private secretary to the Prime Minister. This was a month after Cummings himself infamously travelled to Barnard Castle to test his eyesight in another lockdown-stretching manoeuvre. On the very spot where Cummings set up his trestle table for a press conference on 25 May to declare he had no case to answer, around 40 staff at Downing Street had been enjoying a “bring your own booze” party five days earlier.

This was during the first national lockdown. It was a time when people were frightened. On the day of the Downing Street party, the Metropolitan Police posted a tweet reminding the public they could go outside only with those they lived with or with one person from another

household. The streets were deserted. Many people have testified to the tragedies they endured – the family members they never saw again – because they were dutifully obeying the rules. The Downing Street garden party was so flagrant, so couldn’t-care-less, that it is truly astonishing. Every other instance has been at least arguable, if not edifying. This one is amazing. As some staff members wrote in messages after receiving Reynolds’s email, what on Earth was he thinking?

Whether or not the Prime Minister joined in the fun is something he could clear up at once. He could simply confirm that he was there. The longer he goes without denying he attended, the more obvious it is that he must have been. Johnson’s defensive line, delivered with a smirk, that it is all a matter for the internal inquiry conducted by Sue Gray, the second permanent secretary in the Cabinet Office, will never hold. To have to ask someone else to investigate whether you attended a party is absurd. The Prime Minister is in serious trouble this time and it could conceivably be terminal.

The question now is whether any of the mechanisms for removing a leader will work. Getting rid of a prime minister who does not wish to leave is very difficult. Even a severely wounded politician such as

**The Downing Street party was so flagrant, so couldn’t-care-less, it is truly astonishing**

Boris Johnson can limp on. If the Gray inquiry criticises him directly it will accelerate the strong doubts felt by Tory backbenchers, but it is unlikely to be so unequivocal as to finish him off. It is, in fact, an invidious position in which to place any senior civil servant, and not just because the last head of the inquiry, Simon Case, had to recuse himself. Gray has to work with the government after she reports; her conflict in being judge and jury is obvious. The Met, which has been decidedly reluctant to get involved, has contacted the Cabinet Office. If it pursues the case and concludes the Prime Minister has broken the law, then the Gray report will cease to matter.

Perhaps Gray might knock him out indirectly anyway. Johnson told parliament in no uncertain terms that he was furious when he was made aware there had been parties in Downing Street. He has variously said he did not know about them and certainly hadn’t been to any. Though Johnson has no respect for due process, he has enough colleagues in the Conservative Party who still regard misleading parliament as egregious that he might not survive.

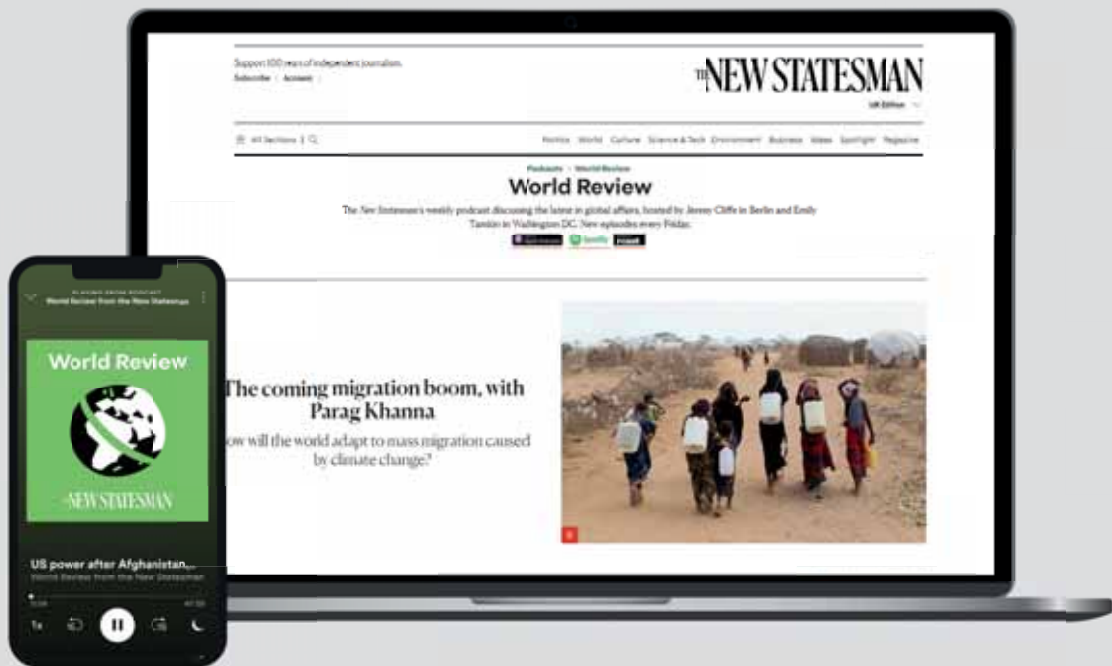
The future of the Prime Minister is, as always, a political judgement. The conclusions of internal inquiries acquire different force depending on the strength or weakness of the political leader. If Johnson is broken by this incident it will be the public, reflected in Tory MPs’ panic, who do the deed. The next set of polls – the first to include this incident – will be critical. If MPs see another lurch downwards in both Johnson’s personal rating and the likelihood of the public to vote Conservative, then Team Truss and Sunak’s Supporters will be out in force. The Goves and the Hunts will be cocking an ear and Sajid Javid will look up from his Covid spreadsheets and smile. A more likely catalyst for action might be a disastrous showing in the local elections in May.

There ought to be lots of shame-faced Tory MPs at the moment. They are simply seeing the consequences they brought on themselves, and on us. They selected a man they knew to be ethically unfit for office to be their leader. They fooled themselves that he would change, but politics always finds you out; there is nothing like politics at the top level for revealing character.

Johnson might yet survive his latest infraction. He would be forced to revamp his Downing Street operation but none of it will make any difference. He is who he is. He is a party animal and now everyone can see it. ●

# World Review

The global affairs podcast



## New episodes twice a week

Join the international team every Monday for interviews with top international thinkers and experts, and every Thursday for a review of the week's global events

Listen on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Acast or at [newstatesman.com/world-review-podcast](https://newstatesman.com/world-review-podcast)



# CORRESPONDENCE

letters@newstatesman.co.uk



## Letter of the week

### The cradle of hippiedom



As a life-long admirer of Joni Mitchell I really enjoyed Kate Mossman's interview (The Critics, 7 January) with Cary Raditz – the subject of Mitchell's song "Carey". I've always found it symptomatic of the insular world of popular music that while Mitchell was writing her songs in Matala, Crete, she was next door to Phaistos, one of the premier sites of the amazing Minoan civilisation (approximately 1,800 BCE).

One distinctive feature of Minoan culture is its marvellous "natural" art: flowers, octopuses, starfish, dolphins and multicoloured, patterned pottery. Women are portrayed dressed in finery, with long dark hair and jewellery – the prominent members of an audience in a theatre. Priestesses performed ecstatic dances as if in search of a higher consciousness.

In short, it was an ancient culture that mirrored the new hippy world of Mitchell and Raditz. But, of course, I am not sure how this might compare to Mitchell's "white linen" and "French cologne"!

Michael Moore, Loughton, Essex

### Team effort

Stephen Bush's fear (Politics, 7 January) that tribalism will derail Liberal Democrat/Labour cooperation may be exaggerated. The support among constituency parties for proportional representation shown at last year's Labour conference implies the acceptance of a future of deals and coalitions, as well as a recognition that (unless and until the SNP bubble bursts) Labour is extremely unlikely to gain an absolute majority of seats.

Philip Jones, Morden, Greater London

Stephen Bush has chosen a topic bound to be a favourite of columnists up until the next general election. But anyone concerned about the UK's decrepit political culture should consider our archaic first-past-the-post voting system.

How can Britain move forwards when, in some constituencies, the same party has won in every election since they were created in the 1830s?

Alan Story, Get PR Done!, Sheffield



"The dog ate my lateral flow test, Sir"

### Taxing times

Robert Halfon (The Critics, 7 January) argues that "the way to empower working people is to cut taxes". That might help, but it depends on which taxes are cut. Yes, reverse the National Insurance increase; cut VAT on necessities; raise the income tax threshold. But providing "affordable housing and quality public services", as he advocates, surely requires increases in taxes on higher incomes, wealth and profits.

Jenny Woodhouse, Bath

### A new arrival

Katie Stallard's article (Reporter at Large, 7 January) wove the powerful story of Peng Shuai into a novel analysis of the West's hypocritical financial relationship with China. But my favourite part was the news that Stallard is joining the NS permanently.

Dave McElroy, Reading

### Off grid

Is it my shame to be the only reader to have solved all the clues of Anorak's special double alphabetical Christmas puzzle (10 December) without managing to fit them into the grids provided? I suspect not.

Tony Benjamin, Bristol

Note: We apologise for the grid error in this puzzle, which made it impossible to fit in all the solutions. The correct answer grids can be viewed for free at [newstatesman.com/magazine/christmas-special-7](https://www.newstatesman.com/magazine/christmas-special-7). Readers can also request a copy from [letters@newstatesman.co.uk](mailto:letters@newstatesman.co.uk)

### Desert island disco

Pippa Bailey's pick-me-up playlist (Deleted Scenes, 7 January) is like my own copying of a friend's preparation for *Desert Island Discs*. My list always changes, with the exception of Lindisfarne's "We Can Swing Together", which, irrespective of the Geordie in me, I recommend to everyone.

Karl Brown, London N13

Send your letters to [letters@newstatesman.co.uk](mailto:letters@newstatesman.co.uk)  
We reserve the right to edit letters

One of the most dramatic social transformations of the past 50 years has been the way young people have fallen in love with authority.

The punk generation grew up during a time when being young meant rebelling against social norms and conventional knowledge. For many, this meant joining one of the myriad youth subcultures – the tribes you encountered at school – which saw the world as a perpetual revolution. Others were distinctly more political. One might have become a Maoist, or a fashionable communist marching on the Left Bank shouting “Those in power are in retreat, now they must fall!”

There was much posturing among young revolutionaries. Masculinity at that time came as close as ever to being associated with obscure theories and tracts. In his memoir Barack Obama mocks his young self for reading Marx and the philosopher Herbert Marcuse with the hidden purpose of picking up girls. But think of the alternative – today you’re more likely to brandish a copy of Timothy Snyder’s *On Tyranny* (2017).

I started to notice a change while teaching at Harvard a little over a decade ago. My experience as a student ten years earlier had left me unprepared for students who suddenly aspired to be the voice of common sense and saw every deviation from conventional wisdom as a waste of time. If you showed them a brilliant passage in Marx, for example, they would shrug. All that had been refuted by history, they sighed; the sentiment was that we were grown-ups and should act as such.

It was the time when punks, rockabilies,

goths or mods started to look anachronistic. Youth cults today involve making shopping lists for Instagram or issuing dance challenges on TikTok.

Youth rebellion may have left the world unchanged, but it inspired generations of visionary film-makers, artists and writers who saw their own mission as something akin to speaking truth to power. In such movies as Francis Ford Coppola’s *Rumble Fish* (1983), a film about street violence and misunderstood teenage boys, you could sense that the director saw his work as a kind of replacement for directly joining the romantic youth gangs portrayed on the screen. One may be excused for feeling nostalgic for a lost world, especially when that world was meant to signify the future of a radically transformed society. I miss that future.

And how unfair we were to those rebels from decades ago. Remember how we used to mock them for believing they would never change? Of course they would. They would get old and join the bourgeoisie, buy condos and convertibles, and then be forced to glimpse in their children a rejuvenated version of their young selves. But strangely, the exact opposite happened. Those punks and Maoists have changed little, never having lost the taste for provocation and controversy. It is their children who mellowed. If there was a betrayal, it was generational, not biographical.

On university campuses today, the unconventional thinkers are the old cranks, nearing retirement and saved from being “cancelled” by tenures awarded to them in a previous age. As for the students, many organise to surveil and denounce the

thought crimes committed by the dons. It’s not only that students today have all the right beliefs, but also that they think these beliefs need the tools of official authority to protect them from danger. In countries such as France, young voters disproportionately support Marine Le Pen’s National Rally, with its promise of a return to authority and tradition – all for the sake of preventing change.

That the young would always be against authority once seemed a truism, but things have changed. In Western democracies, the political economy has become unrecognisable. For three decades after 1945, unemployment in advanced European economies remained low. Odd jobs for the young were plentiful, and the knowledge economy barely existed. If you worked for a few hours in a shop or warehouse, who cared what you did at night or what your opinions were? Today, by contrast, a worker in the knowledge economy – a consultant or a media executive – is hired and rewarded for certain habits and dispositions that are effectively indistinguishable from political opinions. Imagine a recommendation letter that started: “John has an excellent command of Marxist dialectics and what is more he embodies it in praxis and feeling...”

The new political economy reaches deep inside your soul. The darkest side of the knowledge economy is that it has gradually destroyed the separation between intellectual and material life.

A second factor is the overbearing presence of social media. It used to be the case that teenagers struggling to reconcile themselves with society would retreat to a “sphere of interiority”, a private world of books, bands and friends. The dynamics of social alienation could be painful, but they had the benefit of fostering original characters. Social media offers no respite from social pressure. It reinforces and intensifies the need to conform. Today you have no alternative but to be well-adjusted. One can adjust to the real world or do so virtually on the internet.

It would be one thing if youth rebellion had disappeared because all causes for rebellion had been solved. Are there rebels without a cause? Perhaps most social ills and injustices have actually been addressed and the youngest generation were the first to realise we have never lived in a better world. But I think there is a different explanation: youth rebellion was eventually defeated by new and subtler forms of social control. The world is flat not because it is more just, but because it contains fewer places to hide. ●

# BRUNO MAÇÃES



## World View

### Youth culture was once rebellious. But in today’s digital world, conformity rules

# KAT ROSENFELD



## Another Voice

### In the new moral universe of the pandemic, catching Covid has become a sinner's mark

The other day, someone on my Twitter timeline posted a video clip from the 1982 horror movie *The Thing*. Blair, played by Wilford Brimley, has been imprisoned (or, one might say, quarantined) in a tool shed in the Arctic. He's extremely unhappy about it.

"I don't want to stay out here anymore," he says. "I want to come back inside... I'm not gonna harm anybody and there's nothing wrong with me. And if there was, I'm all better now."

If you've seen this movie, you understand its salience to our pandemic moment: it tells the story of a team at a remote research facility in Antarctica who are under siege from an alien organism that works like a virus on steroids. Just as Covid-19 infiltrates our bodies by camouflaging itself as an innocuous sugar-coated nobody, the alien Thing "assimilates" its victims and then imitates them, creating a monster that looks and talks just like someone you know. And like all good horror films, the true terror of *The Thing* isn't in seeing the monster; it's in not seeing it. Your friend is cold, and scared, and all he's asking is that you let him come inside – but you won't. You can't. Because you're scared, too, of the sickness that might be hiding inside him. And so you shut the door and leave him to his fate. He will die out there, alone and afraid.

Who's the monster, again?

There's a reason why horror films return so often to this kind of scenario. The fear of disease runs deep inside us, a lizard-brain survival instinct that is inextricably bound up with our tribal mistrust of the Other. While we might like to think we've moved past all that, every so often a new sickness

comes along that is frightening enough to fire up those ancient, instinctive neural pathways: the fear, the mistrust – and the righteousness of the uninfected. The spread of disease takes on a moral vector, as we grasp for control. The virus is the true enemy, of course. But you can't fight what you can't see, so we set our sights on the next best thing: the people who carry it.

As countries began locking down to stop the spread of Covid in early 2020, pandemic discourse immediately turned political – and hostile. In my own US online bubble of Twitter-verified media and political personalities, the tone was striking: less we're-all-in-this-together, more a profane expression of exasperation with some imagined Trump-supporting idiot who was refusing to cooperate. Wear a damn mask, we sneered. Stay the hell home.

And while nobody ever quite came out and said so explicitly, it soon became clear that getting sick had become shameful. Even as Covid re-ravaged the US once more in early 2021, nobody seemed to know anyone who'd had the virus, let alone been infected themselves. Of course they didn't, because Covid wasn't merely a virus, but a sinner's mark: it meant that you'd allowed your vigilance to falter in the face of some selfish temptation. You let your guard down. You took your mask off. You

Anything you might do to stop the spread is good, no matter how anti-social

travelled, and gathered, and ate indoors – and in doing so, you put us all at risk.

It should go without saying that if getting infected tells you something about a person, the ability to avoid a highly contagious, airborne illness is also illuminating. If you were lucky, it suggests you had both the means and the inclination to live like a hermit for a year, working, exercising and socialising from home while a rotating cadre of masked servants delivered everything you wanted right to your door. Under any other circumstances, the class implications of this dynamic would have been obscure. It would be a person's privilege, not their vulnerability to illness, that would be shameful to admit.

But the pandemic has been a powerful magnet atop our public moral compass, causing it to spin wildly and then point in a strange new direction. This is our north, now. Stopping the spread of Covid is all that matters; anything you might do in service of our one and only priority is a moral good, no matter how neurotic, how fear-driven, how anti-social. You can stay home in your pyjamas for weeks, you can put a \$3,000 exercise bike in your living room, you can order in for every meal. You can slam the door in the face of the terrified friend who's begging you to let him in – after you receive your Thai takeout from the masked delivery man standing next to them – and you can assure yourself that you are selflessly saving the world.

Or, at least, you could do this, in the first phase. The Omicron variant, which is less deadly but far more contagious, deals a serious blow to the fantasy of Covid zero, the notion that we could stop getting sick if we just tried hard enough. But fear and shame still rule the conversation.

Too many of us are still clinging to the comforting pretence of piety as protection, to the illusion of control, and to the infuriating spectre of those people, the ones who keep prolonging the pandemic because they won't do what's necessary. We do this despite growing evidence that neither masks nor vaccines nor all the hand sanitiser in the world can stop this variant from creeping past our defences; we do it even as the most pious members of the Church of Covid Caution test positive, one by one. We watch, bewildered, as the so-called pandemic of the unvaccinated is exposed as a myth. As it turns out, that sense of moral superiority might protect our egos, but our bodies are still mortal, still vulnerable, still made of meat.

"But I did everything right," we whimper, as the fever descends. ●

---

# The global middle class is in revolt

---

Rising prices, falling incomes and pandemic stresses have sparked social unrest and authoritarian crackdowns in middle-income countries across the world. Will they now spread to China?

**By Jeremy Cliffe**

Imagine that you are just turning 30 in a city in a part of the world defined as middle-income, so neither rich nor poor by global standards. Perhaps you live in a sprawling metropolis such as Istanbul, Sao Paulo or Bangkok, or perhaps in a regional centre: Khabarovsk or Durban, Oran or Chennai, Chongqing or Tijuana. Your grandparents were farmers but your parents did well, moving to the city and earning enough to secure a mortgage on a flat, obtain health insurance, go to the cinema or restaurants, support you through further education.

Yet today your parents are ageing and struggling to meet their debt payments. Your father was off work for months with Covid-19 so lost his income. And although you graduated almost a decade ago and earn what before the boom years would have been an excellent wage, you still live with your parents – a strain, especially during lockdowns. Prices have gone up and your job as an office clerk, industrial mechanic or teacher does not pay enough for you to move out. Your parents went up in the world, but you seem to be standing still or going backwards. Plenty of people in your city have got rich in recent years (as the luxury cars on the streets and the gated communities on the outskirts evince) but they always seem to be those with links to the government.

You resent the corruption and mismanagement. In the evenings you scroll social media, following others who share your frustration and even anger. A relatively small event serves as a final straw: perhaps a hike in the heating bill that threatens to push your parents' fragile finances over the brink, or a friend falling foul of a local official and losing his job, or an increase in the cost of taking a cramped bus to work. But you snap. Enough. You join protest groups on a messaging app, perhaps WhatsApp or Telegram. You take part in a demonstration. You vote for an outsider or maverick politician who is promising change.

This, or at least the events leading up to that final moment, is a condensed, generalised account of the experience of millions of members of what might be called the new global middle class. And as recent years have shown, a growing minority is losing patience with the systems that no longer deliver the fast-improving living standards and expanding freedoms that they expect from them. They are taking to the streets to protest.

Consider the events of recent years. In 2019 there were demonstrations in Algeria, Chile, Ecuador, Georgia, Lebanon and Russia, usually over some combination of economic mismanagement, stagnant living standards, and corruption or other abuses of power. It was considered an exceptional "year of ►



TOMAS MUNIÑA/NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX/EYEVINE

**Burning desire:** a barricade after a long day of unrest in Santiago, Chile, October 2019. Protests were sparked by a rise in metro fares

## Cover Story

◀ protests". Then 2020 brought major protests in Belarus and Thailand against autocratic regimes, in Lebanon following the devastating Beirut port explosion on 4 August, and in countries such as Brazil, Iran and Mexico where the Covid pandemic was handled particularly poorly. In 2021 protests in Colombia, Nigeria, South Africa, Turkey and Russia caught the spotlight. Now, a few weeks into 2022, a wave of demonstrations has taken place in Kazakhstan. The closer one looks, the more it seems as if this wave of middle-income anger could continue throughout the decade. The Global Squeezed Middle is in revolt.

The World Bank divides "middle-income" countries into two brackets. In its figures for 2021, lower-middle-income countries are those with a gross national income (GNI) per capita of between \$1,036 and \$4,045 while higher-middle-income countries have a GNI per capita of between \$4,046 and \$12,535. This is

a broad definition, taking in countries such as Nicaragua and Nigeria at its lower end and the poorer parts of the EU (Romania and Bulgaria) at its upper one. It encompasses most of Latin America, North Africa, parts of the Middle East and eastern Europe and southern and eastern Asia, including India and China.

Yet as big a grouping as it is, one can talk about certain common experiences applying to many or most middle-income countries. Most had a good 2000s, at least until the global financial crash in 2008. Market-driven globalisation, the growth in trade, and the commodities boom drove prosperity. The "global middle class" (often defined as those earning between \$10 and \$100 per person per day) grew rapidly.

A study by the Brookings Institution found this group had grown from one billion in 1985 to two billion in 2006 and 3.2 billion by 2017. This was accompanied by a growth in further education, and in mobile phone and internet use. Take Brazil for example, where between 2002 and 2012 the country's middle class grew by 35 million and the proportion of school leavers who went on to university rose from 20.7 to 45.2 per cent. That shift changed the social make-ups of countries (for example, Brazil went from being 38 to 53 per cent middle class in that period) but also that of the entire global population.

A much-quoted study for the World Bank in 2013 found that most income gains between 1988 and 2008 had been around the middle (the 20th to 60th percentiles) and the very top (95th to 100th percentiles) of the global income distribution. Dubbed the "elephant curve" for its broad and high centre and trunk-like peak at one extreme, this chart told the story of globalisation: major gains for the new global middle class in mid-income countries and the educated, mobile upper class at the top, but stagnation for the poorest countries and the rich-world working class.

Life was not just good, high on the elephant's back, but it looked to be getting better – as once-poor citizens rapidly accrued the trappings of rich-world lifestyles, from shopping malls to modern healthcare and pension provisions. Most parts of the middle-income world were growing much faster than the rich world (such as the US, Europe, Japan) and so the story was one of catch-up, of convergence.

Yet as the conservative theorist Samuel Huntington had argued long before in his 1968 book *Political Order in Changing Societies*, history suggests that rapid growths in prosperity and education are often followed by periods of unrest as expectations outpace the expansion of institutions (such as in politics, welfare and infrastructure). "The primary problem of politics," he wrote, "is the lag in the development of political institutions behind social-economic change."

The risk of this anticipatory overshoot in expectations was already present. But then came the global financial crash, which hit parts of the new global middle class hard. Consider Egypt, a lower-middle-income economy whose growth had exceeded 7 per cent in both 2007 and 2008; when foreign investment and tourism dried up, it fell to 1.8 per cent in 2011. The unemployment and low wages that resulted after that fall were a major force in the Tahrir Square protests of 2011.

At the time, many international news reports expressed surprise at how many of the protesters in Cairo and other Egyptian cities were middle class. It would be a sign of things to come. The angry new middle class was a significant feature of the wider Arab Spring in 2011, of movements such as the Chilean student uprising of that year, as well as Istanbul's Gezi Park protest in 2013.

Throughout the 2010s the global middle class continued to grow, but it would prove to be a more fraught decade. Many middle-income countries recovered but at a lower growth rate than they had before the 2008 crash. Some countries – such as Brazil and Egypt – experienced something similar to an economic hangover: a nagging dependency on certain sources of prosperity (commodities, foreign investment) and a large debt carried over from the good times.

There was much talk of the "middle-income trap" that was claiming many countries no longer poor enough to be competitive as low-cost manufacturing destinations, but not yet rich enough to possess the productivity-driving infrastructure and innovation of a high-income country. The risk, as the term suggests, was of such countries getting stuck at the \$10,000 GNI per capita mark.

Not only did growth slow in many mid-income economies in the 2010s, but some experienced democratic backsliding. The two phenomena are not unrelated. Democratically dubious regimes with access to the carrot of public spending increases may choose that over the stick of curbing freedoms (the oil-producing Algeria, for example, largely avoided the Arab Spring by making welfare more generous).

Yet when growth slows and coffers are bare, authoritarians have fewer options and crackdowns on freedoms ensue (consider Turkey, where President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has used nationalist theatrics at home and abroad to distract from the country's worsening economy).

Covid-19 hit middle-income countries especially hard. Unlike the world's poorest, agrarian economies, they are urban and wired into the global economy. The virus spread fast in India, Brazil and Mexico. Unlike the poorest







countries, they were broadly not eligible for debt relief. Yet unlike the high-income world, these states lacked the fiscal resources to keep businesses afloat, workers paid and school pupils educated remotely throughout lockdowns (schools in Latin America were closed for an average of 231 days to October 2021, more than in any other region of the planet). Unlike the rich world, welfare systems in the middle-income countries were too patchy to prevent many from falling through the gaps and stop inequality from soaring.

The long boom experienced by the global middle class, having faltered during the 2010s, has now gone into reverse. This is true in countries from Chile (technically high-income since 2012) and Kazakhstan (expected to become high-income by 2029, where now only stagnation awaits) to Pakistan (just above the bottom middle-income threshold). The middle class is also shrinking. According to the Pew Research group, the global middle class lost 54 million members in 2020 alone. According to the World Bank: “The new poor are much more likely to reside in middle-income countries compared to the existing global poor.”

Stagnant growth, recent and now disappointed memories of an economic golden age, inequality and increases in authoritarian crackdowns are being experienced particularly acutely by urban, university-educated and technology-savvy populations. The pandemic has accentuated these trends.

In many cases, a relatively specific and sometimes small event triggered the unrest and demonstrations. In Lebanon in 2019, it was a 2-percentage-point increase in VAT and a proposed charge on internet phone calls. In Chile that same year, it was a 30 peso (2p) rise

in metro fares. In the Thai protests of 2020, the grievances raised by the pro-democracy movement included mistreatment in the country’s militarist schools.

In South Africa in 2021 the spark was the imprisonment of the former president Jacob Zuma. In Kazakhstan in January this year it was an increase in energy prices. In almost every case, the cited grievance is a proxy for much broader anger rooted in a combination of democratic abuse and a cost of living crisis.

Will these dynamics come to the most significant middle-income country of all – China? It will probably pass the World Bank’s threshold between middle-income and high-income status (\$12,535 GNI/per capita) next year. China’s middle class is half-a-billion strong and their behaviour and consumption have been the biggest contributor to the growth of the Global Middle.

Yet even in China, there are signs of a squeeze. Like other middle-income countries, the rising superpower has a debt problem: about one third of its GDP is tied up in an indebted property sector that appears to be in crisis. Like other middle-income countries, China risks “getting old before it gets rich”; its working-age population is shrinking and its death rate may exceed its birth rate this year for the first time. The middle-income trap terrifies Chinese leaders, and rightly so. China has not yet experienced mass protests – its hyper-paranoid digital surveillance networks have made sure of that – but its latest Covid lockdowns have already sparked rare expressions of dissent on social media.

There are strong reasons to believe that this crisis of the Global Squeezed Middle, this crisis of the middle-income world, will continue. “[T]he recovery prospects for the

global middle class are not good,” says an analysis from Spain’s Real Instituto Elcano think tank (an authority on Latin America). Oil and gas prices are in long-term decline. Rich-world firms spooked by the vulnerability of long supply chains are seeking to “re-shore” or “near-shore” production that they have long “offshored” to distant low-cost economies. Most major international bodies predict continued lower growth for middle-income countries for the foreseeable future.

Should we get used to the protests? Lower growth in mid-income countries will mean lower growth in the rich countries (especially Britain) that provide them with services. It will cause further political upheavals: both Peru and Chile elected outsider left-wing leaders in 2021, both products of protest movements. Colombia and Brazil may both tip to the left this year after widespread protests against right-of-centre or populist incumbents. Lebanon’s protest movements are putting up candidates in the election due this spring – its first since the protests began in 2019.

Elsewhere, the question is how far strongmen leaders will go to quash unrest, and what economic and geopolitical changes that will entail. Will President Erdoğan’s propensity to use foreign adventurism to cover domestic issues in Turkey become more extreme as economic protests grow? Will India’s Narendra Modi seek to shore up support among struggling middle-class Hindus by further stirring up anti-Muslim feeling? Will Iran’s new government under the hardliner Ebrahim Raisi compromise its nuclear talks with the US and EU in the face of new protests? And will the protests in Belarus and Kazakhstan prompt Vladimir Putin to take a yet-tighter grip on Russia’s near abroad?

And then there is China. Here the chances of protests swaying politics are low. But it is also here that any such moves would have the greatest global implications. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has recognised its vulnerabilities with a “Common Prosperity” agenda aimed at reducing inequalities and reining in the excesses of the country’s boom years. But with China’s property sector in crisis (many Chinese people paid for their new flats upfront) and the CCP’s 20th congress looming in the autumn, it is hard to avoid the question: what if China too is susceptible to the struggles of the Global Squeezed Middle?

Should the squeeze really take hold in China, and should people there react as other disaffected members of the global new middle class have, then we will enter a new era of crisis indeed. ●

*Lawrence Freedman writes on the US-China relationship on page 28*

# You can support Afghanistan. Today, and for years to come.

EMERGENCY has worked in Afghanistan for 22 years. Building hospitals and clinics, training Afghans to be medics, and treating over 7 million people.

We have never stopped, even in the most challenging moments. Our facilities across the country remain open and we are committed to supporting the Afghan people.

**Will you help us provide free, high-quality healthcare?**

EMERGENCY provides free, high-quality healthcare to victims of war, poverty and landmines, alongside building hospitals and training local medical staff. We have a long-term, sustainable approach to humanitarian healthcare everywhere we work, and have treated 11 million patients in 19 countries since 1994.



[donate.emergencyuk.org/newstatesman](https://donate.emergencyuk.org/newstatesman)

Scan here to learn more about our charity and how you can help.

Charity number: 1148818  
[info@emergencyuk.org](mailto:info@emergencyuk.org)

Registered with



**EMERGENCY**  
MEDICINE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

# HELEN THOMPSON



These Times

## Boris Johnson's risk-taking was his greatest asset. Can he still use it to his advantage?

**B**oris Johnson's attitude to risk has shaped British politics for the past three years. It made him Prime Minister in July 2019 and then helped him overcome the parliamentary impasse over Brexit by the end of that year. But his risk-taking has now eroded his authority to such an extent that he might not lead the Conservatives into the next election.

Even after the years of cultivating his "Boris" persona – as a journalist and as mayor of London – it was in 2019 that Johnson's personality really started to have a serious bearing on British politics. Prior to the EU referendum, he behaved as any Eurosceptic Conservative MP ambitious to become PM might have done. Politically friendless, Johnson needed a grand cause to challenge the then chancellor George Osborne for the party leadership when David Cameron stepped down before the next general election: nothing was so obvious in the circumstances as advocating for Brexit.

But, after aborting his campaign to win the Conservative leadership election in the summer of 2016, he shrank. With Theresa May's ability to deliver Brexit always in doubt, Johnson did not spend any of his Brexit capital acquired during the referendum to improve his position for any future contest to replace her. Most notably, he remained in May's cabinet when, in December 2017, the backstop provisions agreed with the EU on Northern Ireland made it clear that she was pursuing a withdrawal agreement with no chance of being passed in the House of Commons. By March 2019, Johnson was voting "yes" on a meaningful vote where "no" won a majority of 58.

The elections for the European Parliament in May 2019, when the Tories won just 9 per cent of the vote, rescued Johnson. An idea took hold in the party that only a chancer such as "Boris" might deal more effectively with the EU and the House of Commons and so save the Tories from permanent annihilation. Johnson delivered. He got the Irish government to move on Northern Ireland and shrewdly reckoned that the more resistance to Brexit he invited in parliament and the Supreme Court, the easier it would be to prevail in a general election.

Having secured Brexit and resurrected the Conservatives, Johnson could not have confronted a turn of events less conducive to his temperament than Covid. The pandemic has been a reckoning: on his own confession, years of ill-discipline with his diet and lifestyle contributed to his near-death experience in 2020. With respect to public policy, he had little choice but to introduce the politics of rules in ways that have been more intrusive in daily life than anything ever seen in postwar Britain.

The question of whether Johnson was temperamentally capable of keeping to the rules he enforced on the public has overshadowed his entire political future since the first lockdown in March 2020. It is not possible for national leaders to ask

---

**The loyalty of Leave voters had given Johnson cover for his style of leadership**

voters to sacrifice their normal lives – their relationships, jobs and the need to be with loved ones at the end of life – without them being willing to follow the rules too. At the end of 2021, this new reality finally damaged Johnson after stories emerged (and are still emerging) about parties and gatherings at No 10. When it did, Johnson's reputation was especially vulnerable since the Queen, in her obvious loneliness at Prince Philip's funeral, had demonstrated to the country what it meant to suffer in the name of respecting the rules.

The loyalty of Leave voters had hitherto given Johnson cover for his style of leadership – delegating the specifics of managing the pandemic to others. After all, it was the Leave voters' anger in 2019 that made Johnson. He became the last hope that the referendum result would prevail. Like them, he too was cast as the villain for voting to leave the EU in 2016, which they did not wish to repent. Now, he appears just like any other politician who thinks he is more important than the voters. Unsurprisingly, Conservative support among Leavers has crashed, and Keir Starmer is enjoying his first set of regular Labour leads in the opinion polls. Nor does Johnson have any Leave cards left to play to win back those voters who have deserted him. Just as the future of Northern Ireland could not save Remain in the 2016 referendum, a crusade about whether the European Court of Justice should have authority in the province will not work with disaffected English Tory voters from 2019 in the next general election.

Whether Johnson's luck is exhausted may be determined by the net zero target, which aims for a huge increase in green energy. He is a proponent of net-zero's transformative possibilities, and appears indifferent to the extraordinary economic and political difficulties that realising it will entail. But here the "can-do regardless" spirit of "Boris" is aligned with the broader parliamentary consensus, the climate commitments of the EU and the Biden administration, as well as the financial institutions funding green investment.

Johnson's weakness remains that sustaining net zero requires the kind of strategic thinking that can maximise the opportunities for levelling up while containing energy inflation, which he seems incapable of doing. But any plausible rival for the Conservative leadership will struggle to do much better. Johnson also still has an advantage: with the energy revolution, "Boris"-like displays of conviction that "there must be a way" are probably a necessary condition of getting very far at all. ●

# The Thucydides Trap is wrong about China

The theory goes that war is inevitable when an emerging power threatens to displace an old one. But in the case of the Sino-US rivalry, the logic fails

By Lawrence Freedman

The alarming possibility of a major conflict between the US and China has been framed as a likely consequence of a pattern of great power behaviour first identified by the fifth-century BCE historian Thucydides. In his study of the Peloponnesian War, the Greek wrote: "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable." This argument is now most associated with the Harvard academic Graham Allison, who claims to have identified 16 instances in which a dominant power has sought to suppress an emerging rival before they became too strong. He notes, disconcertingly, that 12 of these ended in war.

Allison first presented his thesis of the "Thucydides Trap" in the *Atlantic* in 2015, and developed it in a book, *Destined for War*, in 2017. Since then, Allison's argument that the

relationship between the US and China is growing increasingly volatile has gained even more credibility with tensions over trade, the South China Sea and Taiwan.

But Allison's notion of the Thucydides Trap – the tendency towards war when a rising power threatens to displace an existing one – fails to address the risks involved in conflict and the reasons why wars occur. The story told by Thucydides is much more complicated than the "Trap" suggests. The notion of inevitable conflict between Athens and Sparta elides the fact that the Athenian leader Pericles made poor strategic calls. Different decisions would have avoided war.

These choices were largely about the cohesion of the respective Athenian and Spartan alliances, and the possibility of a smaller state defecting because it did not feel protected. A major difference now is that there are

asymmetrical alliances: China is far more isolated geopolitically than the US.

If lessons are to be drawn from past power struggles the most relevant among them is the Cold War. The avoidance of armed conflict between the US and the Soviet Union was to a great extent owing to the presence of nuclear weapons. This is a threat that both Beijing and Washington must consider and in that respect, the Cold War is a better comparison than the rivalries between Portugal and Spain in the 15th century or those between England and the Dutch Republic in the 17th.

China is also involved in a complex set of power relationships. Russia was once China's senior partner; now it is China that is the stronger. Fifty years ago they almost came to blows; now they enjoy an uneasy cordiality. Meanwhile, there has been tension on China's border with India (another rising power?), while in 2014, the Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe noted disturbing similarities between Europe in 1914 and his country's dispute with China over the Senkaku Islands (claimed by China as the Diaoyu Islands). China must consider possible conflicts with all the major players in the region, and not just the US. To Beijing's consternation new security pacts have emerged, such as the Quad, consisting of the US, Australia, Japan and India, and the Aukus agreement between Australia, the UK and the US.

As China has become more powerful it has grown more assertive, which is why its neighbours have become anxious about its intentions. But contrary to the logic of the Thucydides Trap, in the past China went to war – with Korea in 1950, India in 1962, and Vietnam in 1979 – when it was in a position of weakness, not strength. Its military and economic power is now second only to the US, but that also means China has much more to lose in any kind of protracted, multi-front conflict.

The "Trap" argument is also undermined when you consider the view held by many experts that China's power may have already peaked. The nation is facing a series of system problems that may halt its rise, including an unbalanced economy, an ageing population, environmental degradation and political dysfunction resulting from President Xi Jinping's authoritarian turn. Indeed, recent war scares start from the assumption that the leadership in Beijing might want to invade Taiwan before China's power wanes.

The risk of war in the Indo-Pacific region cannot usefully be understood as the result of an upstart power challenging the established global hegemon for supremacy. Issues of interest and alliances are as important as power balances, and all need to be watched carefully if conflict between the world's preponderant forces are to be addressed and, hopefully, avoided. ●



---

# Why bad science means bad policy

---

During the pandemic senior scientific advisers and institutions have failed to challenge a populist, post-truth UK government. So what does this mean for the climate crisis?

---

**By Philip Ball**

---

In the weeks before Christmas, as Covid case numbers rose again, Conservative MPs targeted England's chief medical officer Chris Whitty. He was "unelected", Joy Morrissey wrote in a since deleted tweet: "This is not a public health socialist state." In the Commons, backbenchers accused Whitty of excessive caution in his advice to reduce socialising. Greg Smith complained that the chief medical officer had "press[ed] the panic button way beyond what this House voted for".

The dismissal of scientific expertise was the natural endpoint of a relationship between science and politics that has been problematic since the pandemic began. The barbs aimed at Whitty were shameful, especially in the wake of the public harassment he had received. Yet it would be a mistake to portray this as a conflict between ignorant politicians and forthright scientists; at times there has been a dangerous complicity between the two.

The Johnson government has lied to the public, disregarded its own rules, handed out deals to friends, destroyed public trust, and been generally incompetent. And yet its scientific advisers have pursued their jobs as if it were business as usual. It is delusional to think you can give advice to Boris Johnson in the same objective manner as you would to, say, Gordon Brown. The determination to do so has contributed to "one of the most important public health failures the United Kingdom has ever experienced", in the words of a damning report on the early pandemic response published last October by two parliamentary science committees.

In the age of post-truth, populist politics, the mechanisms for feeding science into policy are no longer fit for purpose. According to James Wilsdon, professor of research policy at Sheffield University, "The entire science advisory system feels as if it has been fundamentally – perhaps fatally – compromised by the pandemic."

In his view, we have retreated significantly from the progress achieved after the BSE "mad cow" epidemic, and the 1990s era of public resistance to genetically modified food. The scientific community's relationship with government needs a serious overhaul. And fast – not just because future pandemics are inevitable, but because there is a second crisis that will hinge on scientific expertise: the climate emergency.

Chris Whitty was traduced for daring to recommend, as the number of cases of infection rose rapidly because of the Omicron variant, that we "prioritise the social interactions that really matter". Many perceived this as at odds with Boris Johnson's suggestion, at the same Downing Street press briefing on 15 December 2021, that "we're not cancelling



people's parties or their ability to mix”.

But in truth this was the mildest of dissonances. Whitty seemed to be speaking almost in semaphore, as if wanting to signal the gravity of the situation without explicitly contradicting the Prime Minister.

That's been a problem from the start. Johnson's boast of having shaken everyone's hands during a hospital visit on 3 March 2020 merely led the government's chief scientific adviser Patrick Vallance to offer the muted advice to “wash your hands” afterwards. Questioned about Dominic Cummings's breach of lockdown rules at a press briefing in May 2020, Whitty's response – that he had no desire to “get pulled into politics” – seemed naive and misguided. Cummings's transgression had public health implications: surveys showed that trust in government advice plummeted after the absurd theatre of the adviser's “rose garden” press conference at No 10.

There has been a similar silence on the

refusal of Tory MPs to wear masks. Witness Johnson's maskless visit to Hexham general hospital last November, and to Cop26, where he was photographed without a mask (and asleep) next to 95-year-old David Attenborough. Jacob Rees-Mogg's defence in the Commons – that his party is protected from Covid by a spirit of “convivial fraternity” – was a trademark puerile provocation. But it was also blatant misinformation, seriously undermining the government's message last autumn that people were “expected and recommended to continue wearing a face covering in crowded and enclosed spaces”.

“The [idea of] ‘only wearing masks with people you don't know well’ is infuriating and completely against scientific advice,” says Kit Yates of Bath University, a mathematician who serves on Independent Sage, a non-official coalition of experts that convened in May 2020 as an unaffiliated alternative to the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage). Even as MPs debated the reintroduction of mandatory masks in

November, some defied the existing guidance. “There are egregious examples of irresponsible behaviours being normalised by politicians and not corrected by ‘official scientists,’” says Yates.

The usual narrative has been that Whitty, Vallance and others have tried doggedly to maintain an appearance of unity with politicians in order to avoid undermining public trust, or because they feel it is their duty, or both. Whatever the rationale, such an approach is not good enough; it means that scientists get sucked into a dysfunctional governance. When the second wave loomed in September 2020, Jeremy Farrar, a former member of Sage, asked: “By remaining in central advisory roles, are we complicit in the outcomes?”

Yes, according to James Wilsdon of Sheffield University. “I think it's hard to disentangle some of what we're seeing from the government on masks and so on from the broader rise of a form of ‘post-accountability politics’, in which MPs and top officials no longer ▶

## The NS Essay

◀ need to justify breaches of ethical or procedural standards. It has now completely infected the British body politic. And as the top science advisers work so closely with and for their political masters, it seems inevitable that this infection has spread to them, too.”

These concerns were raised in the summer lull of 2020. Richard Horton, editor of the *Lancet*, told me then that “the relationship between the scientific advisers and politicians in the early phase of the epidemic was strangely collusive”. Wilsdon, too, was troubled from the start. “The very first moment I saw those press conferences, with the CMO [Whitty] and GCSA [Vallance] flanking the Prime Minister it rang all sorts of alarm bells, in terms of lines of accountability and the blurring of the distinction between advice and decision-making.”

There was more than a whiff of collusion in the initial “herd immunity” strategy accepted by Sage, which aimed to let the virus flow in a controlled manner through the population until enough people had natural immunity (if they were not dead) to end the pandemic. The idea that you could turn transmission up or down like a tap, especially without the guidance of a testing programme worthy of the name, was fantastical. Some in Sage now wonder how they could collectively have made such an error of judgement. But they should be wondering why that mistake led in precisely the direction that a libertarian, populist government would welcome.

Last October’s report reductively put this down to “groupthink”, remarking that “it was surprising that the initially fatalistic assumptions about the impossibility of suppressing the virus were not challenged”.

In other words, if ministers were at fault, it was for not pushing back hard enough on herd immunity. But it’s ludicrous to suppose that a libertarian government that has sacrificed lives in its efforts to avoid lockdowns (in autumn 2020, Johnson is alleged to have insisted “no more fucking lockdowns – let the bodies pile high in their thousands”) would have sought tighter restrictions than those the scientists were advocating.

Here at least, Cummings’s assessment rings true: the scientists did not push for a lockdown in early March 2020, he told a select committee in May last year, because they knew Johnson “doesn’t really believe in it”. Worse,

they took on board the Prime Minister’s nationalistic exceptionalism: the idea that such policies might work in compliant Taiwan or China, but freedom-loving Brits wouldn’t stand for it. Michael Parker, a bioethicist at Oxford, has called this view “a kind of racism”.

More generally, Sage badly misjudged its tone. Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust since 2013, has pointed out that the minutes of some crucial meetings in March 2020 were far too anodyne, failing to convey the urgency and even desperation the scientists felt. His conclusion that Sage “could have done better in speaking truth to power” is itself an understatement: thousands of lives might have been saved had ministers been given less latitude.

And now that they have taken to gaslighting the public about herd immunity – it was “absolutely not” the strategy, the Home Secretary Priti Patel told Andrew Marr last May – scientists have made little attempt to correct the record. Farrar has confirmed in his book *Spike* that Patel was not telling the truth, but others dodge the issue – or, like the former deputy chief medical adviser for England Jenny Harries, join the denial.

For many scientists I spoke to, Harries has gone from adviser to government apologist – and in Cummings’s view, she has benefited accordingly. She now heads the UK Health Security Agency, which replaced Public Health England. Her input has often been unhelpful, and occasionally damaging.

Early in the pandemic Harries warned that masks might do more harm than good; her claim in April 2020 that the UK was an “international exemplar” in pandemic preparedness was patently wrong; and she dismissed World Health Organisation (WHO) advice to conduct extensive testing, on the basis that

such measures were meant for low-income countries – a suggestion Farrar calls “a dreadful thing to say”.

In a BBC interview last October, Vallance said scientific advisers should be “fearless... even if it is uncomfortable”, an ambition that has scarcely been borne out in public. We have seen more of the deferential notion he has cited that “scientists advise, politicians decide”. As well as being the government’s chief scientific adviser, Vallance is now national technology adviser and head of the Office for Science and Technology Strategy in the Cabinet Office, where he is likely to have considerable influence on how funding is allocated.

Since his resignation from Sage last November, Farrar has, by contrast, become a strong critic of the way the pandemic has been handled. He described the appointment of Dido Harding, a businesswoman and Tory peer, to lead the calamitous test-and-trace system as “a grave error”; and said the Chancellor Rishi Sunak’s Eat Out to Help Out scheme contributed to Covid’s devastating second wave. It is not clear that, as some have suggested, that Farrar resigned in protest at the sidelining of Sage; his position as director of the Wellcome Trust ends in 2023, and he may want to concentrate on that. But the better question is whether he might have stayed if he believed Sage was having an impact.

If chief advisers have felt they cannot contradict ministers – they are bound by the civil service code to “act in a way which deserves and retains the confidence of ministers” – then this must change. That code does not acknowledge the possibility that the government itself might disregard it, or act so recklessly as to force advisers to decide between a duty to public health or to ministers. When



SIMON WALKER/HM TREASURY

Wait in vain: Rishi Sunak’s Eat Out to Help Out scheme has been accused of fuelling Covid



they cannot publicly correct dangerous misinformation, the system has failed.

There is no barrier to scientific advisers pushing back robustly on ministers: David King did so as chief adviser to Tony Blair, when he encountered opposition to his conviction that nuclear power was needed in the UK's climate strategy. The current advisory system was established in part to address problematic government interventions – for instance, the then agriculture minister John Gummer's misjudged attempt to persuade the public that British beef was safe during the BSE outbreak by getting his young daughter to eat a burger in front of cameras. The Phillips Report that followed that crisis emphasised the need for greater transparency. The public, it said, should be given the information that shapes the scientific advice, and trusted to respond rationally. We shouldn't be reduced to interpreting facial expressions to figure out whether scientific advisers agree with ministers.

It was a lack of transparency in the science advice early in the pandemic that led King to convene Independent Sage in May 2020. This non-official coalition of experts aimed to be more public-facing. Not everyone welcomed the intervention – the name itself invited confusion – but it was unprecedented, and spoke of serious problems with the existing system.

Sage's transparency has improved, for example with the publication of its minutes since late May 2020. But that is still not true of all science input into pandemic policy (of which Sage is only a part). No one will say, for example, where the lockdown-delaying but groundless idea of "behavioural fatigue" (the idea that people cease obeying rules if they go on too long) entered the picture; Sage's behavioural scientists deny that it came from them. And the scientific support Johnson adduced for the pointless 10pm curfew in September 2020 is nowhere to be seen.

The vaccine roll-out has been the biggest scientific triumph of the pandemic, but it hasn't eased science-policy interactions. While ministers falsely and repeatedly claim that the speed of the UK's vaccine programme is an example of the long-elusive Brexit dividend, the chief scientists have said nothing. For a populist government keen to ditch restrictions, the vaccines seemed a godsend – even though it was obvious to specialists (and has proved to be the case) that vaccines alone were unlikely to end the pandemic, or even to keep infections low.

For much of 2021 it seemed that ministers had been briefed to brush aside all embarrassments with the response, "But we gave you vaccines": they were politically weaponised. Johnson used the booster programme to deflect difficult questions about the Owen Paterson parliamentary suspension debacle.

This silence from scientists amid such

## The old notion that scientists should be "on tap but not on top" is no longer enough, if it ever was

opportunism reflects a complex relationship. "I think the extent to which the entire science system – both research and advice – continues to rely on a halo effect from the vaccine programme is a real problem," says Wilsdon of Sheffield University. "The Oxford-AstraZeneca success has now acquired quasi-mythical status and is portrayed as washing away all earlier failings, including in the advisory system. This is hugely convenient for the government, and is already yielding significant extra government investment into the research system. So both politicians and science advisers are complicit, and benefit from an account which exaggerates the positives, and erases or downplays what went wrong."

Part of the problem is operational: emergency structures such as Sage were never designed to function continuously for a long period. But many scientists seem reluctant to recognise that being objective and non-partisan is not the same as being non-interventionist, or indeed supine.

Whitty, Vallance and other advisers can perhaps be forgiven for not knowing how best to work with a government that flouts rules for ideological or personal reasons, manipulates figures, and gives money and jobs to its friends. A mechanism designed for politicians such as Blair or John Major was unlikely to be adequate for Johnson.

But it is not a problem that will vanish with Boris Johnson, in a Conservative Party that has become so radicalised. With a significant parliamentary contingent prepared to sabotage public health, and politicians and the media increasingly emboldened to discredit science advisers ("Cassandras in lab coats", "the misery guts on Sage"), even a muted public voice for science can't be taken for granted.

The Work and Pensions Secretary Thérèse Coffey offered a hint, as early as May 2020, that scientists will be blamed if necessary. In response to criticisms of Covid strategy, she said: "If the science was wrong, advice at the time was wrong, I'm not surprised if people will then think we made a wrong decision."

The scientific community needs to wake up. A policy of appeasement, normalisation and objective detachment has not worked. The problem is not merely political misbehav-

our; it involves scepticism of science itself. The No 10 Christmas parties, as well as the socially distanced drinks reportedly held at Downing Street in May 2020, didn't just show disdain for the rules; they suggest the organisers did not accept a deadly disease might be spread that way.

How will climate advice fare as a result? This is a global emergency of a different order, which demands in Britain a semi-permanent Sage of its own. It would need to acknowledge it may have to work with a government not temperamentally or intellectually committed to tackling the crisis.

Already there is a "Do as I say, not as I do" attitude to strategy reminiscent of that towards masks, as demonstrated when the government's then Cop26 spokeswoman Allegra Stratton justified Johnson's private flight back from Glasgow with a nonchalant shrug of "personal choice!"

"I think, post-Covid, there's a pressing need to look holistically at the entire science advisory system," says James Wilsdon. This must include giving chief scientists more independence, free from government chaperones or censure. Yes, they are civil servants – but if this means defending policies they don't condone and turning a blind eye to misconduct and lies, we must ask where public interest enters the equation. The old notion (commonly attributed to Churchill) that scientists should be "on tap but not on top" is no longer enough, if it ever was.

You can understand the government's desire to delay an inquiry into Covid. But there is a strange insouciance in the UK scientific community, too. In the US, leading scientists have called for an expert commission to assess the country's response, as well as to prepare for the future. There has been no comparable demand here; bodies such as the Royal Society and the Academy of Medical Sciences have stayed quiet. It all feels very British: don't make a fuss, don't embarrass our own chaps.

The British chemistry Nobel laureate Fraser Stoddart told me the response of scientists in learned societies to "policy issues arising out of the UK government's disastrous handling of the pandemic" has been "lacklustre". They should, he said, "be calling for an independent inquiry into the mismanagement of the crisis. UK scientists in high places should be holding the government's feet to the fire."

If in Britain chief scientists aren't willing to openly criticise bad policy and poor performance on climate issues, we will have to expect the worst. And if scientists and their institutions continue to shrug and carry on as before, to consider themselves objective public servants while indulging in the fantasy that they boldly "speak truth to power", they will be fatally complicit. ●

Picture a goblin. Is he short? Hunchbacked? Does he have a long, hooked nose and sallow skin? Does he look Jewish?

This is the basis of the latest row over JK Rowling, thanks to a clip that recently went viral of the US comedian Jon Stewart comparing the goblins that run Gringotts Bank in the *Harry Potter* films with a caricature of Jews from anti-Semitic literature. A furious social media row ensued, and even though Stewart has since denied that he meant to imply Rowling was anti-Semitic, not everyone agrees. Clips of the offending goblin scene were banded about, sparking a frenzied debate about other problematic aspects of the Pottermore and what this says about Rowling herself.

A storm in a Twitter teacup? It should be. Go back to the source material, and you'll find Rowling's goblin has "a swarthy, clever face", "a pointed beard" and "very long fingers and feet" – not exactly flattering, but hardly a description that screams "Jewish". The hook-nosed, sideburned creatures that appear in the films are, presumably, a product of Warner Brothers' design team.

They are also a product of centuries of anti-Semitism woven into European folklore, in which the depiction of the grubby, untrustworthy, gold-obsessed goblin or dwarf was fused in the cultural imagination with the depiction of the grubby, untrustworthy, gold-obsessed Jew. That tells us a lot about literary tropes, cinematic laziness and historical attitudes towards Jews, and very little about the author's personal views.

*Harry Potter* may not win any medals for diversity, but Western fantasy has always had a complicated relationship with race. From the dark-skinned orcs and Calormenes of JRR Tolkien and CS Lewis, to the racial stereotypes that populate the "exotic" regions of the *Game of Thrones* universe. Fans of the genre might be aware of this, but few complain – to some extent, it is baked into the very premise: one of our heroes setting off on a quest to defeat those otherworldly foreigners, with their strange looks and barbaric customs. If anything, the child-friendly message of *Harry Potter* – that evil can be defeated when people put aside their differences and work together – is about as progressive as it gets.

Rowling's keyboard critics hold her to a higher standard. They note (correctly) that the ethnic minority characters of Hogwarts are few and clumsily written. Cho Chang is a Chinese girl with a Korean last name as a first name; the only Irish character is called Seamus Finnigan. And let's not get started on the wizarding world having an entire

# RACHEL CUNLIFFE



## Lines of Dissent

### After another Twitter frenzy, it's time for the witch-hunt against JK Rowling to end

slave class of house elves. Are you bored yet? Because I could go on, listing the myriad ways in which the world Rowling created falls short of today's social justice standards. Hogwarts is elitist, just a magical version of Eton. And where for the love of Merlin are all the queer wizards?

All valid points. Still, I've never seen anyone get upset by a lack of diversity at Miss Cackle's Academy in Jill Murphy's *Worst Witch* books, or take offence at the Aryan handsomeness of Anthony Horowitz's teenage spy Alex Rider. Sometimes children's stories are just that – children's stories. And sometimes authors who write fantasy lean on folklore tropes that have racist, misogynistic or anti-Semitic roots. That isn't usually news.

But then everything Rowling does these days makes the headlines. One of the left's favourite poster girls – a stalwart Labour supporter who has donated hundreds of millions of pounds to children's charities – has fallen from grace thanks to her stance on biological sex and what she sees as the risks of the movement for gender self-identification. She has left her fan base of young progressives feeling betrayed; the author of the stories they loved has a view they find abhorrent. That, to many, nullifies anything she may have achieved in the past – her left-wing activism doesn't count now

that she is at odds with the left's latest shibboleth, and her authorship of one of the most successful literary series of all time must be re-examined.

Sometimes, this manifests as an effort to separate the *Harry Potter* books from the woman who wrote them – whether by minimising her name on the trailer for her latest film, or by referring to Rowling as She Who Must Not Be Named, as has become commonplace within the fandom. And sometimes, as with the goblin controversy, it becomes an exercise in offence-mining, tearing down her creations to expose every flaw and plot hole and insensitivity, so that even those who admired her work are forced to admit there was never anything there worth admiring.

I grew up with *Harry Potter*. *The Philosopher's Stone* is the book that taught my dyslexia-addled brain to love reading. I queued for 12 hours, in costume, to get the final book at midnight. That doesn't mean I think they're perfect – but they're not meant to be searing social commentaries that fit the ethical code of readers two decades later. You don't have to agree with every word their author has ever said (I certainly don't) to enjoy them. You also don't have to read them at all, if her views put you off.

But retroactively demonising these books for failing tests that dozens of comparable works would never pass strikes me as overkill. The urge to draw moral binaries – good vs evil, progressive vs bigoted – might be appropriate in fantasy fiction, but in the real world condemning everything someone has ever done because you don't like one aspect of their politics isn't just worrying, it's infantile. They're only children's books, after all. ●

*The Harry Potter* books are not meant to be searing social commentaries

MARTA SIGNORI

---

# THE CRITICS

---

**Books** Henry Marsh on why we should rediscover the value of convalescence. 36

---

**Books** Jan-Werner Müller on the afterlife of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. 38

---

**Art** Michael Prodger on the dark, unsettling drawings of Victor Hugo. 46

---

**Music** Deborah Levy writes a birthday letter to David Bowie. 44

---

**Music** Simon Heffer on the objects that tell Beethoven's story. 48

---

**Television** Rachel Cooke on the bracing #MeToo drama *Rules of the Game*. 52

---

# Books

## How we lost the art of getting well

Modern medicine tackles the crisis of illness, but neglects the essential process of physical and mental recovery

By Henry Marsh

“It’s hard to get away from the conclusion,” Gavin Francis writes in his wise and thoughtful book *Recovery: The Lost Art of Convalescence*, “that in the rush to modern medicine we’ve lost something important.” Francis is a GP, and he makes this comment when he tells us that he can no longer arrange for a frail and elderly patient to be admitted to hospital simply for much needed nursing care and convalescence. Instead, there must be a proper medical diagnosis and a plan to get the patient out of hospital as quickly as possible. Convalescence and recovery don’t count. Indeed, as he points out, these words are generally absent from the indices of medical textbooks. Yet common sense and experience tell us that they are a vital part of illness, and this truth has become blindingly obvious with Covid and its long-term complications. Illness is not a binary experience where you are either ill or well. You have to recover, and that takes time, and is often a far from simple process.

A sense of loss pervades much of the book, which starts by describing Francis’s own childhood experience of illness and recovery – once with meningitis and once with a badly fractured knee. He remembers lying in a hospital room with “large windows that gave on to trees and afternoon sunshine”. He remembers how long it took to regain the use of his leg and to recover from the profound fatigue that followed the meningitis. When he was training as a doctor years later in Edinburgh, he had



CARL LARSSON / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

the good fortune to work in two hospitals that had been originally established as convalescent hospitals, and which embodied all the principles of access to fresh air and light which Florence Nightingale had emphasised in the 19th century. I had exactly the same experience myself of training and working in what had once been a convalescent hospital. The tall windows, the gardens and the sense of community were a real joy, appreciated by both staff and patients, and in profound contrast to the huge and soulless modern hospitals where most medicine is now conducted. There are few, if any, of the convalescent institutions left – they have all been sold and turned into gated, high-end residential estates.

Although Nightingale believed in the mistaken miasmatic theory of illness – that infections were spread by foul air – and was almost certainly a dualist, believing that mind and matter were separate entities, she was remarkably prescient. In her *Notes on Nursing*, published in 1859, she wrote:

Little as we know about the way in which we are affected by form, colour, by light, we do know this, that they have a physical effect. Variety of form and brilliancy of colour in the objects presented to patients are actual means of recovery.

It is now well known that mind and matter are not separate entities. Our immune systems, for instance, have complex connections to our brains – admittedly, poorly understood – and states of mind can have a profound effect on “physical” illness, just as “mental” illness can have profound effects on the body. And yet this knowledge has been largely neglected in healthcare in recent decades. You only have to look at the number of expensive NHS hospitals built under the Private Finance Initiative, which have an uncanny resemblance to shopping malls and airports, to appreciate this truth. The last thing you get in a modern hospital is peace or quiet. As Francis observes, hospices are the exception. Only when we are dying, it would seem, are we allowed to rest and have contact with nature again.

Francis writes that the medicine in which he was trained assumes that once the crisis of illness has passed, the body and mind find ways of healing themselves. As a GP who has observed thousands of patients struggling to recover from illness, he knows this isn't true. Recovery, he argues, needs time and guidance. I suspect that he is the kind of GP most of us long for. He sees his role as a “guide in the landscape of illness” and not as a mere prescriber of pills.

Medicine, he writes – and I agree passionately – is above all about the relief of suffering, and not simply the prolongation of life and the treatment of illness. Listening to patients and learning from them is a crucial part of this. But Francis also points out that there are many different kinds of doctors and patients. Some will suit each other, and some will not. As I know from my own experience, the occasional (and painful) breakdown of trust – a quality that is vital for all medical encounters – is inevitable.

As recovery requires time, Francis writes of the

importance of telling patients to allow themselves this luxury, without guilt, and that they should not feel they are malingering. “Self-compassion,” he writes, “is a much-underrated virtue.” Even the small number of deliberate malingerers (according to Francis, government statistics show that only 1.7 per cent of sickness benefit claims are fraudulent, despite what the tabloid press might claim) suffer from self-reproach.

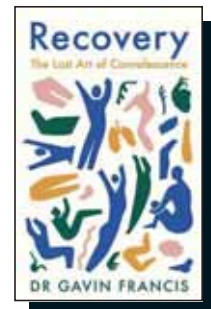
The great 19th-century German doctor Rudolf Virchow – a giant of modern medicine – wrote that doctors are “the natural attorneys for the poor”. Francis describes how for so many of his patients, recovery – and he correctly makes no distinction between physical and mental illness – is inextricably tangled up with their work. The pressure to be ever more productive and the inequality that disfigures our society have a real impact on people's health. This has been known for many years, especially from Michael Marmot's work showing that life expectancy is closely correlated to your position on the social ladder. In his own GP surgery, Francis and his partners have sensibly agreed that they should each have a three-month sabbatical every few years. I remember very clearly when I was still working full-time, I could always tell when my colleagues had been away on holiday – their eyes and faces were so much brighter. John Maynard Keynes' famous essay “The Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren”, written 94 years ago, in which he envisioned a future where we would only work three hours a day and could devote ourselves to leisure, seems charmingly quaint.

Recovery is not always complete. With some illnesses, it is a question of coming to terms with loss, and that you will never return to what you had, or were, in the past. Here, guidance from a sympathetic therapist, Francis tells us, is essential. And yet, as he also explains, we are all so suggestible, so shaped by our expectations, that the guide must take great care in how he or she describes the landscape of any particular illness to the patient. The nocebo effect – that we can make ourselves ill by expecting to be ill – is just as powerful as the placebo effect, which works in the opposite direction. I can think of many patients whose lives had been damaged by some casual, thoughtless comment from a colleague. As a patient myself now with advanced prostate cancer, and despite being a doctor, I was surprised at how I clung to every word or phrase from the doctors I saw, looking for significance that probably wasn't there. And I wonder how often I might have got it wrong when speaking to my own patients in the past.

This book is a practical guide to recovery from illness as well as a meditation on the practice of medicine. Take a holiday, says Francis, travel if you can, read books, set yourself achievable goals, don't compare yourself to others, allow yourself time, commune with green, living things, have a pet.

I cannot think of anybody – patient or doctor – who will not be helped by reading this short and profound book. ●

*Henry Marsh's next book, “And Finally”, will be published in September by Jonathan Cape*



**Recovery: The Lost Art of Convalescence**

Gavin Francis  
Profile, 144pp,  
£4.99

**Illness is not a binary experience where you are either ill or well. You have to recover, and that takes time**

## In the shadow of Leviathan

What Thomas Hobbes can teach us about emancipation, coercion and the doubleness of modern political life

By Jan-Werner Müller



Two observations recur in David Runciman's recent book on the history of ideas: profound political thought is a product of political turmoil; and important theorists are fearless, both in crises and in going wherever the logic of their arguments leads them. Runciman's book is composed of lectures he delivered for his *Talking Politics* podcast during the first lockdown in 2020. Covid is hardly as deadly a threat as the one that civil war posed to Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century, but we have been living through a critical moment that might concentrate fine minds and make them reconsider the basics of our collective life. While one wonders what Cambridge dons such as Runciman have to fear even in non-pandemic periods, the podcast format appears to have freed him from academic conventions: his tone is exceedingly casual; there are plenty of side-remarks usually absent from serious works of intellectual history: do we really need to know that the 19th-century liberal Benjamin Constant had a sado-masochistic relationship with Madame de Staël, his older, aristocratic lover, or that Max Weber's marriage might have remained unconsummated?

These titbits can be fun or even thought-provoking (is it true that the greatest analytical philosophers remained unmarried?). But they also prove distracting from the serious argument Runciman advances: the state, he claims, is central to modern political experience, more so than democracy. Like all historical phenomena, the state is not inevitable. But its crucial role in organising political life is likely to last, as long as we are caught in a delicate situation of needing a Leviathan to protect us from all kinds of threats – and yet also require protection from the protector. During a pandemic, which, Runciman confesses, left him “deeply aware” of the state's power, that all sounds depressingly true. But it's not the whole truth.

If the state is the theme, Hobbes must be at the start; after all, his *Leviathan* (1651) proposed how mutually suspicious individuals escape the state of nature – and the permanent threat of violent conflict – by contracting with each other to establish a sovereign power that “overawes” but also protects them all. Yet, to his credit, and as one of many attempts throughout the book to make canonical thinkers we assume we know seem unfamiliar again, Runciman justifies the focus on Hobbes at length, and through two well-chosen contrasts: ancient Athens and Machiavelli. Greek democracy, in which citizens would be chosen by lot to make collectively binding decisions, had no institutions that we could recognise as amounting to a state; the collective of citizens as such was the *polis*, as opposed to a legal machinery covering a particular territory.

Writing in the 16th century, Machiavelli, a frequent contender for “first modern political thinker”, did indeed dare a radical break by rejecting a politics subject to Christian precepts. But he could still only conceive of a state as something like the property of the prince; when he wrote about *mantenere lo stato*, what he had in mind was not the perpetuation of an abstract public power, but the effective control of a person over a territory.

Less obviously, in the Florentine's writings that praised a republic's “free way of life”, Machiavelli would laud the

endless conflict between *grandi* – the republic’s power-hungry elite – and a *popolo* who on occasion would become exasperated with being dominated and rise up in protest; struggles between groups, rather than being a cause of dangerous instability, actually ensured liberty. For all our (by now thoroughly clichéd) talk about clashes between “elites and the people” in a supposedly populist age, Machiavelli’s is a different world from the one we live in.

Hobbes’s Leviathan is the crucial innovation, Runciman believes, because it is based on genuine representation of everyone in an abstract legal entity, namely the “artificial person” of the state – a state that would not tolerate a proto-civil war between vainglorious *grandi* and the little people. Leviathan not only protects us in the way a benevolent prince might, but the state’s authority is the result of an act of collective authorisation by those subject to its coercive powers.

The logic articulated in what Runciman calls “the most rational book ever written about politics” is that government and people become interlocked. And the state is bound to have two faces: it is authorised to coerce citizens, but it also has to perform its task of protecting them. It deploys fear so as to release us from the fears experienced in a state of nature that is, in Hobbes’s haunting signature phrase, “nasty, brutish and short”.

This is Runciman’s main point: modern politics is characterised by an ineliminable “doubleness”. The governed and the government are separate, but also inseparable; it is because of the state that they are stuck in a permanent “co-dependent relationship”.

For Runciman, that’s a good thing. After all, while all states need authority, they need not be authoritarian. The state is capable of evolving, and Runciman’s chapters, each devoted to a political thinker, from Hobbes to Francis Fukuyama, tell the story of how the basic Hobbesian template of modern politics was amended in light of further insights – and, sometimes, harsh criticisms. Mary Wollstonecraft – another example of intellectual fearlessness – and, two centuries or so later, Catharine MacKinnon, charged that the Leviathan had not really monopolised politics for the good of all. Instead, society was, and remains, characterised by relations of domination over women and what today we might simply call structural injustice.

The Swiss-French thinker Constant drew a seminal distinction between ancient liberty as public and heroic (and bound up with martial virtues) and modern freedom as exclusively private and commercial – what in recent political philosophy is called positive and negative liberty: the liberty to do something versus the liberty we have when we’re left alone to get on with our lives. Runciman reminds us that Constant did not simply praise the latter and declare the former unavailable for us moderns; rather, he taught that even modern liberty cannot be maintained if people entirely vacate politics: the protection of the right not to engage in politics still requires a willingness to do some politics.

Plenty of people willing to do politics – workers, women, racial minorities, the brutally colonised – were long excluded anyway. As Runciman points out, many of the figures he is writing about themselves wrote mainly

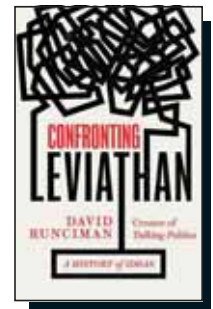
to deny the masses a real role in collective decision-making. Still, the logic of the state – constituted through the act of Leviathan representing an otherwise disconnected and incoherent multitude – means that the people can never be completely left out: the crucial modern idea, Runciman claims, is not democracy, or liberalism, but representation – and democracy merely qualifies it. Runciman puts it bluntly: “What matters is that you should be represented, not how or by whom.”

Many thinkers would disagree: the question of truly equal representation cannot be divorced from the “how” and the “whom”. Runciman is sceptical of such figures mainly because they do not accept the necessary “doubleness” of modern political life. Marx, Engels, Gandhi and Frantz Fanon, he claims, failed to see that emancipation and coercion would always go together; one cannot be had without the other. Hannah Arendt and Gandhi were wrong to think that there is something mechanistic or cold about the state as such (Nietzsche’s coldest of all cold monsters); it is a noble but ultimately naive idea that politics entirely beyond the state could enable heroic forms of human action and collective solidarity.

Runciman writes about all these figures with empathy; it is an appealing aspect of the book that he liberally shares his enthusiasms: *Leviathan* is “an amazing piece of writing”, Wollstonecraft’s work can be “therapeutic” – but ultimately he is adamant that modern political life is simply double-sided, and hence irreducibly ambivalent. While he is not explicit, the warning is at least implicit: any attempt to replace the modern “both” with what he calls an “either-or” will probably lead to disaster.

One person who did spell it out – and who figures as another hero of sorts for Runciman – is the German sociologist Weber. In what is arguably the single most important lecture in the history of political thought – Weber’s “Politics as a Vocation”, delivered in the turmoil of post-First World War Munich – the self-consciously sober Weber subjected starry-eyed, radical left-wing students to withering criticism. He argued that an “ethics of conviction” – oblivious to the dark, violent side of politics and concerned merely with the purity of intentions – was at best ineffective, and at worst, a recipe for bloodshed. Instead, proper politicians needed to cultivate an “ethics of responsibility” that carefully calculates the consequences of political action. The latter was not an endorsement of the politician-as-cynical-operator. Weber’s whole point was that a true statesman – Abraham Lincoln being an example – would need firm convictions *and* superb intelligence to figure out the means (including violent means) necessary to achieve noble ends.

Weber’s teaching hints that the “doubleness” of modern political life is not about “co-dependency” in general. That thought becomes clearer as Runciman gets closer to the present and reconsiders Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis from the 1990s. He resists the temptation to which every pundit yielded when they sneered at the supposedly naive American neocon. Instead, Runciman carefully weighs the argument that ▶



**Confronting  
Leviathan:  
A History of Ideas**

David Runciman  
Profile Books,  
288pp, £20

**Runciman  
puts it bluntly:  
what matters  
is that you  
should be  
represented,  
not how or  
by whom**

◀ Fukuyama's form of "doubleness" – capitalism and liberal democracy as co-dependent and mutually reinforcing – might still have the edge over whatever is nowadays touted as "the China model". Both promise representation of sorts, as well as economic growth benefiting all, but the Chinese version seeks to deliver collective respect (what Xi Jinping calls "national rejuvenation"), not individual freedom.

Runciman believes that only the elements of the Fukuyama model are mutually reinforcing: democracy provides a stable framework for market economies; as people prosper, they support their regime. What's more, if people have a voice, they can tell rulers what's wrong (or get rid of them altogether), thereby further adding to the model's long-term success. The question is whether citizens today actually feel they have a voice. It is also not completely clear why Beijing propagandists could not claim that their package contains mutually reinforcing elements: prosperity presumably also fosters national pride, and pride in turn could lead individuals to recommit to Deng Xiaoping's supposed precept from the mid-1980s that "to get rich is glorious".

Here, then, it's not so easy to dispense with arguments for the distinctive difference that democracy makes; the "what" and "how" of representation do matter, after all. There are obviously states that are not democratic, and there are forms of democracy that do without a state: the lesson from the pandemic is not just that people look to states when their lives are at risk; an alternative reading is that ordinary folks can take matters into their own hands. True, they cannot close borders or control the distribution of vaccines, but the formation of mutual aid associations is the kind of practice that bolsters those who are sceptical of the view that we're simply stuck with a state and have to put up with its dark side.

**R**unciman's self-conscious realism will not be to the liking of many on the left who suspect *Leviathan* of forming a monstrous, unholy trinity with exploitative capitalism and colonialism; they will also always reject the Hobbesian view according to which "men emerge from the earth like mushrooms" – without any mutual obligations – as opposed to recognising how we always depend on each other. Yet even they will benefit from a book that wears its learning lightly and does not pretend to hide personal predilections (Runciman confesses, for instance, that he was long reluctant to read Arendt because she had become so fashionable in the English-speaking academy). The central Hobbesian logic – including the primacy of representation in modern political life – is so forcefully rearticulated that critics, from self-declared radical democrats to anarchists believing in self-organisation, have their work cut out for them.

Runciman seeks to identify each thinker with a catchphrase: Hobbes's is "nasty, brutish and short"; Tocqueville's is "tyranny of the majority"; Fukuyama became his own catchphrase. Runciman's is simply "Hobbes's story is still our story". And it's a story that always has two sides. ●

*Jan-Werner Müller is a professor of politics at Princeton University. His books include "Democracy Rules (Allen Lane)*

## The NS Poem

### Golden Apple Nisha Bhakoo

I circled my slack hand  
across damp bark.  
Words refusing to walk  
straight lines.  
Half-sentences,  
built on fear,  
not quite reaching your ears.  
Your eyes strummed  
catkins,  
heavy with pollen,  
you made small-talk  
about hazelnuts  
and squirrel tails.  
Then as we reached  
the apple tree,  
We cast aside  
inane chatter.  
Instead borrowing,  
the language of leaves.  
The soft breeze  
moved the  
stiffest branches,  
to reveal:  
a golden apple.  
You cupped my hands  
like the most  
delicate water,  
and silence sliced us  
to the core.

*Nisha Bhakoo is a British poet based in Berlin. Her most recent poetry collection is "Spectral Forest" (The Onslaught Press)*





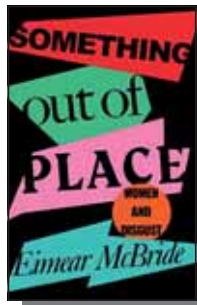
## Anatomy of misogyny

Eimear McBride's vivid polemic explores disgust and the female body

By Megan Nolan

**D**irt, as the anthropologist Mary Douglas wrote and as Eimear McBride reminds us, is “matter out of place”. Dirt does not have to be toxic, or rotting, or harmful to be considered wrong. It must only be contextually at sea – as McBride suggests, “a slice of cake on the toilet floor”. So begins her non-fiction debut, a brief and vivid polemic about disgust and shame and how they are used to such successful effect to disempower women. The concept of being out of place or jarring in some way helps to elucidate the conviction that many women and girls hold, which is that there is something fundamentally bad about themselves, even if they can't articulate it.

It is difficult to argue that women and their bodies are essentially disgusting in an objective, visible way, but it can, instead, be implied that we are doing the wrong thing, that our behaviour is off the mark. Be chaste, but not like that. Have sex, but not like that. Be pretty, but not like that. Lose weight, but not like that. Your body is beautiful, but also an object of permanent potential scorn. In this way, the disrespect, the control, the aggression are indirect and difficult to fight against. This is what makes them so dangerous, and can lead the targets of such behavioural rules to feel gaslighted from internalising so many contradictory messages.



**Something Out Of Place: Women & Disgust**

Eimear McBride  
Wellcome  
Collection, 176pp,  
£9.99

Many of McBride's examples of disgust concern food and consumption. She explores the subtle but significant distinction between “meat” and “flesh”, where meat is intended for consumption and flesh is given a moral dignity that renders its consumption perverse. From here McBride relays a vile piece of writing by the rock critic Lester Bangs about Debbie Harry, part of which reads, “She may be up there all high and mighty on TV, but everybody knows that underneath all that fashion plating she's just a piece of meat like the rest of them.”

This passage, so appalling and open in his hatred of not just successful and beautiful women but all women, seems shocking in its lack of guile. It would be difficult, or perhaps impossible, for such a sentiment to be published by a mainstream title today. But even though overt misogyny finds less official validation nowadays, it has not vanished. This is one of the best aspects of *Something Out Of Place*: it articulates the strange mental space we find ourselves in when we are politically conscious enough to be aware of how pervasive and powerful misogyny is, but lucky enough to live in a place and time where it is prevented from permanently rising to the surface. Speaking for myself, even after I came to understand that misogyny was real, I briskly internalised it so I wouldn't have to continually consider or address it. “Well yes, of course some men hate women,” I thought, filing it away for the sake of my own sanity and advancement and ability to do whatever I want to do.

Early on, McBride says that she is not trying to speak for all women. This admission lends more rather than less credence to her arguments, and if McBride is not an academic she is certainly a fascinating thinker – and one whose wit and anger make great company. There is, however, an example of the limits of perspective that rankles. In an afterword written in March 2021 following the murder of Sarah Everard, McBride compares the excessive and violent policing of a memorial for Everard – which was attended largely by women – to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests of summer 2020, which she describes as being policed with “discretion and solidarity”. Aside from the conspicuous irony that the BLM protests were sparked by a police officer killing George Floyd, it isn't true to say that they were policed benignly in the UK (a Netpol report found “excessive use of force and the disproportionate targeting of black protesters”), nor is it useful or illuminating to counterpose racism and misogyny as competing causes.

The attempt to live with dual realities – the reality of misogyny, and the reality that women are people with agency and serious flaws and as much right to the world as anyone else – brings about interesting inconsistencies in our various feminisms. “I think women should wear whatever they like. I cringe when I see women wearing ‘Porn Star’ T-shirts” is an example McBride gives of her own discrepancies. It's here, in the space among the contradictions, where she challenges us to dwell rather than flee. There is something very exciting about contemplating a future for women where our disagreements about how best to live don't translate into weakness and division. ●



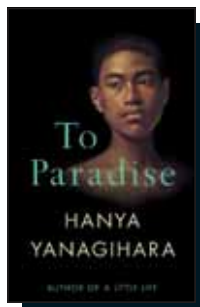
## Redesigning America

The bestselling author of *A Little Life* returns with a novel that is less than the sum of its parts

By Ellen Peirson-Hagger

**D**avids, Edwards, Peters and Charleses (and one Charlie) abound in *To Paradise*, Hanya Yanagihara's sprawling third novel. Across three sections, each set a century apart, different characters bearing identical names live at the same New York City address. The world is in flux, but in each century a relationship echoes one from the last: a naive individual meets someone far more charismatic, and so follows them in their pursuit of utopia. Do they ever get there? Yanagihara doesn't let on, though I'd guess they don't. All she wants us to know is that "America is a country with sin at its heart" – a phrase that becomes the novel's recurring motif.

Readers of *A Little Life*, the bestselling 2015 novel that gave Yanagihara a reputation as a purveyor of "misery porn", will not be surprised to find that *To Paradise* is also full of suffering. But here she does not tend so closely to her anguished characters; at the end of each discrete section she leaves them behind. Reading *To Paradise* it feels as though Yanagihara initially set out to write a generation-crossing web of a novel (in the vein of Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*) but grew tired when it came to actually developing such a complex world. Instead, she wrote three variations on the same themes – legacy, liberty and nationhood – with the repeated



**To Paradise**  
Hanya Yanagihara  
Picador, 720pp,  
£20

names gesturing to a deeper meaning that she has not managed to rigorously create.

The first of the book's three sections is set in 1893 in a reimagined New York in the "Free States" of America, where same-sex marriage is commonplace but racism abounds and a stiff class system is established. David Bingham, a descendant of the nation's founding fathers, is under pressure to marry Charles Griffith, a gentleman from a suitable family – but instead he becomes enamoured with Edward Bishop, an impoverished pianist.

In the second part, set a century later, another David Bingham – this one a descendant of Hawaiian royalty – is in a relationship with another Charles Griffith during the Aids crisis (known in Yanagihara's world, which fluctuates oddly between extreme specificity and bland vagueness, only as "the disease"). This David receives a letter from his estranged father – also named David Bingham – that recalls David senior's relationship with another Edward Bishop, and the futile mission the pair embarked on to attempt to refund the precolonial Hawaiian state.

The third and most substantial part of the novel is set between 2043 and 2093, in a society where a sequence of fatal viruses has resulted in a totalitarian regime that has banned the internet and films, restricted reading materials, and forbidden – ostensibly due to an underpopulation crisis – homosexual marriages. Citizens who get sick and don't recover are moved to "relocation centres". Here meek science technician Charlie Griffith (the granddaughter and daughter of people whose names really are getting boring now), meets a man who promises to smuggle her to a freer life in New Britain.

There is always a better life somewhere else, Yanagihara seems to be saying, in her imprecise yet relentless way – but it's unclear whether we'll ever get there. The author, who is also the editor-in-chief of *T*, the *New York Times's* style magazine, has a writerly penchant for luxurious food stuffs – a "misshapen brick of dark chocolate, scarred and dusty in parts like an oversize car battery" is crucial to one small plot point – and for interior design. Plush furnishings – "carpets so thick they felt like pelt beneath the foot" – act as a softening counterpoint to the characters' trauma.

But the construction of these stories is utterly unconvincing. Letters make up significant chunks of the second and third parts, but the form does not bring anything to the narrative that could not have been achieved in the third person. There is a tonal disparity too in the parts of the third section narrated by Charlie, who describes countless things as "odd" or "strange". She flits between seeming to address someone who understands her society and someone with no concept of the contemporary world at all.

In the second section, Peter, who is dying of Aids, realises that as his friends say "goodbye" to him, he must be the one to comfort them. So he uses the same few phrases: "Yes, I remember. No, I'll be fine. No, you'll be fine. Yes, of course I forgive you." "Dying meant repeating the same things again and again," he opines. In *To Paradise*, life means that too. ●

## Reviewed in short

### **Freedom: How We Lose It and How We Fight Back** by Nathan Law with Evan Fowler

Transworld, 240pp, £12.99

A nation's slide into authoritarianism is a bit like falling asleep – it happens slowly at first, then all at once. That's the message from the exiled Hong Kong activist Nathan Law. Throughout this book – one-part memoir, two-parts polemic – he charts Hong Kongers' battle for democracy in recent years as the city has transformed from a vibrant financial hub to an island under Beijing's control.

The book is at its best when dealing with specifics: when Law delves into his own personal ordeals, such as his mother's anguish at his prison sentencing for organising protests as a student. But the lesson is that signs of totalitarianism were present in Hong Kong long before authorities instilled the draconian national security law in 2020. Law argues that those signs exist around the world, and therefore freedom shouldn't be taken for granted in any country. With democratic ideals such as press freedom and the rule of law being increasingly eroded in nations including Hungary, Brazil and Turkey – and with election results still being called into question in the US – Law offers a warning and a wake-up call.

By Megan Gibson

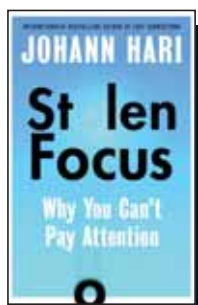
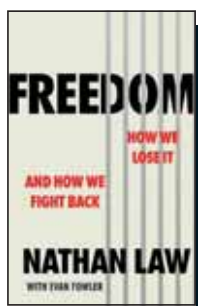
### **Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention** by Johann Hari

Bloomsbury, 352pp, £20

The average American worker, one study shows, is distracted once every three minutes. In Johann Hari's fourth book *Stolen Focus*, he notes that the phrase "multi-tasking" was originally used exclusively by computer scientists, until we created a damaging myth: that the human brain has the neurological capacity to work on more than one problem at a time.

Hari's attempts to rehabilitate himself after his disgracing in 2011 (for plagiarising quotes and editing the Wikipedia pages of others) have been helped by a series of celebrity endorsements, though he still has plenty of critics. Here he argues that we are not simply addicted to our screens but are experiencing an "urgent attention crisis". Drawing on interviews with experts and his own personal experiences, he identifies 12 "deep forces" at work, including the rise of manipulative technology, "the collapse in sustained reading" and the "confinement of our children". Hari concludes that simply turning off our iPhones cannot solve this crisis. Instead, we need systemic solutions and a resolve to hold Big Tech accountable for the damage it inflicts on our everyday lives.

By Eleanor Peake



### **The Burgundians: A Vanished Empire**

by Bart Van Loo, translated by Nancy Forest-Flier

Head of Zeus, 624pp, £30

At its height in the mid-15th century, the state of Burgundy was a messy collection of duchies, counties and bishoprics that occupied a swathe of Europe, from the modern Netherlands and Belgium down through Luxembourg to extensive lands on each side of the Saône, centred on Dijon. Although, territorially, it couldn't match its neighbours France and the Holy Roman empire it nevertheless wielded extraordinary power and influence before its dissolution in 1477.

Bart Van Loo's lively, anecdotal unpicking of this fascinating but nebulous entity has already sold some 250,000 copies on the Continent and it is easy to see why. It mixes politics and war with art and a shifting cast of characters saturated with colour – from Philip the Good with his three marriages, 25 mistresses and 26 children to Charles VI, the French king who believed he was made of glass. It is a story too of patronage and mercantile nous which took the state – it was never a proper empire – to such heights that its disappearance and its lack of hold on the modern imagination seem unfeasible. If we have reached peak Tudor, the Burgundians are even more rewarding.

By Michael Procter

### **Where You Come From**

by Saša Stanišić, translated by Damion Searls

Jonathan Cape, 368pp, £16.99

*Where You Come From*, a critical and commercial success in the original German, is Saša Stanišić's autobiographical novel of a family's displacement following the Bosnian War in 1992. The protagonist, named Saša Stanišić, ends up in Heidelberg in Germany. Central to the author's concerns are the details of assimilation: how can he master the German language, and what barriers might not doing so produce?

The book is most powerful in its gentle undoing of what learning a new dialect might seem (a simple memory game) and what it really becomes (a set of codes and customs). For the protagonist, language is "easy enough to pick up, but very hard to carry anything in". Stanišić's prose is calm, persuasively so. The story's close, however, takes a different approach. Stanišić swaps the traditional form for a multiple choice, "Choose Your Own Adventure"-style finale. As the reader flits from page to page, exploring the possibilities of multiple endings, Stanišić recreates the literal back and forth of a displacement narrative, but one where the opportunity for self-determination – typically stripped from people of refugee status – is imperative.

By Elliot Hoste

## “We poured our feelings into Ziggy”

On David Bowie’s 75th birthday, a fan writes to her hero

By Deborah Levy

*Dear David,*

Planet Earth is blue and bereft without you.

Happy Birthday.

You made my life bigger. You have always astonished me.

Actually, I have never called you David.

You will always be Bowie to me.

The Starman, The Space Oddity, Ziggy Stardust.

David, (if I may presume) may I confess that I often wonder what happened to Ziggy. I mean the Ziggy inside you?

To create and embody a persona, and then to entirely cancel that persona, is it really possible to do that? In Life or in Art? It was hard to believe in the Thin White Duke because Ziggy never died in my imagination.

The Starman stepped into my history when I was 14. The power of your art is that we never lost touch with each other over the decades. Yet, to quote the late, great, Joan Didion, it would be true to say that “I have already lost touch with a couple of people I used to be”. Sometimes, the lost personae in my own life (brave and anxious, lashings of mascara) reach out to touch me with their spectral fingers. There are times when I miss some of the people I used to be. Did you miss Ziggy? Did you entirely shake off the stardust that enchanted us Seventies kids in our stifling English living rooms?

We urgently needed another life to live; to long for; fluid, freer, crazier, more expressed. We poured our big feelings into Ziggy and the music was on our side.

I watched you struggle to see off the glamorous extra-terrestrial rock ‘n’ roll poet in full make-up. The red mullet hair was going to disappear too. Long live the mullet! For a while, as you experimented with other personae, it was as if the spaceship did not know which way to go. Which only made me love you more.

In the iconic film *Blade Runner* replicant human

beings have to be “retired”. They have become unstable, dangerous. Every replicant has learned a false biography by heart, been implanted with memories to help them pass as human. David, you wrote the narrative for Ziggy Stardust and it made you a star. You were born in Brixton but your craziest persona came from Mars.

It seems that Ziggy became unstable, dangerous to you, confusing, too powerful. Who knew we so badly needed a messiah in thigh length boots and blue frosted eyeshadow? Frankly, we still do. To your credit you did not want that sort of power. Ziggy would have to be retired. The replicant Roy Batty wanted more life when his time was up.

“You have burned very, very, brightly” he is told by his creator.

Yes, Ziggy burned so very very brightly. Maybe the poetry of Baudelaire and Apollinaire has something of that spirit. Like you, they cut a new path through their time, were of their time and crashed out of their time.

I notice that when I write your name, David, you become real, normal, a regular mortal person. Unfortunately for you, I am a fan, so I don’t want you to be those things. That’s the problem with having fans like me, but I hope you can feel the love.

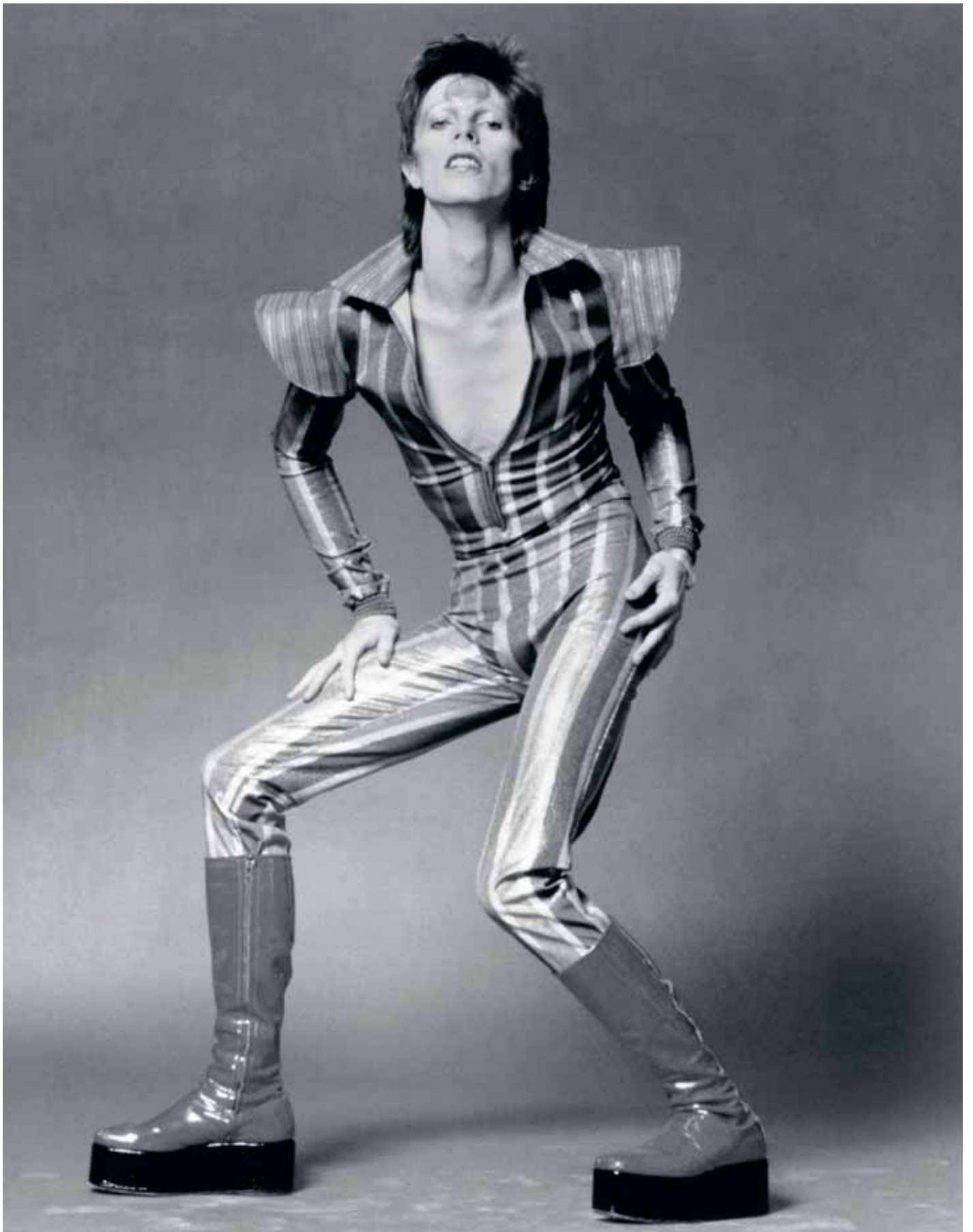
Finally, I understood you were close to yourself when I first heard “Where Are We Now?” It made me cry. I was asking the same question. To land on planet Earth, with all its pain and pleasure is hard enough, but to truly believe that we are its temporary tenants, in the sunshine and rain? Oh no, impossible to accept. So thank you for the sublime music.

*Love from Deborah*

PS Where were the spiders? ●

*Deborah Levy’s most recent book “Real Estate” is out now (Hamish Hamilton)*

As you experimented with other personae, it was as if the spaceship did not know which way to go. Which only made me love you more



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

## Beneath the blots

How Victor Hugo conjured dark worlds in pictures made from spilt ink and coffee

By Michael Prodger

In the preface to his unperformed 1827 play *Cromwell*, the young Victor Hugo laid down a challenge to prevailing artistic orthodoxies: “There are no rules, or models,” he declared firmly. In post-Napoleonic France, under the restored Bourbon monarchy, this was anathema. Just four years after the defeat of the Corsican tyrant, rules were everything – in the theatre and in society. In 1830, with the writing of *Hernani*, a melodrama set in 16th-century Spain, Hugo made good on his maxim.

The play received its premiere on 25 February at the Comédie-Française in Paris, the home of French classical theatre. The first-night audience, primed by pre-performance leaks of excerpts and in self-selecting clagues, watched as Hugo broke with the verities of time and place, strayed from rhyming couplets, and employed puns and metaphors and an unseemly degree of naturalism. Within minutes there was uproar as traditionalists booed and hissed and modernists applauded and hurled abuse at their adversaries. The actors were drowned out and scuffles in the auditorium turned to fist fights. This thespian riot and the disturbances that followed subsequent performances quickly became known as the *bataille d’Hernani* – the battle of *Hernani* – and recognised as the moment that marked the ascendance of romanticism in French art.

The following year Hugo would reassert his adherence to the romantic cause with the publication of *Notre-Dame de Paris* – published in English as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* – a novel that revelled in the gothic, both architecturally and in its sensibility. Its success in France and across Europe spurred the Paris authorities to restore the cathedral and is sometimes credited with inspiring a new appreciation of medieval

**Landscape with a castle on a cliff**  
Victor Hugo, 1857

architecture after centuries in which it had been deemed coarse and uncivilised.

Both his subversive romanticism and his willingness to face down tradition stayed with Hugo. By 1851 he was not just the most lauded author in France but a politician of forcefully reformist views. As a member of the National Assembly he gave speeches calling for the abolition of the death penalty, for the alleviation of poverty, for free education and for universal suffrage. In December that year, however, a coup headed by Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the president of France and soon-to-be Napoleon III, dissolved the National Assembly and granted Louis-Napoleon dictatorial powers. Hugo’s response to this usurpation was to attack Louis-Napoleon, branding him a traitor and denigrating him as “Napoleon the small”.

Fame did not make Hugo unassailable, and he took himself into exile, first in Brussels, then Jersey and finally to Guernsey, where he bought Hauteville House in St Peter Port (owning property meant he could not be extradited back to France), and spent the years 1855 to 1870 just 30 miles from the coast of his homeland. It was there that the gothic of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* found new expression – from the pen still, but not in writing.

Before exile, Hugo was a prolific if untrained draughtsman, sketching caricatures or recording places seen on his travels. In Guernsey, however, drawing became his primary means of expression. He would end up making between 3,000 and 4,000 drawings, many of an extremely experimental nature. His friend the critic Philippe Burty described how: “Any means would do for him – the dregs of a cup of coffee tossed on old laid paper, the dregs of an inkwell tossed on notepaper, spread with his fingers, sponged up, dried, then taken up with a thick brush or a fine one.” He would turn and tilt the paper to direct the rivulets of ink, fold or cut it, press leaves or lace on to it, blot it and scrape it with the feathered end of his quill, add shellac or charcoal, even sometimes, it was rumoured, drops of his own blood.

From this abstracted mess he would conjure castles and churches, mountains and churning seas, monsters and forests. Almost all his drawings are in sepia tones or black and dark blue and, apart from a few ahead-of-their-time abstracts, are brooding when not menacing. In 1859 he wrote to a friend and told of how, in his solitude, sombre scenery “has a supreme attraction for me” and drew him “toward the dazzling apparitions of the infinite”.

The infinite of his drawings was a sinister place, as evidenced by this picture, *Landscape with a castle on a cliff* of 1857, now in the British Museum. With its frisson of horror and its gloomy depths full of suggestion, it invokes the haunted piles of early gothic novels such as Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796). It matches too Hugo’s description of night in *Toilers of the Sea* as “an unspeakable ceiling of shadows; a depth of obscurity that no diver can fathom; a light mingled with the obscurity, a strange, sombre, vanquished light; brightness reduced to powder: seeds or ashes?”

Hugo’s drawings were never intended for the eyes of



the public. The first that most people knew of them was in 1888, three years after his death, when a selection of his pictures was exhibited at the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris. During his lifetime they were the preserve of his friends and family (although lucky guests would sometimes receive a hand-drawn visiting card).

The darkness of many of the drawings and the random nature of their production was a direct reflection of his mental state. Added to the ailments of France that disturbed his mind was personal tragedy. In 1843 his pregnant daughter Léopoldine was boating on the Seine when she capsized and drowned. Her husband repeatedly dived in to save her but he too floundered and died in the attempt. Hugo heard of the disaster from a newspaper report and the shock led to a near decade-long hiatus in his writing career.

It was while in Jersey that he started attending seances in the hope of communicating with his dead daughter, and he claimed he had been able to summon her up (as well as Moses, Christ, Dante, Voltaire and Death itself). His interest in spiritualism also lay behind a fascination with the popular parlour game of Blotto, in which players tried, in verse, to interpret blots of ink (another keen player of Blotto was the young Hermann Rorschach). Although Hugo described some of his drawings as resulting from “moments of almost unconscious daydreaming” he would also intentionally

open himself up to messages from his subconscious or the spirit world by drawing with his non-dominant hand while looking away from the paper.

Hugo’s “automatic drawing” pre-dated the surrealists by nearly half a century, and indeed the group’s leader André Breton, who was the lover of the former wife of Hugo’s great-grandson, declared that for all the sentimentality of the novels: “Victor Hugo is a surrealist when he is not stupid.” He bought several of Hugo’s drawings, as did Picasso and Jean Cocteau, while Van Gogh was another admirer and Eugène Delacroix was of the opinion that Hugo could have been one of the century’s great artists had he dedicated himself to the medium.

Whatever degree of autonomy Hugo granted to his drawing process, the crepuscular pictures that emerged are strange, unsettling and perfect examples of the dark strain of romanticism he helped develop. His son Charles thought the drawings recalled the etchings of Rembrandt and Piranesi but a kinship to Goya is perhaps closer. Ultimately though, they show how faithful he remained to his youthful disavowal of models, and they are his alone.

“Those who do not weep, do not see,” Hugo once wrote. He had wept, and through his drawings he sought to see what was insistent but not physically present. ●

**Hugo started attending seances in the hope of summoning up his dead daughter**

## Inside the mind of Beethoven

The artefacts in a major exhibition are poignant aids to understanding the composer's struggles

By Simon Heffer

Ludwig van Beethoven, who could make a strong claim to be the greatest composer in history, was yet another victim of the pandemic in 2020. It was probably the 250th anniversary of his birth (he himself was unsure whether he was born in 1770 or 1771), and across the world concerts and tributes scheduled to commemorate his quarter-millennium had to be cancelled or postponed.

One such event was the exhibition that the British Library had planned both to honour him and highlight his connections with London and England. Rather than lose the chance altogether, the exhibition – “Beethoven: Idealist. Innovator. Icon.” – opened on 3 December last year and runs until 24 April. From the manuscript pages of his early sonatas, written when he was 11 or 12 years old, through to material associated with his magnificent *Ninth Symphony* (the *Choral*) – a commission by the London Philharmonic Society – the British Library is displaying around 50 items connected with him.

The intention is not just to show some of his connections with this country, but to lead us a little into Beethoven's mind as he composed, and also to make us more alert to his personality and his struggles with deafness. He was almost entirely without hearing by the age of 44, and had very little social life, but his later years of solitude were also profoundly creative. Beethoven had wanted to be a pianist, but his hearing loss made that impossible; he had been brilliant at extemporising and that was how he composed, so from his early 30s his growing disability made it harder for him to write music.

One of the most interesting aspects of London's involvement with his work was the commissioning of the *Choral Symphony* in 1817, which he wrote from 1822 to

1824. Symphonies were not the area that flourished with the onset of his deafness: he wrote eight of his nine symphonies by 1814 and the majority of works in his last decade were chamber pieces, songs and canons.

We learn something about Beethoven's character from the story of the *Ninth Symphony*. The Philharmonic Society thought it had bought exclusive rights to the work for 18 months, but the first performance was in Vienna in 1824, almost a year before the London one, with Beethoven conducting music he could not hear and the orchestra largely ignoring him. He was still waving his arms around after the players had finished: one of the soloists turned him round so he could at least see the audience's ecstatic ovation.

It had its first London performance in March 1825, and the British Library has the score used in that concert with the marks of the conductor, Sir George Smart, together with the handbill promoting it. It had a first half of Mozart, Haydn and Cherubini before the “New Grand Characteristic Sinfonia” of Beethoven, and lasted about three and a half hours. There are also a number of ivory counters inscribed with the names of many of the Philharmonic Society's subscribers, which they used to gain admission to the concert. The Berlin State Library has lent the exhibition the autograph score of the *Choral Symphony*, with annotations in Beethoven's own hand, and it can be compared with the one copied and used in London.

English collectors in the 19th century were keen to acquire Beethoven material, and the exhibition includes some notable bequests, such as the sketchbook for the *Pastoral Symphony*. There are also the composer's kitchen accounts (his genius thrived on beef, liver, bone marrow and red wine), and some of his notebooks record his lessons with Haydn. There are also sketches for some of his smaller-scale works, engravings of Bonn (his birthplace) and Vienna (scene of so many triumphs).

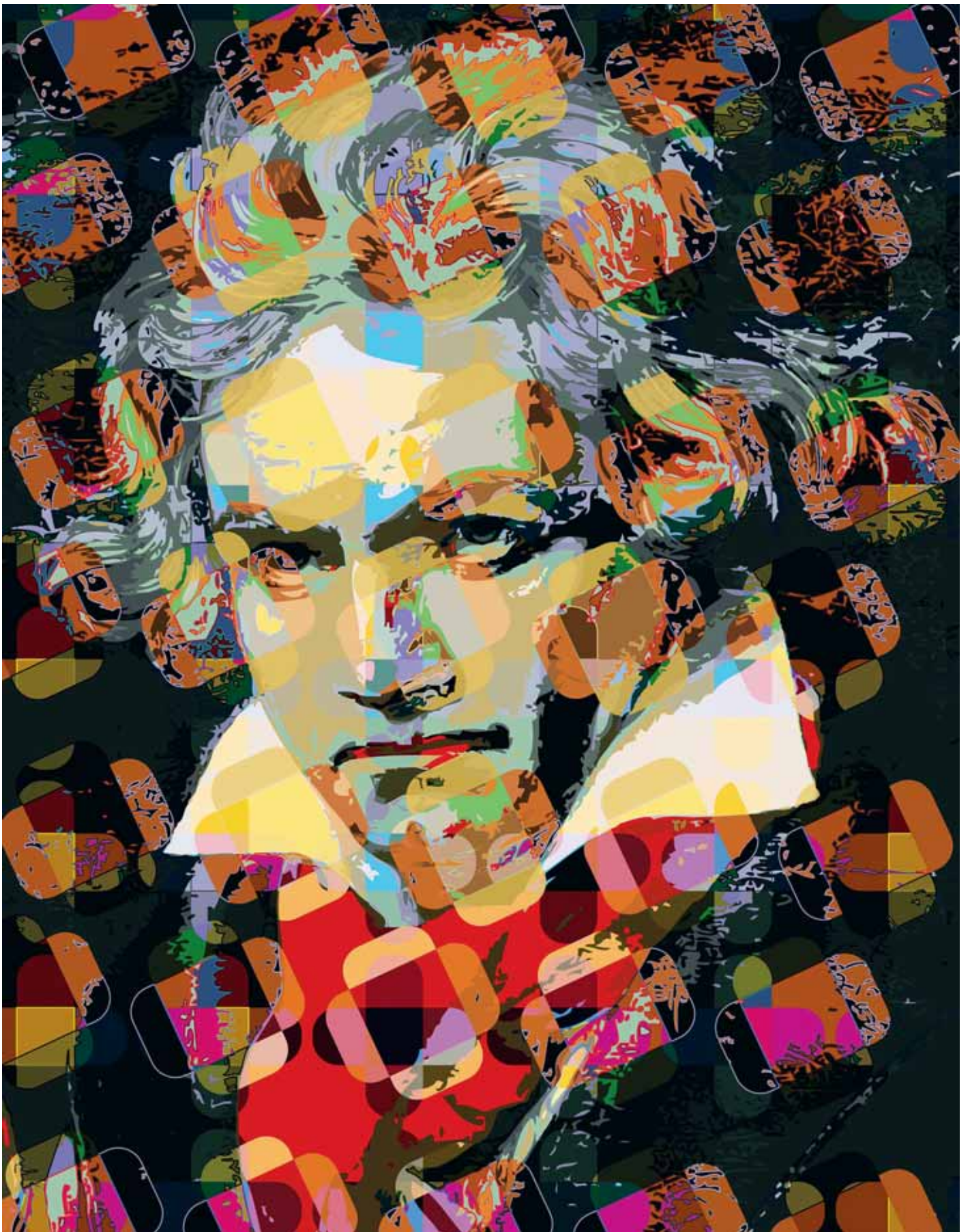
But in rather an inspired move the exhibition also has a section on legacy. Beethoven has permeated *Strictly Come Dancing*. The EU appropriated his setting of Schiller's “An die Freude” – the “Ode to Joy”, set in the last movement of the *Choral Symphony* – as its supranational anthem. And he has had the fate motif of the opening bars of his *Fifth Symphony* used for more Nazi war films than one can remember, evoking, as that music immediately seems to, a stern, harsh Teutonicism. Ironically, those four notes were also borrowed by Britain and France in the Second World War, as they are identical in rhythm to the four beats in Morse code signifying V for Victory, and were used in coded radio broadcasts to SOE and resistance operatives.

However, nothing else on display quite rivals, to my mind, Beethoven's tuning fork, which came through various hands to Gustav Holst and then to Ralph Vaughan Williams. A few years before her death in 2007, Mrs Vaughan Williams gave it to the British Library, apparently fearing someone might steal it. It is safe now. And given that Beethoven died in 1827, the bicentenary is barely five years away, and with luck can be celebrated without hindrance from the present pestilence. ●

**His kitchen accounts show that his genius thrived on beef, liver, bone marrow and red wine**

*Simon Heffer is a historian and columnist for the Telegraph*





SCOTT J DAVIS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED 2021 / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

# independent thinking from polity

## Skin

Sergio del Molino

*"Deeply moving... Del Molino writes with a soft touch, and his political, literary and cultural world is richly resonant throughout."*

The Spectator



HB 978-1-5095-4785-2 | £20.00 | October 2021

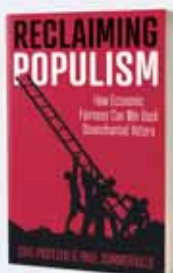
## Reclaiming Populism

*How Economic Fairness Can Win Back Disenchanted Voters*

Eric Protzer & Paul Summerville

*"This book is an important contribution to the vital debate about why so many voters feel disenchanted. As the authors show with rigorous analysis and empirical research, it is the lack of opportunity, not an absence of equality, that is undermining the social contract in Western societies."*

Will Tanner, Director of Onward



PB 978-1-5095-4812-5 | £14.99 | November 2021

## The World According to China

Elizabeth C. Economy

*"Elizabeth Economy is one of the world's most astute interpreters of contemporary China. Here she examines domestic and international politics under Xi Jinping to explain why a more assertive and powerful China will raise questions that the west must urgently answer."*

Rana Mitter, University of Oxford



HB 9781509537495 | £25.00 | November 2021

## The First Days of Berlin

*The Sound of Change*

Ulrich Gutmair

*"Gutmair, who was on site as a young student since 1989, describes the hustle and bustle of those days without exaggerated nostalgia, without veteran pathos, but nevertheless with a view on what was possible then – and what is lost."*

Der Spiegel



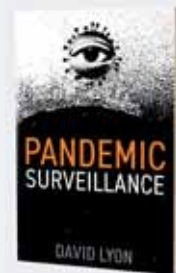
PB 978-1-5095-4730-2 | £14.99 | November 2021

## Pandemic Surveillance

David Lyon

*"David Lyon... guides us through the many complexities of pandemic surveillance, from the opportunistic predations of surveillance capitalism, to the legitimate data-gathering requirements of public health authorities, to the intensification of social inequality and injustice across the globe. Professor Lyon's book will stand as an important chronicle of these days."*

Shoshana Zuboff, author of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*



PB 978-1-5095-5031-9 | £15.99 | November 2021

## The Soviet Passport

*The History, Nature and Uses of the Internal Passport in the USSR*

Albert Baiburin

*"Albert Baiburin's exhaustive and lively account, fluently translated by Stephen Dalziel, shows why passports were so central to the maintenance of the party dictatorship."*

Robert Service, University of Oxford



HB 978-1-5095-4318-2 | £35.00 | November 2021

Order your copy now:  
free phone 0800 243407 | [politybooks.com](http://politybooks.com)

 @politybooks

 [facebook.com/politybooks](https://facebook.com/politybooks)

## The milk of bovine kindness

The first documentary from Andrea Arnold tackles themes of birth, death and motherhood – all through the eyes of a cow

By Ryan Gilbey

It has taken Andrea Arnold almost a quarter of a century to get from *Milk* to *Cow*. She made her debut in 1998 with an unsentimental short film about a woman lactating after a stillbirth. Rather than accompany her husband to the funeral, she takes off with a teenager, has sex with him in his car, and sobs when he drinks from her breast.

*Cow*, Arnold's first documentary, covers the same subjects: birth, sex, death, motherhood – and milk. Far from being a departure from films such as *Fish Tank* and *American Honey*, which preceded Arnold's recent stint in US television (*I Love Dick*, *Big Little Lies*), the new film contains many of the elements that make her cinema distinctive. It's the story of a trapped female, in which social realism is cut with an absurdist sensibility. The lives of humans and animals overlap. A newcomer proves to be a natural in front of the camera.

That star is Luma, a dairy cow at Park Farm in Tonbridge, Kent, where Arnold filmed for around 30 days over a period of four years. Like Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard*, Luma is ready for her close-up. In fact, the picture is comprised of little else: the cinematographer Magda Kowalczyk is permanently at cow's-eye level, squashed in with the jostling jumble of tails, udders, fetlocks and hides as the herd is funnelled into mammoth milking barns. At times, she even butts heads with Luma as the ▶



**Brown-eyed girl:** Luma, the star of Andrea Arnold's *Cow*, which was filmed over four years

◀ beast barges the camera aside, Sean Penn-style. Glimpses of life beyond the farm are restricted to letterbox-shaped slices of the Kent countryside seen through the side of a truck, or shots of distant planes climbing through the sky.

Luma is already a mother of four when she gives birth at the start of the film. As the new calf is yanked free, it opens an unimpressed eye before Luma cleans off its mustard-coloured amniotic fluid with her tongue. Perhaps if she licks this one diligently enough, she will be allowed to keep it. Fat chance. Luma is marched off to be milked, a quartet of nozzles rearing toward her like a yellow rubber Hydra. It isn't long before calf number five is spirited away, and she is being readied to conceive again.

The obvious point of comparison here – Robert Bresson's *Au Hasard Balthazar*, the 1966 account of a donkey on its way to a dismal death – is also a faintly misleading one. Humans are integral to Bresson's (scripted, fictional) film, with the donkey Balthazar a repository for their love and cruelty who also throws human behaviour into stark relief. The people in *Cow* are usually faceless and peripheral, given to prosaic asides ("Her uterus is closing down nicely") and attempts at humour that can sound taunting ("Come on, girlies"). There is talk of getting Luma "cycling again" – a reference to reproduction rather than mountain bikes.

Where *Balthazar* had Schubert as the soundtrack to his suffering, Luma's only accompaniment is the tinny transistor pop that jangles through the yawning metal hangars. It would not be unreasonable to wonder if the poor creature has a Pavlovian response to this, her exploited udders quivering at the mere sound of Radio 1. More effective than the use of Garbage's plaintive "Milk" over the end credits (a bit on the nose, that) are the stray musical snippets that drift through the farm, such as the Soak number ("Everybody wants you/ Everybody loves you"), which feels positively sarcastic under the circumstances.

Regardless of Arnold's aim to resist anthropomorphism, it will be impossible for any audience to spend 90-odd minutes in Luma's company without reading emotion into her expressions or the noises she makes: the slow blink; the remorseful or accusing stare; the lowing after her calf is snatched, which must surely be grief. Her patterning resembles a Rorschach test – is that a black tear under one eye, and an inky X on her nose like a smudged kiss? – and the film may work on viewers that way, too. Any cruelty shown is industrial and generalised; the film is very much not a campaigning exposé in the mould of the Joaquin Phoenix-narrated documentary *Earthlings*. Even without narration or overt editorialising, though, its message is clear. We leave the film convinced that to condemn a living creature to this wretched life means condemning ourselves also. ●

"*Cow*" is in cinemas from 14 January, and streaming on Mubi from 11 February

# Television

## When work turns toxic

By Rachel Cooke

### Rules of the Game

BBC One, aired 11 January, 9pm; now on catch-up

The BBC's naughty new series, *Rules of the Game*, is supposed to have been inspired by the crimes of Harvey Weinstein. But having watched all four episodes, I don't quite buy this. Ruth Fowler's zingy, expectation-busting series is surely rooted in a far graver reality, one that was too often lost in the overexcited reporting of #MeToo's most high-profile case. It's not just that – duh! – sexual harassment is hardly the preserve of Hollywood. The less glamorous the environment, the more likely such behaviour is to be embedded in its culture. Most victims often have only two options: either to get the hell out, or to be, as they mostly are in *Rules of the Game*, complicit. In these workplaces, silence is golden, rewarded in bonuses and promotions and invitations to drinks with the boys.

But I'm making the series sound terribly earnest, when really it's as gripping as a pair of the high-tech leggings they sell at Fly Dynamic, the sportswear company at which it's set (a business that may or may not bear some resemblance to Mike Ashley's Sports Direct). How to describe it? Its chief preoccupation is



Getting nasty: *Rules of the Game* dissects 21st-century office mores

BBC/THE FORCE/GUY FARROW

with office mores: specifically, with the clash between platitudinous, 21st-century HR speak, with its emphasis on mental health, diversity and respect, and the superannuated attitudes of those who began their working lives long before this stuff went mainstream. But it's also madly interested in money, sex and social class, about which it is vaguely satirical, and it has a highly specific setting. It was filmed in Frodsham, in Cheshire, whose Tudorbethan vibe stands service for the plush, footballer towns – Knutsford, Alderley Edge – that lie further east. Think *The Office* meets *The Real Housewives of Cheshire*, with a hint of *Line of Duty* thrown in for good measure.

Anyway, it's great, even if it does go batshit crazy at the end. When the series begins, we already know something seriously bad is going to happen: the story is told in flashback. But what? Who is the woman who sits in an ambulance, wrapped in a piece of gold foil that makes her look like an Eighties clubber the morning after the night before? And what is she doing there? In fact, this turns out to be Sam Thompson (Maxine Peake), Fly Dynamic's chief operating officer. Sam is a throwback, a relic of an age when women had to make like men if they wanted to get on. The men in question being borderline Neanderthals. Sam and her bosses, Owen (Ben Batt) and Gareth Jenkins (Kieran Bew), are preparing the company set up by the brothers' late father to go public, and so are engaged in a huge PR drive. A key element of this campaign is their new recruit as head of HR, Maya Benshaw (brilliantly played by Rakhee Thakrar), a woman whose job, though she doesn't yet know it, will be to make Fly Dynamic appear squeaky clean to investors.

But it's not squeaky clean. It's toxic. Everyone there is either relentlessly horrible or a member of the walking wounded – or both – and it's this, I think, that makes the series so delicious: the nastiness! Fowler's writing is so unapologetic. Whenever you start to believe that the forces of righteousness might, at last, turn out to be victorious, she'll always confound you. Of particular toothsome is her portrayal of the Jenkins brothers' wives and their circle, a Botoxed group whose cheese nights are a joy to behold; also, their mother, Anita (Alison Steadman), the Cheshire version of a mafia matriarch.

Fowler's dialogue is magnificently waspish and witty, and yet it feels based in reality. If you know anything at all about the flashier corners of the north, or of the vapidness of human-resources speak, it will ring in your head like a bell. "Let's start with Mr Whippy, and then we can work our way up to group masturbation," Sam says to Maya drily, unconvinced that offering free raspberry ripples on a Friday will help staff to bond. We've every reason to be suspicious of brittle, raging Sam – I mean it only as praise when I say that Peake seems to be channelling late-era Bette Davis in her performance – but on this point, surely, she speaks only the truth. Oh, boy. This is television for hardcore sceptics and, dubiousness being my preferred mode, I absolutely loved it. ●

# Radio

## The thrill of the chase

By Anna Leszkiewicz

**Sweet Bobby**  
Tortoise Media

**S**weet Bobby, a podcast series from Tortoise Media, sells itself as an unbelievable true story, a "live, multi-part investigation" into a complex crime, "a screwed-up, crazy kind of love story filled with death, lies and witness protection programmes". It opens with a lawyer telling the host Alexi Mostrous, an investigative reporter for Tortoise, about "the craziest case I've ever seen". There's ominous music, and clips of a woman sobbing. It's clear that *Sweet Bobby* promises to be the latest in a long line of salacious, surreal, whiplash-inducing true crime podcasts that started in 2014, when *Serial* became a phenomenon. By that metric, it delivers.

Mostrous introduces us to Harkirat Kaur Assi, or Kirat. It's her story this series explores, often in her own words. When it begins, in 2010, Kirat is a happy, vibrant 30-year-old from a close-knit Sikh community in west London, working part-time as a presenter on a local station, Desi Radio. One day she receives a Facebook message from a man called Bobby. Although they've never met in person, they have friends and family in common. Their chats become increasingly intimate. They bump into each other once in person, but Bobby is distant and acts as if he doesn't know Kirat. They stop speaking for a couple of years – and then Bobby suddenly reappears in Kirat's life with a shocking story. Though he is now living in the US, they quickly grow closer, and enter a relationship that soon becomes controlling, consuming Kirat's every waking moment.

Mostrous tells us almost from the start that Bobby isn't who he says he is. At the heart of this story is catfishing: the practice of creating a fictional online persona in order to deceive one's victim. But to provide the podcast with all the requisite twists and turns, key details are held back, some until the final moments of the series. At the end, some questions remain unanswered. And, like many true crime sagas that largely rest on the compelling testimony of a single witness, there are nagging ethical questions that are, for the most part, left unaddressed. ●

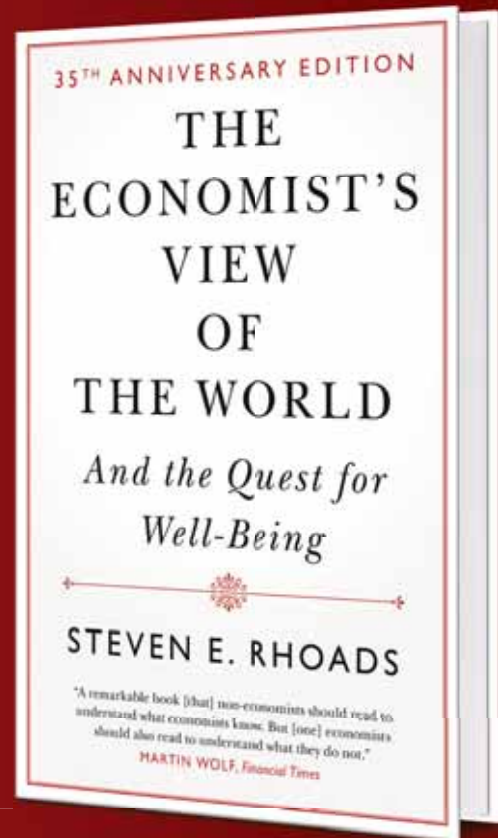
**Sweet Bobby promises to be the latest in a long line of salacious, surreal, whiplash-inducing true crime podcasts**

35TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

SAVE 20% WITH CODE EVW20

# THE ECONOMIST'S VIEW OF THE WORLD *And the Quest for Well-Being*

9781108845946 | Hardback | October 2021 | £20 / \$27.95



"In this remarkable book, Steven Rhoads explains how economists perceive the world. In so doing, he reveals both the truths and limitations of the discipline. Non-economists should read the book, in order to understand what economists know. But economists should also read it, in order to understand what they do not."

Martin Wolf, Chief Economics Commentator, *Financial Times* (London)

"A superb tour of the economist's mind, thoughtful and thought-provoking from beginning to end."

N. Gregory Mankiw, Robert M. Beren Professor of Economics, Harvard University, and author of *Principles of Economics*

"I loved the 1985 edition, which was my first introduction to the distinctive way economists see the world. The new edition retains the virtues of the early one with updated content."

Daniel Kahneman, Higgins Professor of Psychology Emeritus at Princeton University, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences and author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

[www.cambridge.org/evw](http://www.cambridge.org/evw)



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# THE BACK PAGES

## Food



**Felicity Cloake**

What will we be eating in 2022? Less meat, more seaweed, and potato milk

I wasn't brave enough to make any predictions last January about what we'd be eating in 2021 – a decision that proved uncharacteristically prescient. Thanks to Covid and rising inflation, many food banks reported their busiest year on record: Russ Barlow, project manager of Hull's largest food bank, told local media last month: "None of this is normal."

Even for those fortunate enough not to need such services, it was second helpings of 2020 all round: the frozen food manufacturer Birds Eye posted significant growth; tinned soup sales are still up on pre-pandemic levels, according to the trade publication the *Grocer*; and jam sales remain buoyant ▶



◀ as the nation, presumably, tries to bake itself happy.

In fact, what Deloitte calls the “at-home economy” keeps growing. The firm’s research indicates that consumers are planning to continue staying in and cooking more than they did before Covid. (Though a 62 per cent rise in spending on takeaways and fast food reported by Barclaycard suggests this may not always involve preparing meals from scratch, whatever people might tell market researchers.)

At least popular culture gave us a few novelties in 2021, from the sudden surge in interest in Korean cuisine prompted by Netflix’s *Squid Game*, to the many terrifyingly intense, but mercifully brief TikTok trends in which millions of Gen-Zers attempt to deep-fry pasta into crisps or pretend baked porridge is “just like eating cake for breakfast”.

Indeed, Waitrose reckons breakfast is going to be big in 2022, as people commute less and have more time for what the supermarket’s annual food and drink report describes as “the mealtime equivalent of a family group hug before the day begins”. As someone with a book on breakfast coming out in June, I’m delighted by this news, if faintly horrified by the idea of embracing my nearest and dearest over the marmalade.

The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations that same month are likely to prompt yet another baking boom, according to Asda’s Jonathan Moore: “Think afternoon tea, picnics, and British classics... nostalgia with a 2022 edge,” he told the *Independent*. Rather more interestingly for those of us who struggle to get excited about the same old same old, the Dubai-based African dining hall Alkebulan, which assists chefs from under-represented backgrounds, has revealed plans to

open in London. In related news, the trend forecaster WGSN has named jollof rice as one of its six top global food and drink trends for the year ahead, along with kelp and koji, Japan’s national fungus.

Seaweed – or “sea vegetables”, as it has been rebranded – was one of Sainsbury’s surprise hits of the past 12 months. The supermarket attributed this to seaweed’s “desirable umami flavour”, but WGSN is more interested in the links with regenerative agriculture – kelp in particular is an extremely efficient absorber of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This vitamin- and mineral-rich plant is better known in culinary circles by its Japanese name kombu, and is traditionally a key ingredient in miso soup, though it’s said to be very good in vegan burgers and non-vegan ice cream too.

And though only about 3 per cent of the UK population is vegan, we learned last year that our average daily meat consumption dropped by 17 per cent in the previous decade, suggesting far more of us are what is apparently now described as “reducarian”. (Clearly, we are in no danger of losing our appetite for labels.) The 16.5 per cent who told a recent *New Statesman* poll they were aiming to cut their dairy intake in 2022, meanwhile, will no doubt be delighted to hear that potato milk is set to be the next big thing. It is, according to the manufacturer Dug, “the most sustainable alternative on the market”. Early reviews have been... mixed (one journalist dubbed the product “a crime against potatoes”). But honestly, it still sounds better than most things I’ve seen on TikTok. Happy New Year all. ●

## This England

*Each printed entry receives a £5 book token. Entries to comp@newstatesman.co.uk or on a postcard to This England. This column – which, though named after a line in Shakespeare’s “Richard II”, refers to the whole of Britain – has run in the NS since 1934.*

### Story of my life

Usually you need an address to post a letter – but one that made its way to a County Antrim care worker just needed his life story instead.

Feargal Lynn, from Cushendall, said he was amazed to find an envelope that was scrawled with a 57-word mini-biography

instead of a street address had found its way to him. The envelope begins “Feargal, lives across the road from the Spar”, and then refers to the names of his parents, where he lived after getting married, that he plays guitar and used to “run discos in the parochial hall”.

“There was enough there to know it was me,” he told BBC News Northern Ireland. *BBC News NI* (Daragh Brady)

### A nutty diet

A squirrel that beat a bird-feeder designed to keep it out had to be rescued by the RSPCA after finding itself too fat to escape.

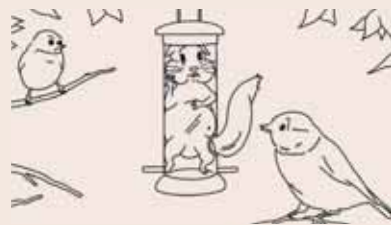
A homeowner in Hartlepool went to replenish the nuts in her bird-feeder and found the squirrel trapped by its metal bars. An RSPCA rescue officer

used wire cutters to free it. *Yorkshire Post* (Michael Meadowcroft)

### The apple doesn’t fall far...

Westwood Parish Council’s plans to chop down four apple trees because fallen fruit is a “tripping hazard” have been called “ludicrous” by residents.

The trees have sat in Westwood in Wiltshire for more than 30 years and nearly 200 people have signed a petition against the proposals. *Western Daily Press* (Roger Millard)





## Off the Record



**Tracey Thorn**

### Humans think they own the world but, outnumbered by birds, I am dumbfounded

It's lunchtime on New Year's Eve and Ben is trying to teach me about birdwatching. "Look, that one with the orange legs, that's a redshank. That one with the lovely curved bill, that's a curlew. Have a go with these binoculars."

We're up at the top of the Estuary Tower Hide at the WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre, having come on an end-of-year day out with friends. I peer through the binoculars, and there really are an awful lot of birds out there. More than I've ever seen before. We're looking over marshy ground towards the Severn Estuary, and the shallow water reflects the wintry light in shades of silver and green. It's a peaceful scene, if something can be both peaceful and noisy, the various ducks, geese and waders all squawking and quacking as they feed. Or whatever it is they're doing.

All at once a huge number of birds take to the sky. The air fills with thousands and thousands of whirling black specks, which look like cinders from a bonfire. Unlike a murmuration, there is nothing neat about the arrangement; it seems random, chaotic even. I am taken aback by the sheer scale of the scene in front of me.

Our friend Cameron, who knows as much about ornithology as I do, turns to me and says, "Cor, look at that huge swarm of birds."

We laugh, and then pause.

"I'm not sure swarm is the word?"

For a moment we can't remember.

"Flock!" I shout. "It's a flock of birds."

We really are very out of our depth here.

In truth, even Ben is overwhelmed. He's been a keen birder since childhood, and so I have often been out on walks with him that are punctuated by long periods of him standing very still and staring at apparently

nothing. A lot of the time birdwatching seems to be quite disappointing. You can't quite see what bird it is or you can hear a bird but not see it. There's a lot of that.

But today is different. I've never been on a safari, but I've seen them on TV, and I'm reminded today of how affecting it is to see living creatures in such numbers – a herd of elephants, or a wildebeest migration, or a lake covered in flamingoes. Maybe it's to do with being human and being outnumbered, maybe that's what makes us feel so dumbfounded. We think we own this place but seeing creatures in their element like this reminds us that we don't.

I stare through my binoculars at the sky, which is all bird, and I am transfixed by their wheeling and turning and the way the light bounces off their wings. Ten minutes pass and I realise that Ben is looking at me.

"You are watching birds," he says. "Through your binoculars."

This isn't the outcome he had expected today, being more prepared for my usual blend of tolerance and boredom. This actual enthusiasm has him taken aback. Within an hour I am confidently identifying lapwings and greylag geese, and although I tire quite quickly, I take home with me a vivid memory of the excitement of seeing so many birds at once.

A couple of days later we are on another walk, through meadows beside a river, and it is all as bucolic as can be, until we have to pass underneath a dual carriageway. Great columns hold up an immensity of concrete above our heads, where the cars roar by. A country walk becomes momentarily urban, and we are forced to notice the intersection of the natural and the man-made. I like these moments, and I stand under the road for longer than I need to.

I'm thinking again about scale, and grandeur, and the sense of wonder they invoke. Thinking that the space here is almost church-like. Thinking that this feat of engineering is as awe-inspiring as barrel vaults and flying buttresses. Thinking how amazing and brilliant humans are.

Although, when I remember the graffiti on the bridge, which reads in huge letters "SHAMDEMIC", I revise this thought. Humans are amazing and brilliant and also stupid. I step out from under the road, and back into the field, and keep on walking. ●



The air fills with thousands of whirling black specks, which look like cinders from a bonfire

## IT HAPPENED TO PEOPLE LIKE YOU ON A DAY LIKE TODAY

The new Second World War and The Holocaust Galleries at Imperial War Museum London

See how the war affected all walks of life

NOW OPEN • IWM.ORG.UK • FREE ENTRY



'stimulating, sensitive and humane'

The Guardian

# Hikobike

Quality Electric Bicycles,  
designed in New Zealand

Five things Kiwis definitely invented...

1. Rugby
2. Sauvignon Blanc
3. Sheep
4. **E-bikes**

NEW STOCK COMING SOON  
[WWW.HIKOBIKE.CO.UK](http://WWW.HIKOBIKE.CO.UK)

## Down and Out



### Nicholas Lezard

## I start the year as I don't mean to continue, sipping venerable condiments

Every New Year I think fondly of the reply given by Samuel Beckett to a reporter who foolishly, or mischievously, asked him what his resolutions and hopes were for the following year. Beckett replied by telegram, so his answer looked like this: RESOLUTIONS COLON ZERO STOP PERIOD HOPES COLON ZERO STOP BECKETT. How he must have relished dictating the word “colon”. Anyway, I have pretty much the same attitude – except this year I do have two goals: one is to get my taxes sorted out and the other is to start tidying up and then keep things tidy.

The first is a legal obligation; the second more of a practical one. I am congenitally incapable of doing either, but then nor was I born with wings and I still managed to fly to New York two years ago. These things can be done. On the way up the stairs last night I picked up four items from the floor that could only have arrived there on my foot: a cigarette paper, a leaf, something that may well have come from the top of a pizza, and a scrap of tissue paper. It's a start.

I do not like to place too much importance on what, after all, is an arbitrary date in the year – and pagans will argue that the new year is in spring, anyway – but like it or not you can't help thinking that, like the first ball of an Ashes series, the first day of the year sets the tone as to how it will pan out. In my case, if the first evening of the year was anything to go by, it will be spent sipping spoon after spoon of, alternately, Henderson's and Lea & Perrins' respective relishes, trying to determine which one is better, and the subtle differences in taste between the two.

Frankly, I think Henderson's owes Lea & Perrins a lot of money. “Harry Henderson,” says the bottle,

“blended the first batch of this famous relish in Sheffield in 1885.” It then says its secret recipe is known to only three family members. And possibly, the bottle does not add, also by Lea & Perrins, which brewed its first batch 50 years before that, only it was better. (I will not enter into any correspondence on this matter. And yes, I know Henderson's is vegan.)

Anyway, resolutions are like predictions of what kind of person you are going to be next year, and predictions are the things that make God laugh, so on the whole I tend not to make predictions, or resolutions. They are hostages to fortune. Over Christmas my daughter was staying at the family home and uncovered some files of clippings from my early days in journalism. She found them most diverting, particularly the piece, which must date from the late 1980s, which confidently asserted that mobile phones would never catch on. OK, I was probably playing the contrarian card just for laughs; if I remember correctly, I said that the feeling of embarrassment generated by using a mobile in public meant that people would only really feel happy using them in the street if they could do so by ducking into a phone box. I might have written the piece just to set up that gag, but whether I did or not the main point is that she, and all the friends she told, now think I'm even more of an idiot than they thought I was in the first place. I decided to front it out. “My proudest moment,” I said.

Anyway, it's back to the New Year. I write this a week ahead, so right now I'm only on the year's fifth day, and all I can say is that it looks like it's going to be a tough one. A casual observer would notice the two bottles of tamarind-based relishes on my desk, the general squalor surrounding and indeed on the desk, and conclude that this was a man fraying at the edges. One of my best deeds of 2021 came when a friend was having a severe panic attack because an electrician was coming round and he hadn't tidied his flat for a year. He sent me a photo. It looked pretty bad, but I sent him a photo back and he suddenly felt better.

This really has to stop. Not the doing good deeds, but the general shabbiness. Do I say this every year? I don't think so. I'm pretty sure I thought it was going to be the same old rubbish but I did not expect that I'd end up tasting century-plus-aged relishes simply because I'd finished the Beatles documentary and didn't have any idea how to use the new free time. The odd thing is that I seem to be tearing through the stuff and I hardly have any culinary uses for it. What do you put Worcestershire sauce in anyway? Bloody Marys, cheese on toast, and cheesy beans on toast. I can't be bothered making a Bloody Mary for myself, and besides I do not have a freezer capable of sustaining an ice tray, and cheese and beans on toast are only occasional treats. And yet, like some demented alchemist, you can find me in the kitchen, sipping first from one, then from the other. Lea & Perrins is better. No, wait, Henderson's is better. No, wait, they're completely different. Henderson's lacks body but cleanses the palate. Let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven. ●

Predictions are the things that make God laugh, so on the whole I tend not to make predictions, or resolutions

## Repeater's 2021 New Statesman Books of the Year

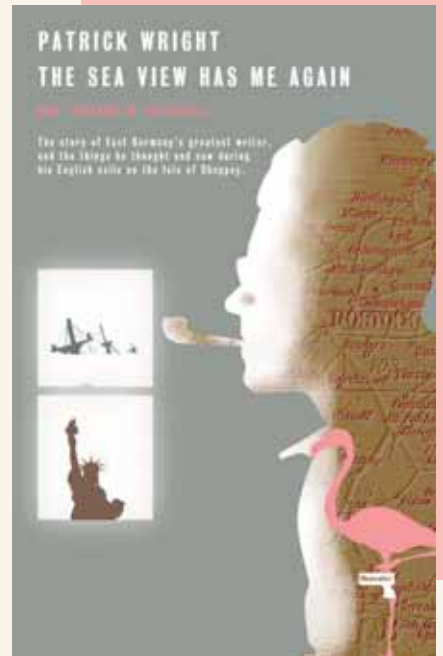
*"A book that feels fresher than anything I've read all year... You either know these working-class spaces, the precarity, or you don't."*



JOHNY PITTS ON SWAN SONGS  
BY LEE SCOTT

*"A microscopic, discursive study of Uwe Johnson... a great book about the relationship between Britain and the rest of Europe, and not a page too long."*

JONATHAN COE ON  
THE SEA VIEW HAS ME AGAIN  
BY PATRICK WRIGHT



OUT NOW

Repeaterbooks.com



# THE NEW STATESMAN

## Enjoy multi-user access to our new website

Unlock our independent, award-winning journalism for your entire team or organisation



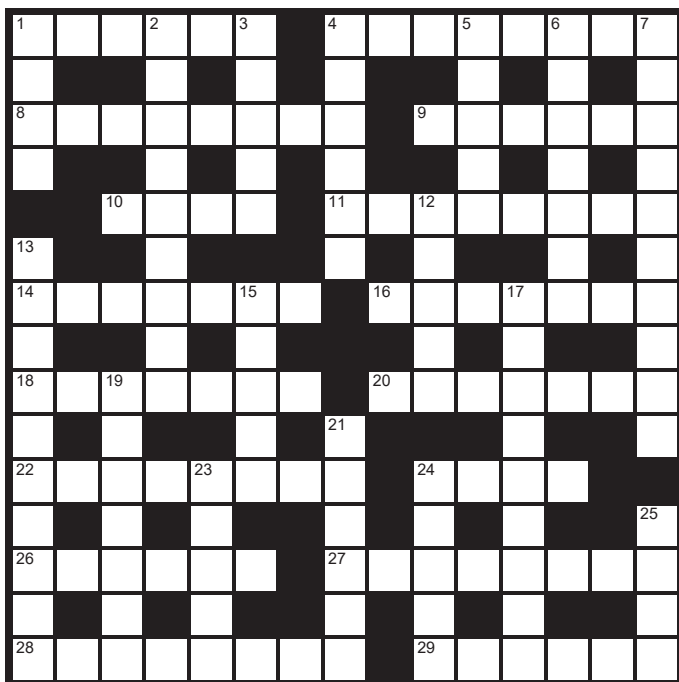
### Our multi-user licence includes:

- Unlimited multi-user access to newstatesman.com, including our data journalism and the NS online archive
- A dedicated account manager
- Exclusive subscriber-only offers

### To find out more:

Contact Ian Appleby on +44 (0) 7729 347 681 or email [ian.appleby@newstatesman.co.uk](mailto:ian.appleby@newstatesman.co.uk)  
For more subscription options and offers, visit [newstatesman.com/subscribe](https://www.newstatesman.com/subscribe)

## The NS Cryptic Crossword 567: by Anorak



### Across

- 1 Tear off a strip of Axminster? (6)
- 4 Golfer madly takes in a quiet game (8)
- 8 Nobleman, one from east of France, is first to arrive (8)
- 9 Rock bands (6)
- 10 Is this athletic race just a warm-up? (4)
- 11 Hastened back, getting scolded and told a story (8)
- 14 Showing opposition to house with steps (7)
- 16 The "F-word" at a dance (7)
- 18 Bloomer, having got up after meal (3,4)
- 20 Country soon to follow the French lead for Brexit (7)
- 22 Everyone knows feature is on island, out East (2,6)
- 24 Time to request a job (4)
- 26 Wife leaves champions on target areas (6)
- 27 Soothing ointment spoken of at castle (8)
- 28 Key on a dead mushroom (8)
- 29 Gloss paint slopped over area (6)

### Down

- 1 Pop diva doesn't come cheap in Paris (4)
- 2 Synthetic material suggested by two girls (9)
- 3 Loss of property, article and pink paper (5)
- 4 Set fire to some catalogue (6)
- 5 He's out of shape, terribly (5)
- 6 Odd bits of cotton put in to bring up pile (7)
- 7 From where to watch a splendid partnership at Lord's? (10)
- 12 Sound of horse in Lyon's river (5)
- 13 Frequency of festival in French river (5,5)
- 15 Fall-guy changes roles (5)
- 17 Travellers' delight (9)
- 19 Wenger endlessly in charge in his element! (7)
- 21 Firm birthplace (6)
- 23 Some music – a rollicking seasonal song (5)
- 24 Bloomer made by workers on edge (5)
- 25 Insect on leaf, back to front (4)

**Crossword editor's note: we would like to apologise for a grid error on the puzzle of 10 December, see letters (page 19) for details on how to view the solutions.**

**This week's solutions will be published in the next issue.**

**Answers to crossword 566 of 7 January 2022**

Across 9) Air-raid 10) Rat-race 11) Earnest 12) Stetson 13) Sanitaria 15) Tease 16) Compete 19) Roister 20) Mania 21) Bargepole 25) Stamina 26) Cashier 28) Theatre 29) Eremit  
Down 1) Havers 2) Dry-run 3) Fame 4) Editor 5) Fresh air 6) Streetwise 7) Camshaft 8) Reindeer 14) Therapists 16) Campsite 17) Maneater 18) Embraced 22) Racket 23) Osiris 24) Earned 27) Shed

## Subscriber of the Week: Laurence Lewis

### What do you do?

I run a music company looking after record labels from eastern Europe.

### Where do you live?

West Finchley, London.

### Do you vote?

Always – not often on the winning side!

### How long have you been a subscriber?

Since the mid-1970s.

### What made you start?

I worked in Holborn and often walked past the NS office in Great Turnstile.

### Is the NS bug in the family?

Yes. My wife likes to read it.

### What pages do you flick to first?

I'm a strictly cover-to-cover person.

### How do you read yours?

With coffee in the morning. What would you like to see more of in the NS?

Classical music reviews.

### Who are your favourite NS writers?

John Gray, Nicholas Lezard, Megan Nolan.

### Who would you put on the cover of the NS?

Bryan Magee.

### With which political figure would you least like to be stuck in a lift?

Christopher Chope.

### All-time favourite NS article?

Robert Peston's "What will survive of us is love".

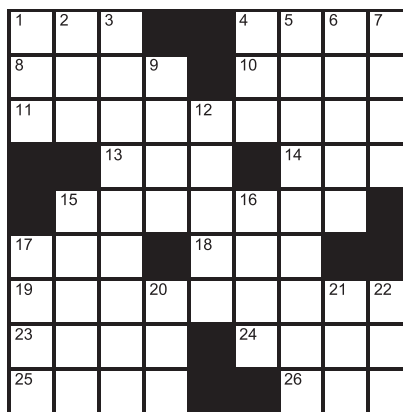
### The New Statesman is...

a thought-provoking read.



Please email [ellys.woodhouse@newstatesman.co.uk](mailto:ellys.woodhouse@newstatesman.co.uk) if you would like to be featured

## The NS Crossword In Brief 16 by Ali Gascoigne



### Answers to crossword 15 of 7 January 2022

Across 1) MCS 4) Swan 8) Sore 9) Part 10) Prue Leith 12) Ass 13) IIs 14) Tea kettle 18) Dug 19) Coy 20) Bride-to-be 23) Oh no 24) Labs 25) Dogs 26) Sty  
Down 1) Morse 2) Crusading 3) See 4) Spelt 5) Waistcoat 6) Art 7) Nth 8) Spat 11) Liege 15) Kudos 16) Lobby 17) Eyes 20) Bod 21) Rho 22) TLS

### Across

- 1 Physique, slangily
- 4 "Voyage" band
- 8 Territory
- 10 Injure with claws
- 11 Horoscope data
- 13 Young lady, familiarly
- 14 Musician in "Get Back"
- 15 Slightly drunk
- 17 Letter following sigma
- 18 Golfer Ernie
- 19 Prepared, as a Brexit deal?
- 23 Snorkelling spot
- 24 Actress Friel
- 25 Ceases to be
- 26 24 hours

### Down

- 1 K-Pop boy band
- 2 Dismissed
- 3 RuPaul, for one
- 4 Parisian pal
- 5 £1,000, to a Cockney
- 6 Rapper Bad \_\_\_\_
- 7 "And another thing..."
- 9 Female in Frankfurt
- 12 More cunning
- 15 Keeper's stats
- 16 Tiny circus performer
- 17 Singer Amos
- 20 Blockchain-based art
- 21 Genetic material
- 22 "Whoopee!"

---

## The NS Q&A

---

**“I’m a nomad in the way I have lived and worked”**

**Winnie Byanyima, diplomat**



**Winnie Byanyima was born in Uganda in 1959. She was her country’s first female aeronautical engineer and later served as a member of parliament. A former head of Oxfam, she is currently the executive director of the UN’s Programme on HIV and Aids.**

*What’s your earliest memory?*

Walking three miles to school as a little girl. I didn’t like coming home in the hot sun.

*Who are your heroes?*

The nuns who taught me – they were so smart and kind – and the people I’ve worked with on challenging inequality. Max Lawson, Oxfam’s head of inequality policy, is totally uncompromising. He takes no prisoners and fights inequality intellectually, with out-of-the-box thinking.

*What book last changed your thinking?*

*Kintu* by Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi. This book is set in Uganda in the 18th century. Our traditional religion, until colonialists came and Christianity took over, was the worship of our ancestors. She brought back to me our original faith.

*Which political figure do you look up to?*

Michelle Bachelet, who led Chile twice, and each time pursued a feminist, socialist agenda. She pushed further on higher education, social protection and progressive taxation – all the things that equalise society.

*What would be your “Mastermind” specialist subject?*

I’m not a specialist in anything. I’m a nomad in the way I have lived and worked.

But if there’s one issue that I could answer questions about, it would be African women’s rights.

*In which time and place, other than your own, would you like to live?*

I would love to have been an adult in the Sixties, in one of the countries of Africa, when we were newly independent. They were times of great hope.

*What TV show could you not live without?*

You’re going to laugh at me: *Last of the Summer Wine*. It’s about these three old men, and as I watch – and I’m getting older too – I see how their youth never leaves them. They still have their funny ways. They never quite stop living and doing little exciting things.

*Who would paint your portrait?*

Michael Armitage, a Kenyan-British painter. I love that he paints about Africa, about Kenya. He uses our colours – all sorts of greens. He remains truly an African painter, and I love that about him.

*What’s your theme tune?*

“Three Little Birds” by Bob Marley.

*What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received?*

“Let it go.” I don’t remember who gave it to me, but I have a block with that message on, and I keep it on my reading table.

*What’s currently bugging you?*

The callousness of some, supported by their governments, holding on to knowledge about a Covid-19 vaccine that can save lives.

*What single thing would make your life better?*

To listen and accept what I hear from others.

*When were you happiest?*

Whenever my son and I go on safari together: we connect with nature, we go mountain biking, we do long walks, we see mountains and rivers.

*In another life, what job might you have chosen?*

A concert pianist. I play a little bit. But I think to play for others would be something I would love.

*Are we all doomed?*

No, not at all. There is a lot of pain in the world. But ultimately I believe that life is a gift. We can make this a safe planet. We can make this a just world, a world where everybody lives happily. ●

# New Year New Ideas New Statesman



From just  
£1 a week\*

Enjoy independent, award-winning journalism and the best political and cultural writing every day.

#### How to get this offer:

 Go to [newstatesman.com/subscribe](https://newstatesman.com/subscribe)

 Email us at [subscriptions@newstatesman.co.uk](mailto:subscriptions@newstatesman.co.uk)


 Call us free on 0808 284 9422

#### As a digital subscriber you will enjoy:


- Full online access to our brand new website
- Our award-winning cover stories
- Extended international and environmental coverage
- Access to our growing online archive
- Early access to ad-free podcasts from the NS team

\*12 week digital subscription for £12, followed by £29.99 each quarter. Available to new subscribers only.

For more offers visit [newstatesman.com/subscribe](https://newstatesman.com/subscribe)



An Hour  
Charging the car  
for another  
family adventure



Our Hour  
Cutting carbon in our  
business, our designs  
and our advice

wsp

[www.wsp.com/en-GB](http://www.wsp.com/en-GB)