

# The Search for.....the holy grail

The 2018 Posts



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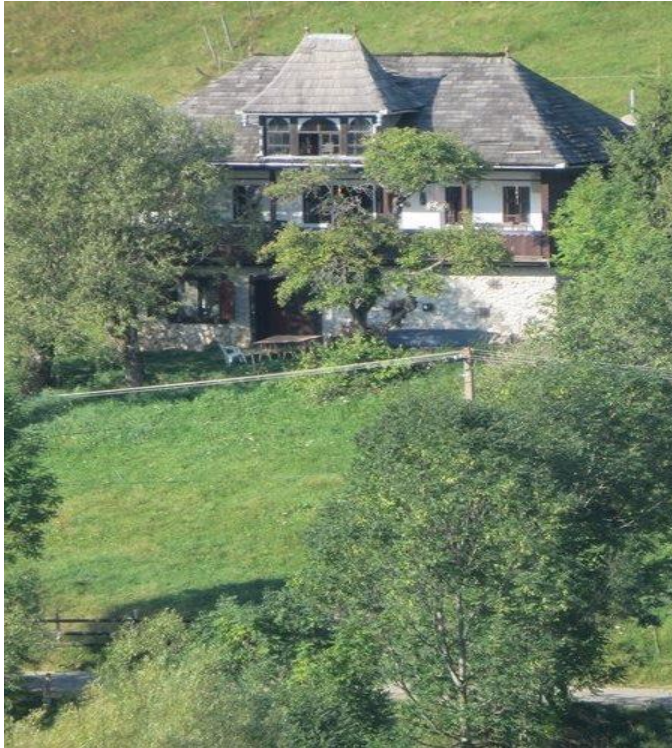
## Introduction

*"How can I know what I think until I read what I write?"*

Variously ascribed to Henry James or EM Foster

These are 2018's reflections from the "[Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#)" blog which has run from 2009 - when I started to have time for more reflection about some of the big themes which have engaged my life and work. I've been a nomad for some 30 years and based, for the past 10 years, in Romania and Bulgaria. The posts started in my mountain house in the Carpathians and continued in Bucharest and Sofia.....

### *In what sense is it different from other blogs?*



Mine is a blog which eschews the never-ending news cycle or the partiality of disciplinary lens and disputes and focuses rather on books and "wicked issues". Readers of blogs expect them to be frequently updated and soon stop visiting sites which remain static.....as mine did for almost three months in the middle of the year.....

Critics of the net say that hyperlinking tends to encourage partisan reading - and I indeed have a folder with the sites of some 200 other blogs which I [rarely access](#) -

the main reason being the **predictability** of what they say....

My claim for the reader's attention is simply expressed -

- experience in a variety of sectors (and countries) - normally closely manned with "gatekeepers"
- the compulsion (over a 50 year-period) I've felt to record the lessons of each experience in short papers
- Long and extensive reading



- A "voice" which has been honed by the necessity of speaking clearly to audiences of different nationalities and class
- intensive trawling of the internet for wide range of writing
- notes kept of the most important of those readings
- shared in hyperlinks with readers

I confess somewhere to an aversion to those writers (so many!) who try to pretend they have a unique perspective on an issue and whose discordant babble make the world such a difficult place to understand. I look instead for work which, as google puts it, builds on the shoulders of others.....my role in a team, I discovered when I did one of these tests, is that of the [resource person](#)....who finds and shares material....

Academia, politics and free-lance consultancy has given me the freedom for 40 years to "[do it my way](#)" - and to write and publish in a fairly carefree manner. This book reflects a life (and perhaps attitude) shaped by the good fortune I've had -

- to work from an early age (26) with an unusually wide range of people (professionals, politicians, community activists - and a much smaller number of academics) who shared an aspiration to improve social conditions;
- to have had a job in a Polytechnic (and planning school) in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s which gave me the licence to talk and write about the issues relating to this work
- to have achieved a position of influence which helped develop a more inclusive style of government in the West of Scotland for 20 years
- to reengineer myself as a consultant, working and living for 25 years in central Europe and Central Asia - in the pursuit of what the turgid academic literature has come to call "good governance"
- all the while trying - through wide reading and writing - to try to make sense of what the masthead on my blog calls our "social endeavours", ie efforts to make the world a better place...



For me a post written 4-5 years

ago is every bit as good as (perhaps better than) yesterday's - but the construction of blogs permits only the most recent posts to be shown.

A book format, on the other hand, requires that we begin.....at the beginning ... It also challenges the author to reflect more critically on the coherence of his thinking .....

It was, however only in 2015 that I started to publish annual collections of these posts - although [In Praise of Doubt - a blogger's year](#) cheated a bit by actually covering 15 months and therefore running it at 250 pages - a bit too much perhaps for the average reader. The images I used for this first effort were all taken by me - and most were from my collections of paintings and artefacts...

[The Slaves' Chorus](#) was more manageable at 120 pages (including the Sceptic's Glossary I had included the previous year) and it kept the focus of the images on my own collection.

Last year's [Common Endeavour](#) covered 76 posts and 180 pages - with the images being - initially at any rate - more eclectic but, ultimately, petering out... This year's posts have been not only fewer in number but - I noticed during editing - also bereft of images. I regret this absence - and have therefore added this year images essentially drawn from my personal objects...

The very first little book I wrote (in 1977) was called [The Search for Democracy](#); the first effort I made some 15 years ago to crystallise some of the key lessons from my organisational endeavours bore the title "The search for the Holy Grail"; and the visiting card I now use bears the epithet "explorer and aesthete" - so "searching and exploring - if not discovery" seem clearly to be part of who I am.....

### **A couple of innovations for 2018**

Until now, I have let the posts speak for themselves. I chose this year to start rereading and reflecting on them from about October and soon realised it might add a little coherence if I grouped posts with a common theme together. So some of the posts are not quite in the order in which they appeared....

This in turn inspired me to use, for the beginning of each section, the tables which I had started to use last year. The first column gives the title of the post - with the middle column compressing what I was trying to say into a few lines (a real challenge!)..... Most of my readership is not using English as their first language and such summaries seem therefore a useful...endeavour

# What the Year Brought

The blog is not a diary - it does not record what I do on a weekly basis - although events such as exhibitions, wine-tasting or trips do make the occasional appearance. I made two trips to Scotland this year - my first such visits since a wedding in 2012 - which didn't feature in the posts but are covered here. The blog remains a record of more cerebral activities - of the thoughts sparked by books and general reading...

The year started with some advice for the Davos set; some deaths; and some Italian and German writers before returning to a subject which had occupied the blog in previous months - [Reforming the State](#)



Change, of one shape or form, was the dominant theme of this year's posts - exactly half of them, not counting several posts on Brexit in the early part of the year. But it was how ideas are conveyed that seemed to exercise me as much as the ideas themselves - with quite a few posts being devoted to examples of both good and bad writing as well as that of the future of the blog

This is the first year for a decade I have spent fully in Romania - so a few posts about it figure in this year's collection....

At one stage I thought the posts had dried up - for almost 3 months I lacked anything to

spark inspiration. I realised some time ago that my mind/body was telling me something when this happened - but what exactly? When I was younger, I could blame stress - but this was high summer.....and in blessed Sirnea of the meadows and high peaks...

It's true that I had just finished a challenging series of posts about "administrative reform" and the nature of the State - so I could be forgiven for being a bit alienated....And that I had spent most of the winter holed up in Ploiesti.....but reasonably active with walking and swimming....

I knew, of course, that one of the curses of retirement is that time can hang heavily but I had, since at least 2012, managed to avoid this....I had discovered wines from both sides of the Lower Danube; written a little book about Romanian culture (see [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#)); and started a serious collection of Bulgarian painters - [Bulgarian Realists - getting to know the Bulgarians through their art](#). And the morning discipline of a blogpost had seemed to keep me ticking over.....but suddenly vanished....Even the taste for reading disappeared...in what was to be a three-month hiatus...

But late October saw me back with a bang - not just the posts but a flurry of the first book purchases (at Bucharest's annual Book Fair) since the spring...

November saw the reader numbers over the period hit the 300,000 mark. Quite a landmark....which I celebrated at Xmas with a special post on Romanian wines....

# Opening Salvos

One of the benefits of "close editing" is that you begin to spot commonalities in what you thought were random pieces. It's only on a fourth and fifth viewing that I realised most of these early posts deal with some of selection mechanisms used by the media. How do the subjects we encounter in the media (or indeed choose to blog about) get to be selected? Why are scandals assumed to attract readers? Are we really as well-read as we imagine?

Title of post	Summary
Development Voices	A development blog raised the question why there are so few feminine specialists in the field and a reader exposes a trade secret about the publishing industry....
Some Reading for the Davos Set	What books would you recommend for the Davos set if you had the opportunity to select some for them to read?
Alternatives - how the media could be helping the good society develop	The media are (rightly) criticised for focusing on scandals. "Good news" is considered boring....but this need not be always the case
Unlocking Cultural Codes	Despite globalisation, there is an argument that we know less these days about other European countries than we did in the 1920s
Cry the beloved country?	A much beloved Romanian historian/diplomat who died at age 101 was active to the end of his life - and would have appreciated this critical article about his country in New Left Review
A Celebration of writing on Italy	A reading list for the intelligent visitor
A Critical German Redoubt - coming up for its Century	A new book about an amazing institute for social research founded in Germany in the 1920s which transferred to America in the late 30s
Memories of Political Sociology	In which I remember an inspired Romanian sociologist who introduced me to political sociology in the early 1960s



## Development Voices

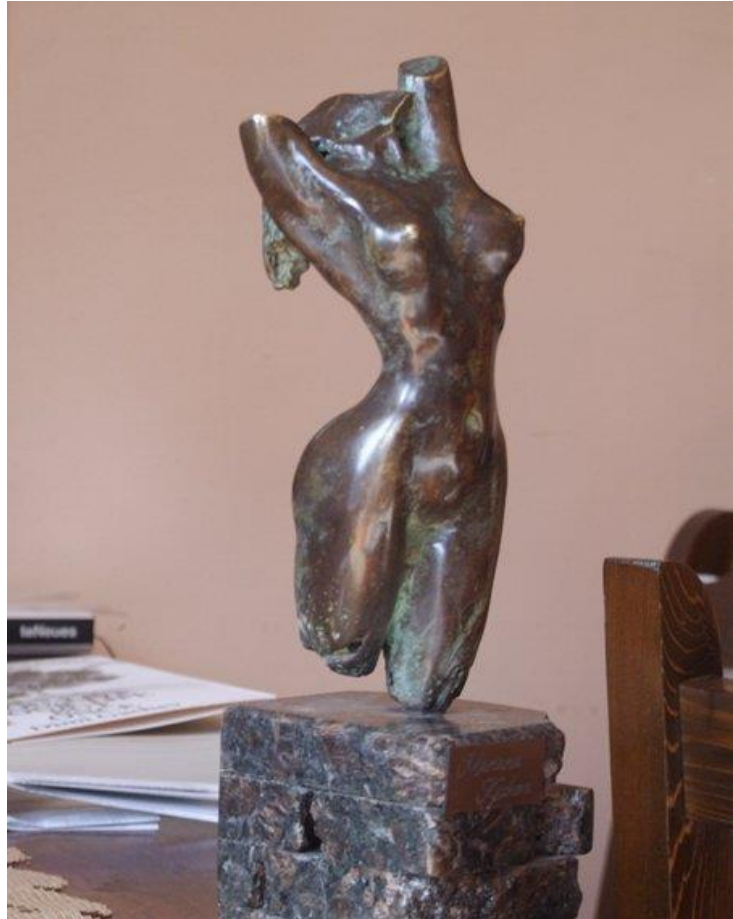
[From Poverty to Power](#) is one of the most interesting blogs around - and, believe me, there are not many which can persuade these arthritic old fingers to do the clicking! ([The Brexit Blog](#) is another of the exceptions which delights in its clarity of thought and expression.....)

"From Poverty to Power" is a remarkable blog which reduces "development" issues to easily comprehensible narratives - and which also succeeds in drawing down helpful comments and, indeed, assistance from its global audience.

One of its latest posts - on the ["ten top thinkers on development"](#) - has attracted some ire from colleagues who objected to its gender imbalance. My own objections were rather different -

"It's rather misleading to title this post the "ten top development thinkers", I huffed ...and continued "it misses, for example, AO Hirschmann and Robert Chambers who made a much bigger contribution to thinking than some of the names on this "top ten" list - which clearly bears a rather old-fashioned economistic stamp (by the way only 3 of those 50 thinkers were women). I then recommended three particular books which cast a contrarian eye on the development industry - Sach's (Wolfgang) [The Development Dictionary](#) (2010) [Deconstructing Development Buzzwords](#) (2010) and ["Fifty Key Development Thinkers"](#) (2006)

"Development" has always been a loaded term and, indeed, politically incorrect from 1990 - despite the scale of EU Structural funding (tens of billions of euros). I'm actually in the world of "institutional" development and working, since 1991, in central Europe and central Asia. Last autumn I did a series of posts about the academic literature on public management and made a point which I rarely see recognized - that writing on the subject has a "Continental" bias, with most of the dominant writing being anglo-saxon (whose influence strongly extends to central european academia). It led to a little book ["Reforming the State"](#) which argues that the "modernisation" effort in this part of the world could benefit from some of the insights from the "development" field



Another reader made this excellent point -

*Here's what you need to do to get your book noticed:*

- 1. Come up with a big idea (about development), preferably slightly controversial or counter-intuitive*
- 2. Explain how if the idea was taken more seriously it could end poverty or at least change the development paradigm*
- 3. Selectively collect evidence and anecdotes that support the theme of the book*
- 4. Spin out a simple idea to be a full length book*
- 5. Aggressively promote the idea and be prepared to "battle it out" with other leading thinkers to prove who has the best take in order to promote your idea and book*

*Maybe this is something men are more inclined towards on average than women*

*More seriously, there are lots of other thinkers, women and men who have done important work on advancing development thinking and practice - but they might not have gotten the same level of visibility or notoriety as those on this list.*

Some decades ago [I wrote a short book](#) to try to demystify the way a new local government system worked. That made me realise how [few books were in fact written to help public understanding!](#) Most books are written to make a profit or an academic reputation. The first requires you to take a few simple and generally well-known ideas but parcel them in a new way - the second to choose a very tiny area of experience and write about it in a very complicated way. After that experience, I realised how true is the saying that "If you want to understand a subject, write a book about it"! Failing that, at least an article - this will certainly help you identify the gaps in your knowledge - and give you the specific questions which then make sure you get the most out of your reading.

## Some Reading for the Davos Set

The annual [Davos festschmalz](#) comes this year with a [book bag](#) - consisting of reading recommended by Bill Gates and [Mark Zuckerberg](#). This includes fairly predictable, mainstream stuff - eg Harari's "Sapiens" and [Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined](#) by Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker

Such lists make, of course, the (rather heroic) assumption that the Davos CEOs are inclined to read books - and an interesting challenge would be to come up with some titles to help such privileged people see the world a bit differently and perhaps change their thinking?

I suspect, for example, that participants might just allow their guard to fall for books written by people who know they are dying - eg the paean to social democracy penned by Tony Judt just before his death - [Ill Fares the Land](#). And there were also these [eloquent final thoughts of a seasoned campaigner found on his laptop](#) after his death

**So here's my New Year challenge to readers - what short and thoughtful books might we recommend to challenge the smugness of the Davos set?**

As it happens I have just collated last year's blogposts which try to give a sense of how writers from the 1970s onwards have been dealing with what is now recognised as a systemic crisis in our economic order. [Our Future - an annotated reading list](#) identifies 250 books. Even more importantly, I make an effort to [classify](#) the books.....using a variant of the 6 distinctive "worlds" or "dimensions" developed by [the Commons Transition people](#)

- political (democracy and the Commons)
- economic (or Financial)
- work
- consumption/"4<sup>th</sup> Dimension"
- conscience
- citizens

Take the first dimension - as representative democracy has eroded in recent decades, direct democracy has attracted increasing attention - eg [referenda](#), citizens' juries, participatory budgeting or random selection of electoral positions. There is no obvious name to offer - although John Keane's huge book on [The Life and Death of Democracy](#) is one of the best resources. [Paul Hirst](#) advanced the idea of "[associative democracy](#)" until his sad death in 2003. This drew on the thinking of figures such as GDH Cole...

But the very word "democracy" will put most Chief Execs off - they feel much more comfortable in the management field where some gems can be found - eg

- Danah Zohar's [Spiritual Capital - wealth we can live by](#) (2004) is an interesting critique of capitalism with a rather too superficial approach to its amelioration.
- [The Ethical Economy - rebuilding value after the crisis](#) by A Arvidsson and N Peitersen (2013) covers the ground better - it's summarized [here](#) and critiqued [here](#).
- Henry Mintzberg is a well-regarded management guru who has been warning of business excesses for a couple of decades and produced in 2014 the highly readable [Rebalancing Society - radical renewal beyond left, right and center](#) which is ideal for Chief Execs.
- Peter Barnes is a very fair-minded entrepreneur sensitive to the evils of unregulated capitalism whose [Capitalism 3.0](#) (2006) is persuasive.
- David Erdal's [Beyond the Corporation](#) (2011) is the inspiring story of an entrepreneur who passed his business to the workers..

They might also be persuaded to open some pages which bear a religious imprint eg the fascinating and totally neglected book [Questions of Business Life](#) by Richard Higginson (2002) an analysis of various critiques produced by a cleric from his work at an ecumenical centre for business people... And then there is [Laudato-Si](#) - the Papal Encyclical (2015). A summary is [available here](#). Its entire 184 pages [can be read here](#)

Some outriders which I would strongly recommend are -

- "[The Lugano Report](#): On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century" - Susan George (1999). A satirical piece which forces us to think where present forces are taking us....
- Danny Dorling's hugely underrated [Injustice](#) (2011) identified 5 "social evils" - elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed and despair - and [explores the myths which sustain them](#). The argument is that we are all guilty of these evils and of sustaining these myths.....

## The Alternatives – how (parts of) the media could actually help the good society develop

I'm encouraged by this new discussion initiative just announced by The Guardian [which promises](#) to -

*..... investigate real-world examples of people doing things differently. We'll meet councillors who are extending local government far beyond collecting the bins; housing activists turning themselves into property developers; and energy bosses who actually ask customers how their companies should be run. Much of the reporting will be from Britain, but we'll also look at other parts of Europe (including Germany) and further afield.*



*Stack them all together and the grand lie of Thatcherism is exposed. There are alternatives. We can do things differently.*

The opening piece skewers what passes for political and economic debate in Britain -

*With Britain already having suffered one lost decade, a murmuring catastrophism has set in among our intellectuals. Mainstream-left politics remains stuck between two clichés. Either: well, we used to do things differently (cue sepia-tinted nostalgia for the establishment of the NHS and huge public borrowing). Or: the Germans do it, and it's done them no harm (along with wistfulness for a proper industrial policy).*

The New series is, sadly, not very easy to find but [can be accessed here](#). I've tried unsuccessfully to register for updates so each time have to try to remember the title ([The Alternatives](#)) and search for it - a pity since [this article on social investments](#) is a great example of the sort of information the

mainstream media doesn't give us and which many of us thirst after.....

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/17/britain-zombie-elite-politicians-economy>

## Unlocking Cultural Codes

Another Guardian initiative is [Europe Now](#), with Natalie Nougayrède promising

*.....to build bridges and engage more closely with readers throughout Europe and those in the wider world who want to keep in touch with European concerns. We know people across Europe are eager to share insights about a region whose destiny is currently being redefined. We want to offer them the space and opportunity to do that.*

The Guardian has tried at [such a venture at least once before](#) - with the support of Le Monde and Der Spiegel as I remember but it seems to have gone down like a lead balloon. Language seems to trap at least the anglo-saxons very much in our own intellectual concerns and bubbles. I had the idea recently of trying to plug into the French and German blogging community to try to find some



people there who might be willing to share with us some of the books and debates which have excited their attention in recent years - offering my own annotated list in exchange [Our Future - an annotated bibliography](#).

But I simply can't navigate my way through the European blogosphere to the gems which must be there and asked for help. The one reply I received referenced the Social Europe website and the sadly dead Zygmund Bauman (who wasn't a blogger).

Jan-Werner Mueller argued a few years ago that [1920s Europe writers engaged more with one another across national boundaries than nowadays](#) and I have bemoaned several [times this missing European public space](#) which - if you except the self-interested academic and technocratic networks - almost [amounts to mutual indifference](#)...

[Perry Anderson is about the only character with the linguistic ability to supply us Brits with extensive analyses](#) of post-war and contemporary debates in France, Germany and Italy. His stunning study [The New Old World](#) (2009) can be read [in its entirety here](#) (all 560 pages) and is easily the best read on what it is to be European - about a third being a survey of the literature on the "European Project"; another third being insightful and acerbic analyses of the political and intellectual currents of the "Core" European countries (with the noticeable and dismissive exclusion of the UK); and the final section ("The Eastern Question") devoted largely to Turkey.

Of course we have excellent studies of individual European nations - particularly France, Italy and Spain - ["How the French Think - an affectionate portrait of an intellectual people"](#) is just the latest in a line which includes [Theodor Zeldin and Rod Kedward](#). And writers such as Peter Watson, Simon Winder and Neil Mc Gregor have ensured that even books about Germany have been making the lists of best-sellers

I'm not sure, however, if I would go so far as US [intellectual Mark Lilla who wrote recently](#) -

*Ever since Madame de Staël wrote "De l'Allemagne" during Napoleon's reign to celebrate the Germans as sensitive romantics allergic to tyranny (unlike the French), and Heinrich Heine responded with his own "De l'Allemagne" portraying them as brutal pagans capable of anything, Europeans have been trying to unlock the cultural codes of their neighbours—and, in so doing, unlock their own.*

Lilla seems to be the only US writer interested in exploring strands of European thinking and gave a very helpful picture recently of some [developments on the centre-right](#) of French social thought - particularly amongst the younger bourgeois Catholics who tend to read [Le Point](#) magazine - which I've just discovered has the astonishing circulation figure of 400,000. This is some six times the British equivalent - proof if it was ever needed of the greater intellectuality of the French....

It would be interesting to know what books (if any) British visitors to European countries (whether for business or pleasure) use for their preparation - apart from the obvious travel books. A few years ago I used an enforced visit to Köln to draft a short book which has turned into a 200-page source book - [German Musings](#) - which would be of interest to anyone with cultural interests visiting that country.....

When one of my daughters was visiting me in Romania I took the various posts I had written about my exploration of the country's painting and literary tradition - added some obvious subjects such





as music, history, food and wine (and some provocative articles on culture and cinema) and found myself with a 120-page [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#).

And Sofia's charm and the country's painting tradition seduced me to such a degree that [Bulgarian Realists - getting to know the Bulgarians through their art](#) turned into a 250 page book

**A resource on French thought**  
[After the Deluge - new perspectives on the intellectual and cultural history of post-war France](#); ed J Bourg (2004)  
<https://aeon.co/essays/french-thought-once-dazzled-the-world-what-went-wrong>

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/french-thought/>

<http://nomadron.blogspot.ro/2017/09/french-letters.html>

<http://nomadron.blogspot.ro/2017/09/the-craft-of-writing-and-thinking.html>

## Cry the Beloved Country???

Two venerable Romanians "slipped their mortal coils" in January - first ex-King Michael who had been forced to abdicate at gun point in December 1947 by the Communists; some 10 days later at age 101, the more significant figure of [Neagu Djuvara](#), émigré, academic, journalist and still active historian. Having fought on the Eastern front, he was briefly charged to explore surrender possibilities with Russia before the communist takeover forced him to seek refuge in Paris.....

He returned to Bucharest in 1990/91 to an academic and writing career (his [Brief Illustrated of Romanians](#) is one of books on my short list of "beautiful books") and was, fairly exceptionally for this highly politicized and divided country, warmly regarded by all shades of opinion

*He was a critic of what he perceived to be an excessively pro-Western attitude in [Romanian politics](#)..... He also wrote about what he called the "American [hegemony](#)" and its premises, analysing the influence which the United States and its foreign policy have had on the World and, more specifically, on Europe. He characterised the efforts of the United States to establish what resembles a hegemony in Europe and other parts of the World as a "Seventy-Seven Years' War" waged throughout most of the 20th century.*

*Neagu Djuvara can be seen as a populariser and "de-mystifier" of history, having published books aimed at younger audience as well as books seeking to explain the historical basis for mythical figures such as [Dracula](#) or [Negru Vodă](#). He also published memories from his exile, recounting his life and work in Paris and Africa*

More recently, he was constantly warning of the dangers of Romania's demographic decline

*"For me, the greatest drama that Romania is currently experiencing is that the young people want to leave this country, and if they go abroad and find work there they will not return to Romania. We, my generation and all my predecessors, the three or four generations that preceded me and who studied*

abroad, none of them was going to stay there after finishing their studies. He was returning with that intellectual baggage and, in his eyes, with the image of other urban landscapes than in Bucharest, and trying to do the same thing at home. But they never thought about leaving or leaving the country. So my message is: "Young people, if you can, even if you do it worse in our country, it is a supreme duty to return and rebuild Romania".

He would have enjoyed the long article - [Romania Redivivus](#) - in the current edition of New Left Review which tells that,...

*of all East European countries, Romania is endowed with the greatest variety of natural resources. The Carpathian Mountains which wall off the northwestern province of Transylvania from Wallachia, in the south, and Moldavia, in the east, boast some of the last primeval forests of Europe. The Danube Delta offers a fabled reservation of endangered bird and fish species. The Ploiești oilfields contain the oldest commercial well on earth—Bucharest's streets were the first to be illuminated by kerosene—and still hold unknown reserves, closer to ground level than in any other country ringing the Black Sea. The fertility of the soil is legendary.*

### **The Rape of the Country**

*But little of the country's potential wealth has found its way into the hands of its people. Arguably the last real peasantry to be found within the EU works what was once the breadbasket of the Ottoman Empire: two in five Romanians live in the countryside; one in three survive off agriculture; many have never left their villages and only a minority have access to mechanized farming equipment.*

*The value of their land, however, has not been lost on Brussels, which has overseen the funnelling of Romanian wealth westward for a generation. Prior to its eu accession in 2007, entire sectors of the economy were picked off by multinationals.*

- *The Romanian banking system was taken over by Société Générale, Raiffeisen and the Erste Group.*
- *Its energy sector fell to Österreichische Mineralölverwaltung of Vienna and České Energetické Závody of Prague.*
- *Its steel manufacturing went to Mittal, its timber production to the Schweighofer Group, its national automobile, the Dacia, to Renault.*

*Much of what isn't yet owned by Western concerns has been laid bare for their disposal. In 1999, the Canadian mining company Gabriel Resources won dubious rights to excavate Roșia Montană, the largest open-pit gold mine in Europe. Its exploitation requires the stripping away of its status as a unesco heritage site, the demolition of four surrounding mountain peaks and a handful of nearby villages, and the carving out of a pit half the size of Gibraltar for holding cyanide-laced run-off; the Romanian state is being sued by Gabriel Resources for \$4.4 billion in profit losses for forestalling this process.*

*- By 2010 the largest private owner of trees in Romania was Harvard University, which six years earlier had started buying up enormous swathes of forest that had themselves been seized by mafia intermediaries on bogus claims of pre-communist ownership; sold off to Ikea, tens of thousands of acres were sawn down, probably never to be recovered.*

*- In 2012, residents of some fifty villages in the Banat, the fertile corner of western Romania that brushes up against Serbia and Hungary, woke up to find that their ancestral plots of land had been seized through another legal subterfuge by Rabobank of Utrecht.<sup>9</sup> There are dozens of such cases. Few have been compensated.*

### **The tentacles of the Deep Security State**

*Meanwhile, beneath the surface of democratization, the authoritarian tenor of Ceaușescu's rule persists in Romania's powerful security forces. The Securitate, the most ruthless police force in the Warsaw Pact, has been rebranded and is now run by a generation of operatives whose average age is 35, trained at*

*special intelligence universities. They are, in many cases, the children of the 16,000 Securitate members who provided the backbone of the Romanian state after 1989, having emerged as the undisputed winners of the 'revolution' of that year. At least nine of these new services exist. The predominant one, the Serviciul Român de Informații (sri), monitors Romanians internally; with some 12,000 operatives, it has double the manpower of any equivalent agency in Europe and, with military-grade espionage equipment, conducts upwards of 40,000 wiretaps a year.<sup>10</sup> The older generation of Securitate agents managed the privatization schemes of the 1990s; they are now shielded by the younger cohort from legal oversight.*

*This interlocking of economic influence—four out of the five richest Romanians have a Securitate background—and legal inviolability—Romania's judiciary is too dependent on the sri to prosecute it—allows the deep state to operate with impunity. The security services have vast stakes in telecommunications and big-data collection. They oversee their own ngos, run their own tv channels and have their people on the editorial boards of the major Romanian newspapers and across the government ministries. The permeation of the state by these networks comes to light only occasionally. In October 2015, a nightclub fire in Bucharest killed sixty-four, more than half the deaths due to infections contracted later at a local hospital. Why? The hospital's disinfectants, concocted by a company called Hexi Pharma to which the government had granted a monopoly,*

## **Musical Interlude**

I must confess that I hadn't heard of the Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson who has just died at the tragically young age of 48 - but I was very taken with this [Song for Europa](#) to which I owe to an amazing US radio station - [KEXP](#) - an affiliate apparently of the University of Washington.....

I also liked his [Free the Mind](#)

Listening made me realise how much I appreciate some of the more atonal music - I have always loved Schoenberg's [Verklärte Nacht](#). And the Finnish composer Arvo Pärt never fails to touch me eg "[Tabula Rasa](#)" and [Credo](#)

## **A Celebration of writing about Italy**

*We had intended to spend several weeks in Italy from mid March - first 5 days in Rome, then ditto in Naples and, finally a couple of weeks in Palermo, using the Italian trains to make the connections from Rome. Our purpose had been to savour the country's landscape and (past) glories - although [La Bella Lingua - my love affair with Italian, the world's most enchanting language](#) had whetted my appetite for learning at least a few words of the language.*

*Such, however, is the anti-Romanian feeling in the country at the moment that my partner took cold feet....and the trip was called off....*

Italy has of course, over the ages, attracted some superb writers (let alone artists) to visit and wonder at its history, paintings, sculptures and buildings - writers whose journeys and commentaries are recalled, for example, in [Sicily - a literary guide for travellers](#). Although I'm not quite sure what such knowledge adds to our appreciation of Italian vistas, I do appreciate book lists and, therefore, pass on this list of the "[top 10 books about Italy](#)" which includes a couple I own - [The Oxford Companion to Italian Food](#); and Peter Robb's "Midnight in Sicily".

I have, over time, accumulated a nice little library of books about the country and made a special journey a couple of weeks ago to my snow-bound mountain house to retrieve it. It includes titles

such as - John Berendt's naughty exposure of Venice society in the late 1990s - [The City of Falling Angels](#); and [The Dark Heart of Italy](#); by Tobias Jones - whose elegant text tries to capture the essence of the country and the way it has become politicised.

Two more detailed and brilliantly-written studies I brought down for rereading are [The Pursuit of Italy - the pursuit of a land, its regions and their peoples](#); David Gilmour (2011); and [Italy and its Discontents 1980-2001](#) by [Paul Ginsborg](#) (2002) whose focus on the family, civil society and the state uses a range of contemporary local sources not normally seen in such books.....

Ginsborg has lived in Italy as a Professor of history for some 30 years and gives us with this offering probably the most encyclopedic take on the country. Indeed there can be few other English-language analyses of foreign countries to rival Ginsborg's!

Resident for almost 30 years, translator Tim Parks' [Italian Ways- off and on the rails between Milan and Palermo](#) (2014) is highly readable - as well as useful for those venturing on its trains.

Two people who hail from Australia have produced 3 books which give us not only cultural insights but the very tastes, sounds and smells of the country - Peter Robb gave us [Midnight in Sicily - on art, food, history, travel and Cosa Nostra](#); and [Street Fight in Naples - a city's unseen history](#); Robert Hughes is sadly now deceased but lives on in his [Rome - a cultural, visual and personal history by](#) (2011). Art critics are usually the worst of writers but Hughes's prose was, by contrast, electrifying. This book of his bringing the city alive through his description of the contribution made by specific Popes to Rome's development - particularly their use of particular architects, sculptors and painters .....

John Dickie's [Mafia Republic - Italy's Criminal Curse](#) is a lively read - but the one book of my batch which really disappointed me was the florid [Naples Declared - a walk around the bay](#); by Benjamin Taylor who has an unfortunate nervous tic of throwing in comparisons with North American sites.....

Latinist Mary Beard, on the other hand, has given us very recently [SPQR - a history of ancient Rome](#); which brought to mind Robert Harris's novels about Roman figures (particularly Cicero) and intrigues - "Imperium", "Lustrum" and "Pompeii". And, speaking of novels, I'm glad to see that the English editions of [Albert Moravia's](#) novels are once again (thanks to NYRB) easily available. I always appreciated his modernist touch (and his naughty book "[The Two of Us](#)")

Of course I have several generic travel guides - 2 for Naples, the [DK Eyewitness one](#) and the [TimeOut City Guide](#); and the [DK Eyewitness Guide to Sicily](#) - but these rely on visuals and tips about accommodation, eating and travel which rapidly date

But the **best briefing about the country freely available** - thanks to the London Review of Books - are the writings of the incomparable **Perry Anderson** who has written, over the years, no fewer than four major and incisive commentaries on Italian society -

[Land without Prejudice](#) (2002)

[An Invertebrate Left](#) (2009)

[An Entire Order](#) (2009)

[The Italian Disaster](#) (2014)



### What is Missing?

I've sent away for [The Italians](#) by John Hooper (produced in 2016 by the Economist's correspondent in Italy) which I think is the only major title currently missing from my library. I also like the sound of [A Literary Tour of Italy](#) by Tim Parks. Thanks to Vlad and the newly re-opened English Bookshop - [the smallest Carturesti bookstore](#) - these 2 titles should be with me by the start of March...

I'm not a great reader of novels - The Leopard sits forlornly unopened on my shelves but [this list of Italian novels](#) tells me I should read Ferrante if I am spending some days in Naples.....

### A Critical German Redoubt - coming up for its century

[Grand Hotel Abyss - the lives of the Frankfurt School](#) (2016) is the sort of book which has me salivating....it is the story of the individuals who came together in Germany in 1923 in an unusual multi-disciplinary institute; and used what came to be known as "critical theory" to try to make sense of the social, political and economic turbulence then being experienced in Europe and Russia..... Evicted by the Nazis after only a decade, they then moved to the States where their survey work focused initially on trying to understand the Nazi takeover and then on cultural aspects of their adopted country - at least until 1949 when Adorno and Horkheimer returned to Frankfurt, managing to attract a young Juergen Habermas to their ranks. The denazification process was, understandably an initial focus of their work there but, as the political momentum for this quickly faded, their focus on understanding the new forces of capitalism was renewed.

Such figures, however, as Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm stayed behind to plough their distinctive radical furrows in the USA - which bore fruit in the heady 60s when their writings indeed were far more influential in 60s Germany than those of Adorno and co at the Frankfurt school. I vividly remember the anger of the Marxist students at Berlin's Freie University when I spent 2 summer months in Berlin in 1964 - and it was Marcuse's "One-Dimensional Man" which was one of the crystallising text for them.



Adorno died in 1969 but the [Institute operates to this day](#) - if with little of the global influence it had in its heady days..... For those who want their analysis in small bites, the excellent Aeon magazine had an article about the school with the appropriate title - [How the Frankfurt school diagnosed the ills of western civilisation](#)



The author of *Grand Hotel Abyss*, Stuart Jeffries, is one of many who have penned the history of this school - although he may be the first English journalist so to do. Many Germans have been down this road eg [The Frankfurt School](#) - by Wiggershaus (1995); and at least 2 American scholars - with [The Dialectical Imagination](#) (Martin Jay 1973); and [Rethinking the Frankfurt School - alternative legacies of cultural critique](#); ed JT Nealon and C Irr (2002).

Jeffries' book has an excellent bibliography - which lists (some of) these books - but, as I discovered them, I wondered why he had not thought to offer a comment in (say) the Introduction to help us understand what exactly his new book offers that is different and distinctive..... I should imagine that he feels that a journalistic approach will clearly be more accessible than an academic's - but have to confess that I find his language, on occasion, a bit elliptic if not cryptic....

In these times, however, it's useful for a British audience to be reminded that, for almost a hundred years, this Institute has been articulating a different way of seeing and thinking..... But I often had the feeling in the first half of the book that he would have preferred to be writing about Walter Benjamin..... whose various writings are generally much more lucid than those of his colleagues at the School - eg [Early Writings 1910-1917](#); [Reflections - essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings](#) (1978); and [Selected Writings volume 2 part 2 \(1931-1934\)](#) - perhaps because Benjamin was actually a journalist

I was also disappointed that, apart from a solitary paragraph, the book failed to make the connection with the group of [New Left writers who have been active in Britain](#) from 1960 to the present - particularly with the "cultural wing" which found expression in the [British Centre for Cultural Studies](#) from 1964 until its demise in 2002. [British Cultural Studies - an introduction](#) by Graeme Turner (1990) offers a good treatment of their work.

Admittedly, the Frankfurt School had a 40 year start on the Brits but, for some reason it's the French whose influence permeates UK cultural studies (as Turner's book shows) - with only Gramsci challenging this. Germans such as Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas simply made no impact on the Brits... Why is this I wonder? [The Frankfurt School and British cultural Studies - a missed articulation](#) is an interesting article which explores this question.....

Let me finish with an excerpt from [an interview with the author of Grand Hotel Abyss](#) (and recommend that you read the full interview)

*What legacies has the Frankfurt School left us? And which thinkers do you regard as its inheritors? They were certainly attentive to how culture changes us and can be a force for change. In the 1930s Benjamin imagined that cinema, for instance, by using jump cuts and close ups, would change our perspectives on reality and so might have a revolutionary potential; a few years later, Adorno and Horkheimer wrote of Hollywood as if it were a totalitarian tool of oppression akin to the Nazi film studio UFA.*

*One Frankfurt School legacy, then, then is to make us think about the politics of culture. For them, art is never just for art's sake, and entertainment is never just entertaining. By taking the politics of culture seriously, the Frankfurt School opened up new lines of thinking. Without them, all the stuff that happened in a little corner of Frankfurt's twin city of Birmingham (the now-defunct Centre for Cultural Studies) wouldn't have been conceivable and our approach to culture would have been very different. To be sure, the likes of Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams saw culture very differently*

*from Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse. They followed the Frankfurt School in seeing culture as a key instrument of political and social control, but, unlike the Germans, appreciated how the culture industry could be aberrantly, even rebelliously decoded, by its mass consumers and that popular sub-cultures might subvert the culture industry in a form of immanent critique.*

### Further Reading

Googling the book's title took me into references about the rather different British approach to cultural studies and about the New Left. [The first New Left in Britain](#) captures all that rather well

## Memories of Political Sociology

My last post was about the recent book - [Grand Hotel Abyss](#) - whose title refers to the accusation of the Marxist philosopher [György Lukács](#) (and others) that the Frankfurt School "lived in a beautiful and comfortable hotel on the edge of an abyss". I am indebted to a reviewer on the Amazon site for the further clarification that -

- they were Marxist or neo-Marxist theoreticians who lived a comfortable academic life but, with the exception of Marcuse, kept aloof from party politics and political struggle;
- part of the reason for this was that both in the United States and later in Germany they did not want to provoke the government or imperil funds they received from some wealthy supporters or research contracts they received from government departments;
- they contented themselves with analysis and understanding, but did not believe it was possible to change society because they thought the working class was not capable of revolution (explained partially in psychoanalytical terms by Erich Fromm);
- they distrusted the political left for an authoritarianism that was as bad as that of the Right;
- in exile in America, they saw some similarities not only between the control mechanism of Hitlerian fascism and Stalinist communism but even between them and those of Roosevelt's America - it was merely that Goebbels and Zhdanov were more open about what they were doing;
- they thought that capitalism was no longer likely to self-destruct;
- the task now was to study these control mechanisms that kept it in place - mechanisms which went far beyond merely economic ones and that to understand them required a wider interdisciplinary cultural approach

*This approach was the essence of Critical Theory. Not least by giving the book its title, Jeffries seems to agree with many of these charges, although he values many of the insights, critiques and influences of the School. Jeffries shows us the divisions within the Frankfurt School - notably that between Marcuse on the one hand and Adorno and Horkheimer on the other over the student revolt of 1967 to 1969, and that between the older founding generation with its profound and radical pessimism and the younger, more cautiously optimistic one, represented by Habermas, who, as Jeffries' chapter heading has it, pulled the School "back from the abyss".*

The pragmatic Brits were impervious to the writings of the Frankfurt School - although they were, for reasons I fail to understand. seduced in the 80s by the charms of such Gallic poseurs as Sartre, Foucault, Baudrillard, Derrida and the improbably-named Lyotard

But Adorno was in fact one of the authors, in 1950, of a famous book [The Authoritarian Personality](#) (1950) which was one of the first of a stream of books produced in the immediate post-war period to try to make sense of the power of the totalitarian mode including Hannah Arendt's [The Origins of Totalitarianism](#) (1951) and JT Talmon's [The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy](#); (1952)

They were required reading on the small Political Sociology class I took under **Zevedei Barbu** - a Romanian who had defected in 1948 from the Romanian Legation in London and who had himself produced in 1956 [Democracy and Dictatorship](#), attempting to explore the insights from combining both social psychology and sociology....You can read the entire book at the link but, be warned, the mixture of the depth and (linguistic) width of his reading; personal style; and awareness of the scale of his ambition does not make for easy reading. This is an original work which requires slow reading!!

**Barbu was a great teacher - it was he who introduced me to Weber, Durkheim and Tonnies - let alone Michels and Pareto - all of whose insights still resonate with me.**

Indeed it was almost certainly Barbu's lectures which led me to register at the LSE in 1964 for a one-year MSc in Political Sociology - focusing on the development of post-war democracy in Germany. But I had also been powerfully influenced by Ralf Dahrendorf whose "[Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society](#)" had come out in 1959 and who was just about to publish his "Society and Democracy in Germany" (1965) and, indeed, found myself registered with no less a figure than Ralph Miliband - of [Parliamentary Democracy](#) fame.

Sadly, I blew this opportunity - I was so lonely in London that I soon scurried back to the family hearth and then had 3-4 jobs (including, ironically, a couple in London) before landing an academic position back in the West of Scotland.... And I regret never establishing any personal link with Barbu - admittedly quite a private person in those days. As students we never knew of his background - we never asked, of course - but, as [this vignette \(which I discovered recently\) indicates](#), he was not someone to flaunt his distinctive experience.

Apparently he left Britain in 1973 - to take up a Professorial post in Brazil where he died in 1993 - somewhat marginalised it seems....However I'm glad to say that he seems remembered in modern Romanian academia - with [this 2012 article on "fascism"](#) quoting him extensively and [a 2014 tribute here](#) (in Romanian)

# The State...Again

I have been writing about organisational change for some 50 years.....ever since I was elected ( in May 1968) to the town council of a shipbuilding town on the River Clyde - representing the interests of those whose lives were so fundamentally affected by both the ships and the municipality. I was appalled by the way "the local state" treated them; worked with local activists on various campaigns and self-help groups; became interested in the urban change literature; and wrote of the need for reform.

That led to the chairmanship of its social work committee and, a few years later, to a key position in a new Region responsible for crucial services used by half of Scotland's population - from which position I helped launch an innovative strategy of inclusion...

It was this experience which, 15 years later, persuaded the World Health Organ (WHO) to let me loose in the newly-liberated countries of Central Europe - thereby starting my career as an international consultant in what you might call "capacity" development or "public management".

Books are a frequent trigger for the musings here - last autumn, a small book actually inspired me to pose no fewer than 16 critical questions about the operation of the modern state. The questions included the following -

- Why is the state such a contested idea?
- Where can we find out how well (or badly) public services work?
- How do countries compare internationally in the performance of their public services ?
- Has privatisation lived up to its hype?
- what alternatives are there to state and private provision
- why do governments still spend mega bucks on consultants?
- If we want to improve the way a public service operates, are there any "golden rules"?

Rather than answering the questions directly, I chose to give a brief summary of how each question had been treated; and identified 2-3 books which I considered made the best job of answering each question - ensuring that each title had a good hyperlink.

I returned early in the year to the issue and wrote the following 6 posts which are included in the pamphlet - "[Reforming the State](#)".

Title of post	Motive for writing
<b>Crafting Public Management - why are practitioners so shy?</b>	After decades of following this field, I suddenly realised how few books exist by actual practitioners (who number millions). Are they shy...poor writers...embarrassed....or just too busy???
<b>"Letting the State Back In"? A story about academic tribes</b>	Anglo-Saxons have long had an ambivalent about "the state" - indeed they treat the subject much as they have tended to treat sex.....
<b>The state of the State</b>	Almost 30 years ago, "the State" imploded in central Europe - and the key question people were asking in those countries then was the shape it needed to take for its new function under capitalism. What happened?

<b>How did administrative reform get to be so sexy?</b>	I realised that my writing style is too complicated - and decided to experiment with this sort of table.....  Nb in 2012 I was complaining that it was too boring!! <a href="https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2012/11/why-is-public-management-so-boring.html">https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2012/11/why-is-public-management-so-boring.html</a>
<b>The Politics of reform</b>	Why does everything have to be black or white? The origins and essence of "New Public Management"
<b>A Rare glimpse of our Neighbours' Affairs</b>	My library on public admin reform efforts of the past 40 years is pretty extensive - I write here about the best of the bunch.....

## Crafting effective public management - why are practitioners so shy?

If you want to understand a subject, would you rather choose something written from a theoretical standpoint - or from a practitioner's? Most people, I suspect, would tend to say the latter....and yet, in reality, we land up with the former. Who, for example, trusts political memoirs?

For an **understanding of politics** we look to academics - or at least to those few who write clearly and coherently. And I have to say they tend to be found in history departments rather than departments of politics (or of social sciences such as economics, geography). Although there are honourable exceptions such as David Runciman, Mark Blyth and [Danny Dorling](#)

**Management literature** is slightly different - despite its pretensions, it is hardly a social "science", offering an inter-disciplinary approach. Which means a highly selective one which use case-studies to weave plausible narratives and "theories" (ie tell stories). And that's before we encounter the large number of autobiographies by - and hagiographies about - the business elite.

Tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of books have been produced in recent decades about efforts to **reform state structures** globally. When I started my own reform efforts in the early 1970s we had only Peter Drucker (and perhaps Machiavelli) to guide us - there were literally no books available on the question of managing government bodies.....Now we are swamped by the literature - which I tried to summarise recently in a booklet "[Reforming the State](#)" (which is actually a trailer for a couple of books I am putting together to try to give a **practitioner's view of reform**).

For every thousand academics writing about public management reform, there will be at most one with practical experience. I actually know of only a handful of consultants who have written about their craft - [Michael Barber](#), [John Seddon](#) and [Ed Straw](#) - all of whom are strongly selling their particular version of the truth. Why such shyness?.....Are we consultants just too busy? Or perhaps too overwhelmed by the complexity of everyday events to feel able to offer theories? Or perhaps lacking the necessary discipline in writing and language???



[Crafting Effective Public Administration - reflections from central europe](#) (2018) is my attempt to meet this huge gap in the literature. It's been almost a decade in the making and opens with an account of the circumstances which led me to develop this strange passion for organizational interventions.....It then moves to an overview of the writing about reforming government systems before outlining how reform got underway in the UK and US from 1965-1995. The follows some 60 pages of "Notes on key readings" which can be skimmed or skipped for a first reading...

"State Building in "impervious regimes" 1995-2015" is the paper I presented to a NISPAcee Conference at the Black Sea in 2011. "Back to the Balkans - Why are the new EU member states so impervious to public concerns?" are some more recent thoughts I had on training and Structural Funds in the Lower Danube area.

It is in fact one of two texts I'm writing on the subject - the next one summarises my various reform efforts of the past 50 years and tries to draw the lessons from them....

## **Bringing the State "back in"?? - a story about Academic Tribes**



I was conscious that I had left the first - and most difficult - of my 16 questions unanswered namely - **what do we really mean when we talk about "the state"?**

I was actually in a good position to give a coherent answer - for 50 years my focus has been on the workings of local and central government from my position as both a lecturer on public management issues (17 years); local and regional politician actually managing programmes and local state personnel (22 years); and, finally, a similar

number of years as an international consultant to some 10 national governments.

**But, despite all this, I felt inadequate to the task - and didn't even try to answer the question....I just left it hanging....**

**Let me try to explain why.....**

When I started in academia and local politics (both in 1968), **things were simple - at least in my teaching role. Public administration was basically legalistic - the first books with a managerial bent only started to appear in the early 70s** (Peter Drucker was the only management book easily available then!!). But American material from President Johnson's 1964 [War on Poverty](#) programme had started to trickle over from the Atlantic - particularly [Dilemmas of Social Reform](#) (1967) - coinciding with the student revolutions of 1968.

"Participation" became all the rage - even the British government felt obliged to start its own (small) [community development project](#).

I lapped all of this up – not least because, with the help of the Rowntree Foundation, I was managing a community action project whose work fed into the [ambitious social strategy](#) some of us developed a few years later for Europe's largest Regional authority.....Here is an [early paper which expresses how I was in those days trying to make sense](#) of what I saw as a huge "democratic deficit" in the Local State. In this I was assisted by the extensive political science literature on [the structure of power in US cities](#) which had started in the mid 50s

Urban sociologists [and a few geographers](#) suddenly found the city a site worthy of their critical attention. Land-use was changing dramatically as heavy industry collapsed – to the detriment of the people in areas which, for a time, were called "traditional industrial regions". The academics started to explore embarrassing concepts such as industrial ownership; to talk of the "ruling class" and "workers"; and to focus on how "the local state" treated the poor....

But the language many of these young academics used was Marxist; the concepts pretty tortuous; and so interest in the locality fairly quickly faded....

Bob Jessop is probably the best-known writer on the State – producing [The Capitalist State - Marxist theories and methods](#) in 1982; and [State Theory - putting capitalist states in their place](#) in 1990. Both are difficult to read – his [conclusion to the second book](#) and this article on [State Theory - past, present and future](#) are probably the best things to look at to get a sense of his contribution – particularly the last and most recent which can be seen as a flier for his [latest book of the same title](#).

In 1985 an interesting article mapped the thinking about "the state" in the period from the end of the war to the late 70s – at least from the American perspective (little Marxist text was mentioned). The article was by a political scientist (with a political sociology bent) but the title she chose, [Bringing the state back in](#), was rather curious since this was precisely the period when Margaret Thatcher was making privatisation fashionable (and soon global) and the phrase "[The Washington Consensus](#)" was just about to be coined. It was indeed only in 1997 that the World Bank rowed back from its apparent mission of **sinking the State** – and published its apologia in [The State in a Changing World](#). So all I can imagine is that Skopcol was allowing the state "back into" some academic debate.....in the real world it was being evicted and replaced by commercial entities....

This didn't stop Bob Jessop from reprising the title in 2001 – but taking it in a **completely different approach** – with his sub-title "[revisions, rejections and redirections](#)" giving a good sense of the drift of his (largely incoherent) analysis. This seemed to focus almost entirely on disputes between European Marxist sociologists – and certainly ignored the corpus of work which political scientists on both sides of the Atlantic were doing on, for example, the state and "[Varieties of Capitalism](#)". This [succinct 2007 article by Vivien Schmidt](#) showed the sort of analysis which the Marxists had missed.....In the meantime a famous American sociologist had been developing this very useful [Reading Guide to theories of the state](#)

You can see how different all this is from **the questions I was exploring last autumn – questions, of course, which don't seem to be of any interest to the sociologists nor even (strangely!) to the academic political scientists** – although there are a few exceptions such as [Matt Flinders](#).

The questions I posed last autumn have been of interest mainly to a (declining?) tribe of **public management theorists**... people such as Chris Hood and Chris Pollitt, a political sociologist (Guy Peters) and, to a lesser extent, political scientists such as [Rod Rhodes](#). Rhodes achieved quasi-guru status in his particular tribe by virtue of his development first of the "[Hollowing-Out](#)" [thesis of modern government](#); and then of his anthropological approach to political science - best expressed in his 2010 book with Mark Bevir - [The State as Cultural Practice](#) which basically seems to tell us that "it's all in our minds"!!

This is not the first time I have here accused academics of confusing us all (and themselves) with their failure to talk across disciplinary borders - here is a hint about how the State is treated by the various academic disciplines.....

Discipline	Core assumption	Most Famous exponents (not necessarily typical!)
<b>Sociology</b>	Struggle for power	Durkheim, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, C Wright Mills, Robert Merton, Herbert Simon, Peter Berger, A Etzioni, Ralf Dahrendorf, Z Bauman, Michael Mann. Michael Burawoy
<b>Economics</b>	Rational choice	Adam Smith, Schumpeter, Keynes, P Samuelson, M Friedmann, J Stiglitz, P Krugman
<b>Political science</b>	Rational choice (at least since the 1970s)	Robert Dahl, Gabriel Almond, David Easton, S Wolin, Peter Hall, James Q Wilson, David Held, Bo Rothstein, Francis Fukuyama
<b>Geography</b>	??	Mackinder, David Harvey, Nigel Thrift, Danny Dorling
<b>Public management</b>	Mixed	Woodrow Wilson, Chris Hood, Chris Pollitt, Guy Peters, G Bouckaert,
<b>Anthropology</b>	shared meaning	B Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Claude Levi-Strauss, Margaret Mead, Mary Douglas, Chris Shore, David Graeber
<b>Political economy</b>	draws upon economics, political science, law, history, sociology et al to explain how political factors determine economic outcomes.	JK Galbraith, Susan Strange, Mark Blyth, Wolfgang Streeck, Geoffrey Hodgson, Yanis Varoufakis,

Excerpt from [The State as Cultural Practice](#).....In this book, Rhodes gives quite a succinct summary of previous approaches

*First, they believed the state expressed, or at least could express, the common good of a people bound by cultural and ethnic ties. Second, they thought the social sciences could explain the character of any particular state through a historical narrative about the emerging political organization of a cultural and ethnic nation. Third, they believed that representative institutions, perhaps alongside a constitutional monarchy, could enable citizens to hold accountable political actors who embodied, acted on, and safeguarded the common good of the nation*

*....the idea of the state as an ethical organism is alien to most of us. It was decisively undermined by the First World War, which eroded faith in progress and, so, in developmental historicism. The war led*

*American and British scholars to distance themselves from the German philosophy and political science that was the basis for much of this theory of the state.*

*If the state is not an ethical organism, how should we think about it? If political scientists can no longer believe in developmental historicism, how can they make sense of the state?*

*Throughout the twentieth century most political scientists responded to these questions in ways indebted to modernist-empiricism and positivism. Modernist-empiricists see the state as a set of formal and informal institutions and behaviour, and they try to explain these institutions by appealing to ahistorical structures, classifications, correlations, and mechanisms.<sup>2</sup> Behaviouralists are far more critical of the concept of the state, often rejecting it for sociological terms such as „system“ .....*

*Political theory combined moral philosophy and constitutional history with the theory of the state. From moral philosophy, it inherited the idea of training young elites to take their place in the world by teaching them a canon of great texts. From constitutional history, it inherited a concern to study law, authority, and institutions through the study of legal and historical documents. From the theory of the state, it inherited a concern with classifications of types of government and institutions.*

*The rise of modernist-empiricism and the new empirical topics in the first half of the twentieth century did not challenge this approach to political theory. A view of science as fact gathering and objective reporting gave political scientists no reason to question the epistemic standing of historical research. While fewer and fewer political scientists outside the subfield of political theory did historical research, they did not see their theory colleagues as obstacles to a scientific discipline. To the contrary, political theory complemented the rest of political science. Political theory gave students both a historical survey of ideas set against the backcloth of evolving institutions, and a guide to the concepts used by contemporary political scientists. Thus, the generalist scholar still flourished. Barker (1915, 1944 and 1956) in Britain and Friedrich (1941 and 1952) in America wrote about both political ideas and institutions. They produced comparative institutional studies, histories of ideas, translations of canonical texts (Aristotle 1946; Kant 1949), and many other works. Modernist-empiricism offered little warning of the theoretical departures that positivism later inspired in American political science.*

*Positivist theory took varied forms in the different subfields of political science. In the study of American politics, the most famous theoretical product of behaviouralism was a new version of pluralism, best illustrated by Dahl's classic *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956). But it was in the subfield of comparative politics that positivist hopes were most ambitious.*

*Comparative politics underwent a dramatic expansion in size, scope, prestige, and funding as America became a superpower engaged in the cold war, competing for the allegiance of the new nations that emerged from decolonization in Africa and Asia. When Friedrich and Finer crafted new analytic frameworks for comparative study in the inter-war decades, they grounded their categories in the historical experiences of Europe and America.....*

*If the behaviouralists brought anything new to the critique of the state, it derived precisely from their positivist concept of general theory based on observable phenomena. The behaviouralists argued that the core life of a society should not be sought in the empirically mysterious and dubiously intelligible entity called the state. They thought the social sciences should study empirically observable activities and behaviour. Easton (1953: 108), a doyen of the movement, argued that the state is dispensable in political science since it is empirically unknowable*

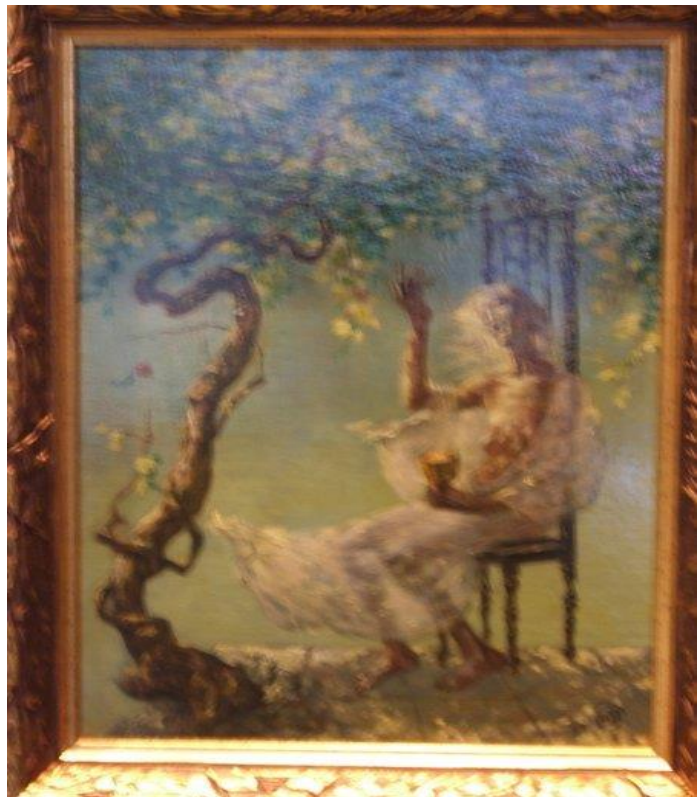


## What can be said about the state of the State??

I realise that the last few posts have tested the patience of my readers. But the last one (however tortuous its construction) was actually quite important in its conclusion that the 5-6 academic disciplines we have come to rely on to make sense of the world have made a pig's breakfast of the job when it comes to the issue of **the role of the State** in the contemporary world

[Libertarian and anarchistic readers](#), I grant you, are not interested in questions such as the shape, strength, role or future of the State - they just want to get it off their backs.

**But most of us still look to government for various types of protection - if not for things such as health and the education of our children.**



And this is the blog of someone who, a bit like Candide, has been trying to understand the role of government (and the shape and meaning of the State) for some 50 years - as a thoroughly practical question - admittedly well-versed in what was initially the small body literature on "public administration" which, after the 1990s, became a tsunami about "public management".

But trying to have a conversation about this not so much with academics as with real people - whether officials, political colleagues or, latterly, beneficiaries in eastern European countries.....

**It's in that open and inquiring spirit that I draft this post for those who actually want to explore the question "How can the State realistically perform better for the average citizen?"**

28 years ago, after all, "the State" imploded in central Europe - and **the key question people were actually asking in those countries then was the shape it needed to take for its new function under capitalism.....** Noone had been prepared for this moment - what little discussion had taken place about reshaping core institutions of the state in the 70s and 80s were academic and had actually been the other way around - about how the transition from capitalism to socialism would be managed! Not that this deterred tens of thousands of advisers from descending on central European capitals in the early 90s and dispensing their advice (full disclosure - I was one of them!)

We basically could be divided into two groups - the "missionaries" whose mission was to sell the snake-oil of privatisation and the idea of "the minimal state"; and the "mercenaries" who focused rather on the mechanics of building up the new institutions required of a "liberal democracy" (see my paper [Missionaries and mercenaries](#)).



More to the point, in 1999 I wrote a book which was effectively a calling card for the officials with whom I would be working in Central Asia where I worked until 2007 - [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time.....

Twenty years later, **it's not unreasonable to ask how that debate panned out** - not just in central Europe - a full 10 of these years have been years of austerity for people in Western Europe whose governments engaged in major cutbacks of state programmes and activities; have increasingly divested themselves of responsibilities (in favour of the private sector) - and/or automated their activities in various forms of E-government....

Let's take 1997 as a starting point - this was the year when the World Bank published [The State in a Changing World](#) - a more measured discussion of what the state was good for than had been possible under the full-scale [Washington Consensus](#) of the previous decade.....

- That report looked at the contrast between **the scope** of state activities and **their effectiveness** (or results). It argued that states needed to concentrate on those activities which only they can carry out - it called this the "capabilities" approach.....

- That, of course, is a very technical approach. It says nothing about intentions - ie the extent to which those "in charge" are seriously interested in the pursuit of **"the public good"**....

- But lots of analysts will tell us that such a pursuit is doomed to failure - Robbie Burns put it well when he wrote "The best-laid plans o' men gang aft a-glax" - best translated as "life is one long F\*\*\*Up" !!

One of my favourite writers - AO Hirschmann - actually devoted a book ("The Rhetoric of Reaction") to examining three arguments conservative writers use for dismissing the hopes of social reformers:

- the **perversity thesis** holds that any purposive action to improve some feature of the political, social, or economic order only serves to exacerbate the condition one wishes to remedy.

- The **futility thesis** argues that attempts at social transformation will be unavailing, that they will simply fail to "make a dent."

- the **jeopardy thesis** argues that the cost of the proposed change or reform is too high as it endangers some previous, precious accomplishment.

**And indeed....we ignore these arguments at our peril....Social reformers all too often allow their hopes to masquerade as serious arguments....**

Most of us (at least of my generation) would like to return to the days, if not of trains running on time, of what we saw as trustworthy (if not totally reliable) state services....We have become aware of the illusion and downright perversity of the talk of "choice".

**Sadly, however, Pandora's box can't be closed or - as a friend and colleague used to put it "We are where we are".....**

- IT, social media and surveillance are [hard \(and ever more developing\) realities](#).....

- Public debt has soared simply because governments considered that banks were too big to fail and "socialised" their losses

- demographic and economic (let alone technological) trends put even more strain on public budgets

**Of course, each country has been and remains very different in public expectations of the State.**

- The public in **Northern European** countries still trust the State and its various custodians and public servants - although the "third sector" has always been important in countries such as Germany (eg health insurance).
- **Southern European countries** such as Italy are completely different - with family and informal networks being the dominant influence. Spain still has a residue of an anarchist streak - particularly in the Basque and Catalonia regions - and therefore a strong cooperative sector.
- **Central and Eastern European** countries suffer from the worst of all worlds - with public services such as education and health chronically underfunded and the private sector taking up the slack for all but the poorest groups; and no cooperative or voluntary sector worth talking about. Even the church in Romania is funded by taxation!!

### The communist and imperialist heritages - the different approaches to analysing reform

<b>National governance (communist legacy)</b>	How to make state bodies effective and accountable to citizens in a culture used to party control and which, since 1989, has seen the state apparatus systemically corrupted by corporate power	Nick Manning Tony Verheijen Mungiu-Pippidi	Fast privatisation (not least of media empires) has created new patrimonial regimes impervious to citizen control. European Structural Funds have deepened the corruption.
<b>National governance (imperialist legacy)</b>	reducing patrimonial power	Robert Chambers Duncan Green Matt Andrews Tom Carrothers	Global aid and consultancy is a massive multi-billion industry which seems impossible to reform. Fashionable nostra come and go - with the local regimes firmly in control....

It was a single book last year - [Dismembered; how the attack on the state harms us all](#) - which started me off on a series of posts which led to my little E-book on the subject "[Reforming the State](#)". Noone really likes the state - it is an easy butt of jokes and has an increasingly malevolent side in the surveillance state.

But it cannot be left simply to subside....Either it has an important function - which would need to be properly articulated for these times and supported.

Or it has passed its sell-by date - in which case we need to take more seriously the various mutual or P2P alternatives which are mooted from time to time....

### Recommended Reading about "the State"

- [Government at a Glance 2017](#); A recent and very handy analysis of the scope and impact of public services. Only for the 35 member states of OECD (so the Baltic States, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia are included - but not Bulgaria or Romania)

- Those who want a more detailed historical treatment can now dip into Francis Fukuyama's engrossing 2 volumes [which he introduces here](#). I never imagined that 700 page books entitled [The Origins of Political Order - from prehuman times to the French Revolution](#): (2011) and [Political Order and Political Decay - from the industrial revolution to the Globalisation of Democracy](#): (2014) could be page-turners!

- [Governance for Health](#) (2012 WHO) A good overview of health indicators and coverage

- [Governance in the 21st century](#) (2001 OECD) An interesting - if rather geeky - discussion of trends
- [Globalisation and the State](#) (2000); a good (and short) overview article
- [The State in a Changing World](#) (World Bank 1997) - the report that indicated the powerful World Bank had had to eat some of its scathing words about the role of the state. But a bit long - and geeky!!
- [The Retreat of the State](#); Susan Strange (1996) Susan Strange was one of the founders of International Political Economy - and, for me, talked the most sense about the contours of the modern state - identifying, for example, the importance of multi-national companies (including the global consultancies; the Mafia; and the technocrats of global institutions). She also authored "Casino Capitalism" (1986); "States and Markets" (1988) and "Mad Money" (1998)
- [The Sources of social power - vol I history from the beginning to 1760AD](#); Michael Mann (1986)  
The first of what turned out to be a 4 volume study, reminding us that "the State" is a modern construct and only one of four types of power (political) - the other three being ideological, military and economic. Not an easy read
- [The Sociology of the State](#); Bertrand Badie and Pierre Birnbaum (1983). A good non-Anglo-saxon view of the subject

If I have to choose one, I would go for [The Modern State](#) by Christopher Pierson (1996); Unlike most books with such titles, this one is clearly written - if a bit boring - and seems to touch base with all relevant issues. Hopefully it will soon be updated to absorb Fukutama's work and Mann's later volumes.

## How did administrative reform get to be so sexy?

After some months of inertia but now back in the mountain house, I'm now able to take a fresh look at drafts which have been lying untouched since the end of last year eg the material on the global efforts to make state organisations more effective which I've been working on for quite some years.

So I have to be ruthless in my editing - particularly since a lot of new material was introduced last autumn - both [a series of posts in the autumn](#) and reflections from my last 4 projects.

A method I've found effective in this editing is to-

- stop reading when the text breaks away to pursue another idea
- reduce the argument of that section to a short and distinctive statement
- develop a table whose middle column reproduces those statements

I find this both helps sharpen the text and ensures the material flows more smoothly. I applied the method to the autumn series and got this result -

- At least 8 very different groups have been active in shaping our thinking about "reform" efforts



- These are - academics, journalists, politicians, think-tankers, global bodies, senior officials, consultants and an indeterminate group
- each uses very different language and ideas - with academics being the most prolific (but tending to talk in jargon amongst themselves; and therefore being ignored by the rest of us)
- In 1989 "the state" crumbled - at least in eastern europe... 20 years on. how do we assess the huge efforts to make its operations more "effective"??
- 15 question offer a key to the most interesting writing on the matter.
- Different parts of the world have their own very different approaches and ways of talking about reform. English language material has tended to dominate the literature; but
- Scandinavians, Germans and French let alone South Americans, Chinese and Indians have also developed important ideas and experience - of which English-speakers tend to be blithely unaware.
- Two very different "world views" have held us in thrall over the past 50 years....a "third" and more balanced (eg the "new public service") has been trying to emerge
- We seem to be overwhelmed by texts on reform experience - but most written by academics. Where are the journalists who can help the public make sense of it all ?
- Some old hands have tried to summarise the experience for us in short and clear terms. The lesson, they suggest, is that little has changed...
- Perhaps the time has come to give the doers a voice?

I'm still working on the material - which is currently about 110 pages long and called [How Did Administrative Reform get to be so sexy?](#) Those interested in seeing it can access it on [my website here...](#)

## The Politics of Reform

The world is an unruly place and has sometimes to be kept in order - whether by force or persuasion. And presumably because of our need for simplification - the battle is generally between two sides. Sun versus earth; Catholicism v Protestantism; Cavaliers v Roundheads; Left v Right; Christians v Muslims. What they call "[manichean thinking](#).....Those in the middle - whether liberals or greens - generally get ground down between such enmities...

So it has been for the past in my professional field - of what used to be called public administration and is now better known as public management. Until 1980 things were actually quite boring - with "public administration" being largely legalistic and a description of conventions governing the "machinery of government" in particular countries.

The subject had been a bit more interesting in the United States - at least at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the blatant collusion between big business and the political class made reform an explosive issue. Indeed it actually led to the founding of public administration as we know it - with none less than [Woodrow Wilson](#) leading the way....

In Britain, the politics may have been more muted - but let's not forget that it was the infamous [charge of the Light Brigade](#) in 1854 during the Crimean War which arguably [created the conditions which led to the creation of the British civil service system](#) which remained intact for more than 100 years. [A Royal Commission on the Civil Service \(Northcote-Trevelyan\)](#) had been set up in the early 1850s but had, frankly, been laboring until that military action exposed the disastrous nature

of the aristocratic leadership in the country as a whole - it was the spark which led to the demands for a more meritocratic approach.....

And the early 1960s saw strong questioning again of British administrative traditions - epitomized in the establishment in 1966 of the Royal (or Fulton) Commission on the Civil Service which laid the foundations to a much more managerial approach in the 1970s which became increasingly aggressive in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher. Richard Chapman's [The Civil Service Commission - a bureau biography 1855-1991](#) (2005) is the best guide to this process - although B Guy Peters' [The Politics of Bureaucracy - an introduction to comparative public administration](#); (1978) was probably the first comparative and sociological approach to the subject.

But it was probably [The Private Government of Public Money](#); Hugh Heclo and Aaron Wildavsky (1974) which first made this subject really sexy in Britain!

Coinciding (?), however, with the breaching of the Berlin Wall, the phrase "[New Public Management](#)" (NPM for short) signalled that we had a new ideology on our hands. Christopher Hood is credited with having invented the term and described it very clearly [in this 1995 article](#)

#### New Public Management (NPM)

No.	Doctrine	Meaning	Typical Justification
1	<b>Hands-on professional management of Public Organisations</b>	Visible management at the top; free to manage	Accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility
2.	<b>Explicit standards and measures of performance</b>	Goals and targets defined and measured as indicators of success	Accountability means clearly stated aims
3.	<b>Greater emphasis on output controls</b>	Resource allocation and rewards linked to performance	Need to stress results rather than procedures
4.	<b>Shift to disaggregation of units</b>	Unbundle public sector into units organised by products with devolved budgets	Make units manageable; split provision and production; use contracts
5.	<b>Greater competition</b>	Move to term contracts and tendering procedures	Rivalry as the key to lower costs and better standards
6	<b>Stress on private sector styles of management practice</b>	Move away from military-style ethic to more flexible hiring, pay rules, etc	Need to apply "proven" private sector management tools
7.	<b>Stress on greater discipline and parsimony</b>	Cut direct costs; raise labour discipline	Need to check resource demands; do more with less

#### How much is really new?

In all the excitement of new rhetoric, it is all too easy to imagine that we are confronting these issues for the first time: in fact argument about how to run government and public services goes back many centuries and the present debates are in some ways a replay, in different language, of those debates. Whilst the technology and skills have certainly presented us with new opportunities, perhaps a touch of humility or sense of history might help us in these frenetic times?



1991 saw the publication of a particularly interesting and strangely neglected book which took such a perspective and managed to produce 99 different "solutions" which had been advanced at one time or another to the issue of improving administrative performance.

If ever we needed a lesson in the need for a measure of scepticism toward the enthusiastic marketing of the latest management fashion, we have it in the brief list of these 99 solutions - many of which happily contradict one another. Sometimes the need for continuity in staffing is stressed: sometimes the need for turnover. Sometimes openness; sometimes secrecy.....

Hood and Jackson suggest that we tend to use three general "stereotypes" in our thinking about organisations -

#### Three classic organizational stereotypes

	<b>Military Stereotype</b>	<b>Business Stereotype</b>	<b>Religious Stereotype</b>
<b>Slogan</b>	Run it like the army	Run it like a business	Run it like a monastic order
<b>Work force</b>	Limited career	Hired and fired	Service for life
<b>Motivation</b>	Fear of punishment Hope of honours	Fear of dismissal Hope for money	Fear of damnation Hope for salvation
<b>Control</b>	Audit of war	Impersonal	Faith; social acceptance
<b>Objective setting</b>	Orders of day	Profit	Worked out at length in discussion and reflection
<b>Belief</b>	Obedience to leadership brings efficiency	Incentives to reduce waste and search for innovations	Lifetime internal commitment limits rash selfish ideas

*Hood and Jackson (1991)*

The third column actually anticipates the various efforts which have been made in the past decade to find a new synthesis to PA and NPM

Just how bad the writing can get in this subject is shown by [A Handbook on Transformation and Transitioning Public Sector Governance](#); Emerson J Jones (2018)

## A rare glimpse of Neighbours' Affairs

For decades, tens of billions of euros have been poured each year by the EC into educational, Cultural, scientific and cross-border European projects - such as the Erasmus and [Interreg](#) programmes. Clearly these develop networks of interested individuals who - at least for the duration of the programmes - have learned how things are done in different countries.

But, as I've [noted here several times](#), this hasn't obviously produced a European public. Newspapers remain firmly national in their focus - despite the valiant efforts of [Le Courier International](#) to encourage an interest in their neighbours' affairs by running translated articles. But no one has followed its example - although The Guardian does cooperate from time to time with a few other European papers on special features.

Perhaps insular Britain is not the best example (Die Zeit and Le Monde's global coverage has always been better than the UK's) but even well-educated Brits could probably tell you little more about their European neighbours other than that Finnish schools and the French health system are the best; that most European railway networks are vastly superior to the UK's; and that German cities and society are impeccable!

Of course, beneath the surface, there is a huge amount of European networking going on at the level of professional associations - particularly universities whose various academic disciplines still have the budgets to bring people together in Conferences, networks and Programmes.

My own field of public administration, however, has had a fairly low profile compared with, for example, the [European Consortium for Political Research](#) which boasts no fewer than 18,000 political scientists in its ranks. True, there is a [European Group for Public Administration](#) but the link hardly indicates great activity and certainly [the NISPAcee](#) Annual Conference has seemed the only place worth attending for me - with its focus on transition societies...

In 2000 Chris Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert produced [Public Management Reform: a comparative analysis; new public management, Governance and the neo-Weberian state](#) which rapidly became the key reference for the subject in Europe. There was also [this EC programme](#) which also brought together some academics in PA from central and south-eastern European universities...

The problem perhaps is that public admin scholars focus, by definition, on "the state" which takes such different structures, meanings and traditions in the various European countries. And PA scholars have also tended to be pragmatic people - in the "positivist mould and slow therefore to pick up on philosophical and "constructivist" schools of thinking.... Bevir and Rhodes' paper [Traditions and Governance](#) (2003) and Fred Thompson's paper on [The 3 faces of public management](#) (2008) are two very rare forays into what was threatening to become a rather boring field too dominated, frankly, by Anglo-Saxon thinking

Now an Italian scholar has somehow dramatically changed to break all of that open - Edoardo Ongaro produced last year a fascinating-looking title - [Public Administration and Philosophy - an introduction](#) (2017) - building on a comparative book he wrote in 2009 - [Public Management Reform and Modernization: Trajectories of Administrative Change in Italy, France, Greece, Portugal and Spain](#) (2009)

But he has now brought together [in 63 chapters](#) a massive and fascinating-looking collection - [The Palgrave Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe](#); ed Edoardo Ongaro and Sandra van Thiel (2018) coming in at almost 1400 pages. [This Google book excerpt](#) covers most of the first 100 odd pages...including, for the first time, linguistic issues...and the link on the title gives

the annexes on the different continental admin traditions (40 pages) with someone from one continent reflecting on another's tradition. Chapter [Two can also be found here](#)

There have been other such collections - from Oxford, Routledge and Jossey-Bass I recall eg [Oxford Handbook of Public Administration](#) (2003) - but this one seems in a league of its own in not only its width and depth but the quality of the writing of at least those parts I'm able to read....

.It is the first really comprehensive look at different aspects of managing public services in different European countries!!

I'm sorely tempted to buy it - despite its 210 pound price tag (down from 260). These days we're expected to pay upwards of 50 euros for a 250 page specialist book .....so it's a bargain!!

## Writing and Reading...mainly



In the middle of the year, I got very exercised by the craft of writing - and first started to raise the question of the future of the blog....

Three of the early posts in this section focus on Brexit - and the last one is a rare comment on Trump's antics...

<b>Title of post</b>	<b>Why I wrote it.....</b>
<b>In Praise of Blogging</b>	it may be a narcissistic indulgence - but blogging does discipline the mind, helps develop a good memory and allows archiving...
<b>The reassertion of the "Nation-State"?</b>	What exactly is Brexit asserting itself against - globalisation? Supra-nationalism?? And for? English identity?
<b>Bored with Brexit</b>	The rest of Europe has become bored with Brexit
<b>Chaos Looms (August)</b>	The British government starts to prepare for "No Deal"
<b>Why we need healthy scepticism - not corrosive cynicism</b>	Fifty years ago, we didn't need inviting to get involved in politics - we had role models and change was in the air.... The older generation patently needed replacing, we thought, and we were the ones to do it. How different things are fifty years on! Cynicism has been at full blast for at least the past decade - with politicians dismissed as self-serving and useless.....
<b>Ten tricks for fast reading</b>	Somebody needs to call halt to "self-expression" and introduce a bit of self-discipline!
<b>A Priceless Guide</b>	A shameless bit of marketing for my draft book - "Dispatches to the next generation - the short version"
<b>Naked economists</b>	We're so overwhelmed by books about the global crisis that I thought it about time someone did a short annotated bibliography
<b>Thanks to my Friends</b>	The blog has stuttered a bit this year.... These days, I need writing which jolts me - not for its own sake but to help identify minds which look at the world in original ways - but which also understand that clear language is an essential tool for such originality
<b>Vignette of a post-industrial town...</b>	Reflections from abroad - on my home-town
<b>The future of the Blog</b>	Some choices
<b>In Praise of the Butterfly</b>	Why I blog
<b>RIP</b>	Leonard Cohen
<b>The Writer's Craft</b>	in the hands of a skilful writer or journalist - the words and conversations of ordinary people can be moulded into powerful literature....
<b>The US as a rogue nation</b>	On Trump's visit to the UK

## In Praise of Blogging

The word "blog" has become so ubiquitous a term that we tend to have forgotten its etymology - "web log". An eloquent essay [Why I blog](#) surveys the world of blogging and gives this account of the second term -

*A ship's log owes its name to a small wooden board, often weighted with lead, that was for centuries attached to a line and thrown over the stern. The weight of the log would keep it in the same place in the water, like a provisional anchor, while the ship moved away. By measuring the length of line used up in a set period of time, mariners could calculate the speed of their journey (the rope itself was marked by equidistant "knots" for easy measurement). As a ship's voyage progressed, the course came to be marked down in a book that was called a log.*

*In journeys at sea that took place before radio or radar or satellites or sonar, these logs were an indispensable source for recording what actually happened. They helped navigators surmise where they were and how far they had travelled and how much longer they had to stay at sea. They provided accountability to a ship's owners and traders. They were designed to be as immune to faking as possible. Away from land, there was usually no reliable corroboration of events apart from the crew's own account in the middle of an expanse of blue and grey and green; and in long journeys, memories always blur and facts disperse. A log provided as accurate an account as could be gleaned in real time.*

It continues -

*As you read a log, you have the curious sense of moving backward in time as you move forward in pages—the opposite of a book. As you piece together a narrative that was never intended as one, it seems—and is—more truthful.*

*Logs, in this sense, were a form of human self-correction. They amended for hindsight, for the ways in which human beings order and tidy and construct the story of their lives as they look back on them. Logs require a letting-go of narrative because they do not allow for a knowledge of the ending. So they have plot as well as dramatic irony—the reader will know the ending before the writer did.*

### How Blogging improves your Life

Of course, blogging is seen by many as a bit narcissistic- a reflection of the "selfie" age we live in...But there are blogs....and blogs....Self-indulgent "look at me!" ones and blobs of erudite text which few can understand.....And it can get you into trouble .... One academic blogger, famously, found himself out of work as a result of his blogging (in the early days) and wrote to tell the tale - in [A Blogger's Manifesto](#)

I would like to hope that readers come to my site looking for some originality - be it the *diversity of the topics (and experiences)* the posts deal with; *the thematic summaries* (eg on memoirs or mountain villages); *the range of the references* in the hyperlinks; *the glimpses of rarely seen painting traditions* and, who knows, perhaps even the *celebration of good writing*.

One writer offers no less than [15 justifications for why people should blog](#). I would go with nine -

1. You'll become a **better thinker**. Because the process of writing includes recording thoughts on paper, the blogging process makes you question what you thought you knew. You will delve deeper into the matters of your life and the worldview that shapes them.

2. You'll become a **better writer**. - once, that is, you start to reread your material or get feedback which shows your text was ambiguous...



3. You'll live a **more intentional life**. Once you start writing about your life and the thoughts that shape it, you'll begin thinking more intentionally about who you are, who you are becoming, and whether you like what you see or not. And that just may be reason enough to get started.

4. You'll develop **an eye for meaningful things**. By necessity, blogging requires a filter. It's simply not possible to write about every event, every thought, and every happening in your life. Instead, blogging is a never-ending process of choosing to articulate the most meaningful events and the most important thoughts. This process of choice helps you develop an eye for meaningful things.

5. It'll lead to **healthier life habits** (although my partner doesn't agree!). Blogging requires time, devotion, commitment, and discipline. And just to be clear, those are all good things to embrace - they will help you get the most out of your days and life.

6. You'll **inspire others**. Blogging not only changes your life, it also changes the life of the reader. And because blogs are free for the audience and open to the public, on many levels, it is an act of giving. It is a selfless act of service to invest your time, energy, and worldview into a piece of writing and then offer it free to anybody who wants to read it. Others will find inspiration in your writing... and that's a wonderful feeling.

7. You'll become **more well-rounded in your mindset**. After all, blogging is an exercise in give-and-take. One of the greatest differences between blogging and traditional publishing is the opportunity for readers to offer input. As the blog's writer, you introduce a topic that you feel is significant and meaningful. You take time to lay out a subject in the minds of your readers and offer your thoughts on the topic. Then, the readers get to respond. And often times, their responses in the comment section challenge us to take a new, fresh look at the very topic we thought was so important in the first place.

8. It'll serve as a personal journal. It trains our minds to track life and articulate the changes we are experiencing. Your blog becomes a **digital record of your life** that is saved "in the cloud." As a result, it can never be lost, stolen, or destroyed in a fire.

9. You'll become **more confident**. Blogging will help you discover more confidence in your life. You will quickly realize that you do live an important life with a unique view and have something to offer others.

That puts it rather well - although I would amplify the first point by emphasising the sharpened critical faculty regular blogging also brings to the reading of what others write. Thomas Hardy was spot on when he (apparently) said - "How can I know what I think until I read what I write?" You thought you knew something but, when you read back your own first effort at explanation, you immediately have questions - both of substance and style.

But this also conveys itself very quickly to changes in the way that you read other people's material - you learn more and faster from a critical dialogue (even with yourself) than from passive reading.....

That's why they say that the best way to learn about a subject is to (try to) write a book about it (rather than reading several books). It sounds paradoxical (as well as presumptuous) but it's actually true - and the reason is simple.

When you start to put on paper an explanation of what you imagined you had understood from reading some books, you quickly realise that you had not properly understood the issue; and that you have questions with which you need to **interrogate** the books. Translating your imagined

understanding into a written summary allows a dialogue with the books - which has the added advantage of helping you better remember the issues....

Blogger [Duncan Green](#) makes another important point that -

*regular blogging builds up a handy, time-saving archive. I've been blogging daily since 2008. OK, that's a little excessive, but what that means is that essentially I have a download of my brain activity over the last 7 years - almost every book and papers I've read, conversations and debates.*

*Whenever anyone wants to consult me, I have a set of links I can send (which saves huge amounts of time). And raw material for the next presentation, paper or book.*

Green is spot on about the help a blog like mine offers in finding old material...you just type in the keyword and the relevant post with its quotes and hyperlinks generally appears immediately - a record of your (and others') brain activity that particular morning. I also have a file of more than 100 pages for each year with raw text and thousands of hyperlinks which didn't make it to the blog.....an amazing archive of months of brain activity which, of course, needs a bit more time to access.....

But both he and the list of justifications underestimate the significance of the blog's facility to archive and find hyperlinks. Very little of what I download do I actually read - although it is there in carefully labelled folders. But one of the world's great frustrations for people like me is remembering you've downloaded a paper but not knowing which folder it's in...that's where the blog archives are priceless.....

## **Brexit - and the reassertion of the "Nation-State"?**

Readers may sometimes wonder why I so [rarely discuss Brexit here](#) - last time was a year ago!

That I know when to defer to my betters is only half of the answer since most of my posts are a combination of a personal slant and hyperlinks to recommended articles or books by those I respect...

Another bit of the answer is that one of the central purposes of this blog has been (and remains) the celebration of writing that can pass the test of time. And, since noticing last year the extent of my non-English readership (see page 10 of [Common Endeavour - the 2017 posts](#)), I try a bit harder to act as an interpreter of good English-language writing on important topics to such an audience. But I am bored with the fixation of so much journalism on the pantomime antics of wicked witch Donald Trump - but equally offended by the barren, wooden language used by so many academics....

**Am I saying that there are no journalists or academics who have written anything about Brexit which is worth sharing with my audience?** Not quite - although my list of such endeavours is a rather short one, with Chris Grey's [The Brexit Blog](#) having pride of place. **Perhaps the reason for my silence is that I can't quite believe that my country seems so intent on destroying itself - from a combination of public and media prejudice; and an incestuous political elite....**

Brexit is the prime but by no means only example of a state apparently trying to assert itself against the forces of.....what exactly?

- **Globalisation?** That can hardly be the case when about the only thing the Brits seemed to like about the European Union was the single market of which indeed they were, with Jacques Delors,

one of the main architects; and when the current government clearly wants to push for maximum free trade.

- **Supranationalism?** The Federalist ambitions of the EU's founders - so clearly evident in the [recent statements of Martin Schulz](#) - have always been viewed with a mixture of bafflement and hostility by Brits and UK governments. But the Brits had successfully negotiated a semi-detached status with the EU and a clear agreement that it would not be bound by any further "closer union" agreements....

No! **The two things which have stuck in British craws** have been (1) the overriding of parliamentary power by a combination of [European judges and Commission regulations](#) (played up by a consistently hostile British media); and (ii), in recent years, a feeling that the country no longer belonged to them - that foreign [immigration](#) had gone too far.

So what exactly is being asserted? At one time we might have said "**parliamentary sovereignty**" but the reluctance of the British government to allow Parliament any meaningful vote has blown that illusion apart. And [this important article by Bogdanor](#) reminds us, in any case, that it only governments can actually negotiate....

Nor is it the **power of the British State** that's being asserted - indeed that never appears to have been so weak, with citizens rejecting the recommendations of all its political parties during the referendum campaign; and the present government seemingly [intent on open conflict with the forces of international capital](#).

Rather it seems more [a sense of English identity](#) that was being asserted on June 23 2016 - I say "English" simply because Scottish and (Northern) Irish citizens resoundingly voted to remain in the EU. The referendum result, however, brought home very powerfully [the stark existence of two very different Englands](#) - that of the cosmopolitan (multinational) cities and "left-behinds" in smaller towns. A contrast which is being emphasised in all accounts of Trump America - whose "America First" doctrine indeed is a powerful example of the new nationalism which seems now rampant.

But the incompetence on display from those who lead Brexit has stunned everyone. It was bad enough that (i) no one had actually done any serious thinking about withdrawal and (ii) the new Prime Minister chose to divide the political responsibility for the withdrawal "strategy" between 3 Ministers ([and departments](#)) - one being the pantomime figure who, weeks before the referendum, was actually so torn about the issue that he actually drafted 2 completely different articles - [one of which argued for staying in the EU](#). Not that this stopped him from being the highest profile figure on the Leave campaign trail.

But the confusion was compounded after the PM was tempted into a General Election in June 2017 (by an apparent 20% lead in the polls) and emerged a sadly depleted figure leading a minority government dependent on a small North Irish party of hard-right bigots.

Inexplicably for many, the public mood does not seem to have changed significantly in the 21 months since the referendum. Indeed, some months ago, commentators were suggesting that the mood in England was nothing short of [a return to the early 1940s when the country stood alone and when Dunkirk was celebrated](#) not as the defeat it was but as a glorious victory. It's not insignificant that the blockbuster films "[Dunkirk](#)" and "[Darkest Hour](#)" have pulled such large audiences in the

country these past few months. [An important article this week](#) (in London Review of Books) mines the same vein in arguing -

*This is the sort of nostalgia which Peter Ammon, the outgoing German ambassador in London, identified recently when he complained that Britain was investing in a vision of national isolation that Churchill had played up (and vastly exaggerated) in his wartime rhetoric.*

*Do they even believe the myth, or is it an expedient way of bashing opponents while pursuing some ulterior goal? Historical re-enactment may be fine for the Daily Mail and the grassroots, but it doesn't seem a strong enough motivation to support a professional political career.*

*We need to know not just what kind of past the Brexiteers imagine, but what kind of future they are after.*

*One disconcerting possibility is that figures such as Fox and Rees-Mogg might be willing to believe the dismal economic forecasts, but look on them as an attraction.*

*This isn't as implausible as it may sound. Since the 1960s, conservatism has been defined partly by a greater willingness to inflict harm, especially in the English-speaking world. The logic is that the augmentation of the postwar welfare state by the moral pluralism of the 1960s produced an acute problem of 'moral hazard', whereby benign policies ended up being taken for granted and abused. Once people believe things can be had for free and take pleasure in abundance, there is a risk of idleness and hedonism.....*

*As the theory behind Thatcherism had it, government services shrink everybody's incentives to produce, compete and invest. They reduce the motivation for businesses to deliver services, and ordinary people's desire to work. Toughness, even pain, performs an important moral and psychological function in pushing people to come up with solutions. This style of thinking drove Thatcher through the vicious recession of the early 1980s.*

*The fear of 'moral hazard' produces a punitive approach to debtors, be they households, firms or national governments, the assumption being that anything short of harshness will produce a downward spiral of generosity, forgiveness and free-riding, eventually making the market economy unviable. Osborne liked to claim (against all the evidence coming from the bond markets) that if Britain kept borrowing, lenders would lose trust in the moral rectitude of the government and interest rates would rise. Gratification must be resisted. Pain works. Only pain forces people to adapt and innovate.*

An [article from the inimitable Ian Jack](#) drew my attention today to a small book by an historian which argues that countries such as the UK and the US are suffering what he calls [cultural dementia](#)



## Bored with Brexit



A once-proud country slowly sinks under the waves - and the rest of the world stifles a yawn....This is the news two of the few writers I value bring back from their recent visits to what the Brits call "the continent".

[The Brexit Blog](#) is about the only thing worth reading about the subject - and is crafted by organisational theorist Chris Grey who was the first this week to [bring back from a visit to France the news that few people in Europe find the subject of the UK's withdrawal from the bloc of the slightest bit of interest](#)....We were always "semi-detached" - at least as a political class - people may regret our going

but it was not a great surprise.....So "bring it on" - and sooner rather than later - is the general attitude of the European political class.

Andrew Rawsley writes a weekly column in The Observer and [confirmed that with today's piece](#)

The month of May saw [quite a bit of parliamentary drama](#) but the hard reality of Brexit (of whatever form) now looms - and the hope many had a year ago that the whole thing would go away now looks an increasingly forlorn one....Exactly a year ago, a knowledgeable (if disgraced) politician even published a book with the title [Brexit - no Exit; why \(in the end\) Britain won't leave the EU](#); (2017).

Britain's "negotiating" tactics have been, it is widely recognised, hapless - if not offensive - reflecting not just the divided counsels inside "government" but a total lack of preparation and conviction.....And the longer the farce has continued, the more it has reminded the Europeans of what a bloody nuisance the Brits have been in the "project". Better, they think, that we should piss far away from the tent..... Even left-wingers are recognising this - see [this week's initiative The Full Brexit](#)

Coincidentally I wrote this post in August which Owen Hatherley (author of [Landscapes of Communism](#)) chose for his new book [TransEurope Express](#) on what the changing shape of European cities tells us about their respective visions....

### **A Brexit reading list**

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2017/07/28/brexit-summer-reading-guide/>

[Brexit and Beyond - rethinking the futures of Europe](#) a measured 300 page book from University College London Press

<http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.com/2018/06/the-nhs-and-brexit-dividend.html>

[Brexit - a reading list of post-referendum publications by parliament and the devolved assemblies](#) (2018)

[Brexit - legal and constitutional issues](#)

[Beyond Brexit? How to assess the UK's Future](#); Janice Morphet (2017)

[How Europe shapes British Public Policy](#); Janice Morphet (2014)

<https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/08/make-left-great/>

[The UK and the EU - what would Brexit mean for the EU?](#); ed A Moeller and T Oliver (2014)

## **Chaos Looms**

I've been in Scotland again this past week - looking for a place to spend winters not least to put some of my personal affairs in order before Britain separates from the Continent. Talk in recent negotiations of a "transition period" had made many of us imagine that time was still on our side but the past week seems to have seen a hardening of positions and an increasingly cavalier (if not positive) attitude by British conservative parliamentarians to the idea of "No Deal" with the EU. This raises the very real possibility that the UK will drop out of the EU on 29 March next year. Clearly there are no contingency plans in place to allow such a development - and a fairly immediate result will be total chaos.

Mutual agreements have not been made with the European Aviation Body which manages landing slots - nor with relevant customs and food authorities to ensure the flow of containers at borders. For example, it appears that nothing less than 95% of vets who operate in food production in the UK are EU nationals (British vets prefer to work with pets) and a lot of the EU nationals are leaving the country

One [of the foremost commentators on the issue](#) puts it like this -

*"No-deal" is probably the most demented policy put forward by mainstream British politicians in the modern era. To see how it would work in practice, this piece looks at what would happen on day one. Doing this for the whole economy would take countless pages of Stephen-King-style horror, so it's stripped down to one topic: food. This is the story of how our system for importing and exporting food implodes almost instantly.*

*You may remember 'Brexit means Brexit' - that nursery rhyme from the bygone days of late 2016. It was false. But no-deal, on the other hand, really does mean no-deal. The withdrawal treaty comes as one package, so if Theresa May fails to secure it, everything falls down. There are no deals on anything. March 30th 2019 becomes Year Zero. Overnight, British meat products cannot be imported into the EU. To bring these types of goods in, they have to come from a country with an approved national body whose facilities have been certified by the EU. But there has been no deal, so there's no approval.*

There's more discussion of the issue at [the excellent Brexit Blog](#). And the [EU Referendum blog](#) gives a great daily commentary on the whole withdrawal process. Its author, Richard North, may have been one of the original Brexiteers but his analysis of government ineptitudes and shallow media reporting is essential reading.....

While I've been here, I've been reading Tim Shipman's [Fall Out - a year of political mayhem](#) which tells the detailed story of political events in the UK from the immediate aftermath of the June 23 2016 Referendum until the end of December 2017 - including the General Election which was suddenly called in April 2017. It is a frightening story of myopia and. manoeuvring

**Updates;** August brought news that, in the absence of any national strategy to deal with the implications of a No-Deal scenario, local municipalities [have been preparing their own.....](#)with horrific results

## Why we need healthy scepticism - not corrosive cynicism

I have just finished a short book which I consider a model for the sort of writing which these troubled times of ours very much needs. **Matt Flinders** may be an academic - but he came up the hard way and, unlike most academics, he's interested in communicating with the wider public. His [Defending Politics - why democracy matters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century](#) marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a book which impressed me a lot when I first read it in my university days - [In Defence of Politics](#) by [Bernard Crick](#) (1962).



Indeed the argument in Crick's book that politics **was an important and honourable activity probably played a role in my becoming in 1968 a local politician.** Of course the election in 1964 of a Labour Government - after 13 years of Conservative rule - was another important influence. As was my interest in regional development and politics - and the writings of Labour and leftist intellectuals such as [Tony Crosland](#) and [John Mackintosh](#). The latter was a tutor of mine whom I met subsequently in parliament to discuss his take on local government reorganisation and devolution - Crosland the author of the definitive [The Future of Socialism](#) (1956) whom I had been honoured to host when he visited local party HQ in my home town.....

Fifty years ago, graduates like me didn't need inviting to get involved in politics - we had role models and change was in the air....The older generation patently needed replacing, we thought, and we were the ones to do it.

How different things are fifty years on! Cynicism has been at full blast for at least the past decade - with politicians dismissed as self-serving and useless.....

Flinders' book is a counterblast to all this, suggesting that the language of "rights" and "consumer choice" conceals deeper forces which have undermined our understanding of the necessarily incremental and collective "give and take" of the political process.

He identifies 8 key factors which have made an impact in the past half century..... listed in the left-hand column. The rest of the table is my attempt to summarise his analysis - always a useful discipline!!

I liked the book a lot - not least because it is short and yet is clearly based on a good grasp of extensive literature.

But the last column indicates the inevitable weakness that comes from such a brave attempt to cover such extensive ground...

<b>Changes in Context</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Line of argument</b>
"Decline of deference"	Greater education, sense of security and of rights	Hypercriticism	Politicians and those concerned with politics need to show courage and realism
"Growth of overload"	State overwhelmed by public expectations	Unrealistic expectations	
"Move from government to "governance"	Privatisation, contracting out has led to more complex organisational structure	Inertia, impasse	Need to assert importance of "the commons" ie collective endeavour
"Growth of globalisation"	Not just economic but legal and informational	Blame can easily be shifted to impersonal forces	??
"Impact of technology"	Move away from door-to-door and personal; aggression on social media	Easy to find scapegoats	Need for cool voices
"Accountability explosion"	Range of agencies monitoring state bodies for performance	Blame culture	More realism
"Ideological blur"	Parties concentrate around the floating voter; journalists focus on trivia	Voters feel voiceless; opening for extremists	
"Flight from reality"	Academics talking to one another rather than the public; media focus on trivia	Opening for extremists	

What I particularly liked was the way he gathered 5-6 books together at various points in his argument to illustrate the various points he was making....

He is particularly angry about the role journalism has played in the past couple of decades in the demonisation of politics. The recent [collapse of Newsweek magazine](#) is just the latest sign of the collapse of editorial standards - and the perversity of the business model based on reader clicks....

Flinders rehearsed the basic argument of the book in his inaugural Professorial lecture in 2010 - which you will find [here on Alastair Campbell's blog](#)  
<https://blog.oup.com/category/series-columns/matthew-flinders-politics/>

His indeed was one of the first of what seemed to be for a moment a veritable flood of books challenging the very relevance of political studies in at least the anglo-saxon world

[The Political Imagination - a rallying call to university professors of politics](#) (Flinders 2014)

[Bridging the Relevance Gap](#); Matthew Wood (2014)

[Human Wellbeing and the lost relevance of political science](#); Bo Rothstein (2014)

[The relevance of political science](#); Stoker, Pierre and Peters (2015)



But Gerry Stoker's [Why Politics Matters - making democracy work](#); (2004; 2016) had anticipated the updating of Crick's 1962 book...- as did [Why We Hate Politics](#); Colin Hay (2007)

## Ten Tricks for Fast Reading

I did a rare thing yesterday - I went back to the Defending Politics book I had just finished and reread it from beginning to end, this time marking the key sections with a pencil.

I had started my last post by saying that it was a "model of the sort of writing we need in these times" - and then went on to [create a table which explored different aspects of the 8 basic arguments the book presented](#).

I would now like to try to identify what it was that so impressed me - and to use that hopefully to make a wider point about the craft of publishing our thoughts

### What I liked about "Defending Politics"...

- **The book was short** (180 pages) - almost an extended essay. You felt the guy had a thesis - and knew how to hone it down to its essentials
- The **text was broken up** - every third or fourth page or so had a heading or an indented section which signalled a movement in the argument. My eyes glaze over when I see a chapter of 30 pages of densely-written text - with no graphics, tables or pictures to relieve the pressure....
- each chapter gave an **early hint of the basic argument it would present**. This was clearly someone who had reread his text with a reader's eye; asked himself what it was saying; and then ensured that the words actually expressed his intended meaning!
- there were lots of **book references** - **but not of the normal sort** in footnotes; or end bibliographies (which often leave me with the feeling of one up-manship!). These were, rather, short lists in the body of the text - generally exemplifying different sides of an argument.

I readily admit to being a policy geek - and have therefore too readily exposed myself to turgid academic prose. But my patience started to wear thin some years ago with books on important topics which were simply unreadable. Life is simply too short to waste time on writers who feel they have to [use clumsy sentence structure](#) and/or pad their material with verbosity. A year or so ago I revealed some litmus tests I used whether to buy/read a book - as well as my [ten tricks for fast reading and comprehension](#) - which are worth repeating -

## How to get the most out of a non-fiction book

### General

- Read a lot (from an early age!)
- Read widely (outside your discipline)
- Read quickly (skim)
- If the author doesn't write in clear and simple language, move on to another book asap. Life's too short.....Bad writing is a good indicator of a confused mind

### For each book

- before doing anything else - **read the reviews** (surf)
- **identify the questions** these suggest - you should never open a book without knowing what you want to get out of it!
- **Mark** (with a pencil) **passages you both like and don't like** - with underlines, question-marks, ticks, comments and expletives

- Write brief notes on the main themes and arguments (this will help you remember better; and also helps build up an archive)
- see whether the author explicitly recognises and properly discusses other schools of thought than the one (s)he is pushing
- Check the bibliography at the end - to see if there are any obvious names missing (I grant you that this requires some familiarity with the subject)

Later in the year, I got so exercised by the casual way we readers were being treated that I dared to [spell out some advice to writers and publishers](#)

For readers, I now have a litmus test for any book which catches my eye - actually not one but four -

1. Does it reveal in its preface/introduction and bibliography an intention to honour what has been written before on the subject?
2. Indeed does it clearly list and comment on what has been identified as the key reading and indicate why, despite such previous efforts, the author feels compelled to add to our reading burden??? And can you, the reader, identify any obvious gaps in that list?
3. Can the author clearly demonstrate (eg in the introduction or opening chapter) that the book is the result of long thought and not just an inclination to jump on the latest bandwagon?
4. Is it written in an "inviting" style? Eg as if (s)he was taking you into their confidence....

## **A Priceless Guide to the writing about the Global Crisis**

The last post tried not only to identify what it was that had so impressed me about the "Defending Politics" book but also to try to generalise possible lessons for the hundreds of thousands of writers whose titles and marketing blurbs shout at us from the bookshops and internet.

I have always loved Oscar Wilde's aphorism - "I always pass on good advice; it's the only thing to do with it". But, on this rare occasion, I actually took on board the advice - in an effort to try to reduce the 200 plus pages of a draft I've had for some years - [Dispatches to the \(post-capitalist?\) future generation](#) - to more manageable proportions.

It's a book which takes the form of a series of posts which I sensed at the time were more like letters to my children (and their generation) who were very much in my mind as drafted them. Perhaps that's why this "giving of account" (with all the religious overtones that term carries!) has been so difficult to write in a satisfactory way.....

**I'm quite proud of the shortened version which has emerged this week - [Dispatches to the next generation - the small version](#).** Just 75 pages (excluding the annexes) - 25 of them an annotated reading list of "key" books about the global economic crisis which give a brief sense of more than 100 books published in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which repay further study  
I'm experimenting with the following marketing blurb -

The author does not pretend to be an economist - although he lectured in that capacity for 60s and early 70s before he saw the error of his ways.

Nor is it easy to pin a political label on him - although he did spend 22 years of his life as a Labour councillor with responsibilities for most of that time relating to devising and managing unique strategies relating to

opening up the policy process and to social enterprise in Europe's largest local authority ([The political compass](#) test, however, placed him in the libertarian left quadrant).

The subsequent 25 years he spent as an adviser on institutional development to governments in central Europe and Central Asia.

So he knows the enemy!

I've always kept notes on the books which impressed me...and the arrival of electronic files and hyperlinks have made the task of collecting and retrieving these lists a positive pleasure. I still find it amazing that my blog can find and present within seconds my ruminations about a book I read almost a decade ago.

Academics are good at throwing bibliographical references at us. Indeed they overwhelm us with them - whether in footnotes, brackets or end-pages. It's almost a virility test with them. I get very frustrated with this - since all these lists do is to flaunt their superiority at us - they don't actually tell us anything interesting about each book.

The Annexes include a little section on some of the great books of the past century and also a favourite of mine - "Just Words - a Sceptic's Glossary"

## A Scottish Trip

It's not often I get the chance to meet up with the members of my family - all but one have visited me in my mountain redoubt and two managed to make the trip to Sofia. Here are some nice pics [from a 2016 visit](#) to my mountain redoubt.

The island of Arran had been selected by the girls as the site for a belated birthday present to Anna and proved to be in a remarkably good mood for April.



Here's Hilary and Susanna - with H suitably equipped (as always) for the start of a long hike over some of the island's mountain ridges and S elegantly attired (as always) for the walk we all took up the side of a glorious little river.

And I've captured Adrian also in typical mode as we head for Arran on the outward journey

More scenery can be viewed [here](#) - which also includes shots of Cullen (a charming corner of the north-east)

which was my first port of call after Arran.....to visit my old friends Duncan and Maggs.

Then my first viewing of H's Edinburgh flat; and Anna's Silsden home in Yorkshire. Glasgow's Kelvingrove art gallery form the last shots.....

I had hoped to visit Jan and Peter on this trip but the distance proved just a bit much for me. I was indeed struck by how narrow the roads were - not just from Perth northwards but immediately I struck east into Yorkshire. And by how well the planning regulations seemed to have held which make shopping development difficult...

## **Naked Economists spill the beans**

[Grand Pursuit - the story of economic genius](#) (2011) was a wonderful read I came across in a remaindered bookshop in Bucharest. At least 2 reviewers paid it the honour of extensive reviews [here](#) and [here](#)

It puts flesh on the classic economists whose ideas we read about such as Schumpeter, Keynes, Irving Fisher, Marx, Alfred Marshall, Hayek and Samuelson; and it got me thinking why there is not more popularising of economic

The "history of economic thought" sounds like - and was indeed - a title of an Economics course - although university departments ceased such offerings some decades back. But it was the subject of a wonderful book issued in 1953 by Robert Heilbroner - [The Worldly Philosophers](#) Heilbroner was one of the few economists who could actually write (JK Galbraith was another) - he had actually practised journalism in his youth and, if more economists had done so, we would perhaps have been spared the soul-destroying writing most economists inflict on us.

**Despite my 4 years of economic studies** (and some years actually teaching it to others!), I make no claim to understand the nature of the global plague that has befallen us in the past few decades. I start to read the books which promise to clear my confusion but find that my eyes soon glaze over....

I toiled during my studies in the early 1960s to make sense of its focus on marginal calculations and "indifference curves" but can remember only the following lessons from my four years engrossed in economics books

- the strictness of the various preconditions which governed the idea of (perfect) competition - making it a highly improbable occurrence;
- the questionable nature of the notion of "profit-maximisation";
- the belief (thanks to the writings of James Burnham and Tony Crosland) that management (not ownership) was the all- important factor
- trust (thanks to Keynes whose work was dinned into me) in the ability of government to deal with such things as "exuberant expectations"
- the realization (through the report of the 1959 [Radcliffe Commission](#)) that cash was but a small part of money supply. Financial economics was in its infancy then.

For someone with my education and political motivation and experience, however, my continued financial illiteracy is almost criminal but not, I feel, in any way unusual. Most of us seem to lack the patience to buckle down and take the time and discipline it needs to understand the operation of the system of financial capitalism which now has us all in its thrall.



We leave it to the "experts" and have thereby surrendered what is left to us of citizenship and political power. Like many people, I've clicked, skimmed and saved – but rarely gone back to read thoroughly. The folders in which they have collected have had various names – such as "urgent reading" or "what is to be done" – but rarely accessed. Occasionally I remember one and blog about it.

The version of [Dispatches to the next generation – the small version](#) I posted a few days ago offered 4 recommended books which gave what I considered an alternative account of modern economics. But I realised that I had omitted not only the best written one (Keen) but an old favourite (Douthwaite); one that is causing a quite a stir (Raworth); as well as the one I would probably rate the best for the interested citizen needing an up-to-date and easy to follow explanation of what is wrong with most economics textbooks (Weeks)



- [For the Common Good](#); Herman Daly and John Cobb (1989). The book which inspired a different approach to economics – written by a theologian (Cobb) someone who for 6 years was the principal economist of the World Bank. But, by virtue of being a train blazer, not the easiest of reads
- [Short Circuit – strengthening local economies in an unstable world](#) – Ronald Douthwaite (1996). Very practical – but also inspirational....22 years on, it hasn't really been bettered. Full text available at the link
- [Debunking Economics – the naked emperor dethroned](#); Steve Keen (2001 and 2011) Written before the crash. it might be called the first alternative textbook (except it's much greater fun to read!). Can be read in full.
- [Economics for Everyone – a short guide to the economics of capitalism](#); Jim Stanford (2006) is a very user-friendly book and has an excellent "[further reading](#)" list which was probably the best there was at that time....Once upon a time it was freely available on the internet but now I can find only excerpts.....
- [Zombie Economics – how dead ideas still walk among us](#); by John Quiggin (2010) is a great read – with a self-explanatory title. He is an Australian author currently completing a book called [Economics in Two Lessons](#)...
- [Austerity – the history of a dangerous idea](#); Mark Blyth (2013) written by a political scientist/political economist, it shows how old theories still affect the contemporary world profoundly
- [Economics of the 1% – how mainstream economics serves the rich, obscures reality and distorts policy](#); John F Weeks (2014) One of the best introductions to the subject



- [Vampire Capitalism - fractured societies and alternative futures](#); Paul Kennedy (2017) A sociologist's treatment which earns high points by stating in the very first sentence that it has "stood on the shoulders of so many giants that he is dizzy" and then proves the point by having an extensive bibliography with lots of hyperlinks...
- [Doughnut economics - 7 ways to think like a 21<sup>st</sup> century economist](#); Kate Raworth (2017). This Oxford economist has made quite an impact with this book which I have not so far managed to read

### Further Reading

Heilbronner Chapter on Marx

<https://ib-econ.wikispaces.com/file/view/Heilbroner%20on%20Marx.pdf>

Heilbronner chapter on Keynes

<http://academic.depauw.edu/~hbarreto/courses/HistEcon/Keynes/KeynesWP.pdf>

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.483.227&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

[Rescuing Economics from NeoLiberalism](#); Danni Rodrik (Nov 2017)

[Why are neo-liberal ideas so resilient?](#) Schmidt and Thatcher

[A History of Economic Thought](#); William Barber 1967

[History of Economic Thought - a critical perspective](#); EK Hunt and Mark Lautzenheiser (1968; 2011)

[http://de.rosalux.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/solidarity\\_based\\_economy\\_in\\_europe.pdf](http://de.rosalux.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/solidarity_based_economy_in_europe.pdf)

British economist Keynes expressed his doubts about a global economic model at the height of the Depression: *'I sympathize ... with those who would minimize rather than with those who would maximize economic entanglement between nations. Ideas, knowledge, art, hospitality, travel - these are the things which should of their nature be international. But let goods be homespun whenever it is reasonably and conveniently possible; and, above all, let finance be primarily national.'*

### With a little help from my Friends"



non-fiction work these days.

Friends of this blog have noticed my silence these past few months....and I'm grateful for signs that readers haven't completely given up on me...

And it's not just writing that I've found difficult - these past few months I've found that books have also become a big turn-off. Perhaps it was the burst of reading and writing I did in the autumn for the blog [series about the State and public management](#) literature which finished me off - somehow I can't take any more the dry, reified technicalities on offer from most

That, you may say, surely leaves the way open for novels - a genre I've admitted I rarely feel partial to (it's 8 years since I last tried to give [a sense of my favourites in that genre](#)) And indeed I did

reread with interest last month Alan Massie's classic [A Question of Loyalties](#) and Bordeaux trilogy as well as some John le Carre novels last week.....

It was perhaps a hopeful sign this week that some authors actually started to speak to me again...

- **Yanis Varoufakis'** [And the Weak Suffer What They Must? - Europe, Austerity and the threat to global stability](#) was the first voice to cajole me out of the lethargy which has been like a funeral pall these past few months. I had pulled down my copy from the shelves of my mountain house and reread the first half - before moving onto the rather easier "[Adults in the Room - my battle with Europe's Deep Establishment](#)" (2017). The reviews contained in the 2 links give some of the essential background if you're not already familiar with this controversial writer. I like the analytical sweep and biographical tone of his writing but know that many find him a bit "showy"....At the bottom of this post, I've included a Varoufakis resource which includes important critiques of his latest book (and also [Varoufakis' response](#) to the more significant critiques)
- And a book about [healthy eating and living](#) which has been lying on my shelves for more than a decade also had the tone and voice I seem to need these days - and led me back to the little library I have of Michael Pollan's superbly written books eg [In Defence of Food](#) and [Food Rules](#) - let alone his The [Botany of Desire](#) (2001) a foretaste of his latest book - [How to Change your Mind - the new science of psychedelics](#)

**These days, I need writing which jolts me - not for its own sake but to help identify minds which look at the world in original ways but which also understand that clear language is an essential tool for such originality...Recently deceased [essayist Tom Wolfe](#) was a favourite of mine ever since I first read his [Mau Mauing the flak catchers](#) in 1970 but the "creative writing" courses which have contaminated journalism in the past few decades have made me suspicious of even good journalists these days. [James Meek](#) remains an exception for his ability to reduce economic complexities to 5 or 10 thousand word essays - ditto [Jonathan Meades](#) for his forensic analyses of cultural issues.**

Varoufakis and Pollan are, for me, all too rare examples of the sort of writing which is needed if authors are to stand out against the verbiage and noise which assails us these days.....

#### A Varoufakis Resource

<https://www.yanisvaroufakis.eu/>; his website

[a profile of the man](#) (2015)

[Reviews of "Adults in the Room"](#)

[a good overview of reviews of "Adult in the Room"](#), structured by ideological slant

<https://www.yanisvaroufakis.eu/2018/03/07/was-defeat-inevitable-a-review-of-adam-tooze-meta-review-of-adults-in-the-room-1/> Varoufakis' detailed reply to these critiques

[a good review of the book](#)

<http://www.cadtm.org/Yanis-Varoufakis-s-Account-of-the>; a serial critique of Adults in the Room

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/03/yanis-varoufakis-greece-greatest-political-memoir>; Paul Mason's review of Varoufakis' expose

<https://verfassungsblog.de/losing-to-the-european-union-a-review-of-yanis-varoufakis-book-adults-in-the-room/>; a critical assessment from a Greek centrist

<https://www.ft.com/content/65e5c4ee-2ffc-11e7-9555-23ef563ecf9a>; FT review

<https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2017/06/yanis-varoufakis-latest-eurogroup-statement-keeps-greece-on-the-austerity-rack.html>; an example of some of YV's doodles!

For those who want an independent "take" on the greek economy of the past decade or so, I [strongly recommend this blog](#) from a retired German banker whose marriage takes him frequently to Greece,,,,  
[The Weak Suffer what they Must](#) – Amazon reviews  
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/paul-tyson/yanis-varoufakis-and-weak-suffer-what-they-must-book-review>

## [Vignette of a typical post industrial town](#)

It was exactly 50 years ago I ran my first successful election campaign in what was then a shipbuilding town (whose yards, in their heyday, employed 10,000 souls) and still remember the scorn with which my remarks at one meeting - about education being the future core of work in the town - were greeted. In 1968 it was only those of us who kept an eye on the United States who had [a glimmering of the world that lay ahead](#). Alvin Toffler's Future Shock may not have been published until 1970 and Daniels Bell's [The Coming of Post-industrial Society](#) until 1973 - but Warren Bennis had written his ["Coming Death of Post-Bureaucracy"](#) in 1966



I've just looked at the [latest employment statistics for the area](#) which tell me that by far and away the largest source of employment in the area I was raised in - and represented politically for 22 years - is that of .....**health** (and social work) with a figure of..... 7,000 (**no less than 23% of the total**). Next, perhaps surprisingly, is the retail trade (at 4,500) - with **education** coming in at what I find is a surprisingly low figure of 2,500. I made that 1968 prediction in a room of what was then the town's new Further Education College - clearly having a sense of what was to be the phenomenal (and global) rise of the further and higher education industry...

Only 1750 people are still working in manufacturing industry.....That's 5.8% compared with about 70% in the 1950s. The town was selected by IBM as the location for an industrial plant which opened in 1951 to great ceremony; grew in its heyday to about 2500 employees - but now employs precisely zero!!! There is a fascinating video here which [starts with that before suddenly cutting to the desolation](#) on the site when it completely closed a few years ago  
"Public administration" has its own separate category (basically the town hall and social security office) and also has a surprisingly low statistic of 1500 people - although there are 3500 jobs in another curious category of "administrative and support services"

I know that these days talk of "real jobs" and "dependency" is old hat - if not politically incorrect. But there is not a single job in the agricultural sector (the area used to have some farms) - and electricity, gas, water and sewage have only 90 workers.

This is simply not sustainable! The talk about ["resilient towns"](#) needs to get louder - particularly with the frightening picture which is emerging of the effects of automation.....

Tales of journeys around Britain have attracted readers since at least Boswell's [Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides](#) (1785). The 1980s and 1990s saw that interest grow – think Bill Bryson and Jonathan Raban (by boat) to which the most recent addition was JD Taylor's superb tale of a bike tour – [Island Story](#) – whose political commentary takes us back to the writings of [Cobbett's Rural Rides](#). George Borrow and George Orwell...

Writers such as Owen Hatherley have added a new dimension which builds on the architectural writings of Ian Nairn. I am just waiting for his [New Kind of Bleak – journeys through Urban Britain](#) (2012) which does not, however, include Greenock

Those interested in tracing the rise and fall of a typical Scottish town should have a look at –

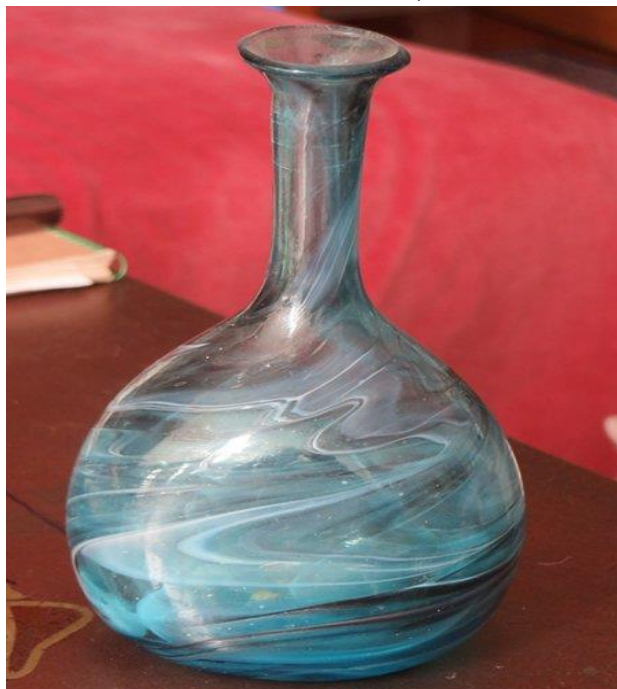
- this collection of [photos of the town in the 1960s](#) (by a Frenchman)
- the [collections here](#) of the municipal museum (art and photographic)
- a rather grainy black and white [of the town in 1959](#)
- a collection of [old photos here](#); and [here](#)
- a short [video montage of the town](#) in the 1960s
- a [drone view](#) of the contemporary town

## The Future of the Blog

This blog stuttered recently but has hit the 1250 post mark – a reasonable time to review its objectives and indeed it's very future. The three objectives I gave it in 2009 are still there on the masthead –

My generation believed that political activity could improve things – but that belief is now dead and cynicism threatens civilisation. This blog will try to make sense of the organisational endeavours I've been involved in; to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on; to restore a bit of institutional memory and social history (let alone hope).

I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor



inclination – as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium.

A final motive for the blog is more complicated – and as to do with life and family. What have we done with our life? What is important to us?

I remember the disappointment when I went through my father's papers after his death. He was a very [well-read and travelled man](#) who composed his weekly sermons with care; gave his time unstintingly to people with problems; latterly giving illustrated lectures throughout the country on his travels in the 1970s to off-beat places in countries such as Spain, Austria and Greece.

Surely, therefore, he would have left some diaries or comments behind to give a sense of



his inner thoughts?

But there was little beyond his jottings about some books (for some lectures he gave) and a diary about a camping holiday in the 1930s with his father. The same silence when I looked at the papers of a charismatic political colleague who was struck down in his prime.

I couldn't hold a candle to these two men - but we are all distinctive in our way. I have been very lucky in the positions I have occupied, the places I've been, the people met, the range and number of books read - and, not least, gifted with a reasonable facility and love for words and language. The least I felt in 2009 that my blog could do was to try to mix together these ingredients of experiences and insights and create a new stew which might be attractive even to those not normally inclined to eat stew?

[Six years ago I went back to these objectives](#) to explore how they compared with my original intentions - or indeed whether they were still useful for me and/or my readers. In 2012 I decided they did. It seems like only yesterday that I conducted that exercise and I got a shock when I discovered today how long it has been

I know that quoting some of the conclusions I wrote 6 years ago in that review of the blog might be felt to be self-indulgent - but the future of the blog is an important question for me and I would therefore ask for the reader's patience....

#### **Lessons from my own institutional endeavours**

The early part of the blog covered the Scottish policy initiatives with which I was associated between 1970-90 such as social dialogue, open-policy-making and social inclusion - which were excerpted from a [long paper available on my website](#).

It then moved on to my concerns about the technical assistance and institutional building work I had been involved with in transition countries from 1991 - which are captured in [the paper I gave at the 2011 Conference of NISPAcee](#).

However my more ambitious venture to bring all of this together in one paper is not yet realised. A very [early draft can be seen on my website](#).

#### **Sharing the insights of others**

.....I've been lucky - in having had both the (academic) position and (political) incentive for more than 25 years to read across intellectual disciplines in the pursuit of tools to help the various ventures in which I've been engaged. I belong to a generation and time which valued sharing of knowledge - rather than secreting or mystifying it - which has become the trend in recent decades.

And I am lucky again in now having gained access to the technical facility which allows sharing (with a copy and paste) the website references of useful papers.

Most of the blogposts contain several such links - in a single year probably 1,000 links. That's not bad! Indeed I have realised that this feature of my writing makes it more convenient to have my papers in electronic rather than paper form.

#### **Life's passions**

Clearly the blog has shared several of my passions - eg painting, places, reading and wine - and has given a good sense of the enjoyment from simple activities such as wandering.



Originally the Carpathian reference in the title was to location only – it did not promise any particular insights into this part of the world. But, in the past year, my musings have broadened to give some insights into life in Bulgaria...

So?

So far, so good. But perhaps the blog objectives are no longer relevant? Or a blog no longer the appropriate format? The first two blog objectives are rather altruistic – a reasonable question might be what I get out of the effort involved in drafting a significant post. The answer is – more than you might think!

Writing is (or should be) a great discipline.

The recent Nobel prize-winner, [Herta Mueller, expressed this very well in an encounter](#) she had a year or so ago in Bucharest –

*"It is only when I start a sentence that I find out what it has to say. I realise as I go along. So I have to somehow make words help me and I have to keep searching until I think I have found something acceptable. Writing has its own logic and it imposes the logic of language on you. There is no more "day" and "night", "outside" and "inside". There is subject, verb, metaphor, a certain way of constructing a phrase so as to give it rhythm – these are the laws that are imposed on you. On the one hand, language is something which tortures me, doesn't give me peace, forces me to rack my brains until I can't do it any longer; and on the other hand, when I do this, it actually helps me. It is an inexplicable vicious circle....."*

A daily blog makes you focus more. I've made the point several times that the absence of newspapers cluttering the house and (for the most part) of television over the past 20 years has been a great boon for me. It has created the quiet and space for reflection. And the requirement to put a thought or two in writing on the blog makes me think more clearly.

A second benefit is archival – I can retrieve thoughts and references so easily. I just have to punch a key word into the search engine on the blog and I retrieve everything.

OK...that's long enough for the moment.....The next post will hopefully give a brief answer to the question of the future of the blog.....  
For those encountering the blog for the first time



<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/search?q=blogging>

## In Praise of the Butterfly



*How can I tell what I think, unless I see what I write?*  
EM Foster (1927)

Most serious blogs I glance at have a theme - be it [British literature](#); Marxist Economics; [paintings](#); [Brexit](#); [French politics](#); [policy analysis](#); left politics or...[Scottish mountains](#) - which the authors stick to fairly religiously with the only relief being the occasional bit of music...(eg [Boffy's Blog](#); or [All That's Solid](#)) One of the distinctive things about "[Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#)" however is its "**butterfly approach**" to subjects.....That's usually a derogatory term - used to indicate a shallow person who wanders from subject to subject. It's true that I have a fixation about strange things such as democracy, government policy-making and institutions, turgid academic writing.... but - like a butterfly - *I alight wherever my senses are*

*attracted by a book cover; striking painting; a wine etiquette; a piece of music; or the ambiance of a town or encounter.....*

After all, the blog started as I knew I was phasing myself out of the job market.....but conscious of the [unusual variety of roles and places](#) I've been lucky enough to work in.

I was first elected to political office when I was 25; and focused my energies respectively on [community action](#) in the late 60s; municipal [corporate management and multiple deprivation](#) in the 70 and 80s; and "institutional development" in ex-communist countries in the period after 1990. I remember, for example, going to the 2 Universities in Glasgow in the mid 70s and challenging them to produce any research which could help us - in the newly established Strathclyde Region - establish some coherent policies on deprivation.....Result? Zilch

Each of these issues now has a huge literature - but, when I came to them, it was difficult to find reading material. For example Marris and Rein's [Dilemmas of Social Reform](#) (1967) and Saul Alinsky's [Rules for Radicals](#) (1970) were the bibles in the early days of community action and deprivation strategies; Donald Schon's [Beyond the Stable State](#) (1971) for organisational studies; and Linz and Stepan's [Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation](#) (1996) and Elster and Offe's [Rebuilding the Ship at Sea - Institutional Design in post-communist Countries](#) (1997) for transitology.....

I started at an early age this rather odd habit of writing (and publishing) papers and article trying to make sense of the experience - which I have continued for coming up for 50 years.

The blog has been my channel for my thoughts about these issues - talking with other people can often box you into a corner (particularly in Gallic cultures!) but writing forces you to pose questions about what you thought you knew. That's why I use so often the saying about the "best way to understand an issue is to write a book about it".....and why I love the EM Foster quote which starts this post

The most interesting question is not whether this blog will continue.....It will (Inshallah!!)  
The most interesting question is whether its focus should change - and if so, in what way?

So what does all this mean for the blog? Its three aims still seem to stand - but perhaps could do with some slight "tweaks" - eg

- I am perhaps using posts even more deliberately these days as a **means of getting inspiration** to help me express better my thoughts on reform and social change issues....When I click open text I have been working on for some time, my creativity tends to freeze - but when I move my mind to the blog (or a blank piece of paper) the words come together to form a new perspective.....
- The world seems confronted with **new problems which apparently require new thinking**.....and make obsolete writings before (say) 1990?...Because I've kept a good record of my wide reading since 1960, **I would dispute this....the old themes are still there - although they may require a bit of dusting....particularly of language**
- **I have therefore become more conscious of the importance of my role in giving annotated reading lists** (and, even more passionately about the need for clarity of expression!!)
- As I move through my "autumn days" and feel the approach of winter, the "settling of final accounts" (in the spiritual sense) becomes perhaps a more dominant theme

Last year I wrote about my [mother's little "commonplace book"](#) which we found amongst her possessions. It's odd that, with the onset of the new technology, the [idea of a commonplace book](#) has not become more popular....one person's record of favourite sayings of sages over the ages..... Perhaps they were more laconic in those days - not feeling the need we apparently do these days to embellish the core of the wisdom with a lot of explanations? My posts of 2016 were collected and put in the logical order in [The Slaves' Chorus](#) and came to 120 pages (the following year there were double the number of pages). Of course these are "musings" - they don't try to compress and distil the components into a basic "essence".....which, in a sense, the tables I started to use last year have started to do.....Now there's a thought!

## RIP

Music and books surround me in this mountain idyll - but I don't pay enough tribute to the former. I was sufficiently moved by [Leonard Cohen's death](#) to post an RIP - as I did [earlier this year](#) to a composer whose film scores touched me.

A conductor has just died (at the age of 84) of whom I had actually not heard - [Gennady Rozhdestvensky](#) and [this video in particular](#) tells me what I have missed .....what a mischievous and expressive face! And how glorious his Russian sounds....

It reminds me of when I sat within touching distance of Rostropovich when he came to Baku just a few years before his death....I was the guest of a friend from the President's Office.... And I have just discovered these [amazing shots of how the Azeri street musicians greeted him](#) during his visit....it brought a smile

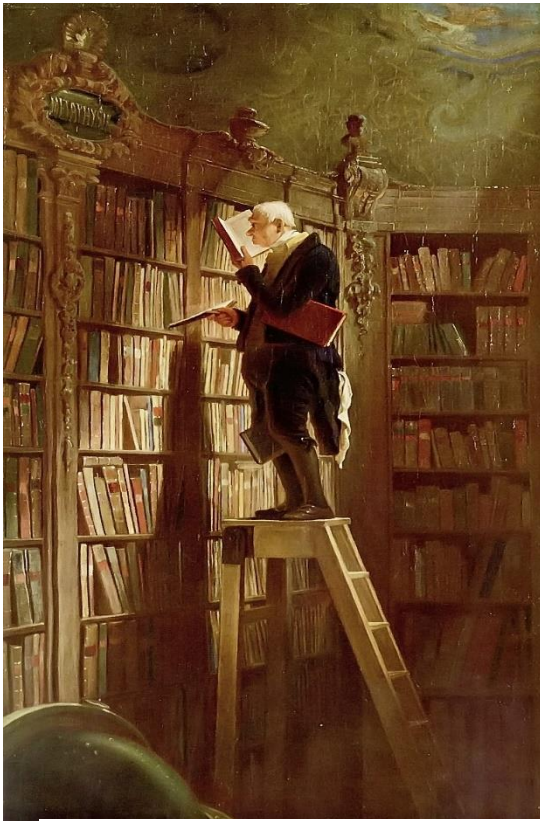
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ict-wF-nDqs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKQpR7aO1SM> BBC

RIP both of you.....



## The Writer's Craft



"What is a writer? [asked jesting Pilot - and would not stay for an answer](#)"....OK I cheated, the question was actually "what is truth?" But the rest of the quotation (from one of my favourite [essayists](#) - Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is correct.

I don't know why this quotation is so deeply engrained in what passes for my mind....although Bacon (and Lamb - I kid you not!) are probably the characters responsible for my love of good language.....[Charles Lamb](#) actually came along a couple of hundred years later (1775-1835) and I remember mainly for his essay "[on eating roast pig](#)".

[Joseph Addison](#) came in between (1672-1730) and [William Hazlitt](#) (1778-1830) was a contemporary of Lamb's...

Perhaps this is why I've never been a great fan of novels - the classical essayists, to whom I was introduced in my teens at school, made their impact, I realise, for two reasons - they crafted [short pieces](#) which left a [vivid impression](#).

Indeed, if I am asked to name my three favourite writers, it's not George Orwell who comes to mind....but rather [Arthur Koestler](#), [Joseph Roth](#) and [Sebastian Haffner](#) - ie

a Hungarian and two Germans - and all of them essentially journalists!

[Arthur Koestler](#) was a taste I acquired in my youth - and the [hyperlink gives my tribute](#) to him. He was a prolific and powerful writer whose arguments on such varied subjects as the death penalty; and laughter and jokes I remember to this day. His memoirs remain for me one of the most vivid.

I wrote an [extensive post about Joseph Roth](#) last year; until recently Roth was known in the English-speaking world basically as the author of [The Radetzky March](#) but now enjoys a reputation for his journalism and short stories thanks to the quality of his translator, [Michael Hofmann](#). He was a master of the feuilleton, a peculiar form of journalism that was especially popular in European newspapers in the early 20th century. In his confident, controversial way, he added, "What people pick up the newspaper for is me. Not the parliamentary report. Not the lead article. Not the foreign news....I don't write 'witty columns.' I paint the portrait of the age."

I was long a fan of [Sebastian Haffner](#) whose material on contemporary Germany I remember reading in The Observer - although he was by the 60s back in Germany. But he had made his reputation in Britain in 1940 with [Germany Jekyll and Hyde - a contemporary account of Nazi Germany](#). In 1978/79 he produced "The Meaning of Hitler" but it was his posthumously produced Defying Hitler - a memoir" which I found quite stunning in the picture it painted of how ordinary decent citizens reacted passively to the beatings, sackings and disappearances being inflicted on their neighbours.....In the post-war period too many people fell for the argument that it was all the fault of a few Nazis when, in reality, it was a significant section of an entire society which was complicit.....Reading it just a couple of years ago, I was immediately struck with the American parallels....

An [article in the current issue of the New York Review of Books](#) looks at a new book by Konrad Jarausch who gave us [Out of Ashes - a new history of Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century](#)

*The problem is that Nazism was so horrifying and so barbaric that for many people in nations where authoritarianism is now achieving a foothold, it is hard to see parallels between Hitler's regime and their own governments. Many accounts of the Nazi period depict a barely imaginable series of events, a nation gone mad. That makes it easy to take comfort in the thought that it can't happen again.*

*But some depictions of Hitler's rise are more intimate and personal. They focus less on well-known leaders, significant events, state propaganda, murders, and war, and more on the details of individual lives. They help explain how people can not only participate in dreadful things but also stand by quietly and live fairly ordinary days in the midst of them. They offer lessons for people who now live with genuine horrors, and also for those to whom horrors may never come but who live in nations where democratic practices and norms are under severe pressure.*

*Milton Mayer's 1955 classic "They Thought They Were Free", recently republished with an afterword by the Cambridge historian Richard J. Evans, was one of the first accounts of ordinary life under Nazism. Dotted with humour and written with an improbably light touch, it provides a jarring contrast with Sebastian Haffner's devastating, unfinished 1939 memoir, "Defying Hitler", which gives a moment-by-moment, you-are-there feeling to Hitler's rise. (The manuscript was discovered by Haffner's son after the author's death and published in 2000 in Germany, where it became an immediate sensation.)*

*A much broader perspective comes from Konrad Jarausch's [Broken Lives - how ordinary Germans experienced the 20<sup>th</sup> century](#), an effort to reconstruct the experience of Germans across the entire twentieth century.*

*What distinguishes the three books is their sense of intimacy. They do not focus on historic figures making transformative decisions. They explore how ordinary people attempted to navigate their lives under terrible conditions.*

The message seems to be that - in the hands of a skilful writer or journalist - the words and conversations of ordinary people can be moulded into powerful literature....

[Joan Didion](#) was another writer who had this gift of conveying conversations - Everyman's Library has a wonderful 1000 page collection of her nonfiction - [We Tell Ourselves Stories in order to Live](#) JD Taylor is too young to warrant inclusion with such names but his recent tale of a bike tour - [Island Story](#) - has political commentary which takes us back to the writings of [Cobbett's Rural Rides](#), George Borrow and George Orwell.....

Talking of books reminds me of Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451" Truffaut's film version being available in 2 parts [here](#) and [Here](#)



## The US as a Rogue nation

Trump the man does not interest me - I blogged about him just before his victory and then [about his inauguration speech](#)...agreeing with those who felt that the best way to deal with a narcissist was to ignore him.

I do, however, understand those who have argued that he represents an existential threat to the post-war order - trouble is that most of those articulating that position are smug members of an Establishment which, in every country, sustains an [economic system that is simply unsustainable](#)....

I do still have some friends (actually one) who argue that his petulant smashing of the other babies' bricks will produce a better system.... While some interpretations of systems theory might offer some support to that, the damage Trump's America is doing to institutional trust is unmeasurable.... The mogul is this weekend sleeping on the Firth of Clyde which I still, after some 30 years, call home. He seems proud that his mother was a Scot - forced, at age 18, to cross the Atlantic for a better life. Ironical that his mother and wives are all immigrants....

The [Guardian has just published an editorial](#) which superbly reflects feelings in the country after a week which has seen the resignation of the 2 key Cabinet Ministers responsible for Brexit. Basically it says that -

- The British PM was warned very strongly by probably the majority of British opinion that her invitation in Jan 2017 to Trump to make an official visit to the UK would be a disaster
- The actual outcome has been even worse for her and her Government than she might have feared in her worst nightmares
- Trump's behaviour in the past week in Europe now shows that only can the UK no longer expect any reasonable deal from the US but that, even more seriously,
- The USA has now declared itself a "rogue nation"
- US official policy is now to destroy the EU [and destabilise NATO](#) (of which, please note, I am no great supporter)
- US policy is now one of support for nationalist forces wanting regime change in EU countries

*The British government did its absolute best - given that the streets of the cities were [full of protesters](#) - to lay on a glittering welcome for Mr Trump this week. Blenheim, Sandhurst, Chequers, Windsor - you don't get much more in the way of British establishment red carpet than that. But this reckoned without the Trump character and, more sinisterly, the Trump political project.*

*The president undermined Mrs May [before he even left America](#). He bullied and lied at the Nato summit in Brussels. He then gave an explosive and deliberately destabilising [interview](#) to Rupert Murdoch's Sun on the very day of his arrival in Britain.*

*This guaranteed that Friday's press conference at Chequers would be purgatorial for Mrs May and maybe even [a little chastening](#) for the president and his team. And so it proved, in spite of what had clearly been the private reading of the diplomatic equivalent of the Riot Act to Mr Trump. But it was not just the rudeness that mattered - though rudeness does matter, a lot, both in personal and in public things.*

*It was the political impact and consequence. That unmistakable consequence is that Mr Trump's America can no longer be regarded with certainty as a reliable ally for European nations committed to the defence of liberal democracy. That is an epochal change for Britain and for Europe.*

*Everything about this disastrous and embarrassing presidential visit could have been avoided with more thought and more political sense. But Mrs May and her advisers rushed to Washington in January 2017*

*to offer a state visit to a president who had barely entered the White House, whose measure as an ally they had not yet properly taken, but who already had it in his character and his power to transform the event from a relatively harmless occasion into a deeply wounding one.*

*It was a shameful and stupid misjudgment.*

*The hostile public reaction was immediate and without precedent.*

*Everything that has happened this week confirms that the Trump visit should not have taken place.*

*Mrs May should have grasped from the very start that Mr Trump was not an ally when it came to her Brexit strategy. Mr Trump wants to break up international organisations like Nato and the EU.*

*He embraced [Brexit](#) on that basis. He saw it as the start of a swing back towards nativist, illiberal, often racist nationalist politics, of which his own election was a further example. He made no secret of his wish to promote other nativist movements on the right. Other European leaders understood this danger, notably Angela Merkel.*

*Mrs May failed to do so. Mrs May rightly wanted a close post-Brexit relationship with the EU, a stance that led in time to the Chequers showdown with her Brexiteer ministers a week ago. But she failed to see that Mr Trump's US has a stronger commitment to the weakening of the EU than it does to a Britain that wants the EU to prosper.*

*Out of that failure came the Sun interview. In the interview, Mr Trump expressed hatred for the EU, support for hard Brexit, unwillingness to strike a trade deal with the UK, contempt for Mrs May, support for Boris Johnson, hostility to immigration, and offered his barely coded belief that the UK - and Europe - is "losing your culture".*

*The interview, its content, its timing, and the fact that it was given to Mr Murdoch's [flagship anti-EU tabloid](#), was a deliberate hostile act. For Mrs May, fighting to control her party on the dominant issue facing Britain, it was simply a stab in the back. But it wasn't fundamentally personal. It was a declaration of hostility to Britain and Europe and the values they stand for.*

*A president who supported the Atlantic alliance, the stability of Europe and liberal democratic values - in short, every other US president of the postwar era - would never have done such a thing. Such a president [would have tried to help](#), would have seen the EU-UK problem as one that needed solving, and would have used his influence to get America's European allies to find a shared way forward after Brexit. Such a president would have been doing the right thing.*

*But Mr Trump is not such a president. He is not our ally. He is hostile to our interests and values. He may even, if this goes on, become a material threat. This week he deliberately inflamed the politics of Europe and of Britain. Yes, Mrs May brought it on herself, but it was hard not to feel for her as a person over the last day and half. She now needs to learn the lesson, and to lead Britain, Brexit or no Brexit, into a constructive and effective relationship with our more dependable allies, who share our values, in Europe.*

# Plus ca Change.....???

About 25 years ago I first [doodled a little table](#) which tried to identify the key subjects which had divided opinion in each of the decades since the 1930s

At the time I didn't understand why I was doing this - but it was clearly an important idea for me because I would keep returning to it...**I became fascinated by the failure of those who became disillusioned with ideas and people which had earlier so enthused them to ask the obvious question about the lessons they drew from both the seduction and disillusionment**

It was, of course, Keynes who first drew our attention to the power of ideas. The quote is on my blog's masthead -

*Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas"*

But most of us seem to imagine that we are so hard-headed as to be resistant to anything but appeals to our self-interest.

As a result we fail to ask good questions about the rise and fall of ideas -

**If only we would take time to explore the reasons for both the seductiveness and disappointments, we might learn to develop the art of scepticism...which is not a form of cynicism**

The focus of my table (called "The Ebb and Flow of Ideas") on fashionable ideas is, of course, rather idiosyncratic. The more normal way to handle social trends is that of [social historians such as David Kynaston](#) which tend to emphasise the influence of technological change. But **documentarist** [Adam Curtis shows us yet another way](#) - choosing the theme of social control to demonstrate how the theories of a few individuals - from Freud to "game theorists" and characters such as RD Laing, JD Buchanan, Bob McNamara - were used by big business and politicians alike in the post-war period. And how an utterly negative assumption about human nature underpinned the basic model of social interaction they all used...

His series called [The Trap](#) is typical and its various parts can be viewed [here](#), [here](#) - and [here](#). I knew that the author of the famous satirical series "Yes, Minister" (Anthony Jay - whose essay I reproduce in the [final part of my own 5-part series](#) on power below) based it on the work of the "public choice" economists - (35 mins into part 1) but I had not, until viewing "The Trap" realised the role RD Laing had played in destroying the US psychology establishment and bringing in a new self-referential one...

Curtis's work has attracted some good profiles - eg [this one](#) in 2007 and [this one](#) in 2012  
No less a journal than [The Economist has just published a long interview](#) with him - in which he makes several interesting points

*What no one saw coming was the effect of individualism on politics. It's our fault. We all want to be individuals and we don't want to see ourselves as parts of trade unions, political parties or religious groups. We want to be individuals who express ourselves and are in control of our own destiny. With the*

*rise of that hyper-individualism in society, politics got screwed. That sense of being part of a movement that could challenge power and change the world began to die away and was replaced by a technocratic management system.*

*That's the thing that I'm really fascinated by. I think the old mass democracies sort of died in the early 90s and have been replaced by a system that manages us as individuals*

Curtis uses the opportunity of The Economist interview to emphasise the point that people are searching for a new politics which will give them a vision worth striving for....and that we all seem overcome with a dreadful fatalism.... **I very much agree with his opinion that our times need a new more positive and more social vision and that the central question indeed is how we learn to trust again.....**This gives me the opportunity to refer to this [little reading list for protestors...](#)

Somehow I just couldn't let go, during the year, of the issue of **reform and change**. There were no fewer than 10 posts over the summer - containing some important ideas which should really be developed further....at least by being incorporated into [Reforming the State](#)

Also a little series about the concept of "**political culture**" sparked off by an interview with a respected Romanian analyst about giving up hope for his country - just as its about to take the reins of the European Union!



"Identity Politics" started another important series of posts about contemporary politics which included reading lists about **the location of power**....As I was rereading them, I had exactly the same reaction as Curtis when he makes this comment -

*"The problem I have with a lot of investigative journalism, is that they always say: "There should be more investigative journalism" and I think, "When you tell me that a lot of rich people aren't paying tax, I'm shocked but I'm not surprised because I know that.*

*I don't want to read another article that tells me that". What I want is an article that tells me*

*why, when I'm told that, nothing happens and nothing changes. And no one has ever explained that to me.*

So here are the rest of the posts - first in summary -

The Final few month of 2018

Post Title	Why I wrote it
<b>The Power of Ideas</b>	I can't shake off the feeling that we underestimate the significance of the fact that Ideas are governed by cycles
<b>Public Services are too serious to be left to....bureaucrats and academics</b>	"mutualisation" became a fashionable subject a few years ago....it's a much neglected perspective and really should be taken more seriously...
<b>Playing Games with a serious issue</b>	Some ideas that momentarily grabbed the interest of writers in the field of public management
<b>Managing Change...why have we lost interest?</b>	Perhaps we got a bit bored when we realised that it was dialogue and consensus that produced lasting change
<b>Theories of Change - mine and other's peoples</b>	In Scotland in the 1970 I talked about the "pincer theory of change". When I moved to central Asia, "Windows of opportunity" seemed a better approach - except that I doubt if "window" is an appropriate metaphor!
<b>Is it people who change systems? Or Vice Versa?</b>	It is, of course, both!
<b>Changing the World?....or oneself??</b>	A neglected truth
<b>I have a little list.....</b>	Every now and then I try to make sense of the books which tell me that the complexity of the world makes a mockery of our attempts to manage it
<b>Why Those seeking systemic change have had little traction....so far</b>	Those seeking social change generally divide their forces by failing to identify a common foe
<b>Revisiting a neglected management classic</b>	Any book which impresses us needs to be reread; broken into its separate arguments.....and updated....
<b>Telling it as it is</b>	An interview with a highly-regarded Romanian analyst suggesting that the country is finished
<b>Why we should be suspicious of talk of "political culture"</b>	I'm being ironic - PC is just not PC
<b>Plus Ca Change,,,,plus c'est la meme chose???</b>	And the contemporary sense of history is so shallow that we seem condemned to repeat.....
<b>When the Spark Ignites....</b>	A reading list for protestors
<b>Kenneth Roy - renewing faith in journalism - RIP</b>	An inspirational journalist from a small country



<b>The inmates have taken over the OECD</b>	Some clichés about public management reform
<b>Identity Politics</b>	An overdue critique of PC
<b>Complacency of the European class</b>	Immigration has been an engine of European economic growth but is now undermining its political consensus
<b>Controlling the Masses</b>	A couple of fortuitous finds sparked off one of my series - this time about the "political class"..
<b>The political class</b>	Some 22 books which might help us understand the significance of that term
<b>We need to talk about....power</b>	My first take on the books....
<b>The new tricks political elites have up their sleeves</b>	Economists have suddenly woken up to real behaviour
<b>How they get away with it - part 5</b>	The only thing worth reading in the thousands of books about power
<b>Why we need to ration non-fiction books</b>	This has become a big issue for me
<b>Romania's National Day</b>	A reread of a recent geopolitical treatment of Romania's history
<b>The Road to Unfreedom??</b>	One attempt to explain the populist upsurge which credits Putin and some older Russians with too much influence
<b>The Road to Somewhere</b>	A much more satisfactory treatment of the outbreak of populism
<b>Brexit's Nine Lessons (December)</b>	An ex-Ambassador identifies some lessons which should be drawn by the Brits from the fiasco of the past 3-4 years
<b>Hacks? Critics? Journalists? What's in a Name?</b>	In which an interesting (and unique) table about good (journalistic) writing is developed
<b>Why is the British media coverage of Brexit so superficial?</b>	A rare good analysis of the strategies left to the UK at the end of a pitiful year of "negotiation"
<b>Killing Three Birds with one Stone</b>	

## The Power of Ideas

Themes of intellectual discussion	
The managerial revolution End of capitalism	Fax
Keynesianism Meritocracy New world order	
End of ideology Revisionism Private affluence/public squalour	
Corporate planning Modernisation of society Participation critique of professionals	
Costs of economic growth Public choice theory Small is beautiful Change	

The longest of the 6 quotations which run down the blog's right-hand column is from Keynes - suggesting that **ideas** have more influence on societies than we imagine compared, that is, with crude calculations of **interest**.

I have long been fascinated both by the ebb and flow of ideas - and how rarely people seem willing to explore how they have changed their thinking.....I suppose our thoughts are so much part of our identity that we get first embarrassed and then angry if others try to push us on our belief changes...."Apostasy" is the big word for such acts of renunciation and there were loads of them in the 1930s as the first flush of enthusiasm for the soviet system dispelled and then again in the 1950s after Hungary. But I diverge.....

As far back as 1995 I doodled a couple of pages of notes about what seemed to me to have been the key focus of at least anglo-saxon debate in each of the decades from the 1930s. An updated version now makes a fascinating [table](#)

[explained in this post](#).

Fear of the masses had been a strong theme in the 1930s but, by the 1960s, many of us in Europe and America were celebrating rather than fearing them - whether through the fashion for "[participation](#)" let alone [community action](#), direct action or social development. 1968, after all, had been an expression of people power. And the writings of Paolo Freire and Ivan Illich - let alone British activists Colin Ward and Tony Gibson; and sociologists such as Jon Davies and Norman Dennis - were, in the 70s, celebrating citizen voices against bureaucratic power. In America, the therapist [Carl Rogers](#) was at the height of his global influence.

But political and economic events in the 1970s punctured that mood of egalitarianism - and ushered in not mutuality but rather egocentricity, greed and commodification. Adam Curtis' documentary [The Century of the Self](#) captures the process superbly.....

But if there is one book which embodied the spirit of individuality and impatience and shaped a global generation, it is [In Search of Excellence - lessons from America's best-run companies](#) which came out in 1982. It ridiculed the hierarchic structure of organisations and encouraged the inner cowboy in managers to ride free.

**I have been turning the clock back 30 odd years to try to understand how exactly we were all persuaded to give managers and markets so much power in the delivery of our public services....**

Clearly the fall of the Berlin Wall both triggered and symbolised a massive shift in people's perception of state legitimacy - but the critique of the role of the state had been building up since the early 1970s and found expression in Margaret Thatcher's completely unscripted programme of privatisation and "contracting out" of the 1980s....

I have a copy in my hands of a book published in 1990 called "*Managerialism and the Public Services*" which maps out in detail the development of UK thinking of that decade - by the same author who coined (the same year) the phrase "New Public Management".

And it was but 2 years later that David Osborne and Ted Gaebler dramatically put the new thinking on the global agenda when they published [Reinventing Government](#) (1992) - with such neat injunctions as -

- *steer, not row*
- *encourage competition*
- *be driven by missions, rather than rules;*
- *fund outcomes rather than inputs;*
- *meet the needs of the customer, not the bureaucracy;*
- *invest in preventing problems rather than curing crises*
- *decentralize authority;*

Effectively, it was the public sector version of the 1982 "In Search of Excellence" mentioned above. No less a figure than Vice-President Al Gore then took charge of what became a major political effort to reinvent government ([see this paper](#) for a good overview). Coincidentally I was in New York a few months after the book's publication and was able to bring a copy back with me. The book was - with the possible exception of Machiavelli's [The Prince](#) - one of the few best-sellers on the topic of government.

**And Osborne and Gaebler weren't academics - but a**

**journalist/consultant; and city manager respectively!!** And its message about contracting out was soon being broadcast globally - thanks to [the influence of the World Bank](#)

corporatism	
Deindustrialisation	
Privatisation	
Pursuit of excellence	
ecology	
decentralisation	
globalisation	
End of history	
Flexibility and reengineering	
Reinvention of government; NPM	
Climate change	
The learning organisation	
Washington consensus	
Good governance	
Neo-liberalism and its limits	
Environmental collapse	
Migration and social integration	
Migration	
financial capitalism	
austerity	
Inequality	

By then I was living in central Europe and working on projects designed to help establish more open and democratic public services accountable to citizens in that part of the world. In 1998/99 I found myself "resting" (as actors say) between projects in Bucharest and used the time to draft a little book about the challenges of building government structures in ex-communist countries. This is how I tried to set out what I thought I was doing.....

The book is about the search for effectiveness and equity in government in a new era of immense change and growing expectations.

It is aimed at -

- those both inside and outside the machinery of government - both local and national - who, however reluctantly, have realised that they need to get involved in the minutiae of administrative change
- people in both West and central Europe.

A lot has been written in the past decade about development endeavours at various levels - but there are several problems about such literature -

- it is written generally by academics who have not themselves had the responsibility of making things happen: who have rarely, for example, been involved in the early, messy stages of taking initiatives they believed in, or in working with people who feel threatened and confused.
- its very volume and language makes it impossible for busy policy-makers and advisers to read : a guide is needed.
- such texts are (obviously) not sensitive to the Central European context

The analysis and argument of this book very much build on my practical experience as a "change-agent" in Scotland during 1970-1990, trying to "reinvent" the machinery of local government and to construct policies and structures to deal with local industrial collapse.

The text reflects a dialogue with a particular Central European audience between 1994 and 1998: the focus - and content - being shaped by the questions and issues which seemed to be at the forefront of the minds of the people I was working with in countries such as the Czech and Slovak Republics, Romania and Hungary....

The result was a little book [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) which is one of the few texts which tries to give a sense of what it was like to be active in such administrative reform efforts in the 1980s and 1990s

## Playing Games with a serious issue?

Part of me understands the groans (sometimes more than metaphorical!) which meet the term "public management reform" whenever it comes up in conversation....

I have sometimes wished we could find a better phrase to do justice to what is, after all, one of the most important issues confronting countries everywhere - namely how we structure and fund the rights and responsibilities we all have ...in order to help make and keep societies secure.



So this post looks at some of the efforts which have been made in the last 20 years to find a less brutal approach to public service management than that represented by [New Public Management](#)... Just why and how the British adopted NPM - which then became a global pandemic - is a story which is usually told in a fatalistic way - as if there were no human agency involved. One persuasive explanation is given [here](#) - as the fatal combination of Ministerial frustration with civil service "dynamic conservatism" (as Donald Schoen would put it) with Public Choice economics offering a seductive explanation for that inertia.... **A politico-organisational problem was redefined as an economic one and, heh presto, NPM went global**

The core European systems were, however, different - with legal and constitutional safeguards, Proportional Representation systems and coalition governments - although the EC technocracy has been chipping away at much of this.

## **"Good governance" ?**

This became a fashionable phrase in the 1990s amongst at least policy wonks in the World Bank - although it was aimed mainly at ex-communist and "developing" countries and never really caught on in everyday conversation. One of the ingredients of the rather formulaic "good governance" goulash was anti-corruption measures - which I felt were always basic aspects of sound public management and not a novel add-on....

## **"Public Value"?**

Mark Moore's [Creating Public Value - strategic management in Government](#) (1995) demonstrated how the passion and example of individual leaders could inspire teams and lift the performance and profile of public services. The decentralisation of American government allowed them that freedom.

British New Labour, however, chose to go in the opposite direction and to build on to what was already a tight centralised system a new quasi-Soviet one of targets and punishment - although this 2002 note, [Creating Public Value - an analytical framework for public service reform](#), showed that there were at least some people within the Cabinet Office pushing for a more flexible approach.

[Measuring Public Value - the competing values approach](#) showed that there was still life in the idea in the UK - if only amongst academics eg [Public Value Management - a new narrative for networked governance](#) by Gerry Stoker in 2006.

Sadly [Public Value; theory and practice](#) ed by John Benington and Mark Moore (2011) offered no clarion call to a better society, it was full of dreadful jargon.....Who in his right mind imagines that [networked public governance](#) is going to set the heather alight???

## **"The Common Good"?**

One of the things which struck me on rereading some of these references is how academic (apart from Moore's original book) they are....For example John Bryson's work on public strategies constitute the best writing on the subject eg [Leadership for the Common Good](#); Crosby and Bryson (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2005) but when I look at the indexes and bibliographies of the material on Public Value, their names and books don't appear! This shows utter contempt for the practical side of things....

Quite rightly, the title of their latest book [Creating Public Value in Practice - advancing the common good in a .....noone in charge world](#); ed J Bryson et al (2015) shows that their contribution is much more valuable than that of the academics....

## **"Communitarianism"?**

At one stage, I thought that [communitarianism](#) - so eloquently served by the indefatigable Amatai Etzioni - held an important key.....But I soon realised that it smacked of what Orwell benignly called the sandal-wearers and others, less kind, would call the Calvin sect.....

Before I finish let me bring up the neglected issue of....**Service**.

Like Mark Moore, Chris Pollitt's [The Essential Public Manager](#) (2003) focused on the human aspect of public management by exploring the core attributes and values of those who used to be called "[public servants](#)"... It's a pity that more politicians don't see themselves as "public servants" - and indeed Pollitt might consider, for the next edition of the book, replacing the word "manager" with that of "servant"; and adding at least one chapter to deal with Ministers.... ....????? And "Public Service



Reform" is certainly the better phrase since it removes that offensive word "management"....and takes me to Robert Greenleaf whose [On Becoming a servant leader](#) (1996) is a book I sometimes turn to for inspiration.

[Greenleaf](#) was a thoughtful senior manager with corporate giant AT and T who took early retirement in 1964 to set up a foundation to develop his ideas about leadership - which had a clear influence on writers such as [Stephen Covey](#) and [Peter Senge](#). These two management gurus preached/preach in the 90s a softer approach to the subject - while avoiding the explicit critique evident in the later work of, for example, Canadian Henry Mintzberg, one of the rare management writers to break ranks and call big business to account - in his 2014 pamphlet [Rebalancing Society - radical renewal beyond left, right and center](#). As early as 1970 Greenleaf wrote an article which set out the main elements of his approach - [The Servant as Leader](#) (1970). His continuing influence on at least [some management writing can be seen here](#)

## In conclusion

This has been quite a romp - which has taken me longer to craft than my normal post. But, from my point of view at least, has been very useful....

"Good government", "Public service reform", "networked public governance", "public value", "communitarianism", "the Common Good".....what is it to be???? Perhaps I should do a straw poll?

But it has left me with one conclusion....that there are two significant sets of voices we don't hear in most of these texts - the officials who run the services and the citizens who experience them. Last week [I discussed the notion of public service ventures in the shape of cooperatives](#); and this is an issue which really does need to be pushed more strongly.....

## Further Reading

[From NPM to Public Value](#) (2007) - a useful academic overview

[Public Value and Leadership](#); 2007 - a mercifully short and clear paper on the subject

[Public Value; conjecture and refutation](#) (2010) - a good academic overview with an emphasis on ethical consideration

[Appraising public value; past, present and futures](#) (2011) is an excellent review of the literature in the first 15 years of the concept's life

[Stocktake of a concept](#) (2015) - a clear exposition of the development of an idea

[Designing the model of public value management](#); (2015) How the concept is seen in Romanian academia

[Creating Public Value in Practice - advancing the common good in a ....noone in charge world](#); ed J Bryson et al (2015),

[Comparison of public value frameworks](#) (2016) a good academic assessment

Peter Morgan - the concept of capacity (2006)

<http://cercle.lu/download/partenariats/ECDPMConceptofCapacity2006.pdf>

## Public Services are too serious to be left to ....bureaucrats and academics



A Bulgarian journalist friend makes the very good point that people tend these days to live in what he called national "traumas" in which any mention of government reform is treated as just so much pointless rhetoric - if not with outright scorn and ridicule...(my words).

Of course this simply reflects the fact (as I've emphasised in recent posts about reform efforts) that [those who write about admin reform are predominantly \(95%\) academics](#) - and that they talk only to one another - or down to students - and never to the public at large ....

**But every European State spends about 40% of its GNP on public services - so there must be a few informed citizens out there - even if most of us are so overwhelmed with apathy/fatalism that we don't bother.... We mutter amongst ourselves but, otherwise, leave it to the politicians, bureaucrats, trade unionists and lobbyists!**

And I know of at least one academic who did try (in 2003) to write a book about the subject for the general public - it was called [The Essential Public Manager](#). Sadly, it doesn't seem to have made much impact....

And what effort - it might be asked - do public service professionals make to try to change the things we (and they) don't like about the services they work in? It is, after all, real individuals who run our schools, hospitals and state infrastructure. They have received expensive training; surely they should be more active?

The idea of [transferring some public services to the workers](#) caught the imagination recently in Britain in a policy called "mutualisation" - which was indeed embraced early into the 2010-15 Coalition government programme. The Post Office was to be the gem in that particular policy jewel but ideological fervour beat principle and the famous [PO was duly privatised in 2015](#)..... Despite that setback, the past couple of decades have seen a considerable [growth of social enterprise](#) (employing about 1.5 million) particularly in the field of public health and some welfare services.... But how many articles do you see about this?

**Indeed, looking back over the past 40 years or so, I can recall only two books by journalists about public services** (in the English language at any rate) - one an American (David Osborne) who produced in 1992 what turned out to be a best-seller - [Reinventing Government](#). The other is a Brit (Polly Toynbee) whose recent book [Dismembered - the ideological attack on the state](#) actually triggered the blog series I did last autumn...

I [understand the environment](#) in which journalists write - but still think it's sad that so many journalists just take the PR handouts from government departments and don't bother with even minimal some policy digging. (Needless to say, my friend doesn't belong in this category)....

Perhaps other journalists might therefore be interested in a little book (100-odd pages) which has pictures, tables and para headings to make it all the more reader-friendly; not to mention an eye-catching title - [How did Admin Reform get to be so sexy?](#)

I readily concede that the book titles and lists which adorn the text are a bit of a turn-off but there is little I can do about that since one of the book's intentions is to guide the interested reader through the extensive literature; and to help people identify what is actually worth reading....

I always liked the comic-book approach - in the 70s there were a couple of good series ([Writers and Readers Coop](#) was one) which did excellent ones on figures such as Marx, Freud...even Chomsky....and [cartoons should be used more often](#) to liven up such texts. [Dilbert](#) is the prime example...

Perhaps the subject of Government Reform needs that sort of approach?

### **Further Reading on mutualisation and social enterprise**

[https://research.birmingham.ac.uk/portal/files/22033682/Hall\\_and\\_Hazenberg\\_2014\\_Pre\\_Publication\\_Version\\_pure.pdf](https://research.birmingham.ac.uk/portal/files/22033682/Hall_and_Hazenberg_2014_Pre_Publication_Version_pure.pdf)

<http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/content/original/Book%20covers/Local%20PDFs/106%20Lyon%20et%20al%20Process%20of%20SI%20in%20mutual%20organisations%202013.pdf> 2013

[https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/enterprise-solutions\\_barriers-and-solutions\\_final.pdf](https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/enterprise-solutions_barriers-and-solutions_final.pdf)

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/5852/7/Hazenberg20135852.pdf>

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/5850/7/Hazenberg20135850.pdf>

[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/84380/1/Le%20Grand\\_Public%20service%20mutual\\_2018.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/84380/1/Le%20Grand_Public%20service%20mutual_2018.pdf)

<https://journals.openedition.org/osb/1632> The Big Society

<http://www.kellogg.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Becoming-a-public-service-mutual.pdf>

2008 <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/reports/social-enterprise-for-public-service.pdf>

### **Managing Change...why have we lost interest?**

Let me try to summarise the argument of the recent posts about public services reform.....

Our view of the State (and what we could expect of it) changed dramatically in 1989 - and not just in Eastern Europe. It was significant that boring "public administration" gave way to [New Public Management \(NPM\)](#) - with its emphasis on the "consumer" (rather than citizen) and on "choice"...

A series of blogposts last autumn [used 15 questions to explore its state](#) almost 20 years on....

Anglo-saxon voices were loudest in what was [essentially a technocratic debate](#), focussing on concepts such as "good Governance" and "public value".

Last week I wrote that it was [nothing short of scandalous](#) that, in comparison with the thousands of books written on the subject by academics in the past 25 years, there seem to be only two written for the general public by journalists....Even if I add in those written by [consultants \(such as Barber, Seddon and Straw\)](#) the total comes to under a dozen....

A question which is surprisingly rarely explored in the vast literature on reform is one relating to the sources of change. We all too readily assume that effective change comes from politicians and their advisers.....The sad reality is that this is generally the kiss of death.

Of course this seems to fly in the face of the narrative about democratic authority and political legitimacy....

But that just shows how two-dimensional is the concept of democracy which prevails in anglo-saxon countries.

Effective change doesn't come from the "ya-boo; yo-yo" system of adversarial power blocs of the UK and USA - it comes from sustained dialogue and coalitions of change.

And, often, it starts with an experiment - rather than a grand programme...Take, for example, what is now being called the [Dutch model for neighbourhood care](#) - started by [Buurtzorg](#) a few years back which is [now inspiring people everywhere](#). That is a worker cooperative model... which, quite rightly, figures in Frederic Laloux's [Reinventing Organisations](#)

And when "[mutualisation](#)" was being explored by the UK Coalition government in 2010/11 (see [reading list at end of this post](#)) it was a bipartisan idea which had strong support from the social enterprise sector....



There was a time when people were interested in [the process](#) of organisational change.....it even spawned a literature on "managing change", some of which still graces my library shelves (from the early 1990s). ...The titles figure in this [Annotated Bibliography for change agents](#) which I did 20 years ago....

Most of the literature was paternalistic but a few writers understood that change could not be imposed (however subtly) and had to grow from a process of incremental adjustment....that was Peter Senge at his best....But the most inspiring book on the subject remains for me Robert Quinn's [Change the World](#) (2000) - [this article gives a sense](#) of his argument... At a more technical level [Governance Reform under real world Conditions](#) (2008) also offers an overview with a rarely catholic perspective.....

I don't understand why we have lost interest in the process of change - and why leaders seem doomed to [reinventing the broken wheel](#).....

### Further Reading

[The Buurtzorg Model](#)

[Public Sector Management Reform - toward a problem-solving approach](#); Nick Manning et al (2012 WB note)

<http://nomadron.blogspot.com/2015/05/come-back-state-all-is-forgiven.html>



## Theories of Change – mine and other peoples'

For the past few years, people in the "development" field have [been encouraged to have a "theory of change"](#). The global technocracy had at last been forced to recognise that its attempts to make political institutions in "developing" countries more open to economic development had not been working - and that a different more [local, inclusive and incremental approach was needed](#) to "good governance" ideas..... Its practitioners often use the phrase "Doing Development Differently" - there is a [nice short powerpoint presentation here](#) of the main ideas to complement the OECD paper which is the first hyperlink

I've had my own theories of organisational change - whether in Scotland in the 1970s and 80s or in central Asia in the 2000s - always (I have just realised) with the assumption that "we" were facing the implacable force of what the great organisational analyst Donald Schoen in 1970 called "[dynamic conservatism](#)"

When I was lucky enough to find myself in a position of strategic leadership in a new and large organisation in the mid 1970s, **we used what I called the "pincer approach" to set up reform structures at both a political and community level.** The organisational culture was, of course, one of classic bureaucracy - but, from its very start, *some of us made sure that it had to contend with the unruly forces of political idealism and community power.* The regional body concerned was responsible for such local government functions as education, social work, transport, water and strategic planning for two and half million people; and employed 100,000 staff but not has been written about it.



You'll find the [full story of the strategy here](#) - and a [short version here](#).

Thirty years later. I was doing a lot of training sessions in the Presidential Academies of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan and developed there what I called [the "opportunistic" or "windows of opportunity" theory of change](#) against what I started to call "impervious regimes" ie so confident of the lack of challenge to their rule that they had become impervious to their citizens

*"Most of the time our systems seem impervious to change - but always (and suddenly) an opportunity arises. Those who care about the future of their society, prepare for these "windows of opportunity". And the preparation is about analysis, mobilisation and trust.*

- *It is about us caring enough about our organisation and society to speak out about the need for change.*
- *It is about taking the trouble to think and read about ways to improve things - and helping create and run networks of such change.*



- *And it is about establishing a **personal reputation for probity and good judgement** that people will follow your lead when that window of opportunity arises".*

I realised that it would be difficult to implement such an approach in Beijing when I arrived there in January 2010 to take up the role of Team Leader in a "Rule of Law" project and made a fast exit from a project that was supposed to last for 4 years – for reasons I tried to explain in a note called [Lost in Beijing](#).

A year later, I tried to share some of my concerns about how the European Commission was dealing with capacity development in "transition countries" with participants at the annual NISPAcee Conference in Varna. But [The Long Game - not the log-frame](#) was met with indifference.

As it happens that was the year the World Bank published its quite excellent [People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform](#) (World Bank 2011). And it was 2015 before [this guide on "change management for rule of law practitioners"](#) saw the light of day

I said earlier that I had always assumed that **reformers were facing "implacable force" in their intervention** but need now to question this.....not just because 1989 showed how easily certitudes and legitimacy can crumble..... but also because management writing has in the past 2 decades paid a lot more attention to chaos and uncertainty – even before the 2006 global crisis (eg Meadows and Wheatley).

As someone who has always felt compelled to try to intervene in social processes (ie of an "activist" mode) I readily admit that my initial responses to those who argued that every force attracts a counterforce and, most memorably, that "[the flap of a butterfly's wings can ultimately contribute to tornados](#)"...has been one of impatience. Quite a lot of the writing on "chaos theory" and even "systems theory" seemed to me to run the risk of encouraging fatalism.

One of my favourite writers – AO Hirschmann – actually devoted a book ("[The Rhetoric of Reaction](#)"; 1991) to examining **three arguments conservative writers use for dismissing the hopes of social reformers**:

- the [perversity thesis](#) holds that any purposive action to improve some feature of the political, social, or economic order only serves to exacerbate the condition one wishes to remedy.
- The [futility thesis](#) rgues that attempts at social transformation will be unavailing, that they will simply fail to "make a dent."
- the [jeopardy thesis](#) argues that the cost of the proposed change or reform is too high as it endangers some previous, precious accomplishment.

He was right to call out those writers; but we perhaps need a similar framework these days to help us make sense of the world of chaos in which we live.

I had been aware of systems thinking in the 1970s (particularly in the writing of [Geoffrey Vickers](#) and [Stafford Beer](#)) and [again in 2010](#) and, finally, in a [2011 post which focused on complexity theory](#). My brief foray into the subject didn't greatly enlighten me but I have a feeling I should return to the challenge....

I have therefore a little pile of books on my desk – including [The Web of Life](#) (Fritjof Capra 1996); [Leadership and the new Science - discovering order in a chaotic world](#) (Margaret Wheatley 1999); [Thinking in Systems](#) (Donella Meadows 2009) – as well as a virtual book [Systems thinking - creative holism for managers](#); Michael Jackson (2003).

So let's see if my older self is capable of new insights.....

## Is it people who change systems? Or systems which change people? (last year??)

Individualists say the former; sociologists and fatalists the latter.

And both are right!

Change begins with a single step, an inspiring story, a champion. But, unless the actions "resonate" with wider society, such people will be dismissed as mavericks, "ahead of their time".

Change of any sort - whether an organisational reform or a social movement - is an intervention in a social system. Like an organism, it will quickly be rejected or absorbed unless there is some such "resonance".

A significant number of people have to be discontent - and persuaded that there is an alternative before there will be any movement.

And the wider system has to be ready for change.

Robert Quinn's [Change the World](#) (2000) is still one of the few books to focus seriously on this question of how one individual can change history....

Formal and informal systems are a well-recognised fact of organizational life. In 1970, Donald Schon coined the phrase "dynamic conservatism" to describe the strength of the forces resisting change in organisations - an update almost of Robert Michels' "iron law of oligarchy". Whatever new formal systems say, powerful informal systems ensured systems remained largely unchanged.

I remember vividly the discussions which ran in the 60s and 70s in the professional [journals about rationality and change](#) - with names such as Donald Schoen, Chris Argyris, Ametai Etzioni, Warren Bennis, Charles Lindblom and Herbert Simon to the fore (Alvin Toffler was simply the populiser)

These, of course, were the academic scribblers in whose midst American society was threatening to escape control....a moment perhaps best described in Adam Curtis' documentary [The Century of the Self](#) (2002).

But it was [The Aquarian Conspiracy - personal and social transformation in the 1980s](#); by Marlyn Ferguson (1980) which at the time caught the spirit of the age and posed the essential challenge both in its title and subtitle. Alas, it was a challenge soon to be marginalised.....



Those of us who had bemoaned the inertia of our bureaucracies were suddenly caught unawares by the speed with which change was unleashed.... In the 1990s, managing change became as popular as sliced bread. And soon indeed had its own recipe -

- communications, leadership and training to ensure that people understand what the reform is trying to achieve - and why it is needed and in their interests
- Development and enforcement of new "tools of change"
- "Networking" in order to "mobilise support" for the relevant changes
- building and "empowering" relevant institutions to be responsible for the reform - and help drive it forward

We are these days advised always to "control the narrative" and to carry out "stakeholder analyses" - to track who will be affected by the changes and how the indifferent or potentially hostile can be brought on side or neutralised.

Out and out manipulation....and the world is wise to it...at last!!

## Change the World?..... Or oneself?

You know you're losing your mind when - after a week of intensive musings - you still can't put into clear words an issue which has led to much feverish searching for (and pulling out of) books.....

It seemed initially to be *about the source of significant social change - the extent to which it comes from external social and technical factors compared with more internal subjective factors...*

Arthur Koestler's [The Yogi and the Commissar](#); (1945) was perhaps an early expression of that dualism....The collapse of communism in 1989 showed how regime self-confidence could melt in the sunshine....

In the middle of last week I came across in Brasov a nicely-presented book in the self-help genre - [About Presence; a journey into ourselves](#) - which I duly bought and read simply because the language was more conversational and downbeat than its usual type.



And the book seemed to connect to the point which a friend had just put to me about the over **abstract nature of the discourse which people like me use.** As well as to a question put a couple of years ago by a schoolfriend with whom I had tried to renew contact after more than 50 years - "why doesn't your personal life figure in your blog??" The answer is quite simple - the technocratic role I've played since 1991 had no place for the personal....at least in the style of our writing... We had to pretend to a neutrality...if not

omniscience! (Although the feedback was that I seemed to be more committed to grassroots change than the typical "expert"....)

The [About Presence](#) book reminded me of another similar title in my library [Presence - exploring profound change in people, organisations and society](#); P Senge et al (2005) which turned out to be a typical example of "New Age" managerialism. By then I had piled on my desk my Robert Quinn favourites - "Deep Change" and "[Change the World](#)" - which remain for me the key books exploring the link between the individual and the apparently impervious forces of the world at large.... But the library also contains books on subjects such as Systems Change, Chaos theory and Complexity which have never been able to engage my sustained attention - apart from Thomas Homer-Dixon's [The Ingenuity Gap - how can we solve the problems of the future?](#) (2001) These focus on the increase of the interdependence of one system with another - making apparently for a world which no one can control and yet one in which local victories are achieved....

So other books were duly deposited on the desk - both real and virtual - and now form a rather fascinating list which starts with a book written in 1967 and ends with 4 powerful books with messages of hope I strongly recommend to my readers.

[Embracing Complexity - strategic perspectives for an age of turbulence](#); Jean Boulton, Peter Allen and Cliff Bowman (2015)

[How Change Happens](#) Duncan Green (2016)

[Can We Know Better?](#); Robert Chambers (2017)

[Knowledge Management Matters - words of wisdom from leading practitioners](#); J and J Girard (2018)

## I have a little list....

About ten years ago, a Frenchman published a book with the great title [How to Talk about Books you haven't Read](#)... and proceeded to do so....

I suppose I supply the same service to my readers - as the two recent little E-books [How did admin reform get to be so sexy?](#) and [Dispatches to the next generation - the short version](#) each had at their core annotated (and hyperlinked) reading lists. And such lists have indeed begun to figure as a regular item in the posts.

The previous post expressed some frustration - since I couldn't quite pin the idea down which had been bothering me the entire week...it was something to do with the world having escaped "our" control, But it was also something to do with the mental models we used to make sense of the world....

So here is the list of books which landed up on my desk - with, inevitably, a few notes....

These titles, it should be emphasised, do not claim to represent anything except the vagaries of my purchases and interests. Half of them just happen to be in my library - but another nine are E-books (you can therefore all access) **which reflect important stages in the realisation that we have allowed a perverse linear/mechanistic model of society to occupy our minds.....**

I had been aware of systems thinking in the 1970s (particularly in the writing of [Geoffrey Vickers](#) and [Stafford Beer](#)) and [again in 2010](#) and, finally, in a [2011 post which focused on complexity theory](#). My brief foray into the subject didn't greatly enlighten me but I have a feeling I should return to the challenge....

The date of the first book is 1967..... That's 50 years ago....a long time for an idea to gestate and develop....The last book arrived only a few weeks ago and didn't seem to be part of this conversation - but as I started it, I realised it was all about....mental models!

I included a column called "clarity factor" to indicate how easily (or not) each book flows in its presentation.....A "1" means it's a joy to read...No fewer than eight of the books get this accolade

#### The Books which landed up on my desk

<b>Titles from 1967</b>	<b>rating</b>	<b>Significance</b>	<b>full book?</b>
<a href="#">The Costs of Economic Growth</a> ; EJ Mishan (1967)	1	The first time an economist warns of this	
<a href="#">The Limits to Growth</a> ; Club of Rome (1972)	2	The book which made the warning global	
<a href="#">The Sane Alternative - a choice of futures</a> ; James Robertson (1978)	1	"Small is Beautiful" (1973) was seen as partisan, if not extreme. James Robertson's book put the case in more balanced terms	Yes
<a href="#">The Whale and the Reactor - the search for limits in an age of high technology</a> ; Langdon Winner (1986)	2	Amazingly prescient book -	Yes
<a href="#">The Fifth Discipline; the art and practice of the learning organisation</a> ; Peter Senge (1990)	3	Made the concepts of systems and of "the learning organisation" fashionable	
<a href="#">The Development Dictionary - a guide to knowledge as power</a> ; ed W Sachs (1992)	2	A powerful challenge to "the western view"	yes
<a href="#">The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook</a> ; Peter Senge 1994	2	The sub-title says it all - strategies and tools for building a learning organisation	
<a href="#">The Web of Life</a> Fritjof Capra 1996	4	A well-intentioned presentation of systems thinking - but tough going	
<a href="#">Deep Change</a> ; Robert Quinn 1996	2	Quinn's first draft of what became the superb "Change the World"	
<a href="#">Leadership and the new Science - discovering order in a chaotic world</a> Margaret Wheatley 1999	2	An early classic in the attempt to present a new world of complexity	
<a href="#">Dialogue and the art of thinking together</a> ; William Isaacs (1999)	3	One of many focusing on dialogue...	
<a href="#">Change the World</a> ; Robert Quinn (2000)	1	Why is this book so seldom mentioned.....perhaps because it makes a moral case?	
<a href="#">The Ingenuity Gap - how can we solve the problems of the future?</a> Thomas Homer-Dixon (2001)	1	A fascinating book which focuses on the complexity of the contemporary world - with a powerful narrative	
<a href="#">Towards Holistic Governance - the new reform agenda</a> ; Perri 6, Leat, Seltzer and Stoker (2002)	4	Cooperation in government is an important topic but is dealt with in an over-confident and technical manner by these academics	
<a href="#">Systems thinking - creative holism for managers</a> ; Michael Jackson (2003)	3	A very technical approach which seems to be strong on the history but which misses the Tavistock school - 400pp	yes
<a href="#">Critical Mass</a> ; Philip Ball (2004)	3	A popular attempt to look at systems issues	



		which probably tries to cover too many areas	
<a href="#">An End to Suffering - the Buddha in the World</a> ; Pankaj Mishra( 2004)	2	A delightful idea and easy read	
<a href="#">Presence - exploring profound change in people, organisations and society</a> ; P Senge et al (2005)	3	A conversation between 4 friends which reflects their uncertainties. Just a bit too self-indulgent and self-referential	
<a href="#">The Dictionary of Alternatives - utopianism and organisation</a> ; ed M Parker, V Fournier and P Reedy (2007)	3	A nice idea - which I have still to read	
<a href="#">Thinking in Systems - a primer</a> ; Donella Meadows (2008)	2	The early pages are a delight to read - this is the woman who lead the team which produced "Limits to Growth"	Yes
<a href="#">Exploring the Science of Complexity</a> ; Ben Ramalingam et al (ODI 2008)	5	Almost incoherent - but see "Aid on the edge of Chaos" below	Yes
<a href="#">The Master and His Emissary - the divided brain and the making of the Western World</a> ; Iain McGilchrist (2009)	3	Apparently a very important read but, with more than 500 pages, too big a challenge for me....	
<a href="#">Deconstructing Development Buzzwords</a> (2010)	3	Clever...	Yes
<a href="#">Power and Love; a theory and practice of social change</a> ; Adam Kahane (2010)	2	Most authors would avoid a title like this - but Kahane's south African experience makes this a great story	
<a href="#">The Dance on the Feet of Chance</a> ; Hooman Attar (2010)	3	A bit too technical - but honest	
<a href="#">Mastery</a> ; Robert Greene (2012)	2	An important topic, nicely presented by a craftsman of his trade	
<a href="#">Aid on the Edge of Chaos</a> ; Ben Ramalingam (2013)	3	A very comprehensive treatment of the various strands but ultimately (at 450 pages) indigestible	
<a href="#">Embracing Complexity - strategic perspectives for an age of turbulence</a> ; J Boulton, P Allen and C Bowman (2015)	1	At first glance, wonderfully clear	
<a href="#">How Change Happens</a> Duncan Green (2016)	1	With its focus on the marginalised of the world, this may not immediately attract but it's one the best discussions of change - building on his <a href="#">From Poverty to Power - how active citizens and effective states can change the world</a> (2008) ...	Yes
<a href="#">Can We Know Better?</a> ; Robert Chambers (2017)	1	What could be final reflections from the development scholar who wrote " <a href="#">Whose Reality Counts? putting the Last First</a> "...	Yes
<a href="#">Doughnut Economics - seven ways to think like a 21<sup>st</sup> century economist</a> ; K Raworth (2017)	1	Not strictly part of this discussion - but the clarity of <a href="#">her exposition of the simplistic nature of the economic models</a> we have been fed blows you away!!	

## Further Reading

[Summary of Peter Senge et al's "Presence"](#)

[https://archive.org/details/The\\_Power\\_of\\_Positive\\_Deviance\\_-\\_How\\_Unlikely\\_Innovators\\_Solve\\_the\\_World's\\_Toughest\\_Problems](https://archive.org/details/The_Power_of_Positive_Deviance_-_How_Unlikely_Innovators_Solve_the_World's_Toughest_Problems)

[The Yogi and the Commissar revisited](#)

[The Marriage of Sense and Soul](#); Ken Wilber (1996)

[Building the bridge as you walk on it - a guide for leading change](#); Robert Quinn

Reviews of The Origin of Wealth - [http://apli6.hec.fr/amo/Public/Files/Docs/101\\_en.pdf](http://apli6.hec.fr/amo/Public/Files/Docs/101_en.pdf)

<http://evonomics.com/radical-remaking-of-economics-eric-beinhocker/>

extended Gintis review of Beinhocker's The Origin of Wealth - the radical remaking of economics

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download;jsessionid=0E208D45B8D086AA1C947A1E7FA6A1F6?doi=10.1.1.360.2437&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<http://www.theoryulab.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Executive-summary-Presence.pdf>

[https://solonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Presence\\_Workbook.pdf](https://solonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Presence_Workbook.pdf)

[http://www.ottoscharmer.com/sites/default/files/2004\\_AwakeningFaith.pdf](http://www.ottoscharmer.com/sites/default/files/2004_AwakeningFaith.pdf)

<https://www.thersa.org/discover/videos/event-videos/2010/11/the-divided-brain-and-the-making-of-the-western-world>

## **Why Those seeking systemic change have had little traction....so far**

I've been looking back at the various posts which have this year discussed the various efforts to improve "the human lot" and trying to draw the threads together.....

One of the recurring themes of this blog is the "insularity" of those who theorise about social conditions ie their failure to realise that they are (generally) writing from one particular intellectual "silo" and aiming their missive at those within the same silo....

It's taken me some time to realise that I'm guilty of the same sin....Let me explain.....

When I started this blog almost ten years ago, its initial focus was what we might call the "conditions of social injustice" in the West of Scotland in the 1970s which had persuaded some of us to elaborate a [unique urban social strategy](#) whose legacy is still evident today....

The blog then fairly quickly moved to try to explore the sort of [reform strategy which might be appropriate for government agencies "in transit"](#) from a system of total state control (under communism) to one with a strange mixture of "Wild-West"/Mafia capitalism and of loose democratic contestability...

At the same time, I was following the "development literature" in which the historical context (or path dependency) had been - not communism but - imperialism...The past decade - [as a recent post summarised](#) - has seen multiple challenges to the development model which had held sway in the post-war period.....with a much more political model of change penetrating even to the World Bank citadels of power

And, in recent years, the blog's focus has shifted yet again - this time scouring the critical literature (which has grown massively in the past decade) about the "global economic crisis" and [trying to identify some common ground](#) in the various explanations on offer for the meltdown and their implications for the future of the prevailing economic model. Critical voices have increasingly been heard of that model - although alternatives are still in short supply

**In each case, theories of change were needed and were duly produced** - with varying degrees of coherence. The best of this literature is probably the World Bank material on government reform;

and the 3 bodies listed in the "global justice" section - particularly the material from [Smart CSOs](#) with its three levels of forces of power - "culture", "regimes" and "niches"

As always, a table will make the point more graphically than text -

### How different "theories of change" have dealt with some key issues

Focus	The issue?	Key analysts	Narrative
<b>Urban Social injustice</b>	How marginalised groups and areas could improve their political influence	Saul Alinsky Peter Marris	Urban ghettos were rediscovered in the 1980s and various methods used by governments to empower their residents....no real answer has been found to the problem of labelling and stigma....
<b>National governance (communist legacy)</b>	How to make state bodies effective and accountable to citizens	Nick Manning Tony Verheijen	Fast privatisation (not least of media empires) has created new patrimonial regimes impervious to citizen control. European Structural Funds have deepened the corruption.
<b>National governance (imperialist legacy)</b>	reducing patrimonial power	Robert Chambers Duncan Green Matt Andrews Tom Carrothers	Global aid and consultancy is a massive multi-billion industry which seems impossible to reform. Fashionable nostras come and go - with the local regimes firmly in control....
<b>Managing the Capitalist Crisis</b>	Ecological collapse, peak oil, low profitability, corporate theft, globalisation	The usual culprits - Chomsky, Harvey, Klein, Monbiot, Varoufakis	The blog has noted several times the reluctance of writers <a href="#">to develop common ground in their various analyses</a> - let alone develop a proper annotated bibliography about the crisis....
<b>"Global justice"</b>	The search for a more sustainable and acceptable alternative economic model	<a href="#">Smart CSOs</a> <a href="#">Great Transition Initiative</a> <a href="#">CASSE</a>	The ecological crisis has more resonance for change than talk about capitalism - so the most effective bodies which have captured global attention tend to focus initially on that - but increasingly broaden out to talk of alternative economic models

It's interesting, of course, that newspaper headlines rarely refer to these fundamental issues - with the single exception of extreme weather conditions....

Perhaps this post is beginning to show the influence of the material I've been reading in the past week or so about thinking in terms of systems.....?? It's suggesting that those of us angry with the way the world is being run need to -

- Show more sensitivity to how issues are being defined in campaigns we're not involved in
- Spend more time making common cause with others
- Clarifying our "theory of change"
- Challenging the leaders of campaigns about such things...

## Recommended Reading

[Systemic activism in a polarised world](#) (Smart CSOs 2018)

[Theories of Change and the vision of the Great Transformation](#) (Smart CSOs 2016)

[How to break out of the system trap](#) (Smart CSOs 2013)

[Effective Change Strategies for the Great Transformation - 5 leverage points for civil society organs](#) (Smart CSOs 2011)

## Revisiting a neglected management classic

Just before this blog went silent in early August, I had written an [important post distinguishing 5 very different "theories of change"](#)....wondering why so few mutual links had been made by the practitioners of the 5 "schools". I now realise I may have missed the most important school of all - that of "managing change"

Whenever the issue of change comes up, I rarely miss the chance to plug a book which was published in 2000 - [Change the World](#) by a management theorist Robert Quinn.

It stood out from the huge mass of books about managing change I had been reading in the late 1990s for its **explanation of why so many change efforts fail**- offering a typology (and critique) of four different strategies - "telling", "selling", "participating" and "transforming" - and daring to pose the challenging question of how individuals such as Gandhi, Luther King, Jesus Christ came to inspire millions.....



Virtually all books on managing change until then were (and most remain) what I would call "mechanistic" - offering apparently neutral tools of the sort consultants claiming objectivity can use. Quinn dares to introduce a moral tone - which both management writers and practitioners find a bit embarrassing. Their very legitimacy, after all, rests on the claims they make to scientific authority.....

This is perhaps why most of his writing passes under our radar.

The same fate overtook [Robert Greenleaf](#) whose books on

"stewardship" are so valuable.....

A European audience does recoil a bit when they see the sub-title of Quinn's *Change the World*, "how ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary results" - even if such hyping is a well-known US habit....His book then proceeds to offer 8 injunctions for those who aspire to be change-agents,

some of which may offer challenges to the translator - the summary I offer in the middle column is from my memory of a book which is almost 20 years old.

Since then, our view of the world has been hugely upset - not least by the social movements since then; by the 2008 global financial crisis; and by more recent books such as [Reinventing Organisations](#) by Frederic Laloux - my final column offers some preliminary and terse comments on how the injunctions have withstood the test of time ....

#### Quinn's 8 Injunctions for changing the world (2000)

Quinn Injunction	What one reader thinks he means	Fit with mainstream and newer literature
"Envisage the Productive Community"	Imagine how the system would work if we treated one another generously - Don't be satisfied with second-best	Laloux has a lot to say about this
"First Look Within"	Set your own standards of excellence - don't go with the mob	The self is very much back in fashion
"Embrace the Hypocritical Self"	Be aware of your own double standards	Still worthwhile
"Transcend Fear"	We always feel a pressure to conform and fear the consequences of appearing different	Ditto
"embody a Vision of the Common Good"	Don't be afraid to demonstrate behavior consistent with what your ethical sense tells you	Laloux and the whole solidarity ethic much stronger these days
Disturb the system		20 years on, we probably have too much of this now!
<a href="#">"Surrender to the Emergent Process"</a>	Events can never be controlled - so let go	Chaos theory also back in fashion
"Entice Through Moral Power"	As above	See Laloux

"Change the World" is actually one of a trilogy Quinn has written - the first being "Deep change" - and the final one "**Building the Bridge as you Walk on it - a guide for leading change**" (2004) an outline of whose [basic argument can be found here](#). I actually managed at some stage to download the entire book but, sadly, this no longer seems possible....

Although I often reference Quinn, this is the first time I have written at length about him and notice a tinge of defensiveness as I reflect on his message.....which perhaps sometimes smacks of "motherhood and apple pie". He writes here about how the responses he received from his first book were the inspiration for the third -

*They defied what is written in almost all textbooks on management and leadership... common understanding and practice..... suggesting that every one of us has the capacity to transform our organizations into more positive, productive communities. Yet it is a painful answer that almost no one wants to hear. That is why it is not in the books on management and leadership. Painful answers have no*



market. The man states: "I know it all happened because I confronted my own insecurity, selfishness, and lack of courage."

In the early 1990s I would look for copies of Stephen Covey's [The Seven Habits of really effective People](#) which had been translated into the language of the country I was working in - partly to ensure that we had a common frame of reference but mainly because of its encouragement of what I considered to be useful ethical practices.....

Robert Quinn is still writing - not least on a blog [the positive organization](#) - although I suspect he has fallen prey to what happens to most gurus.....they end up as egocentrics on egotrips.....

### More reading on social and organisational change

[People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform](#) (World Bank 2011)

[Indignez-vous](#); Stephane Hessel (2010)

[Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice](#) (World Bank 2008)

Change Here! Managing change to improve local services (Audit Commission 2001)

chapter 6 of [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999)

[https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2018/07/i-have-little-list\\_10.html](https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2018/07/i-have-little-list_10.html)

### a Robert Quinn resource

<http://business.unr.edu/faculty/simmons/badm720/actchange.pdf>

<https://keithdwalker.ca/wp-content/summaries/1-c/ChangeTheWorld.Quinn.EBS.pdf>

<https://learningforward.org/docs/jsd-fall-2001/quinn224.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

<https://worldbusiness.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/vp052604.pdf>

## Telling it as it is



[Dorel Sandor](#) is a name to conjure with in Romania....

I first met him some 25 years ago when he had just started his career as an independent policy consultant which morphed into that of a respected political commentator....

Less visible these days on television perhaps than a decade or so ago, he has just given [an interview in Revista 22](#) which some Romanians may feel is selling their country short. As, however, I've posted only once this year about Romania and his analysis will strike chords with many of my readers who are from other European countries - as well as the US, Ukraine and Russia.....

I'm going to try to summarise the main points of the interview - but blame Google Translate for the inevitable mistakes which will occur.....First, however, let's set the context

for the 98% of my readers who are not Romanian.....

The end of next year will see the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Ceausescu regime but few Romanians have any reason to celebrate. Four million of their best and brightest have, for example, emigrated - and most of its industries, agriculture and woodlands sold to foreigners.

Romania joined the EU in 2007 and, for a time, it seemed, was making progress in judicial reform where it is still (like Bulgaria) subject to the constraints of an [annual monitoring system](#). The sentencing of a Prime Minister to jail-time led to what appeared to be open season being declared on senior politicians and businessmen (corruption was so systemic that it was difficult to distinguish the two).

Accusations about partiality were brushed aside initially but evidence slowly began to accumulate first of suspiciously high conviction rates and, more seriously, collusion between prosecutors and the (still extensive) security services..... [Traian Basescu](#) the maverick liberal President (from 2004-2014) had appointed in 2006 a young woman [Laura Kovosi](#) as Prosecutor General who found herself and the service under increasing fire from various high-profile scandals from 2016. In December of that year, the Social Democratic party came to power and tried to use the scandals [to muzzle the Prosecution service and indeed to change the criminal law](#). Extensive street protests have marked the regime ever since.....

### **The Sandor Interview**

He reminds us at the start that there was **no revolution in 1989/90 - just a reshuffling of positions and creation of opportunities for a Mafia-type takeover of financial assets..**

"The great secret of post-communism is that those who fed, sustained and exploited it did not want it to have democracy, market economy, free press, civil society, but to put money on the factories, plants, resources. And here begins the metastasis of Romania for the past 30 years. At present, parliament is a collection of nullity, people fleeing immunity with no idea of what is happening in Romania".

Indeed, he suggests that there are no more than a dozen decent individuals in Parliament - and 2 worthwhile trade union leaders. He is highly critical of NGOs and the media....."empty shells"....

**He is particularly scathing of the passive consumerist culture which now has a grip on the country**

*"Nowadays, the plague that destroys 30-40 year-olds and children is mobile phone, laptop and Facebook. Now, when the baby comes out of the mother's belly, she puts the phone in her mouth and sees what is delivered to her screen, so she does not have any personal experience and she's eating information from commercial companies. Communism and capitalism have been replaced by vulgar consumerism*

*And the phone, the laptop, the computer, Facebook and the TV are sources of substitution for the collective personal identity and the world we live in. On the street, I see mothers with a baby in their arms talking on two phones. Or children for a few years who sit and look at the computer screen. 80% of people are prisoners of the screen. It's a plague. This is one of the main factors that peacefully breaks down, soft liberation, collective and individual thinking..... The human species is in a very serious anthropological deadlock. It is in the global trend. We, being a poorer, more primitive country, are lagging behind in this pathology. So it's an incredible collective plague".*

### **And has clearly given up on politics -**

"The stark reality is now that we do not have political parties any more. The Romanian political environment is in fact an ensemble of ordinary gangs that try to survive the process and jail and eventually save their wealth in the country or abroad. That's all! Romania has no rulers. It has mobsters in buildings with signs that say "The Ministry of Fish that Blooms".

### **Hungary and Poland are currently the focus of serious European concern simply because Brussels has given up on Romania**

*"In Poland and Hungary things are working. They have preserved their internal authority, they want to lead them, according to market standards, and they are naughty. But these are two countries that function and want to function in their traditional, authoritarian way, with pride. And to them is nationalism, but it is a nationalism that has consistency.*

*While there is no such thing in us. However, there are relevant things that happen there in the economy, in investments. And they violate the rules for personal and personal interest, but not in the way we do. It is a gap between the level at which we have fallen below elementary standards and them. One of the reasons why the EU is not too much about us is that you can only correct a driver with a car that works. We are a two-wheeled wagon and two horses, a chaotic space, broken into pieces. What to reform? So it's a big difference."*

Is Romania therefore "finished" - as Sandor claims? If anyone can deal with this question, it is [Alina Mungiu-Pippidi](#) - a prolific and high profile Romanian academic/social activist (with a base for the past few years in the Hertie School of Government in Berlin) who has been trying to understand Romanian political culture and the wider issue of corruption for the past 2 decades. In 2006 she contributed a chapter on "[Fatalistic political cultures](#)" to a book on [Democracy and Political Culture in East Europe](#). In this she argued (a) that it was too easy for people (not least the political elite themselves!) to use the writings of Samuel Huntington to write Balkan countries off; and (b) that we really did need to look more closely at what various surveys (such as [The World Values Survey](#)) showed before jumping to conclusions....

In 2007 she gave us even more insights into the Romanian culture in [Hijacked modernisation - Romanian political culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century](#)

What to do when a system is so broken? Talk of the "democratic will" seems meaningless....Few people understand how the Italian system has been able to survive - but at least it had the liquid resources to keep its people happy.....The stark truth is that, after 30 years, Romanians live in a state of anomie and with none of the social trust or solidarity which allows some European countries to survive - however insidiously neo-liberalism is destroying even these.....

## Why we need to be suspicious of the idea of “political culture”

We like to think that we are “[masters of our fate](#)” and it irks us when foreigners, for example, make us realise that our behaviour is often the result of specific cultural factors which can be questioned.

The last post has made me return to a question which has haunted me since I started to work in Europe more than 30 years ago.....“to what extent can we actually change national characteristics” - let alone state institutions ???



*NB - this may look a long post (and it has certainly taken a full day to compose) but it actually divides fairly easily into three separate sections - which I felt still needed to be part of a single post*

### **1. An ignored 1990 warning**

Ralf Dahrendorf was a famous German sociologist/UK statesman who wrote in 1990 an extended public letter first published under the title “Reflections on the Revolution in Europe” and then expanded as [Reflections on the Revolution of our Time](#). In it he made the comment that it would take one or two years to create new institutions of political democracy in the recently liberated countries of central Europe; maybe five to 10 years to reform the economy and make a market economy; and 15 to 20 years to create the rule of law. But it would take maybe two generations to create a functioning civil society there.

A former adviser to Václav Havel, [Jiri Pehe, referred 7 years ago to that prediction](#) and suggested that

*“what we see now is that we have completed the first two stages, the transformation of the institutions, of the framework of political democracy on the institutional level, there is a functioning market economy, which of course has certain problems, but when you take a look at the third area, the rule of the law, there is still a long way to go, and civil society is still weak and in many ways not very efficient.”*

He then went on to make the useful distinction between “democracy understood as institutions and democracy understood as culture”

*“It’s been much easier to create a democratic regime, a democratic system as a set of institutions and procedures and mechanism, than to create democracy as a kind of culture - that is, an environment in which people are actually democrats”.*

## 2. Where did talk about “political cultures” first start?

The idea of “political culture” is – as the academic have taken to put it – a “contested field”...

Not that this has stopped wild assertions being made about national characteristics. Indeed it has spawned one of the most enjoyable of book genres – who, for example, can resist [We, Europeans](#) – with its amusing vignettes of our various mutual neighbours? And, although the [Xenophobe series](#) does rather take this to extremes, some of this stuff can actually be quite insightful – for example, [this good expose of the phrases Brits use](#) – with columns distinguishing what our European partners generally understand by various common phrases from what Brits really mean by them

And, since we all first noticed globalisation in the 1980s, a new field has been spawned – that of “comparative management” whose foremost writers have been [Geert Hofstede](#), [Ronnie Lessem](#) and [Frans Trompenaars](#) ....Richard D Lewis's [When Cultures Collide – leading across Cultures](#) (1996) is perhaps the most readable treatment.

There used indeed to be an area called “**path dependency**” which argued that our behaviour was much more influenced by historical cultural patterns than we imagined. It focused initially on technical examples such as the layout of the typewriter – but found [new life after the fall of communism](#). Indeed it gave rise to a sub-field of political science called “transitology” (which I try to explain in chapter 2 of my 1999 book [In Transit – notes on good governance](#)) [Political culture versus rational choice – the example of the Czech-Slovak transition](#) is one of the better examples of the genre and [The political culture of unified Germany](#) (written by a German academic) puts the field in the wider context of “political culture”

[Culture Matters – how values shape human progress](#); ed Lawrence Harrison and SP Huntington is not an easy book to find these days. It came out in 2000 but attracted the entirely appropriate comment that a more appropriate title would have been [Western Culture Matters](#)

**And that indeed is the problem – that commentary about other cultures is imbued with notions not only of “the other” but with those of superiority and inferiority....**

This raises the obvious question of what sort of person might be best placed to do an insightful (if not objective) analysis of a political culture. The answer, I would suggest, comes from using 2 axes – one to denote the “status” one (insider/outsider); the other to denote something like “the generalist/specialist” spectrum.

Robert Kaplan would be an example of a generalist outsider in Romania's case – Mungiu-Pippidi is an example of a specialist insider, although perhaps not the best example in view of her Berlin location and international profile...The historian Lucian Boia might be a better example.....And his philosopher colleague, Andrei Plesu (whose prolific writings are, sadly, not accessible to English-only speakers) delivered recently this great [reflection on the complexity of Europe's cultural currents](#).

## 3. How 2 American political scientists tarred the Italian Image

Edward Banfield's study in the early 1950s of a small town in southern Italy whose inhabitants displayed loyalty only to the members of their nuclear family and who had absolutely no sense of social responsibility for wider circles. The book (published in 1955) was called “[The Moral Basis of a Backward Society](#)”

*Banfield concluded that the town's plight was rooted in the distrust, envy and suspicion displayed by its inhabitants' relations with each other. Fellow citizens would refuse to help one another, except where*



*one's own personal material gain was at stake. Many attempted to hinder their neighbours from attaining success, believing that others' good fortune would inevitably harm their own interests. "Montegrano"'s citizens viewed their village life as little more than a battleground. Consequently, there prevailed social isolation and poverty—and an inability to work together to solve common social problems, or even to pool common resources and talents to build infrastructure or common economic concerns.*

*"Montegrano"'s inhabitants were not unique nor inherently more impious than other people. But for quite a few reasons: historical and cultural, they did not have what he termed "social capital"—the habits, norms, attitudes and networks that motivate folk **to work for the common good.***

*This stress on the nuclear family over the interest of the citizenry, he called the ethos of 'amoral familism'. This he argued was probably created by the combination of certain land-tenure conditions, a high mortality rate, and the absence of other community building institutions.*

Fast forward sixty years to an article in "[City Compass Guide Romania](#)" in which an expat (and, full disclosure) friend of mine wrote....

*If you are fortunate enough to drive in Bucharest you will witness what is probably the clearest evidence of mass individualism in global human society. Romanian people, of all shapes, sizes, social and educational backgrounds and income brackets will do things in their cars that display a total disregard for sanity and other drivers.*

*Manoeuvres such as parking in the middle of the street, u-turning on highways without any warning and weaving between lanes in heavy traffic at 150 kilometres per hour are commonplace and point to an extreme lack of concern for the safety or even the simple existence of others.*

*The next time you are waiting to get on a plane at Henri Coandă airport, take a little time to observe how queuing in an orderly and effective manner is clearly regarded as an affront to the sovereignty of the Romanian individual. Enjoy the spectacle of the pushing, shoving and general intimidation that follows the arrival of the airport staff to supervise boarding. Even while watching an international rugby test match you will only occasionally see the same intense level of barely controlled aggression.*

*Outside of their core social networks Romanians closely follow the rule stating that it is every man, woman and child for themselves. ....There is an opinion poll, published in early 2012, showing that around 90 percent of the Romanian population regards almost all of their compatriots as utterly untrustworthy and incompetent. At the same time 90 percent, possibly the same 90 percent, see themselves as being absolutely beyond reproach. This is clearly an extreme response no matter how you view it and provides evidence of an extraordinary and troubling imbalance within the generality of Romania's social relationships.*

*There is a well-known prayer in Romania, which roughly goes: "Dear God, if my goat is so ill that it will die, please make sure that my neighbour's goat dies too."*

So what does this commonality suggest? The EU's first Ambassador here was Karen Fogg who gave every consultant who came here in the early 1990s (like me) a summary of what can be seen as the follow-up to Banfield's book - Robert Putnam's [Making Democracy Work - civic traditions in Italy](#) (1993) which suggested that the laggardly nature of southern Italian Regions was due entirely to this "amoral familism". Putnam made an even greater play of missing "social capital" - indeed spawned an incredible technocratic literature on the concept and ideas on how it could be "engineered" to deal with the new alienation of modern capitalism..

Romanian communism, of course, had almost 50 years to inculcate more cooperative attitudes and behaviour - but the forced nature of "collective farms"; the forced migration of villagers to urban

areas to drive industrialisation; and the scale of Securitate spying created a society where, paradoxically, even fewer could trust anyone.  
From 1990 the market became God; Reagan and Thatcher had glorified greed; the state was "bad"; and television - which had been limited by Ceausescu to 2 hours a day - the great "good".....As the commercial stations and journals spread, the values of instant gratification became dominant (one of the points Dorel Sandor makes).....

### Addendum

My recent posts about Romania raised the general question about cultural values - and of how long it would take to develop the sort of social culture in which the country's formal institutions would actually work....It would probably have been helpful to mention some examples.....

It was exactly 3 years ago that one scandal too many (a fire in a Bucharest night club) forced a "Social Democratic" Romanian [government to make way for a technocratic one](#). It transpired that the club had false licences which a "lax" municipal control system had not bothered to check.... And [small farmers in the country may complain about EC regulations](#) but the hard reality is that the Food and Safety Agency people are the last to bother about such things.....so the uncontrolled cheese and salami of which I'm so fond go thankfully unthreatened....

**Grassroots pressure rarely leads to significant change - not at least on its own.....But neither do the imposition of national or international norms - which produces a push-back if not angry resentment** Social change generally comes from a combination of both (see my [pincer theory of change](#))

### Resource

[The status of Romanian agriculture - and what to do?](#) (2015 article)

[The contribution of rural farming in Romania](#) (ADEPT 2013 )

[Peasants into European Farmers?](#) K Fox (2011)

<https://theecologist.org/2011/jan/07/transylvania-could-lost-time-land-be-future-european-agriculture>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/19/romania-peasants-land-market-local-farming-economy>

<http://www.arc2020.eu/will-organic-farming-save-unbalanced-romanian-agriculture/>

## Plus Ça Change,,,plus c'est la meme chose???

European countries have experienced massive changes since the end of the war - and yet, I keep on wondering, "to what extent do national characteristics actually change". [The interview with Dorel Sandor](#) does not seem to have attracted much notice in the country but, for me, has crystallised the various impressions about Romania I've conveyed in the blog in recent years

Let me summarise his key points -

- the so-called "revolution" of 1989 was nothing of the sort - just a takeover by the old-guard masquerading in the costumes of the market economy and democracy
- Which, after 30 years, has incubated a new anomie - with the "mass" and "social" media dominating people's minds
- So-called "European integration" has destroyed Romanian agriculture and industry - and drained the country of 4 million talented young Romanians
- After 30 years, there is not a single part of the system - economic, political, religious, cultural, voluntary - which offers any real prospect of positive change

- Even Brussels seems to have written the country off
- The country is locked into a paralysis of suspicion, distrust, consumerism, apathy, anomie
- No one is calling for a new start - let alone demonstrating the potential for realistic alliances

My last 2 posts have argued that -

- **in the early 90s everyone (particularly outside Romania) expected too much** - although remember that Ralf Dahrendorf - unique in his experience as both a German and British politician and one of the first academics in the 50s to explore the nature of the social changes which took place in Germany in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Society and Democracy in Germany) - had warned in 1990 that real cultural change would take "two generations". For middle class academics, this meant 50 years!
- **Absolutely no preparations existed in 1989 for the possibility that communism might collapse** and for the choices this would present for political, economic and legal systems .....Everyone had assumed that the change would be in the opposite direction. The only writings which could be drawn were those about the south American, Portugese and Spanish transition ....
- **The EC stopped treating Romania as in need of "developmental assistance" in 1998/99**. The PHARE programme was phased out - the focus shifted to training for EU membership and the implementation of the Acquis (using the TAIEX programme). Talk of differences in political culture was seen as politically incorrect - eastern countries simply had to learn the language and habits of the European social market and, hey-presto, things would magically change.....
- **30 years on, the names of Bulgarian and Romanian institutions and processes may have changed but not the fundamental reality** - with a corruption which is nothing less than systemic.
- The billions of Euros allocated to Romania since 2007 under the EC's Structural Funds programmes have compounded the systemic and moral corruption which affects all sectors.
- The Cooperation and Verification Mechanism is, after 11 years, deeply resented - despite the increasingly clear evidence of **the collusion between the Prosecution and the Secret services**.....

### The Italian and German examples

In 1958 Ed Banfield coined the phrase "amoral familism" to characterize southern Italy and its resistance to change. In 1993 Robert Putnam extended this critique with his Making Democracy Work - civic traditions in modern Italy - pointing out that, centuries later, cultural patterns in the south still profoundly affected modern institutions .... **The Italian system** since then has demonstrated little capacity for change. What appeared to be a new opening in the 1990s disappointed....the old systems simply resurfaced

**Germany's** traditional power structure, on the other hand, was able to change after 1945... The Weimar Republic failed to break it - but simply gave a Nazi regime the opportunity to let loose a blood-letting from which the world has not yet recovered. **Three forces were required to transform German society in 1945-50** - the trauma of defeat on all fronts; the imposition by the

victors of completely new institutional, legal, social and economic systems; and the Realpolitik calculations of the Cold War

Romania, however, has been able to brush off the institutional challenge which had been posed by membership of both the EC and NATO (see). The occasional scandal can and does cause the downfall of a government - but nothing now seems able to disturb its systemic inertia.

## Conclusion

It has given me no pleasure to draft this post. But I feel that too many people for too long have not



spoken out....In 2 months Romania will [take over the Presidency of the EU](#) which will see the full panoply(a) of mutual sycophancy at full throttle.....making it even more difficult for dissenting voices to be heard...

Dorel Sandor was least convincing when he tried to offer a way forward

*I have a list of what to do - starting with the need for an exploration of what sort of Romania we should be aiming for in the next few decades. Such a process would be moderated by professionals using proper diagnostics, scenario thinking and milestones.*

*It would be managed by a group with a vision emancipated from the toxic present.*

I have a lot of sympathy for such approaches - embodied, for example, in the [Future Search method](#). It's how I started my own political journey in 1971 - with an annual conference in a shipbuilding town facing the decline of the trade on which it had depended for so long....But any venture would have to demonstrate that it can deal with the astonishing level of distrust of others shown by the fact that, in 2014, only [7% of the Romanian population could say that "most people can be trusted"](#) (compared with about 20% in Italy and 40% in Germany)

For my money **Social Trust** is one of the fundamental elements of the soil in which democracy grows. From the start of the transition Romania was caught up in a global neo-liberalism tsunami which has been corroding that soil....

## A Short Reading List

### Articles

#### RGY posts

[When will it ever change?](#) (July 2017)

[Can Outsiders ever understand what's going on in Romania?](#) (Jan 2017)

[Impervious Power](#) (Jan 2017)

[A Divided Country - dangerous times](#) (Feb 2017)

[Are Nations really masters of their fates?](#) (April 2017)

[Is it people who change systems - or systems which change people?](#) (July 2017)



#### Academic articles on political culture and Romania

[Romania Redivivus](#) (2017)

[A Guide to Change and change management for Rule of Law practitioners](#) (2015)

[Hijacked modernisation - Romanian political culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century](#); Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2007)

[Poor Policy-making and how to improve it in states with weak institutions](#); Sorin Ionitsa (CEU 2006)

["Fatalistic political cultures"](#) Alina Mungiu-Pippidi 2006 (chapter in [Democracy and Political Culture in East Europe](#) in which she argued (a) that it was too easy for people (not least the political elite themselves!) to use the writings of Samuel Huntington to write off countries such as Romania; and (b) that we really did need to look more closely at what various surveys (such as [The World Values Survey](#)) showed before jumping to conclusions

#### books

[In Europe's Shadow - two cold wars and a thirty-year journey through Romania and beyond](#); Robert Kaplan (2016) - a fascinating book which has an element of the "Common Book" tradition about it with its breadth of reading

[A Concise History of Romania](#); Keith Hitchins (2014) Very readable..

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#); Ronald Young (2014) See section 7.2 at page 31 and all the annexes for the political culture references

[Romania and the European Union - how the weak vanquished the strong](#); Tom Gallagher (2009) great narrative

[Theft of a Nation](#); Tom Gallagher

[Romania - borderland of Europe](#); Lucian Boia (2001) Very readable and well translated

For in The Leopard he did not have Tancredi Falconeri say: "Everything must change so that everything can stay the same" - which would be a paradoxical nonsense. But in Archibald Colquhoun's authoritative translation, he had him say: "Unless we ourselves take a hand now, they'll foist a republic on us. "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change."

## When the Spark Ignites.....

**Sometimes a nation or a people feel such humiliation and anger about the way they are being treated that it takes only one incident to spark off a protest which makes the prevailing regime crumble.** It's said that [one picture is worth \(variously\) a thousand or ten thousand words](#) - although these days, I would put the equation at more like a billion words and I would focus on dramatic actions - rather than pictures.

Last month I [discussed a neglected classic](#) which explored the question of how people such as Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi came to inspire the world.... Emile [Zola's famous J'Accuse letter](#) may have been more than a hundred years ago but inspired one of the western world's first social movements - which split France in half. Saul Alinsky's writings set in motion several generations of community activists. A black woman [refused](#) in December 1955 [to obey racist instructions to move to the back of a bus](#)...- thereby starting what became the US Civil Rights movement.....

Police brutality has often been the cause of riots eg [the Watts Riots](#) of August 1965 in Los Angeles.

But it was probably [Jan Palach's act of setting himself on fire](#) on 16 January 1969 in the centre of Prague (in protest against people's indifference to the Russian invasion in the summer) which made the greatest impact. His memory stayed alive for the 20 years it took for the country to liberate itself.....

93-year old [Stephane Hessel](#) was so offended by the world's treatment of Palestine (amongst other things) that in 2010 he published [Time for Outrage](#) (2010) which quickly climbed to the top of the best sellers.... Later that same year [Mohamed Bouazizi](#) - a Tunisian street vendor - also set himself alight in response to the confiscation of his wares by a municipal official and her aides. The subsequent riots led [the then-president of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali](#) to step down on 14 January 2011, after 23 years in power - and became a catalyst for the wider [Arab Spring](#).





For every such defining moment, however, there are probably a million protests which lead nowhere..... The focus of protests have been variously industrial, racial, environmental, gender, housing, invasion. **What, I have to wonder, makes the difference?** In all humility I wonder whether those Romanians who have taken to the street in the past couple of years - or even those such as Dorel Sandor and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi - should perhaps not be using that experience and literature to explore more

deeply that basic question.....

Romania may have had blood on the streets in December 1989 but - unlike Poland and Czechoslovakia - its intellectuals were fairly passive until then (with the honourable exception of people like [Ana Blandiana](#) and [Mircea Dinescu](#)).

**Social change, after all, doesn't come from writing, consultancy or television appearances - but from a willingness to sacrifice..... Please understand that I'm not denigrating the writers when I say that - they are necessary but not sufficient.** That's clearly one of the messages which comes from the books I've selected for the important reading list I've developed below....

#### **How, sub-consciously, we compartmentalise the world**

It's interesting what happened as I was developing this reading list.....I knew that what I wanted to do was list some of books I had found useful in what is a massive literature on the experience and tactics of social struggle....ie a grassroots movement.....But I found references slipping in which I quickly realised didn't fit.....which dealt what we might call "reform efforts from within the system of power".....eg the World Bank titles and the Guide to Change management..... This blog has noticed repeated instances of people writing about the same issue but doing so with totally different language, concepts and "frames of reference" and - most importantly - without realising that there were "parallel universes" in which the same conversations were being conducted....

Having noticed this, I remembered the post I had done a year ago - [Is it people who change systems - or systems which change people?](#) - in which I had recounted the "pincer movement of change" I had developed in the 1970s. This argued that **significant and lasting policy change required both "push and pull"** - ie a combination of grassroots pressure with insiders sympathetic to change....Twenty five years later and in a different continent I developed what I called [the "opportunistic" or "windows of opportunity" theory of change](#) which I would expound to bewildered central Asian bureaucrats....

"Most of the time our systems seem impervious to change - but always (and suddenly) an opportunity arises. Those who care about the future of their society, prepare for these **"windows of opportunity"**. And the preparation is about analysis, mobilisation and trust....about....

- **caring enough** about our organisation or society to **speak out** about the need for change.
- **taking the trouble to think and read about ways to improve things**
- helping create and **run networks of such change**.
- establishing a personal **reputation for probity and good judgement** that people will follow your lead when that window of opportunity arises".

## Reading list on social change

The selection is a very personal one and ranges from the passionate to the technical - with a smattering of books that are more descriptive.....Temperamentally I go (at least these days) for the more analytical (and generic) works and the development literature is therefore probably a bit overrepresented (and the feminist underrepresented). Readers should also be aware that I was a strong community activist in my early days....The first 8 titles can be read in full - as can the last 4. Strange that none of the books is written by a political scientist (with the possible exception of Gene Sharp). Machiavelli would be turning in his grave

### Key Books for "social change" activists

Title	Focus	Notes
<a href="#">How Change Happens</a> Duncan Green (2016)	Community groups and officials	Great overview - if from only a development experience perspective
<a href="#">A Guide to Change and Change Management for Rule of Law Practitioners</a> (2015)	Transition countries Political culture	Very rare attempt to bring the insights of change management to those trying to build "rule of law" in transition and developing countries
<a href="#">People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform</a> (World Bank 2011)	Change agents in government	One of the best - straddling the various worlds of action, academia and officialdom - with the focus on fashioning an appropriate message and constituency for change
<a href="#">Finding Frames - new ways to engage the UK public in global poverty</a> (2011)	Charities	A great example of frame analysis - showing the importance of trying to identify the link between social values and politics
<a href="#">Indignez-vous</a> ; Stephane Hessel (2010)	Social justice	Inspiring pamphlet from the Frenchman whose whole life has been an inspiration to us all
<a href="#">Common Case - the case for working with our cultural values</a> (2010)	Activists for global concerns	One of the most important 100 pages any social activist could read....it's simply tragic that 8 years later, it would now be seen as revolutionary
<a href="#">Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice</a> (World Bank 2008)	Change agents in government	A decade on, it's still offers one of the clearest frameworks for making government systems work for people
<a href="#">Wicked Problems and clumsy solutions - the role of leadership</a> ; Keith Grint (2008)	Leaders	A must-read analysis which introduced many people to frame analysis - helps us adopt a more holistic approach
<a href="#">Live Working, Die Fighting - how the working class went global</a> ; Paul Mason (2007)	trade unionists	A story that needed telling in a media and political world which is now so hostile to working people organising to improve their lot
<a href="#">Blessed Unrest - how the largest movement in the world came into being and why no one saw it coming</a> ; Paul Hawken (2007)	Environment	This is the field which has probably seen the most action - but the least results!

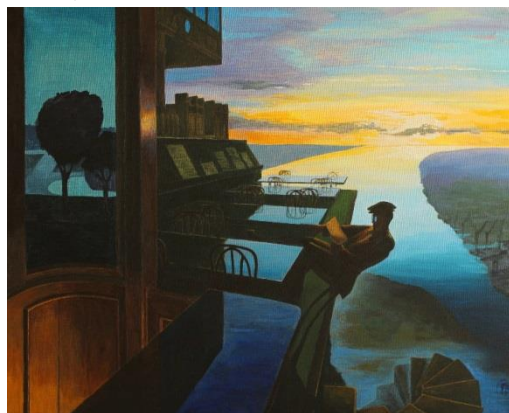
<a href="#">Change the World</a> ; Robert Quinn (2000)	Eclectic	A tragically neglected book
<a href="#">From Dictatorship to Democracy</a> ; Gene Sharp (1993)	Regime change	The handbook for a lot of soi-disant revolutionaries....its provenance is a bit suspect....
<a href="#">Putting the Last First</a> ; Robert Chambers (1983)	Donors	A morally powerful book which challenged (to little avail) the "imperialist" assumptions of most technical assistance programmes
<a href="#">Rules for Radicals</a> ; Saul Alinsky (1971)	Community action	THE handbook for generations of activists... the follow-up apparently to <a href="#">Reveille for Radicals</a> which he published in 1946!

When I googled "reading lists on social protest" I got this interesting selection  
<https://c4aa.org/2017/02/reading-list-activism/>

## Kenneth Roy - a voice to renew faith in journalism - RIP

Most "names" that resonate with us are of famous people whose activities - whether celebrated in music, text or acts of courage - somehow send a tingle down our spine....

[Kenneth Roy - who has just died](#) mere weeks after revealing his terminal diagnosis - was not a "famous person" - although he certainly had a profile in well-read Scottish circles. His was rather a (sadly almost unique journalistic) "voice" which measured the moral significance of public actions....



He was the founder and editor of a small Scottish journal - [Scottish Review](#) - to which ex-pats like me would look forward with great anticipation. It has a freshness matched by few other journals... The people who write for it did so because they had something to say - unlike most of the text which is inflicted on us these days.... His articles were a joy to read and represent what I imagine is the best of traditional journalism borne of the requirement in those days for new recruits to spend their initial years reporting the doings of the Police Court.... As the apparently self-penned obituary which announced his passing put it,

*"he always maintained this experience gave him a dark view of human nature, particularly as his duties were sometimes combined with a night-time trawl of the city's police stations for copy".*

It was such training which must account for the powerful story he always tells - which generally mix in the personal aside and local colour. [Ian Jack](#) is another journalist of this ilk....

I didn't know him - although we corresponded once a few years ago when it looked as if I might be able to pop into his offices on a rare visit to Scotland. But, somehow, the knowledge of his mere existence and continued activity kept my faith in humanity...

In his honour, I have started to reread his book [The Invisible Spirit - a life of post-war Scotland 1945-75](#). It was a part of a trilogy he was doing - the second part of which was [The Broken Journey - a life of Scotland 1976-99](#) which was [reviewed by one of this little country's many great authors](#)

There is only one Amazon review but it is an excellent one which captures the essence of Roy's style.....

*This is a big book, physically and intellectually and a very important book too - but rest assured that it is an incredibly easy read. This is mostly because Kenneth Roy's prose is so clear and so elegant. Above all, it's a book that tackles complex and difficult subjects in an accessible and thought provoking way. Every chapter stays in your mind and makes you think. The subject matter may be serious, the analysis incisive, but it is also laugh-out-loud funny at times, mostly because Kenneth Roy can see a devastating humour in the most grim of situations.*

*He has a sharp and deadly wit and a very fine sense of the ridiculous. Ridicule may well be the best weapon against so much of the material contained within these pages. As the writer points out in his final chapter, 'the reason for re-assembling some of the more deplorable features of Scottish public life is not only to expose...the poor quality of so much of it. It is to make the general...point that the people of Scotland were on the whole badly served by their masters - and by what passed for a free press.'*

*I lived in Scotland through a significant number of these years and I can vouch for the essential truth of this account, although it is a salutary experience to read it all of a piece like this.*

*It's a sad and worrying book. Worrying because by the end, you are forced to the conclusion that pretty much anyone who aspires to be a politician, or even to play a significant part in public life, perhaps anyone who craves power, may well be constitutionally unsuited to the role: sic a parcel of rogues indeed. And it's depressing in its brilliant illumination and analysis of venality, disregard for suffering and parochial small-mindedness (almost in spite of the author - who tends to err on the side of fairness, if not quite kindness.)*

*There are precious few heroes or heroines in this book - although there are a few and what a relief it is to come upon them from time to time! It should be required reading for all Scots, whether for or against independence, or still undecided. It should also be required reading for anyone, anywhere in the world, with an interest in post-war Scottish, or even British history. A masterpiece. And an entertaining one, at that.*

Catherine Czerkawska

This morning's news of his death shocked me into recording this homage. It is at times like these that we both question - and need strongly to reaffirm - the significance of our brief lives.....

The painting is "[Whiteinch Library](#)" by Scottish artist [Frank McNab](#) which adorns the cover of his "The Invisible Spirit"

## **The Zombification of the OECD**

Time was when I read avidly everything the OECD produced on public management.....it was so clearly-written and uplifting.....I actually delivered a paper to one of its Paris seminars in 1990 - if on urban management which was then my area of expertise....But it was practitioners who were then the mainstay of OECD operations and gave it its credibility

The World Bank, on the other hand - with its legions of consultant economists - was suspect - particularly its infamous 1997 Annual Development report [The State in a Changing World](#). To their eternal credit, the Japanese had been warning the Bank that it, for one, did not accept the Bank's neo-liberal view of the State - [Robert Wade's important article by New Left Review](#) in 2001 gives some of the background to the resignation of Joseph Stiglitz, the Bank's Chief Economist, driven out in 1999 by Larry Summers.....



The OECD seemed to have a more activist stance on the role of the state – to which my attention turned from the mid-1990s as readers know from my 1999 book [In Transit - notes on good governance](#). The OECD's 2005 report on [Modernising Government](#) was the first warning sign that it had perhaps left its benign role behind.

Critical books and articles confirmed our doubts – particularly [The OECD and transnational governance](#); ed Mahon and McBride (2008); and [The OECD and global public management reform](#); L Pal (2009). This Canadian academic, Leslie Pal, has worked assiduously over the past decade to bring to our attention the nature and scale of the effort global organisations have made to market a concept of the modern state eg [Best practices in public management – a critical assessment](#); (2013) ; and [The OECD and policy transfer](#); (2014)

[Managing Change in OECD Government – an introductory framework](#); Huerta Melchor (OECD 2008) represents the high point of optimism – drafted as it was before the full implications of the global financial crisis had hit home. I've excerpted the opening couple of paras and explain why I've highlighted some text after the excerpts.....

Today's world is highly competitive and demanding. **Society is better informed and expects more from public and private organisations alike.** Traditional public processes and institutions are less effective in satisfying people's needs. Globalisation, the wide use of communication and information technologies, and the coming of the knowledge society, among other factors, are rapidly changing the world's order. This has created new challenges to nation-states as people's expectations from government have increased, job seekers are more demanding on job content, and societies call for more investment in education, health, and society but are unwilling to pay more taxes (*Modernising Government: the way forward*, OECD 2005).

Personnel systems are becoming less adaptive to these new challenges. **Indeed, traditional practices in public administration are the product of a different context with different priorities.** Now, governments have a new role in society and are taking on new responsibilities but generally without the necessary tools to manage them effectively. Public managers are expected to improve the performance of their organisations focusing on efficiency, effectiveness, and propriety which were not the priorities 50 years ago.

**Therefore, to be able to respond to a changing environment the public sector has to transform its structures, processes, procedures, and above all, its culture.**

In **this new order**, the management of change has been identified as a critical variable for the success or failure of a reform policy. Managing change aims at ensuring that the necessary conditions for the success of a reform initiative are met. A reform policy may fail to achieve change, may generate unintended results or face resistance from organisations and/or individuals whose interests are affected.

For that reason, policy-makers and politicians need to pay special attention to **issues such as leadership, shared vision, sequencing, resources for change, and cultural values** while designing and implementing a reform initiative.

I'm always suspicious when abstract entities such as "society" are credited with thoughts....it's called "reification"; presumes uniformity of thought; and assumes away any possibility of differences of opinion let alone social dissent!! Very dangerous....

And just look at the phrase – "World order"!! And the way that "contexts" have developed priorities....I thought it was people who had priorities!



I explained some years ago why I am [suspicious of manuals and "toolkits"](#) .....And seven years on, the OECD has just issued this booklet (for aspiring EU members) [Toolkit for.....public admin reforms and sector strategies - guidance for SIGMA partners](#) (OECD 2018). which reads as if it were written by a sixth former.... Apparently the EC introduced (in 2014) "a third pillar" into [its enlargement policy](#) - to complement those of "rule of law" and "economic governance" - namely public admin reform....I'm sure the army of EC consultants and their counterparts in Balkan and "neighbourhood" countries are very grateful to have such cookbooks - they save everyone the trouble of having to develop approaches which actually fit the local context.....

### **Examples of the new "Manual"/Guidelines/Toolkit approach**

[The Principles of Public Administration](#) (OECD - SIGMA 2017)

[Systems approaches to public sector challenges - working with change](#) (OECD 2017)

[Quality of Public Admin - a factsheet](#); EC Factsheet (2016)

[Quality of Public Administration - a toolkit for Practitioners](#) (EC 2015)

[From Old Public Admin to the New Public Services - implications for public sector reform in developing countries](#) (UNDP 2015)

[Making Reform Happen](#) (OECD 2010)

[Sequentialism or gradualism? - on the transition to democracy and rule of law](#) (2009) - a more critical article

[Evaluation of donor efforts at PSR in developing countries](#) (2009)

[ethical aspects of npm](#) (Scapin NISPAcee journal Dec 2016)

[neoliberal power and npm](#);

[the politics of expertise in international organs](#); ed

[Mapping global policy networks](#); Leslie Pal (2011)

[New Frontiers in Policy Diffusion](#); Leslie Pal (2018)

Here's a couple of critical posts I did [in 2011](#) and [in 2014](#)

## **Identity Politics**

How has it come to pass that the world is divided these days on the issue of identity and political correctness?? Is it the insidious result of the American "[culture wars](#)" - which can be traced back to 1968; Of an [American left targeting Universities to help develop "identity politics"](#)? Or simply the results of the [polarising effect of the social media](#).....?

Whatever the precise origin, Brexit and the election of Trump have helped divide the world into two groups - "[cosmopolitans](#)" and "left-behinds" - with the former favouring open borders and a libertarian agenda; and the latter a more traditional one which has only recently found expression...

**Except that this ignores a significant middle group** which doesn't fit such a Manichean perspective....and I readily confess to being a fully paid-up member of these "[mugwumps](#)" who don't take up predictable positions - and are as a result considered unreliable - with "their mugs on one side of the fence and their wumps on the other"!

**Take "human rights" as an example**....I still remember my reaction when a young Kyrgyz woman quoted some recondite UN declaration at me - viz to launch into an explanation that such rights were the results of long and bitterly-fought struggles eg for trade union let alone gender rights - and would not be enforced by simple diktat...from thousands of kilometres away. But she seemed to expect the magic waving of a wand.....gain without pain...

And when feminism became active in the UK in the 1980s, I was responsible for a [new "social strategy"](#) which was trying to assert the rights of the unemployed and low-paid - and I confess that I had then little sympathy for what I felt were the interests of well-paid women pushing for an end to the "glass-ceiling".... The issue, I felt, was simply one of priorities in what is, after all, always a crowded agenda for political attention....

With its [referendum on the constitutional definition of a family](#), Romania provides another recent example. This grass-roots initiative would have restricted the definition of a family unit to that between a man and a woman (thereby denying that definition to single mothers!). This did not prevent three and a half million voters from voting yes but this was (at 21%) below the required 30% threshold. Many who supported the amendment argued that social values were offended by same-sex marriage and that it was unrealistic to expect villagers suddenly to accept that such behaviour was normal....



[Francis Fukuyama's latest](#) book - [Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment](#) - reminds us of the dual aspect of identity - individual and social....the first being our own sense of who we are ( very much to the fore in this narcissistic age), the latter being the sense of group differentiation. It is an issue which has clearly been eating away at Fukuyama for some time - evidence this powerful 2007 article [Identity, immigration and liberal democracy](#) which is very good on the contrast between US assimilation v European multiculturalism...

From the excerpts, his new book seems a good overview of how fundamentally politics has

changed from being a fight between labour and capital to being a contest over identity and belonging....

*While the economic inequalities arising from the last fifty or so years of globalization are a major factor explaining contemporary politics, economic grievances become much more acute when they are attached to feelings of indignity and disrespect. Indeed, much of what we understand to be economic motivation actually reflects not a straightforward desire for wealth and resources, but the fact that money is perceived to be a marker of status and buys respect.*

*Modern economic theory is built around the assumption that human beings are rational individuals who all want to maximize their "utility"—that is, their material well-being—and that politics is simply an extension of that maximizing behaviour. However, if we are ever to properly interpret the behaviour of real human beings in the contemporary world, we have to expand our understanding of human motivation beyond this simple economic model that so dominates much of our discourse.*

*No one contests that human beings are capable of rational behaviour, or that they are self-interested individuals who seek greater wealth and resources.*

*But human psychology is much more complex than the rather simpleminded economic model suggests. Before we can understand contemporary identity politics, we need to step back and develop a deeper*

*and richer understanding of human motivation and behaviour. We need, in other words, a better theory of the human soul.*

I'm conscious that this post has wandered a bit.....starting with an (obvious) assertion about polarisation....with a defence of those who seek a more nuanced or "balanced" view... Some confession about past prejudices duly followed....finishing with a relevant Romanian example ..

This post concluded that -

**Grassroots pressure rarely leads to significant change - not at least on its own.....But neither do the imposition of national or international norms - which produces a push-back if not angry resentment Social change generally comes from a combination of both.**

A reread led to this final thought.....A July post had explained that the [pincer theory of change](#) had been my default theory since the 1980s (although it later gave way to one called "windows of opportunity"). In those days, it was clearly possible for some elite "insiders" to work together with activists to change things.

But I have now to ask whether the collapse in trust does not make such alliances impossible?

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst.. are full of passionate intensity".

WB Yeats

### Reading List

[Identity, immigration and liberal democracy](#); F Fukuyama (2007) very good on the contrast between US assimilation v European multiculturalism...

[New Yorker Review](#) of Fukuyama book - "Identity". a rather fatuous review - but useful for getting you to read more..

[podcast with Fukuyama](#)

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2015/11/identity-politics-and-human-rights.html>

[Identity, identity politics and neoliberalism](#); Mary Wrenn (2014) - rather full of jargon but has some interesting diagrams

[The Once and future liberal - after identity politics](#); Mark Lilla (2017)

[The political theory of recognition - the case of the white working class](#); M Kenny (2012)

[The Limits of Identity - ethnicity, conflict and politics](#); article by Richard Jenkins (2000)

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2018/11/29/identity-politics-and-the-political-marketplace/>

## European Complacency

After the last post - on identity and political correctness - was it coincidence or serendipity that brought me first to notice (in the window of Bucharest's Humanitas shop) [The Strange Death of Europe - immigration, identity, Islam](#) by Douglas Murray (2017) - and then a few days later to buy the book at the impressive [Nautilus stand](#) at the annual [Gaudeamus Book](#) Fair?

I had been less open 6-7 years ago when I had encountered a similar book - Christopher Caldwell's [Reflections on the Revolution in Europe; Immigration, Islam and the West](#) (2010) which (very strangely in my view, Murray fails to mention anywhere in his 2017 book??). I had left the Caldwell book lying on the shelf - my antennae telling me that the author was a right-wing "stirrer"....But 2014/15 had seen the massive waves of immigrants pour into Europe - and Angela Merkel's

astonishing open invitation to immigration.....if quickly withdrawn and translated into immigration quotas - which were quickly rejected by member States representing both sides of the old East-West border.. And migration - [as I pointed out at the time](#) - had played a crucial role in the Brexit vote although I have not subsequently written about it.

A few minutes later - with equal serendipity - I had come across and bought at the Book Fair (for 2 euros) a remaindered book by one Andrew Anthony entitled [The Fall-out - how a guilty liberal lost his innocence](#) (2007) which documents one man's disillusionment with the conventional wisdom of the time. The link gives a sympathetic review to the confessions of someone caught up in a highly simplistic (what I call [a Manichean](#)) labelling of the world

Both books are very good reads - and have tempted me to offer foreign readers my take on the confused debate which Europe is now having about immigration....

*At first blush Murray's book looks like the latest in a long series of books with "Islam and immigration" figuring in the subtitle. But it is informed by .....a quality of writing that manages to be spritely and elegiac at the same time. Murray's is also a truly liberal intellect, in that he is free from the power that taboo exerts over the European problem, but he doesn't betray the slightest hint of atavism or mean-spiritedness.*

*Yes, Murray is quite good at piling up the numbers that outline the collapse of European populations and the explosion of migration in the past decades and especially over the past two years. He's also quite good at batting down the facile arguments for allowing migration on this scale. Why must Germany turn to Eritrea for a work force when youth unemployment around the European Mediterranean is between 25 and 30 percent?*

His opening chapters on "**How we got hooked on Immigration**" and "**The Excuses we told ourselves**" present the basic facts and arguments we have all used to make sense of the various phases of migration in the post-war period. In the UK case, net immigration was noticed for the first time only at the end of the 1990s - and I well remember the first research reporting on the economic effects - consistently stressing its positive side. As an ex-pat I had no reason to take sides but did wonder that little mention was made of dependents and remittances abroad.....

#### *The Tyranny of Guilt?*

And, as someone who left the UK in 1990, I have little understanding of the "guilt" of the European Imperial past which has apparently been inculcated into younger generations - which both Murray and Caldwell assure us is a powerful factor in the reluctance of the European political class to act in the face of the immigration wave....

#### *Giving up the ghost?*

One of Murray's most interesting chapters is that entitled "Tiredness" - which argues that Europe suffers from "an exhaustion caused by a loss of meaning, an awareness that the civilisation was 'living off a dwindling cultural capital.'" Substitute faiths, whether in the high cultural visions of Wagner or the political theories of Marx, have also failed and been discarded. Murray is especially taken with the deconstructed edifice of contemporary academia. He has a section about a conference in which the "full catastrophe of German thought" dawned on him and which powerfully conveys my own feelings about a lot of "post-modernist" writing:

*A group of academics and others had gathered to discuss the history of Europe's relations with the Middle East and North Africa. It soon became clear that nothing would be learned because nothing could be said. A succession of philosophers and historians spent their time studiously attempting to say nothing as successfully as possible. The less that was successfully said, the greater the relief and acclaim. No attempt to address any idea, history or fact was able to pass without first being put through the pit-stop of the modern academy. No generality could be attempted and no specific could be uttered. It was not only history and politics that were under suspicion. Philosophy, ideas and language itself had been cordoned off as though around the scene of a crime. The job of the academics was to police the cordons - all the while maintaining some distractions in order to at all costs prevent wanderers from stumbling back onto the terrain of ideas....*

All relevant words were immediately flagged and disputed - "nation" and "history" had the place in uproar and "culture" brought events to a grinding halt.....

*If there remains any overriding idea, it is that ideas are a problem. If there is any common remaining value judgement, it is that value judgements are wrong. If there is any remaining certainty, it is a distrust of certainty.*

"The Strange Death of Europe" is one of these rare books about contemporary issues which needs to be read slowly...with a marker...and reread.... I had not realised that it was as long ago as 2010 that Merkel first made her statement that "multiculturalism is dead" and that this refrain was quickly taken up by other political leaders. And yet, how badly they seem to have used those 8 difficult years!

## Further Reading

"Strange Death of Europe" (2017)

<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2017/06/02/the-strange-death-of-europe-immigration-identity-islam> - the most important review -

<https://www.newstatesman.com/2018/07/strange-death-europe-douglas-murray-review>

[http://hungarianreview.com/article/20180719\\_douglas\\_murray\\_on\\_the\\_strange\\_death\\_of\\_europe](http://hungarianreview.com/article/20180719_douglas_murray_on_the_strange_death_of_europe)

<https://www.npr.org/2017/06/27/534597202/the-strange-death-of-europe-warns-against-impacts-of-immigration?t=1542262916642>

<http://www.dartreview.com/a-review-of-the-strange-death-of-europe/>

<https://vimeo.com/260817325>

"Reflections on the Revolution in Europe; Immigration, Islam and the West"; Christopher Caldwell (2010)

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/17/christopher-caldwell-immigration-islam>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jun/13/christopher-caldwell-revolution-in-europe>

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/christopher-caldwell-on-muslim-integration-it-s-much-better-if-things-are-discussed-openly-a-668750.html>

<https://fabiusmaximus.com/2018/04/10/tiredness-the-strange-death-of-europe/>

<http://theorytuesdays.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Strange-Death-of-Europe-Excerpts-Murray.pdf>

<http://theworthyhouse.com/2017/09/08/book-review-the-strange-death-of-europe-douglas-murray/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Reflections-Revolution-Europe-Immigration-Islam/dp/0307276759>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/14/afd-german-media-politicians-angela-merkel>



## Controlling the Masses

Second-hand bookshops do not get enough credit - first for their shelter from the juggernaut marketing of fashionable titles and then with the delight of a text found which has languished unappreciated after a decade or so.....

Two titles caught my eye this week in a new downtown outlet opposite Bucuresti University - the first [Who Runs this place? The Anatomy of Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#) (2004) was the final contribution of a famous journalist, Anthony Sampson, who was of south African origin and had started in 1962 what became a series of efforts to capture the anatomy of the UK power structure. ....Extracts [can be read here](#). Sampson himself became so ensconced in his role as voyeur that he almost became one of the institutions of which he wrote - as can be seen [in this tribute](#). New Labour was half-way through its 13 years as he was drafting the book and the impact of its media manipulation was already in evidence. But a quick skim suggested that it might suffer from being a tad incestuous - with the references consisting of either newspaper articles or political biographies. Not a solitary academic reference

[The Triumph of the Political Class](#) by journalist Peter Osborne (2007) was the other (smaller) bargain which I swept up - first read and [blogged about in 2014](#). It has a much more powerful tale to tell - of the destruction by Thatcher in the 1980s of the traditional power of trade unions, universities, local government, the judiciary and the civil service. And of the huge rise under Blair et al since 1997 of the power of the political class and media - and the further emasculation of parliament, the Cabinet and the civil service. Interestingly, he coins the phrase "**manipulative populism**" - and identifies the [significance of Peter Mair's writing](#) to the fate of the Western political party

The nature and location of power fascinated me from an early age - I had studied [Elite theorists](#) in the early 1960s on my political sociology course at University. Although Vilfredo [Pareto](#) (1848-1923) and Gaetano [Mosca](#) (1858-1941) had led the way, it was Robert [Michels](#)' (1876-1936) [Political Parties](#) (1911) which made the lasting impression on me - with his close study of trade unionists and social democrat politicians and derivation of "the iron law of oligarchy".

For more than a century, one of the **central issues of our time has been that of how "the masses" might be "controlled" in an age of democracy**.... These authors, thoroughly "Real" in their "Politik", hardly suggested that the political and commercial elites had much to worry about - but this did not prevent writers such as Walter Lippmann ([Public Opinion](#) 1922) and Ortega y Gasset ([Revolt of the Masses](#) 1930) from conjuring up frightening narratives about the dangers of the great unwashed masses. Lippmann's full book [can be read here](#)...

The scintillating prose of Joseph Schumpeter's (1883-1950) [Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy](#) (1943) was also a favourite of mine - with his theory of the "circulation of the elites" reassuring the elites that all would be well....

**But the [populism evident since the start of the new millennium](#) has sparked new anxieties on this count amongst the liberal elites - and indeed raised the question anew as to [whether capitalism is consistent with democracy](#)...**

One guy whose words are worth reading on that question is SM Wolin - whose book on the history of political thought - [Politics and Vision](#) - held me spellbound in the 1960s. In his 90s he produced this great critique of the US system - [Democracy Inc - managed democracy and the spectre of](#)

[inverted totalitarianism](#) (2008) - reviewed [here](#). And this is an interesting recent article, [Why Elites always Rule](#) which reminds the new generation of the significance of Pareto's work....

Since starting this post, I've noticed quite a few new books on this topic and will do an annotated reading list shortly of the dozen or so more interesting of these....

## The Political Class and "Manipulative Populism"



I had enjoyed my reread of "The Triumph of the Political Class" (2007) to such an extent that I started to google the other titles I remembered dealing with the same issue...to discover that what I imagined to be a dozen contemporary books on the structure of power (in the English language) turned out to be more than 20 ....And I can claim to have read only 8 of them - just over a third.....So some fast skimming is in order.

A recent academic article I unearthed [What do we mean when we talk about Political class?](#) (Allen and Cairney 2017) turned out to be a very pedantic analysis....but, as a background read to

help make sense of the three thousand or so pages in this collection, I would highly recommend this (20 page) article on [The Past, Present and Future of the British political science discipline](#)

It's on occasions like this that I would like to have some European counterparts to share analyses with.....what, for example, are the key French and German books in the literature?? And how, if at all, do their studies differ from these?

Twenty years ago, the [British system](#) was admired. Now - and not only due to Brexit - it's seen a "basket case". And sadly, with devolution now almost 20 years old, the Scottish Assembly and governance system does not seem to have lived up to its early promise.

The French have been [highly critical of their centralised and elitist systems](#) for some decades - and don't seem any happier these days...Only [the German system](#) had more balance - although it too is now suffering.

Despite the explosion in the number of European political scientists these days (the [European Consortium for Political Research](#) alone claims 20,000 members), there doesn't seem all that much in depth **comparative analysis** of power structures - at least not that's easily accessible.

[Perry Anderson is about the only character with the linguistic ability to supply us Brits with extensive analyses](#) of post-war and contemporary debates in France, Germany and Italy. His stunning study [The New Old World](#) (2009) can be read [in its entirety here](#) (all 560 pages).

So I googled - and quickly found 20 or so books. Obviously my selection is arbitrary but I think it does catch most of the key writing.....The table starts with the most recent material and the cut-off point is the start of the new millennium since this was the point at which the New Labour style began to make itself felt.....

#### Studies of the system of Power - mostly UK

Title	Summary
<a href="#">The UK's Changing Democracy - the 2018 Democratic Audit</a> ; Dunleavy, Park and Taylor	"Democratic Audit" publishes an annual analysis - <a href="#">described here</a> . This is its latest 500 page study - carried out by academics but who write well!
<a href="#">The Political Class - why it matters who our politicians are</a> ; Peter Allen (2018)	Focuses on the way the homogeneity of the political class damages the quality of decisions - written by a political scientist
<a href="#">Reckless Opportunists - elites at the end of the establishment</a> ; Aeron Davis (2018)	Rather one-sided critique
<a href="#">Prosperity and Justice - a plan for the new economy</a> (IPPR 2018) Final report on economic justice	Most books focus on political power - although this is a book about prescriptions - produced by a commission of the great and the good It starts with an implicit critique which goes wider than mere politics
<a href="#">New Power - how it's changing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</a> ; Helmans and Timms (2018)	A typical, breathless, American "take" on how the internet is apparently challenging "old power". Lacks any historical sense.....
<a href="#">State of Power 2018</a> (TNI)	An annual look at global capitalism by a left-wing Netherlands-based Foundation
<a href="#">State of Power 2017</a> (TNI)	Ditto
<a href="#">The Establishment - and how they get away with it</a> ; Owen Jones (2014)	No pretence at objectivity in this hard-hitting analysis by a left-wing journalist of what's wrong with Britain. So not limited to constitutional issues..Well written and strong on recommendations.....
<a href="#">Ruling the Void - the hollowing of Western Democracy</a> ; Peter Mair (2013)	Rated as the most significant analysis of the issues of the past 25 years...by a political scientist
<a href="#">The New Few - power and inequality in Britain Now</a> ; Frederic Mount (2012)	A surprising critique from a Margaret Thatcher adviser!
<a href="#">Who Runs Britain?</a> Robert Peston (2008)	Less an analysis dealing with the question than a critique of the political economic strategy of New Labour
<a href="#">Democracy Inc - managed democracy and the spectre of inverted totalitarianism</a> ; SM Wolin (2008)	Written by one of America's greatest political scientists
<a href="https://whorulesamerica.ucsc.edu/">https://whorulesamerica.ucsc.edu/</a>	A great website by an academic whose book on the subject is in to its 7 <sup>th</sup> edition
<a href="#">Triumph of the political class</a> ; Peter Osborne (2007)	A provocative analysis a journalist of how the traditional British Establishment has morphed into a much more powerful and homogeneous political class
<a href="#">Power to the People - an independent inquiry</a>	Unfortunately, this investigation limited itself to political and

<a href="#">into Britain's democracy</a> (Rowntree Trust 2006)	constitutional aspects
<a href="#">British Politics - a critical introduction</a> ; Stuart McAnulla (2006) see also <a href="#">the google version</a>	This is a textbook - but a rare critical one which nicely sets out what's wrong with both the traditional textbooks but also the newer ones which emphasise networks and negotiation
<a href="#">Thatcher and Sons</a> ; Simon Jenkins (2006)	Very much in the style of the Osborne book, this "rightist" Guardian journalist gives a strong critique of the destruction of the last vestiges of pluralism
<a href="#">Who Runs this place? The Anatomy of Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</a> ; Anthony <a href="#">Sampson</a> (2004)	The last of a series produced over 40 years by this famous journalist
<a href="#">The Power Inquiry</a> (2004)	Like the 2006 study, limits the analysis to the political aspects. Produced by a commission
<a href="#">Democratic Audit of the United Kingdom</a> ; (Democratic Audit 2003)	Incorporating the negative effects of New Labour
<a href="#">The Captive State - the corporate takeover of Britain</a> ; George Monbiot (2001)	The most explosive critique - from one of the best leftist journalists
<a href="#">Political Power and democratic control - the democratic audit of the United Kingdom</a> ; S Weir and D Beetham (Rowntree 1999)	One of the early audits carried out

## We need to talk about.....Power

[The Triumph of the Political Class](#) was interesting because, rightly or wrongly, it seemed to identify a turning point - that the way the British system of government operated had changed significantly (and for the worse) in the 1980s.....He was not the only person arguing this - a year before, Simon Jenkins' [Thatcher and Sons](#); (2006) had conducted the same analysis but without using such dramatic terms as "new political class" and "manipulative populism"..

And even political scientists had been remarking that the much-famed "Westminster model" (of dominant political power) seemed to have been replaced with a much more consensual one of networked "governance". Rod Rhodes - whom I briefly met in the 1970s - had been the foremost proponent of this view with his concept of "[hollowed out government](#)"

My table included a 2006 textbook [British Politics - a critical introduction](#) by Stuart McAnulla which nicely captures the sort of debate going on in those days in these academic circles.....with McAnulla taking issue with both the traditional and reformist schools of thought and suggesting **that we needed to extend our understanding of power beyond the political.....**

It is, of course, nothing less than astounding that it took a global financial crisis to force academia to consider that government agendas are shaped by more than political manoeuvrings - and McAnulla's is still a fairly lonely voice in his profession....The commercial links of New Labour were memorably exposed by George Monbiot in his 2001 expose [The Captive State - the corporate takeover of Britain](#) But, astonishingly, only 2 of the 500 pages of [The UK's Changing Democracy - the 2018 Democratic Audit](#) have anything to say about corruption

Wolin's [Democracy Inc](#) questioning the scale of commercial funding of American political personalities was distinctive only for it being produced by an academic (one of the most respected) and came out ten years ago. Neither it - nor the various studies of the significance of [lobbying activity and resources at the European level](#) - seem to make any impact on our discussions about democracy....Here is a rare [2014 academic contribution to the question of how consistent capitalism now is with democracy](#)

**We seem indeed averse to talking about "power" and its various facets**...although most of us tend to have our own little conspiracy theory....I grant you that books on the subject tend to be rather specialised and daunting.....although Robert Greene's [48 Laws of Power](#) is a very good read.....if focusing rather too much on individual rather than systemic or structural factors. When we look for books about power, we invariably find that they are written by sociologists who are not famed for their clarity- one honourable exception being the recent [Vampire Capitalism](#) (2017).

Probably the best book about the subject is Steven Lukes' slim [Power - a radical view](#) (2005) which starts with the simple story of how the post-war argument about the structure of power basically got underway with an American (Dahl) being upset with how 2 colleagues (C Wright Mills and Floyd Hunter) were portraying a power elite that seemed impervious to accountability - at both national and local levels...

Inevitably, however, even this book is guilty of the dreaded compartmentalisation of which academia is so guilty and fails to mention the classic work of [Amitai Etzioni who in the 1960s](#) differentiated organisations according to "coercion, economic assets and normative values". Sticks, carrots and moral persuasion we would call it.....And if you're wondering what "moral persuasion" is when it's at home, [Joseph Nye's "soft power"](#) will tell you more than Antonio Gramsci's "[hegemonic power](#)"!!

- let alone the policy analysis writing of [Charles Lindblom](#) who broke with his friend Dahl when he wrote "Politics and Markets" but whose [The Market System](#) (2003) still showed a reluctance to challenge commercial power



## How the power elite can - and does - manipulate us - Part 4 of the series on the political class-

I've often in the past 20 years had to put myself in the shoes of Ministers and senior civil servants to help them develop "road maps" to their destinations of reform....An important technique I've used in these endeavours has been to get my counterparts to list why they think people behave the way they do - whether as officials, as citizens, politicians or businesspeople - and what that tells us about the best way to try to get them to change.

After all, the projects I've led only exist because someone has decided the present state of affairs is no longer acceptable.....**so what aspects of whose behaviour are we talking about? And what is it that is most likely to make target groups change their behaviour?**

- Simple instructions?
- Threats? Incentives?
- Explanations and understanding?
- Moral exhortation?

I have then developed, over the past couple of decades, this table which focuses on the assumptions we make about motives - and then explores the various mechanisms which are available to those trying to change beliefs and behaviour

**The "behavioural turn" - Tools in the change process**

Focus of attention	Example of tool	Relevant Tool
<b>1. Understanding</b>	Training Campaigns Functional review	Rational persuasion  Factual analysis
<b>2. Commitment</b>	Leadership Communications Training	Legitimisation; inspiration  Pride
<b>3. Maximising Personal Benefit</b>	Pay increase and bonus Promotion (including political office) Good publicity Winning an award	Monetary calculation ambition  Reputation; Psychological Status
<b>4. Minimising Personal Cost</b>	Named as poor performer Demotion Report cards	Psychological (Shame) Monetary Pride
<b>5. Obligation</b>	Law Action plan Family ties	Courts Managerial authority Social pressure
<b>6. Peer influence</b>	Bribery Quality circles	Pressure Support
<b>7. Social influence</b>	Opinion surveys	Feedback from public about service quality

## The explosion of interest in behaviour

In the last decade, the question of changing (other) people's behaviour has become a central one for government, business and NGOs. Professors Thaler and Cass may have "nudged" interest with their 2008 [Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness](#) but it was in fact the UK Cabinet Office which arguably set the ball rolling four years earlier with its [Personal Responsibility and changing behaviour – the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy](#) (2004) – an example which was followed with [Changing Behaviour – a public policy perspective](#) (Australian Government 2007).

The Nudge book certainly inspired the Cameron government some 7 years later to set up a Nudge Unit in the Cabinet but the British government had in 2008 been exploring this issue in its [The Use of sanctions and rewards in the public sector](#) (NAO 2008) the very same year – accompanied by a [literature review](#) drafted by Deloitte

Even the House of Lords was not to be outdone – with the voluminous evidence of its [Behaviour Change](#) in 2011. And the voluntary sector put down an early marker with its [Common Case – the case for working with our cultural values](#) (2010) – which showed more familiarity with the marketing approach than did the economic and rationalistic assumptions which were embedded in the early British attempts.

So the World Bank was rather lagging behind when in 2015 its Annual Development Report got round to dealing with the issue – in its [Mind, Society and Behaviour](#)

In parallel to this burgeoning interest, the emergence of "[behavioural economics](#)" has represented a shamefaced admission by the "discipline" that their models had been based on utterly stupid assumptions of rationality...

**However, policy geeks such as yours truly have perhaps been a bit slow to make the connection between the "behavioural turn" and "Big Data" – let alone the scandal of Cambridge Analytics**

It seems that individuals are often predisposed to reject information when accepting it would challenge their identity and values. Campaigning approaches that rely on the provision of information may well work for people whose existing values are confirmed through accepting, and acting upon, that information. But for others, the same information (for example, about the scale of the challenge climate change presents) may simply serve to harden resistance to accepting new government policies or adopting new private-sphere behaviours. This points to the need to incorporate an understanding of people's values into civil society campaigns

## Useful Further Reading

### *Reports and Books*

[Influencing Behaviours and Practices to tackle poverty and injustice](#) (Oxfam 2018)

[Governance and the Law](#) (World Development Report; World Bank 2017)

[Sanctions, Rewards and Learning](#)

(IDEA 2016)

[Mind, Society and Behaviour](#) (World Development Report; World Bank 2015)

[A Practitioner's Guide to Nudging](#); Rotman 2013

[Behaviour Change](#) (House of Lords (2011)

[Finding Frames – new ways to engage the UK public in global poverty](#) (2011)

[Nudge, nudge, think, think](#); book by Peter John, Smith and Gerry Stoker (2011)

[Common Case – the case for working with our cultural values](#) (2010)

[Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness](#); Thaler and Cass (2008).

[The Use of sanctions and rewards in the public sector](#) (NAO 2008)

It was accompanied by a [literature review](#) drafted by Deloitte  
[Changing Behaviour – a public policy perspective](#) (Australian Government 2007)  
[Personal Responsibility and changing behaviour – the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy](#)  
(UK Cabinet Office 2004)

#### *articles*

[The Rational Paradox of Nudge in a world of bounded rationality](#); Martin Lodge and Kai Wegrich (2016). A quite excellent critique

[Big Other – surveillance capitalism and the prospects for an information civilisation](#); S Zuboff (2015)

"Nudge, nudge, think, think"; article by John, Smith and Stoker (2009)

[Wicked Problems and clumsy solutions – the role of leadership](#); Keith Grint (2008)

["Fitting policy tools to context and motivation"](#) (RG Young 2008)

#### [Framing](#)

## How they get away with it – being part 5 of the series on the political class

As you saw from the list of 20 odd books a few posts back, the journalists, political scientists and think-tankers have a lot to say about systems of power. Indeed, I often wish they would take an oath of silence – but then I remember they have families to feed.... This means, however, that we stand to be disappointed when we turn to books to help us understand contemporary issues. Several times this blog has gone so far as to **urge readers to apply some simple tests when they are flicking books eg on the global crisis** eg [early last year one suggested that you go the Preface/Introduction/end-notes/Index](#) and award one point for each positive answer you can give to such questions as –

- Does it say why yet another book is needed to add to the huge pile we already have?
- Does it argue convincingly that the book has something distinctive to say?
- is anything said about the audience the author is aiming at?
- Does it list/identify different schools of thinking about the issue?
- does the author list what subjects (s)he has excluded?
- Is there an annotated further reading list in an annex?

Any book with less than 4 points is probably a waste of your time....

My next post will remind you of some advice I gave readers, authors and publishers earlier this year

But, for now, I want to share an important insight with you all – that **my reading over the past 50 years tells me that the best critique of power is actually a short satirical essay** by Anthony Jay (the highly successful scriptwriter of the "[Yes Minister](#)" television series of 35 years ago) The essay is called [Democracy, Bernard, it must be stopped!](#) and can only be read on my website. It takes the form of the advice given by Sir Humphrey (the retiring Head of the Civil Service) to his replacement – who, amazingly, turns out to be the guy who 30 years previously was the hapless Bernard.

It captures the mechanisms which have been used over the past 50 years to corrupt the political class far better than any book.

The first two rules for neutralising democracy are:

**1. Centralise revenue.** The governing class cannot fulfil its responsibilities without money. We, therefore, have to collect as much money as we can in the centre. In fact, we have done this with increasing effect over the years, with three happy results. The first is that we can ensure that money is not spent irresponsibly by local communities. By taking 80 or 90 per cent of the money they need in central taxes, we can then return it to them for purposes of which we approve. If they kept it for themselves, heaven knows what they might spend it on.

The second happy result is that the larger the sum, the harder it is to scrutinise. The £6,000 or so spent by a rural parish council is transparent and intelligible, and subjected to analysis in distressing detail. By contrast, the three or four hundred billion of central government revenue is pleasantly incomprehensible, and leaves agreeably large sums for purposes which the common people would not approve if it were left to them. It also means that a saving of £1 million can be dismissed as 0.0000003 of annual expenditure and not worth bothering with, whereas it can make a lot of difference to the budget of Fidelio at Covent Garden.

The third result is that the more the government spends, the more people and organisations are dependent on its bounty, and the less likely they are to make trouble.

**2. Centralise authority.** It goes without saying that if Britain is to remain a country of civilised values, the masses cannot be trusted with many decisions of importance. Local government must be allowed to take decisions, but we have to ensure that they are trivial. Meanwhile, we must increase the volume of laws made centrally. We have an enviable record of legislation growth, with hardly any laws being repealed, which it is now your duty to extend. If you are under pressure to provide statistics showing your zeal in deregulation, you will find many laws concerning jute processing and similar extinct industries which can be repealed without too much harm. ...

You will also want to ensure that every Bill contains wide enabling powers, so that unpopular provisions can be brought in later as statutory instruments which MPs rarely read and virtually never debate. You should be able to achieve three or four thousand of these in a good year.

The rest of the rules flow from the first two -

Rule	Reason
<b>3. Capture the Prime Minister</b>	Given the promises a PM makes, it is not difficult to persuade him that he needs more revenue and power
<b>4. Insulate the Cabinet</b>	<i>They must be kept, as far as possible, well away from any contact with the sweaty multitude. This means avoiding public transport by use of private cars, avoiding the National Health Service by private health care etc</i>
<b>5. Enlarge constituencies</b>	<i>In the name of democracy, we have increased constituency size to 50,000 or 60,000, so that no MP can be elected on voters' personal knowledge of him. They vote for the party, and if the party does not endorse him, he will not be elected. His job, therefore, depends on the Prime Minister's approval and not on the respect of his constituents; a splendid aid to discipline</i>
<b>6. Overpay MPs</b>	<i>Even when MPs depend on the party machine for re-selection and re-election, some are occasionally tempted to step out of line. This risk can be significantly reduced if rebellion means not only loss of party support but also significant loss of income.</i>
<b>7. Appoint rather than elect</b>	<i>Government appointment is critical for control of society - so that proper care can be exercised in their selection of the thousands of positions available in Quangos - and so that the incumbents, when chosen, will know to whom they owe their new eminence, while those hoping for such posts (as with honours and</i>

	<i>peerages) can be trusted to behave responsibly in the hope of favours to come</i>
<b>8. Permanent officials - rotating Ministers</b>	<i>We have built an excellent system of a few transient amateur ministers who are coached, informed, guided and supported by a large department of permanent, experienced officials who enable them to take the correct decisions.</i>
<b>9. Appoint more staff</b>	<i>There are three reasons for this: it increases the volume of government revenue, it extends the area of government control, and it enlarges the pool of voters who have an interest in preserving the system that employs them.</i>
<b>10. Secrecy</b>	<i>Our success is based on the principle that no information should be disclosed unless there is a good reason why it should be. From time to time, opposition parties press for a freedom of information Act, but oppositions become governments and it does not take long for a government to discover that real freedom of information would make their job impossible.</i>

It takes only a few minutes to read the essay - and I would urge you to do so - just click [Democracy, Bernard, it must be stopped](#)

Now you can understand [why I am such a fan of satire](#)....Some analysts now argue that satire has made us politically cynical and undermined democracy - although I suspect it is more the slow drip of 24/7 news which has done that....Politicians have certainly become too easy a target. But after wading through so many turgid books about power systems, I have to say [we desperately need the gasp of clarity which good satirical writing brings](#).....

### ***A Resource on Satire***

Satire has long been a powerful weapon against the pretensions of power - Voltaire's [Candide](#) (1759) and Swift's [Gulliver's Travels](#) are well-known literary examples.

[Ralph Steadman](#) and Gerard Scarfe are modern caricaturists in the tradition of William Hogarth; and the Liverpool poets ([Roger McGough](#), Adrian Henry) sustained the protestors of the 1960s. British people are not so familiar with the Bert [Brecht's City poems](#) or the savage anti-bourgeois paintings of [Georg Grosz](#) in the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1987 Management Professor Rosabeth Kanter produced "[Ten Rules for Stifling Initiative](#)" which I have often used to great effect in Central Asian training sessions.

1999 saw the appearance of "[The Lugano Report; on preserving capitalism in the twenty-first Century](#)" which purported to be a leaked report from shady big business but was in fact written by [Susan George](#).

Management guru Russell Ackoff's great collection of tongue-in-cheek laws of management - "[Management F-Laws - how organisations really work](#)" (2007) As the blurb put it -

"They're truths about organizations that we might wish to deny or ignore - simple and more reliable guides to managers' everyday behaviour than the complex truths proposed by scientists, economists and philosophers".

An added bonus is that British author, Sally Bibb, was asked to respond in the light of current organizational thinking. Hers is a voice from another generation, another gender and another continent. On every lefthand page is printed Ackoff and Addison's f-Law with their commentary. Opposite, you'll find Sally Bibb's reply. A short version ([A Little F-book - 13 Sins of management](#)). A typical rule is - "The more important the problem a manager asks consultants for help on, the less useful and more costly their solutions are likely to be".

[Robert Greene's 48 Laws of Power](#) may not be satire but it is a very salutary counter to the thousands of unctuous management texts which attribute benign motives to senior management.

And, to bring tis series back full circle to "The Triumph of the Political Class", a spoof on the British Constitution - called [The Unspoken Constitution](#) (2009) - had a Preface written by The Triumph's author - Peter Osborne.



Peter Cook - the greatest of Britain's post-war satirists - once apparently said, back in the 1960s, "Britain is in danger of sinking giggling into the sea,"

## Why we need to ration non-fiction books

Since 1950, the number of book titles has soared by at least 500% - in the [UK case by almost 10 times](#). And, since 2013, the number of [non-fiction titles has surpassed that in the fiction category](#) - at least in the English language. And that is what my own experience tells me - when I visit a bookshop I am, nowadays, overwhelmed by the number of apparently relevant books... The overriding consideration as I flick through them is not the price but where to put them.....space is rapidly running out...

But, equally, I know that many of my purchases will disappoint.....I tend to blog about the ones that have repaid the effort of reading...

And readers will have noticed that I have been getting very impatient with a lot of writers - particularly those writing on the global crisis...I have increasingly been accusing them of self-indulgence - of not taking the issue or us readers seriously enough....I therefore thought it would be useful if I reproduced, with a few changes, the piece I wrote about this earlier this year

### A litmus test for any book you might be tempted to buy

1. Does it reveal in its preface/introduction and bibliography an intention to honour what has been written before on the subject?
2. Indeed does it clearly list and comment on what has been identified as the key reading and indicate why, despite such previous efforts, the author feels compelled to add to our reading burden???
3. Can the author clearly demonstrate (eg in the introduction or opening chapter) that the book is the result of long thought and not just an inclination to jump on the latest bandwagon?
4. Is it written in an "inviting" style? Eg as if (s)he was taking you into their confidence....

If a book survives this test and you've actually brought it home I then recommend that, **before you settle down to read a book, you should do the following**

- **read the reviews** (surf)
- **identify the questions** these suggest - you should never open a book without knowing what you want to get out of it!
- **Mark** (with a pencil) **passages you both like and don't like** - with underlines, question-marks, ticks, comments and expletives. This will encourage you to return to the book
- If the author doesn't write in clear language, move on to another book asap. Life's too short to waste on verbosity.....Bad writing is a good indicator of a confused mind
- **Write brief notes** on the main themes and arguments (to remember better; and, if transcribed, they help build up an archive)

**This, of course, puts the onus on readers - but the real problem rests with authors and publishers...It is they who swamp our minds with thousands of titles and excessive verbosity... I suggest that, when they come to consider the final draft and layout of a book, they consider the following -**

1. tell us what's distinctive about your book; ie why you feel you need to add to what is already a huge literature on the subject

2. "position" your book - ie tell us what you consider the key texts in the field (and why) and how your book relates to them. At best you can offer a typology of the different schools of thought on the issue
3. convince us that you have not only read the "relevant literature" but that you have done so with a reasonably open mind; At best, offer **an annotated list of key reading - with your preferences**. This will give us a sense of your stance and fairness
4. give a "potted version" of each chapter. Most think-tank reports have executive summaries. I don't know why more authors don't adopt the same approach. Amazon, some publishers and Google offer free access to excerpts - but the selections are fairly random.
5. use more tables...and graphics. Readers can absorb only so much continuous text. And if the subject matter is difficult, it helps if - at least every couple of pages - there is a heading which gives a sense of the argument...

**Their bibliographies may look impressive and their chapter headings riveting but the books increasingly suffer, in my view, from the following sorts of deficiencies -**

- They are written by academics
- who write for students and other academics
- and lack "hands-on" experience of other worlds
- the author's speciality indeed is only a sub-discipline - eg financial economics
- the focus is a fashionable subject
- written with deadlines to meet commercial demands
- making claims to originality- but failing to honour the google scholar adage of "standing on the shoulders of giants" (despite - perhaps even because of - the extensive bibliographies)

[How to Read a Book](#); Mortimer Adler (1940)

## Romania's National Day

This blog has celebrated Romania's [National Day before](#) - but today is special since it is exactly 100 years ago today that various groups came together in Alba Iulia (which was previously the heart of Hungarian Transylvania) to celebrate the unification of that significant part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (and part of Banat) not only with what was (since 1877) already an independent Romania but also with Bessarabia, Moldova and North Dobrodjea. In one fell swoop the landmass of the country - which opted for the Western Allies only in 1916 - was tripled.

It's therefore a suitable day to celebrate good writing about Romania. Let me start with an author, Robert Kaplan, who has established a nice little niche for himself as a traveller with a strong line in geo-politics - with [The Revenge of History](#) (2013) being its epitome.

"In Europe's Shadow" came out in 2016 and was most decidedly not a travelogue but that rare and worthwhile endeavour - an attempt to penetrate a country's soul borne of his forays over a period of 30 years after his first (and unusual) first port of call in 1981- selected simply because, for someone wanting to be a foreign journalist, it offered the distinction of having no competitors...

It's a very individual if not poetic book which in which the country's past casts the main shadow (despite the title) but one which is dealt with deftly - often through conversations with characters many of whom are long dead. Americans are not well known for their linguistic skills and I sense

that Kaplan relied on translated texts for his early grasp of Romanian history - so Mircea Eliade's little history of the country (written when he was an attache in Portugal with the Iron Guard regime) was an early companion for Kaplan. But also English writers such as Stephen Runciman and Lord Kinross (on the influence of the Ottoman empire), Macartney (Austro-Hungarian empire) and particularly John Julius Norwich (Byzantium) Since 1990 he has been able to access the histories of Vlad Georgescu, Lucian Boia, Keith Hitchens even Neagu Djuvara - but has abjured my friend Tom Gallagher

Although he's able to get access to Presidents (Iliescu and Basescu) and Prime Ministers (Ponta), it's the long-term geopolitical threats represented by the borders, plains, armies and pipelines which interest him - and he is happiest when in the company of those who talk this language. The comments of even a dilettante like Patapievici are preferable to any conversation about ordinary life - all we get on that score is a statement that "thanks to the influence of the EU, institutions are slowly becoming more transparent" (!!)

For future editions of the book, I would recommend that he seeks out people such as Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Sorin Ionitsa

Then there's my own [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014). This is my own tribute to the country whose summers I have enjoyed since 2007 and which I have known intermittently since winter 1991

And, in [Bucharest's French bookshop](#), I have just come across a nice set of little stories - "Chroniques de Roumanie"; Richard Edwards (2017)

## The Road to Unfreedom?

Do(es) 25 years of researching the "Eastern bloodlands" unhinge your mind? This is the question I'm left wondering after reading Timothy Snyder's latest book [The Road to Unfreedom - Russia, Europe, America](#) (2018). As some reviews in [the Eurozine journal](#) remind us,

*over the past decade Timothy Snyder has sought to convince western European and English-speaking audiences of the importance of east-central Europe for the history of the twentieth-century. Although the Holocaust is usually thought of as a western phenomenon, in "Bloodlands" (2010) and "Black Earth" (2015) he shows that by almost any measure (death rates, physical devastation, population displacement, societal breakdown or institutional destruction) it was primarily an eastern atrocity. If we wish to draw the lessons of the 1930s and 40s, we must first understand what happened there.*

*As a scholar of totalitarianism Snyder is understandably concerned by the return of fascist ideas clothed in the guise of right-wing populism. The striking similarities between the interwar crisis that followed the Great Depression (1929-39) and the aftermath of the Great Recession (from 2007) lead him to worry that the beginning of this century might end up looking much like the early decades of the last. His previous work, "On Tyranny" (2017), started off as a warning posted on Facebook that went viral after Donald Trump's election and details '20 lessons from across the fearful 20th century, adapted to the circumstances of today'.<sup>1</sup>*

*His "The Road to Unfreedom" (2018) brings his longstanding interest in combating the western-centrism of European history and his more recent attempts to apply his knowledge of the past to the present together in a single volume. The book traces the current crisis of democracy back to Russia, showing how*

*Vladimir Putin used fake news and the hacking of personal data - as well as support for neo-fascist parties in Europe and America - to rebuild Russian power and influence in the world.*

As someone who lived in Central Asia from 1999-2007, I remember following the development of Russia's "managed democracy" with great interest. I never imagined that the crude but apparently successful efforts in building fake political parties there in the late 90s - an updated version of [a Potemkin village](#) - would be a test-bed for developments in the West.

*Snyder's narrative is organized chronologically, with each of the six chapters devoted to developments in a single year from 2011 to 2016. In particular, it focuses on how Russia rapidly shifted from rapprochement with the West to overt antagonism in 2012. Snyder links this transformation to the fact that Putin had to fake the presidential election that year in order to retain his grip on power. He argues that after defeating the uprising in Chechnya, Putin needed a new enemy to rally the people behind him. He settled on the West, concocting a 'fictional problem' that focused on the alleged 'designs of the European Union and the United States to destroy Russia' (p.51).*

*Snyder highlights how Putin adopted the ideas of the fascist thinker Ivan Ilyin (1883-1954), who argued that the Russian spirit must be mobilized against all external threats 'by the caprice of a single ruler' (p.24). Ilyin's Manichaeic worldview, combined with his obsession with sexual purity, helps explain both the vehemence of Russia's recent rhetoric, as well as its erotic focus on the 'homosexual' attempts of the EU and America to 'sodomize' Russian virtue. Snyder notes, 'The dramatic change in Russia's orientation bore no relation to any new unfriendly action from the outside. Western enmity was not a matter of what a Western actor was doing, but what the West was portrayed as being' (p.91).*

I started the book in the hope that it would help me better understand the Russian invasion of the Ukraine but soon hit abstract thinking - particularly phrases like "the politics of eternity". Fellow historian [Richard Evans captured my own thoughts in his Guardian review](#) when he writes that

*The effectiveness of Snyder's thoughts on the "road to unfreedom" isn't helped by the strangely declamatory, often obscure style in which they are expressed. One dubious generalisation follows another, as the author never troubles to support any of them with serious evidence. For instance: "Britain and France had no modern history as nation-states. The European powers had never been nation-states." Does Snyder really think that the possession of an overseas empire negated the claim of the imperial power to be a nation-state? Or: "The meaning of each election is the promise of the next one." Most people think the meaning of an election is defined by the policies of the parties that contest it. And so on.*

*Obsessed with the theory of Russian manipulation behind all the political surprises of recent history, from the [Brexit vote](#) to the election of Trump, he has little to say about the driving forces behind them, forces that are vital to understand if democracy is to be saved. And by packaging all of this in the endlessly repeated concepts of "the politics of eternity" and "the politics of inevitability", he virtually guarantees that he will lose the attention of his readers. The current threats to democracy cry out for reasoned and powerfully expressed analysis, but regrettably, this is not such a book*

And [The Nation went so far as to suggest](#) that Snyder's latest book

*marks the next phase in his transformation from academic historian to political commentator; it is also the apotheosis of a certain paranoid style that has emerged among liberals in Trump's wake. The book's cover comes complete with helpful directional indicators: "Russia > Europe > America"—the road to unfreedom is a one-way street. For Snyder, Russia is to blame for the growth of the "birther" conspiracy*

*theory about Barack Obama, stoking the Scottish independence referendum, Brexit, the rise of the far right in various European countries, and the Syrian refugee crisis. Russia is also in cahoots with the National Rifle Association and has been sowing dissension in the United States by encouraging hostility between the police and African Americans. Putin's "grandest campaign" of all, though, was his "cyberwar to destroy the United States of America" by "escorting" Trump to the American presidency.*

"And sentences that consist entirely of rhythmic abstractions", The Nation caustically remarked, "convey very little" eg

*("As we emerge from inevitability and contend with eternity, a history of disintegration can be a guide to repair"). One of his favorite images in the book is the abyss: so empty and so frightening. This gives us "Having transformed the future into an abyss, Putin had to make flailing at its edge look like judo," but also "Under the mistaken impression that they had a history as a nation-state, the British (the English, mainly) voted themselves into an abyss where Russia awaited." Truly the abyss swallows up all meaning.*

But most of the media are delighted with the book .....as you will see from this "resource" which includes a 15 part series of Snyder expositions....I've included three more substantial texts to help the reader set the Snyder book in context.....

### Further Reading

<https://bookmarks.reviews/reviews/all/the-road-to-unfreedom-russia-europe-america/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/07/the-great-russian-disinformation-campaign/564032/>

[https://www.fairobserver.com/region/north\\_america/timothy-snyder-road-to-unfreedom-book-review-politics-us-russia-news-16211/](https://www.fairobserver.com/region/north_america/timothy-snyder-road-to-unfreedom-book-review-politics-us-russia-news-16211/)

[Timothy Snyder Speaks series](#) - started Nov 2017

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=153&v=Eghl19eIKk8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=153&v=Eghl19eIKk8)

others

[Building an authoritarian polity](#); G Gill (2015)

[The failure of democratisation in Russia](#) - a comparative perspective; AB Evans (2011)

[Russia's Managed Democracy](#); Perry Anderson (2007)

## "The Road to....Somewhere"

[This 2017 book](#) may evince the same metaphor and interest as Snyder's in the causes of the political alienation and turbulence of the past two decades but, otherwise, could not be more different in its scope and style. And its essential focus on the UK is only a small part of the difference.

Both books deal with the populist upsurge against mainstream politics but this one's is a serious effort to understand why social democratic voters have deserted the party in droves since the early 2000s. And his treatment of European populism shows a firm grasp of the European scene...

David Goodhart was a leftist Think-Tanker who - in 2004 (before the "[Polish plumber](#)" became famous) - wrote an essay that earned him notoriety and no little ostracism in New Labour circles .

In "[Too Diverse?](#)", he argued that there was a trade-off between increased diversity, through mass immigration, and social solidarity, in the form of the welfare state. Goodhart said that for citizens willingly to hand some of their hard-earned cash to others via their taxes, they needed to feel a basic



level of affinity with those others. He argued that in the homogenous societies of old that was never a problem: citizens felt the mutual obligation of kinship. But in the highly mixed societies of today, such fellow-feeling was strained.

He went on to write [The British Dream - successes and failures of post-war immigration](#) (2013) and last year produced [The Road to Somewhere - the new tribes shaping British politics](#) which I find the most insightful analysis of contemporary British society I've read.....Such books tend to be written by economists, political scientists or journalists - people like Will Hutton, John Kay or David Marquand - and do not convey the same depth of familiarity with the thoughts of the average citizen as Goodhart.

*Goodhart argues that the key faultline in Britain and elsewhere now separates those who come from Somewhere - rooted in a specific place or community, usually a small town or in the countryside, socially conservative, often less educated - and those who could come from Anywhere: footloose, often urban, socially liberal and university educated. He cites polling evidence to show that Somewheres make up roughly half the population, with Anywheres accounting for 20% to 25% and the rest classified as "Inbetweeners".*

*A key litmus test to determine which one of these "values tribes" you belong to is your response to the question of whether Britain now feels like a foreign country. Goodhart cites a YouGov poll from 2011 that found 62% agreed with the proposition: "Britain has changed in recent times beyond recognition, it sometimes feels like a foreign country and this makes me uncomfortable." Only 30% disagreed.*

The book may focus initially on immigration but its analysis soon widens to cover key aspects of economic and social development in the last 25 years and the best part of the book for me is his critique of the new meritocracy; the inexplicable push for mass enrolment at universities; and the collapse of the commercial training system - with employers preferring to take the option of enthusiastic young central and eastern European graduates.

The initial part of his [presentation of the book here](#) is particularly strong on sketching just how dramatic the changes in our economic, social and cultural world have been since 1992 - the year of Maastricht and the European citizen; the year the Democrats arrived on the scene with "Robert Reich's "The Work of Nations" reflecting the prevailing view that, as he puts it on the video -

*- "globalisation would allow agricultural workers to be transformed into IT workers - as did New Labour a few years later. Well it didn't happen....the only country where it did was Germany....In 2001 China joined the WTO...the Euro came into existence..... in 2004 the first wave of central European countries joined the EU. In 2008 the global financial crisis hit us and 2015 the immigrant crisis....."*

The author is clearly well-versed in social surveys and his sense of how the world has so quickly changed very much gives me a sense of the [8 change factors which Matt Flinders identifies](#) in his recent "Defending Democracy"

Given his treatment in polite English circles, Goodhart could be excused for displaying some bitterness but the tone he strikes is remarkably reasonable - he even argues for "decent" populism....An excellent, [extended review in Spiked Online](#) goes so far as to suggest that "a new form of social solidarity lies at the heart of the book"

*And here, I think, we approach the core of Goodhart's recent work: the search for a new form of social solidarity. He is concerned with the rift between the Somewheres and Anywheres not in order to take sides*

*with one against the other, but to bridge it, or, as "The Road to Somewhere" puts it, to 'reconcile the two halves of humanity's political soul'.*

*To this extent, Goodhart really is neither on the left nor the right - and you can understand why "The Road to Somewhere" was originally planned as a book on 'post-liberalism'. He is concerned with establishing the basis for what he variously calls a new social contract, or settlement, one grounded on a political recognition of the 'decent populism' he regards as the attitude of the vast majority. '[It] refers to those who broadly go along with changing attitudes on race and sexuality', he says.*

*'They aren't in the avant garde of liberalisation, but they have accepted most of those changes - perhaps in some cases with reservations, but they've broadly accepted them. They are not liberals in the Anywhere sense. They have views about the world rooted in place, and very strong national attachments; they place a strong value on security; they focus on national rights over universal, human rights; they worry about the lack of opportunities for those not going to universities.'*

*.....Yet in Goodhart there is sometimes a patrician-like air to his calls for a 'new centre, common norms, things that will pull us together', especially when he seems to want the establishment to provide it. And because of this, is there not a problem, too? How can a political class composed entirely from the Anywhere liberal section of society, incorporate the values and views of the majority of Somewheres, a majority on whom they have waged cultural war for decades?*

*Any move certainly won't come from the Labour Party, at the heart of whose resurgence lies little more than an Anywhere restoration, complete with a determination to overturn the Brexit vote. As Goodhart himself writes,*

*'the Corbyn movement could be described as populist in economics but extreme Anywhere in most other respects. What it has not done is change the social composition of the party - about three quarters of Labour Party members are middle class, about 60 per cent are graduates, and almost 40 per cent live in London and the south-east'.*

*And although he sees the Tories as closer to the Somewhere majority, 'because they often are Somewheres, albeit more affluent than most', there's little evidence that they can break out of their political-class office of mirrors. He seems to admit as much: 'Yes, I think [the political class] is almost entirely Anywhere - political activists, MPs, ministers, shadow ministers - all mostly university graduates, all liberal-minded Anywheres.'*

*At points his argument can sound like wishful thinking. 'The political class has been divided down the middle between the militant Anywheres and the admonished Anywheres', he tells me.*

*'And I think Theresa May is the most obvious admonished Anywhere. The admonished admit that they've got some things wrong, that there's a chasm between the smart liberal people running society, and the rest, and it's time we listened - and that's what democracy requires. And then there are those, the militant Anywheres, saying we've given these idiots too much power, why did we call a referendum - the AC Grayling worldview. Those arguing thus seem almost to want to go back to property qualification for the vote, or that you must have at least a 2:1 before you get to cast a ballot. In other words, you've got to be of us before you vote.'*

*.....'Perhaps it's as banal as doing things that matter to people, doing something about social care, housing, the post-school education landscape, which is hopelessly over-invested in universities, rather than vocational training and apprenticeships.'*

## The Nine Lessons of Brexit

Anyone making an honest effort to explain what's going on in the UK to a foreign audience faces a major dilemma - namely that we **know either too much ... or too little**...Let me explain....

If you're one of the few who really understands the ins and outs of the arguments and issues of Brexit over the past 3-4 years, you will effectively have become an "expert" and therefore (as [Steven Pinker has so eloquently explained](#)) have become unable to convey your message clearly to your audience - whether in writing or speech.

You will suffer from what is called "[the curse of knowledge](#)" - stemming from your inability to put yourself in the shoes of the average person who can't understand jargon such as "single market", "WTO rules", "Red lines" or "the backstop".

If, on the other hand, you know very little, then you shouldn't be trying to explain to others!

Most British journalists fall between these 2 extremes - they know enough to be able to pretend they know more than they do. Don't take my word for it - just read the [website of Richard North](#), one of the original Brexiteers.

It was his [site that alerted me to the speech earlier this week](#) by **one of the few real experts on Brexit** - our erstwhile Ambassador to the EU from 2013-2017, [Sir Ivan Rogers](#). Rogers had just been knighted when he wrote a memo, subsequently leaked, warning that a settlement with the EU could take as long as ten years to achieve....Such unpalatable advice was not acceptable to the government and he chose to resign when it got out....

Since then his speeches (and appearances before parliamentary Select Committees) have proved to be a thorn in the government's side.

[Ivor Rogers](#) was not quite your typical civil servant since he spent 2006-12 working in the private sector - but he had been an EU Commissioner (Leon Brittan)'s Chief of Staff in Brussels for a couple of years before serving under Gordon Brown at the Treasury and was then Tony Blair's chief adviser for 3 years. What he brings to the analysis is a rare negotiator's insight about the Realpolitik involved....Hardly surprising therefore that he takes no hostages when given the chance at last to tell his side of the story!

Earlier this year **Ivor Rogers** gave a lecture at Cambridge University entitled [Brexit as Revolution](#) which he has now capped with a lecture entitled [Nine Lessons](#). It's 22 pages long and my initial reactions were very positive - this, I felt, is that rare expert who can actually put himself in the shoes of the average citizen and help us understand...

Unfortunately he couldn't sustain this focus and..... at the sixth "lesson"....I fell by the wayside or - as we say - "he lost me"..

Ivor Roger's Nine Lessons	The "bottom line"
1. Brexit means Brexit	All sides of the argument need to start understanding how being a "third country" puts the UK in a completely different role from that it has enjoyed for the past 45 years.  <i>"And the most naïve of all on this remain the Brexiteers who fantasise about a style of negotiation which is only open to members of the club. The glorious, sweaty, fudge-filled Brussels denouements are gone. The Prime Minister is not in a room negotiating with the 27. That's not</i>

	<p><i>how the exit game or the trade negotiation works, or was ever going to.</i></p> <p><i>We are a soon-to-be third country and an opponent and rival, not just a partner, now. This is what Brexit advocates argued for. It is time to accept the consequence"</i></p>
2. Other people have sovereignty too.	<p><i>"If you think that the pooling of sovereignty has gone well beyond the technical regulatory domain into huge areas of public life are intolerable for democratic legitimacy and accountability, that is a more than honourable position.</i></p> <p><i>But others who have chosen to pool their sovereignty in ways and to extents which make you feel uncomfortable with the whole direction of the project, have done so because they believe pooling ENHANCES their sovereignty - in the sense of adding to their "power of agency" in a world order in which modestly sized nation states have relatively little say, rather than diminishing it.</i></p> <p><i>Brexit advocates may think this is fundamental historical error, and has led to overreach by the questionably accountable supranational institutions of their club. They may think that it leads to legislation, opaquely agreed by often unknown legislators, which unduly favours heavyweight incumbent lobbyists.</i></p> <p><i>Fine. There is some justice in plenty of this critique.</i></p> <p><i>Then leave the club. But you cannot, in the act of leaving it, expect the club fundamentally to redesign its founding principles to suit you and to share its sovereignty with you when it still suits you, and to dilute their agency in so doing. It simply is not going to. And both HMG and Brexit advocates outside it seem constantly to find this frustrating, vexatious and some kind of indication of EU ill will".</i></p>
3. Brexit is a process not an event. And the EU, while strategically myopic, is formidably good at process against negotiating opponents. We have to be equally so, or we will get hammered. Repeatedly.	<p><i>"One cannot seriously simultaneously advance the arguments that the EU has morphed away from the common market we joined, and got into virtually every nook and cranny of U.K. life, eroding sovereignty across whole tracts of the economy, internal and external security, AND that we can extricate ourselves from all that in a trice, recapture our sovereignty and rebuild the capability of the U.K. state to govern and regulate itself in vast areas where it had surrendered sovereignty over the previous 45 years.</i></p> <p><i>The people saying 3 years ago that you could were simply not serious. And they have proven it. They also had not the slightest fag packet plan on what they were going to try and do and in which order.....</i></p> <p><i>there could never, on the part of the remaining Member States, be the appetite to have TWO tortuous negotiations with the U.K. - one to deliver a few years of a transition/bridging deal, the other to agree the end state after exit. One such negotiation is enough for everyone. So transitional arrangements were always going to be "off the shelf".</i></p> <p><i>When the first set of so-called Guidelines emerged from the EU in April 2017,, it was hard to get anyone in the UK to read them. We were, as usual, preoccupied more with the noises from the noisy but largely irrelevant in Westminster, while the real work was being done on the other side of the Channel</i></p> <p><i>To take just one technical example, though it rapidly develops a national security as well as an economic dimension, <b>cross border data flows</b> are completely central to free trade and prosperity - not that you would know it from listening to our current trade debate, which remains bizarrely obsessed with tariffs which, outside agriculture, have become a very modest element in the real barriers to cross border trade.</i></p> <p><i>The EU here is a global player - a global rule maker - able and willing effectively to impose its values, rules and standards extraterritorially".</i></p>
4. it is not possible or democratic to argue that only one	<p><i>An argument you hear commonly is - "we only ever joined a Common Market, but it's turned into something very different and no-one in authority down in London ever asked us whether that is what we wanted"</i></p> <p><i>"One can't now suddenly start denouncing such people as Quisling closet remainers who do not subscribe to the "only true path" Brexit. Let alone insist on public self-criticism from several</i></p>

<p>Brexit destination is true, legitimate and represents the revealed "Will of the People"</p>	<p><i>senior politicians on the Right who themselves, within the last few years, have publicly espoused these views, and praised the Norwegian and Swiss models, the health of their democracies and their prosperity.</i></p> <p><i>In an earlier lecture, I described Brexitism as a revolutionary phenomenon, which radicalised as time went on and was now devouring its own children. This current phase feels ever more like Maoists seeking to crush Rightist deviationists than it does British Conservatism".</i></p> <p><i>"My real objection is to the style of argument espoused both by the pro "no deal" Right and by Downing Street which says that no other model but their own is a potentially legitimate interpretation of the Will of the People - which evidently only they can properly discern.</i></p> <p><i>"I fully accept that control of borders - albeit with much confusion about the bit we already have control over, but year after year fail, under this Government, to achieve any control of - was a central referendum issue.</i></p> <p><i>But don't argue it's the only feasible Brexit. Or that it's an economically rational one.</i></p> <p><i>Of course the EU side will now back the Prime Minister in saying it is. They have done a great deal for themselves and they want it to stick. Who can blame them?"</i></p>
<p>5. If WTO terms or existing EU preferential deals are not good enough for the UK in major third country markets, they can't be good enough for trade with our largest market.</p>	<p><i>"You cannot simultaneously argue that it is imperative we get out of the EU in order that we can strike preferential trade deals with large parts of the rest of the world, because the existing terms on which we trade with the rest of the world are intolerable. ....</i></p> <p><b>AND also argue that ....</b></p> <p><i>it is perfectly fine to leave a deep free trade agreement with easily our largest export and import market for the next generation, and trade on WTO terms because that is how we and others trade with everyone else..."</i></p> <p><i>"Market access into the EU WILL worsen, whatever post exit deal we eventually strike. And the quantum by which our trade flows with the EU will diminish - and that impacts immediately - will outweigh the economic impact of greater market opening which we have to aim to achieve over time in other markets, where the impact will not be immediate but incremental"</i></p>
<p>6. If the UK with reverts to WTO terms or to a standard free trade deal with the EU, it will have a huge negative impact on its service sector.</p>	<p><i>This the section I found most difficult to understand - partly because several different points are jostling with one another</i></p> <p><i>"The U.K. currently has a sizeable trade surplus with the EU in services, whereas in manufactured goods we have a huge deficit and yet it appears that "UK services' industries needs have been sacrificed to the primary goal of ending free movement"</i></p> <p><i>"For politicians, goods trade and tariffs are more easily understood than services. They rarely grasp the extent to which goods and services are bundled together and indissociable. They even more rarely grasp how incredibly tough it is to deliver freer cross border trade in services - which, by definition, gets you deep into domestic sovereignty questions in a way which makes removing tariff barriers look straightforward.</i></p> <p><i>"We are dealing with a political generation which has no serious experience of bad times and is frankly cavalier about precipitating events they could not then control, but feel they might exploit.</i></p> <p><i>Nothing is more redolent of the pre First World War era, when very few believed that a very long period of European peace and equilibrium could be shattered in months".</i></p>
<p>7. Beware all supposed deals bearing "pluses".</p>	<p><i>This refers to the recent emergence of options such as "<a href="#">Canada Plus</a>" (which has the disadvantage of being favoured at the time of writing by idiot Boris) and "<a href="#">Norway Plus</a>". This detailed explanation of "<a href="#">Canada Plus</a>" soon had my eyes glazing over....,</i></p> <p><i>"The "pluses" merely signify that all deficiencies in the named deal will miraculously disappear when we Brits come to negotiate our own version of it.</i></p> <p><i>As the scale of the humiliation they think the Prime Minister's proposed deal delivers started, far too late, to dawn on politicians who had thought Brexit was a cakewalk - with the emphasis on cake - we have seen a proliferation of mostly half-baked cake alternatives.</i></p>



	<p><i>They all carry at least one plus. Canada has acquired several. Besides "Canada ++" or SuperCanada, as it was termed by the former Foreign Secretary, we have Norway +, which used to be "NorwaythenCanada" then became "Norwayfornow" and then became "Norway + forever". And now even "No deal +", which also makes appearances as managed no deal" and "no deal mini deals".</i></p> <p><i>What is depressing about the nomenclature is the sheer dishonesty. The pluses are inserted to enable one to say that one is well aware of why existing FTA x or y or Economic Area deal a or b does not really work as a Brexit destination, but that with the additions you are proposing, the template is complete".</i></p>
<p>8. you cannot conduct such a huge negotiation as untransparently as the U.K. has. And in the end, it does you no good to try.</p>	<p><i>"At virtually every stage in this negotiation, the EU side has deployed transparency, whether on its position papers, its graphic presentations of its take on viable options and parameters, its "no deal" notices to the private sector to dictate the terms of the debate and shape the outcome. A secretive, opaque Government, hampered of course by being permanently divided against itself and therefore largely unable to articulate any agreed, coherent position, has floundered in its wake.</i></p> <p><i>"It is a rather unusual experience for the EU - always portrayed as a bunch of wildly out of touch technocrats producing turgid jargon-ridden Eurocrat prose up against "genuine" politicians who speak "human" - to win propaganda battles. Let alone win them this easily"</i></p>
<p>9. real honesty with the public is the best policy if we are to get to the other side of Brexit with a reasonably unified country and a healthy democracy and economy.</p>	<p><i>"We need a radically different method and style if the country is to heal and unify behind some proposed destination.</i></p> <p><i>And that requires leadership which is far more honest in setting out the fundamental choices still ahead, the difficult trade offs between sovereignty and national control and keeping market access for our goods and services in our biggest market, and which sets out to build at least some viable consensus."</i></p>

By the way, if you've read this far you might well want to pose the question of where I lie in what might be called the "spectrum of ignorance". That's what they call a "leading question" to which I'm happy to answer that I am neither an expert nor totally ignorant.....which just goes to show...how tricky dilemmas are!

#### Other References

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<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2017/03/brexit-update.html>

## Hacks? Critics? Writers? What's in a Name?

I've been spending a fair amount of time these past few weeks going over the year's posts (60) to try to give them a little bit more "shape" ie coherence. It was probably this [post back in June](#) which planted the idea of the need for some editing of my posts. For whatever reason, there does seem to have been more of a pattern to my writing this year.. The interest in organisational reform didn't entirely peter out - but morphed into a larger concern about systems of power and the State..

I will, in a few days, be uploading this year's collection of posts which also shows that an important thread running through the year has been the need for writing which - [as one post put it](#) -

*jolts me - not for its own sake but to help first identify minds which look at the world in original ways but which also understand that clear language is an essential tool for such originality...Recently deceased [essayist Tom Wolfe](#) was a favourite of mine ever since I first read his [Mau Mauing the flak catchers](#) in 1970 but the "creative writing" courses which have contaminated journalism in the past few decades have made me suspicious of even good journalists these days. [James Meek](#) remains an exception for his ability to reduce economic complexities to 5 or 10 thousand word essays - ditto [Jonathan Meades](#) for his forensic analyses of cultural issues.*

But it was [Arthur Koestler](#) who first stunned me (in my late teens) with memorable writing - hardly surprising given his amazing background. Only Victor Serge could rival the enormity of the events which shaped him. How can those who have known only a quiet bourgeois English life possibly give us insights into other worlds? And yet a few writers manage to do it.

But somehow, academic specialists are rarely able to produce prose which grips...Is it the unrealistic restriction of the scope of their inquiries vision which causes the deadness of their prose - or perhaps the ultra security of their institutional base??

It's this question which led me to offer this matrix of good journalistic writers - dividing them according to their focus on people, ideas, events and places. This made me realise, in turn, the fine line there is between such categories as journalist, novelist and travel writer.

Or perhaps the distinction is, more properly, between generalists and specialists - with the latter including not only travel writers but those who focus on books, films, drama and art (critics) and sports (of each variety - including politics). And the former covering essentially those we refer to, derogatively, as "hacks" - since what they do is to hack out "news" from the public relations handouts they receive

I accept that my table is - in its focus on the former type of writer - elitist

I wanted to include examples from countries beyond the UK and managed 20 - whose nationalities are clearly designated in the table. I've tried googling (in French and in German) to try to get a sense of who might be the equivalent European journalists but the google curse of [neophilia](#) means that only references to younger names are given....

### Good "Journalistic" writers – by focus, base and nationality

Source of income	People	Ideas	Events	Places	Mixed genres
<b>freelance</b>	Biographers	<a href="#">Peter Watson</a> <a href="#">Naomi Klein</a> (Can)	<a href="#">Victor Serge</a> (Be) <a href="#">Kenneth Roy</a>	<a href="#">John Ardagh</a> <a href="#">Dervla Murphy</a> <a href="#">Jan Morris</a> <a href="#">Neal Ascherson</a> <a href="#">Philip Marsden</a> <a href="#">Giles Milton</a>	<a href="#">George Orwell</a> <a href="#">Hans Magnus Enzensberger</a> (Ger) <a href="#">Francis Wheen</a> <a href="#">Arundati Roy</a> (India) <a href="#">Joan Didion</a> US <a href="#">Tariq Ali</a> (Pak/UK)
<b>Academia</b>	Biographers	<a href="#">Mark Greif</a> USA <a href="#">Mark Lilla</a> USA <a href="#">Perry Anderson</a> USA <a href="#">Jill Lepore</a> USA	Historians Political scientists Economists	Geographers Anthropologists Sociologists	<a href="#">Raymond Aron</a> (France) <a href="#">Michael Pollan</a> USA
<b>Journal newspaper</b>	<a href="#">Oriana Fallaci</a> (It)  <a href="#">Joseph Epstein</a>	<a href="#">Francois Bondy</a> (Sw) <a href="#">Claude Roy</a> (Fr) <a href="#">Chris Hitchens</a> <a href="#">Martin Jacques</a> <a href="#">Paul Mason</a> <a href="#">George Monbiot</a> <a href="#">Duncan Campbell</a> <a href="#">Owen Jones</a>  <a href="#">Adam Curtis</a>	<a href="#">Arthur Koestler</a> <a href="#">Vasily Grossman</a> (Ru) <a href="#">Seb Haffner</a> (Ger) <a href="#">Joseph Roth</a> (Ger) <a href="#">Rudolf Augstein</a> (Ger) <a href="#">Paul Foot</a> <a href="#">Patrick Cockburn</a> <a href="#">Simon Jenkins</a>	<a href="#">Luigi Barzini</a> (It) Andrew Sampson <a href="#">Svetlana Alexievich</a> (Belarussia) <a href="#">Robert Kaplan</a> (US) <a href="#">Geert Mak</a> (Neth) <a href="#">John Hooper</a> <a href="#">John Pilger</a> <a href="#">Robert Fisk</a> <a href="#">Tobias Jones</a>	<a href="#">Anthony Lane</a> <a href="#">James Meek</a> <a href="#">Andrew O Hagen</a>
<b>television</b>	<a href="#">Clive James</a>				
<b>Think Tank</b>		<a href="#">David Goodhart</a> <a href="#">Susan George</a> (US)			

## Why is the British media coverage of Brexit so superficial?

The recent post about Brexit was a long one simply because most of the British commentary about the issue is so superficial – tending to focus on personalities rather than issues. So I make no apology for devoting a lot of space to it – even if it was a bit short of analysis of options for the immediate future...

It was left to the ["Open Democracy" website](#) to offer the sort of analysis we need – with this article which applies Dani Rodrik's [impossibility trilemma](#) to the Brexit issue. This states that democracy, national sovereignty and cross border economic integration are mutually incompatible: we can combine any two of the three, but never have all three simultaneously and in full.

*In the context of Brexit, it means that we can do any two of the following:*

- a) Retain the benefits of economic integration that come via membership of the EU's single market and customs union;*
- b) Reclaim national sovereignty by returning powers to the British parliament that currently lie with the European institutions;*
- c) Uphold democratic principles by ensuring that we have a say over all the laws we are subjected to.*

*Theresa May's plan partially achieves a) and b), while sacrificing c). Her strategy has been to retain some of the benefits of economic integration to avoid the damage resulting from a cliff edge, while reclaiming national sovereignty over certain key areas (immigration, agriculture, fisheries etc).*

*The Labour Party's position has become clearer over time. In a [speech](#) delivered earlier this year, Jeremy Corbyn stated that Labour's priorities were as follows:*

- Negotiate a deal that gives full "tariff-free access" to the single market;*
- Negotiate a new customs union with the EU, while ensuring that the UK has a say in future trade deals;*
- Not accept any situation where the UK is subject to all EU rules and EU law, yet has no say in making those laws;*
- Negotiate protections or exemptions from current rules and directives "where necessary" that push privatisation and public service competition or restrict the government's ability to intervene to support domestic industry.*

*The first two of these seek to keep the benefits of economic integration that come via the single market and customs union. The third is about maintaining democracy, while the fourth is about reclaiming national sovereignty. Labour is trying to have all three ends served at once. This is an internally contradictory position that falls foul of the Brexit trilemma, meaning that trade-offs will likely have to be made*

I'll continue the analysis in a minute – but first let me give you a taste of how the serious British media has been covering the issue. Andrew Rawnsley is one of the country's most respected political journalists and concludes his [weekly overview](#) of what has been perhaps the most dramatic week of the past two years in this style

*The risks to Britain are enormous and yet Britons have no more faith in the official opposition than they do in a government falling apart before the country's eyes. In the midst of the worst period for the Conservative party since the [ERM crisis](#), the poll tax, [Suez](#), the [Corn Laws](#) or any other precedent of your choice, Jeremy Corbyn's Labour has become less popular and the leader's personal ratings are even more negative than those of the prime minister.*

*Labour is getting a similar warning from the private polling that the party commissions. However lustily they may demand a general election when in front of a live microphone, some members of the shadow*

*cabinet are muttering privately that they are not at all eager to go to the country for fear that their party will get a verdict from the voters that it will not like.*

*The endless ducking and diving about when they might call a no-confidence vote against the government makes Labour look like opportunists desperately hoping to luck into office on the back of Brexit turmoil rather than a party with the national interest at heart. You can't keep demanding that the Tories "make way" for Labour, the daily mantra of Mr Corbyn and his drones, and then never trigger the only mechanism for making that happen.*

*At the heart of it is Labour's continuing refusal to come clean about whether it will or will not support another referendum. What has always smelled of unprincipled tactical prevarication now reeks of a refusal to be honest with the electorate.*

*Failed by both its major parties, the biggest loser of all is Brexit-broken Britain. Our country is careening towards disaster. All of its political institutions know this. None of them seems capable of arresting it. They continue to play their games of charades as we lurch towards the abyss.*

Now this is a very concise and fair assessment - but what it fails to offer is any analysis of the reasons why the politicians are behaving in such an apparently childish way....For this we have to go to sources which the public rarely access - the Think Tanks - but one which few Brits would be aware of - [The Dahrendorf Forum](#). There I found (on its Publications List) a fascinating paper "[Cultures of Negotiation - explaining Britain's hard bargaining in the Brexit negotiations](#)" which, plausibly, points to three explanatory factors for the embarrassing mess the UK has made of these negotiations -

- the Conservative "ideology of statecraft",
- the [adversarial political culture](#) this blog has occasionally referred to
- "weak socialisation into European structures

But revenons aux moutons - ie to the rare analysis which [the Open Democracy article](#) offers of the options the British parliamentarians currently have at their disposal -

*Some MPs have backed a so-called '[Norway plus' option](#), which would see the UK remaining in the European Economic Area (EEA) and joining a customs union with the EU. However, with the exception of a car crash disorderly Brexit, this represents the worst of all worlds - sacrificing both democracy and national sovereignty in order to maintain the benefits of economic integration with the EU. It amounts to "all pay, no say" - accepting all EU laws and regulations while sacrificing any democratic say over them, while also contributing to EU budgets.*

*It is hard to imagine a world where our politicians and electorate - who voted for Brexit in order to "take back control" - would stomach such an outcome. In any case, Norwegian leaders have [made it clear](#) that they would oppose Britain's application to join such an arrangement.*

*This leaves two possible options which, on the face of it at least, do not involve a significant loss of democracy and sovereignty.*

*Firstly, Labour could favour a harder Brexit which seeks to reclaim national sovereignty and take back control of our rules and laws, while sacrificing economic integration with the EU - and incurring whatever economic cost that might carry (hereafter referred to as **the 'Lexit' option**). This effectively combines options b) and c) in the list above, while sacrificing a).*

*Secondly, Labour could favour a second referendum and campaign to remain in the EU, and seek to transform it from within - and incur whatever political cost this might carry (hereafter referred to as **the 'Remain' option**). This effectively combines options a) and c) in the list above, while sacrificing b).*



The case for Lexit relies heavily on four key assumptions.

- That EU membership places significant constraints on key levers of domestic policy that would prevent a left-wing government from implementing its agenda.
- That these constraints can only be escaped by leaving the EU (i.e. reform within the EU is impossible).
- That once outside the EU, the UK will be able to exert sovereignty over these areas of policy as an independent country.
- That the benefits of this will more than offset the economic and political costs of leaving the EU.

This post is long enough – for the detailed assessment of the extent to which these assumptions can be sustained I recommend that you read [Labour's Brexit Trilemma](#) for yourself!

#### Further Reading

- [EUReferendum daily blog](#) - A critical blog from someone who long argued for Brexit
  - [The Brexit Blog](#) - a sane voice of sense from an organisational sociologist of all people!! A weekly
  - [LSE Brexit](#) - a good selection of items
  - [The Guardian's Brexit](#) - ditto
- <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2018/12/12/a-way-out-of-the-brexit-chaos-parliament-may-have-to-ask-the-people-to-decide/>
- <http://fedtrust.co.uk/brexit-a-national-government-or-no-deal/>
- <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/12/17/let-the-people-take-back-control-of-brexit> - an important article for anyone imagining that a second referendum will solve anything.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/nov/18/brexit-big-decision-didnt-even-think-about-eurozone-studies>

## Celebrating Romanian Wines

Romanian wines seem at last – after almost 30 years – to be coming in from the cold. No fewer than three significant “events” occurred in this domain in the past few months. First the publication in the summer of a substantial book [The Wines of Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova](#); by Caroline Gilby (2018) who has apparently [been a wine connoisseur for the past decade](#) and is the first English-speaking specialist to produce a book about the local wines.

The book came to my attention because of the wine blog of Mike Vesseth – who made [his first visit to Romania](#) this autumn; [took part on some wine tasting](#) at Iasi and posted about these experiences this month.

I had no sooner asked to see a copy of the Gilby book (50 euros!) than, a few days later, I alighted on a copy of the first ever [Gault Millau Guide to Romanian Wines](#) 2019 – which describes (all too briefly) 63 wineries and 152 wines. There's a good summary of the [Romanian wine varieties here](#). At the same time, the various Crama (bulk wine cellars) which are such a pleasant feature of life here have been giving us access to the dry white wines of Averesti (Iasi), Macin (Dobrogea), Jidvei (Alba Iulia), and Vissoara (Constanta) – for 2 euros a litre! The famous Obor market not far from us has the last two including a new grape for me, the [Sarba](#), available from [Girboiu](#) – one of the many new vineyards which have developed in the country in the past decade or so.

There's a nice [review of some Romanian wines here](#)

## EndNote

### Recommended Blogs

All blogs have a "blogroll" - many of which are outdated. I try to keep mine up to date

A few of the good ones send me automatic updates - generally the collective sites such as [Eurozine](#) journal, [the Real World Economist](#) blogs; the great [Scottish Review](#) E-journal.

Those which deserve a special mention include -

- <http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.com/>; discussion of current political developments
- <http://fromarsetoelbow.blogspot.com/>; more elevated discussion of same
- <http://kyq4.blogspot.com/>; my friend Keith's blog which has great photos from his climbing of Scottish mountains
- <https://www.theguardian.com/international> - my only daily newspaper
- <https://www.nybooks.com/>; every 2 weeks for serious discussions
- <https://www.lrb.co.uk/>; every 2 weeks for great reading
- <https://www.lemonde.fr/> the daily I prefer to buy whenever I can find it (all too rarely)
- <https://www.courrierinternational.com/> a weekly which makes available in French articles from the global press
- [Die Zeit](#); my favourite German weekly although its bulky newspaper format makes reading difficult
- [Le Point](#) - a right of centre weekly which has is at the moment my favoured reading in the French language
- [EUReferendum daily blog](#) A critical blog from someone who long argued for Brexit
- [The Brexit Blog](#) - a sane voice of sense from an organisational sociologist of all people!! A weekly
- [LSE Brexit](#) - a good selection of items
- [The Guardian's Brexit](#) - dit
- [Poemas del rio Wang](#) - the most amazing site which tends to focus on memories of old central and east European lands; which runs some trips to them;
- [Michael Roberts blog](#)- an elegantly written Marxist economist blog
- <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/>; a useful source of reports on current issues
- [That's How the Light Gets In](#)- the imaginative site of a retired Liverpool Polytechnic lecturer with strong cultural tastes - which has sadly gone quiet this year...
- [Club Orlov](#) - a very original "end-of-oil" blog by a writer who has written several fascinating books
- [Stumbling and Mumbling](#) - a rather academic blog with, however, good hyperlinks
- [Paul Cairney; politics and public policy](#)- one of the best academic blogs for me, written by a Scottish Professor who explains in clear language the approach to various aspects of public policy

# Key Books of the last century

*Historians like Arthur Schlesinger and theorists like Albert Hirschman have recorded that every thirty years or so, society shifts - essentially, from the public to the private and back again. The grass, after a while, always feels greener on the other side. The late 1940s to the late 1970s was a period of the public, the late '70s to now, the private. Now the conditions are right for another turn, to a new common life and the security and freedom it affords, but only if we make it happen by tackling a market that is too free and a state that is too remote*

Compass Think Tank 2011

The conflict and repression which was the European experience in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave way to a sense of liberation and assertiveness of the immediate post-war period - as well as the first warnings of the excesses of our way of life in the late 1960s.

**This is a list drawn up by a white male who had a Scottish university education (in politics and economics) in the early 1960s and is limited therefore by that interest in political economy - rather than, for example, psychology....** (although I have included the injunctions of Dale Carnegie and Benjamin Spock as well as the more thoughtful analyses of Carl Rodgers)

But "Mein Kampf" and the writings of Ayn Rand are excluded - despite the influence they had..... I simply can't view them as serious.....

My surfing did unearth some "mega-lists" generated from 107 "best of" book lists from a variety of sources eg [which](#) is, however, strongly biased to American reading....

**As a starter, let me offer this list of 35 books - taking us to 1973.**

## How Ideas Change

Decade	Themes of intellectual discussion	Key names
1930s	The managerial revolution End of capitalism	J Burnham J Strachey
1940s	Keynesism Meritocracy New world order	JM Keynes
1950s	End of ideology Revisionism Private affluence/public squalor	D. Bell A. Shonfield; Tony Crosland JK Galbraith
1960s	Worship of scale Modernisation of society Participation critique of professionals	Peter Berger Pateman; Ivan Illich
1970s	Costs of economic growth Collapse of welfare state Small is beautiful Change Corporatism	EJ Mishan Buchanan E. Schumacher; L. Kohr S. Beer; A. Toffler; D. Schon Cawson
1980s	Deindustrialisation Privatisation Pursuit of excellence	Blackaby; Dyson Consultancies; World Bank Tom Peters

	ecology decentralisation globalisation	James Lovelock OECD Stiglitz, Martin Wolf
1990s	End of history Flexibility and reengineering Reinvention of government; NPM Climate change The learning organisation Washington consensus	Fukayama  OECD Scientific community Senge World Bank
2000s	Good governance Neo-liberalism and its limits Environmental collapse Migration and social integration state building	World bank; OECD Naomi Klein, Porto Allegre Scientific community C Caldwell F Fukuyama
2010s	Migration The financial system populism Inequality	Everyone Stiglitz Cass Mudde Dorling-
Present	Populism Big Data Robotisation (AI) The future of Work	T Snyder; Eatwell and Goodwin S Zuboff  World Bank 2018

## My key Books of the 20th Century - Part I

Political Parties - Robert Michels (1913). One of the key texts during my course on Political Sociology in 1963 and one I often refer to. Focused on the German SPD and trade unions to demonstrate how even democratically-elected leaders fall prey to "the iron law of oligarchy"

Public Opinion- Walter Lippmann (1921) Continued the critique of actual democracy from where Michels left off. He looked at how public perceptions are formed and argues that politicians are incapable of accurately understanding issues and proposes that a professional, "specialized class" collect and analyze data, and present their conclusions to the society's decision makers, who, in their turn, use the "art of persuasion" to inform the public about the decisions and circumstances affecting them. "Public Opinion" proposes that the increased power of propaganda, and the specialized knowledge required for effective political decisions, have rendered impossible the traditional notion of democracy. Moreover, Public Opinion introduced the phrase "the manufacture of consent", which Chomsky used for Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media (1988)

Revolt of the Masses - Jose Ortega y Gasset (1930) critical of the masses, contrasting "noble life and common life" and excoriating the barbarism and primitivism he sees in the mass-man.

Moral Man and Immoral Society - Reinhold Niebuhr (1932) - one of the books which made the biggest impact on me at University. His collected papers have been published recently and [a review says](#) -

*The foundational doubt in Niebuhr's work is whether, and how, Christianity can be a force for justice in this world. He believed profoundly that it must, and yet he never underestimated the obstacles. First, the theological obstacles: in the gospels, Jesus preaches a radically otherworldly and self-sacrificing ethics, in which the Christian is commanded to turn the other cheek and render unto Caesar. Niebuhr was never truly attracted by this kind of passivity, perhaps because the mystical and millennial aspects of religion had so little appeal for him.*

*By the time he came to write "Moral Man and Immoral Society", Niebuhr had arrived at the conclusion that Christianity was proving an alibi for inaction rather than a creed of change. This explains the militantly confrontational tone of much of the book, whose primary audience and target was moderate socialists. Niebuhr had run for Congress on the Socialist ticket in 1932, but he came to believe that religious progressives believed too much in individual changes of heart, not enough in systemic transformation. In some of the most unsettling parts of the book, Niebuhr seems to come out in favor of violent revolution. But if this ends-justify-the-means rhetoric sounds odd coming from the minister of a religion of peace, by the end of the book Niebuhr has retreated from it somewhat. In theory violence might be justified, he argues, but in practice the American proletariat has no more chance of winning a revolutionary struggle than do American blacks. For both of these "disinherited" groups, Niebuhr concludes, confrontational nonviolence on the Gandhian model is the best course: "Non-violence is a particularly strategic instrument for an oppressed group which is hopelessly in the minority and has no possibility of developing sufficient power to set against its oppressors."*

The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money - JM Keynes (1936). It was the core of my economics education although, like most people, it was the summaries I read rather than the original



[How to make friends and influence people](#) - Dale Carnegie (1936) I read it for the first time recently and had to confess to finding it useful....

EH Carr's [The Twenty Years' Crisis](#) (1939), a work that combined an attack on the illusions and wishful thinking of much writing on international relations with a staunch defence of the need for utopia, dreams, and distant aspirations in human affairs.

The Managerial Revolution - [James Burnham](#) (1941) A book which helped move the left to the notion of a reformed capitalism in which private ownership was tamed by a new managerial class.

[Escape from Freedom](#) - Erich Fromm (1941) Another book which was still influential in the early 1960s....

[Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy](#) - Joseph Schumpeter (1942). "Elite theory" was one of the most important parts of my politics course - taking in not only Michels but Italians Mosca and Pareto. One of the most scintillating books was Schumpeter's - particularly for his theory about the "circulation of elites"....

[The Open Society and its Enemies](#) - Karl Popper (1944) The book which made the biggest impact on me and to which I owe my scepticism....A lot of it (particularly the sections on Plato, Hegel and Marx) went over my head - but its assertion of the importance of scientific "disproving" has stayed with me my entire life.....

[The Road to Serfdom](#) - Friedrich Hayek (1944) One of only a handful which I have never read

"Baby and Child Care" - [Benjamin Spock](#) (1946)

[Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male](#) - Kinsey (1948)

[The Second Sex](#) - Simone de Beauvoir (1949)

[The Lonely Crowd](#) - David Riesmann (1950)

[The Power Elite](#) - C Wright Mills (1956) Another major influence - he wrote beautifully....

[The Future of Socialism](#) - CAR Crosland (1956) Fifteen years about Burnham's book, Crosland enshrined its central message in the key revisionist text for the left...

[The Hidden Persuaders](#) - Vance Packard (1957)

[The Affluent Society](#) - JK Galbraith (1958) The book which coined the phrase "private affluence and public squalor" (as well as "the conventional wisdom").....

[The End of Ideology](#) - Daniel Bell (1960)

[The Death and Life of American Cities](#) Jane Jacobs (1961)

[On Becoming a Person](#) - [Carl Rodgers](#) (1961) The figure who most clearly expressed the mood and feelings of my generation....

The Fire Next Time - [James Baldwin](#) (1962)

[Silent Spring](#) - Rachel Carson (1962) The first environmental book!

[In Defence of Politics](#) - Bernard Crick (1962) Along with Popper, the book which changed my life!

[Capitalism and Freedom](#) - Milton Friedmann (1962)

[The Feminine Mystique](#) - Betty Friedan (1963) Interesting that it took almost 15 years for de Beauvoir's message to find wide expression....

[Unsafe at any speed](#) - Ralph Nadar (1965)

[Modern Capitalism - the changing balance of public and private power](#) - Andrew Shonfield (1966)

[The New Industrial State](#) - JK Galbraith (1967) The only author to get 2 books in the list reflects both the importance of the subjects he dealt with - and the accessible and wryly humorous style of his writing

[The Costs of Economic Growth](#) - EJ Mishan 1967. A book so in advance of its age.....

[The Active Society](#) - Amitai Etzioni (1968) A book whose importance I was aware of without having the tenacity to read.....

[Deschooling Society](#) - Ivan Illich (1970) One of several Illich books which gave me my scepticism about organisational power...

[Future Shock](#) - Alvin Toffler (1970) The first of the books which alerted us to the scale of the change underway in our societies.

[Beyond the Stable State](#) - [Donald Schoen](#) (1971) No book made more impact on me than this one whose core arguments I vividly remembering listening to on the family radio as Reith Lectures in 1970..... This when I became seriously interested in organisations.....

The [Limits to Growth](#) - Club of Rome (1972)

[Small is Beautiful](#) - Ernst Schumacher (1973)

## Key Books of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century - part II

Apparently I'm not alone in my interest in making a list of "the key books of the century"....I've just unearthed the first of what promises to be a series of posts on "[the hundred most influential books since the war](#)" - which appeared last month in the Time Literary Supplement and gave us 20 titles from the 1940s....It draws our attention to an interesting initiative of 1986 when a diverse group of writers and scholars came together to try to assist independent East European writers and publishers both at home and in exile. The Chairman was Lord Dahrendorf, Warden of St Antony's College, Oxford (and prominent German politician!).

Other members were the French historian Francois Furet; Raymond Georis, Director of the European Cultural Foundation, Amsterdam; Laurens van Krevelen of the Dutch publishing house Meulenhoff; the Swedish writer Per Waestberg, at the time President of International PEN; the European correspondent of the New Yorker, Jane Kramer; and the historian and commentator, Timothy Garton Ash.

The result, in 1995, was a book "[Freedom for Publishing, Publishing for Freedom](#)" which listed 100 key books, listed sequentially on the TLS blog. The very first book on the list for the 1940s is one I knew I had forgotten to put on my list - Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" (now rectified). I think I should also have included the writings of Max Weber and Raymond Aron.....so reserve the right to produce a more definitive list which better reflects my particular criteria of impact, coherence and "sustainability" (ie "lasting power")

I have resisted the temptation to peek at the books the TLS blog gives for each of the following decades - until I have completed my own effort - and simply [pass on this list of 20 key books for the 1950s](#). A few years ago, Time Magazine gave us an interesting annotated [list of the 100 best nonfiction books](#)

## Key Books of the last 40 years

I am having much more difficulty identifying "seminal books with a distinctive voice" for the last 40 years. I had little difficulty naming almost 40 books for the earlier 40-year period - mainly because they marked me at an impressionable age.

That's perhaps one of three reasons for this deficiency - ie that, after the age of 30, one is less easily impressed. Certainly there are more books on this list which I haven't actually read - but whose importance warrants their mention....

The other two reasons for the shorter list are that

- the battle-lines on most disputes were drawn in the first part of the century - and we are now operating in the tracks made by more famous (and original) men and women.....
- University growth, social science specialisation and bureaucratisation have killed off creativity....

Clearly such assertions need to be justified and I hope to post on this shortly.....

For the moment, let me simply list the books which came to mind as I tried to complete the list.....the Peters book is there not for its quality but simply because it reflected the "mood of the time".

And, so far, I don't feel able to include a book covering the post 2001 anxieties about migration - although Chris Cauldwell's 2009 [Reflections on the Revolution in Europe](#) is a front-runner. Nor have I tried to touch the issues related to information and security.....

**So my tentative list for the post 1973 years includes -**

[The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism](#) - Daniel Bell (1976) one of the first books to talk of post-industrialism

[Orientalism](#) - Edward Said (1978) The book which made us aware of our eurocentrism

[The Breakdown of Nations](#) - Leopold Kohr (1978) A personal favourite....which preceded "Small is Beautiful"

[The Culture of Narcissism](#) - Christopher Lasch (1979) which first drew individualism to our attention

[In Search of Excellence](#) - Tom Peters and Robert Waterman (1982) - which opened the floodgates to the celebration of the managerial cowboy in us all

[Imagined Communities](#) - Benedict Anderson (1983) - a study of how the sentiments and affinities of people who had little direct experience of one another could coalesce into a shared identity which they came to understand as national, and of the arbitrary and artificial (if often inexorable) nature of this emergent belonging

[Casino Capitalism](#) - Susan Strange (1986) the great academic who invented the field of international political economy

[Manufacturing Consent](#) - Noam Chomsky (1988) which helped us understand how the media manipulates us

[The End of History](#) - Francis Fukuyama (1989) One of these books which everyone refers to but no one has read

[Reinventing Government](#) - David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1992). The book which made NPM respectable

[Everything for Sale](#) - the virtues and limits of markets - Robert Kuttner (1996)

[Short Circuit](#) - strengthening local economies in an unstable world - Ronald Douthwaite (1996). The book I would vote as the MUST READ for all of us these days

[The Lugano Report](#): On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century - Susan George (1999). A great satire

[Change the World](#) - Robert Quinn (2000) A vastly underrated book about the process of change

[A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism](#) - David Harvey (2005)

[Injustice - why social inequality persists](#) - David Dorling (2011)

Then there are tens of thousands of volumes which management writers have given us - of which the better have been produced by people such as Henry Mintzberg, [Charles Handy](#) and [Ronald Dore](#)

change

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2010/04/understanding-and-acting.html>

lit journalism

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2012/06/getting-under-skin.html>



# Just Words? How language gets in the way

Ronald G Young MA MSc

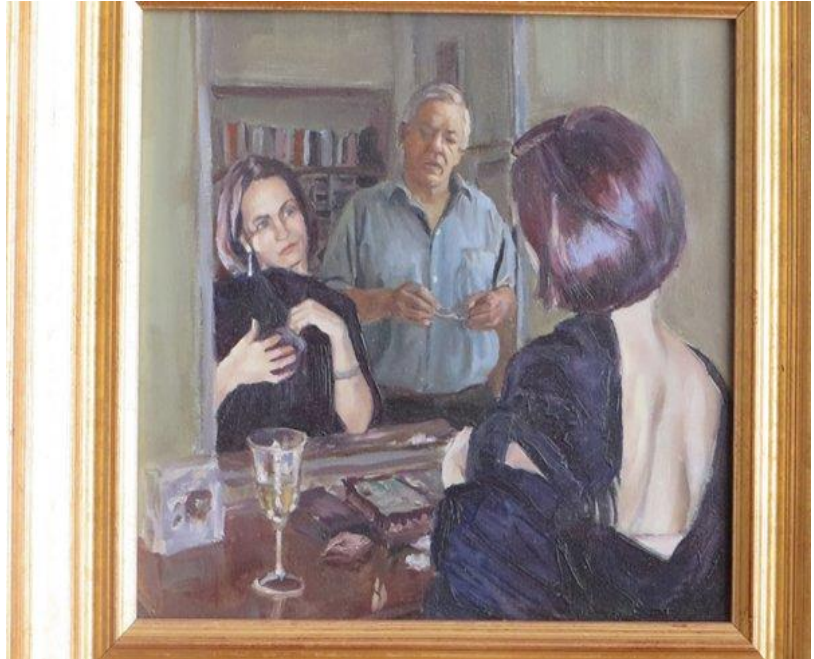
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Inconclusion



## PREFACE

Whenever I've been given the chance, I have tried to insert a short glossary of the key words I've used in any official report - and I've become quite daring and provocative in my mockery of the "weasel words" which officials, academics and so-called experts have become so fond of using.

We should be on our alert whenever we spot a new phrase entering government discourse. New words and phrases put a particular spin on an issue and often carry the hidden implication that a new problem has just arisen.

At first I was amused at the way, for example, the vocabulary for "poverty" changed over time - inequality, disadvantage, deprivation, social malaise, marginalisation, social exclusion, social injustice etc.

Jules Feiffer had a nice cartoon about this in which he has a poor kid repeat the various words which had been used to describe his condition and then says ruefully, "at least my vocabulary is improving"!

But I now realise that three powerful forces propel such verbal gymnastics -

- first the need of governments to avoid admission of failure - better to imply a new condition had arisen! But the new vocabulary kills institutional memory and prevents us from exploring why previous solutions have failed
- Professional interests tend also to arise around each new definition - and create a second, powerful interest favouring new vocabulary. Mystification is one of several methods used by professionals to protect their power and income.
- And the last decade or so has seen a third reason for us to pay more attention to the language we use - governments have fallen even further into the hands of spin doctors and corporate interests and a powerful new verbal smokescreen has arisen to try to conceal this. "Evidence-based policy-making" is a typical phrase - first the arrogant implication that no policy-making until that point had been based on evidence; and the invented phrase concealing the fact that policy is increasingly being crafted without evidence in order to meet corporate interests! "There is no better lie than a big one!"

"Just Words" is a deliberately ambiguous title - the "just" could mean "only" or "merely" but the other meaning touches on our notions of fairness and "justice". This little glossary is offered in the spirit of the original dictionaries - which challenged our notions of just behaviour.

## 1. Purpose

*So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years -  
....Trying to use words, and every attempt  
is a new start, a and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words  
for the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which  
one is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture  
is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate  
with shabby equipment always deteriorating  
in the general mass of imprecision of feeling*

East Coker; Four Quartets  
TS Eliot

History is assumed to consist of hard events like wars and revolts. But such events don't just happen - they are caused by what goes on inside our minds - not just feelings of ambition; fear; greed; resentment; but the stories (theories) we use to make sense of events. And they are legitimised by the words we use.

Words are very powerful - indeed have a life of their own - some more so than others. Once we stop thinking about the words we use, what exactly they mean and whether they fit our purpose, the words and metaphors (and the interests behind them) take over and reduce our powers of critical thinking. One of the best essays on this topic is George Orwell's "[Politics and the English language](#)". Written in 1947, it exposes the way certain clichés and rhetoric are calculated to kill thinking - for example how the use of the passive tense undermines the notion that it is people who take decisions and should be held accountable for them.

Fifty years before Orwell, Ambrose Bierce was another (American) journalist whose pithy and tough definitions of everyday words, in his newspaper column, attracted sufficient attention to justify a book "[The Devil's Dictionary](#)" whose fame continues unto this day. A dentist, for example, he defined as "a magician who puts metal into your mouth and pulls coins out of your pocket". A robust scepticism about both business and politics infused his work - but it did not amount to a coherent statement about power.

This glossary looks at more than 100 words and phrases used by officials, politicians, consultants and academics in the course of government reform which have this effect and offers some definitions which at least will get us thinking more critically about our vocabulary - if not actually taking political actions.

Only in the latter stages of its drafting was I reminded of John Saul's [A Doubter's Companion - a dictionary of aggressive common sense](#) issued in 1994 which talks of the "humanist tradition of using alphabetical order as a tool of social analysis and the dictionary as a quest for understanding, a weapon against idée reçues and the pretensions of power". There is a [good interview here with him](#) Saul contrasts this approach with that "of the rationalists to the dictionary for whom it is a repository of truths and a tool to control communications".

I suppose, therefore, that this glossary of mine is written in the humanist tradition of struggle against power - and the words they use to sustain it. The glossary therefore forms part of a wider

commentary on the effort various writers have made over the ages to challenge the pretensions of the powerful (and of the "thought police" who have operated on their behalf). And, of course, the role of satire<sup>1</sup>, caricature and cartoons<sup>2</sup>, poetry<sup>3</sup> and painting<sup>4</sup> should not be forgotten! Nor the role of films and TV series these days<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Searching for the heart of the onion

I have been heavily involved in reform efforts (and words) now for almost 50 years. I was part of that post-war generation which first succumbed to the blandishments of social sciences<sup>6</sup> as my university subjects in 1962. Between 1968 and 1991 I was first a local councillor then powerful regional politician in Scotland; and the last 20 years I have spent advising government units in 8 central European and central Asian countries.

The social sciences were just beginning to flex their muscles in my student days and popular management texts also beginning to appear (we forget that Peter Drucker invented the genre only in the late 1950s). Books such as Marris and Rein's *Dilemmas of Social Reform* (1968); Donald Schoen's *Beyond the Stable State* (1971); and Heclo and Wildavsky's *The Private Government of Public Money* (1974) impressed me enormously - not only for their application of social science to topics such as the fight against poverty; organisational structures and budgeting (respectively) but also for the clarity of their language.

And the combination, between 1968 and 1985 of academic and political work gave me both the incentive and opportunity to explore what light that burgeoning academic literature could throw on the scope for government actions (and structures) for social improvement. Not least of my puzzlements was about the source and nature of power. And the story told by one of the architects of the British NHS (Aneurin Bevan) about his own search for power - from his own municipality through trade unions to the heights of the British Cabinet - used the powerful metaphor of the onion. As each layer peels away, another appears - there is no heart!

I always knew that the best way to understand a subject was to write a book about it. And therefore developed the habit of writing papers to help me as much as others make sense of the various path-breaking initiatives in which I was involved - particularly trying to make government more "inclusive" both in its style and policy impact. The audience for such writing was practitioners - rather than academics - and also, with my first little book *The Search for Democracy* (1976), community activists who needed some help in confronting the more sophisticated bureaucracy (and words) with which they were confronted after a major reorganisation. So the language had to be clear - but not superficial. This explains any idiosyncrasies in the voice I have developed. And writing that first book made me aware how few books seemed to be written to help the average person understand a subject or question.

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<sup>1</sup> not just the literary sort - see section 9

<sup>2</sup> from Honore Daumier to Jules Feiffer and Ralph Steadman

<sup>3</sup> Eg Bert Brecht

<sup>4</sup> Goya, Kollwitz and Grosz are the most powerful example

<sup>5</sup> From the "Yes, Minister" series in the UK in the 1970s to "The Thick of it" of the 2000s

<sup>6</sup> inspired by the writings of such varied figures as Tony Crosland, [RH Tawney](#), EP Thompson (eg *Out of Apathy*) and Bernard Crick (his *In Defence of Politics* (1962

When I looked again at the books I knew, I realised most were written for one of the following reasons -

- help people pass examinations (requiring compressing of knowledge into artificial disciplines);
- make a reputation or money (requiring minimising or discrediting of other writers)
- advance a new tendentious theory

The Readers and Writers Cooperative which started in the early 1970s (now the highly successful "For Beginners" series) was the first to use a more user-friendly approach to issues. And how helpful the Dummies' Guide series are! Even Rough Guides has muscled in on this approach.

This particular effort started, I suppose, way back in 1999 when I selected about 40 words for a glossary which accompanied a little book I wrote then - [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) which tried to capture my understanding of what was then the fast-moving field of public administration - for a younger generation of central europeans. My definitions were jazzed up in order to provoke thought - eg performance measurement; "judging an organisation by measuring what it produces, rather than whom it keeps happy or employed. Most usefully done on a comparative basis - over time: or among units performing similar work".

In 2008, the glossary I left behind in a major report - [Learning from experience; some reflections on how training can help develop administrative capacity](#) - was more outrageous.

I should emphasise that this is not a Cynic's Dictionary - although I readily confess to the occasional lapse into self-indulgent delight in shocking. But the topic of politics, power and government reform is too important for cynicism. It does, however, require a strong dose of scepticism - as evident in this amazing 300 plus page compendium from OXFAM [Deconstructing Development Discourse - buzzwords and fuzzwords](#) (2010)

### **3. New words and phrases can cause amnesia!**

We should be on our alert whenever we spot a new phrase entering government discourse. New words and phrases put a particular spin on an issue and often carry the hidden implication that a new problem has just arisen.. At first I was amused at the way, for example, the vocabulary for "poverty" changed over time - inequality, disadvantage, deprivation, social malaise, marginalisation, social exclusion, social injustice etc. Jules Feiffer had a nice cartoon about it in which he has a poor kid repeat the various words which had been used to describe his condition and then said ruefully, "at least my vocabulary is improving"!

But I now realise that three powerful forces propelled these verbal gymnastics - first the need of governments to avoid admission of failure - better to imply a new condition had arisen! But the new vocabulary kills institutional memory and prevents us from exporing why previous solutions have failed

Professional interests tend also to arise around each new definition - and create a second, powerful interest favouring new vocabulary. Mystification is one of several methods used by professionals to protect their power and income.



And the last decade or so has seen a third reason for us to pay more attention to the language we use - governments have fallen even further into the hands of spin doctors and corporate interests<sup>7</sup> and a powerful new verbal smokescreen has arisen to try to conceal this. "Evidence-based policy-making" is typical - first the arrogant implication that no policy-making until that point had been based on evidence; and the invented phrase concealing the fact that policy is increasingly being crafted without evidence in order to meet corporate interests! "There is no better lie than a big one!"

#### 4. Critiquing the professionals....

*The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.*

[JM Keynes](#) (General Theory 1935)

In the 1970s, a South American priest Ivan Illich attacked professionals and to the mystification of their processes and language - with his various books which eloquently argued against the damage done to learning by formal schooling methods (*Deschooling Society*); and to health by doctors and hospitals (*Medical Nemesis*).

Stanislaw Andreski was one of the few academics who dared attack the pretensions of the social sciences - in his *Social Sciences as Sorcery* (1973 - now out of print).

The importance of demystifying complex language was continued by C Wright Mills in the 1950s and 1960s who once famously summarised a 250 pages book - written in tortuous syntax by the sociologist Talcott Parsons - in 12 pages!

Alaister Mant extended the attack to contemporary leadership (*Leaders we Deserve* 1983 - also out of print) - puncturing somewhat the mythology about business leaders which was being spread in the popular management books which were beginning to sell like hot potatoes. Henry Mintzberg - a Canadian management academic - is about the only one who has written simply about what managers actually do (and attacked MBAs) and, in so doing, has stripped management literature of most of its pretensions.

By reducing management exhortations to 99 self-contradictory proverbs Hood's *Administrative Argument* (1991 and also, mysteriously, out of print) showed us how shallow management ideologies are.

In 1992 John Ralston Saul gave us a powerful but idiosyncratic critique of technical expertise in *Voltaire's Bastards - the dictatorship of reason in the west*.

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<sup>7</sup> See section 6

In 1996 Harold Perkins gave us a highly critical account of *The Third Revolution - Professional Elites in the Modern World* - whose moral critique is all the more powerful for its academic origin. By showing the parallels with religious doctrine, Susan George challenged the economic belief systems which sustained the World Bank (*Faith and Credit - the World Bank's secular empire* (1994).

It was easier for people like Huycinski to take the scalpel to management gurus in *Management Gurus - what makes them and how to become one* (1993) since they are only peripherally of academia.

And a once worthy venture - the European Union - has, sadly, developed such powerful interests of its own that it too is part of this significant obfuscation with its use of such phrases as "subsidiarity".

## 5. GLOSSARY

*"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.*

*Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"*

*"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument'," Alice objected.*

*"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."*

*"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."*

*"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master.....that's all."*

*Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs, they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability! That's what I say!"*

**Accountability;** the convention that those in power explain - in a transparent, regular, structured and truthful way - what actions they have authorised and why. The corollary is that any failure of their explanations to satisfy will lead to sanctions - including dismissal. A popular convention at the height of constitutional propriety, neoliberalism and its handmaiden, austerity, have probably been the main reasons for its eclipse. See also "Open Government"

**Address** (verb); to fudge. We used to address a person but now address "issues"

**Adversarial systems;** the more political parties have in common (UK and US) the more they profess to be poles apart and fight an aggressive, winner-take-all, no-holds-barred contest which leaves no room for civilised discourse; nor policy consensus. Bad policy-making is normally the result (see book references at end of Annex)

**Agent;** an intermediary who performs actions on behalf of another. A huge theoretical literature was built around this concept in the 1980s - to try to demonstrate the way in which public servants developed interests separate from that of the public - and to justify privatisation and the separation of public budget-holders from those who supplied public services. Pity that there are so

few of these academics now bothering to develop a literature about the (actual rather than theoretical) self-serving and downright immoral behaviour of many of those who now own and manage the privatised bodies and "arms' length" agencies!

**Agencies;** pretend companies - with Chief Executives and others with hugely inflated salaries and pension rights.

**Agnostic;** someone who doubts

**Ambition;** *"Our system obliges us to elevate to office precisely those persons who have the ego-besotted effrontery to ask us to do so; it is rather like being compelled to cede the steering wheel to the drunkard in the back seat loudly proclaiming that he knows how to get us there in half the time. More to the point, since our perpetual electoral cycle is now largely a matter of product recognition, advertising, and marketing strategies, we must be content often to vote for persons willing to lie to us with some regularity or, if not that, at least to speak to us evasively and insincerely. In a better, purer world—the world that cannot be—ambition would be an absolute disqualification for political authority"* (David Hart).

**Assumptions;** the things other people make - which cause problems. Parsed - "I think; you assume; (s)he fucks up". Project management techniques do require us to list assumptions and identify and manage risks - but in the field of technical Assistance these are just boxes to tick. In any project, the best approach is to list the worst things which could happen, assume they will occur and plan how to minimise their frequency and effects.

**Audit;** something both overdone and underdone - overdone in volume and underdone in results. A process more feared at the bottom than at the top as frequent recent scandals (Enron; global banking scandals have demonstrated). See also "Law"

**Benchmark;** a technical-sounding term which gives one's discourse a scientific aura. Generally used as in attempts to measure how one's organisation is doing against "the competition"

**Bottleneck;** what prevents an organisation from achieving its best performance - always located at the top!

**Bureaucracy;** literally "rule by the office" (and the strictly defined powers which surround it - as distinct from rule by whim). See "rule of law". The adjective (bureaucratic) has now become a term of abuse.

**Capacity;** something which other people lack

**Capacity development;** something which consultants recommend and which generally boils down to some training programmes. In reality, capacity is developed by a combination of practice and structured feedback.

**Capital punishment;** "Everyone knows that [capital punishment](#) means that those without the capital get the punishment".

**Change;** something which was difficult to start in public organisations in the 1970s and is now difficult to stop.

**Change agent;** in the beginning a brave person - now a spiv.

**Citizen;** a displaced person in the modern polis - replaced by the customer who has to have money and spend it before any rights can be exercised. For an excellent article which explores the significance and implications of the various terms and roles see [this article by Henry Mintzberg](#)

**Civil servant;** someone who used to be able to stand up to Ministers.

**Client;** someone receiving a (complex) service from a professional - usually with the protection of a professional code.

**Coalition;** a government composed of political parties which have normally fought one another in an election; have not gained sufficient seats to form a majority government; and which cooperate with other parties to avoid facing the electorate again. Seen by some as highly civilised (encouraging consensual qualities) and by other as highly undemocratic (smoke-filled rooms)

**Collateral damage;** a weasel word for the accidental shootings of innocent citizens.

**Commodification;** to put a market value on services which were previously offered voluntarily and offering them for sale on the market in order to make a profit.

**Communications;** the first thing which people blame when things go wrong - parsed "I communicate; you misunderstand; he/they don't listen".

**Compliance;** consistency with a defined outcome. Traditionally called "obedience". Used a lot in the EC

**Consultant;** a con-man who operates like a sultan! An outsider who knows almost nothing about an organisation who is brought in to give the air of objectivity to outrageous changes the bosses have already agreed amongst themselves.

**Consultation;** the skill of bouncing other people to agree with what you have already decided.

**Contract out;** as in "put out a contract on" - to wipe out.

**Control;** to ensure that people do what the elites want. This used to be done by fear - but a range of clever carrots and sticks are now used - as well as words and language itself. Control used to be "ex-ante" (detailed instructions before the event) but is increasingly "ex-post" - through audit, monitoring and evaluation.

**Coordination;** the lack of which is the most annoying thing for the rationalist in organisations

**Corruption;** a fashionable thing to be against. A new anti-corruption industry of consultants has arisen which reformulates the public administration principles to which NPM (see below) is opposed, thereby generating maximum confusion. See also "integrity"

**Customer;** the person who has supplanted the citizen and is responsible for environmental destruction et al

**Decentralisation;** The system of local power which sets up those who can be made scapegoats for deterioration of service.

**Deliberative democracy;** In contrast to the traditional theory of democracy, in which voting is central, deliberative democracy theorists argue that legitimate lawmaking can arise only through public deliberation - generally through the presentation of evidence and then dissection of this in discussion - for more, see [this definition](#)

**Delivery;** what used to be known as implementation - and is now a product marketed by Sir Michael Barber, ex-Head of one of Tony Blair's Cabinet Office units. For more see - <http://followersoftheapocalyp.se/opened13-instruction-to-deliver/>

**Democracy;** a system which allows citizens to select, at periodical intervals, from a small group of self-selected and perpetuating elites (Schumpeter)

**Development;** a good thing.

**Effectiveness;** combining resources to achieve specified objectives

**Efficiency;** a positive ratio between output and input. For more, see this [great discussion](#)

**Empower;** a classic word of the new century which suggests that power can be benignly given - when in reality it has to be taken.

**Environment;** what's around me which I can use and abuse for my benefit.

**Evaluation;** the process of finding out who is to blame. The EU has a very traditional model of evaluation - carried out by outside experts which takes so long (and is so long and tortuous in language) that its results cannot be used in the design of new programmes. See "learning organisation" below.

**Evaluation;** job-creation for surplus academics. An important part of the policy-making process which has been debased by it being sub-contracted to a huge industry of consultants who produce large reports which are never read by policy-makers.

**Evidence-based policy-making;** a phrase which represents the hubristic peak of the generation of UK social scientism which captured the UK civil service in the late 1990s at the time its political masters succumbed to corporate interests and therefore were practising less rather than more evidence-based policy-making!



**Focus group;** a supposedly representative group of voters who will give us a clue about what we should be doing.

**Governance;** an academic term to describe the obvious - namely that governments lacked the power to do things on their own and required to work in partnership with private and others. Found useful by the World Bank - which is not allowed to engage in political activity - to conceal the fact that they were engaged on a highly ideological mission to privatise the world and to "hollow-out" government. For a useful discussion, see this [article by Gerry Stoker](#)

**Good governance;** from a useful insight about the importance of good government to economic and social development, it has become a pernicious phrase which is used by the global community and its experts to force developing countries to take on impossible social and political objectives. It forms the basis of the UNDP Millennium Goals. It shows great stupidity to imagine that this could be developed by a combination of moral and financial exhortations by autocracies and kleptocracies. A few voices of common sense have suggested a more appropriate strategy would be that of "[good-enough governance](#)"

**Greed;** something which is killing humanity and the planet - and is epitomised by ownership of an aggressive SUV; its assumed that increasing petrol prices will drive these monsters off our street - but a touch of ridicule would also help!

**Groupthink;** blinkered thinking which overcomes the leadership of an organisation when its culture has become too arrogant, centralised and incestuous: and when it is too protected from critical messages from and about the external world

**Holistic;** a magical quality - creating harmony - which some people imagine can be created in government by appropriate mechanisms of coordination. Others argue that the job will be done naturally by a mixture of decentralisation and the market.

**Hubris;** something which politicians and policy experts suffer from - ie a belief that their latest wheeze will solve problems which have eluded the combined skills and insights of their predecessors

**Human Resource management (HRM);** treating staff and workers like dirt

**Humility;** something which politicians and policy experts have too little of

**Impact;** the measured effect of an activity on identified groups.

**Impact assessment;** the proper (a) identification of the groups which will be affected by a policy change and (b) measurement of the economic impact of the change on those groups. Clearly, very demanding! See "systems approach"

**Implementation;** the act of trying to bring an intended state of affairs to fruition. The word used in the Slavic language perhaps is more powerful - execution! In the 1970s political science developed an important body of literature which showed the various ways in which the good intentions of laws

were undermined. The classic book by Wildavsky and Pressman had the marvellous sub-title - "How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All". For more [see this article](#)

**Input;** the resources which are put into an activity

**Integrity;** something which NPM has cleaned out from public life. The strategy that came after anti-corruption when we needed to hide the fact that corruption was actually increasing.

**Joined-up government;** New Labour's euphemism for Stalinism.

**Kleptocracy;** A government system in which the transfer of public resources to its elite is a basic principle which overrides all others.

**Knowledge management;** a contradiction in terms

**Law;** "the spider's webs which, if anything small falls into them ensnare it, but large things break through and escape". [Solon](#)

**Leader;** the head of an organisation or movement whose attributed qualities seem to range from the saintly to the diabolical. Modern leaders are supposed to exercise moral authority rather than the exercise or threat of force - but few understand what this even means.

**Learning organisation;** something foreign to the EU since its understanding of organisations is trapped in the Weberian model. The last 15 years has seen management theory develop a view that the best way for organisations to keep up with social change is through valuing their own staff by delegation and strong ongoing feedback - not by commissioning external experts to conduct complex and irrelevant evaluations.

**Legislators;** the most despised group in any society (see "parliamentary power").

**Lobbyists;** people who make the laws

**Logframe;** the bible for the Technical Assistance world which - with a list of activities, assumptions, objectives, outputs and risks - conquers the complexity and uncertainty of the world and removes the bother of creativity. For a critique see [Lucy Earle's 2003 paper on my website](#) -

**Manage;** to make a mess of.

**Market;** a place or system governed by rules which sets prices through the interaction of buyers and sellers. Under severely restrictive assumptions it can produce what economists call "optimum" results. The most important of these assumptions are - scale (large numbers of sellers; perfect information; and absence of social costs). In the real world, few of these conditions exist. See also ["quasi-market"](#)

**Minister;** etymologically "one who acts on the authority of another" - ie the ruler. In some countries they last some time (longer often than many civil servants); in others (eg UK) they last barely a year!

**Mentor;** someone whose experience has given them a high reputation - whose advice can be used to guide others. Sometime adopted as a formal role in organisations.

**Modernise;** to restructure something which just required some oiling of the wheels.

**Monitor;** a school prefect.

**Neo-liberalism;** one of the deadliest ideologies

**New public management (NPM);** the body of literature which has in the past 20 years replaced that of old public administration. It has borrowed its concepts entirely from private sector management and has encouraged governments throughout the world -

- to see the "citizen" as a "consumer" of services
- to reduce civil service skills to drafting of contracts; definition of service targets; and regulation for services which are managed at "arms-length" by the private sector, other state bodies or NGOs
- to set up reward systems and penalties to ensure targets are met

It slowly dawned even on the NPM zealots that such an approach is positively Soviet in its inflexible emphasis on targets - and that the reward systems undermine the teamwork and policy coordination which good policies require. Despite a backlash to NPM over the past decade, it retains a powerful hold on the new managerial class which inhabits what's left of the public sector (inc universities)

**OECD;** the club of the rich nations - an apparently neutral body which was in fact one of the most important proselytisers of NPM see Leslie Pal's [The OECD and global public management reform](#)

**Open government;** an apparent contradiction in terms - "governing" classically involves haggling, compromising, striking deals which will never look good in the cold light of public scrutiny. And even the publication of raw data can prove embarrassing to governments. But Freedom of Information Acts are being passed throughout the world - initially reactive rather than proactive and generally protective of "sensitive" information. Just a pity that this coincides with the run-down of investigative journalism - although a combination of citizen activists with new technology could ultimately prove a powerful combination. For [more see here](#)

**Outcome;** the wider societal impact which a policy seems to have.

**Output;** the immediate way in which the faithful implementation of a policy can be measured.

**Parliamentary power;** when exercised negatively (in the critique and adjustment of incoherent government proposals), something to value very highly. When exercised positively (as legislative initiatives) something to treat as "pork-trough or barrel" politics.

**Performance management;** the system which sets targets and rewards and penalises accordingly.

**Performance-orientation;** a concern for the results of inputs and spending – generally in improved customer satisfaction.

**Policy;** a statement of the tools and resources which government is using to try to achieve an intended set of objectives.

**Policy review;** the critical assessment of the outcomes and outputs of a policy field. This can be carried out within government – or by academic bodies and think-tanks and commissioned by various bodies including government.

**Political party;** we may not like it, but the political party has been (for a century) and remains one of the key elements in the translation of our feelings and voice into “deliverable” programmes of government. For closer analysis, see [Robert Michels](#), [Peter Mair](#)

**Politician;** someone elected by voters who is, in theory, accountable to them but in fact does what his party and its leadership tells him – since this is the only way to survive let alone climb the greasy pole to advancement. Rebels become mavericks.

**Politics;** “A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage” (Bierce – Devil’s Dictionary)

**Populism;** a bundle of anti-elitist positions. Normally used as a pejorative by elite representatives....a dangerous strand is its lack of concern for minority rights....

**Post-modern;** distrust of explanations. “The refusal to describe humanity’s progress as a rational process whose principles can be mastered – as though historical progress were one more step on the way to heaven” (from intro to Postmodern Public Administration by HD Millar and C Fox)

**Priorities;** “Gouverner”, as the French say “c’est choisir”. State bodies and services can never do equal justice to all the laws they are required to implement. Many new member states continue to churn out strategic documents which are checklists of good intentions – which brings the law into disrepute.

**Progress;** cars travelling slower in cities than 100 years ago;

**Project management;** a nice idea! The religion of the new generation which operates from hand to mouth on external funding. See also “assumptions” and “logframe”.

**Public administration;** a phrase which reminds us that state bodies serve the public – not the state!!!

**Public management;** something more clever than public administration – which therefore warrants higher rewards and excuses shady behaviour.

**Quality management;** a fashionable term of the 1990s of which we now hear little.

**Quasi-market;** a pretend market. In the misguided attempt to introduce business systems into public services, governments have tried to get everyone to compete against one another. Naturally this requires a lot of paperwork and bureaucrats (disguised under the term "transaction costs") - which is, curiously, what the reforms were supposed to get away from! See also "side-effects".

**Rationality;** how many people remember the incredible debate in academic circles in the 1960s and 1970s about rationality, bureaucracy and politics - and whether it was ever possible to have significant policy changes as distinct from incremental fudge ("disjointed incrementalism" as Lindblom called it)? Now we seem to have the opposite problem. Sadly, few academics seem to be discussing it.

**Reengineer;** to take apart and build in a different way. A new term in the public sector for an interest that goes back to the zero-budgeting of the 1960s. Why is it I always think of Stalin's epithet for Soviet writers "Engineers of the human soul" when I hear the re-engineering word?

**Reform;** to divert attention from core questions by altering organisational boundaries and responsibilities

**Regulation;** as natural monopolies have been privatised, a vast system of public regulation has been set up to control the obvious consequences of private monopolies. See also "regulatory reform"

**Regulatory reform;** "reforming regulations that raise unnecessary obstacles to competition, innovation and growth, while ensuring that regulations efficiently serve important social objectives" (OECD)

**Rent-seeker;** most politicians

**Rule of law;** the principle that no-one is above the law. See also "Law".

**Sceptic;** an aggressive agnostic - a quality which is greatly missed these days

**Scrutiny;** a political form of audit which became popular in the UK recently to give local politicians something to do after local government had been stripped of most of its functions.

**Services;** what the outputs of government activities should give us - but rarely does.

**Side-effects;** unanticipated and negative impacts of policy interventions - generally more powerful than the positive. Can lead to a fatalistic view of policy-making (see Hood)

**Social capital;** a term brought into the currency of think-tanks and government by the combined efforts of Robert Putnam and the World Bank. Most of us understand it by the simpler trust 'trust'. [See also here](#)

**State;** a bad thing - at least for worshippers of NPM



**Strategy;** a statement of how an organisation understands the environment in which it is working; what problems or opportunities it sees as priority to deal with - and how it proposes to do that.

**Strategic;** what I consider important

**Strategic management;** a proactive style of management

**street-level officials;** a term used to describe those officials who are in close contact with the members of the public and have to exercise discretion and judgement in their behaviour (field; front-line). Its positive sense is that they often have a better sense of what the public needs than senior management. Its negative sense is that, distant from control, such officials can more easily engage in self-serving behaviour.

**Subsidiarity;** a term used by the Catholic hierarchy which is now part of EU rhetoric - can be used to legitimise the further stripping of state functions. Its origin lies apparently in Thomas Aquinas and the justification for government action only where private initiative is insufficient or lacking.

**Sustainable;** a word which, by being placed in front of development, has lost its meaning

**Systems approach;** an approach to management which appreciates the complexity of the environments in which interventions take place and invites teams to invent their own solutions based on a systematic definition of the problem facing the customer. [A good journal is here](#)

**Targets;** what those in power use to measure the performance of - and to blame - others

**Teamwork;** a word to beware! Generally used by those in power to get their way while seeming democratic. While true that decisions taken as a result of joint discussion can be often better (and more robust) than those imposed, a lot depends on the manner in which the discussion is held - whether it is structured in a way designed to elicit problems and ideas or, rather, to sanction a dominant view (see groupthink). See Belbin for details of teams roles and structures

**Think-tank;** the shock-troops of neo-liberalism. Apparently neutral bodies (funded, however, by big business) which marketed the products for the transformation of the rational-legal state into a state of neo-liberal governance.

**Tools of government;** the various ways government tries to make you do what they think is good for you. Laws do not implement themselves. Their implementation requires a commitment to change which cannot be taken for granted in societies whose populations are struggling to survive and whose new rulers - many uncertain of how long they will survive in office - are subject to temptations of short-term personal gains. In such contexts, is it realistic to expect policy-makers and civil servants to have an overriding concern for future public benefit? To explore that question requires us to look at the wider issue of motivation.

**The table below sets out seven different motivations which can be found in people - and some of the policy tools which would be relevant for such motivations.**

Legalism, for example, assumes that people know about laws and will obey them - regardless of the pull of extended family ties (eg for recruitment).

Training and functional review assumes that people simply need to understand in order to take the relevant action.

Other tools assume that man is basically a calculating machine. And so on....

In 2008 the British National Audit Office commissioned [a study on sanctions and rewards in the public sector](#) - the only such government review I know -. However, as Colin Talbot points out in his new book on theories of Performance, the assessment is based on discredited rationalistic theory of behaviour

#### Motives and tools in the change process

Motivating Factor	Example of tool	Particular mechanism
<b>1. Understanding</b>	Training Campaigns Counting and comparing - league tables	Rational persuasion Appeal to common sense Questioning when one's body compares badly
<b>2. Commitment</b>	Leadership Consultation and cooperation Training	Legitimation; inspiration Shared vision Pride (in behaving professionally)
<b>3. Personal Benefit</b>	Pay increase and bonus Promotion (including political office) Good publicity Winning an award	Monetary calculation ambition Reputation; Psychological Status
<b>4. Personal Cost</b>	Named as poor performer Demotion Report cards	Psychological (Shame) Monetary Pride
<b>5. Obligation</b>	Law Action plan Family ties	Courts Managerial authority Social pressure
<b>6. Peer influence</b>	Peer review Bribery Quality circles	Pressure from colleagues
<b>7. Social influence</b>	Opinion surveys	Feedback from public about service quality

Source; an earlier version of this originally appeared in Young (EU Tacis 2005)

Governments trying to improve the performance of state bodies have also made increasing use of "league tables". This involves audit bodies, for example, collecting and publishing comparative information about the performance of individual schools and hospitals in an attempt to persuade senior managers to address the problems of poor performance (1.3 in table). This can also act as a market-type force - bringing the force of public opinion against the organisation (4.3 in table).

**Training;** "surgery of the mind". A marvellous phrase an old political colleague of mine used to describe the mind-bending and propaganda which goes on in a lot of workshops.

**Transparency;** an EU buzz-word - meaning exposing the outside world to the tortuous procedures and language of the European Commission. The reaction to the coverage which Wikileaks gave to the leaked US Embassy cables shows how skindeep is the commitment to transparency.

**Trust**; something which economists and their models don't have and which, therefore, is assumed by them not to exist within organisations. As economic thinking has invaded public organisations, everyone has been assumed to be a "rent-seeker" - and a huge (and self-fulfilling) edifice of checks and controls have been erected

**Whistle-blower**; someone without authority who blows a whistle - and brings everyone down on them for the chaos they cause.

## 6. Floating in words, metaphors and language

In 1979 some British citizens became so incensed with the incomprehensible language of official documents, letters and forms that they set up a campaign called "The Plain English Campaign". It was its activities in making annual awards for good and bad practice that shamed most organisations - public and private - into reshaping their external communications. Their website [www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk) contains their short but very useful manual; a list of alternative words; and lists of all the organisations which have received their awards.

But they have seem to have worked in vain - since, in 2007, the Local Government Association felt it necessary to recommend that [100 words be banned](#) (not the same thing as book burning!!), And two years later it had [expanded the list to 200 words](#) -. Some of the words have me baffled (I have not lived in the UK for 20 years!) but I find this is a quite excellent initiative. I have a feeling that it may not - in the aftermath of a General election and massive public cuts - have been taken seriously enough. The offensive words included -

*Advocate, Agencies, Ambassador, Area based, Area focused, Autonomous, Baseline, Beacon, Benchmarking, Best Practice, Blue sky thinking, Bottom-Up, Can do culture, Capabilities, Capacity, Capacity building, Cascading, Cautiously welcome, Challenge, Champion, Citizen empowerment, Client, Cohesive communities, Cohesiveness, Collaboration, Commissioning, Community engagement, Compact, Conditionality, Consensual, Contestability, Contextual, Core developments, Core Message, Core principles, Core Value, Coterminality, Coterminalous, Cross-cutting, Cross-fertilisation, Customer, Democratic legitimacy, Democratic mandate, Dialogue, Double devolution, Downstream, Early Win, Embedded, Empowerment, Enabler, Engagement, Engaging users, Enhance, Evidence Base, Exemplar, External challenge, Facilitate, Fast-Track, Flex, Flexibilities and Freedoms, Framework, Fulcrum, Functionality, Funding streams, Gateway review, Going forward, Good practice, Governance, Guidelines, Holistic, Holistic governance, Horizon scanning, Improvement levers, Incentivising, Income streams, Indicators, Initiative, Innovative capacity, Inspectorates (a bit unfair!), Interdepartmental surely not?), Interface, Iteration, Joined up, Joint working, level playing field, Lever (unfair on Kurt Lewin!), Leverage, Localities, Lowlights (??), Mainstreaming, Management capacity, Meaningful consultation (as distinct from meaningless?), Meaningful dialogue (ditto?), Mechanisms, menu of Options, Multi-agency, Multidisciplinary, Municipalities (why?), Network model, Normalising, Outcomes, Output, Outsourced, Overarching, Paradigm, Parameter, Participatory, Partnership working, Partnerships, Pathfinder, Peer challenge, Performance Network, Place shaping, Pooled budgets, Pooled resources, Pooled risk, Populace, Potentialities, Practitioners (what's wrong with that?), Preventative services, Prioritization, Priority, Proactive (damn!), Process driven, Procure, Procurement, Promulgate, Proportionality, Protocol, Quick win (damn again), Rationalisation, Revenue Streams, Risk based, Robust, Scaled-back, Scoping, Sector wise, Seedbed, Self-aggrandizement (why not?), service users, Shared priority, Signpost, Social contracts, Social exclusion, spatial, Stakeholder, Step change, Strategic (come off it!), Strategic*

*priorities, Streamlined, Sub-regional, Subsidiarity (hallelujah); Sustainable (right on!), sustainable communities, Symposium, Synergies, Systematics, Taxonomy, Tested for Soundness, Thematic, Thinking outside of the box, Third sector, Toolkit, Top-down (?), Trajectory, Tranche, Transactional, Transformational, Transparency, Upstream, Upward trend, Utilise, Value-added, Vision, Visionary,*

And what about *coach, mentor, drivers, human resource management, social capital, tsar* ???  
Anyway - a brilliant initiative (if you will forgive the term)

And in 2009 a UK Parliamentary Committee actually invited people to submit examples of confusing language which they then reported about in a report entitled [Bad Language!](#)

I suppose if post-modernists have done anything, they have made us more aware of language. After all, they spend their time deconstructing texts! And they have been active in the field of public administration - [Postmodern Public Administration](#) (2007) is one taken at random - The trouble is that they play so many word games amongst themselves that what they produce is generally incomprehensible to the outsider. Despite their critiques and claims, therefore, I do not consider them helpful companions.

Before the post-modernists came along, M Edelman's book [The Symbolic Use of Politics was published in 1964 but then ignored - not least by myself.](#)

I have never found Chomsky an easy companion - but clearly books like his [Language and politics](#) (1988) are highly relevant to this theme

One of the most insightful texts for me, however, is Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organisation* - a fascinating treatment of the writing about organisations which demonstrates that many of our ideas about them are metaphorical : he suggests the literature uses eight "images" viz organisations as "political systems", as "instruments of domination", as "cultures", as "machines", as "organisms", as "brains", as "psychic prisons", as "flux and transformation" and as "instruments of domination".

## **7. The role of international agencies in creating La Pensee Unique**

The World Bank is not allowed to engage in political activity and promulgated various words (governance; social capital) to conceal the fact that they were engaged on a highly ideological mission to privatise the world and to "hollow-out" government. The OECD has perhaps been an even more effective proselytiser through the way it brings practitioners together with researchers and issues publications selling NPM.

## **8. The importance of satire**

Satire has long been a powerful weapon against the pretensions of power - Voltaire's *Candide* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* are well-known literary examples. Ralph Steadman and Gerard Scarfe are modern caricaturists in the tradition of Hogarth; and the Liverpool poets (McGough) sustained the protestors of the 1960s. British people are not so familiar with the Bert Brecht's *City poems* or the savage anti-bourgeois paintings of Georg Grosz in the 1920s and 1930s.

A powerful satirical essay "[Democracy, Bernard? It must be stopped!](#)" was penned by the author of the Yes Minister TV series and exposes the emptiness behind the rhetoric about democracy and government.

In 1987 Management Professor Rosabeth Kanter produced "[Ten Rules for Stifling Initiative](#)" which I used to great effect in Central Asian training sessions.

1999 saw the appearance of *The Lugano Report: on preserving capitalism in the twenty-first Century* which purported to be a leaked report from shady big business but was in fact written by Susan George.

Management guru Russell Ackoff's great collection of tongue-in-cheek laws of management - [Management F-Laws - how organisations really work](#) (2007) As the blurb put it - "They're truths about organizations that we might wish to deny or ignore - simple and more reliable guides to managers' everyday behaviour than the complex truths proposed by scientists, economists and philosophers". An added bonus is that British author, Sally Bibb, was asked to respond in the light of current organizational thinking. Hers is a voice from another generation, another gender and another continent. On every left-hand page is printed Ackoff and Addison's f-Law with their commentary. Opposite, you'll find Sally Bibb's reply. A short version ([13 Sins of management](#)) can be read here. A typical rule is - "The more important the problem a manager asks consultants for help on, the less useful and more costly their solutions are likely to be".

Robert Greene's *48 Laws of Power* may not be satire but it is a very salutary counter to the thousands of unctuous management texts which attribute benign motives to senior management. I have already referred to the [spoof on the British Constitution](#) produced recently by Stuart Weir which is another good example of the power of satire -

## 9. The way forward (or back?)

Ever since my acquaintance with Uzbek President Karamov's philosophy of incremental "step-by-step" change, this metaphor of steps has always amused me. As I would mischievously say to the officials I met in training sessions, simply putting one step in front of the other can often take us round in circles!

As I've worked on these words - and been reminded of various key texts which have, over the centuries, tried to puncture the pretensions and deceits of the powerful and the guardians of "knowledge" which sustained them - I have realised how rare this endeavour has been. Only the specialised cognoscenti have the knowledge and authority to undertake the effort - and they have too much to lose! Of course the discipline of economics, for example, is now subjected to a lot of criticism and adjustment (at least on its edges) - and post-modernists have cleverly dissected bodies of knowledge - but hardly in a reader-friendly language!

But we are overdue a text which will give the average interested citizen the incentive to understand just how weak are the intellectual justifications for so much of the behaviour of modern elites - and satire and ridicule will probably be important elements in such an expose.



## 10. Further Reading

In addition to the texts quoted in the introduction above, I would add the following as useful companions in the search for understanding -

*The Art of the State - culture, rhetoric and public management*; Chris Hood (2000)

*The Future of Governing - four emerging models*; B Guy Peters (1999)

*Market-driven politics - neo-liberal democracy and the public interest*; Colin Leys (2003)

[How Mumbo-jumbo conquered the world](#); Francis Wheen (2004)

Books like King and Crewe's *"The Blunders of our Governments"* (2013); *Great Planning Disasters* (Peter Hall 1982) and *Seeing Like a State - how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (James Scott 1998) showed us how bad centralised decision-making could be.

Christian Wolmar's *"The Great Railway Disaster"* (1996) and Allyson Pollock's *"NHS plc"* showed us how wasteful the private end of the spectrum was. For the effect on transition [countries see here](#) Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of hope - reliving The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 1994); Robert Chambers (*Whose Reality Counts? - putting the first last* 1997); and Tony Gibson (*The Power in our Hands* 1996) are all important inspirations for those who believe in putting the ordinary citizen in the driving seat.

Mintzberg's [The management of government](#) (2000) is one of the most thoughtful contributions to the question of how we should organise government.

Daniel Dorling's recent *Injustice - why social inequality persists* gives us not only a lot of useful material but, even more importantly, the suggestion that 5 belief sets sustain contemporary inequality - that elitism is efficient; greed is good; exclusion is necessary; prejudice is natural; and despair inevitable.

Finally - this is a great site <http://www.civilservant.org.uk/jargon.pdf>

The table which follows is from <http://www.thepoke.co.uk/2011/05/17/anglo-eu-translation-guide/>

### **Development glossary**

### Anglo-EU Translation Guide

What the British say	What the British mean	What others understand
I hear what you say	I disagree and do not want to discuss it further	He accepts my point of view
With the greatest respect...	I think you are an idiot	He is listening to me
That's not bad	That's good	That's poor
That is a very brave proposal	You are insane	He thinks I have courage
Quite good	A bit disappointing	Quite good
I would suggest...	Do it or be prepared to justify yourself	Think about the idea, but do what you like
Oh, incidentally/ by the way	The primary purpose of our discussion is...	That is not very important
I was a bit disappointed that	I am annoyed that	It doesn't really matter
Very interesting	That is clearly nonsense	They are impressed
I'll bear it in mind	I've forgotten it already	They will probably do it
I'm sure it's my fault	It's your fault	Why do they think it was their fault?
You must come for dinner	It's not an invitation, I'm just being polite	I will get an invitation soon
I almost agree	I don't agree at all	He's not far from agreement
I only have a few minor comments	Please re-write completely	He has found a few typos
Could we consider some other options	I don't like your idea	They have not yet decided

## About the author

"Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland - 22 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government.

His next 22 years were spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia - generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects.

Since 2012 he has divided his time tasting wines and paintings from a flat in Sofia, a flat in Bucharest and a house in the Carpathian mountains."

In such a manner is a life normally described - and how little of the hopes, pleasures and anguishes of life does it give away....so the following lines try to be more honest and revealing... ..



In 2008 I started a website which contains the major papers written over the years about attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles I'm lucky enough to have played - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

*"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propaganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.*

*The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"*

Since 2009 my blog - [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) - has tried to make sense of my

organisational endeavours - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on; to restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour of what used to be known as "social justice".

*"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination - as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium".*

A website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - is a library for articles and books he considers useful for those who - like Brecht - feel that "So ist die Welt - und muss nicht so sein"!

This book reflects a life (and perhaps attitude) shaped by the good fortune I've had -

- to work from an early age (26) with an unusually wide range of people (professionals, politicians, community activists - and a much smaller number of academics) who shared an aspiration to improve social conditions;
- To have had a job in a Polytechnic (and planning school) in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s which gave me the licence to talk and write about the issues relating to this work
- to have achieved a position of influence which helped develop a more inclusive style of government in the West of Scotland for 20 years
- to reengineer myself as a consultant, working and living for 25 years in central Europe and Central Asia - in the pursuit of what the turgid academic literature has come to call "good governance"
- all the while trying - through wide reading and writing - to try to make sense of what the masthead on my blog calls our "social endeavours", ie efforts to make the world a better place...

*I've always had great difficulty answering the simple question "What do you do?" "Student" was easy but, after graduation, I had a quick succession of jobs in what could be called generally the "planning" field - and "planner" is as vague a term as "manager" and enjoyed a rather limited vogue. In 1968 I joined a polytechnic and was also elected to a town council - so "lecturer" was as good a description as what I did as any. Using my voice was what I was paid for - whether to transmit information or opinions. I read widely - so "reader" was also a pertinent word. I became heavily involved in community development - managing to straddle the worlds of community action and political bureaucracy (for 20 years I was the Secretary of ruling Labour groups in municipal and regional Councils and also a sponsor of community action) and figured in a book about "reticulists" (networkers) - but imagine putting that word in a passport application!*

*For a few years I was Director of a so-called "Research Unit" which was more like a Think Tank in its proselytising workshops and publications celebrating the new rationalism of corporate management and community development.*

*At age 43 my default activity became full-time (regional) politics - with a leader role but of a rather maverick nature who never aspired to the top job but was content to be at the interstices of bureaucracy, politics and academia. I remember my reception at an OECD function in central Sweden as someone with a proclivity to challenge.*

*All this paved the way for the "consultancy" which I have apparently practised for the past 20 years in Central Europe and Central Asia. But "consultant" is not only a vague but a (rightly) increasingly insulting term - so I was tempted for a period to enter the word "writer" on my Visa application forms since this was as good a description of what I actually did as any. At one stage indeed, my despairing Secretary in the Region had actually given me the nickname "Paperback writer". Except that this was seen by many border guards in central Asia as a threatening activity! Robert Reich's "symbolic analyst" briefly tempted - but was perhaps too close to the term "spy"!*

*When I did the [Belbin test on team roles](#) to which I was subjecting my teams, I had expected to come out as a leader - but was not altogether surprised to discover that my stronger role was a "resource person" - someone who surfed information and knowledge widely and shared it. What some people saw as the utopian streak in my writing gave me the idea of using the term "poet" at the airport guiches - but I have a poor memory for verse.*

*This morning, as I looked around at the various artefacts in the house, a new label came to me - "collector"! I collect beautiful objects - not only books and paintings but pottery, pens, pencils, laquered*

*cases, miniatures, carpets, Uzbek wall-hangings, Kyrgyz and Iranian table coverings, glassware, terrace cotta figurines, plates, Chinese screens, wooden carvings et al. Of very little - except sentimental - value I hasten to add! But, of course, I have these things simply because I have been an "explorer" - first of ideas (desperately searching for the holy grail) and then of countries - in the 1980s Western Europe, the 1990s central Europe - finally central Asia and beyond.*

*Some 25 years ago, when I was going through some difficult times, my sister-in-law tried to help me by encouraging me to explore the various roles I had - father, son, husband, politician, writer, activist etc. I didn't understand what she was driving at. Now I do! Lecturer, reticulist, politician, maverick, leader, writer, explorer, consultant, resource person, collector - I have indeed played all these roles (and more too intimate for this blog!). Makes me wonder what tombstone I should have carved for myself in the marvellous [Sapanta cemetery in Maramures](#) where people are remembered humourously in verse and pictures for their work or way they died!!*

And it was TS Eliot who wrote that  
*old men ought to be explorers*

I believe in people coming together at a local level to work for the common benefit - principles enshrined in [communitarianism](#) (about which I do have some reservations). I spent a lot of time supporting the work of [social enterprise](#) in low-income communities. None of this went down all that well with the technocrats or even members) of my political party - and the national politicians to whose books I contributed (eg [Gordon Brown](#)) soon changed their tune when they had a taste of power.

But, above all, I am a [passionate sceptic](#) - or [sceptical pluralist](#) - which is the reason for my adding the terms which form the glossary at the end - [Just Words?](#)

[This flickr account](#) gives with more examples of art.....[also this one](#)



## LIST OF Author's PUBLICATIONS

[Dispatches to the Next Generation - short version](#) (2018) An idiosyncratic search for meaning as I struggle to make sense of the world - with the help of more than 100 books which have made an impact on me in my lifetime.....

[Reforming the State](#) (2018) inspired by a book about the British experiencing of "dismembering the state" this little effort is based on 16 questions....and tries to guide the reader through the voluminous (and forbidding) literature about reform efforts...

[No Man's Land - journeys across disputed borders](#) (2018)

A recasting of the "Crafting Effective public admin" book to focus rather on the distinctive approach adopted by each project in an effort to fit the local context....

[Common Endeavour - the 2017 posts](#) (2018)

[The Slaves' Chorus - the 2016 posts](#) (2017)

[In Praise of Doubt - a blogger's year](#) (2016)

[Bulgarian Realists - getting to know Bulgaria through its Art](#) (2017 edition)

An unusual take on a country, the core of this book are 300 short notes on painters who caught my fancy in the decade I have known Bulgaria....

[Crafting Effective Public Administration](#) (2015);

This is a collection of short reflective notes about the efforts we have seen in the past 50 years to improve the machinery of government - with an emphasis on the role of the EU and its various programmes. They draw on (a) my pretty extensive reading of that extensive section of the literature on public administration reform which focusses on British experience (since 1970); but also on that of the various countries of central Europe and central Asia with which I have become familiar since 1991; and (b) my own experience as a political change-agent for 22 years and then consultant on administrative reform for the past 25 years

The book should be read alongside two long papers which I produced a few years ago -

- ["administrative reform with Chinese and European characters"](#) (2010) starts with an outline of the 12 features of Chinese public service which impacted on me when I lived in Beijing for a couple of months, preparing for a longer project. The rest of the paper is a summary of the sort of lessons I felt I had learned up to 1999 about public administration reform
- ["The Long Game - not the logframe"](#) was a caustic paper I presented to the 2011 NISPAcee Conference ( building on an earlier paper to the 2007 Conference) in which I took apart the superficiality of the assumptions EC bureaucrats seemed to be making about the prospects of its Technical Assistance programmes making any sort of dent in what I called (variously) the kleptocracy or "impervious regimes" of most ex-communist countries.

With the exception of some 20 pages, they are, in effect, chatty notes on my everyday reading and thinking in a period - after 2009 - when I could be fairly relaxed. I had basically "hung up my boots".

Although I was nominally Team Leader of an (EU Structural Fund) project in Bulgaria in 2010-12 and also involved in a bid for another (unsuccessful) project in the same country - my role was not a demanding one and gave me the time and opportunity to reflect.

[The Independence Argument - home thoughts from abroad](#) (2015)

How I tried to make sense of the 2 year debate which took place in Scotland about its referendum about independence.

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014) My (cultural) introduction to a little-known country

[German Musings](#) (2014 - but enlarged and updated October 2018)

[Introducing the Romanian Realists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries](#) (2014) a disorganised set of notes about a little-known painting tradition...

[Just Words](#) - a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power

[The Long Game - not the log-frame \(2011\)](#); an attack on the myopic and arrogant assumptions western development agencies have taken to the task of building effective institutions in transition countries....

[Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics](#) (2010) my guilty contribution to a failed mission.....

[Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies](#) (2009) - this paper extracts some lessons from the work I've done in the last decade - particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Bulgaria. Even altho I say it myself - it is one of the best papers on the subject

[Learning from Experience - a Bulgarian](#) project (2009)

[Building Municipal Capacity](#) (2007) - an interesting account of an intellectual journey

[Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan](#) (2007) - this is a long doc (117 pages. I enjoyed pulling out this metaphor - and developing and using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

[Building Local Government in a Hostile Climate](#) (2006)

[Overview of PAR in transition countries](#) (2006) This is the paper I drafted for the European Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June 2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!

[A Draft Guide for the Perplexed](#); a short paper I wrote in 2001 to share my concerns about the direction in which Western society was going.....

[Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000](#) I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.

[In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) The book I wrote almost two decades ago for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

[Annotated Bibliography for change agents](#) - For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes on the books I was reading. Perhaps they will be useful to others?

[The Search for the Holy Grail - some reflections on 40 years of trying to make government and its systems work for people](#)