Leviathan Revisited

Policy Exchange

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Contents

Chapter 1

Nearly half a century ago, Britain seemed to face problems which some people thought insoluble. 'Was Britain governable?' asked political journalists. There was wild – and at least in retrospect absurd – gossip about a military take-over by a Strong Man. We could not borrow without support from the International Monetary Fund which in return insisted on very heavy public spending cuts, the consequences of which for our national infrastructure can still be felt today. Opinion polls alleged that the public believed the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union was more powerful than the elected Prime Minister. And indeed, perhaps he was.

Practical people made practical suggestions for policies which might help. But the burst of national energy that carried us away from the brink, and allowed other candidates to inherit from us the title and role of 'the sick man of Europe' handed down from its original owner – the Ottoman Empire – did not derive from practical politicians. For better or worse, that energy derived from a conscious re-examination of political and moral philosophy by intellectuals, journalists, thinking politicians and businesspeople. Their arguments spread far and wide and, in the end, persuaded enough of the population to support the policies which followed.

One set of doctrines, simply articulated and vigorously sold, beat the others in the competition of ideas: a return to an individualistic ideology, respectably derived from philosophers led by John Locke and John Stuart Mill and political economists from Adam Smith to Friedrich Hayek. So complete was its victory among an effective majority of the population that its doctrines became broadly accepted as common sense, reminding us of the connection between theoreticians and accepted current wisdom suggested by John Maynard Keynes, writing in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* in 1936.

> *"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 influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist."*

Or, as Alasdair MacIntyre wrote in *After Virtue* (1981), putting it the other way round as he describes the birth of modernity and its liberalism:

> *"Every action is the bearer and expression of more or less theory-laden beliefs*

and concepts: every piece of theorising and every expression of belief is a political and moral action."

This revived ideological liberalism underpinned a shift in policy terms away from a more collectivist approach both to the identification of public goods, and public policy. This collectivism had derived prestige from the supreme act of collective unity represented by the nation at victorious war between 1939 and 45. The collectivist approach – broadly accepted by all the mainstream political parties for the two decades or so after the war – seemed by the 1970s to have become corrupted into a battle between self-interested national corporations of which the strongest, the trade unions, placed their sectarian demands above the common good. Parliamentary democracy seemed a spectator, not the source of sovereign power: in vain would Edward Heath, twice defeated Conservative Prime Minister of 1974 protest on behalf of the government, "But we are the trade union of *all* the people!"

As the co-founder of western political science, Aristotle, proposed two millennia and more ago, nations seem to pass through cycles. There is however, nothing inevitable about the phases they pass through. It is rather as if complex political structures are like everything else in the universe subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics: they decay towards disorder – but revive if energy is applied to reverse the entropy. That is, if the component parts – in the case of societies or nations the parts are people, interests, or communities – can find the energy to reverse the decay, then ordered life, and all the possibilities which come with cooperation and complex systems may be recovered.

The application of such energy to the reordering of a nation in such a state of high entropy – to stretch my physical metaphor to its limit – must come from outside the current consensus of the disordered political system in question: often requiring very great force to succeed. Where the intellectual energy required comes from, and what kind of restoration of order it creates has nothing inevitable about it, and it need not be found at all. Some societies fail, and are effectively dissolved, as the Greek city states were dissolved, first by Macedonian and then by Roman hegemony, or the Aztec and Inca empires by the conquistadors, their weapons, and their diseases.

The ideas which in the 1970s and 80s triumphed in the United Kingdom, the United States, and many other nations, helped to reenergize those polities; and played a part also in the dissolution of the old, Sovietised, Russian Empire, and even in the radical change of direction which followed the death of Mao Zedong in China. They did immense good. But their effects were not all benign, and in one fundamental way contained seeds of danger for the very societies which led the way in what seemed to some at the time to be the permanent triumph of liberal individualism.

The problem then, and now, was that liberalism to thrive must depend on values and rules which are not derived from its own system. Without those pre-existing rules, liberalism becomes self-destructive. The best

metaphor is of a game. You cannot derive the rules of a game from the game itself: they must exist beforehand. The rules may say, in chess, that bishops move diagonally and knights in an L-shape, always landing on a different coloured square from that on which they start: but obedience to those rules derives from the acceptance by players of the concept of 'game' and 'rules' which are nothing to do with chess as such. The prohibition for example of cheating, derives not from chess or any other game but from pre-existing morality; without it the concept of a game becomes meaningless.

Liberalism must rest on moral foundations, and on institutions designed to preserve those foundations, which cannot be derived from it if it is to avoid mere anarchy. So much many liberals would accept. The problem for their ideology is that while the system frees the individual, it cannot find the standing ground derived from its own rules to stop that individual using the very same freedom to undermine those customs, institutions, and habits which embody, endorse, and protect the morality without which liberalism devours itself.

There is an exact parallel found in one of those heroic but disastrous legal slogans: *Fiat lex, ruat coelum*: let the law be fulfilled even if the heavens fall. The trouble is, if the heavens fall there is no more law, since the catastrophe flattens it along with all other human constructions.

Britain – and not Britain alone – now faces problems which look as daunting as those of fifty years ago. Sober people, not given to exaggeration, are saying very dramatic things. George Robertson, most practical of former Labour Ministers and not long ago Secretary general of NATO, baldly says that the United Kingdom is not safe in military terms. The House of Lords Economic Select Committee and the Office for Budget Responsibility say that Britain's level of borrowing is not sustainable, and at the same time we have the heaviest burden of taxation since the 1940s. And the United Nations Environment Programme tells us that the world will now certainly exceed 1.5 degrees C above pre-industrial levels in the next decades and will not stop there. Among other things, the pressure on the enormous populations now living in the areas of the planet which will heat most disastrously to move north (and south) will make present immigration pressures, acute though those are, look relatively small.

At the same time very stark changes in demographic trends will see richer nations (who inhabit much of that cooler land) lose a significant proportion of their indigenous populations on a scale not experienced anywhere since the Black Death in the 14th century. There will be room, and need, for more people in those countries: but will the existing populations tolerate such a scale of change?

All this against a continuing wave of technological change at least as disruptive of existing patterns of life as that of the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries.

We face these problems at a time when the vigour and self-confidence of our society in Britain has declined. The simplest indicators of this are twofold: a steep decline in the growth of our productivity; and the

enormous growth in our self-diagnosed mental ill health – perhaps two sides of the same coin.

The fifty years of high liberalism has left us in need of renewed ideas and restored national morale, just as we needed those things in the late 1970s. We need a renewed burst of energy to see us through the new problems in reasonable order. Indeed, it is my thesis that the extreme pendulum swing of liberalism has itself added a new problem of its own creation.

This essay aims to make a contribution to the generation of those ideas, just as concerned people – including a much younger avatar of this author – did fifty years ago. There is nothing inevitable about what comes next: no certainty of success, no inevitability of defeat. There is no inexorable process of history or human development; only the totality of human choices against the unforgiving backdrop of the natural world.

There was nothing pre-ordained about the victory fifty years ago of the ideas carried into political effect by Prime Minister Thatcher, President Reagan, and the others. Which ideas and which intellectual traditions will prove most powerful now depends on how they are articulated, discussed, and disseminated and the energy and commitment of their supporters.

One thing, however, does seem clear from our own history and that of others. The political, social and societal energy needed to do difficult things has to be based on some reasonably broadly accepted set of national ideas and habits. There has to be some relatively simply expressed consensus if there is to be sufficient solidarity to accept hard decisions, often affecting individuals inconveniently, if necessary action is to be taken for the common good.

So, it was in the late seventies and early eighties: Margaret Thatcher's 'There is no alternative' was indeed accepted, far from universally, but by enough on all sides in the British polity to allow the energising force of her and her allies' often harsh action to be accepted. To take a far more profound example, even after the bitter class divisions of the late 1920s and early 30s, enough national solidarity remained to be reawakened by the national government of Churchill, Attlee and Bevin to support the extreme dangers and privations of renewed war against Germany only twenty years after the end of 'the war to end wars' in 1918.

More recently, after the financial crash of 2008/9 and the Covid epidemic, a number of European nations have done markedly better than have their neighbours: Ireland, Spain, Greece and Poland would not have been the most predictable winners of the competition for best recovery. Each case is different, but in every case some sense of national pride, combined sometimes with acceptance of very harsh policy responses, has enabled successful rebuilding. Not very long ago, the prediction that Ireland would be not far off twice as rich per capita as the United Kingdom would have been greeted with some scepticism; but it is now so.

The successes are all different, explicable only with understanding of the history and the current politics and economics of those countries. So are the failures: France and Britain, one a central pillar of the European

Union, the other its disruptive absconder, both face similar economic crises in terms of borrowing costs: the United Kingdom at the time of writing paying more for ten-year bonds than Greece – another outcome few would have predicted a decade ago. France and Italy are not far behind in this race to the fiscal bottom.

The origins of the national unity necessary for the recoveries in those other European countries comparable to the United Kingdom, will be found – if it can be found at all – in their own histories. We should look and learn, if we can, and avoid *schadenfreude*. It is no help for the British merely to point to the neighbouring house on fire – France, say – to excuse our own conflagration.

Thus, my thesis is that for the United Kingdom to deal with our own blaze we must consider our own history, politics, habits of thought and institutions. We can learn from comparisons, of course, but perhaps we may add one more to the many examples of the misuse of the opening line of *Anna Karenina* and suggest that each unhappy nation is unhappy in its own way.

Chapter 2

There is no point yet in books, however brilliant, of policy recommendation, which do not first suggest the political, philosophical and social basis on which those recommendations are to rest. Seventies and eighties liberalism, I believe, was able to rest on the pre-existing national bonds, still much firmer than thy looked in that post war period, imbued as it was with the honourable memories of a war fought with broad (though not total) national unity against an enemy that had to be fought. Those underlying patriotic bonds formed the basis of the consensus around post war institutions at home. They were preserved too by the often far too little appreciated skill with which a world-wide empire was dissolved without the bitterness left by similar dissolution in France or Russia. I do not believe that it is possible to find in history an example of a massive empire voluntarily dissolved where the transition into Commonwealth and co-operative friendship was largely accepted by the former imperial power and many of the former imperial subjects as well, and seen by both as a matter of pride.

The political leaders of the new 1970s and 80s liberalism, at least in the United Kingdom and the United States, seemed instinctively to understand their reliance on non-liberal underpinnings for what they were doing when they fought for the triumph of individualistic, libertarian policy in the economic field.

Both the principal leaders, Thatcher and Reagan, emerged from the parties of the traditional right; both were socially conservative, emphasising what were often called 'Victorian values' of family and patriotism; both were imbued with traditional Christian values. Their enemies called them reactionaries, which in some aspects they were. Thatcher and her key intellectual colleague Sir Keith Joseph, both adamantly opposed, for example, the abolition of remaining societal taboos against the acceptance of homosexuality (and tried to embody their opposition in law). Thatcher was a deep respecter of monarchy and of much patriotic tradition. Above all, she encouraged a Gaullist, nationalistic scepticism of the European Union (though stopping far short of advocating leaving the organisation) because of its diminution of individual national sovereignty. Both she and Reagan passionately and effectively opposed the dreary autocracy of the Soviet Union, not only because of its economic illiberalism and inefficiency, but because of its cruelty and despotism.

Certainly in the United Kingdom, and I have no doubt in the United States too, the reassurance provided by this traditional nationalism and its concomitant traditional social morality enabled the two leaders to build

the coalitions which paradoxically helped to unleash the tide of economic and social individualistic liberalism which now undermines the very values they had inherited and instinctively supported. As we loyally sang Edwardian patriotic songs set to music by Elgar at the end of our party conferences, we were also celebrating processes which would threaten to dissolve national bonds.

Nonetheless, the commitment to liberal economics, based as they are on commitment to free trade monitored by supra national institutions, to the primacy of individual choice – without which the market has no justification – ultimately entails a philosophical alliance between these free market conservative politicians and rights-based liberals. Hence the growth of international rules, first within the EU or similar organisations, then via the World Trade Organisation, and the establishment of legally independent central banks. An order was under construction in which the world was to be ruled by legal contract: contracts of course freely entered into by sovereign states and parliaments, but once established adjudicated by law and judges. One of the most intelligent of Prime Minister Thatcher's economically liberal ministers, Nicholas Ridley imagined, only slightly tongue in cheek, local authorities meeting once a year to negotiate and sign contracts for services, and then taking a holiday until the next year. What was not always made quite so clear was the consequence that such a minimalist utopia would then be effectively governed, when disputes or arguments arose, by contract lawyers and not by elected councillors.

In Britain, the old Conservative Party was always torn between these two parts of its tradition. On the one hand, or with one lobe of the brain, we were pragmatic supporters of Adam Smith and free enterprise, congratulating Sir Robert Peel for the repeal of the corn laws and the destruction of much of British agriculture, since by doing so he provided cheap imported food for the workers and unleashed industrial growth seen as the most efficient way of creating the wealth which could improve the condition of the people. On the other hand, or with the other lobe, we loved Benjamin Disraeli who destroyed Peel and sentimentalised the landed interest. In that mood we regarded ourselves as the inheritors of Edmund Burke, deeply suspicious of the uprooting of ancient institutions which embodied traditional wisdom, and like him we bowed to the great oaks, symbols of ancient hereditary nobility.

The problem is, that liberalism did its useful work while critically contributing to the further dissolution of the pre-existing bonds which made the liberal policy agenda possible. Adam Smith – or in fact cruder modern simplifications of Adam Smith – trumped Edmund Burke. The great oaks began to fall. And that is where we are now.

Chapter 3

So where are we to look now for the national solidarity which will permit the difficult policy choices we will need and allow them any chance of success? What ideas or ideologies promise the best chance of a sufficient degree of unity to allow hard consequences to be accepted for the common good? What are the kinds of institutions we need to rebuild, and on what philosophical basis?

When I published my book (*The Binding of Leviathan – Conservatism and the Future*) in 1978, I was on the losing side of the argument. I argued the case for a traditional, communitarian conservatism which I thought offered the best defence against what seemed the unstoppable expansion of the state, and at the same time best protected the values and morality which made free enterprise tolerable. The expanding state seemed the crucial problem: its growth bound both to invade the available space for necessary, wealth creating enterprise, and to suck the life out of free standing institutions which embodied the habits and traditions on which we needed to rely. Such an approach, embedded in much conservative thought, represented then one of the choices before us, along with the liberal revival and, enemy of both liberal and conservative, the still vigorous Marxist tradition. I thought that the expansion of the state, driven by a potentially dictatorial House of Commons needed to be bound both by the preservation of separate, traditional devolved power centres, and in addition by external, liberal, rights-based law: including the European Convention on Human Rights.

Some things I predicted correctly. "*Illegal immigration,*" I wrote, "*will be the crime of the future*" bringing with it a raft of new crime controlled by the illegal carriers of the immigrants, as had happened with the rise of the Mafia in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. It would be very difficult to stop, I thought, without illiberal measures and difficult even then. The Soviet Empire would break up sooner than later, I predicted: but would be dangerous in the process. The European Union needed refounding on Gaullist principles. But my main anxiety was how to stop the inexorable growth of the state's Leviathan.

I could see no help from the moderate left: I could not see how moderate social democracy, as it then was, could do other than decline since it seemed inextricably enmeshed with declining industries which could not be saved by the suggested solutions of public ownership and tariffs. And indeed perhaps I was right: that process did dissolve the old Labour party of Attlee and Bevin, its decline brilliantly disguised by the skill with which New Labour, chameleon like, changed its political colouring: quietly shifting its allegiance to a milder version of the dominant liberalism which seemed

to have become all conquering: Thatcherism with a somewhat gentler face continuing as Blairism, with a quiet but massive further impetus given to the expanding liberal international rights order, not least by the Human Rights Act of 1998, which incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law.

So, back in 1977 then, the choice seemed to be between a revival of traditional conservatism (my first choice); still confident Marxism; or liberalism. Liberalism won, powerful voices finding it quite astonishingly easy to ignore my somewhat tortured arguments for a return to the conservatism I found in Aristotle, Hume, Burke, Oakeshott and Hailsham, decorated with a little Disraeli and my eccentric predecessor as Provost of Eton, Lord Hugh Cecil. The book was many years later kindly described by a very distinguished former colleague at my Oxford college, Colin Kidd, as a 'neglected classic'. The first part of the description was certainly correct, the second encourages me to return now to the central argument of that book with no apology, because its relevance seems magnified by the events of the intervening liberal years.

The warnings of what ideological liberalism might do if left unconstrained by traditions and institutions without which it would decline into self -destructive anarchy turned out to be largely true. Indeed, it is hard not to add the effects of the over-reach of liberalism to the list of problems we now face. It is certainly at least a partial cause of the weakness of some of those institutions and habits of thought and action which now must be strengthened if we are to solve our problems. I had thought that there was an alliance possible between conservatives and liberals around for example the defence of pluralism of thought (a vital conservative concept to which I will return); I did not realise that if you used the mechanism of rights derived separately from the requirements needed to maintain healthy political community, in the end there would be, as there is now, fundamental conflict between the needs of society and the claims of the individual.

In the pages which follow, I will try to restate the conservative tradition and show again why it is immediately relevant to current concerns. That old tradition is still on offer, and I will argue, it remains an essential component, at least, of any civilized approach to the great difficulties which face us. I will suggest an argument as to why conservatism, in its broadest sense, remains a vital doctrine with which both to craft practical solutions to our problems, and to ward off the dangers inherent in the rival ideologies presently on offer.

Chapter 4

The rival doctrines are a little different in 2025 than they were in 1978. Liberalism is still a candidate ideology, with all its old seeming attraction even after fifty years of dominance. Indeed, although I will argue that it has fulfilled the predictions that it is a philosophy that in the end must logically destroy itself, it now has powerful new advocates in the shape of giant industrial companies which have prospered by using liberalism's advocacy of freedom to build very profitable enterprises selling socially destructive products behind banners of individual choice and liberty, defended by lawyers deploying classical liberal language on behalf of what have become engines of the destruction of civilised community.

We will return to the powerful claims of this technology enhanced liberalism below.

Liberalism of the classical kind still of course has its advocates. Just as Harold Macmillan wrote in his book *The Middle Way* (1938) that the failure of central industrial planning up to that time in Britain, was proof that we needed to double down and do more of it and better. So liberals argued – for example during the Brexit campaign – that the current ills, derived in fact largely from their own policies, proved the need to double the dose. Let us have Singapore on Thames! (Singapore seen, oddly, as a symbol of the triumph of free markets – not at all the reality of the state sponsored capitalistic city Lee Kuan Yew built). But the common sense national sentiment that backed Thatcher in her great early period has long since shattered. Few think that more deregulation of our privatised utilities, for instance, looks a very plausible path for the future. Fewer still think that a rules-based international order that cannot respond to pressing needs of actual polities can solve for example immigration problems or deal with the new autocratic states. Few can see how the extraordinary wealth and power of the new techno-liberal super companies can be tamed – at least in any foreseeable future – by free competition.

Marxist-Leninism, abandoned by its erstwhile sponsors in Moscow and Beijing, seems largely now a subject for academic debate; the often brilliant journalism of its founder still read, but the scientism of his account of how societies develop through cycles driven by historical inevitability winning not many intellectual or practical adherents. Nonetheless the perceived failure of centre left governments, and the wild extremes of inequality generated by the overreach of liberalism, is generating in some of its old homes – Germany, Spain, Britain and perhaps even the United States – a far left using at least some of the old Marxist rhetoric, in mirror image of the far right.

Often there is an overlap on this new far left with racially or religiously fuelled extremism: as the far right seems to blame the ills of society on racially differentiated immigrants and on the separatism of, in Europe, usually Muslim groups resisting integration with the host communities, so the far left seeks to build alliances with these objects of the right's resentment – resentment fuelling resentment. These are uneasy alliances: socially conservative Muslim communities attempting to preserve the old ways have little in common with Die Linke in Germany or Corbynistas in Britain, except perhaps for a visceral hatred of the state of Israel. There is something absurd, but also tragic, about watching gay pride marchers misled into supporting Hamas and its friends in Islamic State or Daesh, whose approach to issues of sexuality are savage and primitive. And there is something far more dangerous than mere absurdity represented by leftist flirtation with political Islamists, whose wholly totalitarian ideology is founded on an unwavering determination to exterminate all political institutions not derived from its own doctrines. Those who believe they can make tactical alliances with Islamists play in modern times the role of the useful idiots who once similarly flirted with Leninism and Stalinism.

The significance of these so far relatively small far left parties depends somewhat on the electoral systems of different countries. A serious Corbyn-led left party in the UK, perhaps allied with Muslim independent MPs, could represent a very serious threat to Prime Minister Starmer's Labour Party, potentially easing the path to power of the British far right challenger Reform – just as Reform could damage the hope of recovery of the British Conservative Party.

Social democracy, as represented for example in Anthony Crosland's Future of Socialism (1956) and broadly represented by the New Labour years of Tony Blair; and its alter ego of the pragmatic conservatism of the Major or Cameron years are both respectable ways of proceeding if the conditions are right. The essential conditions for their viability are twofold. First, they thrive in times when crisis is absent, and the task of government seems to be to find decent and honest managerial leaders to keep the ship of state sailing before fair winds. Second, and perhaps more fundamental, they only work against a background of a broad consensual philosophical framework which allows them to rest upon a shared national unity of purpose. If the latter has crumbled, neither can provide the energy and passion needed to restore it. They are good models of government for relatively easy times. One leans towards increased equality as its main objective; the other towards more economic liberalism. Neither are the generators of the renewal that we now need.

So the candidates which offer themselves are a continued and revitalised swing towards individualistic liberalism; conservatism; the beginnings of a renascent far leftism, sometimes in uneasy alliance with ethnically or religiously based separatist parties, and the new entrant, not visible in the 1970s, which I will call Caesarism, borrowing the word– though not his version of historical inevitability – from Oswald Spengler in his *The Decline of the West* of 1918.

Chapter 5

First, Liberalism. It should perhaps go without saying that I am using the word with rather sharp edges within which an effective meaning is retained. 'Liberal', meaning generous or kindly; liberalism identifying some of the good things inherent in decent morality; these are common parlance uses of the word which do not refer to the ideology with which I am here concerned. Liberal – in the looser sense - people are often in alliance with conservatives or socialists, and any decent society will require what are normally described as the essentials of day to day liberal conduct: a respect for fairness, for example, and a willingness to listen to arguments with which we disagree. But it is the system which builds itself upon the inalienable rights of an all-privileged individualism, and has no method for limiting those rights when they clash, nor understanding of how some rights dissolve the underlying morality without which the concept of 'good' and 'right' themselves disappear, which has been the engine which has pulled our societies to the brink of crisis, and left us in such a weak position to find the means to face our societal challenges.

Let us consider some current supposed rights. Fara Dabhoiwala's brilliant book *What is Free Speech: the History of a Dangerous Idea*, points to the danger of the elevation of a 'right' to a categorical imperative wonderfully clearly. As he concludes, comparing a well run university discussion – the ideal locus for free speech - with the *"venal, free-for-all, click-bait gutter of the real world public sphere"* we find the truth is that *"…instead of absolute liberty of expression, the real truth-seeking market-place depends on all sorts of regulation"*. The history of free speech *"does not suggest that greater freedom of expression automatically leads to better outcomes, that liberty of speech should necessarily be allowed to trump other principles, or even that it is best conceived of as an individual right, rather than a public or collective good."*

That is to say, freedom of speech, essential as it is of course to the existence of the free discussion out of which emerges - often after all the noisy argumentation of a free society – has to contain itself within civilised boundaries: the acceptable range of plural opinions containable within a coherent society. It cannot be a good which trumps all others, any more than any other of the multitude of liberal claimants to equivalent inalienability. But it remains a good very vulnerable to waves of attack from one side or another. Once upon a time Isaac Newton would have lost his Fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge if his colleagues had found out his attachment to the Arian heresy outlawed thirteen hundred years previously at the Council of Nicaea. Today academics are in danger of losing their jobs if they transgress the creeds imposed by current

inquisitors leading lynch mobs seeking to impose orthodoxy in relation to gender politics, or partisanship in middle eastern conflict, and much else. Conservatives will fight against such forced closure of debate; but conservatives will remember that even the honourable flag of free speech can be led off the real field of battle and land its followers into dire swamps of over-reach, like Rupert of the Rhine at Edgehill.

If we want to see rights-based liberalism taken to its logical end, then we should examine the venal gutter that lies behind the enormous wealth of the social media corporations and their suppliers who have created it, leading their near monopolies behind banners inscribed 'Freedom of Speech' and 'Individual Choice'. This techno-liberalism may defend itself using the arguments of John Locke and Voltaire; but the behaviour of its giant corporations in legal self-defence and their reliance ultimately on privileged access to the research base, largely a defence research base, of the United States leads one to believe that the founders know very well that their trillions rest on non-liberal foundations. But their slogans, and their intimidation of governments, rest upon the use of liberal rhetoric.

A second example might be the deep and vicious divides created by the rival claims of the right to self-identify and sex-based rights.

There is nothing new in the idea that it is impossible to make a coherent ideology out of the claims to various rights. Isaiah Berlin many years ago argued that there could be no final hierarchy of rights, where one could trump another on an accepted scale: we just had to do the best we could in civilized discussion, deploying freedom of expression (*parrhesia* in the days of classical Athens) in the community in which we live. Those whose instincts tend towards belief in Aristotle's virtue ethics, as mine do, believe also that his system only works if we sort out disputes and conflicts of different types of virtue or *arete* with the use of what he calls *phronesis*: wisdom, or reasoned judgement, conducted in civilised discussion. The context of that civilized discussion however is, as Dabhoiwala argues in the case of free speech, something that has to be laid down externally from the rights under dispute. That external space is governed by preexisting rules – those of basic morality derived from our nature as social animals, to the primacy of which I will return.

The argument remains the same in essence for all attempts at the construction of complete liberal systems. Perhaps the most powerful of these in modern times was John Rawls's famous *A Theory of Justice* (1971), which proposes an 'original position' from which rational individuals choose the principles of justice behind a 'veil of ignorance' which prevents them knowing in advance what position they will themselves occupy in the society they are building. But this hugely suggestive 'thought experiment' of course founders on the same problem: where and of what nature is this unbiased place behind the veil of ignorance? It must be subject to rules itself, of rationality; and the self-hood of the observer cannot be free of whatever society has formed it.

Man is a social animal and cannot be formed alone, any more that a person can invent a private language shared with no-one else. As

Wittgenstein proved, such a private language is a contradiction in terms. So is the idea of a solo observer, free of pre-conceptions. If John Rawls is behind the veil we know what he will choose: a decent, liberal (in the general sense) society not unlike the better bits of the Harvard world within which he lived and had his being. But if it is Trump? Or Putin? Or for that matter Jesus Christ or the Prophet Mohammed? Some very different worlds will emerge.

The same fatal weakness faces all other types of social contract theory: the idea that society is formed by a contract between individuals. Of course, the concept of 'contract' and the values to be written in to it must already be in the minds of the noble savages making the contract with each other in the first place: hence their nobility. All such systems are useful as pictures, grand thought experiments, or fictions: they can illuminate how we behave and suggest good ways of improving the laws and other rules with which we agree to live: but they do not illuminate the origin of the values and virtues with which society needs to maintain itself nor help to sustain them.

It is almost as if liberalism is like arithmetic, and subject to Kurt Godel's two incompleteness theorems, which say that there will always be true statements which cannot be proved within a consistent system of arithmetic, and that no consistent system can prove its own consistency.

Now it could be argued that earlier in the period of the dominance of liberalism in this ideological sense these dangers of internal contradiction and self-destruction did not matter; everything seemed to go on splendidly. Look at the progress in freedom and wealth and all other good things generated around the world for a time in the 1970s and 80s and 90s! And indeed much good was done, much poverty alleviated, much good health made more widely available, much oppression lifted. But the achievements – and they were real – of the era of individualistic liberalism was dependent on the pre-existing order: on the allegiance of citizens to nations; on the limits set on libertarian behaviour by instinctive morality; and by customs of good manners, decency, and dignity – habits that went beyond strict morality into the realms of civility and indeed ordered civilization itself.

As Sir Keith Thomas makes clear in his In *Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilisation in Early Modern England* (2018), the development of civility and manners was part of the evolution of discipline, hierarchy and deference in the nation state. It was because of unacknowledged dependence on those continuing pre-libertarian constraints that for some time liberal rights could grow: parasitic on pre-existing order, but in the end destructive of it – at which point we find ourselves supine in that venal gutter, looking not at the stars but at a very dark night.

We of my generation benefited from a delightful moment of near balance: when the old bonds still held, and we could play the liberal game before the rules frayed and broke. We now observe private companies too powerful even for the government of the United States to control; we see previously locally based industries owned by very distant international

shareholders impossible to hold to account in any one jurisdiction; we see extraordinarily highly paid executives effectively looting their shareholders and employees; we see the near extinction of other forms of ownership such as that of the old mutual societies – often because one generation of owner-members realised that they could extract value for themselves at the expense of the future. And we see inequalities of wealth beyond anything experienced in the west at least for a century or more, with great wealth delivering ever greater access to political power just as Aristotle warned that it always did. And western inequalities of wealth are far surpassed by the equivalent phenomenon in the rest of the world, where wealth often gives even more direct access to political power.

Nor has the destruction, to borrow the economist Joseph Schumpeter's phrase, been creative, even in economic terms. At least in the United Kingdom the underlying growth rate of the economy has fallen sharply over the last twenty years, and unprecedented millions of people are now dependent on welfare.

Chapter 6

The destruction of the pre-liberal order on which liberalism itself depends has two new different dangerous effects derived from new technologies. On the one hand there is the immediacy of the moral anarchy which misused technology has given us under the banners of freedom of expression and of individual choice. On the other is the enormous acceleration these technologies have given to social disintegration.

The dark web represents the first effect, through the examples of amoral and immoral behaviours without limit which it makes freely available. Ultimate selfish and egotistical desires are fulfilled for any subscriber, and the lowest circles of hellish behaviour normalised. Artists and novelists have imagined this darkest side of the human psyche in the past: Hieronymus Bosch and Francisco Goya made it visible in paint. Brian Aldiss at the end of his magnificent trilogy of *Helliconia* novels, published between 1982 and 1985 describes the moral and sexual degradation of the behaviour of the humans on the returning spaceship *Yawheh*, a metaphor for the collapse of a civilisation which has lived for so long observing, but not acting, in the very way in which our screen based world may be thought to be developing. But neither Bosch nor Goya nor Aldiss ever envisaged the scale of what is all around us now.

Second, there is the ultimate – as yet – descendant of the fairground huckster, shouting their wares by means of the power modern physics has given them: separating and sorting us now by algorithm into factions and cults and conspiracy clubs which destroy the common culture hard won over centuries in the creation, imperfect though they may be, of functioning social and political communities. The novelists were here first, too. Rudyard Kipling, in his cruel 'comic' story *The Village that Voted the Earth Was Flat* proposed in 1913 that arrogant, clever young men from the Varsity could persuade foolish small town rustics of anything – and use the result to ridicule and punish the people who had inconvenienced the clever fellows in their cool motor cars. A century later such cruelty is a commonplace of online bullying; the existence of such gullibility in the face of far more ruthless and profitable deceit the basis of many a disastrous cult.

That existing social structures are and always have been fragile, history regularly tells us. Gentle, Christian, Amy Buller watched it in 1930s Germany and recorded how decent people slowly succumbed to Nazism in *Darkness over Germany* (1943). How could the decent, anxious parents of unemployed youngsters be other than grateful to these Nazis, vulgar though they were, for giving jobs and self-respect to their out of

work children? And really, some of the behaviour, the drug taking, the immorality in the big cities nowadays…

Anne Applebaum, in different but no less immediate first hand style, recounts the rise of similar stirrings in contemporary Europe and the wider world in *The Twilight of Democracy* (2020). She watches and mourns as former friends in the fight against Soviet authoritarianism drift, some of them, past patriotism into nationalism and then, surprise! surprise! think they find that who is behind all and any new problems that they face is none other but a Mr Soros who is Jewish and rich!

"*So it goes*" as Kurt Vonnegut's refrain tells us.

The power of the unmediated networked sources of alleged information to spread falsehood alongside truth, to validate conspiracy theories by building numerical support for nonsense, and to turn the savagery of the virtual mob on anyone who attempts to dissent is a solvent of civility and decency which has hugely shifted the balance of power in favour the dark side of our human nature.

That is where technological liberalism is taking us, riding on the wings of freedom of choice, and liberty of expression. And in opposition to them are being generated in reaction old and dark forces familiar from history. Here comes one kind of alternative to liberalism. In Putin's Imperial Mother Russia, in Hindu ethno-nationalism in India stirred and ridden on by Narendra Modi, in the sapping of the foundations of Ataturk's secular pluralism by Erdogan in Turkey, in Orbán's Hungary and elsewhere in the eastern European nations described by Applebaum, in the United States and Britain and France, one kind of response to the over-reach of liberalism is awaking a dangerous and all too familiar reaction.

The growth of these new and threatening doctrines cannot be separated from the overreach of liberalism. Immigration is only the most obvious source of the reaction: but it is a powerful one. Nations watch borders which once defined their political entities become porous. They were in many cases never wholly sealed but never in modern times have they witnessed such current and potential movements of populations. People listen to their governments promising to regain control, and failing to do so at least partly because of the internationally guarded structure of human rights which trump the national democratic will.

They watch the crumbling of day to day law, with illegal immigration only the most visible example of what is perceived as a far more general failing of ordinary lawfulness. If politicians raise such issues, they are branded populist and in the end become so, not seeking solutions but piling on the sense of victimhood among populations told to blame what they see on elites – the same elites they have themselves elected.

Chapter 7

Individualistic liberalism has also bred a further reaction which, more irritating than dangerous, still hampers rational thought about how to make things better. It has taken quite deep root in many western universities. These are the doctrines descended from existentialism and a bit of Nietzsche and from the collapse of belief of some intellectuals, particularly in France, in any sense of hope after witnessing and in some cases suffering the horrors of mid twentieth century Europe.

Many of their prophets benefit from the extreme obscurity of their writing style which enables slogans drawn from their sometimes oracular texts to become objects of near worship by followers. Gathered under the broad banner of postmodernism (an odd banner for thinkers one of whose avowed beliefs was that nothing was or is culturally fixed) or poststructuralism, their doctrines are very easy to ridicule. Roger Scruton has fun doing so in *Fools, Frauds, and Firebrands* (2015). Alan Sokal, then a professor of physics at New York University and University College London saw his incomparable parody of the fashionable nonsense of the day fool the editors of the postmodernist journal *Social Text* and solemnly achieve publication in 1996. The title alone deserves applause: *Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity*. The footnotes rank with some of Edward Gibbon's best. Plausible postmodern propositions (for example that the rules of arithmetic are 'sexed' and that Einstein's famous equation $E=MC^2$ is clearly gendered because it privileges the speed of light over other velocities) are mixed with complete scientific nonsense in a way which makes the heart sing.

Now it would be wrong and unfair to say that Derrida, Foucault (some of whose thought is sympathetic to the right, after all) and Lyotard, prophets of postmodernism, are directly responsible for the collapse in intellectual discipline that could spot nothing amiss in Sokal's spoof, but it would not be unfair to say that they are at least partly responsible for fashions of thought among lesser mortals in the university system which have helped to close minds and even lead to bullying and persecution of any attempt at dissent.

But the fact remains that combined (and this would greatly have annoyed those great men) with claims that an apparently infinite number of inalienable rights could be established upon the basis of individualist desires or emotions, the extreme relativism fathered by these thinkers has degraded what goes on in the humanities departments of many universities to the point where teaching almost becomes pointless. If students can generate their own truth; can accept and celebrate their own victimhood;

and what is more use all the techno-liberal tools to bully those who try to restrain them, the concept of the academy is seriously degraded.

Follow the story of the savagery of the abuse of JK Rowling for her rather moderate and sensible position on gender self-identification if you doubt the seriousness of the problem, or the hounding of Dr Kathleen Stock, or the style of the attacks on Professor Lord Biggar while he was at Oxford.

The fashion cannot be unconnected with the precipitate decline in new students now choosing the humanities in universities, so this latest version of a *trahison des clercs* may be self-destructive; but its passing will leave serious damage behind it in the universities which succumbed to it.

The doctrines made fashionable by this episode in the history of western universities matter because they make it unlikely that any renewed intellectual energy which might fill the gap left by overreaching liberalism will come from academia. They take out of the picture – not entirely, of course, but significantly – the universities as a separate source of the practical inspiration which one might have hoped them to supply. And they contribute, ironically given their intellectual origins in extreme relativism and solipsism, to a fast growing clamour for new rights alongside the old, based on their equation of feeling with truth, and replacement of rational discourse with emotion and expressions of fear, rage and victimhood which demand to be respected regardless of their validity or of the consequences. The students and staff at universities who represent this new mind-closing orthodoxy lack the political coherence to be reliable allies for the left, but their censorship of opposing views more often poses a threat to the right (and indeed to liberalism) than it does to the left. And by shutting down, to the best of their ability, any discourse in the academy which they dislike (often using the argument of personal pain: "*This argument hurts me; it makes me unwell*") they certainly damage universities as potential sources of the renewed intellectual leadership we need.

Chapter 8

Here then is an additional dimension to the challenge for conservatism. Liberalism has overreached and damaged our societal fabric and the underpinning of the rules which liberalism itself relies on; and the fashions in the universities, perhaps filling the void left by the collapse in the prestige of Marxism caused by the disappearance of its imperial sponsors, will give us no help, and sometimes add additional chaos as they generate unmeetable and contradictory demands while seeking to suppress thinking they find uncomfortable.

In my mind is a cartoon in the then mighty *Daily Express* newspaper by their cartoonist Cummings, considering the French 'events' of 1968, when students were smashing universities, throwing not always incompetent bombs, and generally behaving anarchically. The cartoonist had an overcoated, tough looking, middled aged figure leaning on a windowsill watching the student rebels – long haired, of course in those days, speechifying. Out of the watcher's pocket hangs a revolver.

This time, however, that sinister watching figure is very much more powerfully present, awoken not just or even primarily by irritation at the postmodernist absurdities – though some of his supporters have made opposition to 'wokery' a battle cry. This time the dangerous right is on the move because the overreach of liberalism has begun to do damage to things about which for a period only the hard right has appeared to care – but which now disturb the broad swathe of normally non-political people who begin to feel that something has gone seriously awry with the world in which they live, and that their governments have not noticed.

Why worry? Perhaps these voices from the far right will lead us to solutions to the issues on which they ride, and then normal service will be resumed by less alarming centrist leaders?

We on the traditional right know better. Our job has been to exclude the unacceptable right, just as it was Attlee's and Bevins's and Callaghan's and Kinnock's job to extrude the unacceptable left, the danger from which they knew much more intimately than we conservatives ever did. So we recognise old foes in the background of the sometimes absurd leaders who thrive on the genuine resentments which have grown among decent and perplexed citizens. Old senses of fairness, decency and disgust at violence enabled 1920s and 30s Britain to ridicule and reject Sir Oswald Moseley. P. G Wodehouse did his bit, training his incomparable comic eye on Moseley by means of the creation of Roderick Spode, leader of the Black Shorts. Ordinary East Enders did theirs, in the battle of Cable Street. The old foes were defeated then: but unless true conservatives act, there is

nothing inevitable about their defeat now.

What does a conservative regard as unacceptable, coming from the further right? At the philosophical level a conservative finds Aristotle's criticism of Plato a salutary defence against all final intellectual solutions of which extreme ethno-nationalism is one:

> *"Socrates's mistake derives from a fallacy in his basic assumption. Certainly unity is necessary to some extent in both a household and a State. But it does not have to be total. There is a point at which increased unity destroys the State, and also a point, short of that, where the State remains, but in a worse condition. It is as if you were to reduce a harmony to unison, or a complex rhythm to a march."* (Pol 2.4)

Conservatives understand that for our species to thrive, we need community. That is what Aristotle means by saying we are political animals – animals that live in a *polis* -the city state which was the Greek ideal. We form communities of many different sorts and scales; but our humanity, and indeed our concept of our own individuality, depends on our social network, just as does our language, which cannot be privately based. The rules – of civility, of morality and of law – which we agree to construct should be intended to maintain that community and the virtues which support it. They derive from our best judgement – using our *phronesis* if you like – of what allows the best nature, the purpose, the *telos*, of our species to thrive.

There are certain of these rules – respect for courage and truth telling; celebration of kindness and generosity; altruism; which are found in common wherever there is community, and therefore wherever an individual has a chance to thrive in society.

The rules can never be final, or perfect; nor can they ever be so perfectly crafted that they will not sometimes conflict among themselves: we should always be thinking how to improve them. What it is unwise to do is to place immutable flags on some rules, however basic they may seem for the time being, because even the most fundamental may conflict among themselves and require us simply to do our best. By all means have some laws, for example, which are very difficult to change, because difficult to envisage being bad laws: but do not derive them from immutable writ, either heavenly or lawyerly. Sometimes it is right to kill – though the justification will have to be extreme. Sometimes it will be right to lie – though very rarely. And so on.

And the unacceptable right is the right which say there are no such rules; that everything must give way to the might of the central doctrine, that whether Big Brother decorates himself with left wing or right wing slogans, he is still the same old basic enemy.

Chapter 9

As to practical ideas as to what is likely to make a good political community, Aristotle's common sense is a good starting point on this also:

"*It is therefore the greatest of blessings for a state that its members should possess a moderate and adequate property,*" he says in his *Politics* (Pol 4.11). He was not wrong. Such a state, he proposes, has the strength to keep the rich in order and to ensure that the poor are not abandoned. Moderate property, widely spread, works as the national foundation you need. And it stops the concentration of power.

So our philosophy rests on opposition to the killing unity of fascistic, or communist, or any other over-arching doctrine; on recognising the essential nature of pluralism (because there are no final answers to moral or other dilemmas); and on support for a state crafted solidly enough in the middle to prevent dominance by the dictatorship of a Caesar or of the proletariat. Such philosophy is anathema to the extreme right as to the extreme left. It is what we need now.

That is why the nationalism of the marching blackshirts, however thrilling for some, we know in our hearts leads to the suppression of dissidents in the name of unity – the pathological unity Aristotle warns us against. It leads to the doctrines of purity of race – and the extermination camps. It leads to the romance of conquest and suppression of those who question. We know these dangers because we are patriotic, and proud of our country – but know how to recognise when patriotism turns to nationalism. Because we recognise the need for any society to have some structure of hierarchy we know also how extreme hierarchy can lead to the pathology of caste systems. Because we value community, place and tradition we know their pathology too: pathological community exists, greatly facilitated by the world wide web. We know when to fight it.

Some may ask, "*Why worry about flag waving protests against immigrants?*" We should worry because we see the symbols that should unite us being used for internal aggression, when what we ought to be seeing is practical action by competent government to deal with a problem which is real. That is why we need to reinforce our abhorrence of those who would deploy real and difficult issues to infect us with the reawakened fascistic virus. There *are* enemies on the right: if you do not see them, then it is an impertinence to lay claim to inheritance of any of the true strands of the British conservative tradition. If you make old Hindenburg's mistake of thinking you can use the little Bavarian corporal for your own ends and then discard him, history teaches an opposite conclusion.

Sometimes we can be careless of the risks. One of the greatest of modern

conservative philosophers, Roger Scruton, a personal friend, exhibiting in his life those twin most attractive virtues of gentleness and courage, has been claimed and misused by some on the unacceptable right.

Scruton is the most eloquent modern philosopher of traditional conservatism. In often beautiful prose, he speaks for those of us who are pessimistic about all claims that some doctrine or other will give us utopia. *"These (pessimists) will recognise the expansive 'I' attitude for what it is, a desire to remake the world as the compliant servant of a weak and un-self-knowing ego. And they will seek a world in which the 'we' attitude can grow, bringing with it the comforts of genuine society and the free association of reasonable beings."* (*The Uses of Pessimism*, 2010, p166).

He wrote – and lived – with an immense understanding of the power of place, of the relationship between the soil and people who work it, of the intimate connection between beauty and peace of mind, and of the value of traditions embodied in institutions as the repository of slowly developed wisdom. He wrote wonderfully well about music – especially his beloved Wagner, and himself was no mean composer. His collected articles on the countryside and the life of his chosen home, *News from Somewhere: On Settling* (2004) are amongst the best writing in English on the subject – and this is a strong genre in English in which to compete. He never succumbs to nostalgia, which is always a present danger for those of us who value what the past has to offer and warn against any equation between modernity and necessary merit.

It is therefore upsetting to record his award from Victor Orbán, now well on the way to petty Caesarism in Hungary, and to see him celebrated by some Trumpists who are unlikely to have read his subtle and powerful books on Wagner, most especially his final work on *Parsifal*. But his misuse is a reminder to us: the celebration of a beloved land can be degraded into the blood and soil of Nazi doctrine, and contrasted with the libels of 'rootlessness' that doctrine levelled against Jews and Slavs. No-one was more conscious of this danger of co-option by the new 'ethno-nationalists' than Scruton. His admirers and friends should fight to prevent any degradation of his subtle and beautiful writing by those with whom he shared nothing. But we should also remember that there is a dark side even to his beloved Wagner, who provided anthems for some very bad people indeed.

So, this time around it is the extremes of the right, Caesarism often based on ethno-nationalism, or religious nationalism, which it is the duty of conservatives to fight, as once it was the duty of democratic socialists to fight the extremes of the left. And just as in the 1930s the disastrous slogan 'No enemies on the left' led to the intellectual catastrophes magisterially described by George Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) and *Animal Farm* (1945) – catastrophes which helped Stalin maintain his empire, helped to fill the gulag, and to destroy the lives of millions, now there is real danger of the right giving in to the same, mirror image disease with the belief that there are no enemies on the right.

The dangerous seduction from the right is so easy. Who else (apart from the extreme left) is pointing to the destruction wrought by global

unchained capitalism but Le Pen or Trump? Who else is trying to restore a religious base to national belief which respects family and tradition but Putin and Modi? Who else respects heroic history better than Orbán? Who has for years has been going on about immigration more eloquently than Farage? Who has done more to make their nation proud again than Xi Jinping?

Literally for years, commentators such as Daniel Finkelstein have been writing articles with titles like *"Take Farage seriously, because voters will."* The truth is, the mainstream parties have recoiled from the action that was needed not least because they wanted no accusation to be made that they were following the agenda of the hard right. But it would have been truer to say that they have made the unacceptable right plausible by not shutting down the legitimate popular resentments which allowed a permanent fringe to move itself onto real, vote winning, central political territory.

This is the challenge. We have the objective problems with which I started: those of defence, of fiscal failure, of global warming, and of demography. We need a reawakened national energy to deal with these issues. And at this very moment, our political parties are at sea: grappling with the consequences of liberal overreach and appearing in danger of leaving the field open to capture by the far right (with little flickerings starting also on the far left). It is my thesis that the only tradition on which the British can plausibly base recovery is their oldest, the conservative. I will try now to bring the strands together and show how that tradition, deployed sensibly, might provide that revitalised national energy that we need so urgently.

Chapter 10

The British are not alone in requiring a near approach to a precipice before taking action to avoid falling over it. It is a tendency of all democracies to disbelieve their democratic leaders, and rate them low. It is perhaps the inescapable consequence of the constant competitive noise of pluralistic democracy that those engaged in it become perceived as a noisy nuisance by those who are not. Electorates who are told that every single election is the most important in the nation's history; that problems are all the cause of incompetent scoundrels on the opposing benches, and that opponents are all liars and frauds, can be forgiven for believing at least some of it, even handedly, of all parties.

There is nothing new in this except the amplification of the uproar by modern technology. Churchill said an incoming Labour government would use the methods of the Gestapo; Aneurin Bevan called the Tories 'vermin'. Heseltine and Healey; Mandelson and Gove; they all knew how to hurt and how to attract the attention of the half-interested electorate by doing so. Sentimentality about the past golden age of political giants does not work.

The inevitable democratic hubbub does mean that electorates have heard the cry of 'wolf' many times before. But this does not mean that when a veritable wolf is at the door, democratic peoples do not take action. It is possible to argue that once underway, the mobilisation of the British people for the Second World war was more thoroughgoing than that of Germany, and at least as ruthless in pursuit of war aims the democracy endorsed. It is unwise to underestimate the democratic will.

So now, the first task is to tell our people a truthful and thereby convincing story that there is a precipice coming. It is a formidable one, and the truth about it is pretty bleak. George Robertson is right to say that our defences are wholly inadequate. It is inescapable that we will need to spend, in short order, at least the same proportion of our national wealth on defence as we spent, say in 1979.The figure then was about 4% of national output, as opposed to 2.4% now. Welfare and health took around 12% then, now around 21%. We have, compared to most of our post-war history, suffered from very low growth rates for many years. Our national debt is historically high, and debt interest is unstable as we have much borrowing with the interest payments linked to inflation. Our taxation levels are high and predicted to rise to the highest levels since 1945 on current projections.

None of these figures is a catastrophe. If the problems are overstated, they will not be believed. Debt interest payments as a percentage of GDP

for example, were higher in some of the Thatcher years than now. But we cannot afford the increased spending we without question need on defence, or maintain the necessary health spending we need with an ageing population, or renew our infrastructure to replace gas burn for electricity generation with low carbon secure alternatives, without taking money from the welfare budget. This is not an essay of policy nostrums: but as a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, it seems clear to me that we cannot afford the so-called triple lock for the state pension; and we cannot afford the extraordinary increase is benefits for those of working age mostly related to very widely extended definitions of disability.

We cannot make the books balance by the two familiar old snake-oil salesman solutions: promising growth or cutting bureaucratic waste. We do not know how to guarantee the former in any measurable time; the latter never produces the scale of saving necessary.

There are taxes that can increase. Income tax can increase. VAT can be charged more widely. Capital gains taxes and property taxes can increase. But one thing we do know: above a certain level of taxation the incentives needed to fuel the enterprise which generates growth disappear, and the prospects for the economy, including necessary increases in the take from taxes, disappear with them.

The truth has to be told, and baldly. There will have to be both welfare cuts and tax rises. The slogans should be those of national security: we must have the money for defence, and we must place ourselves among those nations secure against economic shocks, because there will be plenty more economic shocks to come. That means cutting our debt, and its associated servicing costs.

Security means cohesion nationally. If we are to shoulder very hard burdens, we need to trust that the national community we wish to make safe is one we recognise, and feel proud of. We need, as every nation needs, to secure our allegiance to the rule of our laws. Perhaps we will wish to continue the immense scale of present day immigration – but we will only persuade ourselves to do it if we make the choice freely, not because we are attached to laws, local or international, which we no longer respect. I do not myself believe that such would be our national choice; in which case we must have laws to which we consent which control the outcome in the way the democracy wants. As I predicted back in 1978, those laws will be to some degree illiberal, but without them we will find no defences against the unacceptable right. But the point above all is this: they must be our laws, generous or not so generous, if they are to win sufficient assent from our democracy.

We should of course stand by the affirmative declarations of the European Convention on Human Rights, as we did before we allowed our citizens to petition its court directly, and then built the decisions of its court into our law; but if the interpretation cannot be in the hands of our own courts we will have to consider what would historically be a drastic step, of leaving the Convention and the Council of Europe. This is a step which can only be taken as a very last resort, when we have given up the

idea that with others we may reform the Convention. We must also be very sure that other treaties, for example, the 1951 Refugee Convention, and a range of other law, both treaty-based and domestic, would not turn out to make such a step nugatory in outcome. If our own laws in this area appear to parliament to have gone seriously awry, then we should debate their correction by statute law, as we often do if when our own Common Law seems to have gone awry or become inadequate for present needs.

Certainly, around important fundamental decisions, whether concerning the law or the handling of other matters, we can put up obstacles to parliament acting hastily and thoughtlessly. An independent central bank, set up by statute (and ended by statute if we so wish) may well be a sensible check on ministers, like Mrs Thatcher, who tend to think interest rates should always be lower than they are.

Certainly the upper revising chamber, the House of lords, should be able to delay legislation and ask the elected House to reconsider. If we like we can build such self-limitation around certain policies, as we have done with decarbonisation targets, though I think too much of that becomes simply a form of virtue advertising unless it represents a wide national consensus. Parliament cannot bind its successors, after all. The same with other laws: if we like: we can make it difficult to change certain protections for citizens (or the state), and call them basic law or 'rights' if we choose as we did in 1688: but the democracy must be able win out in the end.

The purpose of it all will be to ensure that we retain those ideals, beneficent myths though they may sometimes be, which make us proud. We are a country with low violence, an unarmed police force, a pride in our reputation for tolerance and fairness and a half-way truly remarkable story of successful integration of massive new communities. The principal reason for regaining control over our borders, and over other aspects of our society where law-breaking seems to be increasing, is to retain popular allegiance to a society where those quieter virtues have a chance of thriving.

And we must be brave enough to say, yes, our demographic pressures do require further controlled immigration, required by us, and not imposed on us.

Security also means, trading nation though we always have been and will remain, that we should be a little cynical about the ways of international 'rules based' capitalism and free trade in the world of Caesars, big and small, some of them in charge of massive economies. Certain companies of direct defence relevance we must protect. In a world where big Caesars play the game according to their own rules, we must sometimes use protection a little more widely ourselves. What other nations would have allowed the sale abroad of companies like Deep Mind, or Arm? We should make ourselves a somewhat harder target for predators in this as in so many other fields. We should not be the only one keeping to the rules.

We need also institutions which help us do difficult things. Parliament in its origins and for most of its history battled away to stop the King – the executive government – taking too much money from the people. Of

course, for much of its history only people with the money to be taken formed the parliament. But that essential balance is needed. No country can govern itself safely if all restraint on spending is blamed on a magically important but strangely wicked department of state called 'The Treasury'. The Treasury is now a feeble counterbalance to the myriad pressure groups and clamorous rights-claiming lobbies which besiege parliament and are represented in parliament. The House of Commons has become a megaphone for pressure groups calling for more spend; the House of Lords is worse.

But out there somewhere, in their millions, are people who want to keep their own money, to help their own families, to achieve their own dreams: how is their voice institutionally to be magnified? Here perhaps is the new – or renewed – role for the reformed House of Lords we need. Far from being the only subject upon which it cannot exercise its power, a reformed Upper House should be designed to reflect the fiscal needs of the nation as a whole in the face of the unstoppable growth of the multifarious spending lobbies in the Commons.

All these hard messages must be shown to be for something greater, for all of us: a nation again secure in its defence, its borders, its self-esteem, and its economic fundamentals, proud of its multiculturalism, and not ashamed of its history.

The leaders we need to find must recognise that such a nation must be built from the bottom up as well as led well from the top. Good ministers have begun such work: local mayors are just a start of the decentralisation we need to increase if we are to release local energies.

Local pride (and sometimes local disasters) should be based on local taxes, visible and painful and locally accountable. I once tried to invent such a tax, so painful that central government would be willing to leave it to local communities to control it. My tax was a bad one, which would never have won acceptance as sufficiently fair: the poll tax. The principle was right: rebuild localism by giving them their own tax, widely based and visible, and let them fight it out with their own electorates. Part of the property tax, and part of the income tax, maybe, but with so little accompanying central grant that accountability is clear.

And remember Roger Scruton. The beauty of our land at its best – urban and rural – is a large part of our affection for it. There is plenty to do in limiting absurd environmental micro-planning: but do not throw away the green and pleasant land in the process. But have the courage also to build the new infrastructure for the future. We have relied for too long on the post war and 1950s achievements in building our electrical grid, our road system, our power stations. They did not destroy our national aesthetic with their pylons and cooling towers and motorway system and their new reservoirs at Kielder and Rutland and Chew Valley: nor need we.

Get the old property owning democracy slogan to work again. To own your own home is still by far the most powerful source of widespread national stake holding. Rebuild your Aristotelian middle class: and be realistic that that means a decent degree of inheritance. No more powerful

motive for work exists for most people than seeking to help their children or their friends. To try to design a society where the ideal is to work only for oneself and for the present is to fall into a disastrous misreading of human nature and to give the dominant position in society to the selfish individual and to the present tense over family, community and belief in the future.

We need to revitalise our support of society's little platoons, in Burke's famous phrase. Small business; local societies of every shape and size; voluntary organisations; clubs and pubs and self-sustaining communities. All of them must show respect, of course, to national law, and more than that to our wider cultural norms, but the centre should do only what it needs to do, and do that efficiently.

Communities attached to bigger communities and bearing allegiance to national symbols: the message is surely one of a patriotism based not on too much waving of the flag, but of feeling pride when we see it, in its proper place.

But it is the institutions also that bind these little platoons into workable national co-operation that need our equal attention. A collection of warring separate villages – villages built now on the sorting power of the algorithms deployed by the social media technologies as well as by more traditional bonding of ethnic, religious or class solidarity -will not generate the national consensus for hard action which we need. Simple communitarianism cannot by itself create the balance of local and national we need.

Indeed, during my lifetime, I have watched the sad spectacle of the quite touching communitarianism of the counter culture of the 1960s and 70s demonstrating the truth that the 'back to the earth' movement of the then hippies ended in warring, bitterly opposed cults and conspiracists.

The centre has also to hold, if the health of the little platoons, and the civilised social bonding they can produce, is to be secure.

The central state – far too extended now and therefore incompetent in meeting many of the objectives it has laid upon itself, should diminish and do what it has to do well. It should take care to preserve those institutions which foster free central allegiance – not least our non-political monarchy, an effective traditional symbol of unity.

The national rhetoric should extract the best from our traditional beneficent myths: emphasising our allegiance to a nation not built on ethnicity or religion, but on respect for equal laws, fairness, tolerance of diversity, and also a willingness to be strong when challenged. Contempt for *Caesars*, big or small, and respect for hard won equalities among citizens, and a welcome to all those who by invitation come, so long as they respect the culture to which they are coming; these sentiments exist, and represent our best qualities.

We need to recognise, however, that our self-image has to be real: no longer my childhood's *Our Island Story*, let alone *Our Empire Story*, but a long post- imperial Britain adjusting to the arrival and acceptance of peoples who came here voluntarily, both from that former empire and elsewhere,

because they saw something they rightly valued in our traditions which they wanted to share.

On the basis of telling all our people the necessary truths about what is needed now in difficult action to make a secure future for everyone, we can, with serious and brave leadership make this medium sized, but culturally very rich nation, a renewed success, and face down the impostors of both hard right and revolutionary left.

Chapter 11

There are allies for conservatives for this endeavour. It would be a most unconservative thing to claim that we have a monopoly of wisdom. National community comes from free discussion, argument and hard won consensus. So, there are close, and more distant, allies if we are humble enough to look for them.

For example, Lord Glasman and his Blue Labour campaign. What conservative could argue with this?

> *"The politics of the common good takes a paradoxical form by assuming that tension and conflict are necessary for a common life; that pluralism is the basis of solidarity, that inheritance shapes the future; that tradition is necessary for modernity; that cooperation is necessary for competition; in short, that the old is part of the new."* (Blue Labour; The Politics of the Common Good, 2022 p40).

There are plenty of others on the Labour side who know that we have to take back control of our own laws if we are to win consent for those laws from our own democracy. They know also that the purpose of doing so is not to give space to the unacceptable right or left, but to pre-empt them. We may well choose generous laws; but we will not assent to generosity forced upon us. Some on the Labour side are far-seeing enough to want the present Conservative Party to do rather better than it is doing. They watch a party in danger of failing in its historic duty to exclude the hard right, and are alarmed because such a failure would in the end make their job of excluding the hard left more difficult too.

That is not to say that the inheritors of the tradition of Ernie Bevin will not have sometimes very sharp battles with those who quote Edmund Burke; but both of them are far nearer to each other than either is to those who make the atomised individual king, or who follow the flag of some final political solution.

There will be allies too from among those who fought valiantly for the cause of liberal economics when it was a doctrine endorsed only by a fringe minority, as was the case when the Institute for Economic Affairs seemed a wild intellectual outlier in the 1960s and 1970s. But there are plenty now who can see that the pendulum swung too far once it began to move. And there is, I suspect (though I am always suspicious of those who claim to know what the people want) a very widespread desire to live in a country more effective, more proud, less boastful perhaps, and more united in underlying beliefs: but above all more truthful about what needs to be done if we and our descendants are to be safe.

What is needed, if I am right, is the skill to articulate a national doctrine from which, if we can reestablish adequate consensus around it, power and energy can be derived to do the very hard things which now need to be done. It will mean saying 'no' to many powerful pressure groups. It will mean finding confidence to articulate beliefs which are based on truth, but also on hope.

We will have to see off the dangerous would-be Caesars of the hard right, separating from them some of the difficult actions they claim to have made their own, and destroying their pretension that their extremism represents any kind of real majority in our country. The decent, but tough-minded right has to stand up and see off the old enemy of the unacceptable right.

We need not just rhetoric better than theirs, but a sense of an underlying strong but civilised message which requires a voice. It will not come from one man or woman, but from the amplification of many voices. But it does need courage in leadership, and stubborn persistence. Because the things which need saying are pretty clear, I have little doubt, as the precipice comes nearer, that we will find those who will say them. When at first they are not believed, they will need to go on saying them. And if they are telling the truth, however unpalatable, in the end they will be believed, and we will find that the nation will let its leaders do what must be done, though it may be only just in time.

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