New Britain
Hard politics

Plus
Salmond’s blind leap
JOHN KERR

Israel: last chance for a two-state solution?
HENRY SIEGMAN

On feminism
JAGDISH BHAGWATI

The genius dead at 26
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Another country

Britain has become a different country in just a decade. That is the message of the census, which showed the largest growth in the population since the survey began 200 years ago. Politicians are in flight from the implications. No party has addressed the five serious questions arising from this change, as Philip Collins argues (p26). The first is where parties should seek their voters, given that the old politics of identity, based on religion or class, have broken down. The second is what to do about immigration; public concern is high, although the youthfulness of the new arrivals makes easier the third problem, the ageing of the population. But immigration exacerbates the fourth, the pressure on housing and the end, for many, of the dream of owning a home. The fifth challenge—of how to reshape the economy to compete in the modern world—is arguably easier during such change (although Michael Gove will not draw much comfort from Peter Kellner’s poll, p18).

As Philip Collins argues, Britain has accommodated the changes with astonishing calm, although the rise of UKIP is a sign of unease. And the speed of change is forcing politicians finally to face those hard questions. A year ago, we ran on the cover of Prospect the question “Tax the aged?”, which leading politicians described to us at the time as a taboo they dared not break; now, it is at the centre of Westminster debate.

The bigger question is one that confronts any country of more than one ethnic group, whether that has been its character throughout its history or acquired through immigration: how to define the rights of minorities clearly and generously enough to allow people to live in peace. Few get it right, and not quickly; that is one theme of this issue of Prospect, which includes arguments from those who have dedicated years to trying to broker peace or shape a constitution. The “bad peace” of Sri Lanka is the subject of Meera Selva’s report (p42), while Marc Weller, a professor in international law who was a UN senior mediation expert, asks whether peace has come at the expense of justice (p46). Henry Siegman (p38), executive director of the American Jewish Congress for more than 15 years, and a close observer of two decades of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, asks whether there is a last chance to save the “two-state solution.”

Even in Britain, questions of minority and regional rights are hardly settled. David Goodhart, who has written extensively on multiculturalism, argues (p30) that the appearance of harmony conceals separation. John Kerr (p32), former head of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who orchestrated the drafting of the European Union constitution, warns Scotland that if it becomes independent, it cannot assume that joining the EU would be easy, quick or cheap.

Such questions will only increase as people move around the globe. Politicians who dare to confront them now will find that their parties survive in that fluid future. Those who fail will find that their voters leave them—or that whole regions do.
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Reduce suffering and save the world—I’m making you all go veggie

Here is my first decree, as Ruler of the World: we’re all going vegetarian, folks! Well, if you’re one of the small proportion of the world’s population who can’t get enough to eat without meat—perhaps you live in an area where not much grows except grass, on which you graze animals—you can still have some. And if the scientists work out how to grow meat in the lab, maybe that will be acceptable too. Otherwise, a plant-based diet is the direction for the whole planet.

Why? For four powerful reasons: climate change, human health, increasing available food, and reducing animal suffering.

First, no other single step could do nearly as much, in a short period of time, to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and buy us time for saving the planet from catastrophic climate change. A few years ago, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) released a report showing that livestock are responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than the entire transport sector—cars, trucks, ships, trains and planes. That raised some eyebrows. But a more recent study by Robert Goodland and Jeff Anhang found that the FAO report underestimated, by a factor of three, the contribution methane emitted by livestock will make to climate change during the critical next 20 years, when we are likely to pass the point of no return; that is, the point at which climate change will spiral out of control, making the scorching summer that the United States had last year, and Australia is having right now, the average—and the above average summers far worse.

Getting rid of meat, especially beef because cattle are the biggest methane producers, is something we can do much more rapidly, and at much lower cost, than trying to replace all the coal-burning power stations with non-fossil fuel alternatives.

That brings me to the second reason: there really is no cost at all to getting rid of most meat production. On the contrary, it is a benefit. After my decree comes into effect, we will see a decline in cancer and heart disease. Many studies have shown that meat is a factor in these diseases, but the clincher came last year in a large study led by Professor Frank Hu of Harvard University and published in the Archives of Internal Medicine. The headline on a New York Times report of the study summarised its findings succinctly: “More red meat, more mortality.”

The third reason is that food will also become more plentiful. At the moment we are feeding about 750m tons of grain to animals and wasting most of its food value in the process, because when we eat the edible parts of the animals to whom we feed it we get back only a small percentage of the food value of that grain. The same is true of protein-rich soybeans, and the majority of exports of these beans go to feed animals. Ending factory farming will dramatically lower food prices, making it easier for the poor to buy the food they need to survive and reducing the pressure on our forests, which are now being cleared to make more grazing land.

So far, I haven’t even mentioned the benefit to animals. That’s the last, but not least, reason for the world to stop raising animals for food. Since the majority of the more than 60bn animals killed for food each year are factory farmed, they are regarded as mere machines for converting cheap grains and soybeans into more expensive flesh. No concern is given to their welfare and they lead utterly miserable lives. When we stop eating them, that vast universe of suffering will come to an end.

So my first decree will change many things. Perhaps ceasing to depend on the slaughter of animals will even contribute to making us kinder and gentler people—but everything else I have been saying is factual, and that, I admit, is speculation.

With whatever energy I have left from promulgating my first decree, I’ll end extreme poverty by developing a global welfare safety net. The world is wealthy enough to ensure that everyone has enough to eat, sanitation and safe drinking water, can send their kids to school, and get some basic health care. It wouldn’t take much, maybe 1 or 2 per cent of GDP from the rich nations, if we did it effectively. Since I rule the world, there won’t be a problem of obstruction from corrupt leaders who are not interested in the welfare of their people. Sorry, Robert Mugabe and Teodoro Obiang, your time is up.

Peter Singer is a moral philosopher and professor of bioethics at Princeton University
**Prospect recommends**

**Five things to do this month**

### Art

**Quentin Blake: Drawn by Hand**

**Fitzwilliam Museum, from 12th February**

It is impossible not to have your day improved by looking at a drawing by Quentin Blake. It is that bounding anarchic line, which with a quick twist and a turn summons characters as unpredictable and delightful as Mr Magnolia, or Mrs Armitage and her faithful hound, Breakspear. There is joy, but never sentimentality; gleeful cruelty but no meanness.

Blake—best known for his alliance with Roald Dahl, for whom he brought to life an exotic cast of characters animal, human and vegetable—is now 80. Amongst other celebratory exhibitions, this show in Cambridge looks at the work he has produced over the past decade: book illustrations, etchings, lithographs and drawings, and also the increasing number of works done for buildings and outdoor spaces, including hospitals, the sides of buses and on scaffolding, perhaps most extensively across the front of King’s College Cambridge in 2009. Blake was a student of English at Downing College, Cambridge, before studying life-drawing at Chelsea School of Art, so this is the university’s chance to cheer their famous alumnus.

*Emma Crichton-Miller*

### Film

**I Wish**

**On release from 22nd February**

Like the boys in Truffaut’s *400 Blows* and Ken Loach’s *Kes*, the Japanese siblings in Hirokazu Koreeda’s *I Wish* are often on the move through city streets. Yet they’re also juvenile technocrats, wielding mobile phones like an extra digit. Koichi and younger brother Ryunosuke each live with a parent—but marital separation has put them many miles apart. Koichi yearns for all four to live together again. Maybe, when the bullet train links their two cities, the miracle will happen.

The brothers are played by real siblings; their encounters have the authentic offbeat rhythm of intimates. Koreeda neither fetishises nor sentimentalises childhood. His young protagonists have dignity and depth; when disappointment comes, they deal with it. Yet *I Wish* also takes you suddenly, magically, into the wonder of a child’s contemplation or excitement.

Koreeda’s films often deal with loss. His finest, *After Life* (1998), is set in a kind of municipal limbo, where the newly dead await transition to Heaven, preparing their own celestial happiness by recreating their most blissful memory for eternity. It’s a lovely metaphor for film and it’s what he does here, too, capturing the moment.

*Francine Stock*

### Exhibition

**Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind**

**British Museum, from 7th February**

What is the oldest art in the world like? Not “primitive,” is the answer that emerges from the skilful sculptures and drawings in this new exhibition. Looking at a sculpture of a bison, found in Russia, you register just how old it is only when you read that it is carved from the tusk of a mammoth, extinct for 10,000 years.

The exhibition tells two stories. The first begins 40,000 years ago when humans began to make art. As well as an installation showing the cave paintings of Chauvet and Lascaux (recently stars of Werner Herzog’s film, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*), there are examples of abstract art: a half-man, half-lion figure from paleolithic Germany, and fertility symbolised by a woman with emphatic hips. Picasso owned two replicas of this “Venus” and drew on it for his 1933 sculpture *Femme au Vase*. This is where the exhibition’s second thread picks up, including works by Henry Moore, Matisse and Mondrian among others, and showing how much the modern masters had in common with the very earliest art.

*Laura Marsh*

### Ballet

**Marguerite and Armand**

**Royal Opera House, 12th, 15th and 21st February**

A quintuple bill at the Royal Ballet is a rare occurrence. And the latest come-all-ye at Covent Garden has one major wow factor: the dream team of Tamara Rojo and Sergei Polunin. Having danced in Ashton’s *Marguerite and Armand* to great acclaim in October 2011, they return for three farewell performances. Now that Rojo has defected to the rival English National Ballet and Polunin has walked out of the Royal Ballet to pursue his own—so far unchartable—career, this will be the last opportunity to see two stars of different generations dancing in their natural home, the stage at Covent Garden.

The ballet was originally choreographed by Frederick Ashton for Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev in 1968 as a vehicle for their unique partnership. Based on the novel *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas, fils—which also inspired Verdi’s *La Traviata*—the tragic essence is distilled in some of Ashton’s most intensely dramatic choreography. Set to Liszt’s *Piano Sonata in B Minor* and just over 30 minutes long, it is a demanding work for both dancers, especially the role of Marguerite. One of the greatest dancers of her generation, Rojo can convey all the elements required of the role, from realisation of mortality through romantic hesitancy to abandoned passion. Polunin, at 22 the youngest dancer to have tackled the role, provides the perfect foil for her in his youthful arrogance and new-minted emotional maturity.

*Neil Norman*
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A winning team?

George Osborne is beefing up his political team, snaffling all the best policy wonks even as Downing Street is criticised for not having a strong enough political voice in its policy unit. His latest recruit is Neil O’Brien from Policy Exchange, a think tank which has risen in its influence on government. Osborne noticed how Gordon Brown used the Council of Economic Advisers to boost the number of political appointees, and is effectively creating his own policy unit. David Cameron, in contrast, still has a team of civil servants, many of whom worked for Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, to the irritation of many Tory MPs.

One quiet French alliance

When Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced new construction plans around Jerusalem (see p44), William Hague’s first call was to Laurent Fabius, France’s foreign minister. As the foreign secretary made clear at his end of year party at Lancaster House, he feels a personal sense of urgency about a Middle East deal. While waiting to see whether President Barack Obama would shrug off flak from Congress and appoint Chuck Hagel as Secretary of Defence, the UK-French conversations have prompted what seems a new European initiative in the region. French officials say that relations with Hague, whom they like, have been helped by Cameron’s decision to take on Britain’s wider disputes with Brussels himself.

Out of Afghanistan

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, in Washington in mid-January to discuss Nato’s exit—he wants a significant force to stay—may have a new target: British and US military. Britain this year will pull out 3,800 of its 9,000 soldiers from Helmand, and the Ministry of Defence is embroiled in a debate over whether, if it takes out the most valuable kit first, such as mine-resistant vehicles worth £700,000 each, that will leave soldiers more vulnerable.

Meanwhile, the US’s Government Accountability Office has put its cost of withdrawal at $57bn. The US has 750,000 big military items worth more than $36bn there, and it can cost up to $150,000 to bring one vehicle home—hence the temptation to leave some there. The US, which has agreed exit routes through Central Asia, will not want to rely on Pakistan, which reopened its border to Nato only in July. New turmoil there hardly makes that route attractive—as Karzai knows.

The Office

Tension between ministers and civil service officials has extended to the matter of office space. It has been noted with amused anticipation by political insiders that the office of Jeremy Heywood, the Cabinet Secretary, is larger than that of Francis Maude, the Conservative minister in charge of civil service reform. It has become the fashion to say that Yes, Minister was a documentary not a comedy; this might take more than one episode to sort out.

Pale, male and stale

An inspired appointment at the British Science Association, where Imran Khan takes over as chief executive in April. Khan, who fought cuts to the UK science budget while director of the Campaign for Science & Engineering, has spoken out against the “pale, male and stale” culture of the research establishment. The 27-year-old campaigner, who replaces 50-something Roland Jackson, may liven things up; he once posed as Mr December in a “geek calendar” to raise money for libel law reform.

Immortal-in-waiting?


On message

The Christmas card from the Peterson Institute was especially succinct this year. The clarity of thinking—and of goals—encouraged in that institution was reflected in the economy of the message printed upon it, which read simply “Peace on Earth.” But if that is the first policy statement by Adam Posen, the new director of the Washington-based think tank, fresh from the Bank of England’s Monetary Policy Committee, it belies his record as a cheerful controversialist (see Letters, p10).
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The growth solution
Adam Posen has a number of useful ideas, some of which I articulated quite some time ago (“What next?” January). Much of the British policy elite, irrespective of the political aisle they occupy, have been obsessed with trying to apportion blame for what happened in 2008. It has long been time to move on, and get growth back to our probable underlying trend of 2.5 per cent. We don’t need to be stuck with low growth as post-crisis activity in some other countries shows.

Jim O’Neill, Chairman, Goldman Sachs Asset Management

Adam Posen is to be commended for fresh thinking on how to revitalise a faltering UK economy even though he seems to underestimate how little room there is for fiscal policy manoeuvre. Particularly welcome are his proposals for far-reaching competition and increasing the flow of credit to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Much more questionable are his suggestions that the UK should now move towards fiscal stimulus and large infrastructure projects. Such an abrupt U-turn would run the risk of losing the UK’s hard-won credibility in the financial markets that would not be easy to regain.

Desmond Lachman, American Enterprise Institute

Not me, guv
Ian Blair is right to highlight problems facing elected police commissioners (“Policing politics,” January). When MPs and peers raise concerns about dramatic cuts in police numbers or stations we’ll no doubt be told that this is down to commissioners—yet another example of the government passing the buck. So perhaps the policy wasn’t drafted on the back of an envelope as it seemed but in Tory central office under the heading “Not me, guv.”

Angela Smith, shadow Home Office minister, House of Lords

Securing Israel’s future
Anyone who has lived or worked in Israel, or with a sense of Jewish history, will understand the feeling of insecurity—and the consequent need for military strength—expressed in Ehud Barak’s article (“Stiff-necked people,” January).

The issue remains: how can Israel achieve the secure place it deserves in the region? Without commenting on points of detail in the article, I would highlight first that the Saudi-inspired Arab Peace Initiative remains a major missed opportunity, and that Israel’s failure to send a clearer signal of interest in this initiative continues to raise questions in the minds of those in the region who have a shared interest in long-term stability. Second, that while Israeli doubts about the implications of the “Arab Spring” are understandable, surely it would have made more sense to express understanding for and even sympathy with the search for greater dignity and participation which triggered the upheavals, and to say, however provisionally, that should this lead to a region in which Israel is not the only democracy that would be a good thing.

Sir Tom Phillips, former British ambassador to Israel (2006-2010)

I was disappointed to read in your January editorial a description of Israel’s decision to build new dwellings near Jerusalem, as being “egregiously predatory.” I am well aware that the default position of the media in this country is hostile to Israel, but such inflammatory language goes too far. You condemn Israel, while making no similar condemnation of the Palestinians whose application to the UN is contrary to the Oslo accords that they and Israel signed. Why do you unquestioningly condemn the only country in the Middle East that has a true democracy, and whose citizens, regardless of race, religion or colour have complete freedom?

Geoffrey Bernstein, Middlesex

Aid works
Ian Birrell points to significant economic progress in the developing world as a reason for why foreign aid is now an outdated approach to development (“Target inequality,” December). He is right to highlight inequality as a growing problem but ignores the role smart aid is playing in addressing it.

Much of the success in improving the lives of the world’s poorest in recent years can be directly attributed to aid. For instance, government aid and private sector contributions are providing anti-retroviral treatments to over 4 million people who wouldn’t be alive today without them and who contribute to their countries’ economic growth.

Joe Cerrell, Europe director, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Premiership policies
Peter Kellner’s [polling exercise] is fascinating, but probably reaches unreliable conclusions (“It’s a policy knockout,” January). Each of the 16 policy options was tested against only four of the other competitors and the outcome could have been very different had they come up against other opponents.

It would have been more laborious but more convincing if the competition had been modelled on consulting had been modelled on competition had been modelled on regulation bear any resemblance to “statutory control of the media.” Slippery-slope arguments, which are essentially conservative, should always be viewed with suspicion.

Alan Bailey, London

Angela’s ashes
Katinka Barysch (“The Genius of Merkel,” January) forgets that Merkel is running the most divisive European campaign for many a decade. I will be delighted if I am proven wrong, but sadly I fear I will not: Merkel will be remembered as a politician who for expediency squandered the good name and faith that post-war German politicians strived hard to create; yet another blinkered conservative politician who sacrificed long-term European social cohesion and peace for a few pieces of silver.

Kostas, via the Prospect website

Don’t blame capitalism
Antony Beevor, in his insightful and wide-ranging essay, appears to lose his way as he moves towards his conclusions (“Europe’s long shadow,” December). The capitalist ‘system’ is indeed unstable, and attempts to stabilise it will only inhibit creativity. When the history of our current crisis comes to be written, it will tell of out-of-control government spending and deficits, of vote-seeking politicians, of crony relationships between government and cartels. And, it will tell of greed from some executives in the finance industry whose companies were either “too big to fail,” or who were allowed to indulge in risky speculation with no personal downside, but it will not conclude that the “moral crisis of capitalism” was to blame.

Tony Percy, USA

Leveson liberalism
I am somewhat shocked by your editorial knee-jerk hostility to the Leveson report (“The Browning verdict”). Intelligent liberals (JS Mill, for example) have always allowed for state intervention when needed to stop liberty degenerating into licence or anarchy. Neither the Leveson nor the Ed Miliband versions of statutory backing for independent regulation bear any resemblance to “statutory control of the media.” Slippery-slope arguments, which are essentially conservative, should always be viewed with suspicion.

Alan Bailey, London

The Browning verdict
The quotation in the title of Bill Emmott’s piece “The best is yet to come” (December) should really read “The best is yet to be,” shouldn’t it? Robert Browning would not be pleased with Emmott. Otherwise I like Prospect.

David Allbrook, Australia

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The horrifying tragedy that befell the young Indian woman Jyoti Singh, who was brutally gang raped in a New Delhi bus in December, and later died in a Singapore hospital, has led to spontaneous outrage. That Indian women face terrifying risk when they venture into public spaces, as they must do in cities and towns and will do even in villages, is a fact that few had appreciated earlier; this is no longer so.

Nor must one discount the fact that the somnolent, indifferent and at times hostile Indian political leadership in New Delhi has been forced into awareness and action. One would have thought that Sonia Gandhi, a woman totally in charge of the Congress party (India has astonishingly backed into the old Soviet model, where the party chairman is the real boss and the prime minister has no real power) would make an immediate address to the nation, much as President Barack Obama did with passion and tears after the shocking slaughter of young children in Newtown, Connecticut. As a female leader, she should not have taken almost two weeks to speak to the women of India. She needs to abandon the “culture of silence” which she has long embraced.

But the reactions have varied greatly—much like the diverse perceptions of an incident filmed in Rashomon by Akira Kurosawa, from short stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa. They range from thoughtless calls for drastic punishment for rape to expressions of sentiments by men that betray the deeply offensive cultural attitudes of even educated and “liberal” men towards women, which must be confronted.

Perhaps the most widely shared reaction, inevitable in such cases not just in India but everywhere, was that draconian punishment was in order. Many seeking revenge or believing that deterrence increases with the magnitude of punishment reacted by demanding capital punishment for the accused in this and future rapes. Capital punishment has, however, become rare; and even in India, liberal opinion has swung increasingly to endorsement of the celebrated dissent in 1982 against capital punishment by former chief justice Prafullachandra Bhagwati (transparency requires me to disclose that he is my brother).

But it is hard for politicians to take this enlightened position. Michael Dukakis, a US presidential candidate in 1988, fell a victim to his anti-capital punishment views when asked in a televised debate whether he would oppose capital punishment even if his wife was raped and murdered. He should have said, which he did not, that though he might have wanted to wring the neck of the rapist with his bare hands, a civilized state cannot do this.

Some have even suggested public hanging which would take us back to the medieval displays that we have fortunately banished from civilized societies. Others have demanded castration. That is a mutilation that modern societies cannot accept though unfortunately some countries such as Saudi Arabia continue even today to indulge barbarian practices and will cut off the hands and feet of thieves.

But if these demands, expressed in the heat of the moment, are to be rejected, India can certainly profit from enhanced enforcement and forensic advances. Assaulted women must be assisted by female police officers whose numbers are woefully small and must be greatly augmented. DNA samples must be collected.

Instead of cases dragging on for years, fast-track courts must be set up for rape cases, though the fast track must nonetheless not be so rushed that the police and prosecutors are under pressure to get convictions and will therefore fabricate evidence and force confessions that lead to unjust convictions. Remember the case of the Central Park jogger in New York, who was assaulted and raped on 19th April 1989, where the pressure on the police to find and convict the culprits, driven by public outrage, led to five teenagers from Harlem being convicted on the basis of false confessions obtained after lengthy interrogations. Later in 2002, these convictions were set aside when a rapist already serving a life sentence for murder confessed to the crime.
I hope that cooler heads will prevail on these rape-related issues of prevention and redress. But the attitude of men who reacted adversely to the female protestors, and also of the victim who told her mother “I am sorry” as she lay dying, reveal a culture that lets men indulge sexism and encourages women to assume guilt for prejudice directed at them. This wider focus is equally important if India is to reduce, if not eradicate, the widespread phenomenon of gender inequality.

Thus, a Congress member of parliament Abhijit Mukherjee, who is the son of the current president of India, described the protesting young women as “dented and painted”—a comment he later retracted—implying that they were dolled-up prostitutes and also damaged goods. This reminded me of the time many years ago when I was on a panel at the Indian Planning Commission with a high-level bureaucrat who remarked that scarce foreign exchange should not be spent on importing lipstick. So, instead of demolishing his argument on economic grounds, I responded: “I must tell the women in the audience that, even as my fellow panelist says that foreign exchange should not be wasted on lipstick, I can smell the Brylcreem in his hair!” What is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander—but then men would have to treat women as equals.

These attitudes are carried by men into employment practices in India, where women are often passed over in favour of less accomplished men. As it happens, in American universities which offer tenured posts, I often go out of my way in appointment committees to say that women are handicapped, in a way that should be taken into account, because the tenure decision comes up far too soon when they are often having babies and cannot do as much research as men.

But the attitude of women, in India and elsewhere, to accept blame without a semblance of justified guilt, also needs a corrective. I remember two teenage nieces telling my wife that she was responsible for my success: that behind every successful man was a woman. They thought they were being feminists. But they were not. They should have turned this around and said: in front of every woman is a successful man blocking her way!

Women really have to be careful to assert their rights. Sometimes they promote the wrong role models by taking the easy way out, piggybacking on successful men and sacrificing their autonomy. Can we really condone, for example, a woman who abandons her career and buries herself instead in her husband’s career, or a woman who becomes the director of a university programme which she is not qualified for but is part of her father’s fiefdom? The men are surely to blame; but equally so are the women, who should know better.

We know enough today about how gender discrimination is not just bad in itself but also deprives us of the benefits from engaging half of humanity into gainful employment—often the better half. Once, I was in Finland as a member of a UN Group of Eminent Persons and President Tarja Halonen had supplied each of us with the services of a foreign service officer. When I asked the president why all of them were women, she said that women candidates were so successful that they had to introduce an affirmative action programme to bring some men into the foreign service. My amused reaction was that this showed why we men had to suppress women to date: we simply could not compete with them on equal terms.

If the tragic rape case finally focuses our attention on the wider cultural factors in India and the ways in which they insidiously undermine the quest for gender equality and fulsome respect for women, the young victim’s death will have served a larger purpose.

Jagdish Bhagwati is University Professor of economics, law and international affairs at Columbia University. His latest book is “India’s Tryst with Destiny” (Collins)

**THE PROSPECT THINK TANK COLUMN**

**Really, we’re in it together**

The richest have been hit hardest, but yes, it hurts them less, says Paul Johnson

At the start of the 1980s we experienced a deep recession. Unemployment soared to more than 3m—12 per cent of the workforce. During the following decade benefit levels were cut, earnings rose very fast especially for higher earners, and tax rates were cut for those on top incomes. Inequality grew at an unprecedented rate. By the end of that decade, on almost any measure, the UK was a much more unequal society than at the start. To have claimed that we were “all in it together” would have been fatuous.

Since 2008 we have experienced a much deeper and more prolonged recession than we did in the 1980s. Output fell by more and has still not recovered its pre-recession levels. Household incomes have fallen by more than at any time in many decades.

But the rest of the story is very different. We can debate exactly what we mean by “all in it together,” but 2010/11 saw the biggest fall in income inequality in the last 50 years while tax and benefit changes have hit the richest harder than any other income group.

Perhaps the most important feature of the last four years has been the relatively modest growth in unemployment which at 8 per cent is considerably lower than in was even in the early 1990s let alone the mid 1980s. Indeed employment levels have actually risen despite a loss of half a million public sector jobs. Whilst the unemployment rate is too high, we have—and given what has happened to national income—escaped much more lightly than we might have feared.

Those in work have seen their incomes squeezed. Earnings have risen less quickly than prices. That is probably closely related to the relative robustness in job numbers. Workers are cheaper to employ, so more are employed. The incomes of those in work have actually fallen relative to the incomes of those not in work. That is one of the arguments that the government is using to justify three years of below inflation rises in benefit levels. Since 2007, benefit rates have generally increased by 20 per cent whilst earnings levels have risen by just 10 per cent.

And for the first time in decades it doesn’t look as if those on high (or at least quite high) earnings have been insulated. Real earnings have been falling right across the distribution.

Put all this together and in 2010/11, the latest year for which we have data, income inequality fell by more than in any single year in the nearly 50 years for which comparable data has been available. Real incomes fell right across the income distribution but by less at the bottom (1 per cent at the 10th percentile) than at the middle (3 per cent at the median), and less at the middle than at the top (by 5 per cent at the 90th percentile).

What about government tax and benefit reforms? They surely have protected the rich and hit the poor?

Well, up to a point. If you take the full set of tax and benefit changes implemented or announced since the start of 2010 it is indeed true that those most dependent on benefits—the bottom third of the income distribution—will, by 2015, have lost more as a proportion of their income as a result of these changes than will those in much of the upper middle parts of the distribution. There have been, and will be, real cuts to benefit levels and entitlements for many working age people. For those earning below about £250,000 there have been rather few tax increases.

But the group affected most by the overall consolidation package—not just in terms of pounds, but also as a proportion of their...
income—has been the richest. Those in the top tenth of the income distribution have been hit by a combination of increases to income tax and national insurance contributions, restrictions to pension tax relief and withdrawal of child benefit. Estimates by IFS researchers suggest that households in the top tenth of the income distribution will have lost about 7 per cent of their income as a result of the consolidation package, compared with between 4 and 5 per cent for those in the bottom third of the distribution, and about 3 per cent on average overall.

So to a large extent we really are “all in this together”—at least to the extent that changes in income have been spread across this distribution. Of course the rich remain rich and the poor remain poor, and similar proportionate falls in income for each may be more painful for the poor. But in this particular sense this has been a remarkably equitable recession. Employment rates have stayed high. Earnings have fallen relative to benefits, and the long-run trend to greater earnings inequality appears to have stalled. The richest have seen some substantial tax rises.

Naturally the story is much more complex than that, even beyond acknowledging that many individuals will have become a lot better off while other have suffered unemployment and big income losses. Some groups have done better than others. In broad terms older groups have done better than younger groups. That is true of pensioners relative to those of working age. It is also true of those in their 40s and 50s relative to those in their 20s and 30s. And families with children have been hit much harder by the overall tax and benefit changes than those without children, though they were also the group to benefit most from the last government’s massive tax credit programme.

We are living through very difficult times. Household incomes are falling further and faster than at any time in half a century. And very many of us are in this together.

Paul Johnson is director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies

Rachel Wolf

Their real women problem

Conservatives are chasing the wrong votes

Commentators and politicians are convinced the Conservatives have a problem with women. They do—but not the one they think. The Conservatives spend too much time worrying about women like me—the professional, educated and careerist who form a tiny percentage of the population.

Instead it is the 50 per cent of women that form the lower middle and upper working class (C1 and C2 in polling terms) that should be keeping them up at night. Those women not only supported the Conservatives in 2010, they did so to a much greater extent than men of the same social background.

Since then, they have turned their backs.

There are two important facts to understand about women at the last election. First, whereas professional men were more likely to support the Conservatives than men of the same class. A third of C2 men supported Labour, and a third Conservative. If the Conservatives have anyone to thank for the 2010 election it is these women.

However, as polling provided by Ipsos Mori shows, these same female voters—C1 and C2—have lost faith in the Conservative party. Neither women from professional nor unskilled households have changed their voting intention significantly. In fact the former have become slightly more likely to vote Conservative as the Lib Dem vote share has imploded.

But amongst C1 and C2 women, the Conservatives do have a problem. They have lost a significant share of the vote and it has almost all gone to Labour. C2 women have doubled their likelihood of voting Labour, from 25 to 49 per cent.

This tells the Conservatives three important things. First, they do rely on women for success. Second, women are definitely not a uniform group. They don’t vote in the same way as one another, and women in the middle are moving electorally in the opposite direction from the most and least affluent. Third, the “women problem”—or the dramatic change in voting intention since the general election—is not among professionals.

But the Conservatives do not seem to realise this. They treat women as homogenous—there is a women’s minister and a special adviser who considers how to make policies “women friendly.” Their excessive concern with highly-educated women is also reflected in their worry about females on boards and the percentage of women selected as candidates.

Even when they do recognise policies that affect the majority of women, they are too often specifically “women’s issues”—childcare, or women’s pensions. But there is no evidence that this is why women supported the Conservatives so strongly at the last election, or why they have changed their minds.

What do we know about C1 and C2 households? National statistics tell us they are the classic “squeezed middle”—for whom relatively small changes in income make an enormous difference. We know that they spend significantly more of their income on food and fuel than wealthier families. They have significant transport costs and most will have a car.

They pay tax. They are the most likely group to be angry that benefits are rising at a faster rate than wages, and just as angry at MPs and bankers whom they consider to be ludicrously overpaid and quite possibly criminal. Very high proportions live outside London and the south east. A high proportion of the women will work, but very often part time. They are likely to be the people who do the vast bulk of shopping, managing the house and bringing up children. Their partner’s income will probably be more important than their own.

Their concerns, therefore, have little to do with “being women,” and a lot to do with fairness and making ends meet. Gideon Skinner, head of political research at Ipsos Mori, unsurprisingly finds that “C1/C2 women say the economy is the most important issue facing Britain, followed by unemployment—which they’re more likely to mention than ABs,” the professional middle classes.

To reach them, therefore, the Conservatives should have a strategy which is entirely targeted at these issues. It is not about women’s issues—it is about recognising that these women care most about “real world” problems of money and jobs. Anything else is a distraction, and they should ignore every newspaper and blog that tells them otherwise.

Rachel Wolf is the founder of the New Schools Network, an education think tank
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After the shambles of the West Coast rail franchise decision, the government sent for Richard Brown, chairman of Eurostar, to review the process. Earlier in the year, Tom Winsor, lawyer and former rail regulator, had advised ministers on changes to police employment rules, and Mary Portas, retail consultant and TV’s shopping guru, had reported on the future of the high street. These are what the media call “tsars,” a term imported from American business and politics. They are experts from outside government who are publicly appointed by ministers to advise them on policy. The scale of these appointments has only just been revealed in new research that we have conducted at King’s College, London.

Whitehall maintains no central record of them. Their use figures not at all in ministerial rhetoric about “opening up policy making” to outside influences in order to break the supposed monopoly of civil servants. Yet there have been over 260 such appointments since 1997, and the rate has grown sharply over the four administrations since then. The coalition appointed 90 or so in its first two years—more than it did special advisers.

They are a very mixed bunch. Many come from business, with public service a close second; these two categories provide about four-fifths. Others come from academia, law and politics. They are appointed as expert advisers, but only about half have professional expertise on the specific issues on which they are invited to advise. Others simply bring general managerial experience; ministers say they welcome their “fresh minds.”

There are also some who are already known advocates for a cause. They might advise on strategy (such as Andrew Dilnot’s review of social care) or on operations (Graham Aaronson advising on tackling tax avoidance), social affairs (Sir Alan Steer for Labour and Charlie Taylor for the coalition on school behaviour) or on a specific topic (David Quarmby’s inquest on transport resilience in winter 2010). They might focus on a government priority (Alan Milburn on social mobility) or a minister’s enthusiasm (Margaret Hodge’s appointment of Wayne MacGregor as Youth Dance Champion).

Some ministers are keener on tsars than others. Gordon Brown holds the record with 46 appointments, but others have appointed only a few. Ministers in the department for international development have made only one tsar appointment since 1997—Paddy Ashdown to review humanitarian response.

In many cases there is clearly a genuine desire to have authoritative, expert advice on a pressing topic that ministers cannot get from their officials. In others the hope is that the tsar may find a new consensus to address a contentious issue. But other appointments show more naked political purposes. That might be rivalry with another department (often the case with Treasury reviews by tsars), in which ministers seek “independent” support for a favoured policy, most commonly from tsars drawn from business—such as Adrian Beecroft’s advice on weakening employment protection, although that one backfired. They might be apparent compensation for former ministers (Richard Caborn, previously the sports minister, was made ambassador for the 2018 World Cup bid) or a bid for good public relations by appointing a “personality.”

Tsars are ministers’ personal choices. They are drawn from narrow circles because ministers chose who they know.
Michela Wrong

The curse of democracy

Kenyans are dreading the March elections

Kenya’s most famous satirist, who works under the nickname Gado, once published a wincingly sharp newspaper cartoon headlined: “Another Weapon of Mass Destruction.” Below it he drew a sealed ballot box.

There was a time when western aid ministers illustrated progress in Africa by listing how many countries had introduced multiparty elections. Kenya’s polls, due on 4th March, make Gado’s disturbing point: a democratic contest can hold such potential for nation-rending violence that citizens come to dread the day of the vote.

It’s hard to find anyone who is looking forward to the elections, in which Luo prime minister Raila Odinga, heading the CORD coalition, will contest the presidency against a Jubilee alliance formed by Uhuru Kenyatta, son of Kenya’s founding president, and William Ruto, a Kalenjin champion.

A national hunkering down is expected, with migrant workers heading to home districts, army troops recalled from Somalia, prison guards and wildlife rangers mustered to bolster the police, and the Kenyan diaspora and tourists keeping their distance. If you like your beaches and safari parks deserted, March is the time to book.

The anxiety is rooted in the memory of Kenya’s 2007 elections, after which at least 1,100 people died and hundreds of thousands were displaced. After that cataclysm, which shocked both Kenyans themselves and outsiders who had lazily labelled the country one of Africa’s “safe and reliable” destinations, two schools of thought emerged.

One declared that the country had run to the cliff’s edge, gazed at what lay smouldering below—a Côte d’Ivoire-style civil war—and learnt its lesson. The other saw the post-electoral violence as merely the first shot in a showdown between competing ethnic power blocs that had loomed since independence in 1963, with the decisive battle certain at the next poll.

Many Kenyans worked mightily to stop that second scenario becoming reality. A key achievement was the introduction of a new, devolved constitution which recognised that one of the reasons Kenya had become so polarised was that too much power rested with the president, who then played ethnic favourites with state resources.

Another radical step was an invitation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to try the instigators of the violence, an attempt to end decades of impunity for ethnic cleansing. The moment when Kenya’s television viewers saw some of the most powerful men in the land standing in the dock in the Hague marked a psychological turning point (see Sri Lanka, “A bad peace,” p42).

But the real fear goes far deeper, that the elections may expose the vacuum at the heart of what at times feels like a nation state in words alone. Kenya’s political parties are little more than vehicles of personal advancement for Ethnic Big Men. Millions of youngsters have become so disillusioned with the political system, they have not bothered to register to vote. The Mombasa Republican Council, a movement which does not recognise central government, is boycotting the poll. In 2008, there came a moment when the monopoly of violence in the country appeared to be held by hired ethnic militias, not the police or army. No Kenyan likes the thought of where that process could lead.

If all this were happening in Togo or Malawi, it would cause only quiet concern in foreign capitals. But this is Kenya, east Africa’s most dynamic economy and a regional gateway for the likes of Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan, and Kenya really matters. Once the country was prized by the west as a loyal cold war ally, now it is valued as a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism fanning out from Somalia. As Kenyans tussle with the curse of democracy, their friends abroad will be watching in trepidation, praying for the best.

Michela Wrong is the author of “It’s Our Turn To Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistleblower” (HarperCollins)
How Michael Gove compares with the leading politicians
Are they doing well or badly?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Leader</th>
<th>Net Support %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Gove as education secretary</td>
<td>-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Cameron as prime minister</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Miliband as Labour leader</td>
<td>-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Osborne as chancellor of the exchequer</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Clegg as Liberal Democrat leader</td>
<td>-54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education reform: what voters and parents really want, net support %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reform</th>
<th>All Support</th>
<th>Parents Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrap national curriculum; let schools decide what to teach</td>
<td>-47</td>
<td>-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase tax to get rid of university tuition fees</td>
<td>-31</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow private companies to take over failing schools</td>
<td>-19</td>
<td>-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base GCSE and A-level results entirely on exams</td>
<td>-15</td>
<td>-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow secondary school head teachers to cane pupils</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban teachers by law from going on strike</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make all state schools secular</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit university admissions from private schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restore grammar schools</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More punishment for truants’ parents</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban pupils from bringing in “unhealthy” food</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No “unhealthy” food allowed in state schools</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory school uniform for all years</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More traditional British history teaching</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove teachers who underperform</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban mobile phones in classrooms</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When designing examinations for qualifications, exam boards must consider ACCESSIBILITY and what is known as VALIDITY. In short, this is determining what the exam is actually designed to assess, which in turn ensures it’s measuring or encouraging learning in the right things.

Look at the table below. Are these questions testing arithmetic, reading comprehension, or both; and which is it you actually want to assess? Even a simple question can appear more, or less, ‘challenging’ depending on how you express it. Outcomes can be dramatically different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different types of elementary addition and subtraction problems</th>
<th>% of correct solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joe had 3 marbles; then Tom gave him 5 more marbles; how many marbles does Joe have now?</td>
<td>3 + 5 = 97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe had 8 marbles; then he gave 5 marbles to Tom; how many marbles does Joe have now?</td>
<td>8 – 5 = 88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe had 8 marbles; then he gave some marbles to Tom; now Joe has 3 marbles; how many marbles did he give to Tom?</td>
<td>8 – x = 3 78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe had some marbles; then Tom gave him 5 more marbles; now Joe has 8 marbles; how many marbles did Joe have in the beginning?</td>
<td>x + 5 = 8 67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe and Tom have 8 marbles altogether; Joe has 3 marbles; how many marbles does Tom have?</td>
<td>3 + x = 8 62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe has 8 marbles; Tom has 5 marbles; how many marbles does Joe have more than Tom?</td>
<td>8 – 5 = x 79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe has 8 marbles; Tom has 5 marbles; how many marbles does Tom have less than Joe?</td>
<td>8 – x = 5 78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe has 3 marbles; Tom has 5 more marbles than Joe; how many marbles does Tom have?</td>
<td>3 + 5 = 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe has 8 marbles; Tom has 5 marbles less than Joe; how many marbles does Tom have?</td>
<td>8 – 5 = 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe has 8 marbles; he has 5 more marbles than Tom; how many marbles does Tom have?</td>
<td>8 = 5 + x 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe has 3 marbles; he has 5 marbles less than Tom; how many marbles does Tom have?</td>
<td>3 = x – 5 38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Language in Mathematics Education: Research and Practice, Durkin and Shire (ed.), Open University Press, 1991

www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk
Perhaps that’s not surprising: polls have long found that few cabinet ministers beyond prime minister and chancellor have a strong reputation with the majority of voters who pay little day-to-day attention to politics. More striking are the figures for the parents of children at state schools—around 7m adults. One might expect them to have more definite views about the performance of Gove (right). Yet their verdict is virtually identical to the electorate as a whole: 23 per cent well, 36 per cent badly, 41 per cent don’t know.

One of Gove’s problems is that for state school parents to embrace his reforms enthusiastically, they would need to share his view that the system he inherited is broken. They don’t. As much as 83 per cent of primary school parents think their local primary schools “generally provide a good quality education”; the figure for secondary school parents about local secondary schools is slightly lower, but still a healthy 77 per cent. There is greater dissatisfaction among the public about state secondary schools nationally but, even here, a two-to-one majority thinks they provide a good education. Public satisfaction with primary schools nationally is even higher—a four-to-one majority is happy with their performance.

The story is the same for teachers’ pay. Just 14 per cent of parents think teachers “are generally overpaid.” Far more think they are underpaid (26 per cent) or “generally paid about the right amount” (46 per cent). It is, of course, perfectly possible to think teachers are generally paid about the right amount, and still to want the system reformed, so that pay increases go only to the better teachers, and are not spread around in the form of almost automatic annual increments. On this, parents are divided: 44 per cent support reform, “to provide an incentive for teachers to do better”, but almost as many, 38 per cent, want to keep the present system because “it is fair and prevents damaging competition between teachers at the same school.” Perhaps Gove should give higher priority to making it easier for head teachers to sack poor classroom teachers: this has the support of 71 per cent of parents.

While a Mr Chips returning to life would undoubtedly praise parents for many of their views, there is one issue on which he would surely be appalled by what they think. They agree, virtually unanimously, that schools should teach the “facts of life” about sex. As many as 65 per cent think this is a task for primary schools, while a further 27 per cent think it should be left until pupils are 12 or older. But only 4 per cent of parents think schools should steer clear of the subject and leave the job to parents.

Peter Kellner is president of YouGov
New year, new thinking

“There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world, and that is an idea whose time has come.” Victor Hugo

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Boris Johnson
From food, energy, national security to climate change, water is at the heart of all natural and man-made systems that underpin civilisation. It is more than an environmental issue alone. Without alternative or substitute, it holds the key to economic development and global stability.

Projected population growth, increasing urbanisation and accelerating industrialisation may soon create a water crisis. Unless large-scale re-invention and co-ordinated action is taken, the world faces something like a 40 per cent shortfall in fresh water supplies by 2030 – even in stable climate simulations that exclude major regional or global shocks.

The consequences of such a shortfall would be profound: widespread systemic failures, not solely in water but through linked systems, would create energy shortages, disruption to food supplies, and economic, social and political turmoil.

Projections of this kind should be treated with caution: they tend to discount future disruptive technologies, often because they are unimaginable, or deeply uncertain. The challenge is to identify these technologies early and map out how they can create systemic innovation to counter what otherwise may turn out to be systemic failure.

Against this background, if catastrophe is to be averted, where might we look for solutions?

Myriad new technologies are springing up throughout the water sector. Reverse and forward osmosis technologies have come a long way in recent years, as have thermal desalination techniques. Advanced sensors are now placed in reservoirs to provide real time readings on supply levels and alerts about minute changes in chemical make-up. Ultra-violet water treatment approaches make the decontamination of water safer, faster and less expensive. These developments are driving ‘smart water’ – embedding intelligence in water systems through a combination of sensors, automation, decision support and increased mobile device integration.

While water conservation and waste water treatment improvements will be critical, long-term sustainability will ultimately depend on tapping into the 97 per cent of the earth’s water that is trapped in salinity. At the moment, traditional large-scale desalination is simply too expensive for most economies. The associated costs would undermine business models across industries, from agriculture and manufacturing to energy.

The fundamental technologies and economics of clean water must be reinvented.

While it is too soon to identify with certainty which technologies will play the greatest role over the long term, some compelling scenarios are emerging. Among the most potentially disruptive is the convergence of nanotechnology in water treatment (which promises impressive efficiency gains), and brine mining technologies that can be used to extract valuable minerals from the dense, saline-rich by-products of desalination.

Figure 1: Key water-related nanotechnologies and relative space sizes

Cambridge IP research 2012
Could the desalination plant of the future produce both ample fresh water as well as considerable revenue through the large-scale mining of brine? The answer may be yes and there are signs that the essential technologies will be available sooner than many might think.

**Nanotech - innovation ahead of schedule?**
Growth in water-related nanotechnology investment is prompting a new wave of innovative technologies that are demonstrating significant efficiency gains both in the laboratory and in the field. Numerous variants of nanoparticles, nanofibers and zeolites are being used commercially already. Figure 1 demonstrates the relative sizes (based on patent volumes) of some of the most novel water-related nanotech categories.

There are several water-related technologies that stand out as potentially revolutionary. Among the most noteworthy are aligned nanotubes, nanobubbles, aquaporins and graphene-based applications (see case study overleaf).

Beyond their potentially transformative impact on the water industry, each shares another important characteristic: they are developing faster than usual for early stage nanotechnologies. By some estimates, where a development timeline of 15 or more years might be expected, some have the potential to be market-ready in less than ten.

As illustrated in Figure 1, these potentially revolutionary technologies only occupy a small percentage of the overall water-related nanotechnology sector based on patent volumes. However, as the graph overleaf shows, this subset of aligned nanotubes, nanobubbles, aquaporins and graphene-based technologies, are experiencing a very high rate of patent activity relative to the others.

This is due in part to the recent growth in R&D investment in these areas emerging from other industries, which creates better access to infrastructure as well as opportunities for adapting new discoveries to water-related applications.

These technologies also happen to be among the safest in the nanotech sector. Each possess unique natural attributes that should raise fewer regulatory barriers as they form either an integral part of a composite material (as in the case of graphene); do not remain in a solution indefinitely (as in the case of aquaporins); or are inherently short-lived (as in the case of nanobubbles).

**Mining the brine – turning cost into revenue**
While advances in water-related nanotech may hold the key to reducing the size, cost and energy requirements >
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of tomorrow’s desalination plant, there remains the significant problem of waste brine disposal. It is a problem that only worsens as volumes increase.

In a typical desalination plant, generation of brine accounts for 55 per cent of collected seawater. The current approach of simply returning the brine to the water source is already having adverse effects on underwater ecosystems. Increasing these volumes could be devastating.

But hidden beneath the surface of this problem of increasing brine volumes, we may find a partial response to the challenge. Brine contains about 60 elements of the periodic table in the form of metallic and non-metallic ions. Depending on the region, these constituent elements can be mined for numerous uses as fertilisers, plastics, solvents and even construction.

Brine mining technology has been around for years, but its application in desalination brine has been limited due to insufficient volumes to justify the investment in mineral extraction techniques. However, as desalination becomes more cost-effective on the back of emerging membrane and other technological advances, these volumes are set to increase – radically improving the underlying economics of brine disposal.

Additional trace metals, while more difficult to extract due to their low concentrations, hold even greater potential commercial value. Elements such as Rubidium (Rb), Lithium (Li), Indium (In), Caesium (Cs), and Germanium (Ge) are used in fibre optics, electronics, batteries, and aeronautics.

In 2008, around 12 million cubic metres of brine was produced daily around the world as a desalination by-product. By 2015, daily production of up to 20 million cubic metres is predicted, based solely on increases in desalination capacity. This would bring the total annual volume of brine production to around 7.3 billion cubic metres – the equivalent of a Loch Ness every year.

**Investment and invention**

As the picture of our potential water future comes into focus, we begin to see a developing model where fresh water, as well as valuable minerals, are produced with equal efficiency – in parallel, as an integrated system.

Could advances in these and other technologies support the economies of scale required to overcome political and economic inertia in time to mitigate the looming crisis? Trends in investment and invention suggest they could.

Major corporations, utilities, high tech start-ups and universities are already active in some of the most potentially transformative segments within both the water-related nanotech and brine mining technology sectors, with recent investment and patent activity accelerating.

In nanotech for water treatment, there are growing numbers of fast-moving young companies attracting high valuations and increasing levels of investment. Traditionally conservative utility companies, that typically purchase and adopt only very mature technologies, are now beginning to show interest in making significant investments around early stage technologies. This may be the result of both the transformative and disruptive potential of these technologies and the pace of their development.

In brine mining, patent activity in the field of Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) technology, an approach that enables up to 100 per cent recovery rates, is growing steadily with interest.
from both small start-ups and well established multinationals such as GE. Other cutting edge applications involving algae for brine mining are being pursued by public and private entities, including several leading universities and NASA.

In both water-related nanotech and brine mining, increased patent activity is emerging in China, where the impact of global water shortages is a clear and present danger and so driving investment. In brine mining technologies, China’s share of patent filings jumped from 16 per cent to 41 per cent, mainly at the expense of Europe, between 2007 and 2012.

“Change will not be achieved through technology alone”

A possible future
Current invention may herald an age where we have access to a cheap, clean and virtually limitless source of fresh water from sources previously rendered unsuitable for human and animal consumption. Solar, wind, wave and other clean energy technologies may be integrated to support both on and off-grid water treatment, allowing small and large communities alike to thrive while protecting delicate natural ecosystems both on land and offshore.

This is a possible future. The search is on for the specific technology solutions that will help break the embedded cultural and financial industry patterns. Yet change will not be achieved through technology alone. Transformation of these vast, linked industries will require unprecedented global collaboration, supported by a new class of systems integrators to ensure the demands of food, water, energy, climate and security are aligned.

Much remains to be revealed, but the pieces of the puzzle are falling into place.

Commissioned by Coutts from Peter Kingsley 2013
On 19th April 2001, the foreign secretary Robin Cook gave an address on national identity to the Social Market Foundation that has always since been known as “the chicken tikka masala” speech. Cook had chosen a vivid metaphor for a familiar multicultural theme: when cultures collide, the mixture can produce something different from both and superior to either. In this case, the desire of the people of Glasgow to have their chicken tikka covered in gravy created chicken tikka masala.

I recall this speech not just because a decade has elapsed and another census from the Office for National Statistics has recently been published, posing again the question of what kind of people the British are. It is also because, in an event so corny that it could have been staged to provide an opening for an article on British identity, I met my Indian wife that evening. Our children will be delighted to know that I consider that union produced something both different to and superior to either.

Ten years on, how are we all doing? The results from the 2011 census, compiled in March 2011, brings to mind George Orwell’s point that the fading figure in the photograph on the mantelpiece every day bears less and less of a resemblance to the you who is looking at it, apart from the fact that you happen to be the same person. Britain has changed and aged in the decade between 2001 and 2011.

The population of England and Wales has reached 56.1m, up by 3.7m in a decade, which is the largest growth shown by any census since they began in 1801. Half the increase was due to net migration. The other half is attributable to the fact that, between March 2001 and March 2011, the 5m deaths were more than cancelled out by 6.6m births.

The nation which emerges from the 2011 census is one which is more diverse, less religious and older than it once was. It is one which faces five serious questions, all of which are contained in the data, there to be discovered by any politician brave enough to confront them.

The first question is a fundamental, tectonic shift. Politics is no longer anchored to other questions of identity. There was a time when religious affiliation was a reasonably good proxy for political allegiance but that time has long gone. Indeed, religious belief itself is suffering a steady fall. The number of people in England and Wales who described themselves as Christian fell from 72 per cent to 59 per cent over the past decade and a quarter of all people, 14m of us, now say they have no religious affiliation.

This is largely not a function of immigration. Despite common fears about “Londonistan” or reports that Leicester, for example, is on the verge of having a Muslim majority, Britain is not becoming a non-Christian religious nation. The second largest religious group in England and Wales is Muslims, who make up 4.8 per cent of the population.

The 19th century anchoring role of religion was replaced, in the 20th century, by social class. In 1906 there were two events which, it turned out, had chronic significance. The first saw the Labour party take on its modern form and the second was the decisive victory of the Liberal party in the general election; “from that victory,” in George Dangerfield’s justly famous verdict, “they never recovered.” From then on, politics became locked into social blocs organised around stable industrial trades. There were always exceptions and marginal seats, but working class and urban areas were usually red and middle class and rural areas were usually blue.

In the long era of two party politics that ran from the 1920s to the collapse of the post-second world war consensus in 1974, each party could come close to victory by mobilising its own bloc. It didn’t require too many voters to cross the class lines to bring about an overall majority in parliament.

The re-emergence of nationalism in Scotland and Wales and the rebirth of the Liberals as a third party in the nation altered the political arithmetic. The 2011 census shows how. Thirty per cent of the population now works in a professional or technical capacity which, in a sentence, is the explanation of the need

Philip Collins is a writer for The Times and chair of the board of trustees at Demos
“Nothing done by government has changed the nation more than loosening immigration regulations”: a 2008 citizenship ceremony in London
for New Labour. The rationale for a compassionate Conservative party is also obvious when almost a quarter of the population work in health, social work and education. In other words, neither party is able to assume that victory is possible by getting its natural vote out.

There is also a warning for the Conservative party in the fact that half of the population increase of the past decade was due to migration. People born outside the UK overwhelmingly vote Labour. The Tories need people to vote as, say, entrepreneurs rather than as, say, Indians, as they do now.

The big political challenge here is that the parties are, inadvertently, running in the opposite direction, back to their heartlands. Neither David Cameron nor Ed Miliband is the sort of transformative figure capable of bringing over voters from the opposing tribe in sufficient numbers. The upshot of austerity is that Cameron is leading a party popular in the rural south of England and Ed Miliband, by opposing so vigorously, is strengthening his position in the industrial north of England, without either ever threatening to break out.

The second big political question evident in the 2011 census is that something is stirring in the argument about immigration. The most conspicuous change over the last decade has been that Robin Cook’s thesis from April 2001 has been put substantively to the test. Not since 1066 has Britain truly been a nation of immigrants. When historians write the domestic story of the Blair years, immigration will be the largest legacy. Nothing done by government has changed the nation more than the decision to loosen immigration regulations.

In 2001 there were 4.6m residents (9 per cent) of England and Wales who had been born outside the United Kingdom. Now there are 7.5m (13 per cent). Even these bally numbers underestimate the scale of the change, due to the churn as some foreign-born nationals have left during the last decade. Half the foreign-born people who live in England and Wales have arrived in the last decade. That’s some 3.8m people.

This change has arisen for two reasons. Family members have continued to come in from India and Pakistan. Then there has been a nine-fold rise in the number of Poles since the accession of Poland to the EU in 2004 and Britain’s decision to permit free movement immediately.

The argument about immigration almost always breaks out as a demand that immigrants speak English. In fact, they do. In 91 per cent of households, everyone speaks English and there are only 4 per cent of the 23.4m households in which nobody has English as a main language.

A consensus seems to have arisen even amidst the furious dispute that the previous Labour government’s more open door policy was wrong and that the correct response is to get tougher. The Conservative party has taken fright at the issue because UKIP is snapping at its electoral base. The paradox of UKIP’s appeal, as a party obsessed with the European Union, is that its supporters don’t care much about Europe. They come towards UKIP because they find Nigel Farage and his merry men sympaethetically hostile on immigration. It’s not just the Conservative party. Ever since Gillian Duffy accosted Gordon Brown in a Rochdale street during the 2010 general election campaign, Labour has been inching towards a more closed position on immigration.

The third big unanswered question is what to do about the fact that Britain is getting older. A full 16 per cent of the nation is now aged 65 or over, the highest figure in any census, whereas only 6 per cent are under five years of age. Were it not for immigrants, who tend to be young, this number would be even smaller. Likewise, the increase in the numbers of people in their 20s is accounted for by net migration.

David Willetts is fond of pointing out that to be old was once a good proxy for being poor, but no longer. Pensioners are now no more likely to be poor than members of the general public. Yet the welfare system has evolved on the assumption that old age is likely to be a time of poverty. There is a residual sense that people who have paid in when young ought to draw something out when old and retirement did not last as long when Beveridge was drawing up the blueprint for the welfare state in 1942.

Democratic politics in mature societies is notoriously bad at dealing with long-term problems. The political cycle rarely makes it worth the while of any given leader to tackle a problem whose consequences will be visited on one of his successors. Even if he solves the problem, the credit will not come in for many years after the end of his own career.

Hence, the political logic to delay action on social care even though one in ten people provide unpaid care for someone with an illness or disability and almost one in five say they have a limiting illness. We still await a plan for how the National Health Service can cope with the prevalence of long-term conditions that threaten it with bankruptcy.

The 2011 census tells us that these problems cannot be avoided forever. Sooner or later a leader is going to have to accept that, whether or not the grey vote is very powerful, the country cannot afford the winter fuel allowances, free bus travel, television licences and Christmas bonus it is paying out to all its pensioners.

“London has taken in the huddled masses of the world. Does Britain now want more of the same, or does it want to gently push the door closed?”

The fourth big question raised by the 2011 census is housing. The most recent, most sudden and most unexpected weak point of the post-war political settlement has been the unintended and unwanted demise of the dream of home ownership. The number of households with a mortgage fell, over the last decade, from 39 per cent to 33 per cent. For the first time since records began in 1951, home ownership fell, from 69 per cent to 64 per cent. As the price of property became unaffordable for many people, private renting recovered the share it once had in the 1940s. Fifteen per cent of people are now in private rented housing, a rise from 9 per cent just 10 years ago. Incomes are falling and the great dream of advance represented by home ownership is in retreat. The political reality of this is that no party has yet acknowledged.

The fifth question is rebalancing. There is a vibrant political debate about whether the British economy, and especially the Exchequer, became excessively reliant on the tax revenues that flowed from the City of London. However, it is proving a good
deal easier to point this out than it is, in a country with intrinsi-
cally high labour costs, to do anything about it.

There is, though, an increasing national imbalance in
another sense that was highlighted by the 2011 census. There
is a case now, financial, social and ethnic, for treating London
as a separate island within England rather than as a part of it.

There is no dimension of life on which London is typical of
the nation of which it is the capital city and centrifugal force.
Eighty-six per cent of the nation is ethnically white but only 60
per cent in London. Eighty per cent of England and Wales are
white British but only 45 per cent of Londoners. Across Eng-
land and Wales, the 10 local authorities with the highest pro-
portions of both non-UK born and non-UK nationals in their
resident population are all London boroughs. A third of the cap-
itals population is now foreign-born and a quarter are non-UK
nationals. In the northeast, just 5 per cent are foreign-born and
in England and Wales 13 per cent.

The growing divergence of London from the rest of the
nation poses a defining question of identity and national des-
tiny. London is a global, open, trading city. It has taken in the
huddled masses of the world and that policy has brought with
it great enterprise and some attendant problems. Does Britain
now want more of the same, or does it want to gently push the
door closed?

It is worth pointing out, that for all the soul-searching on
the question of immigration, Britain is a nation that still works.
Mixing, of the most intimate kind, is proceeding nicely. Mixed
race people account for 2.2 per cent of the population of Eng-
land and Wales, up from 1.27 per cent in 2001, and 12 per cent
of households had partners or household members from different
ethnic groups, up three points from 2001.

A secure national identity is also holding up well. 91 per cent
of the resident population happily identified with at least one of
the available national appellations—English, Welsh, Scottish,
Northern Irish or British.

Take London out of the nation and it would be a more con-
ventional but less prosperous nation. In the debates about
immigration, and Europe in particular, it seems that this is pre-
cisely what politicians want—a nation detached from the world
yet somehow enjoying its fruits. The 2011 census posed two seri-
ous questions. The first is the question of which nation we now
want to be. The second is whether we have the political courage
to deal with the problems thrown up by the nation we are any-
way becoming. “Thought I might try a bit of rice this year”
White flight?

Britain’s new problem—segregation

DAVID GOODHART

Britain’s social experiment with large-scale immigration just got even more interesting. The results of the 2011 census tell a story that is both encouraging and worrying.

Most of the big picture was expected (as Philip Collins writes above). But on one thing the experts were caught by surprise—London becoming majority-minority. The historic white British majority in the city is now in a minority. The old imperial capital truly has seen the empire striking back and it seems that native white Londoners do not like it.

For it is important to realise that the share of the white British population in London fell so dramatically from 59.8 per cent in 2001 to 44.9 per cent in 2011 not only because of high levels of immigration (both white and non-white) but also thanks to an exodus of white Britons. The number of white British Londoners fell by 600,000, about three times higher in absolute terms than over the previous census period, 1991 to 2001.

This is one of the biggest “misses” by the relevant experts in recent years. Most of the academics who study these things had not expected London to go majority-minority for another 20 or 30 years. Leicester was meant to be the first big town to cross the symbolically significant line though as it happens Slough got there first, and now has a white British population of just 34.5 per cent. (Leicester has also crossed the line, along with Luton.)

But it is London where the change has been most spectacular. I asked a London MP who represents one of the areas where the white British population has fallen below half how many of London’s 33 boroughs had now passed that point and he said: “I would guess five or six.” It is 23.

Is it happening because of “white flight,” meaning discomfort with the changing racial composition of an area? Looking at the boroughs where the exodus has been biggest and most rapid—Newham, Enfield, Redbridge and Barking and Dagenham—it is hard not to see race, or at least a desire to live among people you are familiar with, as a factor.

Take Barking and Dagenham. From the 1950s to the late 1980s the place had been a sort of white working-class, blue-collar utopia in which almost everyone got a council house and, if

David Goodhart is Prospect’s editor at large and director of Demos
they wanted, a job at the giant Ford factory. But then most of the factory closed and Margaret Thatcher’s right to buy policy opened up the borough to recent immigrants in search of cheap private housing. Barking and Dagenham became famous in the mid-to-late 2000s for the brief success of the far-right British National party.

A place that was almost all white British in the late 1980s fell to 80 per cent white British in 2001 and then to 49 per cent in 2011. That latter reduction of 40,000 white British people, almost one third in just 10 years, was the highest proportionate reduction in the country. In their place came a cross-section of British immigrants of the past 15 years—black Africans, south Asians and east Europeans. The biggest single group of incomers was black Africans; just 4 per cent in 2001, they now make up 15 per cent. People from south Asian backgrounds constitute another 12 per cent of the population and east Europeans about 6 per cent.

There are many reasons why white British people might want to leave apart from (or as well as) discomfort at the scale and speed of demographic change: better schools, house prices, retirement and so on. And it is true that there is a long tradition of white East Enders moving from, say, Bethnal Green to Barking and then out to Essex. But even if it is true that the white British are leaving for quite traditional reasons, they are not being replaced in the population “churn” by white British families, so the result is still a more segregated future.

Where are the white British who are shunning the outer suburbs going? Most of them seem to be moving just a few miles to the surrounding counties in search of the way of life they once knew—almost all of those counties, especially Essex and Kent, saw an increase in their white British population between 2001 and 2011.

Essex is now 91 per cent white British, but the number in the neighbouring London borough of Redbridge is 34 per cent. The social geographer Richard Harris, from Bristol University, has found similar ethnic “cliffs” in neighbouring local authorities around the country: Leicester is 28 per cent British Indian, Leicestershire 4 per cent; Bradford is 20 per cent British Pakistani, North Yorkshire 0.1 per cent; Southwark is 16 per cent black African, the City of London 1.3 per cent.

Does this matter? There are many in liberal Britain who seem to believe it is a mark of sophistication not to notice these profound demographic shifts. But if the sort of polite apartheid that is developing in London and the south east of England starts to develop in other parts of the country—and Harris’s figures suggest it may be—this is surely a setback to a decent society.

The rate of immigration is now slowing but, even so, by the time of the next census in 2021 around 25 per cent of England’s population may belong to a minority ethnic group. Rather than turning a blind eye, politicians need to think harder about segregation and white flight and how to prevent or mitigate it.

Lack of contact between majority and minority is a recipe for low trust and prejudice. Yet even in rich, liberal societies, people in both groups still often prefer to live among their own, or at least in an area where their own group sets the tone. We do know, for example, that about 3m people live in households where no one speaks English as a first language and that schools in some areas are getting more divided—in London only about a third of south Asian primary school pupils attend a majority white school.

The census does also give grounds for optimism about the willingness of ethnic groups to mix with each other. The number of British mixed race people now stands at 1.2m. About 12 per cent of households (with more than one person) have people from more than one ethnic group; in Brent, such households make up 34 per cent of the total, in Manchester 25 per cent, while Lewisham has 39 per cent, according to the University of Manchester’s Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity.

Some parts of urban and suburban England are evidently seeing a common life emerge across ethnic boundaries. But this is happening less in places like Redbridge and Enfield, where the white British are fleeing, and even less in towns like Bradford and Oldham where the white British do not or cannot flee to the same extent, instead living “parallel lives” apart from the towns’ minorities.

The question is this: is London’s white flight an outlier, as in so many other things about the capital, or is it the face of the future for the rest of the country? If it is the latter, we are in for a bumpy ride. ♦
Prosident José Manuel Barroso confirmed at the end of last year that if Scotland won independence from London after a referendum vote for secession, this would mean, ipso facto, that Scotland had left the EU. This was to the chagrin of Alex Salmond, Scotland’s first minister, who has undertaken to hold a referendum on independence in 2014, and who last year assured members of the Scottish Parliament that “oil-rich, gas-rich, energy-rich Scotland, fishing-rich Scotland, will be welcomed with open arms in the European Union.” The Scottish National Party (SNP) has implied that Scotland would be automatically an EU member, with Brussels simply setting another place at the table. Alas, the process would be much more complex and costly.

Barroso’s news shouldn’t have come as a surprise: the president of the European Commission was merely repeating the position explained by Romano Prodi, his predecessor. In April 2004, Prodi told the European Parliament that: “When a part of the territory of a member state ceases to be part of that state, for instance because the territory becomes an independent state, the treaties will no longer apply to that territory. In other words, a newly independent region would, by the fact of its independence, become a third country with respect to the Union, and the treaties would, from the date of its independence, not apply any more.”

If the new country wished the EU treaties to apply to it again, he added, there would need to be “a negotiation on an agreement between the applicant state and the member states on the conditions of admission and the adjustments to the treaties which such admission entails. This agreement is subject to ratification by all member states and the applicant state.”

So an independent Scotland would need to go through the same accession process as have all but the original six member states, a process which the Croats have just successfully completed, but in which the Turks are bogged down. Readmission

Don’t count on it

Scotland, if independent, could not assume that rejoining the EU would be easy—or cheap

JOHN KERR

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard, former permanent secretary of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is an independent member of the House of Lords
Scottish first minister Alex Salmond could find his country locked out of the EU after a secessionist success in the 2014 referendum

Nicosia, Turkish Northern Cyprus; and in Bucharest, it is about “greater Hungary” rhetoric in Budapest and its own Hungarian minority. All four countries might similarly view the question of Scotland through their own domestic prism. For Spain the salience of the issue grows with the mounting demand in Barcelona for an independence referendum. Some might try to draw distinctions between Scots and Catalans: unlike the Catalans, the Scots have always kept their own legal system, and, unlike the SNP, Catalans seeking independence do not wish to keep the monarchy. But the plain fact is that Madrid would not welcome the break-up of the United Kingdom, lest the habit catch on, and would not welcome a Scottish seat in the European Council, lest it encourage demand for a Catalan seat. Some Spanish politicians have already spoken of vetoing a Scottish accession bid.

And who would be making Scotland’s case in the European Council? At least until 2013, David Cameron. The blame in Brussels for UK disintegration would, however unfairly, fall on the government in London, which is already testing EU patience by opposing further integration. In Brussels, the prime minister’s advocacy of “less Europe, not more” seems out of tune with the times. His attempt in 2011 to extract a price for agreeing to the fiscal union, for Eurozone members, which he and his chancellor had insistently demanded, caused bemusement and some resentment. And the current Whitehall “audit” of EU powers, as they apply to the UK, is generally interpreted as presaging a second outing for the same strategy, demanding further UK opt-outs, if and when further moves to shore up the euro require amendment of the core EU treaty.

The idea that the UK alone should be entitled to renege on existing commitments is not widely welcomed in the rest of Europe. An alternative—that all countries should be able to select their own “pick and mix” package of à la carte membership—strikes many as a recipe for unacceptable unravelling of the treaty. It isn’t easy to see how either prescription could achieve the unanimous support necessary for adoption. UK influence in Brussels is shrinking. So, however velvet a Scottish divorce might be, the present government in London is not best placed to help negotiate the EU consequences.

How difficult would the negotiations be? Partly that would be for the Scots to determine. If they recognised that any applicant is ill-placed to argue for changes in the club rules, the wisest course might be to accept, en bloc, all the rules currently applied by the UK.

To seek, from outside the EU, reforms of the Common Agricultural or Fisheries policies would be unwise, however welcome in Scotland such reforms would be. To argue, from outside, that the EU should allocate to Scotland more structural funds—the funds given to help the development of the poorest parts of the EU—would cut little ice. Scotland’s best tactic, in order to jump the queue of other applicants, would be to emphasise, from before the start, that it sought no changes, merely the reinstatement of rights enjoyed and EU obligations accepted when part of the UK. Even those, for example the Spanish, most uneasy about any secession, and so most tempted to cause problems or delay, would find such an approach hard to resist in principle.

Problems could however still arise when the negotiations turned to issues on which the UK, using the power of veto of an existing member state, had secured a special status, as
Margaret Thatcher did at Fontainebleau in 1984 on the EU budget, and John Major did at Maastricht in 1991 on monetary union. As an outsider, with no veto, Scotland might not find it easy to secure the necessary unanimity among all insiders that such arrangements should also apply to a separate new member state.

Thus there would have to be a debate if the Scots were to wish to retain the UK’s hard-won VAT anomalies, such as zero VAT on food and children’s clothes. But it looks a winnable fight, because it would not be a zero sum game. Regular cross-border shopping in an independent Scotland by French or Germans would be no more likely than it is now. The actual rates charged in shops in member states bear no relationship to the VAT element in the EU’s central budget income (because the VAT base used for budget purposes is an artificial statistical construct: actual rates vary widely between member states.) For existing member states, if disposed to be kind, there would be no cost. The discussion would however create opportunities for the ill-disposed to cause delays.

Conversely, thanks to David Cameron’s 2011 stance on fiscal union, the 2012 Austerity Pact is separate from the EU Treaty, “In England and Scotland, a common currency with separate economic policies might repeat the problem that has arisen in the eurozone” and so will not come up in an accession negotiation. The Scots would be free to choose whether, like all Eurozone members and most non-members (for instance, the Danes, Swedes, and Poles), they wished to accept common fiscal discipline provisions, or stick with the Czechs and the residual UK in rejecting them.

Similarly, Cameron’s 2012 stance on banking union (accepting the European Central Bank as the EU’s supervisory authority, but not for banks based in Britain) may create future difficulties for the City of London, but solves a problem for the Scots. Edinburgh would be free to stay out too, with the Scottish banks remaining under London supervision as well as London control. If that was what the Scots wanted, there would be nothing to negotiate with other EU member states.

More significantly, the treaties now require countries applying to join the EU to take on a commitment to join the euro when they have passed the economic tests for doing so. Taken at face value, this would demand a currency frontier on the Tweed—between the euro in Scotland, and the pound south of the border. But the Danes and Swedes ignore the requirement to join the euro, retaining their national currencies. In any case, if UK debt were divided pro rata as the Kingdom divided, the share that Scotland inherited would be too big to make the new country, at least initially, eligible to join the euro. Assuming—perhaps rashly—good will all round, in Madrid as well, a declaration by Scotland of its intent to give up sterling and switch to the euro at an appropriate moment, undefined, might well be taken as sufficient.

Rather more difficult might be the negotiation between London and Edinburgh over how to ensure, with a common currency (sterling) but separate economic policies, that they did not repeat the problem in the eurozone that has arisen between Greece and Germany. Would London not insist on some form of fiscal pact, constraining Scottish borrowing, and would Edinburgh not demand some say in London’s setting of Scotland’s interest rates?

### The fallout from independence: who said what

**David Cameron, prime minister**

“If one part of a country—I am not referring now to any specific one—wants to become an independent state, of course as an independent state it has to apply to the European membership according to the rules—that is obvious.”

**José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Union**

“We do not agree that an independent Scotland will be in the position of having to reapply for European Union membership, because there is no provision for removing EU treaties from any part of EU territory, or for removing European citizenship from the people of a country which has been in the EU for 40 years.”

**Nicola Sturgeon, Scottish deputy first minister**

“In the hypothetical case of independence, Scotland would have to join the queue and ask to be admitted, needing the unanimous approval of all member states to obtain the status of a candidate country.”

**José Manuel García-Margallo, Spanish foreign minister**

“Assuming there is a yes vote as a result of the referendum, Scotland will still be at that stage a part of the UK. What we have always accepted is there has to be a negotiation about the details and the terms of Scotland’s membership of the EU. Crucially, that would take place at a time when we are still part of the UK, and still part of the EU of which we have been members for 40 years.”

**John Swinney, SNP finance secretary**

“They seem to be saying Scotland can vote to be independent and not be independent—it’s a ridiculous argument. It is time for the SNP to be straightforward about what independence means.”

**Danny Alexander, chief secretary to the Treasury**

The negotiators would also have to consider the Schengen Agreement, which does away with border checks on travellers between most other member states, but to which the UK has never signed up. But neither has Ireland, which instead maintains a separate travel area with the UK. If the Scots preferred to follow the Irish precedent, avoiding a physical frontier, with passport checks and border guards at Gretna Green, the common sense geographical arguments for doing so might well suffice—particularly if Edinburgh were prepared to signal an intention to come into line with continental member states, and non-EU Schengen members like Norway and Switzerland, as soon as London and Dublin did so. But this would be another issue on which the ill-intentioned could deploy Fabian tactics to slow down or block Scottish accession to the EU; the Scots would in any case need, on joining, to accept the EU provisions on cross-border crime and policing.”
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from which the UK in 2012 announced its intention to opt out.

Finally, there is the question of the EU budget. Here it is harder to see a happy outcome for Scotland. The Thatcher rebate, secured by strong arm tactics, repays two-thirds of the difference between the UK’s contribution and the EU’s reciprocal payments to the UK. Britain has, over time, accepted that the rebate should not apply to that part of the budget which covers expenditure in new, poorer, Central European member states. But the agreement has so far saved the country some £70bn, and means that the UK now contributes some 10 per cent of the total budget. In contrast, the French pay 20 per cent, the French and the Italians more than the UK, and the Dutch the most, per person. UK public opinion still thinks that the rebate looks well justified, but everywhere else in Europe it is much resented. Unlike the VAT arrangements, this is a zero sum game: the less Britain pays, the more the rest all must. But what the UK has, it can continue to hold; since the demise of the rebate would require us to vote for its abolition, it survives. It will survive again when the European Council turns again in February to the financing negotiation adjourned in November.

But for an applicant, Scotland, outside and wanting to come in, the requirement for unanimity has the opposite effect. To secure a Thatcher rebate for Scotland, the Scottish government would have to convince the governments of every other member state, and their parliaments and voters, many much less rich in per capita terms than Scotland, that the Scots should not have to pay the normal membership fee. That is a Herculean diplomatic task.

So we should assume that an independent Scotland, like the UK now, would be a substantial net contributor (one of about a dozen) to the EU budget; and that, with no rebate, each Scot would pay considerably more than each Englishman.

To put numbers to these propositions is not currently possible. The sums would depend principally on the size of the EU budget for the next seven year period, the formula for calculating each country’s contribution, and the distribution of expenditure between agriculture, regional development, and other projects over that period.

Standing back from these individual hurdles, my overall assessment is that Scottish negotiations to join the EU need not be particularly complex, and they would cover far less ground than the standard process for the accession of a territory which had not formerly been part of an EU member state. But the procedure would still provide ample scope for trouble-making by those governments concerned about secessionist movements in their own countries. It could therefore prove protracted. If Scotland adopted a practical approach, recognising the weak hand that any applicant has to play, that would maximise its chances of finding a relatively speedy way through. But there would certainly be a budget price to pay.

When would these issues be tackled? For Scotland, there is a further problem of the sequence.

Pre-referendum

Brussels will not wish to address such questions while they remain hypothetical, so Scotland will not be able to begin negotiations before the referendum. Nor could much be achieved now by discussions with other national governments individually. It would be naive, for example, for the SNP to seek assurances of full co-operation from those in Spain, who have the greatest interest in the Scottish debate: they have their own fish to fry. Even the London government, whose voice in a Brussels debate on a Scottish accession bid would be significant, might be reluctant to give binding assurances before a referendum.

Post-referendum, pre-secession from the UK

It might well be possible, and would certainly be desirable, to get informal exploratory talks started after a referendum vote for independence but before actual secession took place. If all other member states were prepared to co-operate, much of the groundwork could be done in this way. But formally Scotland would have to be a state before it could accede, and the terms of its disengagement from the UK would have a critical bearing on some aspects of the accession discussions.

Post-secession, pre-accession

The final formalities can take time: Croatia’s accession negotiation was successfully completed in June 2011, but it is not due to join until this July. Timing of national ratifications is entirely a matter for individual member states (the Croatia Bill is now in the House of Lords). The practical problems of an extended hiatus might be mitigated if the Scots were to choose to apply EU laws autonomously, while waiting. Brussels could, if there were enough goodwill in other capitals, offer some reciprocal transitional arrangements: there is no precedent for such a concession, but the situation has never arisen before.

However, the ratification processes, like the prior negotiations, could become protracted were they to coincide with an attempt by the London government to secure a wider revision of the EU treaty, or, after a referendum in the residual UK, to initiate the procedure for withdrawal from the EU. Other countries might wish to consider a request from Alex Salmond together with any from David Cameron.

This analysis suggests that the Scots, as they approach the referendum debate, would do well to bear in mind above all that independence from the UK means leaving the EU, with no automatic return ticket. Negotiating re-entry could take time, with the shadow of Catalonia long over the table. There would be a recurring financial price to pay, in terms of Scotland’s share of the annual EU budget. And finally, if London, in parallel, sought to change the relationship of the remainder of the UK with the EU, that could land the Scots with an extended hiatus.

Scots, especially Alex Salmond, must read the small print closely. They can’t assume it would be easy, or cheap, to re-join the EU.
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One last chance for the two-state solution?

The US and Europe are poised to put new effort into peace talks. There is one litmus test for whether the move is serious

HENRY SIEGMAN

One of Israel’s most respected political scientists recently dismissed the idea “that simply engaging in negotiations will automatically foster a peace agreement” between Israel and the Palestinians. Writing in Haaretz, Shlomo Avineri, a former director-general of Israel’s foreign ministry, called it “a fantasy proven baseless by the experience of the past 20 years.”

In this he is unquestionably correct. He is off base, however, when he maintains that previous peace initiatives have failed because they tried to resolve questions about the terms of a “permanent status” deal. He argues that even the two sides’ most moderate positions on these core issues are too far apart, making agreement impossible. He therefore proposes that the peace process shift from discussions of the endgame and Palestinian statehood to incremental improvements—“interim agreements, trust-building exercises, unilateral steps and other mechanisms,” that would serve as building blocks for broader future agreements. But this is the most deceptive illusion of all. For what the 20 years of failure to which Avineri refers prove above all is the bankruptcy of incrementalism and confidence-building measures. They were the hallmark of the stewardship of Dennis Ross, special Middle East coordinator for President Bill Clinton, and discredited the peace process.

That illusion should be resisted particularly by those now considering a new attempt at peace talks. European Union countries, led by Britain, France and Germany, are reportedly preparing to present Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his new government with a new initiative for negotiations with the Palestinians. The initiative is prompted by the anger of European governments towards that goal.

The closing off of East Jerusalem to the Palestinians is a deal breaker that forecloses a two-state solution: the creation of a separate Palestinian state alongside Israel. It would also pre-empt any new initiatives President Barack Obama may be considering in his second term with a new team that is likely to be more resolute in its determination to preserve the two-state option.

It is untrue that negotiations that focused on the endgame drove the parties further apart. There were only three such negotiations: the Camp David Summit between prime minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in 2000, the Tabata talks that followed, and the negotiations between prime minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas at the time of the Annapolis Conference in 2007. Despite their failure, each one advanced the process beyond where it had been.

At Camp David, Palestinians accepted the annexation of the settlement blocs—new towns that Israel has built in the West Bank—and Ehud Barak agreed to the sharing of Jerusalem. The Tabata talks that followed narrowed the differences even more. The Olmert-Abbas negotiations of 2007/8 brought the parties even closer together, and according to the principals would have led to an accord had their negotiations not been interrupted by Operation Cast Lead in December, Israel’s military offensive against Gaza, and by Olmert’s resignation.

The peace process was brought to a complete halt only by Netanyahu’s government. Not only did he refuse to address the endgame, but he would not even agree to recognise the pre-1967 border (before the Six-Day War when Israel captured land from Syria, Jordan and Egypt) as the starting point for territorial negotiations. He reacted hysterically when President Obama was about to propose in his address to the State Department on May 19, 2011 that negotiations must begin from that point. Netanyahu called the president and demanded that he remove that proposal from his address. The president did not comply, but he also did not follow up and translate his speech into policy.

The requirement that Israeli-Palestinian talks begin from the 1967 line was so upsetting to Netanyahu and his government because they are unalterably opposed to Palestinian statehood anywhere in Palestine. Obliterating the memory of such a border (going so far as to remove that border from Israeli governmental maps) is therefore seen by Netanyahu as an essential step towards that goal.

To be sure, Netanyahu committed himself to a two-state solution in his landmark speech at Bar-Ilan university in June 2009. Some naively invoke that commitment as evidence that a resumption of the peace process is justified. Tzipi Hotovely, a leading member of Netanyahu’s Likud party, recently explained to these naïfs that the Bar-Ilan speech notwithstanding, Netanyahu has no intention of ever carrying out the evacuation of West Bank settlements. His commitment to the two-state solution was “tactical,” she said, “intended for the world,” but “the Likud will not evacuate settlements.”

The Palestinian people have known all along how utterly disingenuous was Netanyahu’s Bar-Ilan speech. Not only was this
self-evident from the facts. Netanyahu and his government were creating on the ground, in the form of the West Bank settlements and building in largely Arab East Jerusalem. Senior Likud officials were also the founders and leaders of the “Land of Israel” Knesset Caucus that was established for only one purpose: preventing a Palestinian state in any part of Palestine. At no point did that caucus provoke a murmur of protest from the US or from the Quartet (the joint attempt by the US, UN, EU and Russia to mediate the Israel-Palestinian peace process). Imagine their reaction—or the reaction of the US Congress, for that matter—if President Abbas’s cabinet members had established a “Land of Palestine” Caucus within the Palestinian Authority.

Indeed, even when Netanyahu announced plans to build extensively in the E-1 corridor, the best that the US and the EU were able to say is that such a plan would be an obstacle to peace and to a two-state solution. There were no intimations that such a plan, if implemented, might trigger sanctions against Israel or end the American and European insistence that Palestinians can achieve statehood only in negotiations with the man who has been systematically dismantling what chances for such an accord might still exist.

What Middle Eastern experts, not to speak of the US and European governments that are calling for a return to negotiations, cannot get themselves to acknowledge is that Netanyahu does not accept Palestinian statehood anywhere in Palestine, and will do everything in his power to prevent it because he and his government want the West Bank for themselves. It is that simple. They are convinced that with their vast military superiority over the Palestinians, they can have it all. That is an obstacle to the achievement of a two-state solution that neither incrementalism nor reconfiguration of parameters for resumed negotiations (a subject to which leading US Middle East experts last year devoted an entire book) can overcome. Anyone who still does not understand this simple reality, or who refuses to address it, has little to contribute to a discussion of this subject.

To be sure, Israelis remain concerned about retaining the financial, military and diplomatic support of the US, but Netanyahu is convinced this is not a problem. He believes he exercises greater control over the US Congress than does President Barack Obama.

As ridiculous as this may sound, there are good reasons for that belief. The main TV commercial in Netanyahu’s campaign for reelection in January to his third premiership of the country featured his last address to the combined US Senate and House of Representatives, whose members jumped up from their seats to applaud wildly every second sentence in his speech. The speech included the suggestion that the West Bank is “disputed” territory, not occupied territory, to which Israel has as much a claim as do the Palestinians, a claim rejected by the whole world, the only exceptions being residents of the Capitol building in Washington.

But it is not only the behaviour of the US Congress that gives Netanyahu and his supporters the confidence that the US will always have their back. It is a notion reinforced by President Obama as well. In his speech to the UN General Assembly in September of 2011, he admonished Palestinians, saying that they could achieve statehood only through negotiations with Israel. He thus removed the issue from the realm of international legality and turned it over to the man he knew, from the experience of his first two years in office, will never allow that to happen.

Both formally and politically, what the president said is ▶
One Last Chance for the Two-State Solution?

untrue. Formally, the right to self-determination by a majority population in previously mandated territories is a “peremptory norm” in international law. The implementation of that right was one of the primary purposes of the UN’s establishment, and international courts have confirmed it is a right that even overrides conflicting treaties or agreements. The only reason the Security Council has failed in its clear responsibility to implement the Palestinians’ right to self-determination is Obama’s threatened veto.

Practically, it is true that given its overwhelming military power, and the virtually uncritical support it receives from the US in the exercise of that power, Israel’s government can and will continue to block Palestinian statehood. But that is a reason not to subject the Palestinians’ peremptory right to self-determination to an Israeli veto. Instead it is a reason to demand that the UN exercise the role assigned to it by its charter. Israel’s engagement with the Palestinians will cease to be the historic fraud it has been only when its government comes to believe that its continued stonewalling will lead to America’s support for intervention by the Security Council. That is yet to happen.

The problem is that too often the policy proposals of experts and diplomats are shaped in response to the claims made by the protagonists, but not by realities on the ground. Israel’s government insists it has no choice but to continue its occupation because it has made many painful concessions, and promised more, only to run up against Palestinian refusals to consider reciprocal concessions. It will put to you that in return for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s magnificent unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, President George W. Bush agreed to allow Israel to take in the main settlement blocs.

However, Israel has not offered a single concession on any of the issues in dispute. On every one, whether borders, territory, Jerusalem, refugees, water or security, it wants the concessions to be made by Palestinians. Not a single concession has been offered by Netanyahu on Israel’s side of the 1967 border.

A protest in January at E-1 over Netanyahu’s plans to build on the land; behind, the settlement bloc of Ma’ale Adumin, see box

![Map of West Jerusalem and the West Bank](image-url)
As to the alleged “gift” of the settlement blocs to Sharon, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said this at a joint press conference with Israel’s then-foreign minister Tzipi Livni in February 2006:

“The United States position on [unilateral changes in the border] is very clear and remains the same. No one should try and unilaterally predetermine the outcome of a final status agreement. That’s to be done at final status. The President did say that at the time of final status, it will be necessary to take into account new realities on the ground that have changed since 1967, but under no circumstances should… anyone try and do that in a preemptive or predetermined way, because these are issues for negotiation at final status.”

Netanyahu has famously accused Palestinians of demanding that Israel “give and give, while they only take and take.” This comes from the head of a government that has already helped itself to more than 60 per cent of the West Bank. Here is what Israel’s president, Shimon Peres, had to say on the subject. When challenged to defend his claims for the importance of the 1993 Oslo Accords (and for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize), Peres said, “Before Oslo, the Palestinian state’s size should have been according to the 1947... UN map. In Oslo, Arafat moved from the 1947 map to the 1967 one. He gave up on 22 per cent of the West Bank. I don’t know any Arab leader who would give up 2 or 3 per cent. He gave up 22 per cent.” (But instead of acknowledging that this concession was a gut-wrenching one-sided Palestinian contribution to peace, Peres described it as “our greatest achievement.”)

If Netanyahu and his new government are not to continue on their certain road to apartheid, President Obama would have to leave no doubt in their minds that the “special relationship” between the US and Israel has its roots in shared values, and an Israeli government that acts in egregious violation of those values undermines that special relationship. International law grants native populations of former colonies the right to national self-determination. An Israel that denies Palestinians that right—in this case, in the territories beyond the pre-1967 border—while at the same time denying them full and equal Israeli citizenship is not a democracy but an apartheid state.

Is President Obama up to that challenge? Nothing in his performance during his first term in office would indicate that he is. However, two recent developments hold out some hope. The first, as indicated above, is his nomination of Senator John Kerry as Secretary of State and Senator Chuck Hagel as Secretary of Defence—two men who have few illusions about the reason for the failure of the peace process and the courage to speak the truth.

The second are intimations of a new European initiative to present to Israel’s new government a set of clear parameters that establish the pre-1967 border (with provision for equal land swaps to compensate Palestinians for Israel’s retention of the large settlement blocs) as the starting point for resumed peace talks. It is a parameter that by definition precludes Israel’s unilateral annexation of all of East Jerusalem. Another parameter would preclude a large scale return of Palestinian refugees to their previous homes in Israel.

Because the UK, France and Germany are reportedly all on board, it is likely this initiative will also receive the backing of most—perhaps all—EU countries. More important, its sponsors are likely to have received assurances that even if Washington will not lead the effort, it will not block it. If so, that would indeed be a significant change of direction. Ironically, the chances of this initiative’s success will only be strengthened if the new Israeli government proves even more rigidly opposed to Palestinian statehood.

But no one should be deceived about the chances of such an initiative if it does not contain the one condition that is the litmus test of its seriousness. That is that if the parties do not accept the parameters or are not able to reach an accord by a certain date, the terms for an end to Israel’s occupation of the West Bank will be determined by the UN Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter. If it lacks that provision, or the provision faces the threat of an American veto, the initiative will be as phony as Netanyahu’s commitment to a two-state solution in his Bar-Ilan speech.

For nothing short of the threat of being turned into a pariah by the entire international community because of its apartheid regime will persuade Israel’s electorate to bring back a government that will safeguard the country’s democratic character and accept a viable and sovereign Palestinian state along its border. 
A bad peace
Will Sri Lanka’s failure to account for past bloodshed fuel new conflict?
MEERA SELVA

As I enter Jaffna, the cement dust makes me cough. The city at the northern tip of Sri Lanka, cultural heartland of the Tamil minority, is being rebuilt after 30 years of war.

The city’s houses were beautiful, once. There used to be stone elephants on the pillars of gates, delicate lattice-work shutters, perhaps a dancing Krishna painted on the front wall. The poorer homes had roofs thatched with palm leaves and verandas in the shade of fruit trees. The new houses look more like concrete boxes. Corrugated iron has replaced palm thatch. After years of trauma, people are rebuilding with grim determination, but without poetry.

I left Jaffna in 1983 when Sri Lanka’s civil war began, to live with my parents in England. In the early 1980s, inside the terraced houses in Wembley, East Ham, or in our case Cardiff, the radiators were turned up high, as the scent of cumin and onions fried in smoking hot oil filled the air, and children scuttled along the linoleum while the adults talked in Tamil of a place called Eelam.

Eelam was a country that didn’t exist; the Tamil name for an independent homeland carved out of Sri Lanka’s northeast. The civil war pitted the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist movement who claimed to represent the island’s Tamil-speaking Hindu minority, just over a 10th of the population, against a government dominated by the Sinhala-speaking Buddhist majority, roughly three-quarters of the nation’s 20m citizens.

I have come back to Sri Lanka for the first time since the conflict ended, with my husband and our young son and daughter, to see if I can find the house my grandfather built, where I spent the happiest years of my childhood. Above all, I want to see whether national peace, bought at such cost to the Tamil minority, will hold good—and whether it should.

The war officially began when hundreds of Tamil civilians were killed in riots in Colombo, the capital, after the Tamil Tigers had

Meera Selva is a fellow of the Reuters Institute and a former Africa correspondent for The Independent
murdered 13 soldiers. But the outbreak was not sudden. The decades following independence in 1948 had brought mounting tension between the Tamils and Sinhalese, which often erupted in bloody anti-Tamil riots and reprisals by Tamil militants.

The tension was the result of a vigorous Sinhalese nationalism, of a kind mirrored in other Asian and African nations emerging from colonial rule, expressed in laws which, for example, enshrined Sinhala as the official language of the state and restricted Tamil admission to university. For Sinhalese patriots, the elevation of their language and distinctive Buddhist culture restored the pride sapped by centuries of foreign domination. But for the minority, the years after independence were uncomfortable. It was like a competition to establish who had the oldest claim to the soil, with rival religious shrines planted like flags.

The war dragged on for 25 years. The fighting focused mainly on the Tamil north, leaving around 80,000 dead, according to UN estimates. An article published in the New Yorker in January 2011 said that about half of all casualties were Tamil civilians and a quarter were members of Sri Lanka’s armed forces. For three decades, each side gained and lost territory, with the Tamil Tigers fighting the government’s superior military strength through a campaign of terror, massacring Sinhalese and Muslim villagers and planting bombs on buses and planes. The conflict ended in 2009 with the government’s all-out assault on the Tigers, which left many thousands of Tamil civilians dead (see Marc Weller, p45).

Ordinary Sinhalese are relieved that they can now get on a bus, go to work in central Colombo or take their children to the zoo without risk of being blown up. But many Tamils believed that the government’s fear of the Tigers was their only bargaining chip in arguing for more rights. The dream of Eelam, bankrolled and enthusiastically supported by many in the Tamil diaspora for a generation, is dead. In its place is an uneasy peace.

As a child, I often visited my grandfather’s bungalow in Jaffna and came to think of it as my home. After he died, my mother kept the house, ready for the day the war would end and we could move back. But when the war was finally over, she sold it. For her, the dream of returning had vanished.

Jaffna lies on a peninsula in Sri Lanka’s far north, and the only way to reach it from abroad is to fly to Colombo. My husband and I have hired a car with a driver who is Sinhalese and curious about Jaffna, a city he has never visited. In Sri Lanka, identities are often fluid. While the languages are derived from different roots and written in different scripts, people eat the same food regardless of their race: rice and fish curry, stringhoppers—noodles fashioned from steamed rice flour—with fiercely spiced sambal. And their clothes are similar; as we drive through the streets of southern, Sinhalese towns, I see men in chequered sarongs, dressing just like my father.

The highway veers inland and cuts into the Vanni, the vast zone of dense jungle and scrub south of Jaffna that bore the brunt of the fighting. Here, the scars are barely scabbed over. Houses are in ruins or dotted with bullet holes. Women and men in helmets and armoured jackets gather a harvest of mines. A giant concrete water tower toppled in the fighting in Kilinochchi—one of the Tigers’ statelet—lies like a broken wine glass on its side. The shops and hotels and Hindu temples are all shabby and broken. The only things that look new are the war memorials.

The army is everywhere, silent and watchful. Under the peace established by President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2009, the north is covered by a dense military network. Every few miles along the road, there is an army encampment with sentries in grassy dugouts. Dotted around the city are concrete guardposts, while small shops and stretches of farmland have been converted into bases. When I was in Jaffna during a brief ceasefire in 2003, I recall the nervous, wide-eyed troopers, fingers tightly clutching their guns, surrounded by a populace who spoke Tamil, a language they did not know. Now the troops are at ease, bicycling among the locals or lounging in shopfronts. There is just one army checkpoint as we head in to Jaffna; the soldiers check our passports and wave us through.

A Sinhalese man whose wife is a government employee in Kilinochchi tells me that Sri Lanka should have a federal system—“like in India, where every state has a chief minister.” But that prospect is growing fainter. In the absence of a threat from the Tigers, the government has dismissed the need for further power sharing. Defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the president’s brother, has said that “the existing constitution is more than enough for us to live together. Now the LTTE is gone, I don’t think there is any requirement… Devolution-wise I think we have done enough.” We

A water tower toppled during the war in Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka
one side, hands aloft in victory salute, while soldiers raise the Sri Lankan flag in Iwo Jima style on the other side. There is a large poster of him outside Jaffna’s grand temple. “We wish you a long life!” declares the slogan in Tamil beneath.

We drive towards my grandfather’s address on one of the main thoroughfares that stretches for miles from the city centre out to the coastal villages, roads that were mined and sealed off during the war. I finally spot the familiar wrought iron gates, opposite a shack selling chocolates; my grandmother would take me there in the evening, when it was lit up with candles and looked like a treasure-filled cavern. The bungalow is a rectangle of concrete, with a flat roof and even from the road I can see it is well cared for. The walls are freshly painted and an extension is being built. Much of Jaffna looks dishevelled these days, but this house sparkles, a sign of its new owners’ pride in it. I stand in the front garden, remembering the years when the war took hold.

Staying with my grandfather in Jaffna in 1982, the country had been tense, but normal life still seemed possible. Then the mood turned darker. I noticed my grandparents getting jittery whenever police or soldiers patrolled our street. My grandfather started to encourage his remaining children to leave, and they went one by one to the US and Australia.

One evening during that time, just as we were about to have dinner, a shadowy figure vaulted a fence and dashed through our back garden. Instinctively, my grandfather switched off the lights and told us to gather in a bedroom. He suspected the man was a Tiger fleeing army soldiers, who would soon follow. Tamils had no faith at all in Sri Lanka’s military and my grandfather worried that we would be wrongly accused of harbouring an insurgent. We spent the whole night awake, sitting in darkness, as soldiers walked around the house. We watched their silhouettes in the moonlight, looming tall against the windows.

When war officially broke out a few weeks later, my grandfather’s house was suddenly full of relatives who had fled Colombo, and my parents ordered me back to England.

As the Tigers paralysed Sri Lanka with ruthless suicide bombings and an efficient military force, I was growing up in Britain, where my family would get the occasional letter with stories of power cuts and medicine shortages. I would overhear conversations about the Tigers—always “the boys”—in which the older generation would lament that the militants had stopped listening to them.

Slender threads bound us to the old country. At a coming of age ceremony, just after my 11th birthday, I wore a sari for the first time, my mother pinning me into the heavy fabric. The war rumbled in the background; there were hopeful moments, when India intervened or Norway sought to broker a peace deal, but the hope was always dashed. And there were moments when a Tiger assault would be so audacious that it would make international headlines—the destruction of planes at the international airport in 2001 was one. For many in the diaspora, such attacks fed the false hope that the Tigers could achieve their aims by force of arms alone.

The Tigers raised funds from the Tamil community worldwide, as well as from investments in restaurants and other small businesses abroad. By the last year of the war, in 2009, estimates of the number of Tamils in Britain ranged from 110,000 to 150,000. The diaspora preferred to dwell on the rebellion’s successes in conventional battle with the Sri Lankan army, but the LTTE also assassinated Tamil moderates and killed civilians. My grandparents left in the 1980s, their nerves shredded by explosions, and began a new life in the US, where four of their children had gone.
The seeds of the Tigers’ downfall were there even a decade ago. Their attacks on civilians led to the US listing the LTTE as a terrorist organisation in 1997. Other countries followed suit, choking off the Tigers’ finances. In 2001, the UK joined in, forcing the LTTE to shut down one of its most lucrative offices.

The war ended in 2009 with the government launching a decisive attack to destroy the Tigers. According to a UN report leaked to the press in November 2012, around 30,000 Tamil civilians died during this final stage of the war, caught between government forces and the last stand of the Tigers on a narrow strip of beach in the north-east. A UN inquiry accused the military of indiscriminate shelling of civilians and hospitals; it also accused the LTTE of using civilians as human shields.

Despite the dreadful toll in human life at the end of the war, the peace has earned President Rajapaksa approval among the Sinhalese majority. He won a landslide victory in the 2010 elections. His popularity is understandable. There has been an end to the random violence that plagued everyday life here for a generation. But the results of post-war elections have highlighted how divided the island remains. While the president enjoys immense popularity in the south, Tamil parties allied to the government have fared poorly in the north and east.

The defeat of the LTTE creates the opportunity for a new political dispensation. The Tigers silenced all rival voices; their demise allows the rebirth of more moderate politics. But that is unlikely to happen without any concession from the government. Despite assurances to the UN and foreign governments, including the US and India, the president has failed to offer any devolution of power to the north and east.

The government says it has invested at least $1.1bn in the north since the end of the war. Speaking in Tamil at the UN general assembly before the war’s end, President Rajapaksa said bonds between the two people would grow, as they marched towards a “richer freedom.” However, the International Crisis Group, a respected think tank, warns that the development of the north is biased against the local Tamil population. Many businesses are run by the military, or Sinhalese families, while many local officials are drawn from the Buddhist majority, the organisation said in a November 2012 report.

I speak to a former LTTE cadre, recruited under the bleakest circumstances: “The Tigers asked for me or one of my children, so I went.” He speaks quietly of losing many relatives in the final days, killed by government forces, the bodies disappearing into a mass grave. He adds: “Their [Sri Lankan government’s] development is just for their people [the Sinhalese]. The money that foreign governments give, like Japan, we don’t see.”

Even remembrance of those killed has become a criminal act in Jaffna. After victory, the government bulldozed the cemeteries where Tamil fighters were buried, denying their families a place to grieve.

In November, the army stormed the university campus, arresting students for lighting lamps to commemorate the war dead. An article in the Island, a Colombo-based English language newspaper that strives to be bipartisan, describes the army’s intervention as a demonstration that “the Sinhalese will decide who and what the Tamils are allowed to commemorate or celebrate.” Posters near the campus advertise escape routes: “Study in Malaysia,” says one; another offers to arrange migration to Canada, New Zealand, Finland—all fees paid after visa.” In the 1970s, the creation of a pool of disenfranchised youth was one of the seeds of war.

I think of Britain, which has wrestled with its own national identity in recent decades. From Northern Ireland to multicultural London, my adopted home has painfully reshaped itself. I long for a similar, peaceful refashioning of Sri Lanka’s identity. For too long, politics in Sri Lanka has been a zero-sum game in which the victorious ethnic group stands to claim the lion’s share of civil service jobs or university places.

To be prosperous and peaceful, the country needs a political settlement flexible enough for its mix of ethnicities, with the Tamil-majority provinces allowed autonomy in exchange for recognising Colombo as sovereign.

Embers of the civil war still glow. In Jaffna, a Tamil man who guides us around the city tells us that the fight is over and the LTTE has been wiped out. “But people still play the songs of the struggle,” he says.

Peace versus justice

The Sri Lankan government claims ownership of the truth

Marc Weller

Peace and justice, we are told, are mortal enemies. If you want peace, you need to be prepared to sacrifice the demands of justice. And if you insist on justice, you cannot have peace. Hence, after violent civil conflicts, questions of accountability, truth-finding and reconciliation have often been subsumed to a demand for the victims to forget their grievances in the wider interests of peace.

It is argued that a society cannot move on if it is transfixed by the traumas and sins of its past. But the experience of conflict over the past century proves the opposite: the past imprisons the future. For this, it might be enough to see one’s country or cause destroyed, to see loved ones dead or injured, and to see one’s home and heritage in cinders. It is even more so if such all-encompassing suffering is, in addition, denied recognition by a false truth imposed by perpetrators who write the official histories.

Even now, almost a century after the Armenian genocide, ethnic Armenians the world over clamour for recognition of the fate of their ancestors. The mothers on the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires kept marching every Thursday for a decade, until a reformed Argentina was willing to acknowledge the truth about the horrible killings committed by the military government in the “dirty war” (1976-85) against suspected leftist youths.

Marc Weller is a professor of international law at the University of Cambridge and director of the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law. He is a former UN senior mediation expert. The views expressed are his own
Accounting for the past is therefore not only a moral right of victims and relatives, but it is also a necessity for a society to come to rest after a period of violent confrontation, marked by systematic abuses of human rights and human dignity. This finding has led to the development of a comprehensive toolbox for transitional justice in places as diverse as Central America, South Africa and Canada. It includes establishing the truth through official commissions and allowing victims and their relatives to air their story and share their grief with the nation. The process involves offering official acknowledgement of suffering, and compensation for it, along with guarantees against repetition of the kind of atrocities suffered. And ultimately it may include establishing criminal responsibility for those at the top who ordered atrocities, or those who carried them out on the ground.

The government of Sri Lanka under President Mahinda Rajapaksa, in elected office since 2005, seems some distance removed from recognising the utility of such mechanisms. The violent confrontation between Tamil Tigers and the government ended in 2009, after decades of vicious strife. Despite the government’s decisive victory, the battle over the truth of the final phase of the conflict continues.

In the government’s view, the Tamil Tigers are a terrorist movement that imposed untold suffering on Sri Lanka. They were wiped out by a heroic struggle of the armed forces, who suffered great casualties. But many Tamils, mainly in the northeast, along with a vocal expatriate community around the world, have been confronted with the collapse of their dream of self-determination, as well as suffering many deaths, physical and mental trauma and damage to property. To them, these are losses imposed by a brutal government campaign that violated all standards of humanity.

The government launched its campaign to defeat the Tamil Tigers (also known as LTTE) in their remaining northern stronghold in September 2007. The fighting intensified as government forces increasingly hemmed the LTTE forces on the Jaffna peninsula, where previously they had maintained a virtual state. The final phase of the already brutal conflict commenced in September 2008 and lasted until May 2009.

According to evidence collected by major international human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and most recently supported by two United Nations reports of March 2011 and November 2012, the government used artillery to attack areas where large numbers of civilians were mixed in with small numbers of Tamil tigers. (Authorities deny this charge.) In fact, the government had unilaterally declared these areas “no fire zones” (NFZs) and urged civilians to congregate in them. According to these reports, the government hindered or denied humanitarian assistance necessary for the survival of some 300,000 trapped civilians and later targeted or detained them as they sought to flee the scene. Government troops also allegedly murdered large numbers of captured opposition fighters who had finally surrendered. A video purportedly confirming this fact caused outrage in western states where it was screened. The authorities are also said to have allowed rape and torture to take place as part of their armed campaign.

On the other hand, according to the same reports, the Tamil Tigers themselves face allegations of severe and widespread mistreatment of individuals in areas under their control. They are said to have prevented the terrorised civilian population from leaving the conflict area and instead used them as human shields. The LTTE is reported to have fired weapons from the immediate vicinity of these civilian concentrations.

Such conduct on both sides offends against the most fundamental rules of human rights and humanitarian law, which preclude systematic attacks on a civilian population through killings, torture, sexual violence, forced displacement and other acts. They apply to governments and armed opposition movements alike, in times of both peace and war. Their application can never be suspended, whatever emergency a government may invoke.

In the past, a code of silence on atrocities of this kind might have prevailed. Governments triumphing in internal conflicts would seek shelter behind the doctrine that other countries should not interfere in their internal affairs. But the 1990s changed this. The UN Security Council set up a process to investigate the violations of humanitarian law by Saddam Hussein’s troops in occupied Kuwait. Then came the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia in 1995. It became clear that the suffering of entire populations does not take place within an iron box of state sovereignty; the outside world can insist on an objective determination of facts and on the establishment of responsibility when universal core values have been systematically violated. But it needs to muster widespread agreement to activate the mechanisms now available.

Immediately after the Sri Lanka conflict ended, in May 2009, UN secretary general Ban Ki-Moon visited the country in the wake of initial reports of the atrocities. President Rajapaksa reiterated his commitment to international human rights and promised an accountability process to address grievances. But he wasted the opportunity to cooperate with the UN and other bodies in mounting a credible truth and reconciliation process. Instead, in 2010 the government established its own “Lessons Learnt and Recon-
ciliation Commission,” which lacked the mandate and willingness to mount a full, independent investigation.

Since then, the government has worked hard diplomatically to block a formal international investigation into its compliance with these rules during the final phases of the conflict, skilfully exploiting broader divisions among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Russia dislikes international action it sees as inspired by western liberalism. China often sides with less developed states that claim to suffer from western interventionism. As a result, the council is not in a position to establish an ad hoc tribunal, as it did for Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

It also cannot refer the matter to the International Criminal Court in the Hague, as it did on Sudan and Libya. Sri Lanka is not a member of the ICC Statute, precluding the court from mounting a prosecution at its own initiative. And given the attitude of its government, it is unlikely that a mixed or hybrid court based in Sri Lanka but containing international elements could be established, as was the case in Cambodia, Sierra Leone or Lebanon.

Sri Lanka’s international campaign to own the truth is rooted in the government’s conviction that the conflict was prolonged by meddling western governments who generated pressure for recognition of a separate Tamil identity. It argues that “the west” has been preaching the need for counter-terrorism action against threats to New York or London, but pleaded with the government to give only a “moderate” response to the violent movement of the Tigers. Members of the government consider, too, that international mediators rewarded the fighters with peace plans offering self-governance bordering on independence.

There is some truth to this last point. In the months leading up to the defeat of the Tigers, there was widespread confidence among diplomats and experts that a Norwegian-sponsored settlement offering broad autonomy to the northeast would be signed any day. This, the government argues with some justification, would have handed control over a large part of Sri Lanka’s territory to an unaccountable and dictatorial cadre movement tainted by charges of terrorism.

As diplomatic deadlock on the question of accountability persisted, the UN secretary general himself took action. Building on the commitment the Sri Lankan president made to him in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, he appointed in June 2010 a three-member expert panel to advise him on steps towards accountability. This was a courageous and risky move, given the dependence of the UN Secretariat on the support of the wide range of UN member states.

The panel issued its Report on Accountability in Sri Lanka in March 2011. The experts had not been mandated to make findings on the substance of the case but they confirmed the very serious allegations of systematic misconduct. Moreover, the committee sharply criticised the government’s failure to deal with the violations. It found that the government’s Lessons Learnt commission was “deeply flawed” while no other domestic remedies are available to victims through local courts. It proposed steps to address this gap.

The diplomatic battle then transferred to Geneva, the seat of the UN human rights machinery. Western governments had been pressing for the Human Rights Council to institute its own investigation or demand that Sri Lanka take more effective action. However, the council is not an independent court or body composed of human rights experts. It too is a diplomatic arena, where governments fight tooth and nail to avoid criticism of their conduct or that of their allies. In this instance, highly unusually, the office of the UN high commissioner on human rights felt constrained to censure the Sri Lankan government for attempting to intimidate its own nationals, including journalists reporting on the proceedings and Tamils who had come to Geneva to campaign for a resolution from the council.

In March of last year, almost three years after the conflict concluded, the Human Rights Council managed to adopt a resolution. The text was approved by 24 votes in favour, with 23 votes against or abstaining. Russia and China opposed it. The resolution had to be largely defanged to allow its passage; it meekly calls upon the government to launch a more credible national process to ensure justice, accountability and reconciliation.

Hence it seems that the matter will, for now, remain with the government of Sri Lanka, which is unlikely to be swayed by international pressure; indeed, it may believe that its prime task is to resist unjustified international pressure, rather than to move the nation ahead in its own interest. The government will need to come to realise that its victory in the northeast will be a pyrrhic one, unless it manages to reunite the country in a more profound way. The Tamil population will continue to demand acknowledgement of its past suffering and of its identity within the state.

For the government, taking full account of the past need not be an exercise in unqualified self-flagellation. There is also much to be critically investigated about the armed Tamil movement—a movement that is unlikely to accept the status of a beaten enemy forever. In Sri Lanka, as in most places, it is unlikely that a genuinely lasting peace can be established unless of the visible administration of justice heralds a new beginning.
Go fund yourself

Need to raise some money? Head for the internet—and ask everyone

KEVIN CHARLES REDMON

Roger Horowitz, left, and Brian Sykora, whose food business was partly crowdfunded

So you want to open an ice lolly shop. You’re 23 years old, a year out of university and bored with web development. Office life doesn’t suit you. You’re restive, uninspired, daydreaming. In Mount Pleasant, your Washington, DC, neighbourhood, restaurants are popping up all over. “I could do that,” you think. You call your friend Roger. In college, the two of you were top rowers, discussing ideas on the way to practice.

You mention artisanal ice lollipops: daring flavours, fresh fruit, local dairy. Roger grew up in a diverse suburb of New York City where Mexican paletas—ice lolly vendors—were popular with young and old alike. He immediately sees the potential: Latin street food with an American twist.

Thus, in 2009, was Pleasant Pops born: the creation of Brian Sykora and Roger Horowitz. Sykora quit his job, Horowitz moved into his house, and the pair began making ice lollies by hand in a rented kitchen. On weekdays, they took their truck, Big Poppa, down to the financial district to catch bankers during lunch break. At weekends, they catered for young families at the farmers’ market. Hibiscus flower, lavender cream, avocado lime—the stranger the flavours, the better they sold. Their customers weren’t just loyal; they were fanatical.

When Sykora and Horowitz decided to open a bricks-and-mortar paleta of their own, they launched a campaign on the website Kickstarter. The online crowdfunding website allowed backers around the country—anyone with a credit card—to donate to their epicurean crusade.

Securing a $100,000 construction loan took months of persuasion, plus a Matterhorn of legal paperwork; no commercial bank would lend to them, and a credit union agreed only after the Small Business Administration guaranteed the loan. Their Kickstarter page, on the other hand, was up in a matter of days. It outlined the rewards a donor would receive in exchange for their support: $5 got his or her name inscribed on the “Founders Wall,” $25 bought a ticket to the opening night party. A thousand dollars earned fla-

Kevin Charles Redmon is an American journalist writing about technology and the environment
your project,” follow the instructions, set a funding target and wait.

Device billed as “the incredible egg yolk separator” (over £7000

and possibly fund a huge array of projects. among these was a

Indiegogo have become clearinghouses for creativity. Need

their investment if it does. It.” It adds: “We want it

to be clear that investors in a crowdfund have little or no protection

and complex,” and that it is best left to “sophisticated investors

In a single day, Sykora and Horowitz raised 60 percent of their

$20,000 goal. Eventually, their take topped $26,000, seed money

to purchase equipment and supplies for their empty storefront.

Five months later, the Pleasant Pops Farmhouse Market &

Café opened. The mayor showed up to cut the ribbon. Sykora

and Horowitz were, at 27, successful small business owners, enterpris-

ing foodies, and minor internet sensations. They were living the

New American Dream. The business is still running.

Welcome to the gilded age of crowdfunding. Where entrepre-

neurs once depended on friends, families and fools to fund their

ventures, the web offers garage tinkerers and would-be Mark

Zuckerbergs the ability to pitch their ideas directly to the masses.

Worldwide, crowdfunding raised $1.5bn in 2011, according to

Massolution, the crowdfunding research firm. This figure was

expected to nearly double in 2012. As Fred Wilson, co-founder of

Union Square Ventures, a New York-based venture capital firm,

has said, if American families devoted 1 percent of their assets

to crowdfunding small businesses it would inject $300bn into the

start-up market—compared to the $30bn now at work from tradi-

tional venture capitalists.

It’s an enticing picture and, at a time when banks aren’t lend-

ing and unemployment is high, small business finance has never

needed innovation so badly. But is crowdfunding a miracle or a

mirage? Some say it will support a new vision of work, where peo-

ple will make their own jobs. Other enthusiasts see it as trans-

forming finance, a swipe at the banks that are so reluctant to lend.

Andrew Haldane, director for financial stability at the Bank of

England, is enthusiastic about the transformative potential; last

year, he told the Independent: “These companies are tiny today

but so was Google a decade and a half ago. It has changed every

other industry such as film, music and even football clubs, so why

not finance?”

But others (see Andy Davis, right), argue that the sites play on

the ambiguity of whether the money is an investment or dona-

tion and that, beyond small-scale artistic and media projects, it

is unlikely to get far. Outright critics, meanwhile, argue that it will be

a magnet for hucksters and fraud, where pensioners lose their sav-

ings on risky investments. The “crowd” failed to prevent Enron or

the subprime debacle—why should it be trusted to invest wisely in

the next Facebook? The Financial Services Authority, which regu-

lates crowdfunding in the UK, strikes a cautious note, saying on

its website that “many crowdfunding opportunities are high risk

and complex,” and that it is best left to “sophisticated investors

who know how to value a start-up business.” It adds: “We want it

to be clear that investors in a crowdfund have little or no protection

if the business or project fails, and that they will probably lose all

their investment if it does.”

Donation-based crowdfunding sites such as Kickstarter and

Indiegogo have become clearinghouses for creativity. Need

$100,000 to build a better iPhone dock, or $150 to self-publish

Shard of Iron, your science fiction novel about an evil alien empire

led by three dragons? Just visit a crowdfunding site, click “Start

your project,” follow the instructions, set a funding target and wait

for the verdict of the crowd.

On a single day in January, visitors to Kickstarter could browse

and possibly fund a huge array of projects. Among these was a

device billed as “the incredible egg yolk separator” (over £7000

had been raised—47 percent of its funding target). Other projects

included a rock band looking to produce a new album and go on

tour (£18,000 raised), a gadget to give one-handed control of a

smartphone when using it as a camera (£18,000 raised); as well as

projects to produce books, lamps, clothing and a device for storing

“drink, banknotes or even a ready-rolled cigarette in your bicycle’s

handlebars” (£567 raised). This money is offered by supporters in

exchange for perks—a free gadget, ticket to a gig, and so on—and,

in most cases, a creator collects the money only if the funding tar-

get is met, ensuring that backers don’t waste money on ideas that

never take flight. The website itself makes money by taking a cut

of successfully-funded campaigns of at least 5 percent.

In just three years, Kickstarter has helped thousands of artists

and designers. But now, a new kind of crowdfunding threatens to

have an impact beyond the creative class. “Equity crowdfunding”

envisages crowdfunders not as whimsical contributors to a passion

project, but as investors. This model rewards investors not with

gifts, but with equity—that is, a financial stake in the business.

Crowdfunding will grow, though possibly more as a way to fund

passion projects rather than businesses. Selling equity to the crowd

is going to become important, but it will be a long time before it

rivals the big sources of early-stage equity investment.

Another problem is the lack of liquidity—it’s getting eas-

tier to put money into start-ups and private company shares,

but harder to get it out. This is because the number of compa-

nies being offered for sale by flotation on the stock market has

declined, as have the sales of whole companies. The real issue is

that most people—"the crowd"—have no idea how hard it’s going to

be to get their money back. Unless that changes, doing some-

thing that’s more akin to donation, as with Kickstarter, makes

sense (though people appear to think they have purchased some-

thing when they donate.)

Equity crowdfunding is exciting, but it will be a long time

before we can gauge its full significance. Without a revival of the

traditional exits (stock market flotations, trade sales and buy-

outs), people could easily end up losing patience with it.

Andy Davis is Prospect’s investment columnist

Like contraception and tillage agriculture, crowdfunding is an old idea made better by technology. Before

Kickstarter, there was subscription. Many 18th cen-

tury authors were supported by patrons. In exchange

for coin, a backer was guaranteed copies of the work, plus the

pleasure of seeing his name in print. If enough financiers could

be found, a project might come to fruition.

Samuel Johnson used subscription to publish his 1755 Dictionary of the English Language, if somewhat grudgingly. The dictionary defined “patron” as: “Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery.” Kickstarter was one of the first companies to bring the subscription model to the web, 250 years later. Perry Chen, a former musician, co-founded the site as a place where artists could fund work that record labels and arts funding councils wouldn’t support.

Today, almost 83,000 campaigns have been launched on Kick-

starter. Slightly fewer than half have been successful, taking in a ▶
total of $398m. In October, the site opened its platform to UK fundraisers—alongside existing sites such as Peoplefundit and Crowdfunder—and in the first month British campaigns attracted more than £2m in pledges, or roughly £18 every minute.

Kickstarter is only part of a wider shift in the way we bankroll culture in the 21st century. In 2007, pre-Kickstarter, Radiohead sold their seventh album, In Rainbows, directly to fans via the web, using a give-what-you-can model. More recently, Andrew Sullivan, the blogger and Sunday Times writer, announced that he was leaving the Daily Beast website to strike out on his own. Readers who wanted to subscribe to his blog, The Dish, could do so for $19.99 a year—or more, if they were feeling benevolent.

But what if crowdfunding could produce not just albums but whole businesses? And what if backers were not donors but investors, motivated not by altruism but by profit, who expected more than perks: equity, dividends, maybe even a seat on the board?

Equity crowdfunding works in the same way as the donation-based kind—ventures are only funded if enough investors sign on—but the risks are higher and the money bigger. Fraud is one concern—con men preying on retirees and oystlers out to make a quick buck. So far, however, these fears have not been borne out. The more relevant issue is: what happens when you “kickstart” a great idea and it doesn’t work? When the low-budget film you donated to ends up being rubbish, you may be disappointed, but you’ve only lost £25. When the technology company you bought equity in goes under, you’ve lost £10,000—potentially more.

Equity crowdfunding sites have been active in the UK since 2011, but the practice became legal in the United States only in April 2012 with the passage of the Jumpstart our business start-ups Act. Previously, securities law restricted American entrepreneurs from selling equity—shares in a private company—to most “unsophisticated” or “unaccredited” investors. A company couldn’t even publicly advertise that it was raising money.

All that changed with the JOBS Act. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is now writing the rules, to take effect by 2014. When they do, small businesses will likely be free to both advertise equity publicly and accept investors—rich and poor, accredited and not. There will probably be a scramble to do so.

The legislation has vocal naysayers, among them traditional financiers. The North American Securities Administrators Association called crowdfunding its “top investor threat” of 2012. William Galvin, Massachusetts secretary of state, wrote a letter to the SEC in August stating that: “Longstanding problems in the markets for small and speculative stocks show the pitfalls of relying on the wisdom of crowds. It is clearly possible to deceive large groups of investors, and it is definitely possible for fraud operators to swindle individuals.” Bernie Madoff, convicted in 2009 of running an $18bn Wall Street fraud, is regularly invoked as the kind of operator who misled intelligent people and even the SEC itself.

It’s also not clear that drawing investors at random from the crowd makes for healthy businesses—or sane business owners. “A lot of investors want be connected to the business, which may not be as attractive to the entrepreneur as it seems,” Eric Paley, co-founder of an early stage venture capital fund, said. “All the people who say, ‘I really want to help.’ It’s like, ‘Yeah, but you’re not that helpful. You’re distracting me.’ If you’ve got 100 investors and 30 want to help, it can get pretty awkward.”

But equity crowdfunding has plenty of cheerleaders, too. “It’s going to completely open up capital markets to all kinds of things that we’ve never thought could raise money,” said Robert Litan, the former director of economic studies at the Brookings Institute and now director of research at Bloomberg Government, a division of the news service.

Litan thinks that regulators worry too much about swindlers and class-action lawsuits. “When eBay got started, people were all worried that it was going be a total magnet for fraud. What eBay figured out was a system to rate people, whether they’re trustworthy or not.”

Advocates argue that it’s easy to trick one investor—but it’s a lot harder, maybe even impossible, to trick 10,000. “You’d have to defraud your whole family,” one entrepreneur told me. The herd does have a way of sniffing out chicanery, from shoddy product designs to fantastical revenue projections. Thanks to Google, basic due diligence can now be done from the sofa. And thanks to social media, no rumour stays quiet for long.

“I think this idea of crowdfunding being a bastion of fraud, and bamboozling the unsophisticated populous, it’s bogus,” said Jonathan Sandlund, an erstwhile investment banker who edits a website devoted to the topic. Sandlund points to the British company Crowdcube, based in Exeter. Launched in 2011, the site has raised just under £5m for start-ups and counts more than 27,000 investors among its users. So far, not one of them has been, as Sandlund has it, “bamboozled.”

The idea behind Crowdcube is simple. Until recently, small business finance was stuck in the 20th century. Intricate hierarchies of angel investors—high-net-worth individuals who offer retweets on Twitter was about as difficult as putting on a hat. The big negative, however, was that getting money from those same, impoverished and unemployed, people was like drawing blood from a liberal arts degree.

My film, a dark comedy about dog-kidnappers called The Flight of the Flamingo, was seeking $7,000—a conservative figure, even in the world of low-budget filmmaking—and the fundraising ran for 40 days. Those 40 days were among the most stressful of my life, as I juggled incessantly badgering people for donations with trying to pass my Oxford preliminary exams (not my greatest feat of scheduling). Writing blogs about movies and student life helped. About half of our final total ($7,620—safely above our baseline goal) came from family and friends. The rest came mysteriously via Twitter, Tumblr, web forums and various other dark recesses of the internet.

Our largest contribution was $2,000, donated by an eccentric German investor. In return we gave him a cameo in the film.

Reaching our goal was down to endurance and blind optimism, not skill. When it comes to crowdfunding for arts projects, it’s one part luck, two parts hard work and, if you’ve got that unnecessary garnishing—talent—well, that might help a little too.

Nick Hilton is a student at Oxford University and blogs about films as The Clapper Bored
risky start-ups seed money—dictated what, and who, got funded. Crowdcube’s founder, Darren Westlake, created, in essence, the world’s largest networking lunch, where investors can read through hundreds of pitches, see who else is backing a project, and put down money of their own.

Not all financiers are comfortable with Crowdcube’s business model—Westlake says he’s currently seeking FSA authorisation—and the platform already has competition. Seedrs, which launched in July, crowdfunds yet-to-be-profitable start-ups, and takes a cut if the company later cashes out. Unlike Crowdcube, it’s authorised by the FSA and is open to all investors, regardless of income.

But there’s a catch, one that regulators worry most people don’t understand: equity in a private company is what’s known as an illiquid asset; it can’t be easily sold. When you own stock in Vodafone and suddenly need cash to buy a new car, you can simply dump your shares. But when you own a 2 per cent stake in a start-up that makes robotic pet litter boxes—let’s call it Happy Kitty Co—your investment is, for the moment, worthless. Until Happy Kitty lists its shares on a stock market, or is bought by a larger company, or big investors put more money in, there’s no way for you to sell your share. It typically takes four to seven years for such a “liquidity event” to arrive, and that’s the best-case scenario. Because if Happy Kitty declares bankruptcy and sells all its assets at a huge discount, that, too, is a liquidity event—only you won’t be getting that new car.

The granddaddy of crowdfunding, Kickstarter, has said it’s uninterested in abandoning its donations-and-rewards model, no matter how lucrative the equity business model promises to be. “We’re going to keep funding creative projects in the way we currently do it,” Chen told the tech website “GigaOM” in May. “We’re not gearing up for the equity wave if it comes.” But Kickstarter’s close cousin, Indiegogo, will probably try. If Kickstarter is a carefully curated art gallery, Indiegogo is something closer to a garage sale. Originally a site for fledgling filmmakers, (see Nick Hilton, left) Indiegogo has become the go-to platform for ideas that don’t fly elsewhere—scholarships, vacation funds, medical expenses—plus the usual slew of novels, recitals, and save-the-local-bakery campaigns. “We have an open platform where anyone can create a campaign,” co-founder Danae Ringelmann said. “There’s no application. There’s no judgment. There’s no rejection. There’s no waiting. You have an idea? We don’t believe it’s our right to decide if you can raise money or not.”

I recently stopped by Indiegogo’s headquarters, on a warehoused artery near the heart of San Francisco. The firm seemed to be outgrowing its office like a hermit crab outgrowing its shell. With one conference room booked and the other given over to bike storage, we sat at the kitchen table. Two pugs played at our feet, and every so often, an employee—dressed college campus casual—wandered through to fix a shot of espresso or bowl of oatmeal. Graffiti adorned one wall: “Go fund yourself.”

Ringelmann, a former investment banker at JP Morgan, came to crowdfunding as a frustrated financier. Ten years ago, she accepted a chance invitation to a “Hollywood meets Wall street” networking event.

“It was a sea of emerging artists, and I was one of a handful of bankers,” she told me. For several surreal hours, she tried to explain that, not only was she a junior banker, but she didn’t finance films. “They didn’t get it, because all they saw was JP Morgan.” Two days later, she received a FedEx package from an aging filmmaker. He’d spent $15 to post her a script from Los Angeles. “I look forward to you financing my film,” he wrote. Ringelmann realised that the people who most wanted to bring art to life didn’t have the power to make it happen. “So I quit finance and went back to business school to do it,” she said, “because I was sick of hearing myself think about it.”

Indiegogo has made significant innovations on the Kickstarter model. Creators keep all the money a project raises, regardless of whether they hit a pre-specified target. And it has spent three years building a fully-automated website; it does not want to emulate Kickstarter in having a real person, rather than a machine, review every campaign before it goes live. “It’s very unscalable,” Ringelmann said of the Kickstarter model. “If YouTube had required people to apply to upload their videos, YouTube would not be the company it is today. We’re a YouTube for funding.”

Provided that the SEC’s forthcoming regulations aren’t too onerous, this laissez faire approach will allow Indiegogo to turn equity crowdfunding into a big business. “In working out which models work and which don’t, there will be massive failures,” she allowed. “There will be fraud. There will be people who mess up. And there will be a lot of backlash.” Regulators need to get comfortable with the idea that there will be mistakes, she argued. But this should not be used as a reason to prevent a potentially transformative industry from evolving.

“The ‘middle man’ has been disintermediated in a number of industries over the past few years—music sales, publishing, second-hand goods—courtesy of the web,” Andrew Haldane told me. “From a consumer perspective, they have been for the better.” Equity crowdfunding, he suggests, now promises to revolutionise finance in the same way.

Platforms where anyone can sell equity and anyone can invest are an attractive possibility, but that doesn’t mean they make business sense. Most people have never parsed a terms sheet or investor rights agreement and, whatever the SEC decides, it’s probably not wise for the general public to start buying illiquid securities online. The genius of Kickstarter is that people can support a person with a dream through donation—but making an investment is far more serious. It demands trust and loyalty, which most of the internet crowd are not willing to give. They’re better suited to the spring fling, the passing fancy. Like most people, they want only to enjoy the ice lollies while they last.
Jared Diamond is no modest thinker. His 1997 Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Guns, Germs and Steel* was intended to explain why some societies became powerful and developed in the course of history and why others did not. His follow-up in 2005, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, was meant to analyse the causes of civilisational collapse and to stop the world on its headlong path to destruction. His latest book, *The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn From Traditional Societies*, is a little more limited in its goals, but it is still intended to mark a decisive turning point in one of the longest running discussions in human history and to bring some very longstanding debates about the nature of civilisation and of humanity itself to a close.

Ever since the ancient Hebrews contrasted the habits of the farmer Abel and his pastoralist brother Cain, humans have been fascinated by the cultural and social differences among human groups. They have been intrigued by the way that different cultures produce different ideas about God, politics and family life; and the more settled and literate portion of the human race has always been fascinated by the nomads, jungle bands and other “savages” who live beyond the walls. The ancient Chinese carefully studied the barbarians to their north; Julius Caesar made a close study of the Gallic and Teutonic tribes of his day. Edward Said might have called these studies examples of Borealism, as they were shaped by the desire to control the behaviour of these northerly tribes rather than by a pure thirst for abstract knowledge, but while there certainly were military and political motives

The last savages

We have drawn the wrong lessons from traditional societies

WALTER RUSSELL MEAD

Walter Russell Mead is a professor of foreign affairs and humanities at Bard College
behind these studies, there was also a deeply human fascination with the possible insights to be gained from contrasting the conditions of “civilised” and “uncivilised” peoples.

As European explorers circled the globe in the early modern era, the variety of cultures and primitive people around the world seemed to offer clues to the origins of human society and what it meant to be human. Humans were recognisably similar everywhere, but existed in a dazzling, kaleidoscopic variety of cultures. This led to a number of perplexing questions: why were some peoples “civilised” and others not? Why were such very different social, political and religious ideas so entrenched around the world? Why were European ships docking in Osaka rather than Japanese ships visiting Amsterdam? Why did some peoples have more cargo than others?

These questions have two dimensions. One involves the relationship between great civilisations. Why was the Ottoman Empire in decline while the European states were rising? The other involves the same question that perplexed the ancients: what, if anything, can be learned about the basics of human nature from the comparison of the civilised with the uncivilised?

These remote and “primitive” others seem to have been, from early days, a mirror. By comparing the similarities and dissimilarities between themselves and others, the civilised could refine their ideas of human nature, satirise the defects of their own culture, and develop political theories to account for the rise of such features of civilisation as the state, organised religion and written law.

One of the earliest beliefs humanity has about its historical situation is that in the beginning “we” were all like “them”: the living conditions of the savages of today reflect to some degree the ways our ancestors once lived. From Hebrew and Greek times, the condition of the “savage” has been seen as a kind of time machine. The Hebrews studied the desert Arab tribes around them and reflected on their own distant, nomadic past; the Greeks studied the uncivilised tribes in their neighbourhood and formed theories about the nature of civilisation and their own prehistory.

Accordingly, over the millennia, there has been a marked tendency to historicise the differences between “civilised” and “savage” existence. Our understanding of human nature and of the rise of civilisation is grounded in the belief that the “savage” peoples around us reflect the authentic, primitive life of our species. The study of history becomes in part an effort to explain why we no longer live naturally, like them.

The comparison of these societies has been a minor and sometimes major literary genre and occupation from ancient times; the study of the primitive is the intellectual equivalent of pastoral poetry. Moments when the civilised and uncivilised (or differently civilised) worlds impinged on one another tended to bring this form of writing to the fore. The European discovery of the Americas and the long encounter with native American tribes stimulated centuries of reflection on the differences and similarities between “them” and “us.” In the 19th century it was the imperial project in Africa and the spread of industrialism to remote global regions that triggered another bout of this kind of reflection. In the 20th century, as civilisation extended its grip into all but a handful of places around the world, another series of jarring encounters took place—perhaps nowhere more so than in New Guinea, where tribal peoples whose material level of development appeared to differ little from those of the Stone Age, were suddenly pressed into the war effort as the Allies built landing strips and other facilities.

From Gauguin’s paintings of Tahiti to Margaret Mead’s anthropological studies like the landmark Coming of Age in Samoa, modern observers have gone to “uncivilised” regions of the earth in quest of the insights and experiences that the ancient world also sought in the realm of the savage. And just as political and military motives intensified the curiosity of the ancient Romans and Chinese about their “barbarian” neighbours, so in the 20th century anthropologists were often funded by governments interested in the military and political opportunities and dangers that groups like the Hmong in Indochina, or the various tribes in Central Asia, offered during the cold war.

Presumably the uncivilised have been at least as interested in the civilised all this time, but the absence of written records means that for the most part the story of the contacts and relationships between the two groups is remembered from the book-writing and record-keeping point of view.

The mirror presented by the savage world, then, has been used, and continues to be used today, to ground two kinds of theorising: theories about human nature that use observations of the primitive as raw material out of which ideas about the true nature of our species can be constructed, and theories of historical development that use descriptions of primitive peoples as a starting point in their analysis of how human societies change and develop over time.

Diamond believes that this long process has come to an inflection point. We stand on the cusp between two historical eras. Up until now the primitive has always been contemporary. The savage and the civilised have existed side by side. This was true in our parents’ generation, but it will not be true for our successors. The industrial and information revolutions have so enhanced the reach and the capability of civilisation that its tendrils have reached into the most remote valleys and forests of the world. It has become ubiquitous.

It has also become irresistible.

In past times, many people who lived outside the orbit of civilisation were content to do so. Contact with it might change their trading patterns; the Plains Indians were happy to acquire horses and rifles from European visitors, but they wanted these material goods in order to enhance their own lives rather than find a way into another world.

With a very small handful of exceptions, this is no longer true. The residents of remote New Guinea villages and the descendants of headhunters dress in the cast-off clothing of the west, look to earn their sustenance from multinational corporations rather than the forest floor, and increasingly have turned from the worship of the forest spirits and other deities of their ancestral traditions to the worship of the Christian God.

While a few scattered bands of people around the world continue to elude contact with the diligent anthropologists and surveyors of our global civilisation, we are living through the time when one of the most salient features of the human condition comes to an end. Soon, the only people on earth will be people caught up one way or another in the toils of a worldwide network of production, consumption, politics and information. “Primitive savagery” no longer walks the earth; at long last Abel has buried Cain. “Savages” of a kind we shall still have, but they are post-civilisational, not pre; the jungles they roam are made of asphalt and the barbarism they exhibit is constructed. They do not represent a living tradition that is older than and independent of civilisation; they are “neo-savages” rather than “ur-savages.”
Diamond spent much of his career living among the tribal peoples of New Guinea studying bird life before his two relatively recent books catapulted him to international stardom. As someone whose professional career began when the first contact between New Guinea highlanders and the rest of humanity in the 1930s was still a living memory, he has talked with people who grew up in a world that was untouched by modern civilisation and spent months and years among people for whom it was still only a part of their lives, and often not a very important one. He is one of the last to know the Vanishing Other first hand, and so in The World Until Yesterday he has undertaken a kind of last look at the primitive, offering a coda to thousands of years of human reflection on the differences between them and us.

Intellectually speaking, Diamond is a descendant of George Eliot’s Edward Casaubon in Middlemarch. Like Casaubon, Diamond is on a quest to unravel the “key to all mythologies,” the grand explanation of human cultures that can organise their variety into a single comprehensive scheme. His book Guns, Germs and Steel sought to explain human history in terms primarily of the influences of geography. Conceived as an answer to the question asked of him by an inhabitant of New Guinea—“Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?”—Guns, Germs and Steel says, essentially, that the Europeans were luckier than other people in their geographical location. They enjoyed a wider variety of animals and plants that were suitable for domestication, and they were well positioned to benefit by trade and cultural exchange with other societies in Eurasia. Geography, for Diamond, isn’t just about maps; the chaps come into it as well.

Like most grand simplifications, Diamond’s key to all mythologies has its critics, often rivals who have their own universal key to propose. Some claim that culture, most recently of the influences of geography. Conceived as an answer to the question asked of him by an inhabitant of New Guinea—“Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?”—Guns, Germs and Steel says, essentially, that the Europeans were luckier than other people in their geographical location. They enjoyed a wider variety of animals and plants that were suitable for domestication, and they were well positioned to benefit by trade and cultural exchange with other societies in Eurasia. Geography, for Diamond, isn’t just about maps; the chaps come into it as well.

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Like most grand simplifications, Diamond’s key to all myt
Left: Ellie Nesler (centre), a Californian who killed a man accused of sexually abusing her son, with her children. Such vigilantism threatens social stability, writes Diamond. Right: American anthropologist Osa Johnson faces a group of Kipsikis women in Kenya in 1925

and winding road. Each chapter presents a mix of Diamond’s personal observations and information drawn from the anthropological literature about a variety of topics. His intention is to illuminate aspects of the gap between them and us and to help us either glory in the achievements of our civilisation or, as the case may be, indulge our nostalgia for the lost textures and complexities of the pre-lapsarian world. It is admirable that Diamond doesn’t conscript all these small comparisons as evidence to prove some grand generalisation about the nature of mankind, but it makes for a flat and disjointed narrative. There is no sense of momentum or drive in these pages; we ramble the winding trails of a New Guinea forest while our guide talks on and on. The stories, entertaining as some of them are, don’t add up into anything in particular; the pudding has no theme.

Some sections work better than others. Diamond’s accounts of war among the New Guinea highland tribes are genuinely gripping. Ranging from night-time raids to groups of tribespeople confronting each other in massed array to genocidal slaughters, Diamond presents war as an ordinary but horrifying part of life in the highlands. Trapped by feuds and complex political rivalries, even within the narrow geography of their land (cut off from the rest of the world by steep mountains), the highlanders cannot leave the narrow territory of their particular band without risk—and every meeting with a stranger entails a chance of death. This is far from idyllic; Diamond portrays the highlanders as trapped in cycles of war, calculation, shifting alliance and retaliation as complex and inescapable as those Europe faced in 1914.

There are other chapters which work reasonably well. Despite some troubling allusions to infanticide, parts of the chapter on primitive child rearing almost take us back to Rousseau’s noble savage. Defending or at least palliating such practices as the use of cradleboards, Diamond makes the case that we have much to learn from the New Guineans when it comes to child rearing techniques. Perhaps we do, though Diamond shies uncomfortably away from what he seems to have found a disconcerting amount of public sex play among the rising generations of New Guineans.

Acknowledging that there is a tremendous variation in practice between very strict and very indulgent child rearing techniques among primitive peoples, Diamond finds on the whole that among many of the tribal peoples’ young children may feel happier and more secure than our own. They are close at all times to their parents and companions, nurse on demand rather than by schedule and are never left alone to cry. Diamond doesn’t romanticise the child rearing of these societies; children aren’t weaned until late less because of indulgent maternal affection than because the tribes don’t have access to baby foods and vitamins. Without the nutrition of a mother’s milk, toddlers might not survive. His point here and elsewhere is a modest and unassuming one: the noble savages in the jungle aren’t necessarily wiser and more in touch with themselves than we are—but in the variety of human behavioural patterns found on this planet, we should look for best practices wherever we find them.

Concern for the preservation of cultural diversity is never far from Diamond’s mind. Of the world’s 7,000 odd languages, he informs us, half are spoken by less than a few thousand people and most languages in existence today will either be extinct or on their way out by the end of the century. This concern to preserve the uncivilised and to appreciate their cultural diversity as something precious is very modern; historically, the world’s “developed” people trembled in fear of the Vandals, the Huns and the Mongols roaming the fringes of empire and sometimes invading the heartland. Today, we are encouraged to protect “savage” cultures from dissolution and decay. The savage now belongs on a UNESCO reserve, and we mourn his passing rather than fear his rage.

Other chapters—like the one on religion—are less satisfactory. A generalist trying to cover a great many complex subjects runs risks. Diamond, whose topics range from the evolution of electric eels to the eldercare practices of Kalahari nomads, does not always manage the risks well. The line between dilettante and polymath is sometimes a thin one, and there are too many occasions when Diamond seems to wander across the frontier.

But the book’s lack of success is not primarily due to the
occasional lapses when Diamond’s intellectual ambition out-
runs his (considerable) knowledge. The problem is partly
structural: the book is so long that the lack of a narrative or
intellectual arc leaves the reader feeling lost and becalmed.
Diamond’s insights and aperçus never quite gel into a vision
that justifies the effort expended.

There is a deeper problem as well; like many other
observers of the primitives among us, Diamond misses
the degree to which their experience differs from that
of our ancestors. Diamond in many ways understands
and empathises with the tragic plight of the uncivilised
cultures of New Guinea and elsewhere. Some of the most
effective and gripping moments in the book come when he shows us
the horror, grief and fear that accompany the moment of con-
tact. Before meeting the outsiders, the primitive peoples lived as
adults in a rich and challenging world. Their ideas, their social
organisation and their knowledge base were suited to the world
in which they lived. But with contact, much of what they know
loses its value. Their medicine is not as good as the outsider
medicine. Their methods of food gathering and utilisation of the
land aren’t as effective. The goods they make cannot be traded
for the goods they want. Their children, irresistibly attracted by
the shiny and glittering objects of the new people, move inevi-
tably away from the tribal patterns of life—yet almost never do
they find a satisfying or sustainable relationship with the out-
side world. They work marginal jobs for marginal wages; they
acquire the offscourings and the dingiest trappings of the new
world. They fall prey to substance addiction; they live in a no-
man’s-land between worlds.

This state of limitation and inferiority is unique to modern
tribes. The extended New Guinea Stone Age is quite different
from the global Stone Age that ended thousands of years ago.
The earlier tribes might not have had more in the way of mate-
rial goods, and might have faced many of the same limits and
dangers that today’s New Guineans face, but there was a crucial
difference. Those earlier tribes weren’t cut off from the main-
stream, such as it was, of human knowledge, trade and adven-
ture. Their knowledge and technology was at the cutting edge
of human progress, even if the cutting was still done with a flint
axe. They shared in the common adventure of the human race,
and their tribal culture was continually stimulated and chal-
enged by new ideas, new techniques and tools and new goods
that came in from elsewhere.

More, while most individuals would not have travelled widely
in the early days of the species, humanity was a globetrotter
from earliest times. As Diamond notes, even before the Neo-
lithic Revolution, Homo sapiens had become the most widely
distributed mammal species on our planet; only Antarctica
escaped the encampments of our ancestors. Those early tribes
inhabited a vast landscape; they moved across it, driven either
by fear or overcrowding, or pulled by the hope of something bet-
ter. From the savannahs of Africa to the forests of Borneo, the
caves of France, and the pampas of Argentina, the people of the
Stone Age were explorers and pioneers.

The tribes Diamond encounters in New Guinea and describes
in other places live very differently. They have wandered into
cultural and geographical cul-de-sacs. They have neither shared
in the general cultural rise of humanity nor continued to roam
and discover, altering their habits as they encountered new hab-
itarats. As Diamond describes the embedded enmities and the
deep anxiety about territory, as he recounts stories of geno-
cide and vicious turf battles, he is not necessarily bringing us
closer to a sense of how our ancestors really behaved. During
the Great Expansion of the actual Stone Age, people seem to
have responded to conflict more by moving than by fighting.
Weaker groups were pushed into less hospitable territories, but
it would have been rather unusual for large numbers of tribes to
be trapped like rats in a Malthusian, zero sum game to control
a limited ground.

The physical and cultural isolation of modern tribes doesn’t
just change their relations with their neighbours. Support-
ing a group of people on the same tract of land for a long time
requires a much more inward looking and conservative attitude
than would likely have characterised our Stone Age forbears.
When a group has occupied a finite range of territory for count-
less generations (perhaps for tens of thousands of years), the
inherited wisdom of the group is almost infinitely superior to
the creative intuitions of any one member. The culture must
necessarily become one aimed at discouraging individual initi-
ative, privileging the wisdom of the elders, curbing the exper-
imentalism of youth.

What we see, then, when we look at contemporary “primi-
tive” peoples, is not primitive at all. We are looking at cultures
that have been highly refined through thousands of years of
adapting to very specific and unusual circumstances. While
their level of material and technological development has much
in common with those of our remote mutual ancestors 10 and
20 thousand years ago, their cultural situation of isolation and
confinement is something that few actual Stone Age cultures
would have known.

When observers like Diamond gaze at New Guinea tribes-
people, modernity is not gazing on the antique. Two forms of
modernity confront one another in mutual incomprehension,
both standing at an immense cultural distance from their com-
mon Stone Age roots. While it makes sense to look at tribal cul-
tures as part of the diversity of human experience which might
suggest alternatives to us or shed new and interesting light on
our own cultures and folkways, we must understand the depth
of the deprivation that has so profoundly shaped and so largely
disadvantaged the “primitives” whom we encounter. To partic-
ipate in the flow of information and cultural and intellectual
change across an ever-widening sphere is the natural condi-
tion of human beings. To be outward looking and constantly in
search of the new is to be closer to the Stone Age in spirit than
to be part of a timid and conservative community. The mate-
rial condition of the last surviving tribal peoples may be closer
to humanity’s ancestral level than that of modern Homo empor,
but in many ways the busy, globalised, cargo-making civilisa-
tion we inhabit today is closer to our expanding, experimental
and acquisitive Stone Age roots.
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T: 01283 551211
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W: www.nationalforest.org
Isn't it strange how we like to regard weather forecasting as a uniquely incompetent science—as though this subject of vital economic and social importance can attract only the most inept researchers, armed with bungling, bogus theories?

That joke, however, is wearing thin. With Britain's, and probably the world's, weather becoming more variable and prone to extremes, an inaccurate forecast risks more than a soggy garden party, potentially leaving us unprepared for life-threatening floods or ruined harvests.

Perhaps this new need to take forecasting seriously will eventually win it the respect it deserves. Part of the reason we love to harp on about the disastrously misplaced reassurance from Michael Fish, the BBC weatherman, is that there has been no comparable failure since. “Earlier on today,” said Fish, “apparently, a woman rang the BBC and said she heard there was a hurricane on the way; well, if you’re watching, don’t worry—there isn’t.” Hours later, the great storm of 1987 struck.

As meteorologists and applied mathematicians Ian Roulstone and John Norbury point out in their account of the maths of weather prediction, Invisible in the Storm (Princeton, £24.95), the five-day forecast is, at least in western Europe, now more reliable than the three-day forecast was when the 1987 storm raged. There has been a steady improvement in accuracy over this period and, popular wisdom to the contrary, prediction has long been far superior to simply assuming that tomorrow's weather will be the same as today’s.

Weather forecasting is hard not in the way that fundamental physics is hard. It’s not that the ideas are so abstruse, but that the basic equations are extremely tough to solve, and that lurking within them is a barrier to prediction that must defeat even the most profound mind. Weather is intrinsically unknowable more than two weeks ahead, because it is an example of a chaotic system, in which imperceptible differences in two initial states can blossom into grossly different eventual outcomes. Indeed, it was the work of the American meteorologist Edward Lorenz in the 1960s, using a set of highly simplified equations to determine patterns of atmospheric convection, that first alerted the scientific community to the notion of chaos: the inevitable divergence of all but identical initial states as they evolve over time.

It’s not obvious that weather should be susceptible to mathematical analysis in the first place. Winds and rains and blazing heat seem prone to caprice, and it’s no wonder they were long considered a matter of divine providence. Only in the 19th century, flushed with confidence that the world is a Newtonian mechanism, did anyone dare imagine weather prediction could be a science. In the 1850s Louis-Napoleon (nephew and heir of Napoleon I) demanded to know why, if his celebrated astronomer Urbain Le Verrier could mathematically predict the existence of the planet Neptune, he and his peers couldn’t anticipate the storms destroying his ships. Le Verrier, as well as the Beagle's captain Robert FitzRoy, understood that charts of barometric air pressure offered a rough and ready way of predicting storms and temperatures, but those methods were qualitative, subjective and deeply untrustworthy.

And so weather prediction languished back into disrepute until the Norwegian physicist Vilhelm Bjerknes insisted in 1904 that it is “a problem in mechanics and physics.” Bjerknes asserted that it requires “only” an accurate picture of the state of the atmosphere now, coupled with knowledge of the laws by which one state evolves into another. Although almost a tautology, that makes the problem rational, and Bjerknes’s “Bergen school” of
meteorology pioneered the development of weather forecasting in the face of considerable scepticism.

The problem was, however, identified by the French mathematician Henri Poincaré in 1903: “it may happen that small differences in the initial conditions produce very great ones in the final phenomena.” Then, he wrote, “prediction becomes impossible.” This was an intimation of the phenomenon now called chaos, and it unravelled the clockwork Newtonian universe of perfect predictability. In 1972——after he had identified chaos——Lorenz supplied the famous intuitive image: the butterfly effect, the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil that unleashes a tornado in Texas.

Nonetheless, it is Newton’s laws of motion that underpin meteorology. Leonhard Euler, the 18th century Swiss physicist, applied them to moving fluids by imagining the mutual interactions of little fluid “parcels,” a kind of squishy particle—in other words, it gets stretched and squashed in the flow—that avoids having to start from the imponderable motions of the individual atoms and molecules. Euler thus showed that fluid flow could be described by just four equations.

Yet solving these equations for the entire atmosphere was utterly impossible. So Bjerknes formulated the approach now central to weather modelling: to divide the atmosphere into pixels and compute the relevant quantities—air temperature, pressure, humidity and flow speed—in each pixel. That vision was pursued by the ingenious British mathematician Lewis Fry Richardson in the 1920s, who proposed solving the equations pixel by pixel using computers—not electronic devices but, as the word was then understood, human calculators. Sixty-four thousand individuals, he estimated (optimistically), should suffice to produce a global weather forecast.

The importance of forecasting for military operations, not least the D-Day crossing, was highlighted in the second world war, and it was no surprise that this was one of the first applications envisaged for the electronic computers such as the University of Pennsylvania’s ENIAC whose development the war necessitated, not least because the longer and in any event our monitoring of the atmosphere will always be a moving target. They might yet have to brave moving fronts. But even with all the improvements they have made, the atmosphere is “better behaved” at some times than at others. This is evident from the way prediction is now done: by running a whole suite of models that allow for uncertainties in initial conditions and serving up the results as probabilities. Sometimes the various simulations might give similar results over the next several days, but other times they might diverge hopelessly after just a day or so, because the atmosphere is in a particularly volatile state.

Roulstone and Norbury point out that the very idea of a forecast is ambiguous. If it rightly predicts rain two days hence, but gets the exact location, time or intensity a little wrong, how good is that? It depends, of course, on what you need to know—on whether you are, say, a farmer, a sports day organiser, or an insurer. Some floods and thunderstorms, let alone tornadoes, are highly localised: below the pixel size of most weather simulations, yet potentially catastrophic.

The inexorable improvement in forecasting skill is partly a consequence of greater computing power, which allows more details of atmospheric circulation and atmosphere–land-sea interactions to be included and pixels to become smaller. But the gains also depend on having enough data about the current state of the atmosphere to feed into the model. It’s all very well having a very finely-grained grid for your computer models, but at present we have less than 1 per cent of the data needed fully to set the initial state of all those pixels. The rest has to come from “data assimilation,” which basically means filling in the gaps with numbers calculated by earlier computer simulations. Within the window of predictability—perhaps out to ten days or so—we can still anticipate that forecasts will get better, but this will require more sensors and satellites as well as more bits and bytes. At present the pixels are typically several kilometres across—about the size of large cumulus clouds. But the delicate microphysics of snow and raindrop formation will always be beyond the grasp of weather simulations, and in any event our monitoring of the atmosphere could never access this kind of detail.

If we can’t predict weather beyond a fortnight, how can we hope to forecast future climate change, not least because the longer timescales also necessitate a drastic reduction in spatial resolution? But the climate sceptic’s sneer that the fallibility of weather forecasting renders climate modelling otiose is deeply misconceived. Climate is “average weather,” and as such it has different determinants, such as the balance of heat entering and leaving the atmosphere, the large-scale patterns of ocean flow, the extent of ice sheets and vegetation cover. Nonetheless, short-term weather can impact longer-term climate, not least in the matter of cloud formation, which remains one of the greatest challenges for climate prediction. Conversely, climate change will surely alter the weather; there’s a strong possibility that it already has. Forecasters are therefore now shooting at a moving target. They might yet have to brave more Michael Fish moments in the future, but if we use those to discredit them, it’s at our peril. 

Philip Ball is the author of “Curiosity: How Science Became Interested in Everything” ( Bodley Head)

**The month ahead**

**Alfred Ahuja**

- Alfred Russel Wallace, the somewhat neglected co-discoverer of evolution, steps into the limelight this year with a series of UK events marking the centenary of his death. Unlike the reserved and scholarly Darwin, Wallace was a campaigning socialist and spiritualist, as well as an intrepid adventurer whose wildlife collections still impress today. The Wallace100 lecture programme begins on 7th February at the Natural History Museum, with a homage by geneticist Steve Jones (www.nhm.ac.uk/wallace100).

- The UN set a date of 2015 for achieving its Millennium Development Goals; a four-month global consultation on its next goals closes this month. Given that the first round of MDGs focused on the basics, like improving access to clean water, and half have been ticked off, future health targets might now address quality of life.

- The Cambridge Science Centre opens this month, the first of its kind in this city that has delivered so many scientific breakthroughs. The interactive space is targeted at younger folk but hopes to attract a few of the 4m tourists that head to the city every year (www.cambridgesciencecentre.org).

- The Royal Observatory Greenwich is offering an unusual Valentine’s event. Couples will get to look through a 28-inch telescope and learn about the night sky. Tickets cost £28; book swiftly at www.rmg.co.uk.

- The Prospect Monthly magazine celebrates its 100th birthday this month. To mark the occasion, there’s a range of events planned, including a succulent evening at the Royal Albert Hall, an impressive concert of music from the Balkans and a bombastic date in the diary at the National Gallery. Details and tickets at www.prospectmonthly.com and www.nationalgallery.org.uk.
At the time of his autumn statement, George Osborne had to confront some uncomfortable truths about the growth of the economy, the single most important determinant of private and public finances alike. He is not alone. All over the world politicians, companies and individuals have been struggling to come to terms with economies that have not been functioning according to plan.

Ever since the financial crisis the hope that this is a “normal” economic cycle has been frustrated. In spite of record low interest rates and huge government borrowing, the two traditional remedies for a lack of economic animal spirits, the economies of the rich world have only limped along, at best. Fingers are variously pointed at banks, debt levels, fiscal policy or demographics. Whatever the cause, something seems to be different.

The collapse in world economic activity after the financial system seized up in 2008 was the most severe since the 1930s and involved the first period of falling consumer prices since then. No wonder people were scared. Although the financial system avoided total collapse, the worst fears failed to materialise, what has happened?
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subsequently has been less reassuring.

The US, so far the best of the bunch, has at least managed tepid growth and is now a bigger economy than it was at the peak of the last economic cycle. Even so, unemployment, which rose rapidly during the slump, has remained high; the growth in jobs has not been enough to absorb the numbers joining the labour market.

Meanwhile, the difficult work of addressing the scale of state borrowing starts now. Almost all of the examples of deficit reduction in history have involved periods of rapid economic recovery. Even though the US’s so-called “fiscal cliff” was avoided at the beginning of the year, the effects of reducing the public deficit in such a lacklustre period of growth are hard to call.

The US’s frustrations pale by comparison with the challenges elsewhere. After being hit hard by the slump in world trade and then by the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, Japan’s economic Groundhog Day continues, as business demand has once again begun to shrink. In the eurozone, as well, activity is receding, having failed to regain its previous peak, while the UK potentially faces a “triple dip” recession. Europe’s “periphery” meanwhile is suffering the worst conditions since the 1930s, with economies shrinking rapidly, youth unemployment exceeding 50 per cent in some countries and growing social unrest. These are unusual and disturbing developments.

Perhaps equally disturbing is the chronic failure of mainstream forecasters to anticipate these changes. It’s possible that this is the result of a series of freak events such as the “unforeseeable” financial crisis (in reality, it was not only predictable but widely predicted). Evidence is accumulating, however, that the underlying model may be wrong.

Maps are an apt metaphor. A map which included all the detail of the world it represented would, like the map in Lewis Carroll’s Sylvie and Bruno, be as big as the world itself. To demand exactitude of an economic model is to ask the impossible. A model which captured the full complexity of the reality would fall into the same trap as Carroll’s mapmakers—one might as well use the real economy itself. The alternative, creating a model small enough to be useful, involves far-reaching decisions about what is important.

Most models define the ups and downs of the economic cycle using the economic components “inventories” and “capital spending”. The largest elements in the economy, consumer and government spending, are relatively inert; it’s the changes in these two components which are important.

There are good reasons to question the idea that the ups and downs of capital spending will continue to dominate the economic cycle in the rich economies in the way that they have in the past. Much of the world’s new industrial capacity is now built in China which has become extraordinarily reliant on building physical infrastructure. Rich countries, meanwhile, have become more susceptible to the fluctuations in confidence brought about by the availability of credit and rises and falls in asset prices, in particular houses.

The rich countries face headwinds from two intimately linked phenomena: high levels of debt and ageing populations. Neither of these features heavily in conventional models of the economy. So called “wealth effects” (the feel good or feel bad factor which derives from, for example, the ups and downs of house prices) were not quite respectable until recently. Now, if one listens to what Ben Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve says, they are an important instrument of policy.

Practice is already leading theory. Of all the things which are largely excluded from conventional maps of the developed world’s economies, the most important is the state of the compact between their governments and their citizens. For years governments were not only able to redistribute income from one section of the population to another (after deducting their own substantial expenses, of course) but were also able to borrow on a large scale. Financial as well as pension and social security promises were to be honoured in some more prosperous future. As populations age, the myth underlying the western prosperity of the here and now is revealed to be the dream that it is possible to live well for 85 years by working for 40.

“Ricardian equivalence,” the idea that people internalise governments’ financial behaviour and recognise that more borrowing now means more taxation later, has a patchy record in practice. But there is now a suggestion that it, or something like it, might be gaining traction.

Median household incomes in the US have hardly grown for more than a decade in real terms and, all over the rich world, expectations of future income growth are declining. At the same time, the reality of inadequate pension provision has only just begun to dawn. In the UK, for example, a pension fund of £1.25m (beyond most people’s ability to save) will purchase a pension of only £30,000 a year at age 65, according to Equilibrium Asset Management.

Under these circumstances the perception of the state’s willingness and ability to honour its pension and social security promises becomes crucial. Ironically, the shift towards deficit reduction and fiscal austerity appears to have had the effect of calling both into question. In the UK, child benefit has been removed from some middle-class households and there is increasing discussion of a residence tax on more expensive houses. Both raise challenges to two basic assumptions of retirement planning: the universal entitlement to a state pension and the ability to live rent-free in a house already paid for.

Ultra-low interest rates have failed to reignite demand for mortgage lending and banks report weak demand for credit. Recognising the already large scale of future obligations together with a diminishing ability to discharge them has doubtless played a role.

Even over a shorter time frame, the question of state finances looms large. As HSBC’s head of foreign exchange strategy put it, “very little of the new evidence suggests that the centre of the eurozone’s travails are fundamental questions about who will pick up the bill for the losses from the collapse of the periphery’s bubble economies. For the moment the crisis is in remission and it is the European Central Bank’s support operation for peripheral bond markets looking like a success, but there is no sidestepping the fact that the losses will need to be borne by someone. Not only does the idea of Europe pooling its debt in order to share the burden work to the detriment of Germany, which would have the most to lose from this arrangement, but already other malign consequences are appearing. Germany and Austria now share with the Philippines the dubious honour of having some of the highest levels of house price inflation in the world. German Bundestag elections are in autumn 2013, which suggests that a lid will be kept on the wider debate until then—but the ugly politics of austerity in southern Europe may not allow that luxury.

As the US begins to address its own huge budget deficit, Europe will be on policymakers’ minds. European attempts to cut spending and raise taxes have, in some eyes, been counterproductive. Estimates of the so-called “fiscal multiplier,” which translates a change in public spending into a change in economic activity, are suddenly an area of hot debate. Previously it appeared that a reduction of say, 100, in the public deficit meant that output would be some 50 below what it would otherwise have been. Evidence from Greece, Spain and other so-called “adjustment economies” (Eurospokes abound in euphemism) suggests that in some circumstances the impact might be twice what was previously estimated. The impact of tax rises and spending cuts on a weak economy will be watched with apprehension.

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of England’s quantitative easing programme or the Federal Reserve’s asset purchase programme are now the norm. For investment markets, indeed, they are now the main event. As for their effect on the economy, that is less clear cut.

The ageing of the rich world makes these problems different from those faced before. Individuals as well as investors will demand to know more about how politicians intend to resolve the Great Government Ponzi Scheme. The intervention of central banks will continue to sustain markets—but for how much longer?

Nick Carn is the founder of Carn Macro Advisors

No smooth ride

More cliffs await, says Gayle Schumacher

Against many confident forecasts to the contrary, the euro did not break up in 2012. This defied the logic that default, leading to exit and devaluation, were imminent for some of the weakest members of a very damaged “club.” The survival of the euro clearly illustrates the extent to which politicians and central banks hold sway over global economic prospects.

Though economic signals can be distorted for a while by the promise of a treaty, or a political fix to avoid a cliff edge, or another crank of the printing press, it is important to retain focus on the economic and investment fundamentals that will eventually come to the fore.

Valuation and understanding the economic cycle are key characteristics of successful investing. But it is sometimes challenging to stay anchored to these relatively simple principles. We don’t have to delve far in our memories to recall the technology boom and bust, or Gordon Brown declaring that he had ended the business cycle.

Encouragingly, the two economies that really drive global growth—the US and China—are both showing some signs of traction. The US housing market has stabilised after a savage correction over the past four years. There is abundant cheap gas from the resurgent energy sector and this will be a boon longer term for the competitiveness of US manufacturing. A key signal that would reinforce confidence in sustained growth will be a pick-up in private sector investment early in 2013.

The new Chinese leadership is successfully pulling the levers of central control, avoiding a hard landing and achieving some rise in consumption. It is hard to underestimate the importance of momentum from these locomotives of global growth for 2013: monetary levers, both conventional and unconventional, are looking increasingly exhausted. Even central banks are now talking about targeting growth and employment rather than inflation. This is a significant shift in their priorities that reflects both the importance of growth, as well as its current fragility.

Against this backdrop of nascent growth, it is startling to look at the current valuation of many sovereign bonds, the US and UK both being good examples. After four years of stellar performance, bonds pay out a negative real yield, and should no longer be viewed as low-risk investments for wealth preservation.

Increased confidence in growth, albeit modest, and less attention to inflation fighting on the part of central banks, gives good reason for bond yields to start to normalise at some point this year. There are few western governments that are not wrestling with a challenging fiscal deficit, so a central bank accommodating a rise in inflation will hardly be opposed by politicians (Germany of course being an exception). Inflation is the debtor’s friend and the lender’s enemy and this will not be overlooked by activist lenders, so-called “bond vigilantes.”

We believe bond holders will not be able to rely on capital gains to drive returns, as they have done in recent years and must look increasingly to income. We highlight generous yields that can still be found, but investors will have to take on more risk to access them. Bond investors hoping for a repeat of the stellar performance from European bonds over the past year will probably be disappointed, but swings between confidence and despair over the sustainability of the eurozone should present tactical opportunities. We also think the time is right for investing in bricks and mortar; the US housing market is showing definite signs of a comeback, and there is opportunity in UK commercial property as well.

Increased confidence in growth, and greater danger in bonds, should justify a more sustained flow of investment into equities. There are the attractions of yield.

China’s affluent young: the country’s leadership is “avoiding a hard landing and achieving some rise in consumption”
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Prospect
valuation, and the stock-specific opportunities that come with growth. Even in moribund Europe there are high-quality companies able to take advantage of export opportunities to the growing economies of Asia.

But wealth management is less about binary decisions—buy or sell—and more about weighing probabilities across a range of possible outcomes, hence the title of Coutts’s Outlook 2013, “5 Risks & 10 Opportunities.” A key anchor in portfolio construction should always be diversification, ensuring that a portfolio has “ballast” against risk, for example by including investments in gold or property. It may be more interesting to talk about prospective opportunities, but it is more prudent to also talk about managing risk. And in 2013, a long-term investor should be very alert to the trend in inflation.

The impact of politics on financial markets has grown in the wake of the crisis and is a frequent source of market volatility. There is no reason to think that 2013 will not have its fair share of cliff edges, emergency summits and make-or-break elections, some of which will have the potential to substantially change the course of travel. So while we ended 2012 with a relatively strong equity rally and the prospect of a more benign environment for risk assets in 2013, it is not going to be a smooth ride. Gayle Schumacher is Head of Investment Office at Coutts

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**Buying into inflation**

You can protect yourself, says Mike Amey

Four years on from the collapse of Lehman Brothers, UK inflation remains stubbornly high, growth remains stubbornly weak and the Bank of England remains resolutely committed to supporting growth as best it can. Before inflation is taken into account, growth is 3.1 per cent below the 2008 peak, whereas including inflation it is 7.5 per cent higher.

A series of one-off shocks keeps inflation above target, meaning that real and nominal gross domestic product (GDP) have moved in opposite directions. If this is the case during a period of weak economic activity, whatever the intentions of the Bank, there is a risk of inflation being consistently above target. How can investors protect their portfolios?

Managing longer-term inflation risk is usually relatively straightforward. There is a well-developed market in inflation-linked government debt designed to protect investors against inflation. The only problem is that, this time around, yields on government bonds are very low and some are negative in real terms. In supporting growth, policy actions of the Bank of England have come at a price: the programme of quantitative easing (QE) has pushed both nominal and real yields down. That does not mean that all is lost however, just that we have to look a little further afield.

While we might not want to buy bonds with negative or close to negative yield, what if we could generate returns just from the future inflation rate? The future inflation rate is the difference between a bond yield that takes inflation into account and one that does not. The difference between the two can be exploited using derivatives. At present, this difference is 2.8 per cent. For investors willing to accept the risks and employ derivative strategies, there are already alternatives, priced at reasonable levels.

For those unable or unwilling to employ derivative strategies, there are other options if we ask ourselves where the major sources of inflation are likely to be. The emerging markets of China, Brazil and Mexico are likely to lead global growth in coming years. These are commodity-intensive economies, and their demand should push commodity prices higher—we will import these commodities at these inflated prices. Investors looking for exposure to inflation via physical assets might consider hard commodities such as oil or gold.

Indeed, in a similar vein, several of these emerging countries also have markets in government bonds that are inflation-linked where yields are still attractive. In Mexico for example, the real yields on such bonds are 1.5 per cent, a full 2.4 per cent higher than our own.

Commodity prices and overseas inflation-linked bond markets are not a perfect substitute for UK inflation; however, they should offer some protection against two of the UK’s bigger risks—imported commodity-based inflation and/or a steady fall in the pound. However, these securities are volatile and should be used as part of a diversified portfolio.

Equities can also play a very useful part, with a focus on companies with good balance sheets, a market leading position and clear pricing power. Reckitt Benckiser and British American Tobacco are two examples in the UK.

In short, it may not be as simple as it used to be, but it is still possible to create a diversified portfolio to address inflation-protection needs. Over time, that should help provide protection against the detrimental effects of unexpected inflation.

Mike Amey is a managing director and head of sterling portfolio management in PIMCO’s London office

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**Rules of engagement**

Take care how you pay your adviser, says Andy Davis

The Retail Distribution Review of consumer financial services is here. A key question, discussed at Prospect’s RDR conference in November at the London Stock Exchange, is: now that investment advice must be explicitly paid for, will this new system improve our returns? I can’t point to any reason why, on its own, it should, but I can see one compelling reason why, in practice, it won’t.

There is great uncertainty in the advice market at the moment and fears that investors won’t pay for something that many had previously regarded as free. Not surprisingly, therefore, many advisers will carry on taking their payment via a direct levy on the client’s portfolio, either as a percentage or a fixed fee. So the adviser need not demand a fee directly—and the investor need not write a cheque. Less painful all round.

But allowing this to continue means that investors’ returns will show little or no improvement as a result of RDR. It’s repeatedly been shown that charges levied on long-term savings have a huge effect in reducing returns, because they neutralise the benefits of long-term compounding.

It is much better to write a cheque each year from your income than to pay out of your portfolio. Doing this will make clearer to investors the value they are getting from the advice they purchase, and will also stop the slow erosion of their long-term returns.

Transparency in advice is undoubtedly important—but unless it changes behaviour investors will not see the full benefit.

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This year marks the 30th anniversary of online romance, sort of. The first couple to meet online and subsequently marry were brought together by an early incarnation of the web—the Computer Science Network (CSNET)—in 1983. Three decades later, internet dating is now the second most common way of starting a relationship, after meeting through friends. The industry takes in an estimated £2.5bn worldwide each year, and Brits are the most enthusiastic online daters in Europe: last year over 9m of us logged on to find a partner.

My own online dating story goes like this. Several years ago I broke up with someone. Soon after, my friend Alice created a profile for me on a dating website. For months, the experience only fortified my misery. Since when did the whole world start talking in football clichés? When “chilling out with the Sunday papers” became a hobby?

A couple of months in, I went on a date. His profile didn’t say anything too platitudinous. He liked David Lynch and his brother had Arsenal season tickets. He lived 10 minutes away, so it was only one hour of my life I’d be losing. Five years later we’re married and expecting our first child.

Amid the acres of writing on the online dating “revolution,” two camps have emerged. Enthusiasts say that dating sites have freed people (particularly women) to make choices rather than just settle; that they’ve made matchmaking more efficient, more democratic, more egalitarian. Detractors highlight the dehumanising effects of online dating and point to tabloid tales of serial daters who’ve conned vulnerable, lonely women. Andrew G Marshall, a relationships therapist and author of The Single Trap: the two-step guide to escaping it and finding lasting love (Bloomsbury), argues that dating sites not only make lying easier—they actually encourage people to be more cavalier with others’ feelings.

Stretching the truth
Has internet dating made it easier to find love or just made us feel lonelier, asks Mary Fitzgerald

Life
A history of dating since 1695 68
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So has this so-called revolution made romance more efficient and more transparent, or the opposite? The first thing to note is that online dating profiles are just digital versions of personal ads, and these have been around for hundreds of years; the oldest surviving record is dated 19th July, 1635.

Francesca Beauman’s Shapely Ankle Prefer’d: a history of the lonely hearts advertisement (Vintage) documents hundreds of the lonely hearts ads placed over the centuries, from the florid to the frank: “A young man wants a wife with two or three hundred pounds; or the money will do without the wife” (1789).

Beauman’s work puts today’s claims and counter-claims for online dating into context. Tabloid interest may have been piqued in 2012 by the story of Oluwamayowa Ajayi, a London-based Nigerian gospel singer who was jailed for six and a half years for swindling four American women he met on Match.com out of £120,000. But that was nothing compared to the frenzied attention generated by the case of William Corden back in 1828, who murdered his first wife and then took up with a second via a lonely hearts placement.

Online dating is just a digital extension of what we’ve done for centuries. Take dishonesty. The latest research from the dating site OK Cupid suggests that, on average, men exaggerate their income by 20 per cent, their height by two inches, and that the older the person, the more dated the photographs on their profile. And that 80 per cent of self-identified bisexuals are only interested in one gender.

But dating sites hardly have a monopoly on polishing the facts. How different is buttering up your Match.com profile to varnishing your CV, or giving yourself the title of managing director of your own company to cover the amount of time you’ve spent unemployed? And who posts truly “honest” pictures of themselves on their Facebook profiles?

And dating websites are getting wiser to our attempts to bend the truth. Match.com, the market leader in the US and Britain, links up customers not just by their stated tastes and interests, but by crunching data to calculate people’s “revealed preferences.” In other words, they try to work out the difference between what people say they want, and what their answers to a set of questions—be it their romantic history, food preferences, political views—reveal about what they really want.

If not hard science, OK Cupid’s trends blog—another leader in this sort of data mining—is full of fun extrapolations. Who, for example, would have guessed that the question “Do you like the taste of beer?” is more predictive than any other question of whether a woman is willing to have sex on a first date? Or that the answer to the question “Do you like horror movies?” will best forecast how long a relationship is likely to last. Wondering if someone’s religious but finding it awkward to broach? Ask them if spelling and grammar mistakes annoy them. If the answer’s no, the odds of them being at least moderately religious are slightly better than 50:50.

As dating sites have become more sophisticated and their memberships have ballooned, they’ve been criticised for creating a tyranny of choice. If the thought constantly plagues online daters that something better might be easily in reach, it follows that many people won’t stop trying to find it. MySingleFriend boasts 200,000 active users a month, with a core membership of 25-38 year-olds. “We appeal to a younger professional demographic,” their press person explained to me. “According to Hitwise data, the profiles of the top visitors to MySingleFriend are O6-35: Bright Young Things and O6-35: Urban Cool.” Why settle for the person in front of you when you could be dating a 25-year-old “Urban Cool”?

It’s akin, says Marshall, to “always wondering if you can get a better holiday at a lower price.” This not only encourages indecision and missed opportunities, he argues, it’s disastrous for developing relationship skills. If at the first problem you face, there’s an easy opt out and plenty more potential dates waiting within the click of a button, how willing are you to compromise, to try, to develop the skills needed to build relationships?

But of all the critiques of online dating, there is one that really sticks: that it can reinforce loneliness, rather than vanquishing it. “I hate dates, they’re like a job interview,” one friend confessed. Internet dates only amplify this feeling. Not because they’re “unnatural,” but because there’s extra honesty: no pretence that this meeting is anything other than an interview where what you say, do and look like gets quickly judged. And that’s if you make it as far as a date. Sometimes just the experience of interacting online can be off-putting enough. “Everyone just seemed so banal,” one novelist friend despaired. “It made me so sad to think that all the people you see on the street and the tube every day, who you hope might potentially be interesting, are actually just as boring as you fear... I think it’s a real mistake to even hope for a second that it’s going to make you less lonely.”

My friend also conceded another basic truth, too easily forgotten. No matter how detailed the profile or sophisticated the matching algorithm, there’s no predictor for physical attraction. And until the data crunchers have cracked that one, there will have been no real revolution.

Mary Fitzgerald is a writer and activist
themselves in the 400-square-metre catchment area of north London’s premier genius academy—“We’re just going to send little Hugo to the local school; we really believe in getting properly involved in the community.” You are given nervous ticks by the sympathetic but pointedly grave face that the other dad at the nursery gate pulls when you mention the school into which you have the best chance of getting your kid. You are driven in circles by the purely hypothetical moral calculus, the unsolvable equation, involving your duties to your child, your duties to your fellow taxpayer, your duties to the community you live in.

We got so close—pen poised to sign on the dotted line close—to doing what many including me will find easy to see as contemptible: letting out our house in order to move into rental accommodation in the catchment area of the school down the road with an Outstanding rating from Ofsted.

It would cost us money we could ill afford. It would cause us two house-moves and 12 months of discomfort and anxiety between them. We would spend a year living at Point B and commuting 20 minutes every morning to drop our kids at the nursery next door to where we live now, aka Point A. Then we would return to live at Point A in order to spend the next God-knows-how-long commuting twenty minutes every morning to take our children to school at Point B. We would do so, what’s more, with a profoundly bad conscience. We’d spend a year hem-hemming and changing the subject when it came up at parties. Probably, we’d pretend to all our friends that we still lived at point A.

For what? There was a point at which the madness passed—the fever, if you like, broke—and I thought: “Hang on. She’s going to be FOUR YEARS OLD.” Four. How bad can it be? The biggish local primary has a likeable new head and is rated Good. That’s not Outstanding, but it’s not toddlers holding those blunt knives you use for playdough to each others’ throats. It’s not reverse literacy. It’s not fortnightly outbreaks of dengue fever.

Nursery Gate Dad, with your face of doom; how do you know it’s so bad? You’re just parroting the on dit. Nobody you know has ever sent their children there: it’s bad by the circular logic that it’s the place that nobody sends their kids, because all the people who don’t send their kids there say it’s bad. (Which is, inasmuch as it actually is bad, probably why it’s bad.)

And, for that matter, how good can it be? If she ends up going to St Gustav’s Academy For Nice Boys And Girls are we to expect that she’ll come out translating Racine and offering well-turned aperçus on macroeconomics? Will she start half-inching dad’s copy of Prospect? Christ alive. I doubt it. Probably all she’ll get is an anxiety disorder. Someone told me that in Sweden they don’t bother teaching their kids to read until they’re 10, and they have the highest literacy rate in Scandinavia, or something.

There: that’s me justified to myself. We’re going to resist the pushy-parent middle-class groupthink. We’re going to put the local schools in order of preference, like it says on the form, and let fate take its course. Next year, after the first “bruv,” I expect we’ll move house.

Sam Leith is the author of “You Talkin’ To Me? Rhetoric from Aristotle to Obama” (Profile)

Matters of taste
Oliver Thring

They’ve got Korean style

Many people think of British food as rather bland. But since the Crusades, we’ve had one of the most heavily spiced cuisines of any country, from Christmas pudding to devilled kidneys, tikka masala and haggis.

Combine this ancient trait with a restless national palate and a trend for small sharing plates in restaurants and you go some way to explaining the sudden surge in interest in Korean food.

Like Japan, the Korean peninsula has a long coastline and largely mountainous terrain. But its food differs widely from its neighbour’s. Strong flavours of vinegar and ground spices bubble from the pots. Where the Japanese sip delicate miso soup, the Koreans stave off the cold by slurping doenjang jiggae, a steaming broth of fermented soy beans, fresh green vegetables, dried anchovies, fat prawns and chillies. Meats are flash-grilled or fall apart in hot gingery stews. There are endless, generous side dishes or banchan, featuring vegetables, legumes and meat or fish, as well as rice. Raw vegetables and pickles feature heavily, not least in the national dish of kimchi, a richly spiced fermented cabbage—the wicked, bewitching cousin of sauerkraut.

New Malden, a small suburb near Wimbledon, has hosted Britain’s main Korean community for nearly 30 years. The good train links to central London, relatively inexpensive rents and the fact that the Korean ambassador once lived there all contributed to its popularity among Britons. The first North Korean defector arrived there, among them a significant number of North Korean refugees; Britain has accepted more North Korean defectors than any other western country.

In 1991, the Asadal restaurant joined the Korean barbers, estate and travel agents of New Malden, and many other restaurants

Kimchee is one of a spate of Korean restaurants to have opened in the UK recently
have since followed. The last couple of years have also seen openings in Manchester, Edinburgh and Brighton, adding to a stock of Korean barbecue joints across the country. Though the earliest and most authentic Korean restaurants sometimes seemed a little austere and exclusive, Korean barbecue has always been sociable, accessible and interactive. Cooking your own meat at a table on hot stones brings a primal immediacy to eating out.

The newest Korean restaurants are designed to appeal equally to western diners. Several have opened lately in central London: Kimchee on High Holborn is a good introduction to the cuisine, with an approachable menu and Wagamama-esque design. In September, the high-end, metallic, starkly decorated Bibigo opened in Soho. It’s the first European venture from Korea’s largest food company, the CJ Foodville Group, whose CEO said recently he wants to make the brand “the McDonald’s or Starbucks of Korean food.”

Such world domination seems more realistic now that everyone from the American president to the soldiers of Camp Bastion have mock-lashed to the hyper-viral “Gangnam Style,” now the most viewed video on YouTube and probably the internet itself. K-pop chimes with the western understanding of a certain side of Asia—garish, semi-anarchic, somewhat unreal. For many people in Europe and North America, “Gangnam Style” was perhaps their first encounter with Korea.

And in the UK, more are discovering its food. Google currently treats “Korean food London” as a “breakout” term: one experiencing a spike in popularity. Danny O’Sullivan started the roaming street food venture Kimchi Cult in April 2011. “I’m seeing more and more interest in Korean food,” he says, arguing that some of the new enthusiasm comes from America: “Korean fried chicken is huge in LA, and of course there’s David Chang.” Chang founded the Momofuku brand, which now numbers 12 restaurants in New York, Toronto and Sydney. Though it isn’t strictly or authentically Korean, Momofuku is embedded in the culture of the peninsula and has introduced countless New Yorkers to a more metropolitan style of Korean cooking than they previously found in Manhattan’s Koreatown.

This autumn, the consistently on-trend TV chef Gizzi Erskine ran a pop-up Korean restaurant called K’Town. “Gangnam Style came out the week we announced it,” she says. “I’ve known about K-pop for a long time and I knew that it was due to come over here, but the timing couldn’t have been better.” Erskine believes decent Korean food is still under-represented in the UK. “I’ve always known there are good Korean restaurants in London,” she says. “But Korean food in Britain before was a bit like 1980s Chinese food: very anglicised.”

Upmarket Chinese food is now easy to find in most British cities, in part because it built on foundations laid by high street takeaways. Saronged British tourists returning from Thailand brought home a taste for green curry, which became one of the most popular pub lunches of the 1990s. Like our language, ours has always been a greedy and polyglot stomach, wolffing tastes and ideas from around the planet.

If you’re still unsure, visit the dingy and glorious Seoul Bakery by Centre Point in the west end of London, and order a £5 bowl of bibimbap—spicy rice, beef and vegetables. With its colours and vibrancy it’s vaguely reminiscent of a K-pop video, and it’ll be a damn sight better than a Pret sandwich.

Oliver Thring is a journalist and food writer

Wine

Barry Smith

The burning issue

You’ll often hear it said that if food is too spicy you won’t be able to taste the wine. It’s not true. The flavour of anything is largely a matter of taste and smell. The aromas from what you sip or chew reach the nose from the mouth and are experienced as tastes. When trying wines, professionals often spit out what they’ve swirled for the obvious reason, but they miss something: when we swallow, aromas are pulsed from the mouth up into the nasal cavity to intensify the resulting combination of tongue taste and smell that we call flavour.

By contrast, spices influence receptors at the end of the trigeminal nerve, which serves the eyes, nose and mouth. When this nerve is irritated, we experience the stinging of wasabi mustard or the bite of black pepper. In reality, these sensations are a matter of touch, not taste, and when you have too much wasabi or horseradish you feel a burning sensation at the bridge of your nose, not in the mouth. Do these elements of touch interfere with wine assessment?

Touch, of course, plays a role in flavour perception. An opulent Chassagne Montrachet “tastes” creamy, and a ripe Viognier viscous, even though what we think of as taste is due to mouthfeel. But whatever touch and trigeminal sensations contribute to the overall experience of a food or a wine, they will not disrupt the combined workings of taste and smell. For that reason you are free to drink what you want with a spicy Asian dish, although some flavours will work better with the food than others.

As always, Asian cooking is about balance, and where you have crisp, fresh ingredients with spicy dressings, or chicken dishes with hot sauces, a rich white Burgundy or a luscious Condrieu work beautifully; Chenin Blanc, too, with their fat layers of honeyed apples. And then there is Gewurztraminer’s rose petal and lychee aromas, which can remind us of fragrant Asian flavours, and when made by Alsace producers these wines have the weight and richness to hold their own with the food. Starchier, rice-based dishes call for wines with sharper acidity, like a dry Riesling or Sauvignon Blanc.

In truth, the fresh aromas of Sauvignon Blanc cope well with most foods, and the dry white wines of Bordeaux, often blended with Sémillon, are extraordinarily resilient.

But why stick to white? Do red wines work well with the dishes of southeast Asia? Well, despite the high value placed on the Cabernet Sauvignon-Merlot blends of Bordeaux in Vietnam and China, these wines do not work with the food. Valorisation of Bordeaux has more to do with prestige and its carrying Western connotations of success and luxury. But for successful food-wine pairings and enjoyment, the best accompaniments are cool climate reds with bright fruit and low tannins. Choose a German or Austrian Spätburgunder, or a spicy Blauer Zweigelt. Alternatively, head to Morgan or Brouilly for a Cru Beaujolais.

Finally, a word of warning. Not all spices work the same way. When you eat red chillies, the capsaicin irritates the trigeminal nerve and nasal linings—like mustard—but also produces local oral burning, unlike mustard. Too hot and it will detract from the wine that you’re drinking. Is it because the burning interferes with the workings of taste and smell, or is it because burning sensations capture our attention so completely that we cannot concentrate on anything else? The scientific jury is still out, but I hope you can experiment for yourselves—carefully.

Barry Smith is director of the Institute of Philosophy and editor of “Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine”

“Egrets, I’ve had a few...”
Learning to love Spielberg

For years, Francine Stock hated Steven Spielberg’s films, but as Lincoln, his new epic, hits the screens, she argues that he brings out the dark side of Hollywood blockbusters.

Some years back, I took a trip into the heart of Spielberg country with one of my daughters: we boarded a small craft on the Jurassic Park ride at Universal Studios in California. Universal gave Steven Spielberg his first directing job in the late 1960s. For decades they made his films—through sharks, aliens, dinosaurs, whip-cracking adventures, war, history, and back to sci-fi—and he has helped them construct their rides, acting as creative consultant to the Studio Tour which draws heavily on his films.

The sky was pewter-grey, spitting large drops. Two in a craft which might have taken a dozen, we bobbed along through milky-blue waters scented of bleach, towards a “scientific compound.” Here, we were told, some lab geeks had managed to create dinosaurs through cloning. The concept, as in the film, was that the dinosaurs had escaped their cages and were roaming free, through a landscape of jungle, mesh fences and warning signs.

We entered a hangar: a siren went off and we were instructed that a lethal substance was to be expelled from this sinister structure. It was clear that soon we would be released to rid the area of a dangerous predator. It was apparent to me that I was constantly on my guard. Martin Amis, dispatched to a Los Angeles cinema to document the reactions of this blockbuster tearjerker, recorded his own “grief and bewilderment” and that of his fellow audience members: “executive, black dude, Japanese businessman, punk, hippie, mother, teenager, child. Each face was a mask of tears.” But not mine. Stung by the filmmaker’s cattleprod, I ran the wrong way. I could admire the composition of the story of little Elliott, child of a fractured family, who befriends the oyster-eyed alien; I could appreciate the evocation of wonder, the commentary on science and belief, yet I balked at the manipulation. Why did its subject have to be a cute alien with a toddler’s walk and a baby’s disproportionately large eyes? Wasn’t that too easy? ET made me cross: it was a film about tolerance I couldn’t stand.

I began to detest that ubiquitous Spielbergian blue lighting, harbinger of the poignant or spectacular, that spread widely through 1980s cinema. Spielberg’s signature themes could set my teeth on edge—those threatened families, those tableaux of reunion, characters caught slack-jawed with terror or awe, the curiously desexualised women, even the artistry of John Williams’ scores. By then, I had seen and liked Spielberg’s earliest features, Duel (1971) and the surprisingly sour Sugarland Express (1974); that was the kind of American director I admired. Duel, about a man relentlessly pursued on the road by the unknown driver of a monster truck, was bleak and existential. It would not have been out of place in a European arthouse. Its protagonist (a man called Mann) was like a character from a Michelangelo Antonioni or Jean-Pierre Melville film.

A year after Sugarland Express, of course, Spielberg went on to create our current notion of the blockbuster in 1975 with Jaws. His stated preference was for film ideas that “you can hold in your hand.” Jaws was the Big Shark movie that became the cultural phenomenon, brushing aside low and high-brow labels and setting box office records in its opening weeks. In the film, a group of ordinary people (neither princes nor uniformed heroes) do battle with an extraordinary threat; the observational detail of the ominarness made it gripping and plausibly scary. But once the “event” films took hold, from Star Wars onwards into the 1980s, it seemed Spielberg had become a brazen evangelist for an America—triumphalist, smug and expensive—of which I was fashionably critical. Spielberg was a man, after all, who had enacted the American dream: no film school radical, he was a Cincinnati kid, without connections, who had put on a suit, found his way into an office at Universal and simply sold the bosses the idea that he should make movies. His movies were just commercial products, surely. Even the films of conscience, like The Color Purple,
“The master of mass entertainment”: Steven Spielberg with Tom Hanks on the set of Saving Private Ryan (1998)
(1985) were weakened by a sentimentality that ultimately lets us off the hook and made them forgettable. These were films held in his hand, skilfully controlled and, to me, unengaging.

But I was looking something. Spielberg, the master of mass entertainment, director of mega-stars like Harrison Ford, Tom Hanks and Tom Cruise, was also making films that could be successful and odd, troubling and contradictory. Psychoanalytical criticism of his work concentrated on the personal—his parents’ divorce, the absent fathers and preoccupied mothers on screen—but beyond that increasingly lay darker themes. Like David Lynch or David Cronenberg or Tim Burton, he found the sinister in the suburban, the strangeness in everyday life.

The first film that really made me notice Spielberg’s talent for smuggling these subversive qualities into mainstream cinema was Empire of the Sun (1987). As an admirer of JG Ballard’s writing, I had not expected to like Spielberg’s visualisation of this semi-autobiographical novel of expat Brits in war-time Shanghai and Japanese internment. I postponed seeing it for some years but when I did, I found it satisfyingly strange. In part, this comes from the casting of Christian Bale, whose intense energy runs through almost every scene—but the film is also a skilful cinematically realised novel, wordless for minutes on end. In the Shanghai scenes above all, it has a distinctive gliding quality. The progress through the streets in the grand family Packard reflects the child’s viewpoint while providing a metaphor for the individual’s passage through the tumult of war. As an example of cinematic alienation, it now seems more effective and unforced than, say, Cronenberg’s recent Cosmopolis (2012).

That detachment is the key to Schindler’s List (1993), Spielberg’s cautious approach to the Holocaust. This is necessarily a film about evasion, about those on the List who escaped the greatest atrocity of the 20th century; its effect derives from what we do not see and can barely imagine. Amongst contemporary reviews, the Washington Post remarked with admiration on the “emotional numbness” the film engendered. Kenneth Turan, in the Los Angeles Times, noted approvingly the “detachment and self-control almost to the point of coldness.” In this case, the control only emphasises the terrible chaos beyond.

With Artificial Intelligence: AI (2001) Spielberg took Brian Aldiss’s vivid, cruel and very short story about a little android, David, who begins to suspect that he is not a real boy. Writing for the first time in decades, Spielberg vastly expanded the narrative. The best of it is a seductive nightmare vision of New York submerged, the very symbols of American dominance drowned in the risen sea. Spielberg’s follow-up, Minority Report (2002), a spectral sci-fi adapted from Philip K Dick, also has moments of surreal body horror on a par with Lynch or Cronenberg.

After Minority Report he admitted he was in a period of experimentation, challenging himself and the audience. “I’m striking out in all directions trying to find myself, trying to discover myself. In my mid-fifties!” In 2002 he took a bittersweet 1960s-tribute caper, Catch Me If You Can, and subverted the Hollywood ideal of the self-made man with the story of a compulsively deceitful youth who pretended (with some success) to be an airline pilot. In The Terminal (2004), Spielberg cast one of the world’s most loved Americans, Tom Hanks, as a dispossessed Eastern European forced to live in JFK airport. Had it been directed by a European, the story might have been told as an austere meditation on statelessness. Spielberg made it a romantic comedy. But beneath the schmaltz, the film suggests an America that unthinkingly kicks rather than welcomes huddled masses and which may not in any case have much to offer them beyond shopping. This bleak heresy is smuggled past an audience who came in to see a Tom Hanks movie. Sure, Spielberg can still deliver cloying sentimentality but the lurid excess of War Horse, for example, is cut through by one stunning sequence of a horse fleeing through No Man’s Land. Chaos, again.

And Lincoln is a strange, bleak film. Did Spielberg imagine many movie-goers would recognise the huge cast of politicians caught up in Abraham Lincoln’s manoeuvres to get the 13th Amendment through the House of Representatives? At the preview screening I attended, a sheet with thumbnail headshots was provided so you could tell your Robert Latham from your Richard Schell (under the whiskers, one’s John Hawkes, the other’s Tim Blake Nelson—this is another Spielberg film where dozens of fine actors are glimpsed for just a moment).

For all the monumentality of its subject, Lincoln is unconventional. It rejects the cradle-to-grave biopic rules for a detailed study of the final four months of the president’s life, even refusing to show the assassination. What it does, thanks to the remarkable central performance, is bring that vast self-control almost to the point of coldness. The domestic scenes are claustrophobic and gloomy, unsettling in their detail, steeped in death recalled and anticipated.

Barack Obama has seen the film at least twice and describes it as “extremely powerful.” The film landed three days after Obama won his second term as president and explores political accommodation and negotiation, the importance of “setting a
direction” for policy. Lincoln is not devoid of sentiment; early on there is a conversation between the president and two soldiers (one of them black) that threatens to be the cinema equivalent of a moralising tableau. But the detailed business of politics soon intervenes. In an age of soundbites and presidential tweets, Spielberg wants us to focus on the otherwise invisible “works.” And that is his achievement: to use his Hollywood skills to get some bizarrely un-Hollywood material past us. When I spoke to him recently, he cheerfully spoke of the “popcorn movie” that would be his next project after Lincoln. Then again, his idea of “popcorn movie” might surprise one. The Universal Studio tour also contains another “attraction” from the Spielberg archive. It is the plane crash site from War of the Worlds (2005), HG Wells updated after 9/11. A smoking fuselage sits on a hillside, surrounded by suitcases burst open, life jackets, the odd shoe and toy from its missing passengers—more ordinary detail rendered surreal. Tourists pass close by in little carts, many of them contemplating their own imminent flight home. It’s a strange way to have fun, with this vast *momento mori*, but Steven Spielberg has never really been in the business of comfort. Fracine Stock is a broadcaster and author of “In Glorious Technicolor” (Chatto & Windus)

Not like a novelist

Sheila Heti has struck hard against the male literary scene, as all the fuss shows, says Richard Beck

How Should A Person Be?
by Sheila Heti (Harvill Secker. £15)

*How Should A Person Be?* is Sheila Heti’s second novel. Its narrator is a 36-year-old woman named Sheila Heti, who, like the author, lives in Toronto and spends her days in conversation with friends about how best to live and make art. Much of this extraordinary book’s dialogue is taken from recordings of conversations that actually occurred.

“As people feel life,” Henry James wrote, “so they will feel the art that is most closely related to it.” This is terrific advice, yet many novelists ignore it, holding instead to what James called “an eternal repetition of a few familiar clichés.” The recorded conversations that make up about half of Heti’s book are her way of holding life close, without which the book’s animating question would remain unanswerable and unreal.

The novelty of Heti’s approach is eye-catching, but it is her seeming indifference to many of contemporary fiction’s most cherished ideas that made *How Should A Person Be?* last year’s most polarising and widely discussed novel in the US. In a literary landscape dominated by realists like Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides, Heti’s impatience with the fiction/non-fiction divide struck reviewers as either inspired or tedious, bold or self-indulgent. When asked by interviewers to spell out the rationale behind her approach, Heti’s answer was direct and refreshing: “I wrote this book to answer the question posed by its title,” she said. “I wanted to use everything at my disposal.”

So how should a person be? “Not like a novelist,” seems to be part of Heti’s answer. In the book, Sheila spends time with painters, poets, hairdressers and Jungian analysts—but not with novelists. Heti has acknowledged as influences self-help books, *Fortune* magazine, reality TV, films by Werner Herzog, and the Bible—but not novels. Her wariness about the form may have seemed to be so perfectly themselves in every way.” Sheila’s friends admire her for being a woman,” she writes, “is we haven’t too many examples yet of what a genius looks like. It could be me.” She jokes that the current age cries out for a new kind of genius, one by definition unavailable to heterosexual men. “We live in the age of some really great blow-job artists,” she writes. “Every era has its art form. The 19th century, I know, was tops for the novel.”

The prologue is an exciting piece of feminist provocation, denigrating literary culture’s obsession with canonisation and the heroic inner life. In their place, Heti lionises celebrity and friendship, admiring “all the great personalities down through time, like Andy Warhol and Oscar Wilde. They seemed to be so perfectly themselves in every way.” Sheila’s friends admire her for who she is, but she wants to be someone better fitted to the times: “I would rather be liked for who I appear to be, and for who I appear to be, to be who I am.”

Although reality TV does not appear in Heti’s novel, its atmosphere and logic, which combine a nearly sublime form of leisure with the terror of always being watched, pervade and shape Sheila’s thoughts and choices. Other novelists have critiqued reality television, but Heti may be the first to
simply describe it, which is much harder. Sheila and a friend take a trip to Miami for an art fair, where, like the characters on any reality TV show, they find themselves simultaneously enchanted and bored by the vulgar, shimmering manifestations of wealth that surround them. Drinking in a hotel bar, the pair take off their clothes and swim around in a pool as patrons look on. "I'm so happy," Sheila later says, "with how we were making everyone jealous with how happy we were in the pool!" Then they watch the infamous Paris Hilton sex tape on a laptop.

Heti's quest for a way of being that suits both herself and her age unfolds in the form of a picaresque, moving quickly from incident to incident. The novel begins with a marriage that ends. Divorced and embarking on a period of self-imposed celibacy, Sheila seeks to understand why she has always been drawn to spending time with men but not women. "What was a woman for? Two women was an alchemy I did not understand." Since How Should A Person Be? is not only a picaresque but a self-help book and bildungsroman as well, Sheila will have to learn what a woman is for. That's when she meets a painter named Margaux.

One literary commonplace is that the novel needs solitude like an orchid needs its greenhouse, and that the internet, by interrupting this solitude, threatens writing and reading alike. But the friendship that emerges between Sheila and Margaux advances the opposite possibility: the mutual dependence of art-making and social life. In Heti's book, an endless series of drinks, discussions, brunches and fights nourishes art making, and if art will sometimes throw friendship into crisis, or vice versa, that isn't a problem but rather the foundation of the whole project's appeal.

Sex, eventually, rears its menacing head. Out drinking at a bar one night, Sheila strikes up a conversation with a man named Israel, who she has long thought of as "the sexiest guy in the city." What follows, in a chapter titled "Interlude for Fucking," is an explicit, extravagant account of their time together. Israel is a pervert, but fortunately (or unfortunately) for Sheila, he is amazing at it.

Reviewing the book for the New Yorker, James Wood wrote that Heti's prose "is what one might charitably call basic: simple, direct, sometimes ungracefully." The best of Heti's writing on sex—ambitious, assured and ruthlessly controlled—shows just how wrong this judgement is. It is one thing to say that sexual degradation is degrading, but Heti is able to show what makes it sexy, too.

The problem with sex, or at least the problem with sex with Israel, is that it distracts Sheila from her friends, her work, and herself. Although Sheila eventually stops seeing him, the larger questions surrounding sex go unanswered, and in fact How Should A Person Be? has been criticised for a certain evasiveness. Many of the book's grandiose expressions of artistic ambition wind up with a self-deprecating joke, as when Sheila writes that if her play only maintains our global standard of living at "its current level," she will "weep" into her oatmeal. These supposedly wild swings between sincerity and irony—between confidence and hesitation, it has been suggested, demonstrate some flaw in Heti's thinking that runs so deep as to border on the pathological. Maybe she is a lazy writer. Maybe her need for adulation and fame blunts her capacity for self-criticism. Or maybe, like so many of her peers, she is simply a narcissist, another hapless "millennial."

But what if Sheila Heti is simply Jewish? How Should A Person Be? is filled with searching references to the wandering tribes, Moses, and the modern state of Israel. Halfway through the book, Sheila thinks to herself, "I will give up pot because it makes me paranoid. But I will stay close to God because he makes me paranoid." This isn't just a joke—it's a Woody Allen joke. ("I was captain of the latent paranoid softball team," Allen once said. "I used to steal second base, and feel guilty and go back.")

Here we have a technically experimental, autobiographical novel, narrated by an authorial alter ego who is obsessed with fame, sex, her Jewish heritage, and egotism. Does that description remind you of any particular American novelist? If one detects a bit of sexism in the idea that Heti's project is hopelessly self-involved, one reason may be that when Philip Roth pursued exactly the same project, he ended up being celebrated as America's Greatest Living Writer.

One passage, late in the book, makes this Jewish literary ancestry obvious. Sheila is soliloquising, again, on the topic of her world historical destiny:

"Yet there is one character in history who is reassuring me these days: Moses. I hadn't realised until last week that in his youth he killed a man, an Egyptian, and buried him under some sand. The next day he saw two men fighting. When he tried to stop them, they said to Moses, "What? And if we don't—are you going to kill us too?" He became afraid. He thought, Everyone knows what I have done.

Then he fled town.

And he is the king of the Jews—my king. If that is what my king is like, what can I expect for myself?... I used to worry that I wasn't enough like Jesus, but yesterday I remembered who was my king: a man who, when God told him to lead the people out of Egypt, said, "But I'm not a good talker! Couldn't you ask my brother instead?" So it should not be hard to come at this life with a little bit of honesty. I don't need to be great like the leader of the Christian people. I can be a bumbling murderous coward like the king of the Jews."

This passage is rich with humour, terror, self-delusion, and all the energy and confusion of youthful ambition. "I will stay close to God because he makes me paranoid"—it is precisely Heti's closeness to life, or to God (or at least to Moses) that lends her book its seriousness.

"The characters in my book are wandering," Heti told an interviewer. "I saw a correspondence between our generation's doomed worship of the self and that generation's damned worship of the Golden Calf." Heti also pointed out to the interviewer that it isn't the Jews who leave Egypt who reach the Promised Land, but the generation that comes after. But
“A fierce attack on the view that suicide terrorists are true martyrs to a cause, worthy of respect or honour because of their commitment.”
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Punk at the theatre

The playwright Simon Stephens is a rebel at the heart of British theatre, argues Michael Coveney

The most prolific playwright of our new century, 41-year-old Simon Stephens, sits at the very centre of new British theatre, a ubiquitous activist who believes in “making” theatre, not writing it, relishing what he calls “the gang mentality” involved.

*Port*, which opens at the end of January at the National Theatre, defines Stephens’s talent and areas of interest almost perfectly. A story of growing up and escape in his native Stockport, *Port* charts the odyssey of a young girl over 12 years as she strikes out on her own, with a much younger brother. Pushed to the margins in the shadow of a big city, she embodies the spirit of melancholy and alienation Stephens admires in the music of Morrissey and the Smiths.

Last year alone, Stephens had six titles performed in Britain, including the controversial *Three Kingdoms* at the Lyric, Hammersmith (only someone “debauched beyond redemption” could enjoy the dildo-and-bondage scenes, I wrote, somewhat primly). The play, which begins with the discovery of a headless female corpse in Hammersmith, followed two British detectives through the lower depths of the European vice-trade and sex-trafficking business.

Stephens also served up two acclaimed, award-winning adaptations, both re-surfacing this year: brilliant versions of Mark Haddon’s hit novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, transferring to the West End from the National Theatre in March, and of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, returning to the Young Vic in April.

There is a time-honoured division in British theatre: on one side stand the roundheads of the Royal Court “new writing” school and the politicised fringe; on the other, the Cavaliers of the Trevor Nunn-style Royal Shakespeare Company, with the National Theatre straddling both camps.

When it comes to the playwrights themselves, the distinction is even clearer. Stephens, as a former inner city teacher, odd job man, shop worker, musician (he played in a Scottish punk band called the Country Teasers) and provocateur turned playwright, is the leading roundhead in a profession more easily identified by the general public in its Cavaliers: Tom Stoppard, Alan Bennett, David Hare and Alan Ayckbourn.

Unlike those plumed playwrights, Stephens has never had a West End hit (well, not until the arrival of *The Curious Incident* next month, perhaps), nor does his work court, or indeed attract, top box office names. But it lies at the heart of our theatre, partly because Stephens himself gets so involved—he used to teach on the Royal Court’s brilliant Young Writers Programme, was resident dramatist at the National and is now a busy associate at the Lyric, Hammersmith—and partly because he is so effusive and skilful.
Two years ago, Stephens wrote a subtly interconnecting triptych, Wastewater, which studied some odd relationships around the child care industry. It was an intriguing formal experiment that didn’t quite work, but a palpable poetic tension ran through the thought-provoking production. A policewoman unexpectedly quoted Charles Dickens in Great Expectations: “Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts.”

Sounds like Morrissey again. Stephens also cites Tom Waits and Shane MacGowan of the Pogues as major influences. Several of his plays are set in the urban sprawl around Heathrow Airport, even more of them by rivers, seas or lakes. There is the idea of struggle in a permanent state of transition—the nominal heroine of Harper Regan (2008, at the National) is a soul in torment, poised on the brink of leaving her job, her husband, her daughter. And, as always in Stephens, that spiritual odyssey is also a physical one, hence its poignant theatricality.

Will the plays acquire classic status? I think they might. One of my favourites is Motorway (2006, Royal Court) in which a British serving soldier returns to Dagenham, home of the Ford plant in Britain, and endures an episodic period of non-adjustment to civilian life. It struck me as our modern equivalent of the first great European working-class tragedy, Georg Büchner’s fragmentary Woyzeck—published in 1879, 40 years after its author’s death—in which the disoriented military anti-hero drowned himself in a lake.

The poetic is the political in Stephens, and vice versa, and he’s first and foremost a regional, not a London, writer. His signature play, Punk Rock (2006), a vibrant companion piece in some ways to Port, deals with peer pressure, sexual games-playing and suicide in a fee-paying Lancashire grammar school, and the scenes are punctuated with blasts of noisy rock from the likes of Big Black and the White Stripes. The schoolchildren are both critically emblematic of a private education system and true to the spirit of rebellion they discover in themselves.

Port, like Curious Incident, is directed by Marianne Elliott, who also worked on the original production ten years ago in Manchester. Elliott is one of many colleagues on whose careers Stephens’ work acts as a sort of lightning rod. And not just in Britain: like those figureheads of British theatre in the 1990s, Sarah Kane (Blasted) and Mark Ravenhill (Shopping and Fucking), Stephens goes down well in Germany.

His work—in its sexual and psychological analysis, as well as in its social and cultural obsessions—has a knack of illuminating the terrain around everyone working in progressive contemporary theatre from Birmingham to Glasgow, the National Theatre to the German Schauspielhaus. You’re unlikely, though, to see Dame Judi Dench’s name on the marquee.

Michael Coveney is chief theatre critic for WhatsOnStage.com

Wittgenstein’s master

Frank Ramsey was friends with Keynes, supervised Wittgenstein’s PhD thesis, made breakthroughs in maths, economics and philosophy, and died before he was 27, says AC Grayling

Frank Ramsey: A Sister’s Memoir
by Margaret Paul (Smith-Gordon, £20)

Frank Ramsey was 26 years old when he died after an operation at Guy’s Hospital in January 1930. In his short life, he had made lasting contributions to mathematics, economics and philosophy; and to the thinking of a number of his contemporaries, including Ludwig Wittgenstein.

When I taught at St Anne’s, Oxford during the 1980s, I was introduced by my colleague Gabriele Taylor to Ramsey’s sister, Margaret Paul, by then retired from teaching economics at Lady Margaret Hall college. As with anyone with some knowledge of the fields of enquiry Ramsey influenced, I was immediately recruited into helping with her research into his life and thought, though in a minor capacity; she had a formidable array of other helpers besides, from eminent philosophers like Taylor and PF Strawson onwards.

Frank Ramsey was 18 when Margaret was born, so her own memories of him were those of a little girl. A large part of her motivation in writing about him was to get to know him. In this quest she was equally tireless and scrupulous. Most aspects of his work require advanced technical competence, but she was determined to understand them; an afternoon at her house talking about him could be as gruelling as it was educative.

Her memoir has now been published. It is a remarkable book, a window not just into a prodigious mind—Ramsey translated Wittgenstein’s Tractatus as a second year Trinity undergraduate, simultaneously publishing original work in probability theory and economics—but into the amazingly rich intellectual world of his day. The book’s roll-call includes John Maynard Keynes, Bertrand Russell, GE Moore and Wittgenstein, and the mise-en-scène equals it: Ramsey’s father was president of Magdalen college at Cambridge, his famously bushy-eyedbrown brother, Michael, later became Archbishop of Canterbury, and Ramsey himself, after scholarships at Winchester and Trinity, became a fellow of King’s, aged 21.

Suffering unrequited love for a married woman drove Ramsey to Vienna to be psychoanalysed by one of Freud’s pupils. It was there that he met Wittgenstein, spending hours every day in conversation with him, and later helping Keynes to bring him back to Cambridge. In the last year of his life, the 26-year-old Ramsey was the 40-year-old Wittgenstein’s nominal PhD thesis supervisor, the thesis being the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus itself.

Margaret Paul has traced the brief days of Ramsey’s life with assiduity, much helped by his copious correspondence and the memories of those who were still alive when she was conducting her research and whom, therefore, she could interrogate. Even if she had written little about his work, her portrait of him and his world would by itself be fascinating—to talk of Ramsey is to talk of an extraordinary time in the history of intellect.

But she describes Ramsey’s work, too. To philosophy he gave a first version of the “redundancy” theory of truth, stating that to describe a statement as true is merely equivalent to asserting it, so that predicating “is true” of an assertion is strictly otiose. So to say “Europe is a continent is true,” is equivalent to simply saying “Europe is a continent.”

This in turn means that “true” does not denote a substantive property of utterances. Although it sounds simple, redundancy theory went on to have a huge impact on formal
logic and epistemology.

To economics Ramsey contributed important ideas on probability theory, taxation, and economic growth and saving. This work was described by Keynes as “one of the most remarkable contributions to mathematical economics ever made, both in intrinsic importance and difficulty of its subject.” To mathematics itself Ramsey gave the theorem from which the field known as Ramsey Theory stems. This explores how order emerges from combinations of objects. A simple example of this intricate and powerful field is the “party problem,” which asks: what is the smallest number of invitees to a party such that at least some of them will know each other and some of them will not know each other?

As Ramsey’s work shows, each of his contributions has given rise to spreading fields of enquiry. There are now several redundancy-style theories of truth; his work on probability inspired John von Neumann’s discoveries in game theory; the Ramsey-Cass-Koopmans mathematical model shows how an economy can maximise its potential, and there is more besides.

In the autumn of 1929 Ramsey suddenly developed liver failure and had an operation at Guy’s, it being thought that a gall bladder blockage was causing his jaundice. The operation revealed a long-standing condition affecting his liver and kidneys, and he died a few days after the operation, not knowing that he was in mortal danger.

His loss was a tragedy, not only to his family and friends but, as his sister’s luminous and absorbing account shows, to the progress of the human mind. Frank Ramseys do not often come our way.

AC Grayling is Master of the New College of the Humanities

The month in books

From the war on terror to modern myths of progress, history haunts February’s selection, says Rachel Sylvester

“History is the third parent”—the first line of Naseem Aslam’s powerful new novel, The Blind Man’s Garden (Faber, £18.99), could be a subtitle for all this month’s books. Set in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11, Aslam follows the story of one family shaped and damaged by war. The backdrop is the father’s garden, a symbol of safe domesticity that becomes more threatening as he loses his sight. In the same way, danger closes in on all the characters as they travel through conflict, their lives crossing as the plot moves from rural village to bustling market place, from terrorist training ground to CIA prison camp. Aslam beautifully evokes varying places and cultures, portraying different versions of love and loyalty, extremism and cruelty. There’s a sense here that Afghanistan is a nation travelling in circles, haunted by its past as it struggles towards the future—a particularly pertinent message this year, perhaps, as British troops prepare to leave.

A Hologram For the King (Hamish Hamilton, £18.99), by the novelist Dave Eggers, is set in another country caught between modernity and antiquity: Saudi Arabia. A struggling American businessman, Alan Clay, travels to Jeddah to try and win a contract to run the technology for a new desert development, the King Abdullah Economic City, as it rises from the sand. The clashes between western life and Saudi traditions are all too apparent in the marble-clad hotels and air-conditioned tents where alcohol is illegal but readily available. As the American visitor waits to make his pitch to the monarch, his own mid-life crisis seems to mirror the identity crisis of the country he is visiting. But his attempt to hold himself and his dysfunctional family together, under pressure from both the recession and globalisation, is also a metaphor for the wider problems facing his own country. The shifting balance of power in the world—the decline of America and its effect on the American psyche, and the rise of China—is the main theme of this book. Named by the New York Times as one of the best five novels of 2012, it is a serious and engagingly told work.

In Anatomies: The Human Body, Its Parts and the Stories They Tell (Viking, £18.99), Hugh Aldersey-Williams moves from body snatchers to tattoo parlours, from the death-mask of Isaac Newton to the afterlife of Albert Einstein’s brain, to look at how assumptions have changed about the workings of the human body. There are lots of interesting facts—the heart will squirt blood six foot into the air, for example, and ears have hair cells tuned like piano strings. It’s entertaining, but the book deals only briefly with modern developments in genetics and neuroscience, perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the human body to have been discovered in recent years, which makes it seem rather old-fashioned.

The Colossal, from Ancient Greece to Giacometti by Peter Mason (Reaktion, £25) spans the centuries with a similarly broad sweep. Taking the Colossus of Rhodes, the Roman Colosseum, the Easter Island statues, the gigantic heads of the Olmecs and Egyptian obelisks, the author develops a theory of “the colossal” that goes beyond size. The archaic Greek “kolossos” referred to a ritual effigy and the author argues that the word should refer not just to scale but also to symbolism. He applies the theory to Giacometti, who he says tapped into this alternative sense of the “colossal,” particularly in his work The Cube, which articulates themes of death and mourning. It’s an interesting theory— if written in a slightly dry, academic style—which makes one see the art in a new light. Mason convincingly links the ancient world with the 20th century, showing yet again how the past and present are entwined.

John Gray’s latest book, The Silence of Animals (Allen Lane, £18.99), returns to one of his favourite themes, attacking what he calls “progress and other modern myths.” Drawing on diverse sources from Joseph Conrad to Sigmund Freud, Gray tries to debunk the assumption that things can only get better as time goes on. The freedom of “liberal civilisation” is “a dream,” he argues, while humans are no better than animals. The idea of progress is a late survival of early Christianity rather than a secular offshoot of science. For me, the whole of this nihilistic vision was less than the sum of its often interesting parts. Gray sets out to scotch what he says are the myths and superstitions of the modern age—but remains too wedded to his own illusion, which relies on an excessively pessimistic view of human nature.

Rachel Sylvester is a political columnist
Janice Galloway is the author of several award-winning works of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Her latest, All Made Up, won the Scottish Book of the Year Award 2012. This story, “Fittest,” comes from a new collection, Beacons: Stories for Our Not-So-Distant Future, in which a selection of writers have responded to the subject of climate change. “I wanted to write about that moment we all face sooner or later when there is no option but to turn spectator sport into sharp-eyed engagement,” says Galloway.

### Fittest

The weather had been wicked for ages but summer was little short of criminal. Warm, heavy rain every morning shifted to high winds, howling winds and tree-shaking bluster by noon. Long humid evenings, the sun emerging fitfully like a jaundiced eye between bruised clouds, brought an end to more days than most cared to remember. There was even a freak shower of giant hail, ice-balls hard enough to shatter as they landed, spilling seeds, or maybe insect eggs, over the pavements of Braemar. Not to be outdone, Stornoway reported fleets of stray jellyfish stranding boats offshore, and Perth, a shower of live eels. The Central Belt was milder by comparison, but no one would have called it pleasant. Save for the occasional olive-tinted tuft, grass showed only in shades of straw and brown. When an intercepted film shot by Grampian Police surfaced on YouTube suggesting the sky near Inverness was turning bronze, those of us who paid attention to our instincts began, like salmon, drifting north. Despite warnings of petrol shortages, I took the caravan. Old engines don’t let you down, and this way I could ferry the bike on the roof, just in case.

Despite the dreichness of the drive, I was there before I realized, the loch showing suddenly over the gorse like labradorite under heavy cloud. A wispy ectoplasm floated above the water’s surface, preparing to evaporate the moment the sun broke through, only the sun wasn’t for breaking. The water itself was as still as ever, but swollen. Horribly swollen; near-convex, like a cow in calf. Leery now, I parked behind a clump of spruce trees and scrambled up the nearest crag, scanning the surrounds for—what? Clues, maybe?

A landmark that said I was somewhere else entirely? Most likely, something as weak-willed as the need for company. And there they were. Spread like sheep on the downside of the verge, their tents and their transport, their animals and children, washing lines like flags in the wind. A whole camp, it seemed, had arrived before me, massed, however loosely, for what was most likely the same reason I had begun this journey myself. The tweed set, having sought out less sodden clumps of moss, perched on shooting sticks near the edges of the lake, keen to observe what they took to be their terrain more closely. Others had gathered driftwood and stood chatting or simply staring near smoky fires. Behind them, fishermen cast lines. I glanced over my shoulder to the caravan, hoped its camouflage enough, and tipped my boots over the downward slope to join them.

Next day, I left the caravan shortly after dawn and approached the encampment by a devious route, fearful of giving away my home. Either I had miscalculated, or the number of settlers had doubled overnight. Two saddled ponies fed from open sacks at the waterside, and a handful of chickens, with no coop in sight, scratched at nothing under a barren tree. A man in a cloth cap had set up a deck chair and held a flask as he smiled absently over the water. There were tents, teepees, a makeshift lean-to and open-backed vans, and further off, a painted contraption not unlike a dog sled, its tangle of harnesses empty. A couple of boys in biker boots played Elvis songs to the queue at the snack van offering all-day breakfast rolls with black-pudding or sausage. I ate from my own provisions out of preference, watching monster-hunters, here in the hope of a brief appearance of Nessie from the vantage point of higher ground. A girl in tiger face paint had set up a stall with helium-filled balloons and inflatable hammers, and an ice-cream van rounded the brae with a jungly round of “Green-sleeves,” the strains of which attracted a trio of divers, who broke the surface of the loch like seals. People took photographs. Why not? There was charm here, an air of festival. Even I could feel it. At night, my natural caution restored, I saved the torch and washed my socks in the dark, taking my books to bed unread merely to keep them dry. I needed them for reference, after all, these maps, tables of edible flora and, if it came to it, fauna. Some were old, already out of print. I could not risk loss. Irredeemable loss. Next day, an almighty whirring of helicopter blades brought a fly-over of military sorts and freelance hacks with long-lens cameras. I assumed they were scanning the loch, but perhaps they scanned the crowd; the hippies and hoboes, the students and amateur geologists, the tourists, the rubbernecks, and the solemnly intent that made up our group. We were families, radio hams and lone rangers. Silent, in the main, this last group exuded an aura of mild trepidation, a wish for separateness. They—or more correctly, we, for I counted myself part of their number—carried our own supplies: books, compasses, axes, wire and rope, picks and fish-hooks. We carried hunting knives, boning knives, toughened steel-parers. I knew from experience we carried lots of knives.

That same afternoon, the rain came back so hard it hurt. Some people moved out, or tried to, but their wheels rutted, spraying loam. As the sky darkened, faces that had begun to be familiar...
The priests were the first to rally, setting up votives under tarpaulin and handing out free cigarettes. There was laughter, a general softening of shoulders and shaking of hands. Tyres were checked with a view to moving on when the mist cleared, fresh tea gratefully sipped in proper cups. An elderly woman began to practise tai chi. It was then I noticed what made the human sounds, small as they were, so stark. There was no birdsong. No cries of crows or sparrows, not even a stray gull. I had a fag while they lasted, in sympathy with the others, and snapped my maps into the pockets of my cargoes. Two books, a knife, and a slim-handled pick. In case.

The dry spell continued just long enough to begin to seem normal. Then the earth, done with resting, girded its loins. We heard a sucking noise, like boots emerging from the water, ready to act. But there was nothing to act against: just more sound, like groaning, the press of insistent, ground-covering waves. Children clasped whatever hand was prepared to take theirs and a helicopter reared into view like a black Pegasus, the pilot waving one arm from the cockpit. Back, he mouthed, circling once, move back, though only a handful could have seen before the harsh, warm gust that meant he had turned away for the last time.

As the water groaned again and the copter disappeared, I wheeled and walked, limping with something very like sluggishness, a sensation of being trapped underwater. Perhaps I was afraid. A great belch of mud and gas behind me was all it took to spur my legs, of their own volition, to a canter, to choose without my having to rationalize that to run was my best chance. Where were the pheasants? I thought. They were here only yesterday, but now not one remained. On either side, tethered dogs strained on their leashes, part of the debris, the abandoned litter we would doubtless leave behind. It was then, as I lurched uphill and away from whatever it was that headed towards us, I saw it. Off to my right, glowing in the dark, dry grass. A tiny, living fire. I slowed. Orange with coal-black flecks and magnesium-flare markings, those tiger-tints of amber, auburn, gold. Closer to, though I tried to still myself, the creature fluttered, showing its full colours. A copper lycaenidae, but which? Its antennae, glowing like incense sticks; that frill, like bead-work on his wings; those distinctive legs. It was a Duke of Burgundy for sure. Male, perfect, impossibly far from home. Despite the situation, I could not help but smile. An allegedly extinct butterfly was here, miles from what had once been his normal habitat, breathing after all. And searching for a mate. And where he had chosen to search, where his instinct had driven him to best survive, was north. As I watched, he folded himself in half and lifted weightlessly into the air, spiralling higher with every beat of his wings. Against all prudent judgement, I waited, wishing him luck, till he disappeared.

Others crushed against me, insistent, haring in what I knew for sure now was the wrong direction. Trusting everything to an insect, I let his fitter senses guide me and took the left fork. I accelerated North. North.
The generalist by Didymus

Enigmas & puzzles

Evening the odds
Ian Stewart

“Let’s play Oddly,” said Mathophilia.
“What are the rules?” asked Innumeratus.
“We each choose a pair of distinct odd numbers between 5 and 17. We can’t both choose the same pair. Then we each roll three dice. One of us wins if their total is one of the numbers they chose, but the other’s total is not one of the numbers they chose. Otherwise we both roll again.”

“Show me an example.”
“Well, suppose you choose 5 and 11, while I choose 7 and 13. Then you win if you roll a total of 5 or 11, but I don’t roll 7 or 13. Conversely, if I roll 7 or 13, but you don’t roll 5 or 11, I win. Failing that, we both roll again, until we get a winner.”

Innumeratus did some quick calculations.

“Hey, hang on! With those choices, my chance of winning is 33 out of 216, but yours is 36 out of 216. So the game is unfair!”

“That’s right,” Mathophilia admitted, with an ill-concealed grimace. “So we have to choose the pairs of odd numbers so that each of us has the same chance of winning.”

What are the two pairs?

How to enter

The generalist prize
One winner receives a copy of A History of Opera by Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (Penguin, hardback, £30), which explores the last 400 years of this extraordinary artform and examines some of the problems it has encountered in recent times.

Enigmas & puzzles prize
The winner receives a copy of The Logician and the Engineer by Paul J Nahin (Princeton University Press, £16.95), which looks at how a system of mathematics established in the Victorian era paved the way for the digital technology of the modern world.

Rules
Send your solution to answer@prospect-magazine.co.uk or Crossword/Enigmas, Prospect, 2 Bloomsbury Place, London, WC1A 2QA. Include your email and postal address for prize administration. All entries must be received by 7th February. Winners will be announced in our March issue.

Last month’s Generalist winner Clive Scott, Surrey

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The Prospect List

Our pick of the best public talks and events in February

**Friday 1st**
- **Manet, Music and Modern Life**
  - Gulliver Ralston, musicologist
  - Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, W1, 6.30pm, £16, 0207 300 8000, www.royalacademy.org.uk
- **Boris Akunin in conversation with James Meek**
  - Boris Akunin and James Meek, novelists
  - London Review Bookshop, Bury Place, WC1, 7pm, £10, 020 7293 9030, www.lrbshop.co.uk
- **Scottish Art in Focus: Jacob More, 1740-1793**
- Patricia Andrew, lecturer and museum consultant
  - **Monday 4th**
- **Undressing Anne Boleyn**
  - Hilary Mantel, novelist
  - British Museum, Great Russell St, WC1, 6.30pm, £10, 020 7323 8181, www.britishmuseum.org

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**Tuesday 5th**
- **Can Democracy be Saved? Participation, Deliberation and Social Movements**
  - Donatella della Porta, academic
  - London School of Economics, Kingsway, WC2, 6.30pm, free, 020 7955 6043, www.lse.ac.uk

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**Thursday 7th**
- **Design in Nature**
  - Sarah Coakley, John Cottingham, John Worrall, academics
  - London School of Economics, Kingsway, WC2, 6.30pm, free, 020 7955 6043, www.lse.ac.uk

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**Monday 11th**
- **The Crisis of American Democracy**
  - David Runciman, academic and author
  - British Museum, Great Russell St, WC1, 6.30pm, £10, 020 7323 8181, www.britishmuseum.org

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**Wednesday 13th**
- **Constructing Time: The Ancient Near Eastern Legacy**
  - Jonathan Ben-Dov, academic
  - University of Durham, Elvet Riverside, New Elvet, 6.15pm, free, 0191 334 6071, www.dur.ac.uk
- **Beryl Bainbridge**
  - Brendan King, editor
  - Museum of Liverpool, Pier Head, Liverpool Waterfront, 5pm, free, 0151 478 4545, www.museumofliverpool.org.uk

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**Thursday 14th**
- **The Nottingham Globalisation Lecture**
  - Martin Wolf, journalist
  - University of Nottingham, University Park, 5pm, free, 0115 951 5469, www.nottingham.ac.uk

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**Wednesday 20th**
- **Making the Himalaya: Oozing Squashing or Sliding?**
  - Matt Kohn, academic
  - University of Cambridge, Madingley Hall, 7pm, free, 01223 330 476, www.talks.cam.ac.uk

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**Monday 25th**
- **Is Wagner Bad for Us?**
  - Nicholas Spice, writer
  - British Museum, Great Russell St, WC1, 6.30pm, £10, 020 7323 8181, www.britishmuseum.org

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**Tuesday 26th**
- **How Were Maps Produced?**
  - Chris Burgoyne, academic
  - University of Cambridge, Emmanuel College, St Andrew’s St, 5.30pm, free, 01223 330 476, www.talks.cam.ac.uk

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**Wednesday 27th**
- **What Can We Learn From the Ancient Greeks Today?**
  - Richard Seaford, Christopher Gill, John Wilkinson, academics
  - Hellenic Centre, Paddington Street, W1, 7pm, free, 020 7563 9835, www.helleniccentre.org

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To see a wider list of events and add details of your own, go to
www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/listings

Listings are free. We’ll print our pick of the best in the magazine each month and highlight recommended events among those online.

To attend events
Always confirm details in advance and reserve a place if necessary.
Prices listed are standard; there may be concessions.
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‘This book is long overdue. Finally, the political interests behind the GDP mantra have been unveiled, forcing us to rethink mainstream economic views and build a more just and sustainable world.’
Kumi Naidoo, Greenpeace International Executive Director

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Richard Heinberg, author of The End of Growth
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www.zedbooks.co.uk/paperback/gross-domestic-problem

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Lord Giddens, House of Lords, London

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The way we were

Financial crises

Excerpts from memoirs and diaries, chosen by Ian Irvine

St John Brodrick, an Irish MP, tells his father, the Irish Lord Chancellor, of the collapse of the South Sea Bubble in 1720. The enterprise was founded in 1711 to consolidate and reduce the cost of national debt:

“Various are the conjectures why the South Sea directors have suffered the cloud to break so early... They have stretched credit so far beyond what it would bear, that specie proves insufficient to support it. Their most considerable men have drawn out, securing themselves by the losses of the deluded, thoughtless numbers, whose understandings have been overruled by avarice and the hope of making mountains out of molehills. Thousands of families will be reduced to beggary. The consternation is inexpressible—the rage beyond description, and the case altogether so desperate that I do not see any plan or scheme so much as thought of for averting the blow, so that I cannot pretend to guess what is next to be done.”

Claud Cockburn, a British journalist in New York, recalls Black Thursday in the Wall Street Crash on 24th October 1929:

“The subway to the City Hall Square the change [in the atmosphere] was as evident as a notable change in the weather. At The Sun office [a now defunct New York newspaper], there was just that nip in the emotional air which you get on the day after a big air raid, when people have grasped that the bombers really did get through last night and may do so again today. It was a situation in which nobody says much, but everyone knows what everyone else is thinking and knows that everyone else is a little frightened too.

“As the electric clocks ticked off the minutes until the opening of the market, the tension was nearly intolerable. I do not mean that any of us had much idea of what was really going to happen except perhaps Louis Hinrichs [a financial journalist and Cockburn’s immediate superior at The Times]. None of us, I am sure, thought, ‘This is a turning point, one way or another, in the history of the 20th century.’ There were some very smart people hanging over the ticker at the opening of the market that morning in The Sun office, but none of them was quite smart enough to know that, as they saw in those first few astounding minutes shares of Kennecott and General Motors thrown on the market in blocks of five, 10 and 15 thousand, they were looking at the beginning of a road which was going to lead to the British collapse of 1931, to the collapse of Austria, to the collapse of Germany—and that at the end of it, there was going to be a situation with Adolf Hitler in the middle of it...

“It seemed pointless to go through the usual routine of telephoning to ‘contacts’ and informants and asking for their comments on the situation. There was no sensible comment that anyone could make, and furthermore you had the feeling that there was no question you could ask which would not strike the man at the other end as some kind of affront. Even so, I scarcely began to guess how bad the situation really was until Hinrichs, in a low voice, said to me, ‘Remember, when we’re writing this story the word ‘panic’ is not to be used.’”

Barbara Castle, minister for transport in Harold Wilson’s Labour government, writes in her diary on 16th November 1966:

“As soon as [the Cabinet meeting] started Harold said, ‘The chancellor and I have an important statement to make. We must make it first and then deal with any other items for which there is time.’ We all stiffened and Jim [Callaghan, the chancellor] began heavily, ‘I have decided that the pound must be devalued. If Cabinet agrees, the necessary machinery will be set in motion and devaluation will be announced on Saturday. This is the unhappiest day of my life.’ We all sat very still.

“He then elaborated on the recent run on the pound. We could arrange another massive loan, but the thought of going through the whole process again was sickening. He and the PM therefore recommended 14.3 per cent devaluation. This was the only alternative to further deflation, which would be intolerable...

“In conclusion he said, ‘This is the most agonising reappraisal I have ever had to do and I will not pretend that it is anything but a failure of our policies.’”

Niall Ferguson describes Britain’s exit from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) on 16th September 1992:

“Moonlighting as a newspaper leader writer while I was a junior lecturer at Cambridge, I became convinced that speculators like George Soros could beat the Bank of England if it came to a showdown. It was simple arithmetic: a trillion dollars being traded on foreign exchange markets every day, versus the Bank’s meagre currency reserves. Soros reasoned that the rising costs of German reunification would drive up interest rates and hence the Deutschmark. This would make the Conservative government’s policy of shadowing the German currency—formalized when Britain had joined the ERM in 1990—untenable... So sure was Soros that the pound would drop that he ultimately bet $10bn, more than the entire capital of his fund, [on it]... I was equally sure that the pound would be devalued, though all I had to bet was my credibility. [One night] I went to the English National Opera, to hear Verdi’s The Force of Destiny. It proved a highly appropriate choice. Someone announced at the interval that Britain had withdrawn from the ERM. How we all cheered—and no one louder than me (except possibly George Soros). His fund made more than $1bn as sterling slumped.”
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