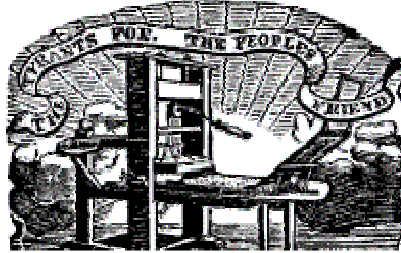


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Editorial:

Is There Anyone in Charge Here?

Sean Gabb

When the news first broke that David Kelly, a senior scientific expert at the Ministry of Defence, had been found dead, I had no real doubt that he had committed suicide. When the claims emerged almost at once on the Internet, that he had been murdered as part of some cover up, I paid no attention. One of my settled assumptions has been that the British State may do any number of wicked things, but it does not murder its domestic opponents - and it especially does not murder its own servants. The man had performed badly in some televised Parliamentary hearings. He was

depressed. He ended his life. It would have been convenient to accept the lurid claims of murder, but I rejected them out of hand.

I am no longer so sure in my assumption. Why would a scientist commit suicide in so incompetent a manner? Why should he remove his watch after slashing his wrist? What were those ads doing on his chest? Why was there no note? Why should he invalidate his life insurance when he was trying to gather money for his wife? What were those documents shredded in the Ministry of Defence? Dr Tame has drawn to my attention the fact that the security services are handing their own agents in Ulster over to Sinn Féin for disposal now that they are no longer needed. Then there was the Hilda Murrell case in the early 1980s. Some of the newspapers have added the adverbial phrase "apparently committed suicide" to any statement about his death. I do not fully accept that Dr Kelly was murdered, but I begin to find it more likely than not. The theory is that he was forced to choose between lying about his knowledge of the weapons of mass destruction claims used to justify the Iraqi War and end his career. After making a mess of lying, he may have wanted to tell the truth. And so he was killed before he could open his mouth. This looks increasingly likely. If that is what happened, we are indeed living in a gangster state, and none of us is now safe.

But I am still not convinced that this was part of some organised conspiracy. For all I hate and despise him, I do not believe that Tony Blair could order the murder of an embarrassing civil servant. After the fiasco of his world tour, he is presently taking shelter in Barbados as the guest of Cliff Richard. I suspect he has retreated into a fantasy world as a last defence against the collapse of his reputation and the scandals emerging about his domestic arrangements. He has left the country in the hands of John Prescott. Though stupid and morally corrupt in the petty sense, I do not think this man would order a murder. He is too cowardly and perhaps too mindful of a few scruples. I can imagine that some of Mr Blair's policy and media advisers would be capable of murder. But I am not sure if they have the authority to order one.

We are left with the alarming prospect that no one is in charge of the mess that has followed the Iraqi War. If Dr Kelly was murdered, it was on orders not from the top. Someone fairly low in the intelligence bureaucracy may have given the orders. The government of this country is on autopilot, and the various parts of its administration are going their own way. We must bear in mind that this is how these scandals usually begin.

I never supposed this dreadful war would end other than badly. But I did not suppose the Government would be destroyed by the cover up of the cover up of the justificatory lies. But that seems now to have happened. There is an irony in events. Any historian knows that.

We have now endured six years of posturing and growing tyranny from New Labour. Let us hope we shall see an end of it before long. The Conservatives may not be an ideal replacement, but they never behaved like this when they were last in government, and probably will preside over at least a modest cleaning up of the mess that Tony Blair has made.

**The Cancer in Our Bones:
Thoughts on Immigration and Assimilation
by David J.K. Carr <carr@libertarian.co.uk>**

In less extraordinary times, news of inner-city youths committing acts of vandalism, affray and arson would not make front-page headlines nor elicit a great deal of comment aside from customary complaints about the kind of rampant delinquency and lack of respect that many people, older ones especially, regard as a part of the systemic cause of crime in general.

But an incident of this nature did occur in times both recent and extraordinary. Further the circumstances were such as to engender not just comment or even condemnation but altogether darker concerns.

On the night of 5th November 2001, the Reverend Tony Toobey was called to his Church in Bradford in the North of England, where he found a group of Asian youths trying to set a fire. He ran to his car in order to summon help but was chased by the gang who hurled stones at the vehicle, one of which shattered the rear window. The Rev. Toobey managed to flag down a police vehicle and persuaded the occupants to follow him back to the Church. By the time they arrived the suspects had fled the scene.

It transpired that youths responsible for the attack were local British Muslims and it was for this reason that the police categorised the attack as a 'racist incident'.

Had the timing been less significant, this incident may well have been simply dismissed as yet another episode of feral underclass malevolence. The kind of hum-drum inner-city reportage of the kind that results in a perfunctory report on pages two or three of the local newspaper and barely makes it into the national press at all. But the previous summer had witnessed widespread riots and civil disorder not just in Bradford but in other cities across the North of England, as tension between the native White and Muslim people who share those environs, spilled out onto the street in violent confrontation.

The sights and sounds of such visceral ethnic conflict, and the prospect of long-term and deeper conflict, sent a judder down the collective spine of not just the establishment but of everyone else who had grown used to the idea of Britain as a willing and easy-going melting-pot.

The Church-attack also followed far too soon after the horrific mass-murder attacks on New York and Washington on September 11th. An act that was planned and ruthlessly executed by a gang of Muslim terrorists and aimed not just at America but at what they considered to be symbols of Western capitalism and virility.

As the shockwaves from the WTC attacks rippled around the globe, more than a few people delivered the grim prognosis that this was not just another terrorist attack but the opening shot in what was going to prove to be a long and extremely bloody civilisational war between Islam and the West.

In was in the midst of that shockwave that the Church-attack in Bradford took place, sending another, though smaller, shockwave rippling through this country. Coming when it did, it fuelled suspicions, some rather febrile, about Britain's own Muslim community. All of a sudden, the darkest imaginings about a hostile, rampant, radical Islam engaging in a war against the West sounded marginally less preposterous.

I can understand the concern for my own reaction to the Church-attack was one of utter abhorrence. Although I am a secular Jew, I greatly value the presence of Britain's historic Churches. I admire them not just for their imposing edifices or their architectural significance but, more importantly, for the sense of continuity they provide. They are a persisting embodiment of British heritage and a reminder, made stone, that Christianity, despite its waning influence, was the intellectual anvil upon which the character of the British people was forged.

For sure there are criminals and young thugs who desecrate Churches for no greater reason than the malicious pleasure of vandalism or because they hope to gain financially from stealing Church relics and religious artefacts. However, the Bradford attack does not appear to fit into these

categories. As best as one can tell, it was a purely sectarian incident designed to intimidate not just practising Christians but, perhaps more widely, the local native British. In this respect, it is likely that Churches hold the same significance for that gang of young Muslim men as they do for me.

Since the Bradford incident, I have come across various other lurid allegations of Muslim intimidation and violence apparently directed at the native British in various towns and cities in the North and Midlands. The tales involve various accusations of arson, threats, assaults, criminal damage and other malevolent acts which, so the stories go, are all directed at Whites by roving gangs of young British Muslims. All of these stories have appeared on the internet, either in chat rooms or newsgroups and while they often sound terribly convincing, I cannot find any independent corroboration for them in any credible or respectable publication or news service. Therefore, I am forced to conclude that these stories are, for the most part, nothing more than rumours, misrepresentations or, in some cases, outright fabrication.

The fact is that, mercifully, the riots of 2001 have not been repeated and, moreover, the Church-attack in Bradford appears to have been an isolated event.

However, the awful spectacles of 2001 have made their mark to the extent that they have precipitated a widespread discussion about Britain's Muslim community and even the broader topic of immigration in general. I think it not unfair to suggest that worries about inter-communal strife have fuelled a rather inchoate hostility to 'asylum-seekers', particularly those from developing countries.

As is usual in discussions of the immigration issue, many of the views I have encountered are silly, squalid or woefully naïve. But, in the midst of this cacophony, two coherent, and diametrically contrasting, views can be identified. The first is a view that is common to many on the Nationalist Right, that Islam is a culture which is utterly alien to our own Western values and Muslims in the West are, in effect, a fifth column and the spearhead of a planned takeover of the West by radical Islam as part of an ambition to establish a world-wide *Khilafah* or Caliphate. Hence Muslim people can never truly integrate and they will remain sullen, angry and hostile.

This is offset by the view largely held by those on the Left, that many recent immigrants, but particularly Muslim immigrants, have been the victims of racist sentiments in the host community which has lamentably failed to accommodate the new arrivals with sufficient vigour or make allowances for their different cultural identity. This failure to adapt sufficiently to the new immigrant cultures has left many among the more recent arrivals, but particularly many young Muslims, feeling isolated, unwanted and alien.

I subscribe to neither of these views but I find that there is a kernel of truth within both and that is the recognition that large swathes of the recent immigrants have failed to integrate into British society with anything like the success of immigrants in previous eras.

If this is so, and I think there is considerable evidence to support the proposition that it is so, then I think it of the utmost importance to examine the reasons for this unfortunate state of affairs and, thereby, point towards a remedy.

My view on the process of immigration is that it is a form of trade and, as such, can and does benefit all parties concerned. However it is nonsense to suggest that this process takes place against a *tabula rasa*. A nation with as much history as Britain is also bound to have attributes that actually keep it bound together as a nation. These characteristics include tangibles such as the English language but, of equal significance, there will also be a common culture, a sense of shared identity,

a reasonably cohesive civil society and a widely-accepted set of assumptions, traditions, customs and norms.

It is for this reason that I take the view that it is incumbent on the immigrant to change and adapt in order to fit in with the host community and not the other way around. I say this not out of any sense of animus towards the immigrant's original culture but because it is the only sensible and sustainable way to go about the process. The alternatives are for the immigrant to make no effort to change in order to integrate or for the host community to be changed to adapt to the ways and culture of the immigrant.

Many on the Left make no secret of their desire for Britain to be changed in order to accommodate new immigrants but since people emigrate here from all corners of the world, which culture should the native British adapt to? What if those various cultural demands conflict with each other? Even leaving aside those problems, the entire thesis is badly misconceived. The majority hosts will not change their ways, identity or culture voluntarily and so this process can only be embarked upon by means of an expansive and intrusive programme of state-mandated social engineering. Such a process will (and has) become oppressive in short order and will lead to meritorious feelings of resentment among the host population who will regard themselves as being bullied and victimised simply because of what they are and will tend, therefore, to blame the immigrants for their plight. Demanding change of a host community is not just ugly and unfair but it can also have catastrophic consequences if taken too far.

The other route is for neither the host community nor the immigrant to adapt which simply leaves the immigrant being regarded as the outsider, the foreigner, the alien. This, I believe, is exactly the situation we have found ourselves in now.

When I was a small child I was sent to a small privately-run infants school in Central London. As a non-state school in that particular locale, it also took in a great many foreign children, many of them the children of diplomats and various embassy staff. Consequently, I shared a class with children from Japan, Canada, Egypt and various European countries.

I can clearly recall, as clearly now as if I was staring a photograph, a particular day in that school when I could not have been more than five or six years old. Our class teacher, a redoubtable and sturdy dowager, pinned a large map of the world up on the blackboard. The map was mottled with splodges of red which, as she proceeded to explain to us, was the British Empire. I gazed up at that map, utterly enthralled and amazed that this little island in the North Atlantic could possibly have extended its dominion over such a vast swathe of the globe. The teacher continued to wax poetically about the rule of Britannia without making even the slightest attempt to mask her pride.

Would such a scene play out in any classroom in Britain today? I very much doubt it. And that is symptomatic of the problem.

I was born here as the grandson of immigrants from Russia and Poland and yet, when I was growing up, there was nothing in either my life or my education that suggested anything to me but that I was British and that being British was both an honour and a privilege. Practically everything I did, from the games I played, to the language I used (including the Cockney idioms), to the history I learned and even the football team I supported reinforced my image of myself as a little Englishman. Consequently, I have never felt anything but.

Like my grandparents and my parents before me, I was successfully assimilated and I was assimilated by a nation that still had the confidence to share its national identity with me but demand that I play my part. However, a toxic combination of excessive post-colonial guilt and the

rise in influence of the post-modernist Left has worn that confidence down to a nub and replaced it with a patina of miserabilism, defeat and self-loathing.

I therefore find myself in the odd position of actually agreeing in part with the cries of the Left but for entirely different reasons and reasons for which they themselves are overwhelmingly responsible. We have failed our recent immigrants but we have failed them by largely abandoning the very sense of national pride that they need and we sorely miss. I believe that most of our recent immigrants would jump at the chance to assimilate and become British but how can they be expected to do so when they constantly told that being British is something to be ashamed of or, worse still, a bogus concept? Instead of demanding that they become a part of this great nation, they are told to cling to and foster their cultures and nations of origin so instead of becoming Britons they reside here as foreigners who simply live in a place that happens, by dint of some historical accident, to be called 'Britain'. Small wonder there are gangs of young Asian men who feel alienated and unwelcome. They are no longer of there but neither are they of here. They are nowhere.

I do not believe that Britain's Muslim immigrants are a threat to this country. The vast majority are probably happy to continue getting on with the business of being shopkeepers and accountants. Talk of 'Holy Wars' probably sound fantastically stupid to them and status as permanent victims of racism are but patronising and humiliating. They would probably much prefer that we extend to them the kinship that was so readily offered to previous generations of immigrants, but the best thing on offer is a desultory recognition as part of a 'community of communities' - a polite euphemism for a meta-stable patchwork of mutually suspicious tribes.

That disastrous collapse of national confidence and pride is the real threat to Britain and to everyone who lives here. That is the cancer in our bones. A bout of remedial surgery is long overdue.

David J.K. Carr is a Member of the Executive Committee of the Libertarian Alliance. Many of his writings can be found on the Samizdata web site.

**On Being Uncertain:
A Case for Scepticism
by Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
issue 105, 26th May 2003)**

One reason I have written almost nothing this month for *Free Life Commentary* is that my busiest time of year is upon me. I have examinations to set and mark and to prepare students for. I am also hard at work on other projects that I hope will bear fruit in the months to come. And I am bored with the essay that I was trying to write. This was to be about the European Union and what makes it really so bad. However, I found myself unable to write my usual thousand words an hour. Indeed, I was picking over it for days and even weeks. I found it lacking the connection between ideas and the general clarity and smoothness of construction that I have always tried to achieve. In truth, I was bored with it. Pay me to do so, I grant, and I will show an almost convincing interest in what I find the dullest subject. But these are essays that I write above all else for my own entertainment. If something bores me - and the European Union does for the moment - I see no reason to switch on my notebook computer.

Therefore, I will write nothing yet again about the great issues of the day. I will instead respond to several of my readers who objected to my confession of scepticism in my last piece about ghosts. I

am asked how I can be a sceptic when our knowledge of the world is based on such sure foundations. How can I deny the obvious, and so join myself to the nihilists whose own course of doubt ends in the various kinds of political correctness, and whose denial of reality in earlier generations cleared the way for the gulag and the holocaust?

My answer is that the probability of a belief is not determined by its alleged consequences. As for nihilism, I am not devoid of belief. I have strong beliefs, indeed, on just about every subject. I am a sceptic in the sense that I do not believe rational certainty to be possible in any of these subjects. In arguing this, I do not pretend to originality. Nor do I claim that this will be an academically useful essay. I am writing while sat on a railway train, far away from my books. If I draw on the thoughts of Plato, Lucretius, Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, Descartes, Berkeley and Hume, it is without consulting them on any point, and often without having read them for many years. I will use and conflate and alter the ideas of others as I see fit to argue my case. This being said, I will begin.

First, I take the existence of an external world. I perceive a stream of sensory impressions. I see shifting patterns of colours, and hear sounds, and feel heat and cold and soft and hard; and I have sensations of taste and smell. But I cannot know for sure if these impressions are in any sense related to an external reality independent of my perceiving it. I have had dreams in which I do not for a moment suppose any immediate connection between the things perceived and their existence outside my mind. It may be argued that the impressions of my waking life are different in both intensity and internal coherence from those when I am asleep. I disagree. I have had dreams quite as vivid and my waking experiences. As for continuity, I seldom notice any carrying over of memories between one dream and another. I recall them all afterwards as fragments. In each of them, though, I generally have the same awareness as I have now of a permanent state of affairs.

It is not inconceivable that I am now dreaming - or, to use the modern terminology, to say this does not imply any contradiction. Or I could be some vastly superior being - God, perhaps - who has grown bored with perfection, and like, the Thetans of Scientology, has created an imaginary universe in which to divert himself. Or, to connect myself for a moment with the popular culture, I could be imprisoned in a bottle and plugged into a computer that feeds me a stream of perceptions of a world that my gaolers destroyed a very long time ago, or that never existed in the first place. I have no means of knowing anything for sure about the world.

Even assuming that the world does exist, I cannot know that I perceive it as you do. What I see as blue, you may see as red. What you smell as a rose, I may smell as mown hay. The words we attach to impressions are conventional in their meaning, and all that matters is that we use them consistently. Just as when I see the first number written, I say "one" to myself, and a Frenchman says "un", and a Slovak "jeden", so the words attached to things may not describe the same impressions on all our minds. This may also apply to shapes and even ideas. I cannot tell.

Even assuming further, that the world exists and that we all perceive it in much the same way, we cannot be sure why it behaves as it does, or how long it will continue so to behave. It may be that the apparent connections between events that we call cause and effect are derived from a set of universal laws. Or it may be that nothing exists but atoms moving at random, and that these have temporarily come together into an appearance of stability vastly more unlikely than throwing a million double sixes at dice. Again, this is not inconceivable, and so it is possible. This conjunction may last for a long time to come, or it may end a moment from now - or it may continue, but with unexpected changes in the sequence of events. All our science is grounded on observed regularities, and no amount of clever reasoning from the laws thereby derived can strengthen this grounding. Just because the sun rose yesterday gives no rational certainty that it will rise tomorrow, or that it will rise in the east. We believe that it will rise, but cannot do more than believe.

In the second place, there are the truths of reflection. If I take thought, I seem to know that two and two make four and neither five nor three, and that the square of the side of a triangle opposite a right angle is equal to the sum of the square of the other two sides. But I cannot know these things for sure.

I cannot know them because I cannot know to what degree I exist. I can say with Descartes "I think, therefore I am", which is an undisputable proposition. But it is undisputable only in the present moment that I conceive the idea. It gives me no surety that I shall exist a moment later, or that I existed a moment before. Again to connect myself with the popular culture, I might be a replicant, brought into being quite recently, but given apparently true recollection of events from before then. Or I might be the purchaser of an extended holiday from the ReCALL Corporation - though if so, I shall want a refund when I wake. Yet again, none of these possibilities is inconceivable; and what can be conceived can be.

This being so, I cannot be sure of the truth of any complex reasoning. If I try to examine the theorem of Pythagoras, for example, the larger part of my reasoning is remembered from a time that may not have existed, and what I conclude in the present may rest on a delusion. Even if I have existed as long as I believe I have, I may be the victim of some force that systematically diverts my thinking from its logical course, so that I always reach a false conclusion. I once dreamed that I had found the internal angles of a triangle not to be equal to 180 degrees. I once dreamed, indeed, that I could see the music of Beethoven flowing through a plastic tube. On each occasion, I was filled with a sense of absolute conviction, though I cannot now say exactly how these things appeared - I recall my descriptions on waking, not the things described - I cannot be sure that what I conceive awake is not also deluded.

It goes without saying that all the trivial analytic truths alleged against scepticism are also to be doubted. The same object may well be able to exist in two places at the same time. When two things are equal to something else, they may not be equal to each other. Not all bachelors may be unmarried men.

So where does this leave us? Does it justify us in believing that nothing exists or that nothing matters? Does it mean that it is not wrong for me to murder my neighbour and rape his wife before sending her to be worked to death in a labour camp? Or that the world view of radical Islam is no worse than that of western liberalism? Or that all knowledge - not excepting the laws of motion - is socially constructed to serve some ideology of repression? I do not think so.

Faced with the apparent reality and consistency of things, I feel no choice but to believe in them - or perhaps I just choose to believe in them. I believe that you exist, and that the whole universe exists as I experience it or as it is persuasively explained to me. I also believe in the validity of clearly conceived ideas. I cannot know these things in the sense that a philosophical rationalist claims to know them, but I see no reason not to believe in them.

From this, it follows that, if we feel any benevolence for our fellow creatures, there are fairly obvious ways of adding to the common stock of happiness. People should be left, so far as possible in the given circumstances, to mind their own affairs. Given that we are left to mind ourselves, there is a large body of experience on which we can draw to minimise our chances of personal unhappiness or the hatred of others from which this often proceeds. We have fair reason to know what is the good life and how to achieve it. So long as it tastes good, does it matter if our dinner really and truly exists? So long as I love her, does it matter if my wife may vanish every time I look away from her?

Only when it is defined as an absolute and undeniable certainty does knowledge become a problem. It is no problem at all, so long as we rely on the evidence of our senses and judge this according to our common sense. That gives us all the knowledge of which we are capable, and all that we need for the improvement of ourselves and of the world around us.

There may be nothing more suited to making the world into a nightmare than an ideology that claims a rational certainty to its conclusions. When disagreement is seen as proof of imperfection or of malevolence, the call for persecution is never far behind. Above the metaphorical entrance to every good society that has ever existed has been inscribed the words "Nothing too much".

I am a sceptic and a libertarian and a conservative; and these are connected views of the world. I do accept the need for occasional unpleasantness to others. I would send a man to prison for theft; and if I doubt the value of hanging a man for murder, I do believe in the right to shoot him if I catch him uninvited in my house at night. If I can be persuaded that it is for the defence of the community to which I belong, and that no unavoidably horrible consequences will follow, I accept the use of weapons of mass destruction. But I do all this in the belief that I may be wrong, and that I may one day regret all this, or be held up to universal infamy. I see tolerance as a virtue, and I welcome diversity of lifestyle. I think I know roughly what is best for people, but would never presume to impose it on them - unless to prevent them from interfering with the legitimate rights of others.

There - to the best of my ability, and as briefly as I can, I have made my case for scepticism. I only wish I could make a convert of Tony Blair. While nothing can undo the crimes he has already committed, I know as surely as I need to that the world would be a better place in future could it be spared more of his smug, murderous conviction.

Sean Gabb on Scepticism:
A Comment by Stuart Goldsmith <Stuart@medina.demon.co.uk>

Hi Sean

Surprised to see a man of your intellect caught up in such an obvious confusion. The world (reality) is OBJECTIVE; i.e. not subjective OR intrinsic. Put very simply, what you perceive is a result of BOTH something 'out there' AND your consciousness interacting. T'would take me a devil of a long time to explain this to you if you are not already familiar with the argument. If you are really interested, I can point you to a good book! Since Kant f***ed everything up, most modern people are infused with this error (that the world is a 'subjective illusion').

The fact that we have a word 'dream' means that we know the difference between that and reality. That the mind is capable of errors of perception (often extreme) does not contradict the objectivity of reality. The fact that one person MAY see 'blue' different to you (highly unlikely, by the way) also does not invalidate the statement "something out there, impinges on my unique consciousness and causes a perception I choose to call 'blue'"

Incidentally, it is this VERY error (world=subjective illusion) which is responsible for bad politics, ethics etc. - something you care deeply about. Put very simply again, if the world is a dream, you can slaughter your way through any number of people with absolute impunity! If you are a skeptic, you invalidate man's method of reaching knowledge, and hence you invalidate man's method of survival (his rational mind) and hence you destroy man - QED.

I Could go on - for pages!

Best Regards,

Stuart

**Sean Gabb on Scepticism:
A Comment by James Dunlop <james.dunlop@workpermit.com>**

Dear Dr. Gabb,

Thank you for your latest essay and indeed for your regular and interesting communications.

Please forgive a couple of observations which may seem a little pedantic but which may be of interest to you.

A) The internal angles of a triangle do not always add up to 180 degrees; they do so only when the triangle is on a flat surface. If the surface is convex then the sum will exceed 180 degrees, and if concave their sum will be less than 180 degrees.

B) Regarding the numbering system, it is self-referential. $2+2 = 4$ (assuming we are in base 10, or at least that we are in a base of not less than 5) not because this is a fundamental truth about the universe but because within that particular numbering system 4 is defined as being 2+2 (or 1+1+1+1 or 1+1+2 or 3+1). The question is not 'are these numbers true?' but rather 'is this system useful?'

Best regards

James

**Dogmatic Uncertainty: Sean Gabb on Scepticism
by Anthony G Flood <anarchristian@juno.com>**

'Murderous conviction' are the last words of Sean Gabb's odd rhetorical exercise, but we must begin with them to understand what precedes them.

He argues that if no one knows anything for certain, then that's true of agents of the State. Having no convictions at all, one can have no murderous convictions. For those who value their lives and property, utter lack of conviction is therefore a mental state it would be good for everyone to be in.

At first this reminded me of Jackie Mason's comic observation that if there weren't any food, there wouldn't be any garbage. Upon reflection I noticed more serious difficulties. For one, lack of knowledge and lack of conviction do not correlate. One may be full of conviction on matters of which one has the weakest grasp, and cautious to the point of immobility where one is expert. Nescience is therefore no sure impediment to conviction, murderous or otherwise.

There are other problems with Mr. Gabb's deduction. For one, he cannot, except arbitrarily, restrict nescience to agents of the State. If the State's victims are equally ignorant, then they cannot ever hope to learn that the State exploits them. He may, of course, retort that while they may not know with certainty that they are victims of the State, they can come to know it, and many other things, 'as surely as they need to.' The qualifier 'with certainty' now becomes a false knot, and the

slightest tug undoes the whole modern 'problem' of knowledge and its latent skepticism. And into this crevice pours all that we normally count as knowledge, namely, fallible, probable judgment.

Mr. Gabb implicitly believes that we leap beyond the evidence when we claim to know with certainty the things he claims to doubt. The implicit norm, of course, is that one ought not leap beyond the evidence, but rather proportion one's belief to it. That is, he values the exigent mind, but unfortunately conceives it according to the modern fixation with theoretical doubt. Of course, he never lets that doubt immobilize him, any more than Hume's philosophy ever caused him to miss his appointment with the gaming room.

Mr. Gabb's excruciatingly subjective, personal position, to the effect that he is cognitively holed up in his mind, intends a real world in which things are what they are, and wishing them otherwise will not make them so. This dynamic of self-transcendence is a homing device that orients us toward reality. It is as inescapably his as it is ours. It marks us as human. But he has ideas that lead him to misinterpret that inner compass's readings.

The word 'skepticism' has broader and narrower meanings. A self-proclaimed skeptic may only reject Received Opinion about a given matter (e.g., ESP, the Warren Commission report, Iraq's WMDs, etc.). To champion a radically negative position on epistemology is the furthest thing from such a person's mind. Indeed, it is only in accordance with common epistemological standards that he mounts his case against Received Opinion. He expects others to judge that case by them.

The philosophical skeptic, whom Mr. Gabb impersonates, may opine as promiscuously as many people do, but never regards his opinions as ascending to the glory of knowledge, which must be infallible and certain. Of course, the very effort to express this opinion requires a fatal exception to his pretense at general skepticism. For concerning what he believes about the exigencies of mind he is nothing less than certain. His attitude toward this immanent demandingness, as he misinterprets it, is a matter of unalterable conviction. Unfortunately for the pretense, his view of what the mind demands installs the very thing he believes it must disestablish.

Mr. Gabb spontaneously knows things, just as we all do. We are all in causal relationship to all other things, and knowledge is one effect of that metaphysical situation. We must presuppose this fact in any attempt to deny it, and that makes the effort to make the denial 'stick' an exercise in futility. We feel our relationship to a world that we make and that makes us. Only on the basis of this presupposition can we meaningfully examine particular methods of knowledge and particular knowledge claims.

Mr. Gabb's regard for infallibility, however, unnaturally deprives him of the use of a perfectly serviceable word, namely, 'knowledge.' And against such deprivation he naturally rebels, a reaction that should have alerted him to the error of his presupposition about knowledge. For our claims to know are mostly, but not exclusively, fallible and probable. Our claim to know the proposition in the immediately preceding sentence, for example, is infallibly certain. It is therefore a necessary exception to the general rule of fallibility, which utterly requires that exception to be true. About particular matters of fact we might be mistaken, but we are cannot be mistaken about that and certain other reflections on our cognitive relationship to the world. Ironically, Mr. Gabb shows no indication that he regards his skepticism as anything less than a dogma about which he cannot be mistaken. And his fixation deprives him of the enjoyment of the irony.

So the labor of his 'case for skepticism,' with its resultant non credo,¹ comes to naught. Why he feels it is important to announce his lack of conviction regarding these matters he never makes clear (apart from suggesting, almost in a postscript, that affirming them fits the profile of a statist monster).

Mr. Gabb negotiates his cognitive business pretty much as everyone else does. For no apparent purpose, however, practical or theoretical, he makes a show of epistemological gloom-and-doom. Yes, rational certainty about matters of fact is impossible, but acknowledging that fact does not affect the successful conduct of that business. Our fallibility is one thing we are certain about. Our fallibility's being no impediment to action is another. Between omniscience and nescience are degrees of fallible, probable, adjustable belief. To regard them as knowledge is to satisfy rather than flout the exigent mind.

NOTE

1 'I do not believe rational certainty to be possible in any of these subjects.' 'I cannot know for sure if these [sensory] impressions are in any sense related to an external reality independent of my perceiving it.' 'It is not inconceivable that I am now dreaming.' 'I have no means of knowing anything for sure about the world.' 'Even assuming that the world does exist, I cannot know that I perceive it as you do.' 'Even assuming further, that the world exists and that we all perceive it in much the same way, we cannot be sure why it behaves as it does, or how long it will continue so to behave.' 'I cannot know these things [i.e., simple arithmetic] for sure.' 'I cannot know them because I cannot know to what degree I exist.' It seems to me that 'cannot' implies certitude, the very attitude Mr. Gabb disowns.

How Much Longer Must We Endure Tony Blair?
by Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
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Gloating over the misfortunes of another is best avoided - except, of course, if that other happens to be Tony Blair. It seems for now that he is in deep and inescapable trouble over the war with Iraq. As I hoped, the coalition of interests that supported him in going to war has dissolved. The glow of patriotism that attended the war has also faded. If Mr Blair ever imagined that capturing Basra would do for him what retaking the Falkland Islands did for Margaret Thatcher, he must now be sadly disappointed.

His apparent problem is the inability to find the "weapons of mass destruction" that he used to justify our going to war. He swore blind before the fighting began that these existed, and none has been found. It is not enough to hold up a few shell cases that might have contained chemical weapons, or to point at a few vans that might have been used for producing biological weapons. We were not told that the Iraqis had once used such weapons on the field of battle, and that this was a beastly thing, or that they might want to use them again locally. We were told that their government had weapons capable of being deployed over long distances against civilian targets. And unless we are to reduce it to nonsense, that is what the phrase "weapons of mass destruction" must mean. None has been found. None of the captured officials and scientists has yet said other than that there were no weapons. Certainly, none was ever used. The Iraqis had good warning that their country was to be invaded, and the routes that the invasion would take. It is hard to imagine that they would not at least have positioned all the weapons they had, even if they had no time to use them. But nothing has been found.

Not surprisingly, Mr Blair is now accused of having lied to us. Had the coalition that supported him in the war remained in being, this might not be so important. Mr Bush is open to the same accusations, but has not so far suffered the same damage. The problem for Mr Blair is that many of those who supported him in the war did so for their own reasons, and had no general reason for liking him. Some wanted the overthrow of a bloody tyranny - arguing that we had the duty to do this because we had the power to do it. Some wanted the destruction of one of Israel's most implacable enemies. Some wanted to see a breach with the European Union by moving Britain more firmly into an American orbit. Some wanted to see if our new weapons worked as well as the

companies that made them said they did. Some wanted to teach a general lesson to Moslems not to challenge Western domination of the world. Some wanted all of these and perhaps other things beside. These now have what they wanted, and the means to their end has now served his purpose. Their reasons for loathing him before the crisis have re-emerged, and he is dispensable.

If I hated the man less than I do, I might object to the gross hypocrisy of many of my friends. But I do not object. I had coffee with one of them yesterday afternoon. A man of great intelligence, and professionally skilled in the detection of falsehood, he supported the war without believing for a moment in the weapons of mass destruction. But he lit up and took a drag on one of his horrid cigars and rehearsed with a cynical grin his new position on the war.

"I believed Tony Blair" he said. "What else was I to do? He stood up in the House of Commons and assured Parliament and the British people that Saddam Hussein was a clear and present danger to us all. He said he had solid evidence for this provided by the security services. British Prime Ministers do not lie - at least not openly and with so little equivocation. I had to believe him, and I thought people like you were blinded by simple hatred. I now realise that I was wrong. Mr Blair lied to us. He lied us into a war that might have gone very much worse than it did. He lied us into this, and now he is lying us into a European federal state. I am shocked - shocked at the innermost core of my being."

This is the line also taken by the Conservative Party and by the conservative media. And what better start for the renewed debate over European integration than to paint its most committed and most powerful supporter as a liar on an issue where no doubt can exist - and on an issue where most supporters of integration opposed him? It opens him to simultaneous attack from both sides. It also allows the Conservatives to demolish his case for the European Constitution while avoiding what to them would be the unwelcome resort of discussing actual withdrawal from the European Union. Of those now calling for a public inquiry into the intelligence reports I doubt if a tenth ever believed them to be true. Their indignation is an excuse, though it is undoubtedly a very good one.

So our politics have made yet another of their strange shifts in this age of disintegrating party loyalties. And I am for now content. Both before and during the war, I hoped Mr Blair would gain no advantage from his vain and murderous policy. I hoped that he would soon be driven from office, and that his evident desire to be remembered as a great Prime Minister would be utterly frustrated.

It is too early to say that what I hoped is really coming to pass. Perhaps he will survive this crisis. But surviving is not the same as flourishing, and I cannot see how his reputation will recover. From now until he eventually does leave office, he will be a perceptibly weakened leader. He will never again have his way so easily. I shall celebrate with a long and indecent and perhaps unreadable gloat if he resigns tomorrow. Better still, though, might be another year for him in office. That would give him time enough to know what was fear and bitterness and the paranoia of one who knows he is conspired against and can do nothing about it - and would give him time enough to appreciate exactly how he will be remembered in the histories of the future.

Yes - I am for now content.

Sean Gabb on Tony Blair
A Comment by Huw Shooter <huw.shooter@workpermit.com>

You gloat too soon, Sean. Patience!

I continue to find the possession of mass weapons by the former Iraqi regime perfectly plausible, it's a big country and it may well take months to find hidden stocks. The finding of the "mobile laboratories" buried in the desert does look like a genuine report, and the possession of these manufacturing facilities does bolster the likelihood of the possession of their product, probably also well buried in the desert, although I agree that it obviously doesn't prove it. Also, I suspect that one of the criticisms made by the opponents of the war may well be true - the US expressed such certainty about Saddam's weapons because they still have the sales receipts, and if that was true before then it's still true now, but still too embarrassing for the US to admit - in which case, the weapons are still out there somewhere (even if not necessarily still in Iraq, which is a worrying thought).

However, like many others in this country and the majority in the US, I don't really care about the weapons question. If the PM made it all up as an excuse for invasion, then it's a handy stick with which I shall join you in beating him. However, I remain glad that we fought, regardless of whether or not the chosen pretext gets Blair into trouble, although the latter possibility is obviously a welcome bonus. The underlying reality is still that Saddam was a despicable bastard and the world is a better place without such people in power, on which point I assume that we can agree, even though we clearly disagree on whether or not we were justified in using force to depose him.

Obviously I share your hope that the after-effects of this affair will do Blair no favours, but I suspect that you're over-estimating the damage he'll suffer. A lot of people share my view that the weapons question isn't fundamentally important, without necessarily sharing our detestation of Blair, and therefore they won't be greatly motivated to turn against him over the issue even if it does turn out to be bogus intelligence. Unfortunately.

Furthermore, we must be cautious in berating Blair too aggressively over the non-appearance of the alleged weapons. If we commit heavily on this line of attack, and later on some such weapons are discovered after all, then Blair will suddenly look vindicated and victimised, and those who have gambled on the story being a complete lie will be left looking very foolish. That would give Blair a big lift in popularity, and the potential upside for Blair in that case is actually larger than the potential downside for him if the banned weapons aren't found - and I'm sure we can agree again that such an outcome would be appalling.

Thus I think it's risky to start gloating on this issue at this stage. If the weapons are still conspicuous by their absence in a year's time, then I'll agree that we should gamble on committing to the argument that he lied, but probably not until he's had a year to come up with the evidence.

There's another tactical point to bear in mind. We should keep up pressure on the "Where are the weapons then, Tony?" line, to keep it in the public consciousness, but if we go for the jugular prematurely then the undecided elements of his own Party will give him the benefit of the doubt and rally behind him. If we hold open the possibility that he might turn out to have been right after all, then his opponents within his Party will have a freer hand, and within a year they'll have him under a lot of pressure if he still hasn't produced any evidence, and the currently undecided element among his supporters may therefore start to lose patience with him. That's the point at which we can demand his resignation and he'll find his internal support evaporating, but if we jump too soon then we'll blow the chance.

Best regards

Huw

Sean Gabb on Tony Blair
A Comment by Simon Marcus <simonmarcus2003@yahoo.co.uk>

Here is my take on the Blair WMD argument:

First I would caution that WMD's of some description might yet turn up and in turn put a few percentage points back on Tony Blair's ratings, but this would merely serve as closure on a diversionary sideshow poorly managed by Blair's advisors.

The 'grand strategy' or 'bigger picture' as I see it is a tangle so inextricable that to attempt to unravel it would simplify the issues to distortion. yet I will try, I am at work and have no sources at hand from which to draw so forgive the ad hoc and anecdotal nature of this contribution.

In domestic political terms what has this war done for Blair? It has eroded a significant lead in the opinion polls for both himself and his party, torn up much of Tony Blair's grass roots support in the parliamentary party and destroyed what support he had in the unions. It has turned most of the press against him, caused a deep rift between us and our European 'partners' France and Germany and , further-a-field, has severely damaged relations with the entire Muslim and Arab world and increased the likelihood of Britain and especially London becoming a target for terrorism.

WMD's. To me, the idea that the war was about WMD's was and is preposterous. Yes Saddam has butchered possibly millions of his own, innocent, people and this is more than enough argument for a 'just war' but must not be confused with his ability and will to pose a realistic threat to other nations.

I remember the first gulf war. I was living in Italy at the time at the ripe old age of 18. I clearly recall the hysteria, not only of the Italians but of the world press. Saddam's army was the 4th or 5th biggest in the world! Scud missiles! millions of troops willing to die! republican guard!

Affairs and matters military had been within my realm of interest since I had been a child. Several thoughts came to me. Most of his conventional army was obsolete to the tune of 30 years. Iraq's Chinese manufactured T54/55 tanks were almost completely useless against Challenger/Abrahams MBTs. His air force was similarly obsolete and therefore in an open desert his army was simply irrelevant against massed allied air power. Also, the fighting abilities of his troops no matter how brave against a western army (as opposed to Iran whose soldiers were equally brave and poorly trained) had been demonstrated in the 1973 war with Israel, when the tank division he sent to help the Syrian army was destroyed almost to the last tank (250-300) for negligible loss on the other side.

Saddam's nuclear reactor had been destroyed by Israel many years before the first gulf war and in 1990 Israeli intelligence was such, and their will to retaliate unilaterally was sufficient to almost guarantee that WMD's were not going to be unleashed on Israel and if not Israel, very unlikely anyone else. Certainly not against the allied army who could retaliate massively. As for scuds, vast though the desert is, under the omnipresent eye of modern military technology a scud launcher can be detected. Therefore to stop and launch one was not easy. As it was I thought more would be launched and more damage done. Luckily not. That was the best Saddam could do.

So second time around after 10 years of sanctions, withering surveillance from a number military intelligences, constant UN inspections, a world community united against him, for all his cat and mouse antics, what was Saddam's will and capability regarding WMD's? It was negligible. And if

not, even after the argument that Saddam is an unpredictable madman, then there were several regimes before Saddam's that should have been 'toppled'. We all understand the hypocrisy.

WMD's were chosen as a 'just war' argument, wrongly, by Bush and Blair, whether they find anything or not. My own feeling is that their existence or discovery will not make that much difference.

Thank you for reading if you are still here, I hope an argument will elucidate. What I am trying to do is find out why Blair put himself in his current domestic predicament and what will come of it.

Ultimately Britain is in the middle of a new battle ground. The one between the Euro and the Dollar. There is much economic insecurity in the US at present over the strength and ultimate growth of the Euro as the dominant world currency. I have read too many arguments now that hinge the future of the American economy on which currency wins the quarrel and one of the most important elements in the argument is, inevitably, oil. Not only because it is the main energy source of the American industrial-military establishment, but because it ensures the dominance of the Dollar in world financial markets

The battleground is spreading to eastern Europe. ex. America offering aid to the poorer eastern European nations, such as selling F16's to Poland in a beneficial package and, recently, announced they would be relocating their armed presence in Europe to the east; Rumania, Albania etc thus helping their economies

Also, I would argue, the American politico-industrial establishment simply lost patience with diplomatic attempts to secure the Caspian sea/eastern black sea region and the safe exploitation of some of the world's largest oil fields. The American "centre of gravity" policy was therefore deployed; if the most dangerous and dissenting country in the region is taken out, the others fall into place. In the long term this may backfire but for the mid term will ensure that most of the world's oil is traded in the US dollar.

When Saddam announced his intentions to trade his oil in the Euro, he signed the death warrant of his regime.

There are countless further issues that surround the argument right or wrong for better or worse but I have already gone on for too long.

Blair, as Sean Gabb argues is domestically in a bad way. However what I am driving at is that yes Blair may not survive the next election, but his ambitions lie elsewhere. During the Iraq conflict Blair forged closer relations with the eastern European states that supported the war and are due to join the EU next year. In doing so, I believe, he has put himself and perhaps Britain in a position to outmanoeuvre France and Germany in the EU legislature. remember the new influx of countries into the EU will, in time alter the whole voting balance of the council of ministers the European parliament etc. also Blair can do no wrong in the US at the moment. So it seems he is in an enviable international position. He is the ideal arbitrator between the US and 'old' Europe, he is popular with many of the next wave of countries joining the EU which will make him reasonably popular, if not necessary in any federal superstate.

And as a corollary of this he has brought Britain more time in deciding whether to join the single currency or not.

For the record I am no fan of Blair, Bush, Globalism, EU, War. I merely suggest that Blair knows what he is doing and is perhaps even more ambitious than we think. I thank you,

Simon

**Farewell to the Lord Chancellor:
A Brief Comment on the New Labour Revolution
By Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
issue 107, 16th June 2003)**

Brian Micklethwait has suggested that I should comment - no matter how briefly - on the announced abolition last week of the office of Lord Chancellor. Being the resident Jeremiah at the Libertarian Alliance, I suppose I have a duty to complain. So I will.

Last Thursday, Tony Blair reshuffled his cabinet. Those Ministers who had performed badly by his standards were dismissed. One of his main loyalists resigned under circumstances that have given rise to much private speculation. Mr Blair then moved some of his remaining Ministers around, and appointed a few more to fill up the gaps.

This is normal practice for a government as old and strained as this one now is. I have lived long enough to see it happen many times before. What makes it worthy of comment is the unexpected changes to the way in which the judiciary is managed. The Lord Chancellor was dismissed, and instead of being refilled, his office has been announced for abolition, its main functions being put out to commission or being eventually regathered into a Ministry of Justice. At the same time, the senior Judges are to lose their seats in the House of Lords and will be given their own Supreme Court over which to preside. The immediate reason is a political crisis for Mr Blair. I cannot know the details, but it is obvious that he is under severe pressure; and the changes may have been meant to draw attention away from the sorry fact that he is running out of loyalists, and that those he has are not very good.

The principle of the changes, though, is not bad in itself. In standard constitutional theory, the Lord Chancellorship is an anomaly. He is a Judge. He appoints all the other Judges. He is the Speaker of the House of Lords. He also sits in the Cabinet as a creature of the Prime Minister. The modern doctrine of the separation of powers - as most notably expressed in the American Constitution - was derived in the 18th century from observation by Montesquieu and de Lolme, among others, of the British Constitution. They plainly did not observe very well.

Of course, there is no reason for correcting an anomaly simply because it is. There is no reason to suppose that any of the potential conflicts of interest for a Lord Chancellor have produced actual evils. Even Lord Irvine, the last holder of the office, was never accused of political bias in his legal functions. He appointed judges with the traditional impartiality, and defended them against attack by his colleagues in the Cabinet. He was similarly impartial in his judgments.

This being said, the potential for conflicts of interest has been greatly increased in the past few years. The steady growth of judicial review since the 1950s, plus the Human Rights Act 1998 - plus the seizure of review powers over primary legislation in the Thoburn case of last year - have transformed the judiciary. Increasingly, the Judges of the civil law are no longer mainly doing justice between subject and subject, but are ruling on the legality of executive actions and even now on the constitutional validity of Acts of Parliament. Leaving the Lord Chancellorship untouched

might be dangerous. Evils that in the past were potential, and that as such gave no reason for change, might easily soon become actual. Now that the evolution of our laws is taking us towards a Supreme Court - and bearing in mind that this is an entirely welcome evolution on liberal grounds - the time may already have come for making the Lord Chancellor into something less of a constitutional hybrid. I say this, even if it seems that the present changes have not received proper consideration.

My objection is not to the principle of reform, nor even really to its attendant lack of consideration - this lack can be supplied given reasonable discussion. My objection is to the change of names. There was no good reason to abolish the office of Lord Chancellor. The most fundamental legal reforms in English history were carried through during the third quarter of the 19th century. First, there was the fusion of law and equity. Then there was the setting up of a proper system of law reporting and the movement of the civil courts from Westminster Hall to the New Courts in the Strand. Then there were the Judicature Acts of the 1870s. These abolished the jumble of competing jurisdictions inherited from the middle ages that had made justice into an expensive lottery, and replaced them with a single High Court of Justice divided in its business on rational lines and with a codified procedure. In its substance, what the Government announced last week is nothing compared with this.

Yet, for all its radicalism, the Victorian reformers did all they could to preserve the old associations. Even if the substance was entirely replaced, the names of Queen's Bench and Chancery were retained. The New Courts were built to look old. Within a generation, I doubt if anyone but a legal historian really noticed what had been done. The present set of reforms is quite different in its regard for old associations. A few years ago, writs became claim forms and plaintiffs became claimants. There are proposals to stop the Judges from wearing their horsehair wigs. Now, there is to be no Lord Chancellor. The office has existed in England for at least 800 years, and began as a sort of secretaryship to the King. It is older than Parliament. Thomas Beckett was Lord Chancellor to Henry II. Thomas More was Lord Chancellor for Henry VIII. The office was satirised in *Iolanthe*. It has always been around in English history, and its holders have been some of the great men of English history. Even before the proposed abolition, the cumulative effect of these reforms has been to advertise a break with the past. Let another generation go by, and only a legal historian will be able to understand the mass of obsolete words contained in law reports from before the present century. Threads of continuity will have been snapped. The past will seem more of a foreign country than is needed.

That is my objection. It may seem trifling to argue over words and appearances, but these are part of our national identity. These are part of what it means to be an Englishman. They help to tell us who we are and what we were. Had our history been as unfortunate as that of most other European countries in the 20th century - and usually before - it might not be bad to advertise a break with the past. Throughout the old Soviet Empire, for example, I can think of no objection to the renaming of towns and streets during the 1990s, to the pulling down of statues and to the restructuring of the functions and the names of political institutions. But, as I keep insisting, the most important protection of English liberty is the apparent continuity of our institutions. Take away our grounds for conservatism, and we are left with a set of new institutions that may have a splendid future, but which are now too evidently new to attract the unthinking loyalty that is their surest source of strength.

I could be wrong, but I believe there is a conspiracy among our political masters to destroy our national identity and with it our ancient freedoms. I say I could be wrong because I remember the absurd conspiracy theories put forward in the 1980s by the opponents of Margaret Thatcher. Socialists like Ruth Levita and Martin Jacques claimed there was a coherent project to bring about a "free market and a strong state". Except there was little actual freeing of markets, this was an

accurate description of what happened in the 1980s. It was, however, an unintended consequence. Thatcherism was never a coherent ideology, but was instead a muddle of quite separate ideologies. There were the free market libertarians, the traditionalist conservatives, the middle way social democrats, the social authoritarians. These all got part of what they wanted, though in a pretty random way, and the result was the toughened big government machine that New Labour eventually inherited.

Perhaps the same reductionist analysis can be applied to all that has been done since 1997. Perhaps there is no New Labour project. Certainly, there is no unity within the Government on the main issues of the day. We have seen them fall out over the war with Iraq and the Euro.

But while I could be wrong, I do believe there is more here than just a set of unintended outcomes. This is a government above all of philosophes. For all it has put up taxes and increased the burden of regulations, this is not a socialist government. Considered in themselves, many of its acts have been rather liberal - always granting that many other have not. It passed the Human rights Act. It accepted the judicial coup announced in the Thoburn judgment. It has been no more friendly in practice to the claims of the European Union than the Conservatives were in office. It has tried to reform the public services on market principles - and if it has failed in this, it is because of a deference to vested interests and a lack of economic understanding for which it may be fairly blamed but not denounced.

The general problem is that the New Labour turn of mind is frankly contemptuous of the past. Mr Blair's "forces of conservatism" speech in 1999 was an accurate expression of how these people regard the English past. They want a New Britain, and regard all that is left of old England as an embarrassment to be cleared away as soon as possible. Some New Labour people, I accept, have the fairest intentions. I have eaten with these people. They often have more sympathy for libertarian concerns than Conservatives have ever had. But many of their seniors are malevolent. They have no liking for liberties whether ancient or modern. They want a politically correct police state and a corporatised economy. Ordinary people are to have the appearance of freedom, but little of its substance, and the world is to be made safe for an elite of politicians, big businessmen and their pet intellectuals. What joins these different factions is their contempt of the past. And this is fatal to the benevolent strain within New Labour. By ripping up every old association on which they can lay hands, our masters are turning a nation into a frightened mob. They may be doing to us what the revolutionary governments did to France after 1789. And, while the men of 1789 had some excuse for not understanding the consequences of their remodelling, their modern successors have no excuse.

I note with surprised approval that the Conservatives have rejected the abolition of the Lord Chancellorship. They have decided to leave their existing system of shadow portfolios, complete with a shadow Lord Chancellor. They seem committed to undoing the abolition once they are back in office. I am glad. Generally speaking, I have been reasonably impressed by the Conservative performance over the past few months. The strategy of revival that I thought I could see in the spring and summer of last year has re-emerged, and this time in opposition to a much weaker and more discredited Government than was the case last year.

But this is another matter.

Race and Culture: A World View
Thomas Sowell
Basic Books, 1994, 331pp., \$16.50 (pbk)

Thomas Sowell is one of the most prolific authors in the free market movement. He has written extensively on matters of race, always imbuing his insights with rigorous economic analysis and empirical validation, accompanied by voluminous documentation. The current volume is no exception. It comprises part one of his “Culture” trilogy. The other two parts are Migrations and Cultures and Conquests and Cultures. The trilogy was originally conceived as a single volume but the amount of material became so vast that it demanded subdivision. In conducting his research, over a period of a decade, Mr. Sowell explains that he travelled around the world twice, visiting numerous countries, collecting literature and talking to officials, scholars and others.

The overall theme of Race and Culture is that the diverse performances of different ethnic groups are more influenced by culture than environment. Before elaborating on this, some terminology needs to be clarified. Mr. Sowell uses the term “race” to describe “ethnicity” rather than to describe groups differing in skin colour, hair texture and the like. He points out that the term “race” was once used to distinguish the Irish from the English or the Germans from the Slavs rather than to distinguish the more visibly different categories just alluded to. Mr. Sowell largely sticks to the older meaning, while also admitting a more conventional sense. He writes: “The more generic term, race, will be used here in a loose sense to refer to a social phenomenon with a biological component...” (p6.) Elsewhere he writes: “The term ‘race’ [shall designate] ethnic groups of various sorts – by race, religion or nationality.” (xiii.)

Mr. Sowell uses “culture” to mean “the specific skills, general work habits, saving propensities, and attitudes towards education and entrepreneurship...” (xii.)

Environmental determinism regards groups as being shaped by immediate circumstances, including the people and institutions around them. In contrast, Mr. Sowell concludes that groups have their own internal cultural patterns, possibly developed over centuries and antedating the environment around them. The proof of this is that specific ethnic groups are found to exhibit similar skills, chosen professions and the like even after having migrated to different parts of the world and to radically different social environments.

Cultural habits, however, are not fixed. Cultures can change as the result of migrations, conquests or merely the receptivity of ethnic groups or nations to absorbing foreign cultures. A related observation is a challenge to cultural relativism, the belief that cultures aren’t superior or inferior but merely different. Cultural features exist to serve a purpose. From this perspective it is clearly the case that specific cultural features are more suited to specific purposes than other cultural features. An example is the replacement of Roman numerals by Arabic numerals. The latter are not merely “different.” They are superior. Superior, that is, if one’s purpose is to do mathematical analysis. The superiority is also demonstrated in the fact that all cultures, including Roman culture, now use Arabic numerals. A very different example is the case of Australian aborigines, during early European settlement. The Europeans often died of hunger or thirst in a wilderness in which the aborigines had no trouble finding food and water. Aboriginal “culture”, in this respect, was objectively superior to European.

But to say that cultures differ objectively in their effectiveness is not to say that a particular people or a particular culture is superior in all things or for all time. World leadership in science, technology and organisation has passed from one civilisation to another over the centuries and millennia. Today, “Western” civilisation is superior in most things. But Western civilisation was itself formed culturally from earlier more advanced civilisations or more advanced cultural strata such as Asia and the Middle East as well as from Ancient Greece and Rome.

After discussing the effects on cultures of migrations and conquests, Mr. Sowell moves to more specialised topics. I shall touch on a few of these that are especially interesting. The first is race and economics. Laying his cards on the table he writes:

The study of economic results is a study of cause and effect. Philosophical observations, moral lamentations, or political rhetoric are not economic analysis. (p81)

What economics offers is a systematic analysis of the incentives existing under different market conditions. The economics of race is the application of economic principles to heterogeneous populations. A couple of the areas Mr. Sowell discusses are employment segregation and employment discrimination. The former, of course, can also be due to discrimination. Sometimes racially differential outcomes are the result of overt discrimination. Sometimes they are due to “perceptual” discrimination. The latter means differential outcomes that are the result of real differences in general behaviour of different groups.

There are higher costs of employing mixed groups of incompatible workers than in employing more homogeneous groups of workers, whether those costs originate in language differences, lifestyle differences, or intergroup animosities. (p85)

Thus it often paid employers to segregate workers. For example, in the days when American factories worked six-day weeks they had to accommodate the fact that Jews would not want to work on Saturdays, while Christians would not want to work on Sundays. The cost of having mixed workforces would be to have part of the workforce absent on each of two days a week rather than having the entire workforce absent on Sunday when the business closed down. This meant higher costs. It was cheaper to have separate workforces.

The pressures of economic competition in the product market would favor the survival of firms with either all-Jewish or all-Gentile workforces, whether or not the owners of these firms were Jews or Gentiles, whether or not these owners and employers had any animosity toward the other group, and irrespective of whether Jews or gentiles were better workers. (p85)

Over time, rising productivity enabled two-day closures of businesses at weekends. This meant it was no longer economically necessary to have segregated workforces.

Whether there are additional costs due to unsegregated hiring is an empirical question. In the American South during the Jim Crow era, white proximity to blacks in the workplace was not the major issue. What mattered more was preventing blacks from associating with whites on a plane of equality.

Where racial groups do not differ in their productivity then, in a competitive market, discriminatory employers must face higher production costs compared to those who don't discriminate. Thus over time, discriminatory outcomes tend to disappear. Where racial groups differ in their productivity, differences in pay tend not to exceed differences in productivity. These effects have been confirmed empirically in various times and places.

However, a different kind of discrimination can occur when there are differences in group productivity.

If the average Irish immigrant in nineteenth century America was more beset with alcohol problems affecting his work performance, or...was less productive than employers would be reluctant to hire the Irish for jobs where such deficiencies could prove costly. At the same time there were Irish who did not drink at all, who were productive, cooperative, and were otherwise desirable workers. The cost of sorting out such individuals from their compatriots was not always negligible... (p89)

However, it would be wrong to say that the below-average earnings of the group as a whole are due to such discrimination. Such misperceptions are unable to survive the pressures of the marketplace. These pressures are considerable even when markets have elements of collusion. Racist business cartels formed in the Deep South after the American Civil War to hold down the wages of blacks. To the extent that such cartels underestimated the productivity of blacks individual white employers hired blacks away from their competitors with the higher pay.

One of the most interesting parts of the book is Mr. Sowell's discussion of the thorny topic of race and intelligence. This analysis is conducted with great care and sophistication. Mr. Sowell's agenda is the following:

(1) the existence, magnitude, and persistence of mental performance differences among racial and ethnic groups;(2) the reasons behind such differences, as these can be inferred from available evidence;(3) the reliability and validity of the instruments used to measure differences in mental performance; and (4) the social implications of these issues. (p156)

Among the conclusions he draws are:

1. Intelligence tests are good predictors of academic and socio-economic performance.
2. Ethnic groups differ in their performance on such tests in a way that is not wholly determined by socio-economic environment (though this is a factor).
3. Ethnic groups differ in their performance in various aspects of intelligence tests, such as verbal versus non-verbal questions.
4. If cultural biases exist they take a different form to what is normally supposed. For example, the worst performing groups tend to do the more markedly worse on non-verbal rather than verbal questions.
5. Ethnic group performance in intelligence tests can increase over time, even where there has been no change in the genetic stock of the group (due to low inter-group marriage). This suggests an environmental influence.
6. Research suggests that females are less susceptible to environmental influences than males. The phenomenon of females outperforming males in low-IQ groups such as US blacks and early Jewish immigrants appears to be an environmental phenomenon.
7. Variation in performance within an ethnic population appears to be governed more by heredity than environment.
8. Ethnic groups raised in the cultural (rather than socio-economic) environment of a higher-performing group show no significant differences between their performance and that of the higher-performing group. (For example, black orphans raised by white families in the US or the children of black or white US servicemen raised in Germany after World War 2.)
9. What evidence there is argues against the difference in performance between ethnic groups being genetic.
10. (On the other hand, group differences transcend socio-economic environment.

This is a highly complex picture. These conclusions are not reached simply by trotting out statistics but also with the aid of careful sociological and economic analysis. For example, to assess the issue of heredity versus environment

It is a question as to what sorts of evidence would be observed if one theory were correct, compared to what would be observed if the opposite theory were correct. (p170)

Examples of this type of approach are:

#If the differences between two groups are environmental rather than hereditary then members of one group raised in the culture of the other should have an intellectual performance level more like their adopted group, rather than their biological group.

This has been observed. See (8) above.

If substantial changes in mental performance are observed without corresponding genetic changes this too would suggest environmental causes for the original differences.

This too has been observed. It has happened in the history of Jews, Poles and Italians in the US as well as for whole nations around the world.

On the other hand, differences in performance between various groups have been demonstrated to be independent of socio-economic status. Asian Americans from families with incomes of \$6000 or less have scored higher in the maths section of the SAT than black, Mexican American and American Indian students with incomes of \$50,000 or more.

But group differences can also be regionally based and cut across racial lines. US Blacks in the North average higher than those in the South. And, in World War 1, black soldiers from the North scored higher on mental tests than white soldiers from the South.

Mr. Sowell follows his discussion of race and intelligence with a discussion of slavery. Much contemporary discussion of slavery focuses on slavery in the West, though slavery has existed for millennia almost everywhere. In the United States slavery was referred to as the “peculiar” institution. But it was only peculiar because it was inconsistent with the principles on which the nation was founded. Historically, it is those principles that are peculiar, not slavery.

Slavery has existed in various gradations, from the circumstances of the stereotypical plantation slave, labouring under threat of the lash, at one end of the spectrum, to virtual employee status at the other. A sociological and economic analysis of slavery needs to take into account this variation and also explain it.

The process of enslavement has generally been one of enslaving outsiders of one sort or another whether by race, nationality, religion or some other characteristic. And those who were enslaved were vulnerable people in some sense. The consolidation of nation states around the world reduced the number of people who could be captured and enslaved. Africa remained prey to other nations long after enslavement was no longer viable in other parts of the world because it was the least urbanized continent containing lots of small, isolated and weak tribes. They were vulnerable to more powerful African tribes as well as the Arabs. Europeans became slave traders largely by purchase from powerful African tribes. The chief reason being that Europeans were prey to African diseases and so could not capture slaves directly.

Before the use of quinine became widespread, the average life expectancy of a European in the interior of sub-Saharan Africa was less than one year. (p195)

Slavery, once established, had ongoing costs – costs that varied with the social environment and with the type of work that was expected to be performed. Even having slaves surrounded by armed guards was not always economically feasible and this was seldom done in the American South, for example. Maintaining ignorance of the slaves’ local geographical region was one way of reducing

the costs of slavery. Enslaving people on their home grounds was more likely to lead to successful escapes than enslaving them in unfamiliar surroundings.

The comparatively unmodified slavery that prevailed in the Western hemisphere had other costs. The kind of work done by slaves was limited by the need to keep close control of a population that often greatly exceeded the free population. The need to prevent escape precluded using slaves extensively in otherwise productive fields that required education. This imposed a cost on the wider society, as potential skills that could benefit it remained untapped. Moreover, this was a cost that was apparent after emancipation, and since each new generation learns from the preceding one, the costs were borne by later descendants of the slaves.

At the end of his study of slavery, Mr. Sowell asks: what economic benefits did slavery yield? The answer is: not very much. The American South was the poorest region of the country both during and after slavery. Brazil, which imported several times as many slaves as America did, remained backward until the mass European immigration that followed slavery. The slave societies of North Africa and the Middle East, which absorbed millions more slaves than the Western Hemisphere lagged well behind the economic and technological level of the West until the arrival of oil. In many parts of the world slaves were luxuries or domestic amenities rather than capital investments. Mr. Sowell considers the claim that the profits from slavery provided the investments that made the Industrial Revolution possible in Britain.

[E]ven if all the profits from slavery had been invested in British industry, this would have come to less than 2 percent of Britain's domestic investments during that era. Moreover, neither in Britain nor the Western Hemisphere was there any evidence that slave owners were such dedicated capitalists as to invest all or most of their incomes. Contemporary observers frequently characterize slave owners as self-indulgent or ostentatious consumers, often in debt...

In the United States, it is also questionable whether all the profits from slavery exceeded the enormous costs of fighting the Civil War – a war that would not have had to be fought if there were no slavery, even if its purposes were conceived in other immediate terms by those on both sides.... Appalling as it may be to think of untold millions of human beings sacrificed for no larger purpose than the transient aggrandizement of others, that is what the historical record suggests. (p215)

Slavery has also produced an aftermath of counterproductive attitudes towards work both by the descendants of slaves and non-slave members of slave societies.

Mr. Sowell concludes with a discussion of race and history. He focuses on how cultural competition and geography have affected the development of various peoples throughout history. Progress is governed by the extent to which cultural isolation or interaction is present. And this is largely governed by geographical factors such as the existence of navigable waterways and harbours. Without the latter, cultural interaction is lessened and progress of ethnic groups is restricted. Nearly all the world's great cities have developed on rivers or harbours. At the beginning of the nineteenth century four fifths of the world's population lived in coast lands.

Mr. Sowell unearths so many fascinating facts and makes so many interesting observations that it is not possible to do them all justice in a brief review such as this. Suffice to say, I learned much of value from this work and I highly recommend it.

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