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Eleven perspectives on how the humanities and social sciences enrich our lives

PROSPERING WISELY

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Suggestions for articles by current and former British Academy grant- and post-holders, as well as by Fellows of the British Academy, are very welcome. Suggestions may be sent to the Editor, James Rivington, at pubs@britac.ac.uk

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In this issue

Prospering Wisely

Prospering Wisely: How the humanities and social sciences enrich our lives is a new British Academy publication which explores the notion of 'prosperity', in its widest sense, far beyond its purely financial meaning. It illustrates the many ways in which the humanities and social sciences actively contribute to this broad definition of prosperity – for example, in helping improve people's well-being, in sustaining a healthy open democracy, and by constantly fuelling and expanding the frontiers of knowledge, innovation and human understanding, and the creation of new ideas. The text is available via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely

As part of the preparation of this publication, interviews were held with eleven Fellows of the British Academy, drawn from a spread of the subjects supported by the Academy. The Fellows revealed the personal stories behind their academic careers. They talked about the practice of research and scholarship. They presented arguments for the importance of their own subjects, and the humanities and social sciences more generally. And they discussed the need for academics to be challenging, and to reach out to wider audiences.

Video extracts from these personal accounts may be viewed via the *Prospering Wisely* website. But fuller edited versions of these interviews are published in this issue of the *British Academy Review*. These self-portraits of leading humanities and social sciences academics at work provide an intriguing picture of modern scholarship, and help us understand why these disciplines bring so much to our quality of life and well-being.

These interviews were originally conducted in June and July 2013. We would like to thank Des Burkinshaw (Magnificent TV) and David Walker for their help in conducting them.

Nicholas Stern

Lord Nicholas Stern of Brentford FBA is IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government at the London School of Economics, and President of the British Academy. A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/stern

Q

You did your first degree in maths, and then did a doctorate in economics. Why did you go down that path?

Nick Stern

I always loved the intellectual challenge of mathematics, and I seemed to be quite good at it. I loved the puzzling and the conceptual frameworks that mathematics dealt with; I liked the precision.

At the same time, I was deeply involved in the big issues of the day. I was both a teenager and a student in the '60s. There were some clear issues that we had to engage with – particularly Vietnam and apartheid. I was very politically involved: we were trying to change the world on two very big subjects. Of course, in the UK we were on the front line of neither of them, but this was a generation that was deeply engaged on those issues, and rightly so.

The perceived duty to try to change the world was very much part of my growing up. My mother was at the London School of Economics (LSE) during World War II. My father was a refugee from Hitler, and even with his heavy German accent he became active in local UK politics. At home, it was a very political household. But whether or not it had been a political household, the issues of the day were intense, and we were all engaged. Wanting to change the world was very much part of the time when I grew up.

Q

When you completed your doctorate, you could not possibly have known where you would end up.

Nick Stern

I finished my doctorate just about the same time as I became a Fellow of St Catherine's College in Oxford, and a tutor in Economics there. I knew I was going to be an academic then. I think I knew I was going to be involved in public policy, and I think I knew I wanted to work on development – and that characterised my whole career.

How the rest of it played out would have been very hard to predict. That is one of the joys of life. It is central to the work of Friedrich Hayek. He and Karl Popper (both Professors at the LSE and Fellows of the British Academy)[1] tried to explain that the inability to predict is central, not just to the human condition, but also to the way in which economies work and function. Recognising the role of discovery, recognising that we cannot know everything – and it would be a very boring and unproductive world if we did – is key to much of our understanding of the human condition, whether that be through literature, history or economics.

Q

What did you hope to do with economics?

Nick Stern

I should say that my interest in economics was not just about changing the world, although it was in a major part about that. It was also the fascination of trying to understand how we interact with each other in economic life. Why do some people get paid more than others? As Keynes said, if you want to buy a particular product at a particular time, on the whole you can do it; but what lies behind that whole process? What are the power relations within economic systems, and what do they imply? All those were fascinating questions for me. It was the intellectual fascination of the subject, along with the motivation of (to put it in rather banal terms) trying to make the world a better place.

I can give some examples of that from my own experience. In 1981-82, I was working on tax reform in India, particularly on the idea of value added taxation. About 20 years or so later, reforms in India were enacted, which led to something that is more or less a value added tax – not exactly with that title. Manmohan Singh, the current Prime Minister of India, who first brought me to India – he was a middle ranking civil servant in the Finance Ministry – very kindly gives some credit to my work in bringing that about. Sometimes these things happen with very long time lags.

Later on in the '80s, Tony Atkinson, Mervyn King[2] and I led a programme of work on taxation, incentives and the distribution of income, which in many ways influenced our subsequent careers. We were doing work on tax reform, which included the merits and demerits of switches from direct to indirect taxation. Before long, that was something that became an issue in relation to the political programme of the Conservative Government of the 1980s.

[1] Friedrich Hayek was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1944; Karl Popper was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1958.

[2] Sir Tony Atkinson was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1984; Lord Mervyn King was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1992.

I led the writing of the report for the Commission for Africa 2004-05, which was the main intellectual basis for the discussion at the Gleneagles G8 Summit of summer 2005, around the campaign to 'Make Poverty History'. That seemed to deliver – not by itself of course – part of the ideas that helped produce a substantial increase in aid for Africa.

Those are a few examples from India, UK and Africa where I have been fortunate to be involved. Much of what I have done has been closely involved in influencing public policy. Provided it is based on serious work and careful analysis – it is not just what you say, it is the analysis that supports it – you can have an influence, and with that comes a responsibility to do your work well.

I got to do the Stern Review in 2005-06, and that was something that seemed to have an impact on discussions of public policy.

Q

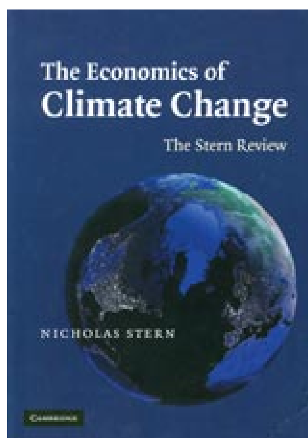
Could you tell us more about the Stern Review?

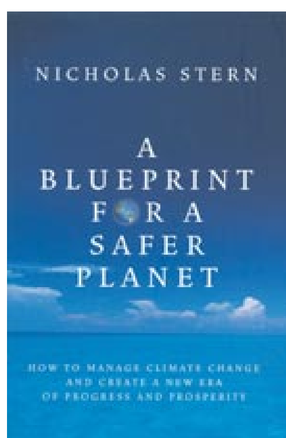
Nick Stern

For many of us the two defining problems of our century are managing climate change and overcoming world poverty. If we fail on one, we will fail on the other. If we fail to manage climate change, there is a probability – we do not know exactly: 30/40/50 per cent – that 100 years or so from now we could see global average surface temperatures increasing to 4-5°C above those of the middle of the 19th century (the usual benchmark), temperatures we have not seen on the planet for perhaps 30 million years. *Homo sapiens* has been here for perhaps 250,000 years. We risk – not just a remote risk, a substantial risk – redefining the relationships between human beings and the planet. We risk hundreds of millions, possibly billions, having to move. And if history tells us anything, that will involve severe and extended conflict. The reasons for that conflict could not just be switched off. You can't just make peace with the environment having distorted it in the kinds of ways that are now possible.

We are the first generation that, through our own neglect, has the ability to destroy that relationship between human beings and the planet. None of this can be predicted with certainty. But 200 years of science – and the

The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change was launched on 30 October 2006 in the presence of Chancellor Gordon Brown and Prime Minister Tony Blair (photo by Peter Macdiarmid/ Getty Images). Nicholas Stern has continued to publish on the subject since then.





evidence is ever mounting – tell us that those risks are potentially immense. Of course, that could destroy the quite extraordinary advances we have made in the last 50 years or so in overcoming world poverty. The story of the changing international structure of the economy is the story, in large measure, of overcoming poverty in big parts of the world. That could be grossly undermined, and essentially turned backwards, by an incredibly destructive environment, which could well arise from unmanaged climate change.

If, on the other hand, we try to manage climate change by putting obstacles in the way of increases in standard of living of billions of poor people in the world, then we would not be able to put together the coalition we need to manage climate change. We have to be able to show through analysis, argument, and above all example, that there is a different way of doing things; that the transition to a low-carbon economy is full of Schumpeterian, Hayekian creativity, innovation, discovery, and investment. We need an energy-industrial revolution, and past industrial revolutions have seen exactly that: a few decades of creativity, innovation, investment, and growth.[3]

If we can do that then the coalition to manage climate change can be built. Increasingly, it is being built, but it is not easy, for two particularly strong reasons. One is that people really have not understood the extraordinary magnitude of the risks that we face. This is not a matter of getting a hat, sunglasses and taking your jacket off; this is a transformation of the relationship between human beings and the planet, and the environment in which they live. People haven't really understood the magnitude of those risks sufficiently well yet to foster the kinds of decisions that we need. And at the same time, I don't think there is sufficiently deep understanding of the attractiveness of the alternative path.

That intertwining between managing climate change and overcoming world poverty is a big part of my own research. As we think in planetary terms, I would also like to underline a piece of research that is very dear to me. I have been following one village in the Moradabad district of Uttar Pradesh in India for the last 40 years. I first went there in my late twenties; I am now in my late sixties; I have been following that one village for 40 years. We have a 100 per cent survey of that village, one for every decade since independence, because there was a survey in the '50s and '60s, one each, before we got there, and I have been directly involved in running surveys in the '70s, '80s, and '90s, and most recently 2008 and 2010. As I get involved in the planetary issues, I try to anchor my understanding of development in the experience of that one village, now about 1,300 people – the village of Palanpur in Moradabad district of Uttar Pradesh.

Q

It is interesting that the Stern Review was chaired by an economist, not a scientist.

Nick Stern

It was about the economics of climate change, and I was very close to some of the world's leading climate scientists. I sat with them, I learned from them, I asked them questions, I challenged them, and I read the stuff. I was a consumer of the science; I tried to understand from the science the risks that we run. I am still a consumer of the science. I try to understand from them the risks that we run, and then see this as a problem of risk management, and see it as the problem of the economics of risk management. I do not think there is anything strange in thinking about the economics of climate change – it is exactly that, it is the economics of climate change.

This is economic history and understanding industrial revolutions and what people have done to their environments in the past. It is international relationships, it is ethics, it is politics, it is game theory, industrial economics – the whole gamut of economics, and of politics, philosophy and history. You have to bring everything to bear on this subject, because it is a subject that is all embracing.

Q

In issuing the Stern Review, did you feel you were sticking your head above the parapet?

Nick Stern

As Chief Economist of the World Bank I used to get shot at. On one day I had two letters from Commissioners of the European Union, to the press and the World Bank, complaining about me, because I had drawn attention to the fact that the average European cow got a subsidy of $2 a day and a couple of billion people in the world had to live on less than $2 a day. That was deemed by those European Commissioners to be unhelpful.

When I built the transition indicators as Chief Economist of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, I had Presidents of Republics of the former Soviet Union complain directly to the President of the Bank that I had underscored them, that I had not appreciated the wonderful advances that their countries had been making, and that perhaps I had suggested that they were corrupt. That comes with the territory.

I suspect in terms of the volume of things that have been shot, climate change is bigger than some of them. But it was not the first time.

Q

How would you describe the challenges that face us today?

Nick Stern

Looking back, it is hard to imagine a period where there was less confidence in, for example, what kind of economic systems we ought to be embracing. There has been reduced confidence in sense of community and sense

[3] Nicholas Stern & James Rydge, 'The New Energy-industrial Revolution and International Agreement on Climate Change', *Economics of Energy & Environmental Policy*, 1 (2012), 1-19; Mattia Romani, James Rydge & Nicholas Stern, *Recklessly slow or a rapid transition to a low-carbon economy? Time to decide* (Grantham Research Institute Policy Paper, December 2012); Nicholas Stern, *Ethics, Equity and the Economics of Climate Change, Paper 1: Science and Philosophy* (Grantham Research Institute Working Paper 84a, November 2013); Nicholas Stern, *Ethics, Equity and the Economics of Climate Change, Paper 2: Economics and Politics* (Grantham Research Institute Working Paper 84b, November 2013). Lord Stern is the Chair of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment (www.lse.ac.uk/Grantham Institute).

of identity – all these applying, not only to the UK, but to many parts of the world.

There has been a struggling with confidence in institutions: political institutions, financial institutions, institutions more generally. There has been a struggling to understand the significance of the enormous changes in economic power that we have seen in the world, and what they will imply for political power, for social interactions, and so on. On all these crucial fronts, you are seeing a crisis of confidence, a crisis of understanding. It is right there that the humanities and social sciences make their contributions.

I do not use the language 'solutions', but the 'response' to those issues has to be led by the humanities and social sciences. These are not technical issues; there is no laser treatment or new drug. It has to be individuals, communities and nations working out how they want to run their affairs in this climate of loss of trust, in a very different geopolitical economic structure.

This is a period of difficulty and challenge, but also fascination. This is the moment when the social sciences and the humanities, which always had a strong role to play, have a particularly strong role to play.

The power of ideas is immense, and that is what influences people.

Q

So, the humanities and social sciences can provide intellectual ammunition for politicians?

Nick Stern

The power of ideas is immense, and that is what influences people. But it is a two-way street. If you look back to the '80s and '90s, a lot of economists – I speak about my own subject – started to feed politicians what they wanted to hear, and that was a problem for our subject. At the same time, politicians were articulating what they thought economics said. There is a two-way relationship, but the responsibility for developing new ideas, for understanding the way in which things are changing, for understanding who we are – the notion of identity, the notion of community – lies primarily with those of us who work on society, as part of society itself.

Q

The British Academy is launching a booklet, a website with a series of videos (and this issue of the *British Academy Review*) on the theme of *Prospering Wisely: How the humanities and social sciences enrich our lives*.[4] Can you tell us what this is about?

Nick Stern

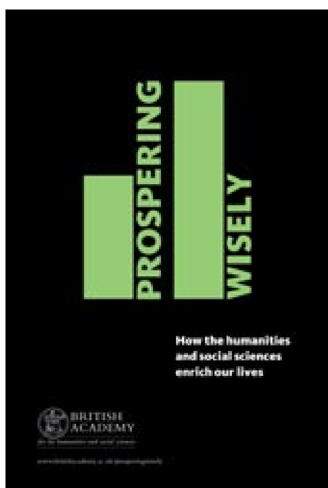
The idea of *Prospering Wisely* is to try to understand what some of the objects, not all, of public policy should be. Also to understand how those objects might be pursued. Immediately as you start phrasing the question that way, the whole humanities and social sciences come in.

Before we get too specific, it would be helpful to think of some of the contributions that Fellows of the British Academy have made.

I have already mentioned Friedrich Hayek, an extraordinarily influential economist and philosopher, who focused on discovery, the role of markets in discovery, the centrality of discovery to the human condition and the human purpose and, indeed, how economies worked.

Lionel Robbins,[5] who was President of the British Academy – in fact, he was 50 years ago the last economist to be President of the British Academy and the last person from the LSE to be President of the British Academy – was deeply involved in the whole planning processes through the Second World War, which were delivering a Britain that functioned fairly well, as well as being a war economy. Levels of satisfaction, nutrition levels, were higher during that period than in some subsequent periods. He was an economist putting his tools to work in ways that may have eventually helped – he was only part of a bigger thing, of course – both with an overall sense of purpose and, for example, with nutrition; very different from the ideas of Hayek.

If you go forward to Isaiah Berlin,[6] one of the great philosophers of our time, his influence in our thinking was around the idea of it being important to bring a number of different perspectives to bear on a problem: that there was not simply one ethical answer, we had to bring a number of strands to bear and do our best to form a judgment on the back of those different ways of looking at things. That idea of plurality in ideas, plurality in ethics, has been fundamental to our understanding of what life is about and what we should be doing.



If you go forward to historian Keith Thomas,[7] again a predecessor as President of the British Academy, his wonderful book *The Ends of Life* looks back into history and asks, 'What does it seem people were trying to do? What does it seem that moved people? What were their ends of life?'

I have given examples from economics, moral and political philosophy, history. I could go on to one of the current Vice-Presidents of the Academy, Jonathan Bate, the great Shakespearean scholar.[8] Understanding the condition of people is one of the many things that Shakespeare is about: what people want, what they do, and

[4] www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely
[5] Lionel Robbins was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1942.
[6] Isaiah Berlin was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1957.
[7] Sir Keith Thomas was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1979.
[8] For the interview with Jonathan Bate, see pp. 46-51 of this issue.

trying to understand and celebrate some of the mysteries. If you look right across the humanities and social sciences, they help us understand what 'prospering' means, and begin to help us understand how we can advance that notion of what 'prospering' means.

Prosperity is a very broad concept. It is way beyond material income, consumption or wealth. It is how we live, how we manage uncertainty and anxiety, how we interact with each other, what our sense of community and identity is.

I have already said enough to make it clear that prosperity is a very broad concept. It is obviously way beyond material income or material consumption – those are flows, of course – or material wealth as a stock. It is much more than that. It is how we live, how we manage and live with uncertainty and anxiety, how we interact with each other, what our sense of community and identity is. We must recognise both that insecurity and worry can make us less prosperous, and that uncertainty is a part of, and sometimes the spice of, life.

'Prospering *wisely*': well, you would not want to prosper unwisely, would you? The word 'wisely' forces us to think of the long term. It forces us to think what is sustainable in relation to the environment – something that has much concerned me on climate change – but also what is sustainable in terms of relationships with other people, relationships with other countries; what is sustainable in terms of the way markets are behaving. The word 'wisely' is also about risk. Much of what makes us feel worried, what makes us in that sense less prosperous, is worry about what might happen to us. In other words, we have to get explicit about risk, and so much of the measurement that we have in economics, and elsewhere, when we try to assess how well off societies are, does not focus on risk and what kinds of risks we are taking. In fact, we know that much of what makes for the lack of prosperity is worry and anxiety, and the perception of risk.

'Wisely' carries the notion of the long term, it carries sustainability, it carries interaction with others, and it carries risk. And the two words together – *Prospering Wisely* – chart a way of thinking, a research agenda, a way of organising things, at least a way of organising thought.

Q
Couldn't one argue that social scientists can and should make us *more* anxious by pointing out areas of life that *should be* a source of anxiety?

Nick Stern
The social sciences do have a role in challenging, in being awkward, in asking difficult questions, sometimes making us more uncertain. Indeed, making us more uncertain is often enormously important.

Q
Starting in spring 2014, the British Academy is going to be holding a series of *British Academy Debates*. What are the sorts of issues that will be addressed?

Nick Stern
Let me give three examples of debates that we are going to organise in the British Academy over the coming two years – three examples that would obviously command public attention as being very important issues for public policy, public discussion: migration/immigration, ageing, and the relationship between ideas of well-being and public policy.

Migration/immigration:[9] if you were to ask people about their top three issues facing the UK today – and you would get similar answers outside the UK as well – it is remarkable that immigration would be in many people's top three.

We can bring history, anthropology and literature to bear in understanding how our own cultures have arisen. London is a very important example of the way in which a mixing of cultures and people has shaped the identity of a city – that is one part of the humanities.

There is a big story in politics and ethics. Politically we know that immigration is high on people's agenda. Why? What is it politically that drives that? How does that come to be? It is not quite as obvious as some people might want to suggest. There are constant ethical decisions around policies on immigration, and a lot of economics: is this increasing competition for scarce resources? Is it young people coming to this country and contributing a lot, not getting sick very much, not drawing pensions, paying taxes, or at least VAT? Is that the economics, or is there some other part of the economics?

The series of 'British Academy Debates' on Ageing is being held in February-April 2014.

We are not driving to answers of these questions, but we are trying to put on the table serious analysis from across the spectrum of the humanities and social sciences. Discussions on this very important subject should have a much firmer foundation in scholarship and organised ideas.

If you put *ageing* in all the sentences I have just articulated, instead of 'immigration', it would again be very clear to you that the humanities and social sciences across the board have a tremendous amount to contribute in helping us structure a discussion, so that when decisions come round, they are decisions with much more maturity

[9] A series of *British Academy Debates* on this theme is planned for October and November 2014.

than you find in the usual cut-and-thrust and sloganising in which these subjects are discussed.[10]

Well-being and public policy are enormously interesting questions[11] – not just about what well-being is, which we discussed a little bit when we were talking about 'prospering wisely'. There are also questions about what the relationship between well-being and public policy is.

Let me give you an example of where people have thought answers are obvious, which is surely not obvious, and that is the notion of 'nudge'. Nudge is the idea that the way you put questions to people shapes their answers – no surprise there – but that you then put questions in a way that you think gets better answers, which is much more controversial. If you want people to save for the future you give them a pension scheme where they have to opt out rather than opt in – that is an example of nudge. It makes a very big difference to the decisions that people take. You can tell people that eating doughnuts is bad for their health, or you can make it more difficult to eat doughnuts. The first is information; the second is nudge. There are some quite difficult questions around what you should do. You are intervening in favour of the higher self against the lower self, or the longer-term self against the shorter-term self. Many of us would instinctively think, 'Well, that is probably the right thing to do'. It is for the social scientists, the philosophers, to ask the question, 'Is that obvious? Who are you to intervene in this way?'

When you get into what are very serious public policy decisions, you quickly run into these kinds of problems. And it is our duty, from the perspective of the humanities and social sciences, not only to help raise the questions, but also to help in structuring a discussion of responses.

Q

Given what you said earlier about people's lack of confidence nowadays, the time for such debates could not be better.

Nick Stern

The duty could not be stronger, to initiate a discussion on these issues. There is a collapse of confidence in political parties, just measured by membership of political parties. There has been very bad economic performance across the last six years or so, predicated on what we now see as rash policies over the preceding 20 years or so. What do you do to try to find better ways of organising yourself? We are struggling with those ideas. One of our distinguished Fellows, Sir John Vickers,[12] has tried to set out some ideas on how to organise financial and banking institutions in ways that could generate more well-founded confidence. That is a rather technical side of the way in which the Fellows of the British Academy contribute to the discussion.

We need much more discussion of what it means to be part of a community, and what our responsibilities in a community are. We had a very long period in the UK and the US particularly, during the '80s and '90s, where it seemed that looking after yourself was your first and perhaps overriding responsibility. Well, perhaps it is time to reflect a bit more on that, and ask whether we want our community, political and economic systems to run only on that fuel, or whether they should be organised in a way that gives a much broader perspective of who we are and how we want to live with each other.

Q

Does it go without saying that this kind of intellectual activity deserves public funding?

Nick Stern

You have got to be careful about the jump you just made. I probably would make that jump, but we have got to recognise that it is a jump: a jump from saying an activity is very important – indeed it is a fundamental responsibility to pursue it – and to say that the public should pay you for doing it. Most of these activities occur in universities, and there are many universities that function without much in the way of public money, particularly in North America, rather than in this country.

It is a step from saying something is of vital importance and there is a duty to pursue it if you can, to saying that other people have a duty to pay you for doing it. I think that what we do is of fundamental importance in understanding the big issues of the day, and understanding what a good society means, and understanding the dangers of a bad society, and challenging those who think they know and would insist that you go in a particular direction. That is of enormous value to the whole community, and there is therefore an argument for the community contributing to that activity. You have to make that argument.

It is interesting that many philanthropists see, not simply a duty to help poor people, but a duty to try to help foster this kind of argument, because they think that either it makes a better society or the challenge to so-called intellectual authority is very important. I think that is a very healthy part of philanthropy. You can run universities partly on fees, you can run universities partly on philanthropy, and you can run universities partly on public funds, and there are powerful arguments for all three. That is the kind of system that I would favour. And in the UK the philanthropy side of it is a bit too small, and probably the public support side of it is a bit too small.

Q

How should we measure the success of academic activity?

Nick Stern

I do not think we should be too mechanical in measuring success. This kind of intellectual activity is not a simple input-output model. I have managed institutions all my life, some of them quite big institutions, when I was Chief Economist for the World Bank, and Chief Economist for the EBRD, and Second Permanent Secretary at the UK Treasury. I take management very seriously, because bad

[10] The following *British Academy Debates* will be held on the theme of 'Ageing': 26 February 2014, 'Benefit or Burden? Coming to terms with Ageing Britain'; 25 March 2014, 'Too Old and Ugly to be Useful? Challenging Negative Representations of Older People'; 29 April 2014, 'The Best Years of our Lives? Body, Brain and Well-Being'.

[11] A series of *British Academy Debates* on this theme is being planned for early 2015.

[12] Sir John Vickers was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1998.

management messes up all sorts of things. In our area of activity you can overdo the attempt to measure exactly what we have done, for example, in some of our research assessment exercises we have got too mechanical. This is not anti-assessment, it is anti-excessively mechanical assessment. We should be asking what kinds of contributions have been made with a healthy view of length of time.

At the time Isaiah Berlin was writing, I am not sure that people would have understood quite how long his intellectual shadow and his intellectual contribution would be. Hayek went up and down, and then up, in terms of celebration of and interest in his ideas. Assessment is important; challenging ourselves as to what we do and what we have done, challenging ourselves with the duty to spend public money wisely to the extent that we have it. That is all very important. But we need to take a broad view, and, indeed, a deep view, of what contribution is.

Q

What did you feel about becoming President of the British Academy in July 2013?

Nick Stern

I felt it was an enormous honour. The predecessors that I have described – such as Keith Thomas, Isaiah Berlin, and Lionel Robbins – have all been great people: those few examples show what an honour and responsibility it is to take on this job. So a first reaction was a feeling of an extraordinary lineage that I had the privilege of joining. And I am fortunate to build on the very strong foundations laid through the leadership of Adam Roberts[13] and before that Onora O'Neill. So the Academy is in good spirits and a good state.

The second feeling is cheerful enthusiasm for what this is all about. There is nothing more important, and there is nothing more interesting, and no better way to spend your time, than pursuing these ideas, and encouraging and trying to help others to pursue those ideas. After the feeling of heavy responsibility, you feel the cheerfulness of wanting to get involved, and, indeed, having to get involved, in subjects that you have always had some interest in, and always had some involvement in, but you get a chance to make that deeper.

I am not an economist only anymore – well, I hope I have not ever been just an economist – but I have to go far further outside my professional area than I would have done, and that will be a great joy, and I am looking forward to that very much. I am already interacting with people from different disciplines in those seminars that we were just discussing on migration, ageing, and well-being. That, for me, is going to be a big part of the pleasure.

Lastly, I feel that interaction with Government on these issues is of fundamental importance. It is so easy for people to think that science, technology, engineering and mathematics are where the wealth comes from. I celebrate those subjects and will walk arm in arm with our neighbours in the Royal Society, and the engineers and medics, and so on. However, at the same time we should recognise the enormous productivity of our own subjects in the humanities and social sciences. We are half of the teaching faculty, and at least half of the students, of the UK. At least half of the students coming to the UK, with enormous benefit to the British economy, are in our subjects. It is not just their education now, which is the service we provide this year or next year, it is also the deep relationship that we forge with people from around the world, which will be of enormous value to us politically, emotionally, and economically in all sorts of ways in the future.

It is important to remind government, and remind those who make decisions or allocate resources across society and the economy, just what a powerful resource we are; just how much our activities matter. I have already underlined the intellectual challenge, the understanding of policy, all those that we bring – the difficulty, the awkward squad – all that matters fundamentally, but in addition to that we have a fundamental role to play in the economy and the future economy of the country. That's a case that gets lost; it gets lost in shallow thinking, and old-fashioned thinking, where it is only if you can weigh it or give a formula for it that it has substance. There's not much difference between making a television and making a television programme, and we have to think of economic activity much more in those terms. We have got 70-75 per cent of the economy in the service sector in the UK. Personal and business services were the most important drivers of productivity growth in the UK in the 10 years up to 2007 – that is one thing we showed in the LSE Growth Commission, which I was part of and which published its report in January 2013.[14]

We should, in a very cheerful and positive way, continue to point out how much we matter to the

[13] For the interview with Adam Roberts, see pp. 62-66 of this issue.

[14] *Investing for Prosperity: Skills, Infrastructure and Innovation. Report of the LSE Growth Commission* (2013) www.lse.ac.uk/growthcommission

economy of this country and its future; this is critical to understanding resource allocation. But I should emphasise that, important though they are, the points related to effects on output constitute the second argument; the first argument is the inherent importance of these subjects in understanding who we are and how we interact and organise ourselves.

Q
What is your experience of how politicians and policy-makers respond to the work of humanities and social sciences scholars?

Nick Stern
We are the people who try to develop the ideas and the insights, and do the research that underpins the more detailed immediate public policy process.

Many of the Fellows of the British Academy do that, and are very effective. I have already mentioned the example of Sir John Vickers, who wrote this important and influential report on banking and finance. That is getting involved in the nitty-gritty of the detail of policy. But he is also a person who has done fundamental work on oligopoly theory, regulation, and so on, which underpins a lot of the work that policy-makers do on regulation.

The good politicians want to get engaged in discussion of these issues, and I am directly involved in such discussions. On the straight line from the British Academy – where we are sitting now – to the House of Lords, you will find HM Treasury. That is where I spent three and a half cheerful years, some of it working on the reform of tax policy and bringing Revenue and Customs together, some of it on writing the report for the Commission of Africa, and some of it on doing the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change. As someone who had worked an intellectual lifetime on public policy, growth and development, being asked to do this illustrates that some politicians want to listen and work with the people who are having the ideas.

There are so many examples of other people who not only think hard about the fundamentals, but get involved directly in policy. John Maynard Keynes is perhaps the most outstanding example of all of somebody who was directly involved in transforming the intellectual side of his subject, in creating policy and institutions – particularly the Bretton Woods Institutions – and in helping to create a whole system of national income statistics, working with James Meade and Richard Stone.[15]

You can see that there is a wonderful tradition in the British Academy of people involved all the way from the fundamentals to direct involvement in policy, some of them involved in all steps of the way, some of them involved in some of the steps of the way.

The humanities and social sciences are all about trying to make the difficult and the complex simple enough in terms of principles and ideas that we can find a way forward.

Q
If you had a magic wand and could do anything, what would you do?

Nick Stern
The humanities and social sciences are all about *not* being able to wave a wand. They are about how you deal with understanding the issues of our time – identity, community, interactions, public policy – when it's difficult. It is trying to make the difficult and the complex simple enough in terms of principles and ideas that we can find a way forward.

If you insist on the magic wand metaphor, I think I would like people to understand the purpose and intellectual challenge, and the excitement of the humanities and social sciences still better than perhaps they do currently. I hope that by putting them to work in public discussion, people will see not only their contribution, but also their fascination.

[15] John Maynard Keynes was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1929: see Donald Winch, 'Keynes and the British Academy', *British Academy Review*, 22 (Summer 2013), 70-4. James Meade was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1951; Richard Stone was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1956.

Diarmaid MacCulloch

The Reverend Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch Kt FBA is Professor of the History of the Church, University of Oxford. A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/macculloch

Q

What was the initial spark that made you want to study history?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

I can't remember a time when I didn't study history. My father was an amateur historian, and we talked history as other people talk football. It was there in the blood. I told stories to myself. I told stories of history. I made up histories when I was a boy. So what else could I do? And so I went to university to read history. I stayed on and researched history. The joy of finding things that other people did not know about has stayed with me. There is nothing more exciting, if you are historically minded, than looking into an original document and seeing things in it that someone else has not seen.

Q

What is it that historians contribute to our sense of the past?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

Historians aren't people who just list events. Any fool can do that and create a timeline. Historians are people who combine chronology – the order of the past – with interpretation. We are always interpreting. Every age interprets, and says, 'This is what this timeline means; this is what its shape is.' That is hugely important, and it changes from century to century, from decade to decade, from generation to generation.

All the time you have to be wary of the complacent timeline. Take the story of the British Empire, for instance. Is it a proud story, or is it a shameful story? Well, of course, it is going to be in the middle; it is going to be a bit of both. But to tell it as a proud story has great implications for national identity and national policy. To tell it as a shameful story is also going to have profound implications. But neither is quite right. As historians, we have to do the job of nuancing and complicating, but also giving credit where credit is due and putting shame where shame is due.

Q

Does the study of history then become just about the interpretations reached by the historians of different generations?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

You might despair about history and say it is a hall of mirrors: you have a historian telling a story in one generation and it becomes part of the story in the next. But that is just a counsel of despair. You have to think of the alternative. If you leave history in the hands of the stupid or the malicious, what sorts of stories are they going to tell?

You just have to tell the story well, which may mean making it complicated, but you have also got a duty to tell it clearly in a way that is exciting and even entertaining. There is a goddess the Greeks gave to history called Clio. She started life as a dancer, a goddess of song. You can imagine the goddess of history dancing around and entertaining and doing the dance of the seven veils. That is what historians should do. We are not put there to be boring. We are put there to be honest. That may mean telling a slightly more complicated story than people want to hear, but that is just life.

Q

So much of our sense of history is deeply embedded in our culture. Shakespeare has told us who is a good king, who is a bad king. How does the historian deal with that?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

That is a tremendously interesting question. How do we get away from the myths that we are all stuck in? My method is to try to heap the facts up and see what shapes come out of them. In that way, you may tell a story in an entirely different way.

The obvious example, which has excited people recently, is Richard III. When all the nonsense has been talked about Richard III, ultimately we find someone who was a pretty bad king, and we have to say that. He was a king who murdered children. Even at the time, murdering children was not a good thing. We just have to accept that fact. There is a sort of amateur history that delights in being perverse, and doing 'what if…?' 'What if we say that everything bad about Richard III was all made up by the Tudors?' That's not good history; that's a sort of hobby. The art of history is to balance one side and the other.

Q

Are there different types of historian?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

You need the moles burrowing away in the archives because their work feeds the greater picture. Those who can soar above the landscape like eagles and see the broader picture, need that landscape to have been laid out for them and explored by the moles. You can transfer from being a mole to being an eagle. It really does matter to have the detailed work. You can't make the vast generalisations that I made in 1,000 pages on the history of Christianity[1] without the tiny, detailed articles in learned journals, amazingly obscure. Each will illuminate a particular point.

Another way of looking at it would be a railway network. Yes, of course you need the intercity lines, but below that you need the sleepy junctions, you need the branch lines, you need the capillaries and the body to feed the arteries and the veins, otherwise the whole thing does not function. It is unglamorous to work on the power structures of Elizabethan Suffolk.[2] But it is the only way of getting the historical picture right, and so that is why it needs to be done.

Q

How important is a sense of place in your work?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

I have always been interested in history about place. I think it is so important to walk across a landscape and see how long it takes to walk from one place to another. I have found, going abroad on great television trips, that to spend an hour in a place illuminates it. We are living in an age when a lot of people are not where they came from. It is an intensely mobile age, so we need a sense of place even more. We need to understand the places we have got to, as well as the places we have left, compare them and gain a sort of balance and sanity from that.

That is why local history is immensely popular now. I remember some years ago, a friend of mine advertised a meeting on the local history of a new housing estate in a suburb of Bristol. They expected about a dozen people to turn up. Fifty people turned up; the room was crammed, because they wanted to find and establish an identity. Place is about identity. That can often go wrong. It can be a poisonous thing, because place becomes about excluding people who are not there. But if we can understand a place, we might get a balanced sense of how we should relate to it, and how we might love it without hating other people as well.

Q

Does history help us avoid the mistakes of the past?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

History's main purpose is to stop us telling mistaken stories on which we then act. History is full of examples of very bad history leading to very bad actions. The obvious one, which is no less true for being obvious, is the Third Reich, which was built on an entirely false view of history. In an evil, totalitarian dictatorship like that, all history is poisoned.

But the same is true for any democracy. Particularly in democracy, telling the story right is really very important, because so many people are involved in making decisions, even if it is just a vote at an election. They need to have the right sort of story in their minds. It is not going to be a complicated story, because most people do not want a complicated story. But it must not be the wrong sort of simplified story; it must not be a malicious story. For instance, it must not marginalise a particular racial or social group. Generally, what historians do is to complicate things. But the art of being a historian is also to tell complicated things in understandable, clear, simple ways.

Q

Yet we still make mistakes. So is history a futile study?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

No. History is not a futile study, even though all of us always make mistakes. You can say it is an act of faith. It is the sort of act that says, 'Yes, all societies are imperfect and all individuals are imperfect, but we can try to do better.' Telling the story of the past correctly, or as near to correct as we can ever get, is part of that act of faith.

We can stop making terrible mistakes in the present if we have at least seen what the mistakes of the past are, and avoid them. It is often said that history is played twice – that famous remark of Marx that, first, history is tragedy, then it is played out as farce. In other words, what Marx saw is that history is never the same twice, even if it looks a bit the same. What historians can do is show you something about the past and point out the similarities – not the identical nature of present events, but the similarities – and stop the patterns of behaviour that made that wrong turn happen.

Q

If historians are producing new stories, disturbing our sense of what the past is, do we need to recognise the rather edgy nature of scholarship?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

The essence of what we historians do is to disagree with other historians. We are always revising the previous story. It is a very destructive profession. We are a rather subversive bunch, and very often we have to dismantle cherished myths. And that's rather difficult, because historians are paid by the government and by the public, and very often they don't want their stories disrupted.

History's main purpose is to stop us telling mistaken stories on which we then act. History is full of examples of very bad history leading to very bad actions.

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[1] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (2009).

[2] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors* (1986).

Diarmaid MacCulloch's 2012 BBC television series 'How God made the English' challenged our assumptions about what it means to be English. Here he discusses with Professor Miri Rubin how the English persecuted Jews in the Middle Ages.

Recently, I did a television series on what it is to be English.[3] One of the things we chose was the notion that Englishness is tolerance – the English are a tolerant race. We devoted a programme to showing that the English have been one of the most *intolerant* peoples in history. That is a very important lesson for us to learn. As a nation, we must not be complacent about our past. We must see how difficult it has been to become a tolerant nation. It's only historians who can show us that. It seems to me that it's actually a service to the nation to be a bit annoying. That is what the profession is about.

Q

Why do the humanities and social sciences deserve public funding?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

The answer is they are the means of keeping our society sane. The sciences can tell us wonderful things about how to heal illness, how to cure particular sorts of malaise. But it is the humanities, it is the social sciences that talk about the malaise in society, and explain the mysterious ways in which human beings behave to each other – which are not susceptible of being put into formulae or mathematical assemblages. They are that mysterious thing, human nature. That's what we deal with. If you don't have a healthy humanities and social sciences sector, your country will go mad. There are no two ways about it.

Q

Can you give an example of where that has happened?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

Think of a country that went mad: Germany in the 1930s. It created a whole set of policies around the premise that there was a set of beings who were sub-human: Jews, Slavs. It created a society in which whatever you did to such people did not matter because they were not human. That was based on an entirely false reading of history. Quite apart from whatever moral issues you might have with it, it was not true, as well as being cruel, stupid, mean-minded and very wasteful of human talent. To marginalise people is very often to marginalise talent and skill. No society can afford to do that. The most successful societies in the long term are the most inclusive, the most plural. That is what the humanities constantly need to say to power.

Q

But if the message falls on deaf ears, you have the same results.

Diarmaid MacCulloch

There are limits to what any sane view of life can do. If those who are in power are insane, what can you do? I think that is an insoluble question. But we humanities people do our best. What else can we do? We stop the even madder getting into power and doing even madder things on the basis of stories which we, as people in the humanities and social sciences, can say are not true. Whatever the truth *is*, that is a rather more complicated thing to say. But we can say some things are *not* true, and that is a hugely important thing to say.

Q

When we interviewed Lord Stern, he said there was currently 'a crisis of confidence, a crisis of understanding'. How can the humanities and social sciences help?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

We live in interesting times. Many sorts of authority are being questioned. It seems to me entirely healthy that that should happen. It is an opportunity, when authority is being questioned, to show what a good sort of authority might be. A good sort of authority is usually a well-informed authority. It is also an honest and open form of authority. The humanities and social sciences have a good record on encouraging openness. That might be our contribution to the social progress that this society must make.

I am very optimistic about our society. I love its irreverence. I love its shapelessness. I grew up in constricted 1950s England, and the transformation has been exhilarating. Yet it is, of course, also dangerous. It needs conversation. It needs constant attention to what sorts of structures we can create in this open society.

Q

Can you provide an example of when your work has been influential outside the academic sphere?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

One of my proudest achievements was to complicate the debate in the House of Lords on equal marriage. That related to a lot of work I had done on the history of the Church. What I was hearing from the traditionalists in the debate in the Lords was that there was a thing called 'traditional marriage', which was under threat. One of my television producers, a voting member of the House of Lords, used the script that we had created on Christian history to show how complicated the history of marriage

[3] *How God made the English* (BBC, 2012).

actually is.[4] You can't make an easy distinction between a thing called 'traditional marriage' and a dangerous change that is happening now. Marriage has been a continually changing thing.

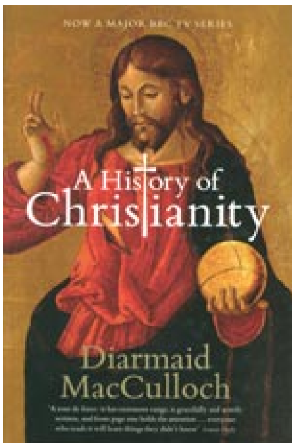
So, directly, a story becomes a part of present-day policy. It shapes the way society is going to be. That seems to me hugely important, and I'm really proud of my part – that little nudge – in the debate on that matter.

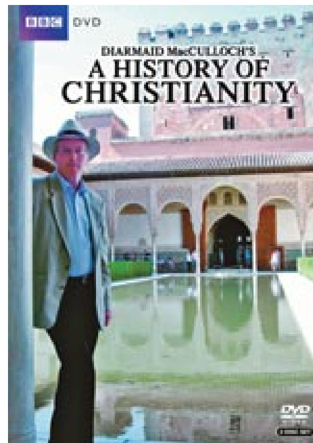
Q

Do you see yourself making more contributions to informing policy?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

I do see writing history as a moral task. I always have. Obviously, if you are writing about some detailed local history topic, that is not so obvious. But when you come to write about as big a topic as the history of the Church, inevitably you make statements about morality. I see traditional Christianity as having made some very poor statements about morality. It condoned slavery for 1,700 years of its existence. It is trying to forget that, but it should not. It is likely that it made equally stupid, dangerous and immoral statements about sexuality, and I am very conscious of that. I make no bones about saying it is a moral task to get the story right in order to influence policy attitudes in the future.





Diarmaid MacCulloch's 2009 'A History of Christianity' was both a BBC television series and a book. The research behind the book subsequently fed into the House of Lords debate on equal marriage in June 2013.

Q

As someone who has studied the history of the Christian Church, how do you see its current role and influence?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

It is interesting watching what is happening in Europe, which is now the least religiously practising part of the world. Most parts of the world are getting more religious, rather than less. Europe is not.

It is interesting to be a historian and see what is happening to the remaining Church. The Church is becoming less strident because it no longer has political power. It is listening slightly more – I am being optimistic here, but I hear it listening more – and it is co-operating more with areas of society that previously it dominated and now cannot. It has a much more respectful attitude to the arts and to literature. It is learning things.

Christianity is a very young religion. It has only been around for 2,000 years. That is absolutely nothing in terms of human experience. I begin to hear the western Church understand that now, and see that is it possible to learn wisdom from the world around it. That is a very heartening thing to watch.

Q

Would your work have been considered heretical a few hundred years ago?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

I am very aware that I have been in a very dangerous area of history – the history of religion – which, three or four centuries ago, might have got me into very serious trouble, if not death. Well, I am not there, and I now have the space to talk quite freely, even within the Church, about its history, and stop it making stupid statements about what one can dogmatically believe and what one cannot. It is a very exciting thing to be that sort of historian, and it is a great privilege to have been accidentally born at the right time.

Q

I love your phrase – you are 'a candid friend'.

Diarmaid MacCulloch

Yes. I have always tried to describe myself in recent years as a candid friend of the Church. It means that you understand it from within, you have experienced it, yet you are not going to let it get away with things. There is no reason why lazy, smug, complacent thinking should dominate the way it presents its message. In the end, it is better and a more friendly thing to be candid, than to be complicit in stupidity.

Q

As a 21st century historian, you have embraced the non-traditional ways of discussing history. What are the pros and cons of that?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

Historians must embrace whatever media of communication there are. Radio, television and now the net are all part of it. You have to realise their limitations. I always think of the standard of a one hour Oxford University lecture. That is two hours on the radio, and three hours on the television, because each is a simplifying medium. There are things you can't do on television that you can do on radio. Notoriously, the pictures are better on radio. But even that means simplification.

[4] See the contribution of Viscount Colville of Culross in the House of Lords debate on the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill, held on 4 June 2013 (*Hansard*, columns 1078-1080). The television series is *Sex and the West* (BBC, 2014).

The ideal way of absorbing history is still the book – sitting there quietly with a text. It may be on a screen, but it is still the book. That gives you the chance to sit back and consider. The next best thing is radio or a podcast – that sort of level. And the next best thing after that is television. None of them are bad, but they are all different and some of them have more limitations than others.

Q

Is there an art in communicating with the public?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

Journalists will get in touch and say, 'What do you think about this? Can you tell me the story of this in two sentences, please?' That is an art that we all need to try to develop as academics. The trouble about being an academic is that we tend to try to complicate things, because that is what we have to do for our students. When we go to the public, it is the opposite job. We have to simplify, without losing track of the reality of what we are talking about. It is a difficult art, but it is the challenge we have been offered by the position we are in.

Q

Historians are not the only people writing stories about history. Historical fiction is amazingly successful. Is that a challenge?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

I am an enthusiast for good historical novels. I grew up, as a boy, with the then already old-fashioned novels of G.A. Henty, and, of a later generation, Rosemary Sutcliff. I know from that just how exciting it is to combine fiction with history.

In the present day we have one of the best historical novelists ever, Hilary Mantel, who just happens to have illuminated a subject that fascinates me – Thomas Cromwell. I think she has got him exactly right. It is wonderful, seeing a man who has been vilified over the years as a thug, suddenly appreciated as a thoughtful, detached human being. When I read *Wolf Hall*, the first of her novels, I wrote to her – we did not know each other – and I said, 'Look, you know this is a great novel. It has just won the Booker. But what I want to tell you is that this is the Tudor England I recognise, and I gasped at some of the detail you knew.'

That, of course, is the best sort of historical novel history. There are bad ones, but there are bad historians too. There are bad examples of the genre in any form of literature. But at their best, what historical novels can do is what Hilary Mantel has done, which is to provide explanations of things that historians dare not try to create. I will not give away the ending of her second novel, but it seems to me an utterly convincing way of explaining the very confused events of the fall of Queen Anne Boleyn. That is so exciting. I cannot do it, but novelists can. All right, we are not the same animals, but we are allies, and long may that alliance continue.

Q

Hopefully she was buying your books to find those small details.

Diarmaid MacCulloch

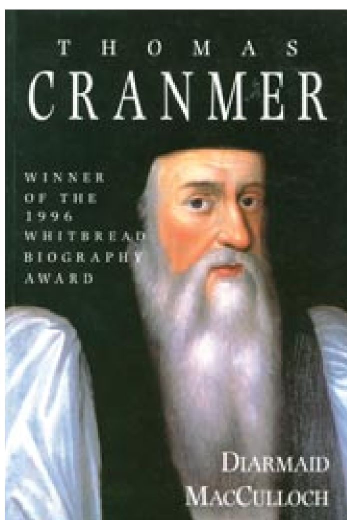
She did read my books, I'm glad to say. Other Tudor detective novelists have done as well. If they read it right, hurrah! But we are doing different jobs. We are entertaining and informing, but we are doing the job of entertaining and informing in different ways.

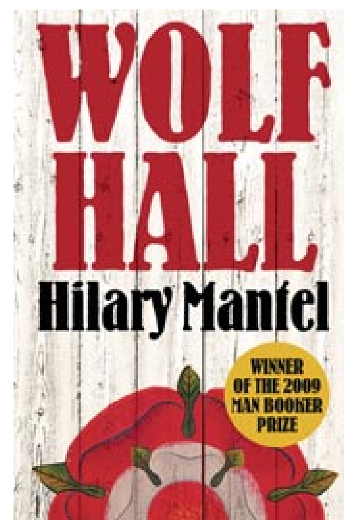
Q

What are you working on next?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

I have got steadily more ambitious as the years have gone by. I started at PhD level writing about Elizabethan Suffolk – very worthy, but a tiny little bit of history. It has got slightly bigger as the years have gone by. It became Tudor England. Then it became Reformation Europe. Then it became the world, when I wrote a book on the history of Christianity.[5] After that, where do you go? Douglas Adams has done the universe.





The interplay between historical scholarship and historical fiction. Having already written a biography of Thomas Cranmer, Diarmaid MacCulloch is now working on a biography of his contemporary and friend Thomas Cromwell – the subject of Hilary Mantel's prize-winning novels, which drew on historical research

[5] Diarmaid MacCulloch's books include: *Suffolk and the Tudors* (1986); *The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603* (1990); *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700* (2003); *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (2009).

So what I have done is to retreat. I have gone back to Tudor England, and my next book will be a biography of Thomas Cromwell. Twenty years ago, I wrote a biography of his great friend and colleague, Thomas Cranmer.[6] The fascination of what I am doing now is to see how my view of Tudor England has changed in the process. I think it will be a larger view, because I now know what was happening in Krakow and Bucharest at the same time. That makes the story of Tudor England very different. It was something I was beginning to realise as I wrote on Cranmer, but now I see it for Cromwell. I hope that will make it a very different sort of biography.

Q

What did election to the Fellowship of the British Academy mean to you?

Diarmaid MacCulloch

I was delighted to be elected to the Fellowship of the British Academy. It is recognition of what you have done. That is an affirmation. When you are feeling a bit down, you can say, 'Well, at least they elected me to the British Academy.'

It's also more than that. You can do things when you are in the Academy. We have an extraordinary assemblage of talent. What we are now doing is trying to open up that talent, and give something back to the public, to provide events that are cutting-edge about what we are doing, about research, and to debate great issues. We had a debate on equal marriage a year ago, just at the time the Government was looking for submissions on equal marriage.[7] So we can contribute to what is on the public's mind at any one stage. That seems to me to be an essential duty of those who have the great privilege of being in the Academy.

[6] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (1996).

[7] The British Academy held a panel discussion on 'Gay marriage: prospects and realities' on 29 May 2012.

Conor Gearty

Professor Conor Gearty FBA is Professor of Human Rights Law at the London School of Economics.
A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/gearty

Q
What was the initial spark that made you want to work and study in human rights?

Conor Gearty
The initial spark behind the move into academe was actually not wanting to be a practising lawyer, so it was a negative spark. I also liked teaching.

I grew into the human rights bit because I'd taken a hostile position towards having a Human Rights Act in Britain, for various entrenched left-wing reasons. I felt I had to master this subject on which I was becoming somebody with a sort of heretical view. So I grew into the subject that way.

Q
What was that like as a personal transition?

Conor Gearty
I think academic life is a mix of feelings and reasons. I am from Ireland, and I came to England to study for a masters degree. In the first year I was here, there were all those hunger strikes in Northern Ireland; there were those miscarriage of justice cases a bit later on; there was the Brighton bomb. And here I was, as an Irish person in England. I felt quite a lot of this was a result of an institutionally-flawed legal system. I was a lawyer and I began to work in this field, so my passions drove my ideas. I specialised in civil liberties: my first book with a friend was called *Freedom Under Thatcher*.[1] And when it came to human rights, again passions fuelled the reason, because a lot of these people in jail in Britain were there because judges had ensured that they would be, notwithstanding, to me, the obviousness of the fact that they were not guilty beyond reasonable doubt, if guilty at all. So I became very critical of the judiciary. And that meant that I had a position which looked very angry, and very aggressive, and that's not really my personality. It was a kind of mismatch between my personality and my ideas. I did not really want to meet any judges, because the terror I had was that I would like them. And therefore I stayed outside the world of which I was so critical.

But, times change, and certainly the system here changed, without doubt. The judges seemed to me, credibly, to refresh themselves. The various people who had been the victim of miscarriages of justice were released, and gradually – maybe you could say I grew up, maybe some people might say I sold out – I saw that life was a bit more complicated than I had earlier believed. I became an advocate for a human rights law that preserves Parliament's power, in the end, to reject human rights, but which apart from that prioritises the idea of human rights. I was sort of ambiguously recanting. I wrote a journal article with the title 'The Human Rights Act: An academic sceptic changes his mind but not his heart'.[2] I have quite enjoyed the tension between my emotional commitments, reason and changed circumstance. One of the hardest things for academics to do, I think, is to acknowledge changed circumstances.

Q
What affinity do you feel when you see a Muslim lawyer talking in the same way about detainees as you might have done previously?

Conor Gearty
Recently I went to a public meeting being hosted by an organisation that certainly the Prime Minister has explicitly said he wants to ban, but which he can't ban because you need to prove a connection with violent extremism, and nobody can. I was very struck at that meeting, very well attended by Muslims, by the parallels with the Irish in Britain in the early 1980s – except that their situation to my mind is rather worse, in that they are more isolated from the culture. The Irish always had quite a lot of influence abroad, a lot of Irish people in Britain. They had quite a lot of shared religious colleagues within government, a lot of Roman Catholics. And, of course, they looked like British people: I remember that in the '80s if I kept my mouth shut on the Tube nobody would know I was Irish. I thought, at that meeting, of those similarities, and what the Irish should do now – which is show solidarity to what is a new suspect community. In the 1980s a famous and well-known academic, Paddy Hillyard, called the Irish 'a suspect community', and in some ways Muslim people in Britain have replaced the Irish as the suspect community.

[1] K.D. Ewing & C.A. Gearty, *Freedom Under Thatcher: Civil Liberties in Modern Britain* (1990).

[2] *European Human Rights Law Review*, 6 (2010), 582-588.

An academic can bring passion and energy, but can also bring a strong sense of independence, of not being bought. We can call it as we see it.

Q
Can the humanities and social sciences provide perspectives and potential solutions?

Conor Gearty
An academic can bring passion and energy, but he or she can also bring a strong sense of independence, of not being bought. They are, after all, usually funded by the taxpayer, in order to teach and research. What an amazing social good that is. We academics can call it as we see it. Not claim some incredible truth, but call it as we see it. That is a fantastic resource for policy-makers and politicians who are interested in reason. If you are not interested in reason, of course, you have no interest in academe, because the reasons will undermine your prejudices. But if you are rationally engaged in any kind of policy pursuit, academics become a resource.

I have that in my own career. In the mid-'90s I became very involved in advising the Labour Party on terrorism laws. I knew about the terrorism laws because I had written a book on terrorism,[3] and Labour needed some guys because they were in Opposition and they did not have much civil service support. They were able to avail themselves of my advice, so I was able to go into the House of Commons, I was able to hear the Shadow Home Secretary debate on the basis of discussions I had had with him, and see first-hand what it is like to try and implement arguments that I had put in theory. It is that kind of interrelationship between the academic, who is thinking about what ought to happen, and the politician or the policy-maker who is saying 'Yes, you might be right, but let me tell you why that won't work.' That is a tremendously creative space, and it works to the benefit not only of the academic, obviously it works to our benefit, but it works to the benefit of the general public, because they get policies, mediated by a politician for sure, but rooted in independent thought.

Q
You talked about scholarship and education being a 'social good'. Can you expand on that?

Conor Gearty
Let us think about why it is valuable to have education in something other than how to make something, or how to fix a car. Let us take, for example, some terrible atrocity, like the Woolwich killing. You have this community running around in a semi-hysterical state, anxious, and what are they anxious about? They are anxious about trying to understand something. Politicians can get up and they can say the usual sorts of things about this and that, people being responsible, or we will clamp down on this, or clamp down on that. But what the community, what the public, want is some guide to understanding. That is where a person who has specialised in understanding behaviour, or in understanding culture, can become relevant. Or it might be a lawyer, who can actually understand the relationship between the law and this event, and can say – because there is no constituency, and he or she doesn't care what the *Daily Mail* says – 'Maybe we don't need a law.' There is this way in which an academic, independent, informed, committed to reason, with no axe to grind, can actually communicate effectively at moments of the highest importance.

Q
Can you provide any examples of how your work has been significant to the world outside academia?

Conor Gearty
Academics nowadays have been forced by the government to prove what is called 'impact', and I approve of the idea, I have to say. I am slightly unusual in that I think we are all able to show that our work has an impact. However, you can be lucky or unlucky in your field: as one of my friends in anthropology said, 'If I prove an impact, I haven't done my job. I'm supposed to leave them alone.' It can vary, and we need to be flexible about what we understand as impact. For me, impact in the social sciences is not often going to be about being able to point to a section of an Act, in my case, or somebody who has not been arrested, and say 'That is the result of that work there.' We are not scientists, we are not sitting together in a laboratory producing a cure. But what we are doing is having impact in a cultural context, and by that I mean making ideas seem normal, from which change flows.

I will take an example from my own work. I went on and on about how we can use the criminal law instead of all these extreme counter-terrorism laws. Other people did this too, so you can't say 'Ah, that's the Gearty Test' – it's not like Crick & Watson and DNA. But you can say 'Gearty along with other guys made it kind of normal for the Attorney General or the Director of Public Prosecutions to say "We are using the criminal law", and therefore made it part of common sense that we should not intern people, for example.'

Impact in the social sciences is about the salience of the issue. That is a tremendous thing to be able to achieve as an academic. And I think most of us – give or take a few – can aspire to do that, and it is not unreasonable to ask of us that we try.

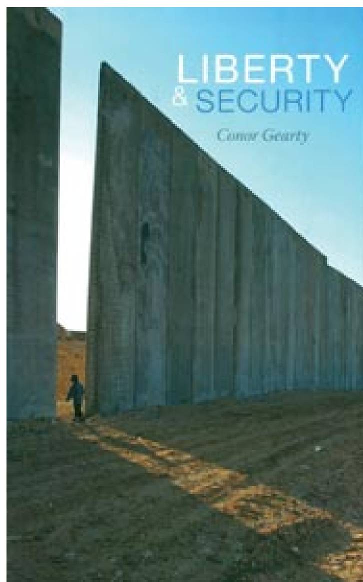
Q
What are the challenges that researchers currently face?

Conor Gearty
In the early phase of democratisation, a lot of people became influential propagators of ideas through their own self-education. We had a culture in which the idea of a public intellectual was very familiar. Then, after the war, with the expansion of the university sector and then the great impetus towards further expansion in the 1960s, into the 1970s, with further reforms, we have had this vast

[3] Conor Gearty, *Terror* (1991). Also Conor Gearty & J.A. Kimbell, *Terrorism and the Rule of Law: A Report on the Laws Relating to Political Violence in Great Britain and Northern Ireland* (Civil Liberties Research Unit, 1995).

professionalisation of intellectual knowledge. That has been terrific, because it has meant there has been an expansion of the number of people who can enjoy university. And what we mean by that, of course, is enjoy reason, enjoy ideas, enjoy understanding that life is about more than work. But it has had a slight cost, which is that we have silo-ed ourselves into various disciplines. You have the guys who know all about social policy, the guys who know all about sociology, the guys who know all about law, and this is a little bit of a problem as we look ahead.

However, it is being dealt with, and, increasingly, what you see in the social sciences is a breaking down of these slightly artificial barriers. The shift is towards solving problems, not protecting disciplines. So someone from the London School of Economics (LSE) like me has just had meetings talking with the people who are involved in managing the consequences of climate change, such as Nick Stern, who is now President of the British Academy. That is not about whether you are a geographer, a sociologist or a lawyer. That is about 'What are we going to do about climate?' I think the future of intellectual work in the social sciences is a future that will be centred on problem-solving, and that is where there is then an explosion of energy from the academics, and it shows the public that actually they can produce value. You still need to teach people how to be lawyers, how to be philosophers, of course; these are technically important areas. But academics should be *both* disciplinary specialists *and* problem-solvers.



Q

When we interviewed Lord Stern, he said there was currently 'a crisis of confidence, a crisis of understanding'. How can the humanities and social sciences help?

Conor Gearty

I have just done a short book,[4] and it is an attempt to understand the mystery of the current uncertainty. It is my contribution, if you want, and so it is about explaining how we seem to be drifting into a state of affairs where we think we are in a democracy, we think we respect the rule of law, we think we respect human rights, but in fact people are getting poorer, people are getting discriminated against more than they were, and we have secret justice, and we have special courts, and we have Guantanamo, etc., etc. Using myself as an example, what the social sciences guy can do is take a jumble of stuff that looks very confusing, arrange it, and produce it in a readable form. This book is a short book, because I wanted people to read it. Hopefully people can then understand stuff and, because they understand it, see that they can cope. They can cope by engagement as citizens; they can cope by knowing how to contribute to a circumstance they want to bring about. The academic renders intelligible that which is confusing, and provides an agenda for those inclined to take action.

Q

Can you talk further about that?

Conor Gearty

The academic says 'You can't go back to the past. Let me explain why.' The academic says 'Let me explain this fear you have.' The academic may link it to neoliberalism, may say, like me, that this is about capital and power taking back the concessions it made at a time when it was fearful of communism. The academic can position him or herself in a way that explains, and therefore renders less terrifying the unknown. I think that we are able both to explain and then to promote solutions.

Take reason. I think it is beyond dispute that reason does not work for an awful lot of people, and so we need to try and work out other ways of persuading ourselves how we should act, and when we should act well. Academics do that. There is fascinating work at the moment at LSE – we had a whole seminar on this a few weeks ago – on altruism, on the reality of people's outward reach, which is not reason-driven; it is something in themselves. I am doing a paper on the human rights take on altruism,[5] and that is an effort to understand language in a way that explains something as other than rooted in reason.

Everything is always changing all the time, and the academic is trying to capture the moment and explain it. That should be, if not a balm to people, a kind of assurance that there is a capacity to understand.

Q

Do you find it difficult combining being an academic and a practitioner?

Conor Gearty

I am a barrister as well as an academic, and to be honest with you it is very difficult to do those two together. The reason for that is that a barrister has to be available to argue cases in court, and I decided quite early on that I would put the academic side first. If I have got a class at 10.00am, I cannot be in court. Now, that is very clear, and it means I am not running around the Strand trying to put my wig on or take it off before I go into the court or classroom, and forgetting which I am in. But it means I have not been able to do as many cases as I would have liked.

However, that apart, the two are complementary. I will give you an example. I do an article for a learned law journal. I am in a case in the House of Lords a few years ago, before it became the Supreme Court; I am being led by a colleague of mine at Matrix Chambers, Cherie Booth. And we were able to submit my article in proofs to their

[4] Conor Gearty, *Liberty and Security* (2013).

[5] C.A. Gearty, 'Human Rights: The Necessary Quest for Foundations', in C. Douzinas & C.A. Gearty (eds), *The Meanings of Rights: The Philosophy and Social Theory of Human Rights* (2014).

The academic explains, and therefore renders less terrifying the unknown. We are able to explain, and then to promote solutions.

Lordships. And we were able, as it were, to jump the queue of academics trying to engage with the judges because I am there, in the room, in the court. I am able to say to the guys who are publishing the article 'This has been before their Lordships in the case of "X".' That is a nice little virtuous circle, where they are both working together.

When you teach the students, you can say 'This case – I will tell you what it was like…', because you have been in it. You don't need to have been in too many. You don't need to have a prolific practice – for the reasons I have given, I do not – in order to be able through a few cases to communicate very strongly the excitement of front-line legal work.

So I have found them, given that I decided to go for academe as my main job, complementary.

Q

As a commentator and campaigner, how easy is it to compartmentalise the different roles?

Conor Gearty

I think the way to try to have an impact out of university in the social sciences nowadays is to wear lots and lots of different hats, and not to be too worried about this. I remember some great advice I got from a fantastic academic, when I was worried about how I was on the one hand opposed to this but supporting that, and he said 'Relax, relax.' I discovered then something called post-modernism, which apparently means you can be everything at the same time. I think that somebody who aspires to be a successful academic these days needs to be able to put on the journalistic hat and do 800 words; needs to be able to do the scholarly article and monograph; needs to be able to do the radio. Actually, I think if you have got something to say, which is the key thing, you can choose how to say it depending on what the audience is, and it's not that difficult. The problem is where you don't have anything to say, and if you don't have anything to say it is very difficult to say anything at all, anywhere.

Q

Do you worry about being likeable?

Conor Gearty

I learnt quite early on that the English are a very polite culture, particularly at higher professional levels, so I have experienced very little personal antagonism. I hope that somewhere, behind my back, there are people who are angered by my work. I hope it is not all as smooth as it looks to my face, because obviously an academic wants to disrupt, wants to critique, wants to problematise things that are taken for granted. It is essential that the academic does that, because otherwise the academic is not able to communicate.

My students sometimes get worried. They get angry, because I appear to be so critical of human rights, but my critique is a route into understanding. I did one radio programme once where I called for the repeal of all terrorism laws, you know, a crazy idea; but it was a route into understanding. Now, when you get to a position like mine on terrorism laws, which is eccentric in the culture, people are polite. You do not make headway on the key goal, but you make headway on the margins, and you put those who argue for ever-increasing laws in this field on the defensive. You can antagonise for a purpose.

I have also, from time to time, picked fights with academics who I believe are acting in bad faith. What I mean by that is an academic who forgoes that independence that they have, which is a most extraordinary part of our civilised culture, in order to emulate a politician, or to emulate a policy guy, in the search of advancement. We had this over the so-called 'war on terror'. We had a few academics who would say 'Well, when you look at it very carefully, President Bush is allowed to do what he wants,' and bingo, that guy becomes a judge. Or you get some other guy who says 'Well, it's not really torture when you beat people up, because we have to try and defend our culture,' and that guy gets read by President Bush. Those academics who play at being careerist, the ones who, as a result, forsake that academic quality of independence, are the ones I do not like. Paradoxically, I really admire the ones who have completely different views than mine, but they are views that are forged by their independent reasoning, not by some careerist manoeuvre on their part.

Q

Is it important for an academic to be subversive?

Conor Gearty

When I went for the best job I have had so far – Director of the Centre for the Study of Human Rights (2002-2009) – a very distinguished interviewer, who was President of the British Academy, said, 'Let us go straight to it, Professor Gearty. Since you are an opponent of human rights, and of all that human rights stands for, why have you applied for this job?' Remember, the job is Director of the Centre for the Study of Human Rights. I was able then to say 'I don't oppose human rights, I just oppose all these hateful lawyers', etc., etc. That is a kind of lovely position, and some of the students sometimes come to me and say 'I would love to be Director of the Centre for the Study of Human Rights', or Professor of Human Rights Law, which is my other job. I would say 'Start by opposing all human rights, start by this, start by that,' and what I mean is, be yourself. Maybe for some people subversion doesn't work for them, and it is painful if they play at subversion. Maybe their ideas are conventional. There is nothing wrong with that. The key thing is to be yourself. So I don't think subversion for subversion's sake, but subversion if ideas take you there.

Q
Should a scholar try to appear uncommitted, disinterested?

Conor Gearty
It is very difficult, in my opinion, for a scholar credibly to say that they are aloof from, outside of, that on which they comment. I am not an academic who has ever successfully been able to separate myself from my ideas. So my ethnicity as an Irish person informed my critical engagement with my subject. I am nervous about any claim that I would ever make to say of my ideas that they are separate from what constitutes me, except in this important sense: that they are tested by reason, and that they are subject to exposure as either unduly influenced by *my* persona, or plain wrong. I see my persona as informing my ideas; but my ideas, informed as they are like that, and qualified in the way I have suggested, have a life that can reach beyond me.

Q
Are you saying that, although some research might, for example, suggest that internment laws were actually a good idea, your personality would always make you look for arguments against?

Conor Gearty
What I am demonstrating is that my personality and background may lead me to a set of positions, but I do not just declare their truth on the basis of those accidents. I develop an argument.

It is often quite tricky for people to argue for things like internment or torture, because their arguments flush out their disregard of fundamental values, and they often don't have the courage to admit that they don't care about those values. So they end up implicitly condemning the values – the dignity of the human person, non-discrimination, equality of esteem – implicitly disregarding them, but are not able to do it honestly, with the result that their arguments are a mishmash of confusion.

Q
Why should people study the humanities and social sciences, rather than learn how to produce nuts and bolts or build things?

Conor Gearty
The saddest thing about trends in contemporary culture is how everything is being monetised or commoditised. It's sad not only because people lead drearier lives as a result, without what one famous politician, Denis Healey, used to call a 'hinterland', because they have not learned how to have a hinterland. But it's sadder for another reason. Nuts and bolts don't get made, cars don't run, computers don't work, without intellectual activity. People who seem to think everything has a price, and that someone studying English or studying classics is not delivering some product that they can use tomorrow, don't understand that that product was probably delivered by a team of people who learned how to think at university, not in some special garage where they were taught how to fiddle with nuts and bolts.

There is both a moral and a practical reason why we should support universities. The moral reason is that we want to make our community a happy, successful community. And the way the human is wired, the human needs thinking, needs engagement. It's not all about food and sex.

The practical reason is because society will not function effectively. I was at a seminar in a country that will not be named. It is a country that invests heavily in education. But all the students want to leave, and they come in particular to places like the LSE. The Prime Minister spoke directly before me, and he said 'Why not come and do your degrees here? We have great engineering, we have great this, we have great that.' What they do not have is respect for freedom of expression, tolerance and diversity. I got up afterwards – I was the human rights guy, you know, the Trojan horse – and I said 'Look, if you allow your guys to protest, if you allow your guys to have some kind of cultural life independent of the state, maybe they will stay.' But, of course, they did not.

You cannot separate out stuff like building from stuff like thinking. The two are interconnected.

Q
Are British universities a success story?

Conor Gearty
If you take a place like my university – but many, many universities – education proves itself to be one of the biggest earners of foreign currency, because we are so good at it. So, even in a crude financial calculation, the funding of British universities in order to create spaces for the successful education of persons who come here for it makes an awful lot of sense. But we can't be just a service industry for foreigners. We have to have a programme which covers ourselves. One of the great glories of the last decades has been the availability of that tremendous university experience to more and more people in this society, which has meant that it is a much less elite thing to have secured this university education.

Q
What are your aspirations for the future?

Conor Gearty
In academe you go through a kind of trajectory of research to secure promotion, let's face it, to move up, and I did all that. Then, when I got professorship, I got a nice couple of notes. One guy said 'I hope you are one of those people who uses the Chair to stand on, not sit on.' When you get to the point where you are whatever it is that you wanted to be, you have to ask the question 'What are you for?' That can happen at different ages to different people, if they are lucky enough to become professors. For me, that is about developing a portfolio of activities, and I succeed to some extent and do not succeed to other extents.

Good academic work is about working with raw materials to produce credible versions of the truth within your discipline. But also it is about journalism aimed at distilling

your deep knowledge into a language that is understood with a view to impact. And journalism now means TV and radio, but it also means Twitter, getting your ideas to people through social media.

As well, the more you get caught up in the establishment, the more you become somebody who is a well-established professor, it is about setting examples. It is about returning articles that people send to you to read, with comments. It is about engaging in editing on behalf of colleagues in journals. It is about saying yes to invitations, and not just not replying. It is actually giving back. In the early stages of my career, senior academics who had never heard of me returned articles with comments, invited me to things, and I was a beneficiary of the generosity of others. That is an important part of what I aspire to do at this stage in my career as well.

Q

What would you like to be remembered for?

Conor Gearty

This is a counterintuitive, I think. I would like to be remembered by my students as somebody who showed them a new way of thinking. Not that they would remember a particular class, or 'Yes, his view on Section 6 of the Human Rights Act was really exceptional'; more a mood, an energy, about constructive critical thought. I would really like that. I don't know if I will have that, but I would really like that.

Then the books and so on. There is always an issue about whether anybody reads books, and what impact they have. But at their best, when somebody comes up to you and says 'That book really affected how I engage in the world,' that is a special thing. That's like the classroom reaching out of the classroom, reaching into the living rooms of these people and engaging them directly, through the book rather than in person. That happens now and again, and that's also terrific.

I don't get a big kick out of solving some technical problem where I am the only guy who knows that I have solved it.

Q

What did election to the Fellowship of the British Academy mean to you?

Conor Gearty

Being elected to this Academy, elected by these people – who are by the votes that elected them earlier the 'top' people in your discipline – was a big deal for me. It was a big deal for me because I am a lawyer, but I do a bit of telly, I do some journalism, I am on the radio a bit, I am a barrister. And this election said to me 'We respect your work. Not because you are on the telly, not because you are this, not because you are that, but we respect your work as a scholar.' That was a tremendous thing for me, especially as some of my stuff crosses over into other disciplines.

And I am also aware, though relatively new in this, that the British Academy might be trying to do something very important about connecting the social sciences to culture in a way which is not just about a community of self-regarding scholars from a narrow community of universities.

'Somebody who aspires to be a successful academic these days needs to be able to put on the journalistic hat.' Here Conor Gearty comments on the summer 2011 riots in the 'Tablet'.

Summer riots

CONOR GEARTY

Back to basics

The courts have dealt robustly with the violent disorder and looting of last month's riots, and the Government has promised swift action to prevent a recurrence of them. But one leading human-rights lawyer is sceptical about proposed changes and offers an alternative approach

I was once booked by Australian TV to be their legal expert live on air during the funeral of Princess Diana. "So what are the constitutional implications of the death of Her Royal Highness?" I was asked. "There are none," I replied, and – immediately hustled off stage – spent the rest of the six-hour marathon reading *The Economist* in a back room. It is the same with the riots that ravaged England last month: despite the protestations of some newspapers and politicians they reveal no gap in the law or need for any legal initiative. Yet they do raise serious issues about the political, ethical and legal responses to the troubles of this summer.

Riot has long been a serious crime in Britain. The Thatcher Government's 1986 Public Order Act put it (and the lesser crime of violent disorder) on a statutory basis, with those convicted being liable to terms of imprisonment of up to 10 and five years respectively.

and generally praiseworthy feature of the prosecutorial and judicial response has been its speed, narrowing the temporal gap between

flying in "to take charge" and harassed officers on the front line was evident for all to see. This was also surely not the time to talk up the suitability of an American super-cop to solve all London's woes: even the most anxious of British voters know in their bones that the capital is nowhere like New York and Los Angeles – and does not want its policing to follow those models.

The effort to recover lost political ground made David Cameron sound even more like Tony Blair than usual – all busy talk of legal changes that in truth signified nothing. His plan to tackle social networks has already fallen away. The proposed police power to remove face masks "under any circumstances where there is reasonable suspicion that they are related to criminal activity" would hardly have stopped the riots and may simply become another vehicle for police harassment. "Gang injunctions" – new Asbo-style civil court orders

Mary Beard

Professor Mary Beard OBE FBA is Professor of Classics at the University of Cambridge. A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/beard

Q
What was the initial spark that made you want to go into your field?

Mary Beard
I have been interested in the ancient world as long as I can remember. In my own mythology, it goes back to visiting the Elgin Marbles when I was five, and being gobsmacked by them. Later, classics for me represented a subject where you could be the kind of intellectual dilettante that I slowly realised that I was. You could do philosophy, and you could link up philosophy, history, art and archaeology. And you could put it together with the way we are still embedded in the classical tradition. For me, classics doesn't mean studying the ancient world on its own. It means studying us and our relationship with the ancient world. It has grown with me for a long time, I suppose.

Q
What part of your published work are you most happy with?

Mary Beard
I like pieces that I've written that have shaken the field up a bit. I don't think I'm the sort of person who writes three-volume histories of the Roman Consulship, taking 50 years. There was one essay I did about Cicero's letters that did change the way people read them, and it was my intervention into the field. I feel pleased with that.

What I like about classics is the way that you can explore different bits of it, and change your expertise within a single field. It has been a privilege to engage in areas of study of the ancient world, where you still can say, 'Let's look at this differently. Did the Romans have a mythology? Well, try looking at it this way.' Thirty pages, and on to the next thing.

And the great thing about British intellectual life is that it has room for everybody. It has room for three volumes on the Roman Consulship, and it has room for people like me who try to shake things up.

Q
What does classics contribute to our understanding of our own culture?

Mary Beard
The important thing about classics is that, like it or not, it remains at the heart of the Western cultural enterprise. You could put it like this: ultimately, when Dante was writing, he was reading Virgil, he was not reading Gilgamesh. In a way, Western culture remains in dialogue with the classical world. You couldn't take classics out of Western culture and leave anything behind but a torso; it would no longer make sense. That is claiming quite a big privilege for the classical world and for classical studies, but I think it is true.

What is Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* except in dialogue with the ancient tradition of tyranny? Where do we learn about what killing a tyrant is, if not from the assassination of Caesar? It is no good denying that. People often say, 'Look, didn't the early 20th century and the rise of Modernism finish the classics off? Wasn't that when we stopped teaching arts students by making them copy ancient sculpture?' No, go and look at Picasso's work. It is absolutely rooted in a conversation with the ancient world.

I don't mean by that in any way that we have to admire the ancient world. The ancient world is horrible, it is deeply unadmirable in all kinds of ways. But it is nevertheless part of the conversation that Western culture has always had. Western culture is about talking to antiquity.

This is not to say a kind of multicultural vision in which people study Chinese or Polynesian culture is irrelevant to us – of course, happily it is not. But it still remains the case that the Western European literary tradition, on which much of our cultural talk is founded, goes back to Homer and Virgil and other classical authors. You *can't* read Dante without knowing something about Virgil. You *can* read Dante without knowing something about Gilgamesh.

Q
What can we still get from Homer?

Mary Beard
After five minutes' talk to people, they can see that we are still thinking with *The Odyssey*. That's not just James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The Coen Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* movie is explicitly citing itself in relation to *The Odyssey*. Why is it in relation to *The Odyssey*? What has *The Odyssey* still got to teach Western culture? Actually, it is the prototype of almost every novel that there is: bloke is away, comes back to wife through trials and tribulations,

and in the course of that he discovers what it is to be a man, what it is to be a hero; he discovers and explores the notion of civilisation and barbarity.

A great example in *The Odyssey*, which always gets people going, is when Odysseus is captured by the one-eyed giant, the Cyclops. Very resourcefully, with that well-known ruse, he manages to escape from the cave of the Cyclops, where he and his companions have been penned in, first of all by blinding the Cyclops with a burning stake in one eye, and then hiding underneath the sheep, which the Cyclops was letting out of the cave. This is the very beginning of the Western literary tradition. What it is asking you to say is: do we like Odysseus for doing that? The Cyclops was a nasty cannibalistic giant that was going to eat them up. But do we feel sorry for him when Odysseus drives the stake in? Of course we do. Homer talks of the awful sizzling sound made by the stake, and we can almost feel the Cyclops' pain. We start to see the kind of culture clash there that we are still negotiating.

Q

What other insights do we get from classics?

Mary Beard

Classical culture and literature help us debate what it is to be good citizens. The debate in the West about what politics is, what citizens' rights are, has long been discussed very profitably through thinking about classical precedents.

To take one very obvious example, the most famous speeches to survive from Republican Rome are Cicero's speeches against Catiline 'the terrorist'. Cicero denounces Catiline, who he claims was trying to overthrow the state, and he puts the co-conspirators to death without trial. A few years later, after he has done that, he himself is exiled for that very crime.

What we are seeing in 63 BC are the roots of our issues about homeland security, about how far the state should be able to suspend its normal rules of operation and the normal rights of a citizen, in order to protect itself against terrorist threat. It has been discussed in those terms from Ben Jonson to Ibsen, precisely saying, 'What does this tell us about how the state should respond to threats from the inside?' If we want to understand not just how we now debate big issues of citizenship, and we want to follow that through in thinking about how people before us have debated those issues, and why we might want to change our minds about them, we cannot do that without thinking about how we have done that by talking to antiquity.

This is not a plea that every 10-year-old should learn Latin in order that they can talk to antiquity for themselves. What is important within our modern cultural operations is that we have *some* people who can do that. The cultural operation that any society launches is a collaborative one. That means we do not all have to do everything – that would be impossible. But in order for our culture to know where it has come from, and why where it has come from is important to us and has formed how we are, we have to have *some* people who can offer expertise in that area.

Q

Can you explain that a bit more?

Mary Beard

We can't say, 'We don't need people studying classics anymore, because we've got everything translated. We've got a library, so we've got it there for us, done and dusted – that's fine.'

One: everything *hasn't* been translated. There are plenty of works of Galen waiting to be translated by someone who has got the time to do it.

Two: more Latin and Greek is being discovered all the time. One of the most exciting public discoveries in this country over the last few decades has been the letters from the Roman soldiers and their families at Vindolanda. If we hadn't had anybody who knew Latin, we would never have known about what was going on in Vindolanda.

Knowledge can't be set in stone or pickled in aspic. It's not a set of things you can consign to a library. Knowledge is something that is dynamic and changing.

That is not the most important thing. The important thing is that knowledge can't be set in stone or pickled in aspic. Knowledge is only knowledge if it's an active verb, if somebody is doing it. It's not a set of things that you can consign to a library and say is there. Knowledge is something that is dynamic and changing.

You see that terribly clearly if you say, 'Okay, we've got everything translated, they've been translated for years; let's go back and look at Gilbert Murray's translations of Greek tragedy from the early 20th century.'[1] They are meaningless to us. That's not just because Gilbert Murray perhaps wasn't the greatest poet; it's not because he was rather flowery. It is because translation is always about a rediscovery, which changes all the time. Our Greek tragedy is not the same as Murray's tragedy. It's close to unreadable because we are now engaging with Greek tragedy in a different way from how we did 100 years ago. Murray's engagement is still interesting to us, but it can't be ours.

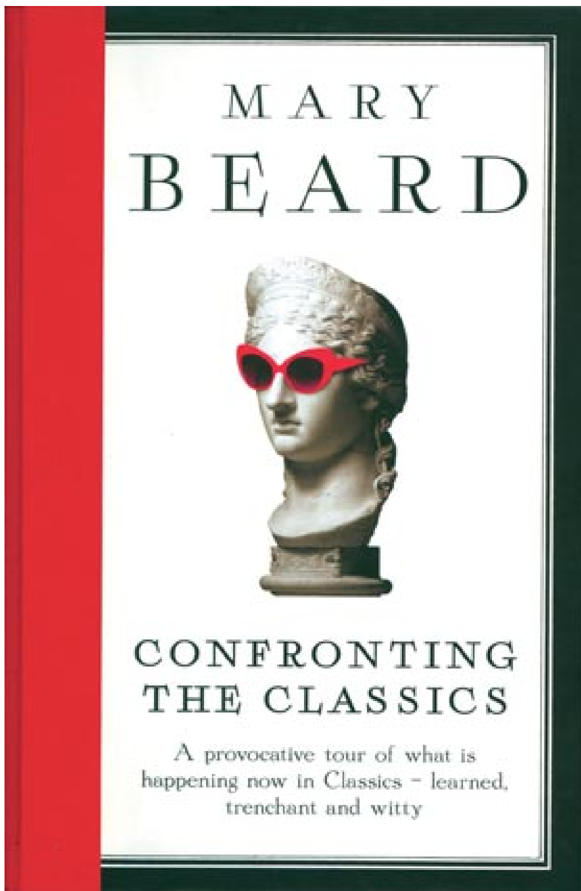
Q

So each generation has a new conversation with the ancient world?

Mary Beard

There's a very important strand of the humanities, which is always taking that conversation afresh, it is renewing it. What I think I am doing is: I am talking to the Greeks and Romans; I am ventriloquizing the Greeks and Romans, because they can't talk to us. I am engaged in a conversation with them, and I am engaged in a conversation with the other people who have studied them over the centuries

[1] Professor Gilbert Murray (1866-1957), Fellow of the British Academy.



and, in a sense, have handed them down to me.[2] It's not that you can just throw away the history of classical scholarship and say that it is irrelevant. In no way is that the case: I still use books day-by-day that were written 100 years ago. But it is always essentially a process of making it new again, and making it for us.

You can see that very clearly in the way classics is engaging with the popular audience. People will often say, 'How do you explain the fact that classics has had a renewal and is so popular? We have classical movies and there are people like you making television programmes. That's really new.' You have to say, 'It isn't new.' When I was a kid, we had the biographies of Michael Grant,[3] and we watched *I, Claudius* on the television. Go back to the late 19th century, and people are reading *Ben Hur* or *The Last Days of Pompeii* in their hundreds of thousands.

What you try to get across to people is that it's not that it is literally new. It's not that there are more and better people engaging in a popular way now. It is that every generation discovers it for themselves. The wonderful thing about classics is every generation really does have a new engagement, which *is* new for them.

Q
And those different engagements with classics can also help us understand other parts of our past?

Mary Beard
If we think about 19th-century politics, we're going to think about Gladstone. What did Gladstone do every night when he came home? He wrote books on Homer. If we're going to see how even the recent past formulated its ideas and its decisions about what to do, what was important, the priorities and moralities, we can't understand Gladstone unless we understand what he was doing with Homer. That was his passion.

Q
You communicate your work through different media.

Mary Beard
I don't really see a difference between interventions in some very austere classical periodical, and interventions in literary journalism. Some of the things that I have done that have made a difference have been published in the *Times Literary Supplement*. There is something nice about the seamlessness of that culture, where you can write things that are really hard-core serious, while making them approachable, in a wide variety of fields, and on the radio. We are very lucky that we have got public service broadcasting here. There is not a gap for me between writing for the *Journal of Roman Studies*, writing for the *TLS*, and doing something for Radio 4. It is all part and parcel of the same thing. You reach some of the same people, you reach some different people.

Q
Talk a bit more about reaching different audiences.

Mary Beard
One thing that I have been able to do is extend classics into some different constituencies. Partly, it is terribly important that classicists still talk to people in neighbouring humanities disciplines, rather than becoming a very narrow specialised ghetto. But it is wider than that. Classics matters on a much broader front. People in general are a bit frightened of it, partly because of the name. It sounds as if you have to be rather reverential about classics. But I did a comedy gig in Leicester Square with a stand-up comedian talking about the Pompeii Exhibition.[4] It was in fruitier language than I would use in a seminar about the statue of Pan making love to a goat, but the issues were just the same.

In 2013, the Pompeii and Herculaneum Exhibition at the British Museum[5] was big, and it has got thousands of people into thinking quite complicated things about the ancient world without quite realising it. I wrote an article for the *Sun* about Pompeii and what we could learn about it. It was approachable, but it was making big points about slavery and freedom, and about mortality, the issues that we are all talking about in the academic world about Pompeii. What was fascinating about that was my text was exactly the same as I submitted it, but it just had this fantastic headline: 'rompy Pompeii'. It became a *Sun* piece, and people really liked it. But it was talking about the real issues. It wasn't dumbing down.

[2] Mary Beard, *Confronting the Classics: Traditions, Adventures and Innovations* (2013).

[3] For example, *Julius Caesar* (1969), *Nero* (1970).

[4] Richard Herring's Leicester Square Theatre Podcast, Episode 19, Mary Beard (June 2013). www.comedy.co.uk/podcasts/richard_herring_lst_podcast/episode_19_mary_beard/

[5] 'Life and death: Pompeii and Herculaneum', British Museum exhibition, 2013.

There's a tremendous fear that somehow, if you move outside proper academic modes of dissemination, it's dumbing down. People don't want to be dumbed down to. People don't know about the ancient world, they are ignorant about it quite often, but they're not stupid. Also, you want people who really know about antiquity talking to ordinary people; they don't want to be fobbed off with someone who isn't the expert.

Q

What was the reaction to your article in the *Sun*?

Mary Beard

One of the things that is great about online newspapers is you can read the comments of people who are reading what you say. What was very striking for me was that people were picking up on precisely the issue that underlies almost everything about our study of the ancient world – which is that in some ways the ancient world is terrifyingly like us, and in other ways it is absolutely, alien-ly different.

It doesn't take much to see that point. Here is a lovely cradle. Inside there was a little baby being rocked. So they had cradles and babies just like we do. But who is rocking the cradle? It's a slave. What happens if you start to think about how a society operates with slavery? One of the nice things about the ancient world is that it is such a long time ago, we can all talk about it without somehow that feeling of raw involvement that we have still when we talk about black slavery in America. Classics is a privileged zone for discussion and for thinking about issues that still matter to us.

Sun+

WELCOME BACK

Wide boys, brothels and lager louts, it's... rompy Pompeii!

Roman town that put Broken Britain in the shade

Q

You also communicate through social media.

Mary Beard

The quality of debate about humanities in general, and the classics in particular, has been enhanced by new social media – blogging, tweeting, and so forth. The way that you can engage directly with people about your subject has expanded. The pleasure of being able to blog about something that I have seen in a way that reaches 40,000 or 50,000 people is a privilege.

I have been involved in blogging for a long time. When I wrote my first blog I think I had never read anybody else's, and I was very dubious about it. I had been urged to do it by the *Times Literary Supplement*. I thought, 'This is a fashion that will not last.' And I thought, 'I am never going to be able to get really complicated ideas over in 600 words.' I quickly found that it was quite different from that. I found that, paradoxically, I could write things on a blog at a level of complexity that I could not write in a mainstream broadsheet newspaper. That is partly because of links. You can say, 'Let's talk about the autobiography of Emperor Augustus' on a blog, because you can put a link to the text for people.[6] Blogging, for me, has been a way of bringing all kinds of things into the popular arena.

Q

And do you also get feedback through social media?

Mary Beard

What is very moving, as well as gratifying, is the way that, in the feedback between aca-demics and the wider public that social media offers, you can see how things you have done affect people. For me, in making the television series *Meet the Romans*,[7] which was in its own way quite difficult – there was lots of Latin in it, there was no dumbing down, we were reading Roman tombstones in the original Latin – it was humbling how it affected people's lives.

'Meet the Romans, with Mary Beard' aired on the BBC in 2012.

I had a letter from a prisoner to say that he had watched it in prison and was now going to learn Latin. I had endless tweets and emails from kids who said, first, how interesting it was, but now they were going to go and do classics at school, that they were going to get their mum and dad to take them to Pompeii in the summer. This spread through all cultures, ethnicities, and social groups. One issue about classics in particular, but humanities in general, is there is a kind of sense that it is a bit dead, white, European male, and that it is not speaking to a wide demographic. I have plenty of old ladies from the English shires who watched *Meet the Romans*. But the kind of reaction that I have had from all

[6] Mary Beard, 'A nice new fragment of Augustus' Res Gestae – so there!', posted to 'A Don's Life' blog, *Times Literary Supplement* (13 August 2012). http://timesonline.typepad.com/dons_life/2012/08/a-nice-new-fragment-of-augustus-res-gestae-so-there-1.html

[7] *Meet the Romans, with Mary Beard* (BBC, 2012).

kinds of very different people, wide cultural diversity, has been extraordinary. There was one amazing black woman rap artist who did a video rap song about *Meet the Romans*. You think, 'Gosh, you can't get more real than that.'

Now that communication is instant, it can spark all kinds of new conversations that spiral off something you have written.

Q
Your television work has brought you public recognition.

Mary Beard
I have found a position in which I can talk, and people will take notice, whether that is to agree or often to disagree. And I have had more recognition than I need, honestly. It is important to see that this is not a one-woman operation. You have to be a bit careful about thinking that the only way to do it is a Beard-like one: she goes and blags her mouth off on the telly and people get interested.

We do not want a world without the history of Western culture still present in it.

The contribution to arts and humanities is of many, many different types. It is terribly important that we don't forget that, if there is a standing on the shoulders of giants in my particular neck of the woods, then some of those giants are the people who sit in the library, year after year, and work out what Thucydides was trying to say. They don't do it in a glamorous telly-like way. They might be slightly retiring people. But they provide many of the most important discoveries that we are all the beneficiaries of. It is terribly important to realise that we still can't translate Thucydides. We bandy his name around in international relations as if we knew what he was saying. I want some boffins in the library working hard on that.

For part of my life, I am that kind of boffin. I write some really technical hard-core stuff, as well as doing more approachable things. But we can't turn arts and humanities disciplines into a series of showpiece events. There is a lot of hard work that has to be done, and a lot of it is not glam at all.

Q
What is the argument for the public funding of that kind of scholarly work in the humanities?

Mary Beard
The argument for public funding of the humanities seems to me an absolute no-brainer. There are a lot of people who would say, 'What is the point of learning Latin when you could do physics?' When you go back to basics with most of these people, whether they are in government or the media or education, they turn out to be false enemies. They turn out underneath not to be as opposed as they find it convenient to pretend to be. There is nothing worse than the backbench politician from any party who thinks they can get a few philistine cheers by saying that classics is done and dusted. You get them eyeball to eyeball, and you find they don't really mean that.

If you were to say to people, 'Look, we have got all kinds of new reproductive technologies, we have got all kinds of new scientific advances, do you think we want to go down the new reproductive technology route without thinking about what it means to be a human being; without thinking about what the philosophy of this is?' – of course people don't want to do that. Of course they need Plato, because you can't talk philosophy unless you start with Plato – still the most read philosopher in the world.

The same is true of a more literary culture in general. When you say to people, 'Do you want there to be a London stage in which we never see Greek tragedy? Do you want there to be a world in which nobody knows who Virgil was?' – of course they say, 'No'. That is where the idea of active knowledge comes in, because if we want to have these things, it's not a question of just putting a preservation order on them; it's a question of going on doing them. If you go on doing them, you have to pay people to do it – it's as simple as that.

We do not want a world without the history of Western culture still present in it. We don't want to go to art galleries where nobody knows what the Renaissance painters were painting, because nobody knows what Ovid's *Metamorphoses* said. We know we don't want that.

I suppose I remain a broad optimist on this, because I think that Western culture, our culture, is not in the end so stupid that it will give it away. For all the faults of the British political system, in the end we are not going to cut off our limbs, we are not going to leave a bleeding torso – so that nobody understands what happened in the past. We know that more would be lost than ever could possibly be gained.

Q
But the case still has to be argued?

Mary Beard
The question isn't whether we should justify what we do, but what counts as justifying. If I have a resentment about governmental requirements, it is that they tend to be expressed much too crudely in terms of instant profit and loss. The point about humanities work – the way the work in the humanities productively ignites our own cultural and political environment – is that happily it isn't easily relatable simply in cash terms. So, the philistinism of seeing justification being entirely economic is an area of resentment.

But also it's a resentment of the *short-term* economic dimension. We are laying foundations for what is going to happen in 50, 100, or 150 years' time. Judging it by what

The new media enable us to take high-level informed debate onto people's laptops, onto people's iPhones, into the world at large. It's exciting.

happens next year is short-termism of a rather foolish kind. Should I justify what I do? Everybody should justify what they do. But I shouldn't necessarily justify it on whether it can be shown next month to have added a particular number of pounds to the British economy.

Q
What did election to the Fellowship of the British Academy mean to you?

Mary Beard
When I was elected to the British Academy, I had many different reactions. I was gobsmacked. I thought this would never happen to me. I was absolutely overwhelmingly delighted, because I thought, 'It is a validation. Someone has wanted me'. Those guys out there thought I was good enough, and that was hugely important.

It has been wonderful. And I suppose I have discovered it is good sometimes to have one's prejudices not confirmed. Although I had always thought of them as a load of old codgers, they turn out to be rather acute and with a good sense of debate about the humanities in general and where it is going. It's been fun.

Q
Where should the humanities be going?

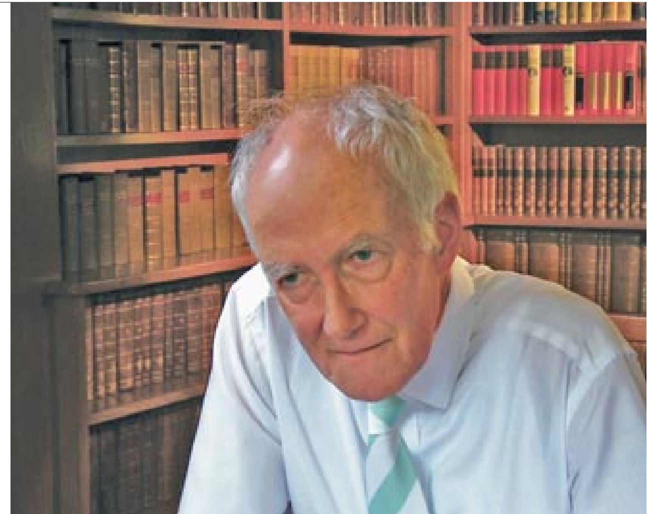
Mary Beard
I think we have a fantastic opportunity to expand intelligent public debate, which is informed by all the kinds of different aspects of the areas of study that the Academy represents. You can't think interestingly about migration unless you have some sense of what the history of migration and the history of ideas of citizenship have been.

One of the things that the new media enable us to do, and that we have to grasp, is they help us take that kind of high-level informed debate outside the walls of the British Academy onto people's laptops, onto people's iPhones, into the world at large. It's exciting.

And we're going to reinvigorate a sense of inquiry into the human past and human culture, throughout the British educational system and beyond.

Anthony Heath

Professor Anthony Heath CBE FBA is Professor of Sociology, University of Manchester.[1] A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/heath



Q
What was the initial spark that made you want to study sociology?

Anthony Heath
I think I chose to study sociology partly because I found economics too difficult, but also because I wanted to engage with the real world rather than just the make-believe world of the introductory economics that I studied at Cambridge. I had also been working as a supply teacher in a northern secondary modern school, so I had become aware of inequality and that there were other ways of life, and this is the kind of thing I wanted to engage with.

Q
What was difficult about economics?

Anthony Heath
Cambridge economics at that time – this was in the ’60s – was highly theoretical, highly mathematical and very abstract. I was taught by James Mirrlees,[2] the Nobel Prize winner, and he was a wonderful man, and they were doing great things, but it was just over my head. I came across sociology, which was being taught by John Goldthorpe,[3] who was a lecturer at Cambridge then. He captured my interest because he was talking about things I could understand and get my mind around – and things that I thought were important. Yes, I might have stayed an economist if I had had good enough maths. But I had some outstanding contemporaries and I knew I was not as good as them at the maths. So, in a sense my comparative advantage was to look at the data, and see what was actually happening, as opposed to producing models. In a sense, that is what I have always done: go out and get hold of some data, rather than theorise or produce analytical models. I want to know what is going on out there.

Q
But in your work there is still a lot of cross-over with applied economics.

Anthony Heath
That’s right. Throughout my career I have drawn on economics, and economic techniques and ways of thinking. I still have to read articles in economics journals, because economists also tackle a lot of the same issues that I am concerned with. I have written a lot on social mobility; but economists have written some very interesting and important work about income mobility. I am very interested in ethnic inequalities in the labour market; economists write about that. Almost everything that I touch, there is probably an applied economist who has also come at it with a distinctive angle as well. So, yes, I have had to be aware of what the economists are doing, just as I have also tried to be aware of what political scientists are doing and what social psychologists are doing. It is very interesting to look at how you get such different angles on the same topic coming from those three different disciplines.

Q
Why is sociology a vital discipline?

Anthony Heath
Sociology has been a very important discipline. But it has had, interestingly, huge influence outside sociology, and has even permeated some of the humanities as well. It is important. I think the great contributions have been of two sorts: the more theoretical ways of looking at the world; and then the kind of work I do, which is more descriptive. It is what we sometimes call in sociology the ‘political arithmetic tradition’, which goes back to Sir William Petty who did the first, fairly hard-headed, quantitative study of conditions in this country in the 17th century – collecting evidence about the state of society. In that sense, it was arithmetic: he was counting and describing empirically what the patterns were – the state of agriculture, poverty and so on. But it was political in the sense that the agenda was an instrumental one, to inform government and decision-making.

The title ‘political arithmetic’ was used more recently in the first half of the 20th century by a group at the London School of Economics who were looking at social class inequalities in education, and collecting the data to show the extent of the inequalities and hoping that this would lead to educational reforms. I worked a great deal with

[1] Anthony Heath is also Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Oxford.

[2] Sir James Mirrlees was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1984.

[3] Dr John Goldthorpe was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1984.

Chelly Halsey here at Oxford University – my first major study was with Chelly[4] – and he was very much part of that same tradition: 'Let's get the evidence on the state of inequality and let us see what can be done about it.' Of course, Chelly worked very closely with the Labour government in the late '60s, at the time comprehensive reform in schools was happening. Comprehensive reform was itself partly driven by the evidence accumulating from people like Chelly Halsey about the lack of opportunity for the children in the secondary modern schools, where I had done some teaching. The concern is to look at inequalities or social conditions much more broadly, and to bring that to bear on issues of public concern and public debate – so we have a more informed public debate about inequalities, rather than one based on prejudice or what your friends have to say.

Q

The idea of inequality is quite abstract. Couldn't we have sociology based on levels of happiness?

Anthony Heath

I don't agree; I think happiness is a very strange, abstract concept.

People like Chelly Halsey and myself were interested in: Why don't children from working-class homes, whose parents are manual workers, get into the grammar schools? Why don't they go on to university? Today, the issues are: Why are so many people in a university such as Oxford privately educated? Why are young people from comprehensive schools – even more, young mature students who have been through further education – almost invisible in a place like Oxford University? I think these are very concrete issues; I don't think there is anything abstract. You can dress it up with your theory of class, but the reality is a very practical one which affects lots of people's lives.

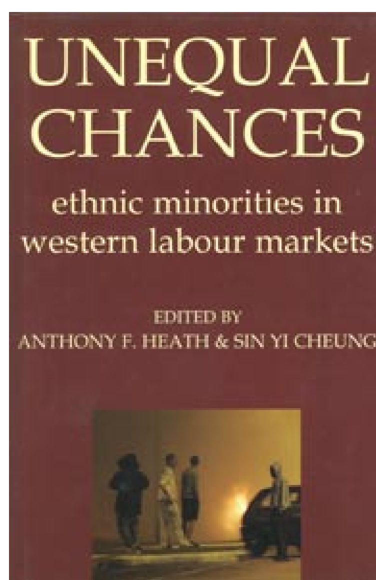
Q

Yet we live in an increasingly unequal society. So one might say that social trends have been largely unaffected by your work.

Anthony Heath

I think it is certainly fair to say that our work exposing these inequalities has often not led to the kind of reforms in the real world that those of us who have addressed these issues would have liked to have seen. I think sometimes there have been effects, not always the ones that we wanted. Comprehensive reorganisation was partly driven by the evidence that sociologists were producing. I think there are other examples: the education maintenance allowances, which were one of the successes of the last Labour Government, had a solid, empirical basis, because that was directly in the tradition of showing that working-class kids were leaving school early, immediately after the end of compulsory education, often for economic reasons. I think there have been reforms that have at least taken on board the evidence that we are providing. While inequality, of course, has increased over the last 20 or 30 years – and I think is a major issue for the general well-being of society – that has been driven by other influences, often political ones. I think it would be unrealistic of social scientists to think that we can change everything.

What I think we have tried to do is shine a light on particular issues, like social class inequalities in education. In my more recent work, I have been trying to shine a light on the issues of ethnic inequality, particularly the huge issue of black unemployment rates,[5] where young black men have double or treble the unemployment rate of their white contemporaries. I think that is a major issue of social injustice. I think it is also a major issue that threatens social cohesion and social order. I see part of my role as being to highlight these issues, to monitor them, to see whether they are going away – and I only get exercised about them because the evidence shows that the inequalities are huge and not declining. If they were smaller and declining, I would be much less worried. I would probably turn my attention to some other great problem of which we have many, lining up to be looked at – like the education of children in care and what happens to children in care, which I think is a major scandal. So if ever we overcome ethnic inequalities and inequality of opportunity, there are plenty of other issues that are waiting for empirically-minded sociologists to investigate and to highlight.



Anthony Heath discusses black unemployment rates in this volume in the 'Proceedings of the British Academy' series.

There are two stages. The first stage is just descriptive. It's not very intellectual, in a sense, just, 'Let's get some good data, best possible data, and see what is happening. What happens to kids in care, when they leave care? Let's see what happens to young black men who have good qualifications, who have done all they can be expected to in the educational system, when they leave school and university.' So the first step is just to highlight what is going on: is it getting better, is it getting worse? Are we living up to our ideals as a liberal society of offering equality of opportunity? The second stage, of course, is to try to think what could be done? What reforms would be effective?

[4] A.H. Halsey, A.F. Heath & J.M. Ridge, *Origins and Destinations: Family, Class and Education in Modern Britain* (1980). Professor A.H. 'Chelly' Halsey was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1995.

[5] See for example Sin Yi Cheung & Anthony Heath, 'Nice work if you can get it: Ethnic penalties in Great Britain', in Anthony F. Heath & Sin Yi Cheung (eds), *Unequal Chances: Ethnic Minorities in Western Labour Markets* (Proceedings of the British Academy 137, 2007).

So there is an important policy element there. Highlighting the issue is political, and so is trying to say, 'Can we investigate potential levers – like educational maintenance allowances – that might go some little way towards reducing the inequality?'

More information is going to make for better government than less information – and even information that you don't like, you would still be wise to take on board rather than suppress.

Q

Does giving that sort of advice make you subversive?

Anthony Heath

I think there is a long tradition of sociology being subversive.

I take, perhaps, the rather naive and optimistic view that, surely, more information is going to make for better government than less information, and that even information that you do not like, you would still be wise to take on board rather than suppress. I hope that my research would be of interest to a government of any complexion. Although, in a sense, my political agenda sounds left-wing, I think the issues I am addressing are ones that would be of great importance to a Conservative government as well, because the issues are real ones.

For example, take ethnic inequalities. The National Audit Office showed in a recent report on these inequalities that under-employment of minorities costs the economy something like £8-9 billion a year.[6] So, if you are only interested in the business case, there is a very powerful business case for tackling issues of discrimination and under-employment. I don't think that what I am saying should be ignored by, or is necessarily antithetical to, a Conservative government, because one is saying, 'Here is a problem, and this problem affects your ability to achieve your objectives.'

Q

So there are two levels of argument: one about values, one about practical consequences.

Anthony Heath

Yes, just as with ethnic inequalities, I think it is also the case with class inequalities that you have two crucial parts to the argument. One is the social justice argument, that we certainly claim to be a liberal society that supports equality of opportunity, and I think all politicians alike would subscribe to that. So, partly, our kind of research is highlighting whether we meet those ideals of equality of opportunity that we profess. We are concerned to expose social injustice. That is one element, and it is directly, if you like, normative or ethical, because it is saying, 'You favour social justice; here are examples where it is not working, they need to be tackled'.

The other is to say that there is a business case for diversity; there are social consequences of injustice. Even if you don't share the same values, in a society like ours if you allow social injustice to be widespread, then there is a risk for social order and social cohesion. It costs money to police, to put people in prison, and so on. I suspect most people do share the values, as it happens, in Britain. But there is an instrumental aspect of this as well as a purely moralistic one.

Q

Are there comparisons with what Charles Dickens sought to achieve?

Anthony Heath

I think sociologists can learn a great deal from the kind of work that others do – writers, novelists, film-makers, certainly anthropologists. There are a lot of similarities between those traditions of working. They focus on the individual – the novelist above all. Anthropologists often focus on a particular village, for example, in the classic tradition of anthropology. So, although I do large-scale, quantitative work, I think there are great insights, essential insights, really, to be gained from the in-depth study of particular cases. It doesn't help to be too blinkered to other insights and other approaches.

I sometimes tell my students, 'Even if you are not going to do ethnographic or anthropological work, you should go and have a look.' I once examined a doctorate on Russia, and I asked the student 'Have you ever been to Russia?' No, he had never been to Russia. He had only looked at the results from surveys. I said, 'How can you be confident about your interpretations if you have never been there, and you don't speak a word of the language? Shouldn't you have gone and had a look just to see if the findings you think your surveys have produced ring true to people who live there?'

Although my professional expertise is analysing large-scale, quantitative survey data, actually to go and have a look helps give you some ideas of what you should be looking for. It gives you a quick check on whether what you are coming up with is sensible or not. I did some work for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bosnia.[7] I did the survey, and it produced a really rather grim picture of divided communities who hated each other. I went to have a look. I arrived in Sarajevo and thought, 'What a wonderful place. My survey must be completely wrong. Here they all are, sitting, chatting in the sunshine, in the cafes, playing street chess. I must have got something wrong. I need to check this out more.' Then we went around and we talked to people – some of them Bosniaks, some of them Serbs. And we concluded, 'No, our survey was right. There really is a great deal of antagonism and hostility still.' So it was very reassuring that the results of the survey then tallied with our going around and seeing and talking to people. But I was very worried for a bit, when I just saw this lovely scene in Sarajevo and I thought, 'No, we have got it wrong.'

[6] *Increasing employment rates for ethnic minorities* (2008) www.nao.org.uk/report/increasing-employment-rates-for-ethnic-minorities/

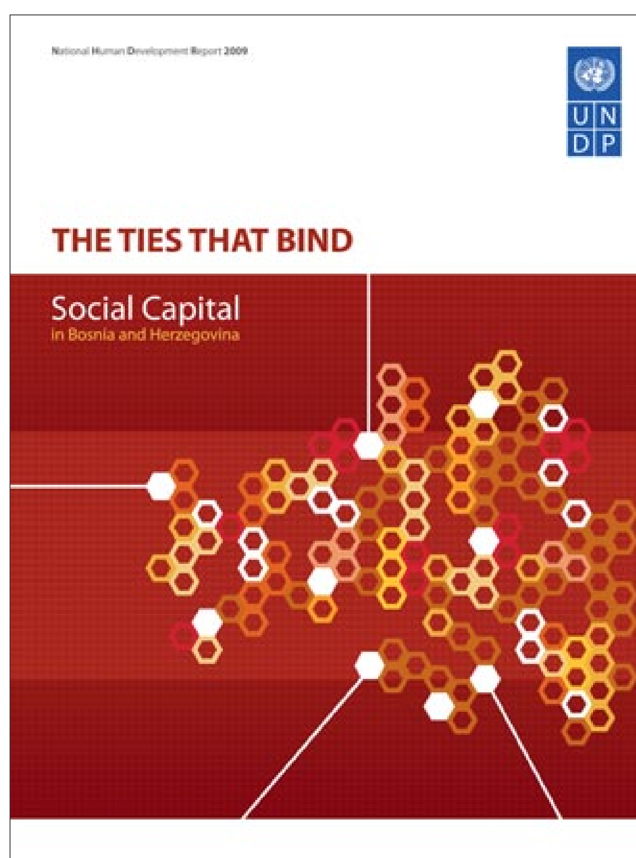
[7] *The Ties that Bind: Social Capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2009) http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/ties-bind

Q

Much of what you are dealing with is what is in people's heads and hearts.

Anthony Heath

That's right. And one of the things that our survey research can do is to give ordinary people a voice. In fact, the first project we did in Bosnia, we titled, 'The Silent Majority Speaks', because what we were doing was talking to the silent majority – who were not part of the great and the good, or the academic or international community – and getting what they thought about the situation and what their priorities were.[8] So essentially, we are concerned in a lot of the research in giving ordinary people, ethnic minorities, the disabled, a chance to say how they see the society, what their problems are and to convey their experiences.



This research into social cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina was undertaken for the UN.

Obviously, you want to check that the responses you get in your survey do match with what ordinary people think, because there are all kinds of problems. A standard technique, which we are doing at the moment on one of my surveys on attitudes to immigration, is to draw up your question and get a trained interviewer to do an in-depth conversation with the man or woman in the street, and say, 'What were you thinking of when you answered this question? What was going through your mind? How did you interpret the question? What did you think we meant by this?' You always have this task of going back and saying, 'Does this survey really reflect how our respondents – basically, ordinary people – address the issue, how they think about it?'

Q

It's rather like the 20th-century Mass-Observation project in trying to find out what people are thinking.

Anthony Heath

Mass-Observation was very much in this tradition of going and talking to ordinary people. (It sounds rather pretentious, doesn't it? 'Ordinary people', as though I am not ordinary. Sociologists need to remember they are ordinary too – 'Ordinary sociologists'.) The major difference is that Mass-Observation was not a systematic random survey, so there are all kinds of unknown biases in the kind of work that Mass-Observation did.

What we have seen – it was started before the war, but we have seen great developments since the war – is the move towards systematic sampling, so that you have got a representative sample, so you're tapping, in a better way, what people in the society think. The worry with some of the earlier pieces of research, or indeed some contemporary pieces of research from phone-in polls, is you are just getting a very biased selection. One of the great strengths of what fieldwork companies are doing now is the application of these systematic sampling methods, so we really are representing a cross-section of the population.

Q

When you are commissioned by policy-makers – such as government departments – to conduct research, do you regard yourself as a partner of them or a lever on them?

Anthony Heath

Sometimes I have tried to be a partner, sometimes a lever, sometimes simply a servant. It has depended to some extent on the topic, and on who is commissioning the research.

There are some topics I have worked on and want to continue working on, like discrimination, inequality of opportunity, black under-employment, where I am perhaps moving more towards the activist direction. I work closely with various ethnic minority groups; I provide them with the evidence to strengthen their arguments, and the case they want to make to government. I think for some topics, I care passionately about them. I hope I am using my research in a dispassionate way, in order to be a lever on government. So I think I'm certainly doing that some of the time.

In other cases, I was commissioned. There was a very nice study that we were able to do on ethnic diversity and social cohesion for the Department for Communities and Local Government,[9] and there we did not know what the

[8] Oxford Research International & UNDP, *The Silent Majority Speaks: Snapshots of Today and Visions of the Future in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2007).

[9] J. Laurence & A. Heath, *Predictors of Community Cohesion: Multi-Level Modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey* (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008).

The research actually showed that diversity had no negative effects on social cohesion, and that the real driver of lack of cohesion was poverty and neighbourhood deprivation.

answer would be before we did the research – we were not committed to any particular answer. The DCLG wanted rigorous, impartial evidence on whether diversity undermined cohesion or not. We did our best job, so I think there we were being a servant. They just wanted our expertise and I wanted to do a good, professional job to provide evidence on an important topic, which could have gone either way; we had no idea until the research came out. The research actually showed that diversity had no negative effects on social cohesion and that the real driver of lack of cohesion was poverty and neighbourhood deprivation. I was very happy with that result. But that came out of the statistics – it didn't have to come out that way. And it has actually been replicated by other researchers, from different political persuasions.

A lot of our research is really trying to get independent – as far as we can be – evidence where we do not have a particular stake in the outcome. It is following this mission of: better government involves better evidence. That is our expertise: looking at the evidence, and understanding what is representative and what is a high-quality sample, as opposed to a low-quality sample. What are the appropriate statistical techniques? I have applied that kind of approach to quite a number of different projects, and often I'm just interested to know what the answer is. I don't know when I set off. And even with the ethnic inequalities, if the evidence shows that ethnic inequalities are declining, I will say, 'Hooray, let us find out why and see if we can do a bit more in that direction.' But in other cases, I think I am as much a servant with some technical expertise: these are interesting and important issues of public concern, let's go and have a look.

Q

Can you identify a particular piece of work that has perhaps been your biggest achievement?

Anthony Heath

I always think my biggest achievement is going to be the project I am working on right now.

Right now, I have just published a book on ethnic minority political integration.[10] Often when I finish a book, I am a bit dissatisfied. But this time I think we've not done too bad a job. I have learned a bit. I thought it was going to be a book all about political exclusion of minorities and how this has all kinds of unfortunate consequences for lack of political participation, apathy, alienation and so on. In fact, the evidence did not show that. The evidence is a very positive story that second-generation ethnic minorities are actually politically very well integrated. They participate at more or less the same rates as their white British contemporaries. They have very similar attitudes to many of the political parties of the day. In fact, Britain, compared with many other countries in Europe or indeed America, has actually been rather successful at the political integration of ethnic minorities. That is not to say there are not some concerns that the book is also going to highlight, particularly the effect of discrimination and prejudice and feelings of relative deprivation among the second-generation black population.

One idea we are putting forward is what we call the 'paradox of social integration'. The more groups become socially integrated, the more aware they are of the inequalities of treatment that they experience. Hence, they become more disaffected. Social integration can lead to greater criticism and dissatisfaction because you are more aware of what you should be receiving. I think that is an important issue.

I have also written a piece I think is important, on multiculturalism,[11] which has been very topical, saying, 'Let's go and look at the evidence'. I used to be rather critical of multiculturalism; I didn't like it as a set of policies. Then politicians started saying it was bad, and I thought we ought to check the evidence: let's have a look and see what multiculturalism is, first of all; and has it had the bad effects politicians claim? In particular I wanted to look at the second-generation groups – young people born in Britain, particularly those from, say, Muslim or Sikh backgrounds, where there have been multicultural policies that have particularly given them exemptions from, say, the rule to wear crash helmets; that would be a good example. Is there any evidence that the groups that have been the beneficiaries of multicultural policies have become less integrated as a result? The evidence could have worked out either way. But the evidence showed very clearly that all second-generation groups are becoming more integrated. This applies equally to the Muslim groups, to the Sikh groups, to the black groups. And we see great generational progress towards social integration, feeling British, speaking English. All the things that politicians have complained about, you actually find are getting better in the second generation without any political interference. In a way, this is a case where we say, 'Britain is becoming a more integrated society, and we just need to let people get on and lead their own lives. No need for political reform – don't interfere.'

Q

So the picture is often more complicated than one might expect.

Anthony Heath

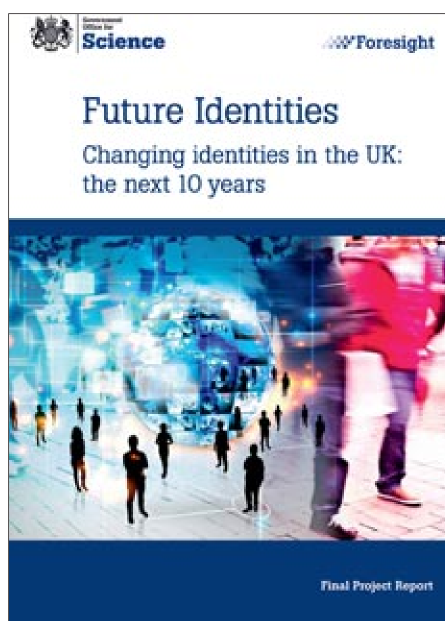
There are many dangers in the kind of research I do – and particularly in the kind of interview that *this* is. The temptation is to oversimplify and to produce one-liners.

[10] Anthony F. Heath, Stephen D. Fisher, Gemma Rosenblatt, David Sanders & Maria Sobolewska, *The Political Integration of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (2013).

[11] Anthony Heath, 'Has multiculturalism failed in the UK? Not really', *Guardian*, 10 August 2012; Anthony Heath & Neli Demireva, 'Has multiculturalism failed in Britain?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2013) DOI 10.1080/01419870.2013.808754

The real world is much more complicated than one-liners allow. One of the things I tend to criticise is what economists call 'stylised facts', which are sort of simplifications of the real world. Yes, I try to give a quick summary of some of the results, but the results are much more complicated than that one-liner.

One of the interesting developments is that, in many ways, British society is becoming more fragmented, more complex, more diverse – not just in an ethnic sense, but in looking at a range of criteria. One of the recent government projects I was involved with was one for the Government Office for Science, on the future of identity. It was launched at the British Academy in January 2013.[12] One of the main themes emerging from a very large number of different research papers that the Government Office commissioned was this increased fragmentation – which means that these stylised facts are even less and less appropriate, because the real world is very complicated. So, obviously, the detailed research tries to convey that complication. In the book, we have tried to emphasise that there is huge internal diversity within the ethnic minorities, both culturally and socially, just as there is within the white British population. When I talk about ethnic minorities and the white British, that is over-simplifying very, very complex realities.



This report for the Government Office for Science was launched at the British Academy in January 2013.

Going back to the theme of social attitudes, one of the biggest stories is the huge generational shift in attitudes. Again it is a very complex statistical issue to sort out whether it is generational change or change of the life cycle. But there are very big differences, descriptively, between older people and younger people in their attitudes to things like multiculturalism, ethnic minorities, racial prejudice, inter-marriage. Young British people, both white and black, tend to have very liberal views. I think there has been huge change across the generations in my lifetime.

Q

Given that the research you are describing seems so crucial to how we live our lives and how we enact policy, is this an argument for the public funding of the humanities and the social sciences?

Anthony Heath

I think it is crucial to have public funding of social science. It is very important to get better information and independent information, so that government actually has a better basis, and so that citizens have the most reliable and trustworthy data for issues of public concern.

I have just finished a piece that is coming out on the last Labour government's education policy, for example.[13] There we find that, if we look at the government statistics under Labour, it looks as though educational standards have been getting better and better and better. Yet, the other parties were saying, 'No, if you look at this other bit of evidence, it has been getting worse and worse and worse.' The trouble is that neither of these were based on properly independent, reliable, high-quality data. There is a great danger in just relying on government statistics or the statistics generated by Ofsted and these other bodies.

One of the crucial things about social science, and the ESRC funding of social science, is to get genuinely independent evidence which we can check against the claims made by political parties for their own political advantage. It gives you an independent basis for holding government to account – which, going back to our earlier point, can be subversive, can be very uncomfortable. But, if you want good government, any government surely would rather be doing it on the basis of better evidence than on the basis of worse, biased evidence. I think the academic research funded by the ESRC in the British case enables us to hold governments to account, and to provide governments with the evidence that will help them to make more sensible decisions that might actually work. It is the independence and the rigour of the data that is absolutely crucial.

And I should emphasise that Britain is very lucky to have the ESRC. When I talk to my international colleagues, they often say they have much greater difficulty. Britain is seen as a world leader in public funding of independent research.

Q

Social science provides the data to make sensible policy decisions. But isn't all of that sociology work completely pointless if, in the end, we do all the analysis and we inform policy-makers, but the issues remain?

Anthony Heath

We shouldn't expect too much of social science. I think one of the problems is that there is a long history in social science, going back to Marx and before, of tackling very big issues. That is important. But then, perhaps, as a result – and this is most obvious with Marxism – the political programme is almost utopian and unrealistic. One of the

[12] *Future Identities. Changing identities in the UK: the next 10 years* (2013). www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/identity/13-523-future-identities-changing-identities-report.pdf

[13] Anthony Heath, Alice Sullivan, Vikki Boliver & Anna Zimdars, 'Education under New Labour, 1997-2010', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 29 (2013), 227-247.

things social science can do is tell us the limits of, if you like, social reform. It's quite important that we learn a bit of humility about what we cannot do, as well as what we can do.

I don't think that I am too disappointed that we have not overcome class inequality or social inequality generally, because I never thought that the kinds of tools that government has at its disposal could ever really do more than make a difference at the margin. I think educational inequalities, which is where I first worked with Chelly Halsey, are a pretty good example. It is just a fact of life that middle-class parents are going to try hard for their children, whatever the educational system. You can reform the educational system and the middle-class parents will quickly adapt – just like accountants adapt to the latest tax regulations. Middle-class parents will adapt to the latest educational reforms, and they still try to do well for their children, so middle-class parents' children still get better qualifications. Yet, we would not want to live in a world where we stopped middle-class parents from doing the best for their children. That is also a strength of our society. We just want everyone to be doing the best for their children and to have the skills so they can put it into practice.

I don't think I would see it as a problem for social science that we have not achieved utopia today. It would be nice to make a difference – and I think there are some issues where I think we can say, 'Yes, there is evidence that this is a problem, and furthermore, there is evidence that we can ameliorate the problem if we do the following things.' I think that is helpful. For example, with Christopher McCrudden we did work evaluating the affirmative action programme in Northern Ireland.[14] Northern Ireland's problems go much, much further than just ensuring fair employment. But we were able to evaluate a programme and show that it had been successful and it played a small but probably important role in helping overcome the Troubles. Although there are still tensions in Northern Ireland, we were able to show that at least one element of the package that had been put in place, back in the 1990s as part of the Good Friday Agreement, had been successful. So, if social science can make contributions of that sort, even if they are marginal, I think that is something to be proud of.

Q

What did election to the Fellowship of the British Academy mean to you?

Anthony Heath

Election to the British Academy is a wonderful accolade for anybody. It was completely unexpected. So, yes, I was absolutely delighted, very honoured.

I was also a little bit critical. I thought at the time the British Academy ought to do more work in promoting the discipline, in organising academic events – should be more proactive. I have been delighted that the Academy has been doing that. I think I would probably be even more delighted to become a Fellow now, because the Academy is punching its weight much more than it did when I was elected 20 years ago.

Q

Has the British Academy been useful to you?

Anthony Heath

It certainly has been. The British Academy has been very generous to me, partly because I try to put into practice the things I preach. Thinking that the Academy ought to be a bit more proactive, I put in bids to run symposia, and to have the proceedings published. The Academy has been very generous in supporting my conferences and then publishing the work.[15] These have often been interdisciplinary conferences, so in the course of them, I have worked with other scholars from completely different branches of the Academy. I organised one conference with Christopher McCrudden who is a leading human rights lawyer, and that was a conference on affirmative action, a topic on which he is a much greater expert than I am.[16] That kind of interdisciplinary work, bringing together law and social science, and actually economists and political scientists as well in this case, was of great intellectual benefit. Because the British Academy was able to fund these events, and because it likes to fund interdisciplinary work, it encourages you to go out and talk to people like Christopher McCrudden. Indeed, I organised another one on 'Educational Standards' with Harvey Goldstein,[17] who is one of our leading educational statisticians; that probably wouldn't have happened without the Academy.[18] So that interdisciplinary collaboration – in all these instances working on conferences followed by publications – has been a great asset to me, and I have been very glad to have been given the opportunities to do this kind of work.

[14] Christopher McCrudden, Robert Ford & A.F. Heath, 'Legal regulation of affirmative action in Northern Ireland: an empirical assessment', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 24 (2004), 363-415; Raya Muttarak, Heather Hamill, Anthony Heath & Christopher McCrudden (2013) 'Does affirmative action work? Evidence from the operation of fair employment legislation in Northern Ireland', *Sociology*, 47:3 (2013), 560-79. Christopher McCrudden was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2008.

[15] For example: Anthony F. Heath, Richard Breen & Christopher T. Whelan (eds), *Ireland North and South: Perspectives from Social Science* (Proceedings of the British Academy 98, 1999); Anthony F. Heath & Sin Yi Cheung (eds), *Unequal Chances: Ethnic Minorities in Western Labour Markets* (Proceedings of the British Academy 137, 2007); Anthony F. Heath & Roger Jeffery (eds), *Diversity and Change in Modern India: Economic, Social and Political Approaches* (Proceedings of the British Academy 159, 2010). Heath & Brinbaum (eds), *Unequal Attainments: Ethnic Educational Inequalities in Ten Western Countries* (Proceedings of the British Academy 196, in press).

[16] The conference on 'Affirmative Action in the Labour Market: International Perspectives' was held at the British Academy in November 2009.

[17] Professor Harvey Goldstein was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1996.

[18] Harvey Goldstein & Anthony Heath (eds), *Educational Standards* (Proceedings of the British Academy 102, 2000).

Peter Hennessy

Lord Peter Hennessy of Nympsfield FBA is Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History at Queen Mary, University of London. A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/hennessy

Q

What was the initial spark that first made you want to work in and study history, and particularly history of government?

Peter Hennessy

I can date my surging interest in history to Christmas 1958 when my sister Kathleen, who was indeed a history teacher, bought me R.J. Unstead's *Looking at History* as a Christmas present. I thought that was fabulous. I think I was pretty well attuned – the grey cells were lined up before that – but that is the moment I can date it to, because I still have it. I read it to my grandsons. It was a combination of not a word being wasted in terms of explanation and context, and beautiful diagrams. Monasteries: the monastic bit really grabbed me as a Catholic boy. In fact, I wanted to be a monk – until puberty, which soon took care of that. So I think I can date it to 1958.

But I became a historian by trade by accident. After university, I fell into journalism, which I did for 20 years – and had a great time. But I always had a yen for the archive. The 30-year rule documents, the classified state papers, were released every 1 January, and the hacks would all go down in late December to read them. I did that for *The Times*. I loved doing that. When I came to write books, on Whitehall and government, in fact it was an accumulation of the journalistic notebooks really. I also wanted the paper trail, and because I am a nerd, I also had to put footnotes in. So when I decided in my early to mid-forties that it would be nice to get an academic life before the grey cells deteriorated, I had sufficient books, with footnotes – because of 'nerdery' – to give me the chance of getting a job. So it was all a happy chapter of accidents.

Q

What are the differences between being a journalist commentator and an academic?

Peter Hennessy

They come at the same thing from different angles. In journalism, you would try to penetrate a Cabinet Committee or two – in the days when it was difficult to see what they were really up to, as opposed to what they were saying they were up to. The use of history came in there, because you knew how the system of government worked from those old 30-year-old files – the Cabinet Committee structure, the way Number 10 related to the other departments, and so on. So all of that helped. The thrill of the chase as a journalist was hourly sometimes, whereas the thrill of the chase for a scholar is a bit more measured than that, but it is the same instinct: the curiosity to find out.

There are two things that link it all. One is a passion for gossip. I would define contemporary British history as gossip with footnotes, to be honest. The other is to belong to the Max Bygraves school of history: 'I wanna tell you a story.' So when you have all of this stuff – some of it may be very arcane (Cabinet Committee minutes are not the stuff most people throb on) – the desire to convert it into a story that will travel to a wider readership, and help explain how the government behind the scenes works, not the froth but the heavy duty stuff, was quite a compulsion.[1] I wouldn't say that it amounted to a mission statement, because that would make me sound like a management consultant – which wouldn't do. But it's a pretty strong compulsion nonetheless.

It's all linked by the key to everything: Einstein's notion of 'Never lose a holy curiosity' – that's what he said in pretty well the last interview he gave in 1955. We exist to help take care of the curiosity of the species. It's rather a grand way of putting it. But if you've had the fires of curiosity lit inside your own set of grey cells – by teachers, family or circumstance, happenstance, whatever – it's a kind of sacred silken duty to pass it on. That's what gets us out of bed on a wet Monday in February. It's what gets *me* out of bed on a wet Monday in February. So, curiosity is the spur and the spark.

Q

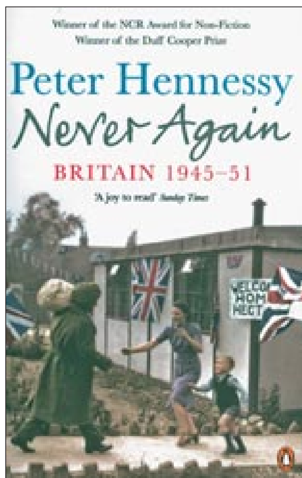
What is the work that you are most proud of?

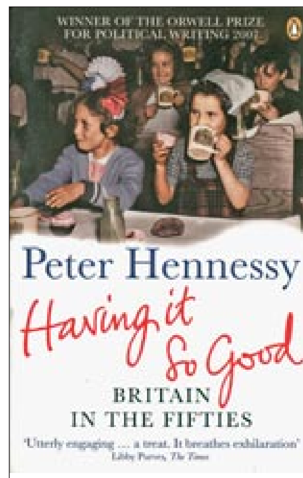
Peter Hennessy

You know, I have no idea. I think it is probably the general histories of post-war, post-1945 Britain. I have written two of a planned five: I have done ones from the '40s up to the '50s,[2] and I am working now on the '60s. This seems to

[1] Peter Hennessy, *Cabinet* (1986); Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (1989).

[2] Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-51* (1992); Peter Hennessy, *Having it So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (2006).





have helped as well as intrigued those who lived through those years – and not just them, because of course students read it. What is very nice is what Melvyn Bragg calls 'generational kinship'. I have discovered that there is an enormous amount of generational kinship in those books. The test of a book like that is to have people who lived through it, including those who were on the inside in government, say, 'Do you know? That is just how I remember it. But heaven's above, I never knew that. How did they keep that secret for so long?' So that, maybe, is the patch of the scholarly terrain that has mattered most. It is impossible to judge the impact that you have. And those that claim to have had impact, you have to take very, very cautiously.

Q

Who do you think you are writing your books for?

Peter Hennessy

That's a really interesting question. When I was on *The Times* in the old days, we were taught to write for the clever sixth former who had bags of curiosity but no prior knowledge. So everything had to be explained within itself. That has never left me. If what I and my colleagues have written goes into the sixth forms and is absorbable, that is terrific. Yet at the same time it must not be oversimplified or over touched up, and you have got to reconcile all that. So the wider audience really does matter.

The other one that is quite an obvious audience is Radio 4 – which is the nation thinking aloud together. If your material is transmittable that way, not necessarily a documentary or Radio 4 discussion, but in nicely polished bits for the *Today* programme – the megaphone of the nation – you are on the way. But it is serendipitous; you have no idea where it is goes. All sorts of unexpected people said, 'I have read this that you have written' and so on. I mean, it is very touching. It goes much wider than the obvious.

The other place where you see it incarnate is the literary festivals, which are everywhere. There is a tremendous appetite for political history and contemporary British history, which is very, very heart-warming. It meets the human desire to make sense and to put a bit of a pattern on your own experience, the times you live through. As well as the individual patterns, there are collective patterns – changing consumption patterns, and all the rest of it. That's the nerve that we touch. And that's a high utility – a very, very high utility, overall. But again, it is almost impossible to know where it goes.

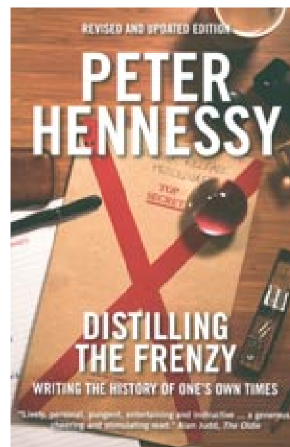
Q

Is it a utility that should be publicly funded?

Peter Hennessy

If somehow there wasn't enough money to keep in being the human and institutional infrastructures that you need to create this serendipitous product, that nation would be scoring a very considerable own goal. Again, the most important bits of it are immeasurable. But, if that is the argument – if that utilitarian argument ever prevailed – we would be a shrivelled, meagre little nation, wouldn't we?

We live in a country to which I am absolutely devoted, but at the moment it tends to look for things to fall out over rather than to fall in about. One of the virtues of arts and humanities is that it does teach people that nothing is quite that simple, that primary-colour approaches are not that wonderful, and that scapegoating other people is not wise. Also, in my particular bit – the history of our country, Europe and the world – to explain just how the outcomes have come out the way they have, and why, is a great advantage in a country that's a bit scratchy with itself.[3] That's not a heroic manifesto, but it's an indispensable one.



I'll tell you what the test is for me as a university teacher. If the students don't do a Masters degree, let alone a PhD, and never do a course again, but if they want, in 20, 25 or 30 years' time, to devote a bit of their best leisure time and surplus money to buying the latest book in that bit of the historical training that most excited them, to read it for pleasure and instruction, our lives have not been in vain. It is the ultimate performance indicator, and it is the only one I believe in.

There is a tremendous appetite for contemporary British history. It meets the human desire to make sense and to put a bit of a pattern on your own experience, the times you live through.

[3] Peter Hennessy, *Distilling the Frenzy: Writing the History of One's Own Times* (2012, revised edn 2013).

Q

How are the humanities and social sciences of value to policy-makers?

Peter Hennessy

The wide answer to your question is to be found, I think, in John Buchan's memoirs – John Buchan of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. In there, there is this sentence which intrigues me and inspires me to some extent: 'In the cycle in which we travel we can only see a fraction of the curve.' A considerable part of the curve goes back centuries. It applies to us as individual human beings, and it certainly applies to those in authority. If those in authority do not take careful note of how we got to where we are, they are flying blind, they are flying without radar. I'm not a 'history repeats itself' man. I'm a Mark Twain man. Mark Twain said, 'History doesn't repeat itself but sometimes it rhymes.' That is of enormous value to policy-makers. Those who say that it is all in the past, and the past is only an object lesson in how not to do it, need help. They need arts and the humanities more than anybody else.

In fact, I don't split off arts and humanities from sciences at all. As a historian, unless you have a sense of the Carl Sagan/Martin Rees territory – the cosmos, how we got here from various explosions of stellar ash – you have no idea, no conception of the passage of human history. I never separate off the sciences. That's why Einstein is the link with all of us. It's the curiosity that takes different forms in different people. But if you have uncurious people in authority, you are in trouble in a society.

Having said all that, you have got to make it as easily absorbable as possible. Now that might sound patronising – I do not mean it to – but you have to write it in such a way that it tingles a bit in the old curiosity, and goes into the hippocampus – the memory bit of the brain. Those in authority are very busy people. They are hugely overburdened and overladen. I remember Jim Callaghan saying to me once – he was one of the three post-war prime ministers who had never been to university (the others were Churchill and John Major) – 'When you go in to Number 10' – and I think he also meant big departments of state – 'you don't get much time at all really. And unless you have got some accumulated reading, some intellectual baggage, you're in trouble'. The real collective product that academics put out is of maximum value not just when would-be permanent secretaries or cabinet ministers are students, but in their earlier professional formations when they can accumulate it. A lot of them are not going to have much time to read more than one side of A4 when they are in power. So you need to give them as rich a compost as you possibly can, against which they can set things for the purposes of context. Now, this is all very difficult to measure. But like all the most important things in life, it is beyond metrics.

Election night, 6 May 2010.

The collective product that academics put out is of maximum value when would-be permanent secretaries and ministers are in their earlier professional formations, when they can accumulate it. A lot of them are not going to have time to read more than one side of A4 when they are in power.

Q

Can you provide an example of how your own work has helped decision-makers?

Peter Hennessy

I suppose if you pin me down and ask if I had helped a bit, I can give you one example because it is public. It was in the run-up to the 2010 election. There was a feeling that there might be a hung result – the polls suggested there might be. (I did not think there was going to be, because I am a terrible forecaster.) We had a conference on transitions at the Ditchley Foundation, with people from Canada, the United States and elsewhere – from places that had done transitions, and places that have proportional representation, where they have to do brokerage politics before they can form an administration. Out of that came a desire to write down the constitution on what the Queen does and does not do in circumstances of a hung parliament. I can tell you this because the Cabinet Secretary of the day made it public to a Commons select committee. In mid-February 2010, over a 90-minute sandwich lunch in the Cabinet Office – which is the way the Brits do their constitution, eccentrically you might think – we worked out what the constitution was on hung parliaments, and the Queen's prerogative to appoint a prime minister, and all that. We agreed a draft, which then went public to a select committee, in time for the 2010 election, where to my surprise it turned out to be pivotal – well, the parliamentary arithmetic was pivotal.

I think five or six of us outside scholars – lawyers, historians, public policy people – together with the Whitehall people, the Palace, and the Cabinet Office – had come to this written version of what was laying around in fragments of past practice and precedent. We had put it all down on a bit of paper. Those of us that had to go on the television to be the impersonators of the British constitution (the Queen cannot go on telly, you see),[4] first

[4] For example, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCufiTe-p4o

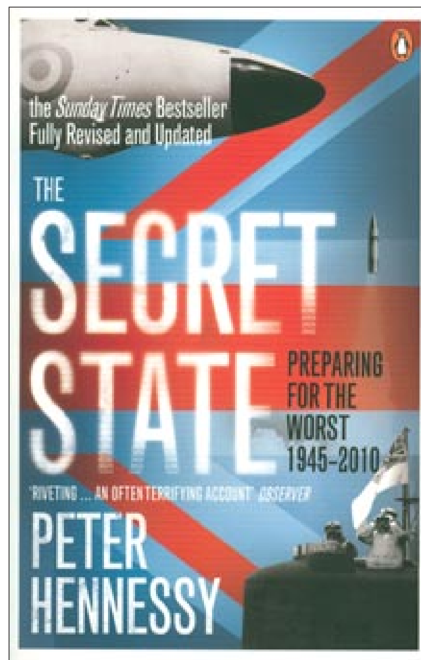
for the exit poll and then, it turned out, for a further five days, we would have been stuffed without that bit of paper. Politicians are exhausted. They are desperate. They either want to cling on to power or they want their one chance of power in their age-group to come to them. And they are prone to say very silly things about the British constitution, which slips though their fingers like mercury. So having that bit of paper, which the scholars had helped formulate, in the television and radio studios turned out to be absolutely critical. So that's an example of where tremendously nerdy bits of scholarship – you don't get the hosannas of a grateful nation for working on the British constitution, I can tell you – on that occasion rather mattered.

Q

Can you talk about your book *The Secret State*?[5]

Peter Hennessy

One very important aspect of the contemporary historian's craft is catch-up history. Those of us who are children of the Cold War – children of the uranium age, the first generation to grow up in the shadow of the mushroom cloud, my age group – knew very well that the state had to be prepared for the worst, and it had to go to the abyss in terms of thinking about what the Third World War might mean and also the deterrence mechanisms you needed to prevent it. The state had to consider, if it did happen, how it would continue in some form – bunkers where the ministerial decision-takers would go – and all the rest of it, and the nuclear release drills. Now all of this, for obvious reasons, was immensely highly classified during the Cold War, and the bulk of it could not be released. The intelligence perceptions, analyses and assessments that fed into it could not be released under the normal 30 year cut-off.



So after the Cold War was over, and when we had an immensely sympathetic minister in William Waldegrave – the Minister for Open Government in the Cabinet Office, a scholar himself – we had what we christened the Waldegrave initiative, where he set up a process of re-reviewing these documents that had been retained longer than 30 years. Within six years, just under 100,000 files had come out, some of a sensitivity that took my breath away. That process has continued. It was a new currency with which contemporary British historians could trade. That is what documents are really: currency. It enabled us to fill in these huge gaps in our knowledge of the state – the secret state. Also, the makers of the post-9/11 secret state – because we have a career civil service thank heavens, which is not politicised – had been formed in the Cold War. So it was the same set of people – their younger versions – that drew the lessons from the Cold War: protective mechanisms that we needed for the era of terrorism of the kind that we have been living through.

All of this was fascinating, and it still happens. We are still getting, from time to time, breathtaking cataracts of documents of a sensitivity that you would not believe. For example, in the early part of 2013, we had the first batch from the hottest set of files the Cabinet Secretary ever had. Being Whitehall, they call it the Cabinet Secretary's 'Miscellaneous Papers'. But this is the stuff that burns through the cardboard, and was so hot it could not be left in the regular files. We had a tranche of it from the late '30s up to 1951. A lot of it is intelligence-related of course, and material dealing with the Abdication. But also we had the files of what is known as PUSD – the Permanent Under Secretary's Department, which is the Foreign Office euphemism for the bit of the Foreign Office that deals with the Secret Intelligence Service. Some of it I did not expect ever to see because of its sensitivity, and yet it is there.

So this is relatively easy to convert into books that go to a wider audience, because people get excited by that. There is more fantasy per square inch about the British intelligence world than anything except the British Royal Family. So there is always an immense market for that. But the impulse for *The Secret State* for me was catch-up history, plus giving the people who had served the King and the Queen with immense distinction in intense secrecy – they couldn't even talk about it at home – their place in the historical sun, once it was safe to do so. We are cryogenicists, because those files are frozen history, and what we have to do is warm them up a bit so they begin to twitch, and then the diaphragm starts heaving and they talk to you and you can talk back. To make that work, you have to have a pretty good feel and knowledge for the formation of the people who wrote those files and the context in which they wrote them. To bring all of this to the collective memory of the nation, we put it together in such a form that it gets up and rises, and walks to the wider audience.

The Cold War slice is particularly fascinating to me because of being a child of the uranium age.

Q

It's John Le Carré territory.

Peter Hennessy

His word power outguns mine by a factor of heaven knows what!

[5] Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (2002); reissued as *The Secret State: Preparing for the Worst 1945-2010* (2010).

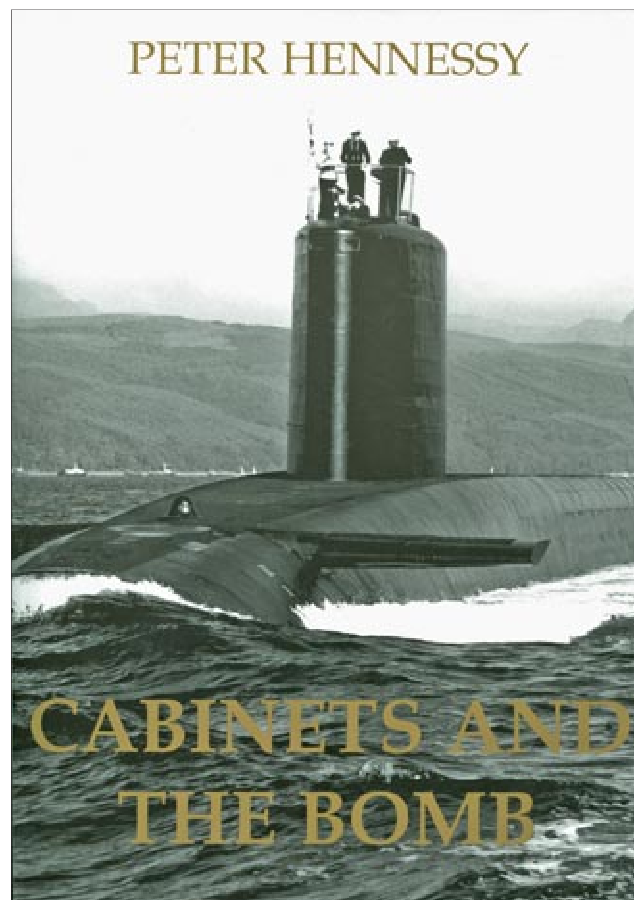
Q
What are the comparisons between what the government had to do behind the scenes then and what it has had to do post 9/11?

Peter Hennessy
The intelligence services had no legal position. They were creations of the royal prerogative. Until 1989, with the Security Service Act, MI5 had its own statute. The Secret Intelligence Service did not even exist officially in peacetime until it was officially outed in 1992 during the Major government. And there was not a whisper of its files; if you did find something, it was in other departments' documents by accident. The cover story in Gloucestershire, when I grew up, about the Government Communications Headquarters was that it made crystal sets, so we had a long way to go to catch up. But the intelligence world has been increasingly subject to statute. When I was a young man on *The Times*, MI5 and MI6 shared one lawyer. When he came in to see the editor, William Rees-Mogg, the word would go round the newsroom, 'The ghost has come to see William' – all very dramatic. Now, however, there are lots of lawyers and all that world has changed.

The comparisons between the Cold War secret state and the post-9/11 one are interesting. The first big one is this. In the intelligence world, they battle all the time with secrets and mysteries. During the Cold War, secrets were things you could get, with a lot of effort – order of battle, or the performance of a particular piece of military equipment. Mysteries were the intentions of the Soviet politburo – very hard to get, even if you had had human agents close in; certainly not something you could get by technical means. In the post-9/11 world, there is no mystery about the intentions of al-Qaeda and its associates. The mysteries/secrets thing has been reversed. So the whole of British intelligence has had to adapt to that.

The other factor that came strongly out of the Cold War and World War II intelligence picture, once we had the files (indeed before that, because people had talked about it), was the great British advantage in the intelligence world of separating the providers of intelligence and the producers of the intelligence picture on the basis of that product, from those who decide what to do when given that material. Some would say the Iraq experience showed that this absolutely crucial distinction – which was developed in World War II and continued right through the Cold War – had temporarily broken down, and there have been great efforts to restore it since. In that debate about Iraq and intelligence, however, it was crucial to know what the governing norms were – not just the statutes – of the divisions of labour within the secret world. You can do that only by having a pretty good sense of the nature of intelligence provision and what was done with it in the past from 1939 onwards. I really think that had high utility.

Another example from the Cold War. As a country, we get very neuralgic about nuclear weapons. Of all the nuclear weapons-possessing states, we have mini-breakdowns when it is a question of carrying on or not, or upgrading a system. There is a lot of paper trail in the National Archives, particularly now the Cold War is over, of how previous generations took those decisions and what the factors were, and the vectors of forces that played on them. Here at the British Academy, we had a fabulous seminar one evening, with senior politicians who had taken decisions, the civil servants who had advised them, the scientists who had provided the briefings on what was possible and what wasn't, as well as the scholars. We put it together as a non-partisan contribution: it was not advocating stopping, carrying on, or anything else. We put it together as a book called *Cabinets and the Bomb* – the primary material, with commentary and the fruits of the seminar – to feed in some good historical material to the continuing debate.[6] I think that has a high utility because, when they sit there in those Cabinet Committee rooms, there are the wraiths of the past in the room saying, 'My heavens, you are going through the same agonies as we did.' Senior officials and ministers always have to be reminded that they are not alone in the room. There are these ghosts saying, 'Here we go again. Rather you than me.' We are the providers of the words of the wraiths.



This documentary history of Britain's nuclear deterrent was published by the British Academy in 2007.

[6] The 'Cabinets and the Bomb' workshop was held at the British Academy in March 2007. Peter Hennessy's documentary reader, *Cabinets and the Bomb*, was published in November 2007. www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/cabinets_and_bomb.cfm

Q

Is such a role affected by your entering the House of Lords?

Peter Hennessy

There is a problem for me now in the nuclear debate because, since going into the House of Lords, I have had to say what my own views are about nuclear weapons – whether we should carry on or not. If you take a public job, which is what a cross-bench peerage is, you cannot mumble and you cannot dissemble. If you have views, you have to explain them. I hope I am as detached as I still can be, but you cannot do that if you have a role in public life. You cannot just stand back and say, 'No advocacy either way.'

Explanation is critical. That is really what it all comes down to. Unless you have people whose trade is explanation on the basis of evidence, you really have diminished the supply of material and knowledge that decision-takers need before they go over the threshold and make the final outcome.

Q

Is it also the function of the historian to inform more widely?

Peter Hennessy

If, in an open society and democracy, the public is denied the chance of casting an informed vote, that's an own goal of mammoth proportions.

The political parties are indispensable, but they operate by mobilising prejudice more successfully than the competition. They are indispensible and many of them are really wonderful people. But the careful use of evidence is not at the top of their hierarchy of needs. So you have to have somebody to say, 'Wait a minute. It's not that simple'; or 'We've been here before. Just think a minute.' What disturbs politicians' atoms is knocking the competition for six; whereas, if anything disturbs the scholars' atoms, it is the quiet rustle of an archive.

Q

What did election to the Fellowship of the British Academy mean to you?

Peter Hennessy

Election to the British Academy was wonderful, because it was a surprise. It is all the sweeter if you cannot apply for it and you do not know it is coming. It's one of the great joys in life. One must not be obsessed with the approval of one's peers, but if the peers think you are a bit of alright, a little glow comes to brighten one's world, to put it mildly. Also, they are great company. Some of the Fellows of the British Academy are the most terrific purveyors of gossip – sometimes it reaches weapons-grade gossip. They are great company. You join a Fellowship in every sense.

The British Academy is crucial because it's the gold standard. If you're asked to be a Fellow of the British Academy, you swoon. You can't say that about many invitations in life, can you? Also, it's a setter of tone and pitch, right across the whole set of disciplines, because of the extra work it does – not just the creation of Fellows.

Hazel Genn

Dame Hazel Genn QC FBA is Dean and Professor of Socio-Legal Studies at University College London. A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/genn

Q
Originally you studied sociology. What made you want to study that?

Hazel Genn
When I was in my teenage years, I thought I wanted to be a social worker. This probably links later on to my interest in law. I was always quite interested in the concept of justice, and in vulnerable people. At university I did sociology and social anthropology, and also what was called social administration in those days, which was supposed to fit you for social work. I became interested in empirical social science – in how society works, how it is held together.

Q
What did you gain through that experience?

Hazel Genn
The most practical thing that I gained from studying sociology was learning social science research methods. In those days sociology was heavily quantitative, so I was compelled to do a course in statistics and learned how to do quantitative social science. Throughout my career, I think that has been fantastically useful. It has made it possible for me to combine the rigorous skill of a quantitative social scientist with that of a traditional lawyer. In this country that is an unusual combination.

Q
How does that contribute to the study of law?

Hazel Genn
Because you need to know how the law works.

What most lawyers are interested in is doctrine. What does the law say? Why has a judge interpreted something in a certain way, and is he right in his interpretation or approach? Academic lawyers spend a huge amount of time picking over legal cases. I can do that, and when I teach black-letter law, that is what I do.

But that is not what I am most interested in. I am interested in how the law *works*. Does the law do what it is supposed to do? Can people use it in the way we want them to be able to use it? How does the law support social order? How does the law support economic activity, economic development? Might it be that – this is one of my catchphrases – the law and the justice system are as important to our nation's health, as our hospitals? Unless the law works, unless we can maintain order, unless you have the rule of law, nothing else works.

That may just be the sound of the lawyer saying that the law is more important than everything else. But it is as important as many other things that people would recognise more immediately as being important to their well-being.

Q
How does an efficient, fair justice system enhance people's well-being?

Hazel Genn
Let me put it the other way around. What happens if you don't have an efficient and fair and well-operating justice system? What does its absence mean for any society? Our commerce operates on the basis of contracts, of agreements, which people abide by. Somebody who enters into a contract, who enters into some kind of trading arrangement, knows that if the person on the other side does not comply with the terms of the agreement, they can force them to do so, or they can get compensation through the courts. What stands behind that kind of activity is a well-functioning justice system.

What does a well-functioning justice system need? You need judges and lawyers who have the technical legal skills for them to know what the law is and to apply it properly. You have laws that are known and that are published, and that people are required to abide by – including the state. Government doesn't like it very much when judges overturn decisions, or tell it to go back and decide again. But everybody – citizens, businesses, the state – are all bound by laws that we know. Where there is a disagreement, or where there is a problem because your rights have been infringed, you can argue your case before a judge in court, where you know the judges aren't corrupt and where you can trust them to make a decision according to the published law. Actually, it is a huge luxury to have that kind of order in your system. Many other societies do not.

Q
How far does the academic study of the law contribute to its healthy functioning?

Hazel Genn
The academic study of law contributes a great deal. We live in a common law system where a lot of our law does not come directly from Parliament. Instead it is found in the decisions of judges in individual cases in the courts. What academics do is to put some order onto that. They provide frameworks for understanding how the law is developing. And they criticise what judges say in courts, or demonstrate where there are inconsistencies in reasoning – which then influences the way judges think and decide in the future. So the academic study of legal doctrine influences the legal decision-makers.

The empirical study of how the law operates – the kind of work that I do – has a huge influence on policy-makers who are devising policies to achieve certain kinds of objectives which have legal implications. If you can demonstrate that the law is not actually delivering the outcomes that are wanted, or that doing it a different way might be better, you can influence the making of policy. We have a massive amount of regulation. Many lawyers are involved in looking at how regulation operates on the ground and can provide information that helps policy-makers to review the kinds of work that they are doing. Empirical legal scholars can shed light first of all on how certain legal relationships operate in practice, and then on how regulation designed to influence behaviour or relationships operates in practice.

The judiciary depend on academic writing. It helps them to think through how the law is developing in practice.

Q
What is the relationship between those who practise law and those who study law academically?

Hazel Genn
Some judges get irritated with academics for picking over their decisions and saying that they are not terribly well reasoned. There is a good-natured tension sometimes between the judiciary and academics. But actually, the judiciary depend quite heavily on academic writing, for them to understand better certain areas of law. It also helps them to think through how the law is developing in practice.

The practitioners depend very heavily on academic lawyers, not just to write the heavy-duty academic analysis of doctrine, but also to explain. A lot of legal academics actually write practitioner texts. Some people think this is a simplification of the law. It's not; it's a distillation of the essential legal principles that practitioners need to have at their fingertips in order to advise clients and argue cases in courts.

So, academic lawyers provide quite sophisticated analyses of the development of doctrine, which influences judiciary and high-level practice. But they also provide the very solid material that practitioners have on their bookshelves, which they need to consult for every day practice to look up an area of law they don't know very well.

Q
You also study the issue of access to justice.

Hazel Genn
Access to justice is one of the things I have spent most of my time on. We say that the law binds everybody. Everyone is equal before the law, everybody should have equal access to the justice system. I have always had this interest in justice and injustice, and the difficulties for vulnerable people in modern societies. So, my studies have focused a lot on how ordinary citizens, who ostensibly have rights, can make those rights effective by having access to the courts. I really do believe that the courts are operating at their best when they are enabling people who are not powerful, people who have weaker voices in society, to become powerful, by bringing a more powerful person – or the state – to account.

When that works well – and it doesn't always work well – I think that is a very compelling argument for having a well-functioning justice system. Of course, at the moment, we are in difficult times financially, where money is very constrained, and all government departments – including the Ministry of Justice – are being asked to cut costs. One area where the Ministry has cut costs is legal aid. I think that legal aid is very important if we say that the operation of the courts constitutes the rule of law in action. And there is no point in living in a society governed by the rule of law, if weak, powerless citizens can't get access to that law to vindicate the rights that we give them. Where you have a situation where people don't have the knowledge of the law, don't have the skills that they need to be able to advocate for themselves, and cannot afford to pay for an advocate, then legal aid is very important – not just for that individual, but for society to be doing its job and for the justice system to be operating effectively.

I think we are moving into a time where people involved in civil justice problems are simply not going to be able to get legal aid to pay for advocacy, for representation. And the fantastic network of organisations we have – Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centres, which have been a model for many other countries around the world – is now going to struggle because of the loss of legal aid. I do worry about how people are going to have access to the courts and tribunals in the future in order to be able to vindicate their rights.

Q
Can you talk about the research work you have done on access to justice?

Hazel Genn
In the late 1990s I did a study called *Paths to Justice*. I did two national surveys, one in England and Wales, and one in Scotland (because Scotland has a different legal system).[1]

[1] Hazel Genn, *Paths to Justice: What People Do and Think About Going to Law* (1999); Hazel Genn & Alan Paterson, *Paths to Justice Scotland: What Scottish People Do and Think About Going to Law* (2001).

These were surveys of citizens, asking them about the kinds of disputes and difficulties that they had been involved in that had a legal aspect, then trying to understand how people grappled with them. It was about people's need for the courts and the legal system: whether people wanted access to justice and if they did, how they went about getting it. What was ground-breaking about that piece of work was that it started not from the point of view of people already in the legal system. It started at ground level. What kind of problems do people have for which there is a legal solution? How often do they have them? What do they do about them when they are in that situation? Do they do nothing, do they just lump it, do they get help, do they resolve it? Also, very importantly, what is the broader effect on their lives of being involved in one of these kinds of disputes or problems that remains unresolved?

What was important about those surveys was that they were nationally representative. So they provided heavy-duty quantitative data about the prevalence of these kinds of disputes. We could talk about how many people do this, how many people do that, and what happens with them. That was interesting and useful. And I think it was quite a wake-up call to the Lord Chancellor's Department at that time, about the kind of unmet need for information, assistance and help in resolving these kinds of problems.

For me, the thing that came out of it which I thought was really very important was the impact that unresolved legal problems can have on people's health, on their social relationships, on family relationships: how having a legal problem that you cannot solve can have a kind of cascade effect, so that everything starts falling to pieces. I don't think that anyone had described that before. People who advise citizens with problems have a sense that they often have clusters of problems, but I don't think that anyone had documented it before. Demonstrating the clustering of problems was very important.

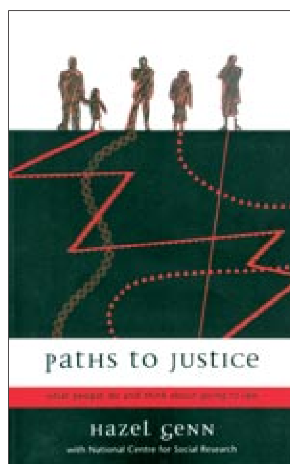
What came out of the study was how having a legal problem that you can't solve can have a kind of cascade effect, so that everything starts falling to pieces.

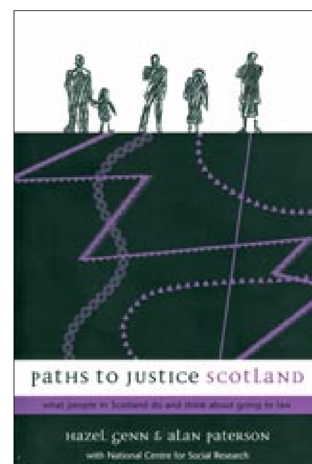
I do believe – in fact, the policy people have told me that it is true – that at the time of that study, it was almost a kind of paradigm-shifting study for the policy-makers. It was published in 1999. The Labour Government had recently been elected, and they had initiated a modernising justice programme. And the *Paths to Justice* study flipped their thinking. Instead of focusing on what judges, lawyers and courts were doing, it flipped government thinking to ask: 'Hang on, what is it that people want? What do the consumers or potential consumers of the legal system want from it?' What policy advisers have said to me is that it changed the way that they thought about what they were doing, and strategically it has made them think that the justice system provides a service for society. It just changed the way the government thought about things.

It also gave them a methodology for assessing what kinds of legal needs that people have, and a way of understanding it. It also helped them to think about how to focus legal aid more on particular areas of need – especially those kinds of legal problems that are likely to trigger the kinds of cascades of disasters that happen afterwards.

I do think it was relevant for policy-makers at that particular time. It has been influential in policy terms, but also the approach has been copied in many other jurisdictions. *Paths to Justice*-type studies have been done all over the world.

I think that that is the most important piece of work that I have done.





Q

It must have been very satisfying too.

Hazel Genn

I think *Paths to Justice* was one of the most difficult but one of the most satisfying pieces of work I've done. The satisfaction partly comes from the fact that it was very interesting to do. I am just a very inquisitive person; I love knowing how people do things. I spent a lot of time in the early developmental stage of that study, sitting in people's homes interviewing them. Whenever I do research, it is absolutely critical for me that I am involved in the data collection. In order to understand, analyse and write up the results, I have to have had the experience of sitting there, talking to people about their experiences.

The other satisfying thing for me as a social scientist was the combination of data collection techniques. I have always said that if you are doing empirical social science, the best approach is to have a combination of methodologies, because you can answer different kinds of questions. I have always described *Paths to Justice* as a 'quant-sandwich'. I started with qualitative work. We put together different focus groups – members of the public, people who advised in Citizens Advice Bureaux, lawyers – just talking round the table about the kinds of everyday legal problems that people have. We wanted to get a sense of the vocabulary that people used and a feel for how they talked about it. So we started with quite a long period of qualitative work, just talking to people, developing open-ended questionnaires to try to get the questions right.

Then we constructed a rigorous, representative, face-to-face national survey of England and Wales, and then another one in Scotland. These surveys produced a huge amount of data. Then we identified particular kinds of cases, and re-interviewed respondents – carrying out really long, in-depth, qualitative interviews with people who had had particular kinds of experiences. So you could present the quantitative data to answer 'how much and how many' questions, and undertake some reasonably sophisticated analysis. But we were also able to present the stories about how legal disputes were handled, the kinds of paths people took to try and resolve problems, and the thought processes people went through. We could also look at the impact of certain kinds of problems on people's lives. So you could put flesh on the bones of the statistics.

Q

In late 2012, you gave a speech about the decline in the access to civil courts. And you said that we don't know what the impact of that will be.[2]

Hazel Genn

If we no longer have cases being decided on their merits, we give people rights but we no longer make it possible for them to vindicate their rights. What will the long-term impact of that be on society? I talked a bit about the privatisation of justice, because the government at the moment is trying to divert cases away from public courts into private compromise, saying 'Don't stand on your rights, have a reasonable conversation and compromise your rights.' That might be okay in certain circumstances. But what will happen if we don't have cases going to court, if the courts start to crumble, if there is nowhere you can go?

The point I made at the end of the speech is that the end of blood feuds and self-help in the 12th century was around the same time as you had the development of the King's Courts – the Common Law courts. I argued that, if people can't get access to the courts, if they can't get the advice they need or advocacy, and they can't get access to public, peaceful systems for dispute resolution, what do they do? Send round the boys? I recently talked about this to a meeting of Australian judiciary and practitioners,[3] and ended with a rather compelling image from *Pulp Fiction*, of the guys coming in to settle a dispute with their guns.

There is an empirical question as to whether, when you don't have access to public forums for dispute resolution, there is a greater resort to self-help. There are examples of this. Banks don't bother to go to court when they have debtors; now they hand it over to debt collection agencies, who phone people up all night long and harass them until they are run ragged. That's not going through the proper processes; that is self-help. I would be interested to know how many people are resorting to non-peaceful self-help.

Q

What is happening to the civil courts?

Hazel Genn

They are short of resources and many are being closed down. There is a problem because when the government is short of money, the criminal courts take priority. But the civil courts quietly do their work, also supporting social and economic order.

Most sensible people don't want to be involved in a legal case. Most people don't rush off to lawyers when they are involved in a problem. But when you talk to people, when you interview the population about legal issues, what they will say is that it is good to know that, if you were desperate, if something terrible happened, there is standing behind all of us this justice system which we trust – or mostly trust – to do justice, and we think it would protect us.

In her 2008 Hamlyn Lectures, Hazel Genn criticised what she saw as the downgrading of civil justice in the UK.

If we didn't feel we had that kind of access, I think we would lose something that supports what I call 'the tranquillity of the state' – the fact that we do live in a relatively tranquil state most of the time. Courts have a practical value, but they also have a symbolic value. If ordinary people no longer have access to the courts or tribunals in order to vindicate the rights that they are supposed to have, what will that mean for respect for the law, for our connection with society? I'm not saying it *will* be disastrous. What I am saying is, I am concerned about what the effect will be.

Q

What is the wider contribution that the humanities and social sciences can make to addressing the challenges that face us?

Hazel Genn

I think that social science is helpful in understanding some of the global challenges that face us – about understanding human behaviour better, so that we understand where we want to improve things, what kinds of government strategies will actually help to improve things. But there

[2] 'Why the privatisation of civil justice is a rule of law issue', 36th F.A. Mann Lecture, Lincoln's Inn, 19 November 2012.

[3] H. Genn, 'What is civil justice for? The significant social purpose of the civil justice system', Speech to Australian Bar Association conference, *Improving the route to Judicial Determination*, Bologna, 26 June 2013,

are so many things we don't even know about the world. There is a lot in science we don't know about how the world works, but there is a lot about the social world that we don't understand enough about. There are enormous areas of the law where we have no idea how things operate, we don't know how systems work.

We need to be not just helping the government to solve the challenges that we know about now, but to be thinking forward, about what are the challenges that are coming up. We need to be looking on the horizon, using our skills to understand better not just how things are, but where things are going, and what we are going to need to do to meet the challenges of the future. I think those are absolutely critical skills, and that is a very important contribution that social science and arts and humanities and law make to society.

Q

So government needs to make possible basic research that has longer-term value?

Hazel Genn

If you only concentrate on what gives us an immediate pay-off, it is very short-sighted. The problem with government is that, of course, they are usually thinking in three- to four-year terms. It is the job of fundamental social science research to help with the immediate challenges, but to think beyond. We are the people who are going to still be there, doing the research when this particular lot of politicians have gone and somebody else is coming in. So we seriously need to be doing that forward-thinking.

The government has to fund that forward-thinking. They have got to be thinking longer-term, because this society needs to continue and prosper in the future, and this is the legacy for future generations, and we need to be a part of that. I think that is why government does fund it, because at some level they do understand that. That is why they do continue to fund both basic research and the more instrumental kind of research.

Q

Do academics need to engage more with wider audiences and with policy-makers?

Hazel Genn

I really do believe that academics are understanding much better the need to disseminate what they are doing, the need to address wider audiences. In the past, sometimes academics have spent too much time talking to each other, in very sophisticated ways – which is exclusive. I think that academics are actually taking much more pride in the fact that what they are doing is not only intellectually interesting, is not only pushing forward the boundaries of wider knowledge, but actually has some practical value.

The kind of work that I and many of my colleagues do might arise out of conversations with policy advisors. We might draw them in to help us think through the research questions. And at the end of it, we will be writing publications that are accessible to them, that meet the need that they have to answer very specific questions – as well as being able to address wider, theoretical questions that are of more academic value. I don't see that there is a conflict between that. I have always been a bit bemused by people who feet that it is impossible to have something that is theoretically sophisticated, but which is also of relevance to policy.

Q

How can the Fellowship of the British Academy contribute to the debate you are talking about?

Hazel Genn

In the British Academy you have people who are at the top of their fields. By definition, they have distinguished themselves in terms of the quality of the research they have done, the quality of thought and debate.

The problem with government is that they are usually thinking in three- to four-year terms. It is the job of fundamental social science research to think beyond.

I think that what the Academy's Fellowship can do – what it must do – is to concern itself with the challenges that we face as a society, that we face globally. It has to address itself to those immediate issues, as well as horizon-gazing, thinking forward about what is coming up. People used to talk about providing a solid evidence base, but it actually provides context for political discussions, and even though politicians do not necessarily listen to everything you say, or want to hear everything you say, the fact that you are providing thoughtful, intelligent, well-researched content, that you are putting that content into the debate that is going on, I think is important, and it helps to keep debate focused on the things that are important.

The British Academy comprises people who have done a lot, who know a lot, and have a huge amount to contribute to culture, to policy debate, to science. We face issues about well-being, about ageing, about the economy. The Academy's Fellows are people who have spent their lives researching these issues. They have knowledge, information and insights which will be valuable, and which will help us as a society to move forward in a constructive way. The British Academy has a duty to do that.

Jonathan Bate

Professor Jonathan Bate CBE FBA is Provost, Worcester College, University of Oxford. A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/bate

Q
What was the initial spark that made you want to study literature, and Shakespeare in particular?

Jonathan Bate
It all began at school. I remember the first Shakespeare I did at school was *Othello*; it was at the time of O-Level. The teacher made us listen to a very old gramophone record, and it was absolutely terrible and I didn't understand a word of it. But then I started going to the theatre, and suddenly it clicked. We had a very good drama teacher, and I played the part of Macbeth when I was 16, and that was it. There was something about the language of Shakespeare that just grabbed me. There is nothing like performing it, nothing like doing it. I think I still know the whole of *Macbeth* word-for-word, because I learned the part and you listen to the other parts, and it just enters your skin. Shakespeare was writing for the theatre, he was writing to be performed. And once you see it – or even better, do it – it just comes alive and it stays with you.

Q
So Shakespeare needs to be seen and heard?

Jonathan Bate
The key to getting people interested in Shakespeare is enjoying the language. It is getting the words aloud. The problem with Shakespeare, and indeed other dramatists of his period, and indeed for that matter much literature of the past, is looking at it on the page. The language can seem very alien. The sentence structures can seem very complicated. But when you read it aloud and, above all, when you see it on stage, you see it performed, then the language makes sense. You start enjoying the language. It doesn't matter that you don't understand every word of it.

Q
Your website[1] describes you as 'biographer, broadcaster, critic, Shakespearean'. Which of those labels is the most important to you?

Jonathan Bate
I suppose of all the labels I attach to myself, *Shakespearean* is the most important. The thing about Shakespeare is there are multitudes within him. What is so fascinating about Shakespeare is that he writes in almost every literary genre imaginable, and his plays have inspired so much later great creativity. There are so many great novels, later plays, operas, ballets, films, you name it, inspired by Shakespeare. It's as if what you have in Shakespeare is a kind of concentration of the force of creativity, the force of the imagination. Everything else flows out from that. I have always had very wide interests in my scholarly study.

I am very interested in the classical inheritance of English literature, the way that the renaissance was a great discovery of the cultural glories of ancient Greece and Rome. Shakespeare, of course, was part of that, because he studied the Latin classics at school; they were formative of him. But then I am also fascinated by the process that Shakespeare has been constantly re-invented down the ages on stage, on screen, in different media. So, Shakespeare, for me, is the central point – the centripetal force that brings everything together.

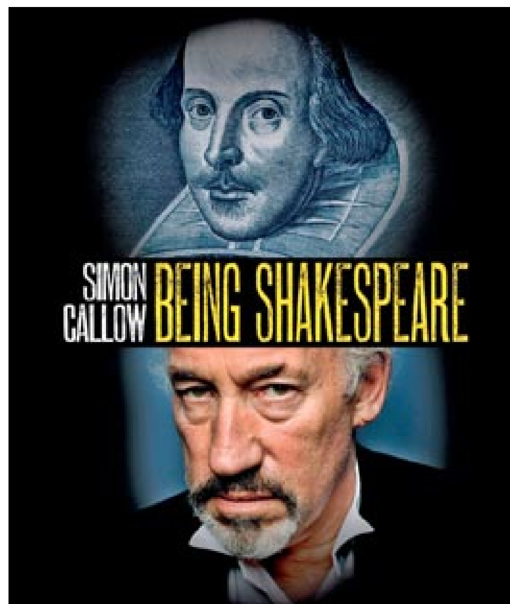
But I have ranged very widely in my work. My PhD thesis was on the Romantic poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, Shelley, and how they were influenced by Shakespeare. Ever since doing that thesis, I have always felt that to be a true *critic*, to understand literature fully, you should not confine yourself within one specialism or one period, because there is a sense that all of literature, and perhaps all of cultural creativity more generally, is a form of dialogue. Writers are always answering back to other writers. So, as a critic, I have often explored those kinds of relationship, those sorts of cultural intersection.

Another thing that I have learned, crucially, from Shakespeare is the need to communicate to a wide audience. Shakespeare was writing in an age where some poets wrote very narrowly-focused poetry for a very specialised audience – maybe for their patron, maybe for their friends. But Shakespeare wrote for everybody. He wrote for the public stage as well as the court. He is the great example of the crossover between high culture and low. I don't like the idea that there is an elite form of literature, and a way of approaching literature that is only for experts. It should be for everybody. So that sense of *broadcasting*, reaching a wide audience, is also something that I think really begins with Shakespeare.

[1] www.jonathanbate.com

In my later writing, I have become increasingly interested in the art of *biography*. Biography, of course, is a form that does have popular appeal but also requires great scholarly skill and dedication. The wonderful thing about writing a biography is that you have simultaneously got to be a scholar, working scrupulously with archival sources, balancing what you read, say, in a writer's diary or in someone's letter, seeing how different people interpret the same events. So you have to be a scholar, you have to do the archival research. But, in telling the story of an interesting person's life, you also have to be, in a sense, a novelist. You have to tell the story. You have to grab the reader. Those arts of writing biography are something that I have become increasingly obsessed with.

In a way, that has been a reaction against one of the main sort of doctrines when I was a student of literature, which was that you shouldn't really think about the writer's life too much. English literary study, really from the 1950s to the 1970s, was dominated by the so-called New Critics, under the influence of the great American poet-critic, T.S. Eliot, but in Britain, especially, the influence of the Cambridge critic F.R. Leavis. The watchword – this is very much how I was first taught to study literature – was to concentrate on the text; only the text counts. The context, and especially the biographical context, was something you shouldn't really look at. There was a sort of stringency, a purity to the idea that all you should do is focus on the text. I have reacted against that now. The fact is, all literary texts, all forms of cultural creativity are produced by people who have their own experiences, their own lives, their own historical, social, cultural context. Exploring the biographical origins of great works of art seems to me an absolutely fascinating task, although you always need to be careful not to try to look for a crude mapping of a writer or creative artist's life onto their work. The imagination is a form of alchemy. Things change. Every writer uses what they have experienced. But the best writers transmute it in such a way that the process of going back from the work to the life is a very delicate and intricate one.



Q
You wrote a biographical play about Shakespeare.

Jonathan Bate
The play that I wrote for Simon Callow, originally called *The Man from Stratford*, and then renamed *Being Shakespeare*, arose precisely out of the problem of writing a biography of Shakespeare. I knew I wanted to write a biography of Shakespeare, and I had a lot of original research for it. But I was struggling to write it in a new way. The problem with orthodox biography – which begins with the birth, goes through the life, and ends with the death – is that in the case of Shakespeare the documentation that we have is really rather boring. We have his baptismal records, his marriage records, the record of his death. We have some records of financial disputes he got involved in. We know, roughly, when his plays were written. But we don't really have a way, in terms of original biographical documentation, to get inside his mind, his imagination.

I wanted to write a kind of intellectual biography of Shakespeare, a biography of his mind. I had lots of material gathered for it, but I couldn't find a structure. Then out of the blue, I had a postcard from the actor Simon Callow, saying that, having had great success with his biographical play about Charles Dickens, he wanted to do something similar for William Shakespeare, and could I write it for him.

So Simon and I got together, and we started hammering out the problem of how to present Shakespeare's life. We realised that my problem, how to do it on the page, and Simon's problem, how to do it on the stage, were the same. By working together, we created a structure that allowed us to solve that problem. It was a really simple discovery, which is that Shakespeare himself told us how to do it. In the great speech 'All the world's a stage' in *As You Like It*, the character of Jaques divides human life into seven ages. I did a lot of research on the idea of the seven ages of man, the idea of life as a play, and it was absolutely perfect. It just opened up so many aspects of Shakespeare's world, Shakespeare's life. So it worked for me in the structure of writing my biography, and it worked for Simon as a piece of theatre.

Q
Why is Shakespeare so important for understanding our own culture?

Jonathan Bate
For me, Shakespeare is both the mid-point and also a living, changing reference point within culture, partly because the amount of other early literature that is studied in schools, and indeed increasingly in universities, is diminishing. People perhaps have the idea that Shakespeare is the father figure, the starting point, the place where we begin. But of course, that isn't the case. Shakespeare built upon a huge achievement in earlier literature: Chaucer came before Shakespeare. He also, in very, very important ways, built on the inheritance of the classics, the inheritance of ancient Rome, ultimately of ancient Greece. Yet, he has been constantly reinvented, revived, had a shaping influence in later cultures. So, he is genuinely a figure who is constantly changing, but he is a figure who, in his work and in the story of the reinvention of his work, enables us to connect the past, the present and the future.

There are aspects of Shakespeare that are now very alien to us, and it is crucial that academic commentary should help to keep those alive.

Q
We can see Shakespeare being performed for ourselves. Why do we need academic commentary on Shakespeare?

Jonathan Bate
Shakespeare is universal, and if he is well-performed, you can get it without the academic commentary. But, at the same time, a deep understanding of a cultural phenomenon from the past needs an understanding of the historical context of the language. There are aspects of Shakespeare that are now very alien to us, and it is crucial that academic commentary should help to keep those alive.

Ben Jonson, who was Shakespeare's friend, rival, fellow dramatist, wrote a wonderful poem as a preface to Shakespeare's collected works, when they were published just after his death. Jonson says two things about Shakespeare. On the one hand he says, 'Thou art not of an age, but for all time' – the idea that Shakespeare's characters, the human dilemmas he presents are valid in every age, every culture. But he also described Shakespeare as 'Soul of the age' – Shakespeare somehow embodying the spirit of a very particular historical moment.

There are many dimensions of Shakespeare's work – whether attitudes towards monarchy, for or against republicanism; or the great crisis of religion, Catholic against Protestantism; or the encounter between European Christianity and the Islamic Ottoman empire, the great confrontation in the Mediterranean at that time. These historical dimensions are things that people today need help with. We need historians, literary scholars, to place the work in their original context. And that can be an incredibly enriching experiencing, as all forms of historical reconstruction can be when done well.

Q
Is it important that Shakespeare is studied because of his role in our national identity?

Jonathan Bate
There is a particular phenomenon with regard to Shakespeare in British cultural life which you could perhaps get to by a famous remark of the great general and politician, the Duke of Marlborough, in the early 18th century, who said, 'The thing about the English is that they get their history from Shakespeare and their theology from Milton' (he was thinking of Milton's *Paradise Lost*).

Take the idea that the English get their history from Shakespeare. It is certainly the case that the Shakespearian theatre was the place where national history, the Wars of the Roses, the Hundred Years War against France, the idea of Richard III as a bad king, and Henry V as a great king – these ideas, these national myths – were played out for the first time to a wide public on the Shakespearian stage. You could read about them in the history books, but the history books were expensive and only available to the literate. It was Shakespeare who gave the national story to the people.

Now, it is very tempting for politicians to say, 'In that case, we must study Shakespeare, we must pay Shakespeare scholars out of the public purse, so that they can carry on that national story' – a sort of patriotic duty to study Shakespeare. Of course, what you discover when you start reading a play like *Henry V* carefully is that actually there is a powerful critique of patriotism built into that, even as it is an expression of patriotism. Shakespeare, in a way, becomes a tool for questioning ideology, even as politicians put it forward as an exemplar of a kind of national ideology.

There are wonderful stories to discover about how Shakespeare has been used for subversive purposes, not only in British culture, but in other culture down the ages. The great example would be during the Soviet era in Russia and Eastern Europe. When there was very strict censorship of new plays, Shakespeare's plays were often used as a way of criticising the current regime. There was a famous production, for instance in Romania of *Hamlet*, where it was clear that the villainous Claudius and Gertrude were the Ceauşescus. And when the revolution came in Romania, the person on the tank going into the television station was the actor, Ion Caramitru, who had played the part of Hamlet in that production. It is not the only time in history that Shakespeare has been part of a revolution.

I am not sure that is what the government would want to hear when prescribing Shakespeare for school examinations, but it is something to be aware of.

I had a bit of an argument recently with the officers in the current Department for Education, where I was brought in to advise them on the canon of literary works that should be studied in a revised form of GCSE. A very strong steer was coming from the Minister that there should be two compulsory Shakespeare plays, the sense that Shakespeare is the centre of our national literary canon and, therefore, all students leaving school should know at least two of his plays – maybe a comedy and a tragedy. I slightly got the sense that, as a Shakespeare scholar, I was being brought in to agree with that. But I actually proposed on the contrary, that everybody at school should study at least two plays, at least one by Shakespeare and one by someone *other than* Shakespeare. I worry that the sort of canonisation of Shakespeare, the reverence we have for Shakespeare, is now getting to a stage where he is becoming, as it were, the token of high culture – the tokenistic, representation of the whole of the cultural past, the literary past. 'If you have Shakespeare, that is all you need.' I think to the contrary. You need to have Shakespeare *beside* his contemporaries and his successors. For one thing, you can only tell how great and how distinctive Shakespeare is if you read some other things as well. I don't think my idea went down particularly well in the Ministry, but I am going to keep on fighting the battle for dramatists other than Shakespeare.

Q
Do we have to be wary of putting Shakespeare on too high a pedestal?

Jonathan Bate
I think it is very important for academics to have a little bit of scepticism about what George Bernard Shaw called, 'Bardolatry', the idea that Shakespeare could not write a bad line. Actually, Shakespeare wrote loads of bad lines. The cult of Shakespeare is something that we need to ask questions of. The history of that cult is itself an extremely interesting story, and a complicated one. It is something I have done a lot of work on. But I hate it when you hear politicians or journalists just assuming that Shakespeare stands for universal genius. It is a much, much more complicated story than that. And part of the business of the academic is to ask some rigorous questions about that, and indeed to find new ways of complicating the way in which people understand Shakespeare.

You hear politicians or journalists assuming that Shakespeare stands for universal genius. Part of the business of the academic is to ask rigorous questions about that, and find new ways of complicating the way in which people understand Shakespeare.

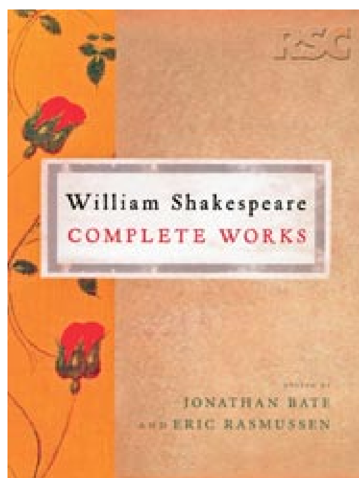
I am working at the moment with a film company. We are creating a series of Shakespeare apps, where you will be able to download a Shakespeare play to your iPhone or your iPad. You will get the heads of actors speaking the lines. It will be like a sort of video book – a 21st-century equivalent of the audiobook – but you will also get the text. When you turn your iPad from vertical to horizontal, you will get the commentary down the right-hand side. So you will get the pure experience of hearing the words, seeing the text. But then you will also get the opportunity to get the commentary that will help you have a deeper understanding of it. And then you will be able to click on various buttons and getting deeper and deeper into the background, into the historical context. With that series, our hope is that a kind of toolkit for a really serious understanding of Shakespeare will be made available to anybody who pays a few quid and downloads it.

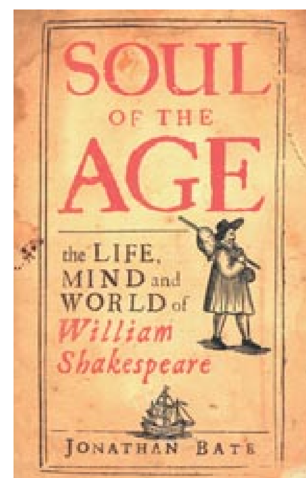
Q
So are you optimistic about our continuing interest in Shakespeare?

Jonathan Bate
I think it says something incredibly positive about where we are as a culture that Shakespeare is still so alive, whether it is a workshop in a school, a production at the Globe, or an amazing movie like the recent, low-budget *Much Ado About Nothing* – more or less shot over 10 days in black-and-white around someone's kitchen table, and yet a beautifully achieved production which makes a 400-year-old story as fresh as if it were written yesterday. I think Shakespeare just brings so much to so many people. It is fantastic that we can continue to celebrate him, to perform him, and to do work on him that keeps him alive. That enables people to understand him more and more deeply.

Q
You said that your work has ranged beyond Shakespeare.

Jonathan Bate
I think the piece of work that I am proudest of is my biography of the poet, John Clare,[2] an agricultural labourer from Northamptonshire in the early 19th century, very much a contemporary of Keats and Byron, but comparatively little known. Yet, to me, John Clare is the greatest writer from a humble origin that England has ever seen. Scotland had Robert Burns; England has John Clare. He is also our greatest writer about the natural world: flowers, trees, the life of nature. No one had really done justice to his life. There was a huge amount of unpublished, archival material, letters and so on. The process of gathering that and exploring this extraordinary life – where he overcame so much hardship, then fell into mental illness and ended up in a lunatic asylum – was very satisfying. Every great writer needs a biography that readers will say, 'Yes, this does justice to his achievement. This gets inside the mind of the subject.' I really believe I did do that with John Clare.





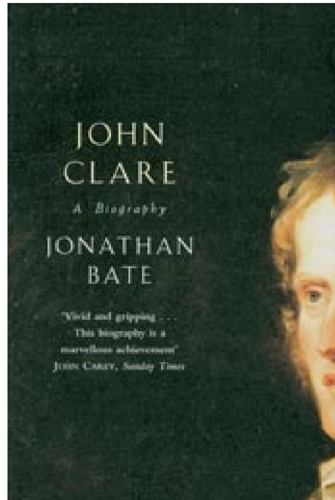
Jonathan Bate's books on Shakespeare include the 2007 Royal Shakespeare Company edition of the complete works of Shakespeare, and 'Soul of the Age' (2008).

Q
Why is John Clare so interesting for us?

Jonathan Bate
My biography of John Clare coincided with a broader revival of interest in him, and there was also something timely about it. Clare was very interested in questions of environmental fragility, ecological change. He witnessed great changes to the land and landscape around him, and he was very conscious of the fragility of the natural environment. He was an ecologist, before his time; a conservationist. The rediscovery of that aspect of his work

[2] Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (2003).

gave a very interesting literary dimension to the great passion for questions of 'What do we do about environmental crisis?' which really came to public prominence in the late-20th century and the beginning of this century.



Another thing that happened, interestingly, was that shortly after my biography came out, the cottage in which John Clare had been born and brought up, and lived for much of his life, came on the market. A charitable trust was set up and they managed to obtain the cottage and have now turned it into a visitor centre and education centre and a writers' centre. So, writers can go there to work. But perhaps more importantly, school children from the city who have no sense of what rural life in Britain was once like, and in many parts still is like, can come and learn, through the life and work of John Clare, about rural life and also about questions of environmental fragility and ecological sustainability. So that is a very interesting example of where a piece of scholarship about a poet who has been dead for 150 years can feed into a broader educational, social, and in this case ecological development.

Q

In 2011, you edited a collection of essays defending the humanities. Why did you do that?

Jonathan Bate

The collection of essays on *The Public Value of the Humanities*[3] really emerged from a challenge that did indeed come from the government funders of research in the humanities. Its origin was a meeting, when I was on the council of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which gives out public funding for humanities research, where a senior civil servant was pressing us. He said, 'I very much value the work that you do, but not everybody in either the civil service or indeed the government shares that value. I want to challenge you to find some good answers as to why the taxpayer should pay people to research medieval history, archaeology, the history of film, the poetry of the Romantic period, whatever it might be.' So we asked scholars in a whole spectrum of humanities disciplines to try to say something about the public value of what they did.

The book that resulted had a rather interesting tension at the heart of it, because in a way we were trying to balance two conflicting impulses. On the one hand, we were putting forward ample evidence that economic benefit does flow from the study of the humanities. A piece of archaeological research about Stonehenge can have a huge knock-on effect on tourism. A piece of research on Shakespeare can feed into Shakespearian productions, which then maybe take you into the world of the movies, and vast amounts of employment and economic activity can follow from that. So, there was one impulse just to gather together evidence that we are not all sitting in an ivory tower, indulging a sort of fetishistic passion for some obscure area of medieval history, but we are actually doing stuff that has an effect in the wider community. At the same time, one of the reasons for studying the humanities is precisely that the humanities draw our attention to big, valuable, important things that cannot be contained or constrained within a model of economic benefit. Beauty, truth – these are difficult, abstract concepts, concepts that defy quantification. So the other aspect of the book was to challenge that model of economic productivity, through the humanities.

The humanities draw our attention to big, valuable, important things that cannot be contained within a model of economic benefit.

In the introduction to the book, I talked a bit about a great debate there was in the 19th century. One of the things the humanities do is show us that the past can help to illuminate the present; the disputes we have in the present have also been played out in the past. I looked at a pair of essays by the great Victorian philosopher, John Stuart Mill: one on the philosopher Jeremy Bentham; the other on the poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Bentham famously was the man who quantified, the man who said what we need to do in society is create 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' of people. If we can measure what brings most happiness to the people, that will produce a good society. Coleridge said almost the opposite. He said what we need to do is find the good, the true, the beautiful, the significant, and those are things that can't be quantified. If we simply followed Bentham, it would be football for everybody. If you simply followed Coleridge, you might have a rather elitist sense that the people were excluded from high culture. What John Stuart Mill argued for was some kind of balance between the two. That is what we were seeking in the collection of essays. There is huge public value in the work that the humanities do. And there are, for instance through collaborations with museums, art galleries, theatre companies, wonderful opportunities to share humanistic scholarship with a wide public and to enlighten, to stimulate them. But at the same time there has to be an aspect of our work that challenges this idea that all that matters is that it should be popular, and readily accessible to everybody.

[3] Jonathan Bate (ed.), *The Public Value of the Humanities* (2011).

Q

You quote Coleridge talking about the humanities securing for the nation 'that character of general civilization, which equally with, or rather more than, fleets, armies, and revenue, forms the ground of its offensive and defensive powers'.

Jonathan Bate

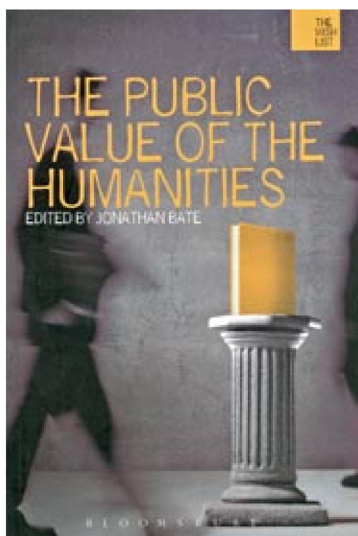
There's a great twist that Coleridge introduces when he is talking about the value of having what we would now perhaps call 'public intellectuals'. He says that the work of humanistic scholarship, the work of creativity, of critical investigation, is actually a form of power and a form of defence. He actually says that intellectual work, academic work, in some senses can achieve more than an army or a navy. It is what nowadays might be called 'soft power', or might be called 'hearts and minds'. If you are going to maintain a position of strength in the world, then you need a robust set of principles, moral, ethical and perhaps aesthetic – a set of values that you can stand for, you can fight for.

Q

Can you give an example of that from the book?

Jonathan Bate

For the book *The Public Value of the Humanities*, we simply asked a ranged of academics to tell us one story about why they thought their work was valuable. The philosopher, Simon Blackburn, came back with a lovely, simple story about someone who wrote to him asking if he could translate Simon's little book called *Think*, which is essentially a book about philosophy, about the art of thinking, the art of asking questions.[4] This person, who was Syrian, asked him if he could translate his book *Think* into Arabic, because, he said, the Islamic world needs an introduction to secular philosophy. It needs a counter to a sort of Islamist fundamentalist way of thinking. Simon Blackburn says that that simple act is potentially a huge achievement. It is something that could actually change the world. You need to change minds in order to change politics.



And of course, what would then follow is that, if you begin by changing minds, then you move forward without the appalling human and indeed financial costs that come through working with hard power, with armies, with bombs.

Q

And the humanities continue to contribute to the culture of the nation.

Jonathan Bate

One has to justify public funding of the arts, of scholarship. But at the same time, one has got to say what matters. When people are lying on their deathbed, looking back at their lives, what are some of the things that they will remember and will think were worthwhile? Having great cultural experiences is part of that. Cultural experiences do not come cheap. A great cultural experience will often require an enormous amount of work, of expenditure, of time, of intellectual work in the background in order to make it possible.

Just to take a crude example, think of the 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony, which created an extraordinary national feel-good sense. It really did raise the morale of the nation at a difficult time, and it told a very interesting story about Britain. But if you look at the background to that, what you will find is that Frank Cottrell Boyce who wrote it, working with Danny Boyle who directed it, did an immense amount of research in English history, in English culture. They got particularly interested in the work of the great documentary film maker, Humphrey Jennings, in a book of his called *Pandæmonium*,[5] which was about the Romantic period, the growth of the industrial revolution. That book in itself condensed an immense amount of historical and literary scholarship. So there is actually a direct line that goes through there. It's not immediately visible, and yet there is no doubt that an event like that is of great value. All the people who said, 'The money being spent on the Olympics is a waste of money' – well, they were wrong, weren't they?

Q

What did election to the Fellowship of the British Academy mean to you?

Jonathan Bate

It was a great honour and surprise to be elected to the Fellowship of the British Academy, because I thought it was something for old men from Oxford and Cambridge. I was 40 and taught at the University of Liverpool. The first thing I thought was, 'Thank you to Shakespeare', because there is no doubt that it was my work on Shakespeare that made it possible. But it also really pleased me, that it was a way of acknowledging that somebody whose work was as wide-ranging and in some sense populist as mine, was acknowledged as a proper scholar, a proper academician. There can, within academic life, be a kind of snobbery about people who try to reach a wide audience. That makes me very angry. Of course, if you are writing for a wide audience, sometimes you have to simplify. But I think you can still have a real scholarly rigour and you can smuggle in a surprising amount of genuinely original scholarship even when you are writing for a wide audience.

[4] Professor Simon Blackburn was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2002. His book *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy* was published in 1999.

[5] Humphrey Jennings, *Pandæmonium, 1660-1886: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers* (published posthumously in 1985).

John Kay

Professor John Kay CBE FBA is an economist.
A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/kay

Q
What was the initial spark that made you want to work and study in economics?

John Kay
I suppose there were two things. One was that I was a person who was good at mathematics at school and interested in politics and current affairs, and economics brought them together. Then, it was a brilliant lecturer at Edinburgh University who excited me about the subject.

Q
What is economics and why is it important?

John Kay
I don't think it is very difficult to persuade people that economics is important. It is often harder to explain what economists do, and how the academic study of economics contributes to everyday events. What most people recognise as economics is: what is happening in the markets, whether interest rates are going up or down, growth and inflation, and so on. These are the issues that brought me to economics in the first place as well. But actually the part of economics that I found really interesting was the way in which households, firms, businesses and industries operate. That is why it is micro-economics that has been the subject of the work I have done over my career.

Q
It is obvious from looking at your CV that you are not just a theorist; you get your hands dirty and actually do stuff.

John Kay
That's right. If I had just been interested in theory, I would have stuck with mathematics. It is because I was interested in the practical application of the analysis that I did that I moved to economics.

Q
Do values play a part in economics? Or do you take the view that, as an economist, you are a kind of scientist, and values do not influence your thought processes as an economist?

John Kay
I think, in this sense, economics is somewhere in-between the hard sciences and the pure arts subjects. In physics, values do not play much role at all. It would be wrong to say that they play no role, but they do not play very much. In most of the social sciences, most theories are associated with some broader ideological views of the world. In economics, there is an element of ideology.

In particular over the last couple of decades ideas from economics have been used as support for a rather aggressive right-wing ideology. However, that is people who have that ideology seizing on the bits of economics that suit their preconceptions. Before the last 20 years, people on the left did the same. It was the Marxist categories and the arguments that were generated from the political left that dominated economic debate, for people on the right as well as the left, in the years up to the collapse of central planning and the end of communism in the 1980s. Since the 1980s, we have had a kind of market fundamentalism in which the political right has seized on a different group of economic ideas as justification for their policies.

Whatever the prevailing political climate of the times is, people will find bits of economic doctrine that suit their beliefs.

Q
What part did economists play in the financial crisis? Are they to blame, are they the solution, or are they both?

John Kay
If we think of the financial crisis, economists have to take some of the blame, but they are also part of the solution.

The reason they deserve part of the blame is that, certainly, there was a set of economic ideas that had a large influence on policy. These were, roughly speaking, that what was going on in the merry-go-round of circulating paper that happened before 2008 – and which was a great deal to blame for the crisis – was a more efficient way of managing and sharing risk. There were economic theories that provided the intellectual underpinning for what was, from the point of view of the people who thought they were making a lot of money out of it, a rather convenient doctrine. Economists have to take responsibility for that, and there was bad policy made on the basis of that belief.

I think most of the ideas as to how we escape from this kind of crisis come from economics. While the development of global economies in the years since 2008 hasn't been great, we have at least avoided the kind of economic and political collapse that followed the biggest

other economic crisis in modern history, which was the Great Depression that followed the financial crisis of 1929 and afterwards.

Q
Is there a specific piece of work that you are particularly proud of?

John Kay
I suppose the thing I am most proud of was the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which has become probably the most respected think-tank in the area of economics. Then I went on from that to set up a business that did economic consultancy. The idea we had was that I and the people I was working with were good at taking economic ideas that were firmly rooted in serious research, and making them relevant and communicating them to a wider audience. We thought there was a market for that, both in the public policy area and in dealing with business and everyday affairs as well. That proved to be right.

Q
What has been the influence of the Institute for Fiscal Studies?

John Kay
The specific influence of the Institute for Fiscal Studies has really been telling truth to power and the public. When people are rightly more and more sceptical about the value and the reliability of the information with which they are presented, in the press or, equally nowadays, by government, then having people out there who are just trying to tell the truth as best they can is terribly important. I think that was the big contribution of the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Ideas influence behaviour. But it is a gradual influence – it is almost like dripping on a stone.

What we also did there, and what I have tried to do in other parts of my career, has been to put ideas into the public domain. A lot of people think that 'impact' means you talk to business people or politicians and they say, 'Gosh, that is a good idea. I must do that.' That is not the way the world works at all. The way the world works, as I have discovered, is that ideas influence behaviour. And they do have a huge influence in the long run, but it is a gradual influence – it is almost like dripping on a stone. You put ideas out there into the public domain, and people start talking about them. You know you are winning when people start feeding your own ideas back to you as if they were their own. That has happened many times in the course of my career.

Q
Can you give us some examples of how, over time, your thinking has affected conventional wisdom?

John Kay
I will give two examples.

At the Institute for Fiscal Studies, we talked a great deal about fiscal neutrality: the idea that the tax system wasn't designed to make people do good things and stop them doing bad things.[1] The most that we could actually hope for was that they wouldn't make worse decisions as a result of the way the tax system operated. Now, that's something that is almost taken for granted in public debate today; but when we first started talking about it, it was a new idea. Politicians and the public took for granted that the tax system was there to be a form of social engineering.

A more recent example, which I feel startled and excited by, is that when I wrote in 2007 and 2008, as the crisis in the financial system emerged, that what we needed to do was separate out the risky investment banking from the boring payment system and ordinary lending operations of banks – to separate, as I called it, the utility from the casino in the financial system – that was regarded as a way-out idea, impossible to do and undesirable in any case.[2] It has gradually moved from being on the fringes of public debate to being at the centre of the proposals the Government is actually implementing. That is how things have changed after only five years. I described earlier how people feed your own ideas back to you, and I quite often now have people asking me, 'What do you think about this idea of splitting utility from casino banking?' It is not just my idea that is reported back: it is my words.

Q
The fact that the work of economists and other social scientists can be subversive and critical of existing structures of thought and institutions can be quite difficult for policymakers.

John Kay
Yes, that's right. If you analyse how the financial crisis and reactions to it have evolved, you have a quite interesting story.

What you got in 2008 was a pragmatic reaction by policymakers, who said that the priority is to keep the system afloat – and it *was* the priority. That is how we got into the business of providing loads of public money to keep the banking system operating and make sure that, when we put our cards in the holes in the wall, there was still money coming out. But that kind of pragmatism is quite hopeless as a framework for deciding how in the long run you prevent that kind of crisis happening again.

Now, if we move a year or two after the crisis, what we get in 2010 onwards is people in the financial sector thinking, 'It's back to business as usual. We can just get on making money in the ways in which we have before.' But we have moved on from there. If one looks at the way public and political opinion started to evolve last year,

[1] J.A. Kay & M.A. King, *The British Tax System* (1978; 5th edition 1990); *The Structure and Reform of Direct Taxation*, Report of a Committee chaired by Professor J.E. Meade (1978).

[2] John Kay, 'Taxpayers will fund another run on the casino', *Financial Times* (17 September 2008) www.johnkay.com/2008/09/17/taxpayers-will-fund-another-run-on-the-casino; John Kay, *Narrow Banking: The Reform of Banking Regulation* (2009) www.johnkay.com/2009/09/15/narrow-banking

people in Britain started to understand that what had gone wrong in the financial sector was not that some terrible accident of events that was beyond anyone's understanding or control had happened. Actually, the problems that had emerged were the product of forces that were the result of deficiencies in the culture and behaviour of the financial services sector itself. It is at that sort of moment that you start getting the influence of more fundamental thinking and ideas coming into policy. I hope – I am still not sure, but I hope – that the ways in which policies evolve over the next three or four years will reflect this more thoughtful, long-term analysis of what it is that went wrong.

One of the lessons of the 2008 crisis is the way in which the financial sector has become enormously self-referential. One needs an underlying theoretical framework in order to ask basic questions about what these activities are for in the first place.

Q
You chaired the Kay Review of UK Equity Markets and Long-Term Decision Making.[3] Was it inevitable that an economist would chair that, or could it have been someone from another discipline?

John Kay
I doubt if it could have been someone from another discipline. Most often that kind of exercise would be given to someone who had no particular disciplinary background, but simply practical experience of equity markets. One of the lessons of the 2008 crisis is the way in which the financial sector has become enormously self-referential. People have generated – to my mind – largely unnecessary complexity. There is a dialogue in which people talk to each other, and one needs an underlying theoretical framework in order to try and penetrate that, and ask basic questions about what these activities are for in the first place.

Q
If the crash had not happened, who do you think would have chaired a similar review?

John Kay
I think, at a different stage, you would have had someone from the Stock Exchange chairing a review of equity markets. It is when events raise fundamental questions about how well these institutions are working that you have to ask someone who is not directly connected with these institutions to take a dispassionate, outside view.

Q
This is a good example of how the social sciences have value.

John Kay
That's right. This goes back to the ways in which economics, or any other social science or humanities discipline, influences policy and generates economic value in the long run. It is through the way in which it influences the climate of ideas. People who make practical decisions – which can range from the design and technology of an iPod to big policy decisions about how the financial system should be organised – make these decisions in a framework of ideas that is, in the end, framed by a series of academic disciplines.

Q
One of your books has the subtitle *Finance and investment for normally intelligent people who are not in the industry*. Why did you write that?

John Kay
The motivation for writing my little book, *The Long and the Short of It*, which has the subtitle of *Finance and investment for normally intelligent people who are not in the industry*, was this. People know I am an economist – and not just an economist, but an economist who has been interested in investment and financial markets over my lifetime. Lots of intelligent people, such as academic colleagues, friends who are professional lawyers and doctors or something like that, who have a little bit of money to set aside for their retirement or whatever, have asked, 'What should we do with it?' They have discovered that they are not very

THE KAY REVIEW OF UK EQUITY MARKETS AND LONG-TERM DECISION MAKING

FINAL REPORT

JULY 2012

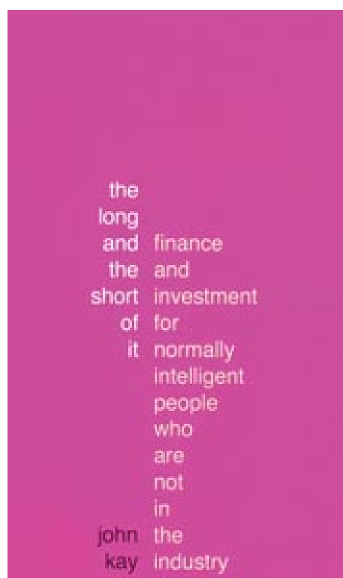
In February 2013 John Kay gave evidence to the Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee about his 'Review of UK Equity Markets'.

[3] *The Kay Review of UK Equity Markets and Long-term Decision Making: Final Report* (July 2012) http://bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/business-law/docs/k/12-917-kay-review-of-equity-markets-final-report.pdf; Professor Kay's oral evidence to the House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee on 5 February 2013 may be seen at www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/Player.aspx?meetingId=12506"

sure that they can trust financial advisers – and they are right to think that, as events have shown. I said, 'I ought to write a book that actually answers that question, so that next time people ask me, I can say, "Read this".' That is how we got to *Finance and investment for normally intelligent people who are not in the industry*, which is designed to capture exactly these kinds of people. They are whom the book is aimed at.

Q
So it's about empowerment.

John Kay
That's right. In that little book I said to the reader that, even if at the end of this, you still don't feel confident enough to manage your financial affairs yourself, at the very least you will be able to ask some pretty penetrating questions of the people you do hire to manage your investments for you.



Q
As a communicator – as a columnist – do you think that it is both beneficial and an intellectual challenge to convey subtle and complex ideas through forms of media that are sometimes regarded as culturally inferior?

John Kay
Yes, I think that is a really important point. It is still true that a lot of academics are very snooty about the idea of communicating with the wider public, or getting their name in the newspapers, and most of all about the telly don who is presenting ideas on television. Of course, some of what people are doing there is, in fact, very superficial. But in the end, if we are only communicating our ideas to each other, we are not going to have the effect that I have described of putting ideas into the climate of opinion in which economic development and the development of a whole set of ideas of a democratic society are formed.

Q
Do you sometimes feel that you now have to react instantly, and say something when you have got nothing to say yet?

John Kay
Personally, I don't blog, for exactly the reasons that you are describing. I don't think I want to put every wild idea that comes into my head into the public domain. I do a lot of popular writing. I write a weekly column in the *Financial Times*, but not everything I put in there is necessarily something that I definitely agree with myself. It is an idea that I think is considered and worth putting into public debate. I don't think that people in any academic subject should be wanting to make an impact just for the sake of it.

Q
As a popular writer as well, what is the most peculiar piece of feedback that you have had?

John Kay
I remember, quite a long time ago, getting a publisher's comment card back on a book I had written. It was from a professor of physics somewhere, and he said, 'I don't know how I got this book – I must have filled in a form by mistake. But I enjoyed reading it so much that I want to keep it.' I thought, 'I have succeeded with that particular piece of communication.'

Q
What are the opportunities and challenges in economics that lie ahead for you and that you would like to work on in the future?

John Kay
At the moment, I am working on the issues that we have talked about in terms of the reform of the financial services system. I am asking, in a basic way, the question, 'Suppose we had a blank sheet of paper and we could design a financial system to meet the needs of the nonfinancial economy, what would it look like?' In a way, that illustrates some of the themes we have been talking about, because of course we do not have a blank sheet of paper – we have a history and a culture and a whole variety of established institutions. However, if we are to think about the ways we actually want to change the reality of what we have had, thinking about it in this kind of bluesky way seems to be an essential contribution to that.

There is a broader aspect to this, which is that financial economics has gone quite badly wrong over the last 50 years. In some ways, it is one of the great achievements of economics and social sciences that we have been able to develop some theories that are, at the one level, intellectually rigorous, and at the other have very obvious practical applications. People have been able to go away and earn very large salaries in the City of London and Wall Street by knowing about these theories. The trouble is that I am not sure these theories are true; or perhaps I am just not sure what I think about them. This is difficult, especially for people who come to a subject like economics from the hard sciences, or people who are in economics and want to make economics like a hard science. It is difficult for them to accept that we can have theories that are useful and relevant without actually being true.

For example, the efficient market hypothesis – which is one of the cornerstones of modern financial economics – is a theory that is 90 per cent true. That means, if you don't know this theory, you are going to make a lot of mistakes in dealing with financial markets; but if you believe it is true, you will also make a lot of mistakes in dealing with financial markets. If you come from a physics background, that is quite hard.

Q
What did election to the Fellowship of the British Academy mean to you?

John Kay
Election to the Fellowship of the British Academy meant that the Academy really valued the kind of work that I had been doing for the last 15 years, which was – as I described – taking serious, academically rigorous ideas, communicating them to the public, and applying them in a business context and a public policy context. That is what I have tried to achieve. I was also rather proud, actually, that I was the first person to be elected as a Fellow of the Academy who was an occupant of a Chair of Management at a business school. We were saying, in effect, that you can do this kind of activity in a way that scholars in the most rigorous of disciplines actually take seriously.

The real economic contribution of the humanities is about defining the ideas that make our society function and operate.

Q
What do you think the British Academy should be doing more of?

John Kay
I think what we are doing in this exercise is one of the most important things that the British Academy should be doing. That is, to make the case for the humanities; not in the kind of pathetic, narrow economic terms that people want – like how many jobs it creates or something like that. That is not what the real economic contribution of the humanities is about. It is about defining the ideas that make our society function and operate, and that is what people studying the humanities for the last 2,000 years have enabled us to do. That is the argument that needs to be understood by people who have a narrow and limited concept of economic value and the ways in which economic value is created.

Q
What is your message to the people who publicly fund the humanities and social sciences?

John Kay
My message to them is that they ought to look at the impact of research not just in terms of narrow, short-term criteria. If you had asked Plato, ‘What have you contributed to improving manufacturing productivity?’, or ‘How many mentions have you received in the *Daily Mail*?’, the answer would be rather few. And yet his ideas are influencing what we do and how we think 2,000 year later. That is the way that the humanities operate.

Q
Does it matter that the impact of the humanities and social sciences is often not measurable?

John Kay
The world wants things that are measurable rather too much at the moment. There is this quote from Lord Kelvin, which astonishingly was engraved on the University of Chicago’s Social Science Research building, which says, ‘If you cannot measure something, your knowledge is of a rather meagre kind.’ I think that is a terribly stupid remark. There is a great deal of human knowledge that is not of a measurable kind. If I look back on my career in economics, for most of it, I was too inclined to take that Kelvinish view.

I recently wrote about the amazing activity that involved building the embankments in London, which was done in the 1860s.[4] The embankments have London’s main sewers in them and the Tube lines, and so on. The scale of the project and the vision of the people who built them are extraordinary. What I wrote in the article was that now we would evaluate that project with a huge model in which we estimated how much time people would save by not having to have their sedan chairs carried through congested Fleet Street, and so on. We would come up with a spreadsheet full of thousands of numbers of this kind. And it would all be rubbish, because it would miss the essential point that if you felt sick every time you went out of doors – which, in the late 1850s, people did in London – London could never have become a great business and commercial centre. We would have made the same mistake about medicine, actually, because people believed quite wrongly that the smell gave people diseases. Bad sewerage gave people diseases alright, but that was not the way it worked.

Q
The humanities and social sciences remind us that our lives are not all about crude economics.

John Kay
Yes. The good life is what it is worth having an economy for!

[4] John Kay, ‘London’s rise from sewer to spectacle’, *Financial Times* (16 January 2013) www.johnkay.com/2013/01/16/london%E2%80%99s-rise-from-sewer-to-spectacle

Vicki Bruce

Professor Vicki Bruce OBE FBA is Head of the School of Psychology at the University of Newcastle. A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/bruce

Q

What was the initial spark that made you get into studying and working in psychology?

Vicki Bruce

Before I went to university I was a computer programmer. That was in 1971, before most people had computers. I worked writing laborious programs to do very simple statistical things. But it meant that, when I picked up psychology as one of my subjects, without knowing what it was, I had a very good understanding of what it might be to think of a brain as something that needed to process information. I was immediately absolutely hooked on psychology through the idea that you could understand the brain, and understand the mind, as a kind of computer. I absolutely loved the idea that people were talking about this very clever machine between our ears. And I had an enormous advantage at that time, because I had worked as a computer programmer, so I understood what an information-processing model would look like – the sorts of flow charts that we used to draw before we wrote software. The information-processing model was just coming through psychology in the late '60s and early '70s, in terms that I could actually understand and make a contribution to.

Q

At what point did you realise it was going to become a career?

Vicki Bruce

Possibly like many people, I was driven to do a PhD through curiosity, from things I found out as a student. At that point it was simply like a love affair. I didn't want to stop. And so there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to continue to do the sorts of things that I had done through my PhD. So it wasn't a gradual realisation; I didn't drift into the life academic and stay there because nothing else tempted me. It was absolutely – absolutely – what I wanted to do. The research questions, and the research excitement. And the excitement of working in a discipline that was becoming mature at that point, but which was still a relatively young discipline, where relatively junior people could make contributions. That was simply what I wanted to do.

At the same time – and this is something I feel equally passionate about – I loved teaching. I did quite a lot of teaching while I was a PhD student, and knew that I wanted to continue to teach in universities as well as to do research. That was what I wanted to do, and that is what I have done ever since.

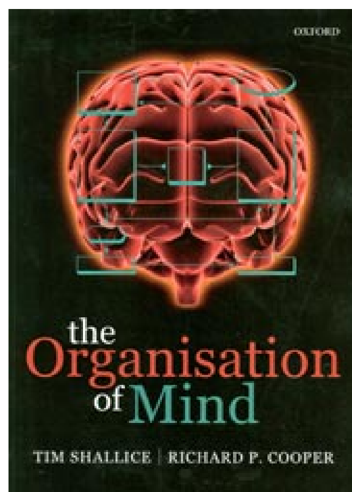
Q

What is the value of psychology?

Vicki Bruce

If you want to understand what it is that parts of the brain are doing when, using current brain imaging technologies, you see parts of the brain lighting up, you have to have an understanding of the functional side of what the mind is. You need to understand the things the brain is trying to achieve, not just which bits are active, otherwise you can't actually understand what that brain map is about at all. So, at a theoretical level, psychologists are the people who try to understand what the different things are that allow us to do all the different things that are very important in different areas of human life.[1]

Psychology is the perfect discipline. It's a science – it uses a scientific method, it's rigorous. It is applied, so psychologists can make a difference to people's lives. It has got interdisciplinary interfaces with biological sciences, medical sciences, engineering sciences.

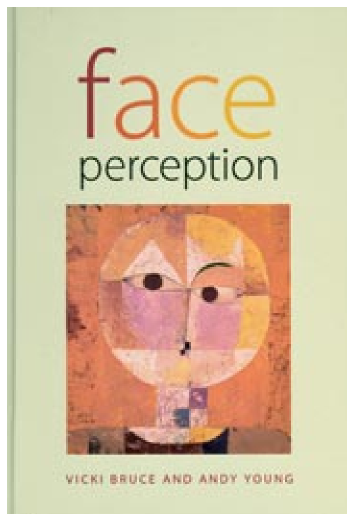


This excellent account by Tim Shallice FBA & Rick Cooper won the authors a British Academy Medal in 2013.

[1] See Tim Shallice & Rick Cooper, *The Organisation of Mind* (2011). For this book, the authors were awarded in 2013 a British Academy Medal for outstanding achievement in the humanities and social sciences.

At practical levels, these interfaces with other disciplines lead to a range of applications. We have methodologies that help us work with engineers so that we can better design things that people will use. To use an example from my own work, I was involved for a number of years in working with the Royal Mint to evaluate proposed changes to UK coins, and to try to ensure that coins, when they were introduced, were not confused with other coins – particularly by people who might be frail or vulnerable or not able to see. So, the pound in your pocket is as thick as it is because when we did our research on 'Coin X' – we weren't allowed to say it was going to be a pound coin, because it was all very top secret – we discovered that the additional thickness was essential to prevent confusions between the pound coin and the then five pence coin by people who couldn't see.[2] It would be very easy to say to somebody 'Here's your pound change', and give them a five pence. That extra thickness turned something that was easily confusable into something that actually was very difficult to confuse. When people complain about the fatness and the weight of our pound coins, I feel very proud. That was actually a really good design, and it needed careful experiments comparing how easily you could sort things out by sight, by touch and in dim light, using different variants of the coins. That is using a methodology to work at the interface between psychology and the people who knew how to get certain metals to work together.

Other kinds of interfaces are between psychologists and medics. There are a number of both congenital and acquired deficiencies in areas such as face processing. You might be somebody who is born with difficulties recognising faces. Or you might have a brain injury and – although it's rare – you might end up unable to recognise faces. Psychologists might work with people in medical areas to think about rehabilitation techniques for people with problems acquired through injury. They might work with engineers or computer scientists to think about trying to develop what we will call cognitive prosthetics: things that you might be able to do to substitute for the kinds of functions that you have lost.



Q

Talk more about your work on face recognition.

Vicki Bruce

Just at about the time that I was thinking of doing a PhD in psychology, there were two very interesting observations, one entirely practical and applied, and one theoretical. On the theoretical side, psychologists, who had been interested in learning rather than memory and interested in words rather than images, were just rediscovering visual memory and discovering that people could be terribly good at remembering faces. That was rather interesting. At the same time, there were lots and lots of cases of appalling mis-carriages of justice. Witnesses had testified that people were the people who had committed crimes, which led to their convictions. But the people were innocent – they hadn't done it. We had this extraordinary paradox – that people were good at remembering faces and very bad at remembering faces. And that was a stimulus to the work that I have done on face perception and face recognition, which has actually carried me through my scientific career. And the field of face recognition and witness memory has grown enormously, both in the UK and internationally. We've changed the way that people interview witnesses, to get more correct information and less incorrect information. We've helped change the tools that are used when working with witnesses to help people remember faces. We have made discoveries which are actually taken into the courtroom, and which hopefully inform judgments that could otherwise be based on rather fragile, inappropriate use of resemblance between people. Resemblances between people don't necessarily mean that *that* person *is* the same person as is shown in a CCTV image, for example.

We've helped change the tools that are used when working with witnesses to help people remember faces.

Q

How does that sort of research evolve?

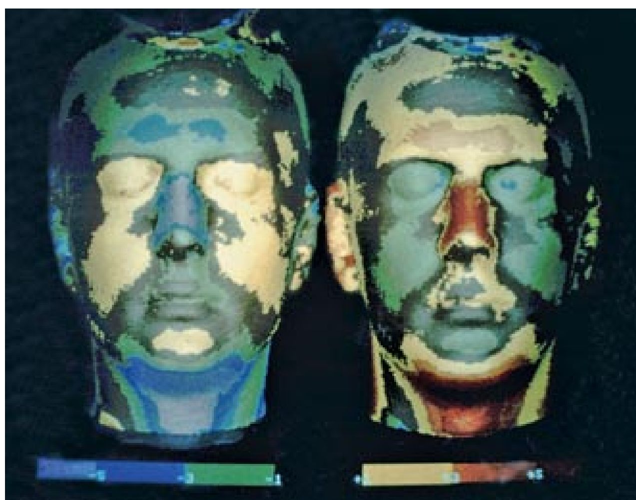
Vicki Bruce

I liken my own research area to moving up a spring, so that progress is onwards, but sometimes one appears to go backwards a little bit. And that is often because what is happening as you turn the corner of the spring is that you are beginning to ask questions in a slightly different way, or you are beginning to get new technology that allows you to make an advance, or you are realising that the way that you framed that question doesn't make sense once you think about this broader context. Even though some might say 'Well, it's confusing, because some people are saying this and some people are saying this other thing', actually there really is an accumulation of understanding, which moves in a particular direction. But it is always going to be a little bit like the spring, where you move on, but you have to be able to take some steps that might seem to be retracing your steps.

I'll give you an example in my own area of face recognition. How do we recognise human faces, given that everybody's face is the same? Everybody's face has to fulfil the same basic biological functions. Everybody's face has got two eyes, placed the same distance apart so we can see

[2] V. Bruce, C.I. Howarth, D. Clark-Carter, A.G. Dodds & A.D. Heyes, 'All change for the pound: Human performance tests with different versions of the proposed UK one pound coin', *Ergonomics*, 26 (1983), 215-27.

in stereo. We have a nose above a mouth. We have our ears at the same location to do sound localisation. Our lips and jaws and tongue have to be a certain configuration, so that we can speak. We have certain diets that are very different from other sorts of mammals' diets, so we have certain sorts of teeth and not others. You have got a basic template. Despite the fact our faces are all the same, they carry this bewildering variety of important social signals. Your face tells somebody else a little bit about what you are feeling, a little bit about what you are thinking. Are you thinking about the person you are talking to? Or are you thinking about the fact that you have got to pick something up at the dry cleaners later? It tells you about some of the things you are saying – we all lip read. And it also conveys identity. Faces are our best way of recognising people. So, how do you recognise the very subtle variations on that basic template? How does your brain do that?[3]



A comparison between an average male face surface and an average female face surface. The red and cream colours highlight the more protuberant male nose, jaw and voice box, and the female cheeks and fleshy top of chin. (Image: Professor Alf Linney, University College London.)

At the time that I was first trying to understand how it is that we recognise faces – what kind of description of a face does the brain hold that allows it to know that this is Fred's face or Joe's face? – I was working within a theoretical framework that was emphasising our delivery from visual objects of a three-dimensional description. We thought that the secret to how we recognise faces is that the brain builds a three-dimensional description of each person's face. And we spent quite a lot of time and research effort doing some really rather difficult things at that time – because this was during the 1980s – trying to do experiments on three-dimensional representations of faces.[4] They were obtained by working with medical physicists, who were using laser scanning to build range maps of faces. After some years, the experiments revealed to me – I am absolutely sure that this is right, but not everybody would agree – that actually this is not how the brain describes faces. Our representations for face-recognition, I am now persuaded, are not based on three-dimensional descriptions at all. They are based on a rather simple, two-dimensional set of low-level lights and darks – a very simple image description. Now, it's not that the brain doesn't describe faces in three dimensions. Of course, it does. If I wanted to reach out and punch you on the nose now, I would need to know how far your nose juts out in comparison with your cheek. So we do have a description. But it's not, we now believe, the basis of recognising faces. Recognising faces is based on something rather simpler than that. That is an example of how you can take these twists and turns and do quite a lot of research driven by one particular question, and then find something different.

Q

You were talking about how your work has affected the use of CCTV evidence in court.

Vicki Bruce

We were working on how to build a computer system that could recognise faces in the same sorts of ways that human brains recognise faces. This is because building a computer system gives you a model. We had one sort of theory of what kind of process would be involved, and we wanted to test that computer model against human face matching.[5] To do that, we needed gold standards of how well humans matched faces and what happened to that matching performance as you varied the viewpoint and the expression between the face that was the target and the faces you were trying to match against. I sent off my research assistant to collect data. We had very clear images taken from a video camera at the top, and an array of faces that might or might not include that person in an array at the bottom. People were just asked 'Is this person in this array, and if so which one is he?' Very simple task, no memory involved. We expected, on the basis of at least 20 years' research in the area, that when the viewpoints and expressions of the face at the top matched those of the face (when he appeared) in the array at the bottom, you would be 100 per cent. You would be perfect at that. And then we would look at how performance varied as you added a bit of expression change or added a bit of viewpoint change.

My research assistant came back in. She said: 'But they can't do it. They're making lots of mistakes.' 'Well, they can't possibly be making mistakes. You don't have to remember faces. You've just got to compare this face at the top with these faces at the bottom. They can't possibly be making lots of mistakes.' But they were. The face, when it appeared at the bottom, of the chap at the top, was taken on a slightly different camera. So there were some superficial image differences between the clear frame from a video at the top, and the clear picture of that person at the bottom. We discovered that the difficulties that people have in remembering faces – and the difficulties that people might have in establishing from a CCTV image 'is

[3] For a recent summary of our understanding of the field of face perception and its neurological underpinnings, see Vicki Bruce & Andy Young, *Face Perception* (2012).

[4] V. Bruce, P. Healey, A.M. Burton, T. Doyle, A. Coombes & A. Linney, 'Recognising facial surfaces', *Perception*, 20 (1991), 755-69.

[5] A.M. Burton, P. Miller, V. Bruce, P.J.B. Hancock & Z. Henderson, 'Human and automatic face recognition: a comparison across image formats', *Vision Research*, 41 (2001), 3185-95.

this the person who has been apprehended'? – isn't because the image quality is poor, and it isn't because people's memory for faces is bad (though it can be bad). It is because two different images of the same person can look very different, and two images of different people can look very similar. The best you can do, when you have got an image of one person and an image of somebody who has got a resemblance to that person, that might or might not be the same, is to say 'That person resembles that person.' That is a really important finding.[6] It has been used a great deal, in defence usually, in courtrooms, when people are trying to appeal to a resemblance between somebody apprehended and a CCTV camera image. They are trying to appeal to that resemblance and say 'That means that person was there.' No, it doesn't. It means that person *resembles* the person who was there. It gives you some information. It is useful for the investigation. But it shouldn't be used to convict.

We were doing something for theoretical reasons, which led us to a discovery that is important for completely different practical reasons. That is what science is about.

So that was an example of where we were doing something for theoretical reasons – we were trying to test our computer model of face matching – which led us to a discovery that is actually interesting theoretically but important for completely different practical reasons. And that is what science is about.

Q

Does that sort of research deserve public funding?

Vicki Bruce

In the particular example I was talking about, when we stumbled on this rather important observation about video image matching, that was work that was funded by one of the UK Research Councils. I think that that discovery alone vindicates that public funding.

That's not to say that all research in my area would be funded by the public sector. Some of it would be funded by private sector. So I have been involved in work on how you design remote video communication systems to capture the best things about face-to-face communication.[7] Is it the same if you talk on a video link, or talk on Skype to somebody? Is that exactly the same in terms of interpersonal impact as talking face to face? Our experiments showed it wasn't exactly the same. There are some things which are subtly different. And that's not just to do with the quality of the line. If I talk to you on Skype, I can't see what else is going on in your environment. If you suddenly look somewhere else, or make an expression or make a gesture, I don't have the context. There is an ambiguity about what is happening in your face when we are communicating remotely. Some of that sort of work might be funded by people who want to sell better video phones, for example.

But yes, I think our work justifies its public funding. Public funding usually allows us to pursue particular areas that arise during a grant, and can allow us to go on and build on those discoveries.

Q

Can you provide another example of where psychology research has had great public utility?

Vicki Bruce

David Clark, who is a Fellow in psychology, and Lord Layard,[8] who is an economist, were able to persuade government, on the basis of evidence, that there should be substantial investment in cognitive behavioural therapies in the NHS – rather than, or in addition to, investment in certain sorts of therapies (particularly drug therapies) – to treat people with anxiety, depression and a wider range of problems. The cognitive behavioural therapies were developed in the context of trying to help people who were struggling. They were also developed on a very strong theoretical base, about understanding the relationship between our thoughts and our feelings and our coping strategies. Many of the people who work in that area had made very distinguished, important contributions of our understanding of the cognitive and behavioural processes that lead us to construe the world in particular ways, to feel good or bad about ourselves. But those contributions have also had an enormous impact on the kinds of therapeutic treatments that are available – and importantly, given the involvement of Richard Layard in this particular case, the economic side of this. These treatments are relatively inexpensive, and therefore hugely cost-effective.[9]

Q

Does scholarship also have a role in promoting public understanding?

Vicki Bruce

One of the things that I think is absolutely marvellous about the recent years in this country is the way in which people's curiosity about themselves and their histories – about their personal histories through things like ancestry, about community history, about national history – has been stimulated really in the most sophisticated way. There is interest kindled by some fantastic scholars, who have been leading the way in terms of public debates, but also really high-quality television programmes and things of that sort. I think that the quality of the interface

[6] V. Bruce, Z. Henderson, K. Greenwood, P. Hancock, A.M. Burton & P. Miller, 'Verification of face identities from images captured on video', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 5 (1999), 339-60.

[7] G. Doherty-Sneddon, A. Anderson, C. O'Malley, S. Langton, S. Garrod & V. Bruce, 'Face-to-face and video-mediated communication: A comparison of dialogue structure and task performance', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 3 (1997) 105-25.

[8] Professor David Clark and Professor Lord Richard Layard were both elected Fellows of the British Academy in 2003.

[9] David Clark, 'Implementing NICE guidelines for the psychological treatment of depression and anxiety disorders: The IAPT experience', *International Review of Psychiatry*, 23 (2011), 375-84.

The quality of the interface between public life and public curiosity, and the humanities and social sciences, has never been better than it is now.

between public life and public curiosity, and the humanities and the social sciences, has never been better than it is now. I feel personally that there is more interest in matters of the mind, and society, and culture, interest in understanding ourselves, and understanding our origins and where we are going to in the future, than at any point during my own career.

Q
And you have contributed to that public engagement yourself.

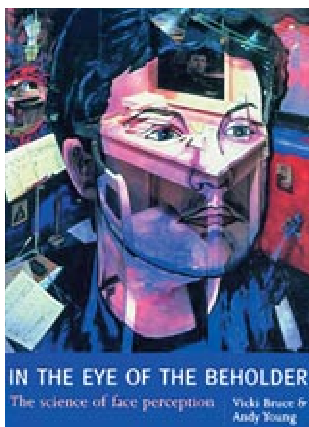
Vicki Bruce
The piece of work that I am proudest of is one that I did with Andy Young.[10] He and I worked together to produce an exhibition at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery on 'The Science of the Face' in 1998.[11] That exhibition was a way of taking out to a wide range of the general public the things that we understood about face perception, and put that at the interface with visual art and portraiture. That was a piece of work that both Andy and I really felt very proud of – first, because the exhibition was very successful; secondly, because we learned a tiny little bit about art. But we found that that gave us a vehicle for thinking about our science which was very novel. We created a book that went with that particular exhibition, which we think was a good synthesis for a fairly introductory and general audience of our field at that time.[12]

Pictures at an exhibition

Pictures at an exhibition

The science of the face

Andy Young *and* **Vicki Bruce** *report on their exhibition at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.*



Q
Were the exhibition and book well received?

Vicki Bruce
We got extremely good feedback from that exhibition. The National Portrait Gallery in Scotland was very pleased with their visitor numbers. We got, with one exception, very good reviews of that exhibition, and very good reviews for the book, which also won a prize.

But we were thinking it was the best thing we did before we got the feedback, because you sort of know when you are engaged in something that you think is really working. It was both a synthesis across a wide range of face perception issues, and it was working at an interface with an unfamiliar discipline for us at that time. It was extremely challenging, and an enormous amount of fun. And I think that such a broad-based communication challenge, while also really enjoying it, is the hallmark of intellectual life for me.

Q
What did election to the Fellowship of the British Academy mean to you?

Vicki Bruce
I was elected to the British Academy at a particularly productive phase in my career, so it felt like a good endorsement of the quality of my own work. But also it was a time at which the numbers of psychologists in the British Academy were beginning to grow – which begins to reflect the size or scale of the discipline outside the Academy. According to the last numbers I saw, psychology is the fourth most popular undergraduate subject now. If it is the fourth most popular undergraduate subject, you can imagine how many academic psychologists there are in universities delivering this. So I was pleased to be part of this growing recognition within the humanities and social sciences of psychology as an important discipline.

Psychology is also one of the disciplines in the social sciences that has a particularly strong interface with the Royal Society. So some Fellows of the British Academy are also Fellows of the Royal Society. We are one of the disciplines that helps build these bridges with the Royal Society.

Q
As its Vice-President for Communications and External Relations, what are your ambitions for the British Academy?

Vicki Bruce
One of the things that the British Academy has in recent years begun to do really well is to have intellectually rigorous, exciting public events and debates – and not just in London. The other thing that some of us are very excited about in the Academy is that we realise that we have got not just an opportunity but an obligation to do more things directly aimed at younger audiences. So, getting out more and reaching out to a wider range, particularly in terms of the future generations of humanities and social scientists: that is what I want us to be doing.

[10] Professor Andrew Young was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2001.

[11] See Andy Young & Vicki Bruce, 'Pictures at an exhibition: The science of the face', *The Psychologist*, 11:3 (March 1998), 120-5.

[12] Vicki Bruce & Andy Young, *In the Eye of the Beholder: The Science of Face Perception* (1998).

Adam Roberts

Professor Sir Adam Roberts FBA is Senior Research Fellow, Department of Politics and International Relations, in the University of Oxford. He was President of the British Academy in 2009-2013. A video of extracts from this interview can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely/roberts

Q
What was the initial spark that made you want to study and work in international relations?

Adam Roberts
It was at school. The most eccentric teacher at my school was a history teacher. He allowed you to study almost whatever you liked in the field of history, provided you did it well. The first essay I wrote in his class at the age of 16 was on the Crusades. I always had the feeling that international history and international events were what would interest me.

Q
Who would have thought that the Crusades would still be such a live issue?

Adam Roberts
It is one of those eternal issues. One of the greatest problems in the contemporary era is the widespread belief that we are in a completely new age, and we do not need to understand the past, because we are above that. In fact, we seem to be particularly good at repeating many of the mistakes of the past, precisely because of our ignorance of it.

Q
Did the 20th century – and the Cold War – represent something of a hiatus in Christian-Muslim conflict?

Adam Roberts
I am not completely persuaded by that. From the start, the twentieth century witnessed much Christian-Muslim conflict, not least in the wake of the Italian annexation of Tripoli in 1911, which was widely perceived as yet another case of Christian interference in Muslim lands. During the Cold War there were a many conflicts that had little or nothing to do with the US–Soviet rivalry. There were conflicts over colonial rule and particularly conflicts within new post-colonial states – over such issues as secession, contested borders, and constitutions – and some of these conflicts involved religious rivalries, including Christian-Muslim ones.

If you had asked people in the 18th century, they might well have accepted that relations with Mahometans, or at least with Mahometan sovereigns, were a problem. In fact, some of the first proposals for a European Union, made by Abbé de Saint Pierre in the early years of the 18th century, were marked by deep uncertainty as to whether a predominantly Muslim state, the Ottoman Empire, could be a potential member the European Union or not. We still have that question today, in the long-drawn out and unresolved negotiation about possible Turkish membership of the EU.

However, I do not think that in the 20th century, even well before the Cold War, people would have felt that

Christian-Muslim relations were the deepest problem we faced. They were a problem in certain parts of the world. Now this issue has more of a global character. But of course today we have reason to be particularly cautious about grand generalisations about Christian-Muslim conflict. Muslims today constitute a very heterogeneous community, characterised by deep divisions of which the Sunni-Shi'a divide is the most notable. So-called Islamic fundamentalism is a small heresy; and for some of its adherents today the main enemy is not Christianity but Western secularism.

Q
As your career progressed, how did you see yourself making a contribution in international relations?

Adam Roberts
The main way I saw myself making a contribution was through understanding particular different perspectives on international relations, each of which had their own national and intellectual roots, and were based on different experiences. It was always my approach to argue that we are not at a stage where everybody sees the world alike. There are fundamental differences, and it is important to be aware of them. Otherwise, we get specious explanations of why there are differences, which do not get to the roots of the matter.

Q
What did you envisage your career path being?

Adam Roberts
My career path was odd. I left university on a Friday, and on the following Monday I started a job on a weekly newspaper called *Peace News*, which had once been pacifist and still had a pacifist editor. I was not a complete pacifist – I never have been. But it was a paper concerned, above all, with the anti-nuclear movement. I worked for it for

two years. Only by a slow process did it dawn on me that it is not much use opposing a policy such as reliance on nuclear weapons if you do not know what you are going to put in its place. I felt that I needed to go back to do graduate studies to think more about what might be put in the place of nuclear deterrence. That is how I ended up at the London School of Economics (LSE) doing graduate studies. It was from that point onwards that I began to think of an academic career.

It was far from a direct career. I wrote a doctoral thesis, but in those far-off days it did not matter whether you had a doctorate. My supervisor was a sort of reverse snob, who liked you to work hard and to produce good work, but had no interest in you submitting the work for examination. I published it as a book,[1] but never submitted it for examination. So I do not have a doctorate. By today's standards, it is a really weird career path.

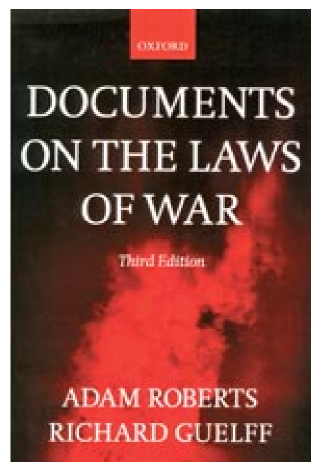
I applied for a lectureship at the London School of Economics, and was lucky enough to get that. Since then, I have jobs in the academic world, but not at all a steady progression. I was a lecturer for a long time at the London School of Economics, and only left there to come to Oxford because they were introducing a degree I did not agree with. I thought it was not a sensible way of occupying one's teaching time. I do not believe in grumbling, so I started to look for jobs elsewhere. That is how I then got a job in Oxford. It is all happenstance.

Q

What aspect of your work are you most proud of?

Adam Roberts

The thing I am most proud of in my work is having been ahead of the game on a number of issues. I produced a book about non-violent forms of resistance against foreign occupation regimes in 1967,[2] one year before the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, which was a very interesting case of just that: popular resistance against the Soviet-led invasion. I produced a book of documents on the laws of war in 1982, which has since had many editions,[3] but it came out just before the hugely increased public interest which we have witnessed in the last 30 years or so in such issues as the treatment of detainees and protection of civilians, and respect for human rights in occupied territories.



Then in the late '80s I produced a book on the United Nations, called *United Nations, Divided World*.[4] Again, it was just the time when there was beginning to be interest in the UN – it actually preceded it by a year or two. So what I am probably proudest of is having identified important areas before they were widely considered important.

Q

Would it be fair to say that, in spite of academic research into past examples of popular resistance (you mentioned Czechoslovakia), no one predicted the Arab Spring?

Adam Roberts

Some people saw that something was happening in the Arab world. There was an interesting book that came out two years before the Arab Spring, edited by an American author whom I know quite well, entitled *Civilian Jihad*, about the tendency towards civil resistance in the Arab world.[5] So it was not a total surprise. But I have never believed that one should equate knowledge of international relations with a capacity to predict specific events. There are too many unknowns that go into the causation of events, and we are fooling ourselves if we think we can achieve any certainty in predictions.

The Arab Spring has been an extremely important phenomenon, and it is having repercussions around the world. Look at what has been happening recently in Turkey and Brazil, to name just two such cases. They seem, in some respects, to have some similarity at least with what has been going on in the Arab Spring.

But humans can suffer from hubris in all sorts of different forms. There was an element of hubris in the belief in some Arab Spring uprisings – that if they resisted non-violently on a wide enough scale and could undermine some of the sources of power of the adversary, many existing regimes would simply fall. That did happen in Tunisia, and it did appear to happen in Egypt, but it was never going to be the pattern everywhere. There was a lack of willingness to do the boring, mundane things – for example, to understand the different circumstances of different countries, and to build up a leadership structure able to negotiate over the future constitutional order of the state – all of which are necessary if one is to achieve political change.

Q

Can you identify ways in which your work has been influential?

Adam Roberts

Proving direct impact of ideas of that kind is extremely difficult. I had an intimation of impact once when I was at a conference in Poland, and an accusation was made against me – it is the accusation I am proudest of – that I had essentially organised the Prague Spring, and was a very dangerous person. It was an East German telling a Russian, and overheard by a close colleague. I suppose that is evidence of impact of a kind, although I hasten to add that I think the East German's story was greatly exaggerated.

The book on the laws of war has been very widely used, and I have frequently had officers who have been serving

[1] Adam Roberts, *Nations in Arms: The Theory and Practice of Territorial Defence* (1976; 2nd edition 1986).

[2] Adam Roberts (ed.), *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-violent Resistance to Aggression* (1967).

[3] Adam Roberts & Richard Guelff (eds), *Documents on the Laws of War* (1982; 3rd edition 2000).

[4] Adam Roberts & Benedict Kingsbury (eds), *United Nations, Divided World: The UN's Roles in International Relations* (1988; 2nd edition 1993).

[5] Maria J. Stephan, *Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization, and Governance in the Middle East* (2009).

in Afghanistan or elsewhere say to me that they had a copy with them on operations. Indeed, on one occasion, an officer told me that he and two colleagues had been faced with a problem, and they all got the same book out to consult about what to do about it. So there is evidence of impact of that kind.

Q

Have former students of yours gone on to reach positions of influence in the world?

Adam Roberts

Many of our former students – whether at the LSE or here at Oxford University – have gone on to important positions. Currently, for example, the US National Security Advisor, Dr Susan Rice, is one of our former graduate students in international relations here at Oxford. Ditto the European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, Dr Olli Rehn, who had previously dealt with EU expansion. In such cases, I often ask them point blank, 'Tell me, was what you studied here useful to you? Was it relevant to your later work?' I do not think it is just out of politeness that they all say, 'Yes, it was extremely useful.' When you are in a busy job like that, you do not have time to do new thinking. The body of ideas that they took on board as graduate students has to serve them, and they have generally found it has served them well.

Q

So, social sciences scholarship translates into students who end up in positions of power, who are directly able to influence the quality of people's lives and decisions made?

Adam Roberts

Absolutely. It is also true that many of the people we taught go into non-governmental jobs of one kind or another. Many of them, for example, have taken up senior positions in the International Committee of the Red Cross or Amnesty International. So it is not just positions of power, in the conventional sense. It is also other positions of influence. Again, they find that what they learned was useful.

Q

Of course, people who get into positions of power may be responsible for decisions that are highly controversial. So, is it a slightly subtler story than simply saying that social science education has helped government by supplying personnel?

Adam Roberts

It is absolutely true that those who go into positions of importance, be it in government or other types of body, may be part of a story that, overall, one can regard as tragedy. They may not make perfect decisions. One has to live with the knowledge that perfection, or even sensible policy-making, is not something one can guarantee just because somebody has studied the subject with reasonable diligence and care and a certain amount of flair when they were graduate students. There are risks attached to this, and sometimes there may even be the risk of people knowing too much and being too self-confident.

Sometimes having studied a subject gives the individual sufficient independence that they can stand out against the current. A very good example of that is a former student of Oxford University, Senator Fulbright, who became a dissident in the United States on the subject of the Vietnam War. He always saw that there was a connection between his confidence in being a heretic and his having studied at Oxford.

It is inevitably a complex and nuanced picture, and one cannot simply state that social science education is a good thing and leads to wise policies. It is not like that.

Q

In March 2013 you visited India and Pakistan. What was the trip about, and what were you hoping to achieve?

Adam Roberts

I visited India and Pakistan with a group from the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, which was inquiring into the possibilities of arms control and of reduction of tension between India and Pakistan. This was the first such trip that had been done with those two powers, both of which are nuclear powers that are outside the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Neither of them has ever been a party to the treaty.

We felt that on this first mission – there may be follow-ups later – the important thing to do was to listen carefully to both sides separately – we went first to India and then subsequently to Pakistan – to find out what the security concerns and worries are, and to find out what they thought about various possibilities for a reduction of tension between the two states, and for an increase in what one might call normalisation – increasing trade, and so on. That was the nature of the visit. The purpose of it was not to come up with a single set of proposals there and then, but to initiate a dialogue, which is likely to carry on. We made clear our concerns on a range of issues relating to security doctrines and practices.

Q

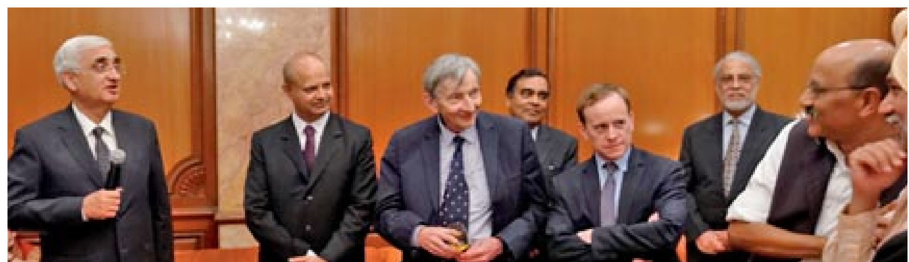
Who initiated that, and how successful was the mission?

Adam Roberts

The International Institute for Strategic Studies asked to do that. I think it had approval from a number of foundations and from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

It is for others to decide whether it was a success or not. All I can say is that those who were involved and those who

Adam Roberts (centre), together with Salman Khurshid (External Affairs Minister, India; far left), at a reception in New Delhi during the March 2013 visit to India and Pakistan by members of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.



have been studying the question of India-Pakistan nuclear relations all seem to see it as a success, precisely because we did see top-level people and we did hear from the horse's mouth what their concerns are and how they see the world. We had some interestingly different views from the two sides.

Q

So, if you work in international relations, you have to spend time in the field?

Adam Roberts

I have always positively believed in the value of understanding what it is like out there at the rough end. I have often visited conflict areas – be they in Guatemala, Kosovo or Bosnia – precisely because of the need to understand first-hand how the situations feel and what the possibilities look like to those directly involved. I am positively a believer in a degree of engagement. But at the same time I do respect, and indeed share, the view that it is also necessary to have a real historical perspective and depth in understanding international relations.

Q

When you witness awful conditions in the field, how do you maintain a balanced perspective?

Adam Roberts

I have worked in the West Bank and Gaza. I have been to institutions that have suffered a great deal under the Israeli occupation. But I am an absolutely firm believer that one needs to understand the different perspectives on the Middle East conflict, including the Israeli ones. I think they do reflect understandable security concerns. There are security concerns on both sides of that dispute.

People often treat international relations as an area in which they can take moralistic condemnatory stances.

People often treat international relations as an area in which they can take moralistic, condemnatory stances. There is a long tradition of intellectuals viewing international politics as a subject on which you can produce prescriptions that will solve all problems in one go. I don't believe it is like that. I believe that one should see the rough end, but one should not necessarily thereby conclude that one side is purely in the right and another side wholly in the wrong.

Q

Don't conflicts need to be resolved by everyone sitting down and talking?

Adam Roberts

There have been some conflicts that have been ended without talks with the people who have been originally in charge. People did try talking to Adolf Hitler, and it wasn't very successful. After a war with the aim of unconditional surrender, there was a rather successful reconstruction of Germany and Japan. I would not say it is a universal rule, but it is a pretty good general rule that it is worth talking.

DEMOCRACY, SOVEREIGNTY AND TERROR
LAKSHMAN KADIRGAMAR ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER
Edited by SIR ADAM ROBERTS

What one needs to bear in mind is that talking is not a sign of weakness or softness. Take, for example, a guy I knew very well, Lakshman Kadirgamar, a distinguished Tamil from Sri Lanka who was assassinated by the Tamil Tigers; I have recently done a book about him.[6] He was a student at Balliol College, Oxford many years ago. He later became Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, and was assassinated. I had known him for 35 years. He was as tough as anybody I know in the struggle against the Tamil Tigers. He succeeded in getting the British government to proscribe them so they could not raise money here for the cause, and so on. Yet he also believed in negotiating with them.

I think that combination of toughness with willingness to talk can be very valuable. It is a sign of intellectual toughness that you are able to talk. You are not afraid of going into a room with somebody and exploring both the differences and the possible areas of agreement.

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This is a live issue in terms of talks with the Taliban. Do you think those could have started earlier under President Bush?

Adam Roberts

I think Bush might ultimately have been forced into the same position. He no more wanted to stay in Afghanistan than his successor does. If you are going to leave, then it is obvious that at some point there may need to be talks with the main adversary.

Q

What is the most important quality that the study of international relations can bring to policy-making?

Adam Roberts

The quality that, in my view, is most required, and has been largely lacking in western policy-making, is an awareness of how complex and difficult it is to change the fundamentals of a society. In the 1990s we, as well as the Americans, were guilty of thinking that globalisation

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[6] Adam Roberts (ed.), *Democracy, Sovereignty and Terror: Lakshman Kadirgamar on the Foundations of International Order* (2012).

sweeps all before it, and thinking that the English language was becoming a universal language. We simply underestimated the complexity of the task of rebuilding fractured societies, be it in Afghanistan or Iraq. That was largely because of a lack of interest in and knowledge of those societies, and their longstanding internal divisions.

We have instead a mania for having lots of very up-to-date information, whether it comes from news agencies, television or intelligence agencies. It is a mania for up-to-date information without a sense of where a society is coming from and what its collective experience has been. It is that sense that we have deprived ourselves of, with the dire consequences we see every day. The attempts to modernise Afghanistan and to democratise Iraq were, in both cases, simply too sudden and too extreme, and inevitably produced antibodies in the society concerned.

I do not know of a single major problem that we face which does not require attention both from the physical sciences and from the social sciences and the humanities.

Q

Is it the nature of scholarship to show that things are more complicated, and therefore to make the task of government – in this case in the areas of diplomacy and security – more difficult?

Adam Roberts

I think making government more cautious is not the same as making government more difficult. If one influences policy in the direction of saying, 'Look, this is a really, seriously difficult project. You need to put your minds to it, and you need to commit our forces to it for a generation', that would induce a more cautious mindset than one that thinks there are reasonably quick fixes to be had. A great deal of trouble can be saved that way. What may appear to be making the policy environment more complex and difficult may in fact save us from serious difficulty and even tragedy.

In the case of Iraq, for example, there were academics who clearly warned that it would be a very, very difficult enterprise, and would require, if it was to be done, a lot of extremely careful planning, etc. I think those academics were right.

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Ultimately, a well-informed government will not make expensive mistakes?

Adam Roberts

I think it is the case that quite significant lessons have been learned from these failures. The present Foreign Secretary, William Hague, may have at times appeared to be a little bit gung-ho in respect of the extremely difficult problem of the war in Syria, but he is also a historian with considerable knowledge of various past conflicts. He wrote an interesting book on Pitt the Younger, and another very good one about William Wilberforce and the abolition of slavery.[7] Within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, there has been a revived attention on the study of history and the study of languages. That has to be a good thing.

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What is the case for the public funding of the humanities and social sciences?

Adam Roberts

I do not know of a single major problem that we face – be it the environment, be it how to get economic growth started again in our country, be it how to reconstruct business in an era where we are past the stage of heavy reliance on industrial manufacture, one could go on with a list of international problems – which does not require attention both from the physical sciences and from the social sciences and the humanities.

For example, the environment case. Whatever we do about the environment is going to require in some measure individuals, companies and even governments taking actions that are not obviously in their short-term interests. There has to be some notion of looking to the long term and looking to a broader public interest, not just the individual interest, if we are to be able to tackle these exceptionally tricky problems. The social science aspects of the environmental problem are the most challenging and difficult. We certainly need to be looking at them very hard. Among other things, we need to see how it is that problems are successfully tackled, so we have some successful models to go on.

Q

In 2009 you took over as the President of the British Academy. How do you think the Academy has moved forward since then?

Adam Roberts

When I took over at the British Academy, I set a number of objectives. One of them was to enlarge our premises with an auditorium. We have done that. Another was to get the Academy more active in public meetings and generally to have a higher profile. We have done that. Finally, I was concerned to establish policy involvement by getting the best of academic opinion on specific issues, preparing short, succinct reports, then feeding that in to whoever was concerned with addressing those issues – be it in government or outside government. We have made a very good start there too.

I don't want to sound complacent. Among other things, the British Academy does need to establish itself better in the public mind as a body that can speak for the humanities and the social sciences, and can speak relevantly in a way that the public, not just government, can understand. The plans of my successor, Lord Stern, in that regard are excellent, and I think he will be able to continue on the path of making the British Academy a national institution that distils the best from the world of scholarship.

[7] William Hague, *William Pitt the Younger* (2004); William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (2007).

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