



In association with The Economist

## Perspectives on Progress

Speaker: **Ruth Dudley-Edwards, Dr Theodore Zeldin and Robin Blackburn**

Chaired by: **Peter Jones**

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### **NB**

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**PETER JONES:** I am a journalist working for *The Economist*. I met a friend when I first joined *The Economist* who has a habit of pinning up little notices or cutting some other journals and newspapers and so on next to the lift shaft at *The Economist* building, and that week there was one which was pinned up there which came from a French publication, and it described *The Economist* as “the most vertiginously superior magazine in the world”, and the Editor sent a note saying, “this is incorrect, we are a newspaper not a magazine”, and I thought that when I joined and was a mere journalist, I was liable to drag the intellectual quotient down a bit, but I seem to have survived.

Anyway, let me introduce you to your panellists tonight. First on my right here is Theodore Zeldin who is a former Dean and a Fellow of St Anthony’s College, Oxford and he has been described as one of the forty world figures whose ideas are likely to have a lasting relevance to the new millennium and, if that isn’t praise enough, then the French indeed have described him as “one of the hundred most important thinkers in the world today”. I don’t know about you, but if I were described as that, then it would have frightened the living daylights out of me.

Theodore was a historian who wrote and researched about 19th Century France which perhaps explains why the French like him, but these days he has moved on to reflect on the nature and the future of such human things as intimacy, happiness, conversation and patterns of work, and he is constantly thinking about how these things came to be the way they are, and what sort of lessons that we can draw from them and, for example, he says that companies and corporations may have to change the way that they work, the model and the culture, so that they better use the talents of the people, and I’d say that companies who model themselves more to fit their employees than employees fitting a company which, in these days of when we tend to regard the future with a little bit of foreboding worrying about terrorism and the possibility of the lights going out when it gets hot, that seems to me to be a very optimistic kind of view of the future.

Again, on my far right, that’s an odd kind of description, is Professor Robin Blackburn who teaches at the Graduate Faculty New School

University, New York and the University of Essex. I don’t think Robin minds if I describe him as a bit of an old lefty, but he has recently come, perhaps, into his own as his most recent book is a formidable tome on the history and the future of pensions called, “*Banking on Death*”. In this book he delights on a quote which comes from Paul Coogman who is a great American economist and economics guru and in this quote Coogman is writing about a company where people are dressed very casually and looking at screens and they are making lots of economic activity, they are trading and they are very busy, and the whole place works extremely well and looks terribly impressive, and Coogman writes, “who would have thought it, the Millennium economy turns out to look more like *Adam Smith’s* vision or better yet, that of the Victorian economist, *Alfred Marshall* than the corporatus future predicted by generations of corporate pundits. Get those old text books out of the attic, they’re more relevant than ever”. While the company which Paul Coogman was describing was Enron, so I think Robin has every right to be proud of citing that particular text and perhaps he is not the kind of dinosaur that he might have been thought of ten years ago, and indeed has some important things to say to us.

Our final panellist on the left here is Ruth Dudley-Edwards who will be familiar to many of you, I am sure. Her books are many in legion and if I was to read all the titles, then I think it would occupy the entire time tonight, so I am not going to do that except to say that we are especially fond of her at *The Economist* because she has written a book about *The Economist :The Pursuit of Reason*, where you can find such gems as the journalists’ expenses used to go down in the accounts book as literary expenses, they don’t anymore, and some of us don’t consider that to be progress at all. Ruth, I think, is here as a kind of intellectual layman to comment and perhaps provoke a little bit from our two speakers.

Ladies and gentlemen would you please welcome your panel tonight.

Theodore would you like to kick off. I think the plan is that each of the three speakers will speak for about 15 to 20 minutes, which should leave a good half hour or so for debate and discussion.

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**THEODORE ZELDIN:** I don't want to talk about progress because the idea of progress is an old one, and we now have to think much more of experiments, experiments in which we are likely to make mistakes, and we are not likely to reach a Utopia and when we get there we will find that people are interested in something different. So let us talk about experiments, and I'm not going to say what ought to be done, but what I am doing, and I, having been an academic and a writer and so on, thought it was a gentler place for it seeing what was needed today.

So I say to myself, if I was living in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century I would say to myself and to you, "what is the great adventure in which you could go?" and it would be, "lets go to America, lets discover what else there is in the world, get out of our Country and go somewhere else". If I was talking to you in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, I would say, "lets go to the moon, lets go into space, things we have not discovered". But what should I say to you in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and I am saying, "let us go and discover who inhabits the world". That's to say the people, not the geography, not the land, not the terrace and not the animals and the plants, but the people, and how many people do you know out of the 6 billion who inhabit the world?

There we are we have produced all this technology which enables you to communicate in theory, but how many people can you actually pick up the phone to, and who will speak to you? And so I have started a foundation called *The Oxford Nuse* the idea is that what we can hope to become is nuses to one another, in other words, it is not more information that we need now, but inspiration and encouragement, and how can we give encouragement to one another. I think the first answer is by getting to know one another, and so I am inviting people to make self-portraits of themselves in words, and also in other media, and I am collecting these and I hope ultimately to have 6 billion. It may take some time but I'm starting in England, in the USA, in France, in Romania, in Turkey and these are the first attempts. And what I have discovered is that, first of all it is quite hard when I say, "who are you?" not easy to answer. Some people take several weeks, sometimes 6 months to answer this question, and I help them by giving them 25 topics on different aspects of life to

stimulate their thoughts, and they produce the most amazing results, and each person is different.

And so here we are, if you're talking about progress, the first way to get beyond the idea of progress is to see the uniqueness of each individual. But it is not enough to discover that people are unique, you then have to see what they can do with one another, and how they can interact, because I believe it is by the interaction of two individuals that you can produce a stimulation and that ability to go a bit further than where you could go on your own. It used to be thought that the way to progress was to get whole nations together and say that they believed in a certain mythology and that was the way they would all march towards liberty, or whatever it was, and alternatively of course it said each man for himself.

I'm saying that it is a meeting of two people that produces, at least a basis, of change and above all of encouragement and above all of the limitation of fear. But what is it that is the great obstacle to what used to be called progress ... it is fear. Fear we are being laughed at, fear of the unknown, and also fear of disappointment, which is the origin of cynicism. People will laugh at you when you say, as I do, I am not afraid that you should laugh at me when I say; "I want to change the world". Can I change the world? I think I can change the world, and I think you can change the world. Every time two people meet and discover one another really well and treat one another with respect, and therefore become equal, and each time you create a conversation like that, you create equality and you have introduced an element of equality in the world, and the world has been trying to discover equality for Centuries and has not got very far, and indeed, it is going backwards.

And so that to me is the first stage towards experimenting to see how, if my plan proceeds, one will have a knowledge of the world similar to what the physical scientists did in the last Century. They discovered the elements of the world, what physical matter is made of, and they put these molecules together and they created new materials. And if one can get people to discover who can stimulate and encourage them, who can get beyond the fact that poor people

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remain poor to considerable extent, because they know only poor people. And giving them money is not enough, it is necessary to also give them encouragement, new ideas, possibilities, introductions to something different, and this means entering a personal world.

We abolished the personal world in the course of the last two Centuries, that is to say a world where people knew one another because we were afraid of favouritism and nepotism. And so we have introduced a democratic world where you are just a number and everybody is featured equally in theory, but no one is featured as a person. The question now is, can we invent something to replace that and where, without favouritism, we can treat one another as unique and amazing and always enigmatic individuals. And of course this is just the beginning.

You have to then say, how can you enable people to have contacts if they are trained to have narrow minds, to live narrow lives because our whole educational system and our whole work system is designed to make us think only about narrow subjects, and to be specialists, to focus our attention on one country or one area of the world. And therefore we have to invent, and I have produced a kind of course, I don't want to call it a course, but it's more a series of encounters and meetings and so on which I would like to develop as a rival to the NA and the NBA and all the other things which nowadays supposedly mark a culmination of education.

Instead of teaching people to become even narrower specialists, and so they can work on their little topics for the rest of their lives, I want to teach them, not to teach them, but to introduce them to the ways of thinking and the attitudes, and the approaches of every discipline and every occupation and every kind of way of looking at a world. If you think what we have, we have ways of looking at the world, which are legalistic and bureaucratic, we have commercial ways, we have scientific ways, we have artistic ways, we have spiritual ways.

How can we have a sort of apprenticeship in each of these different aspects of life, and that is what I want to give people, and I'm thinking of how to establish this.

And finally, since I must only talk briefly, I am interested in developing new ways of travelling, that is to say, not only do we need meetings between us in terms of the knowledge we acquire, but also in a way of what we do when you go and meet strangers.

We have been taught to have prejudices about strangers and to have stereotypes about strangers, and that is why I am developing *The Neuse* in a place like Romania, where we went last month, and Turkey where they are going, likewise, next month where they're getting an amazing amount of collaboration because the Romanians say, "We want to enter Europe. Nobody understands what we are about. We don't understand what we are about. Who are we? For 50 years we were communists and we didn't know how to get out of it, and now we are becoming religious but we don't really know what is a Romanian, and no one knows what we are either."

And the Turks say something very interesting, the Turks say, "We have been in Europe for 500 years, and we are still not invited to European meetings. Why don't they treat us as Europeans? We've been here for so long." And of course I, as an historian, I was never taught that, I was taught it the other way around, these people were invaders and what were they doing here? But you know the Anglo-Saxons were invaders also, and therefore they are anxious to participate and say, "this is what I am", and the interesting thing in Turkey is to meet all those Muslim women who are now being educated and who continue to wear Muslim clothes, and who deliberately wear Muslim clothes hiding themselves, saying, "this is a new kind of feminism". And one wants to give them a chance to say who they are, but we have had 3 Universities say they would like to participate in this and believe the Turkish Government is keen on it and so on.

So what one wants is that in every country it is not the government actually that will speak on behalf of people and say, "this is what we stand for", but that each individual will say, "this is the great mass of amalgam of individuality and dreams and hopes and regrets that each one of us has", and so does this fit in with progress, does it fit in with an experiment? Yes, it is an experiment in the sense that if one enables you to meet every morning instead of reading a

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newspaper, you know a British newspaper who prints a weekly newspaper, but every morning we buy a newspaper, what a strange thing to do. Supposing every morning we met somebody, it takes about half an hour to read a newspaper, supposing you actually met somebody every morning and you could invent all these technological methods for the person to be in China or wherever you liked, and, no doubt, in due course we would invent translations and so on.

Would this be more full of promise than reading about what the government has recently announced? I don't know, I offer it as a possibility to you. I feel that I am living too restricted a life, that there are so many things that I have not yet experienced. I feel that all of us who supposedly belong to civilisation have never really tasted that civilisation, we've tasted minute aspects of it, and most people, when we talk about civilisations of the world, have never had a chance to see what other civilisations have to offer them also, and so this is an attempt to say, "here is the menu of life", and you start on it when you're a young person and you discover as much as you can, "This is what life has to offer, now you make up your own dish, you make up your own combination of things and see what you can make out of it, and other people will help you".

When I say that I invite people to make self-portraits, they cannot frequently do it easily themselves, and they need a bit of stimulation and encouragement to do it, and so I encourage people to do it in twos, either write something, somebody says, "well why; I can't understand what this is; why don't you talk about that?" and as a result of that you can get something which does become a document which you can make as public or private as you wish, but I hope public because you must not be afraid of the idea of ... privacy requires that you must not speak about things which others should not know. Your privacy is what only you know, and it is an asset of experience, which you should be willing to share with others and you do not lose anything by sharing your experience.

I do not know who you went to bed with last night, I do not want to know who you went to bed with last night, but you can talk about the art of going to bed if you want to in the abstract and give the results of your happy or sad conclusions. It is possible therefore for each person to have

something to say to the world and to be recognised and appreciated as having some value, and therefore we can construct something to be traditional to the kind of communities we have created. There is no need for you to be just a member of the communities into which you are born or in which we live, you can create a community of your own. And this way we perhaps might have communities, which do things, which we really want to happen. Of course we will make mistakes, of course it will go wrong, that doesn't matter, we must try and see what life has to offer.

**ROBIN BLACKBURN:** I would like to pick up the train of thought that Theodore has very intriguingly presented to us, perhaps in different dimensions from the ones that he has spoken about already. But I do think that this idea of progress is an essential one for us. I don't think we can reject it or turn our back from it. I think people who counsel that we should, are really giving in far too easily, and in a sense, although they can point to many terrible things that have happened, and that seem to disprove progress, I think that they, unfortunately, would be encouraging a degree of passivity and resignation there, that would be part of the problem.

I think we've got to recover a nerve and a sense that we can rediscover one another, we can in fact make the world a better place. I think the original promise of progress was this idea that the individual could realise themselves in richer and better ways, that there were structures of oppression which had to be taken away. There were romantic misconceptions here, there was too much optimism in human nature, but at the same time I think there was something essential.

Before I took up the study of pensions, mentioned by Peter, I was studying slavery and in a way I see that what's happened concerning slavery over the last 200 to 300 years as an example of how progress is enormously difficult and can be achieved, its never secure, but it is always worth striving for.

Up until 300 years ago the state of slavery was entirely accepted by the great philosophers and even the theologians, there were just a few individual voices but really practically nothing,

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and yet within a comparatively short space of time at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, there began to be this revulsion against slavery, and philosophers began to take up the cause, rather after ordinary people, interestingly enough, in fact the first philosophers point out that the idea of slavery is not acceptable to ordinary people, they don't seem to accept it for themselves, and they find something uncomfortable even for other people, even whether they've been taught that that must be right.

Something happened which does rather follow Theodore's idea here of a conversation between two people and the telling of a life story, an essential part of the rise in the anti-slavery movement was slaves ... I mean to begin with it was a movement of philosophers, respectable people, clergymen and so forth, but it really started to get somewhere when slaves themselves and former slaves were drawn into the advocacy, and one of the most powerful tools of advocacy, but it was also a way of themselves coming to terms with their own previous life history, was the telling of their narrative, the slave narrative.

*Frederick Douglass* came here to Scotland in the early 1840's and got huge audiences, actually he was still himself technically a slave, but he learnt through his ... in fact he goes on and writes his autobiography three times, and it's sort of compulsive with him because it's a way through language that he conquers a sense of himself and of his destiny, and also the destiny of those who have been left in slavery.

And I want to mention this because I think when one or two or three people get together, and I think there are signs that that apparently completely Utopian idea that even early in the day before reading the newspapers, you might be in touch with people, in really quite fundamental ways, who might be on the other side of the planet, and in a way that Utopia is almost within our grasp as we know. And in fact many people in this room will now be connected to the Internet and will actually be exchanging communication of greater or lesser weight, but this is an extraordinary transformation. But it's a transformation that, by itself, I think, you know fundamentally important forms of human communication, but if we look at the larger world and where the great decisions are made, we see there's a disconnect with this intimate sphere.

50 years ago, 100 years ago, people really felt committed to political parties, to a political process, committed in other spheres of their life to institutions, and in many cases I think the feeling of self fulfilment and the feeling that that was an essential part of one's social existence that type of activity, I think that has waned to a tremendous extent, even the turnout at the elections here in Britain, the turnout dropped by 10% at the last general election, a fairly astonishing fact, and that is in fact a picture of what's going on throughout the world. People find there's an intense commitment to the personal sphere, the family and family life and so forth, and this insatiable desire for equality for each individual to become the author of their own existence, I think there are many signs that it's a very powerful force in the world. I think the large corporations even try to flatter people that by buying their products that's part of what they're doing, they're helping to carve out a new existence for themselves.

The problem with that is that partly its simply not true that there is an agenda that the large corporations have which is not that of human, or its an imperilled ... I mean it will promise to some people some of the time some forms of self fulfilment, but there is together with it a great alienation, I mean I've been studying pensions where this alienation could scarcely be more palpable. The pension funds actually wield tremendous power potentially at the AGM's and in the boardrooms. They could call to rights the chief executives with tremendous programmes of self-aggrandizement and indeed even self-enrichment. They could call them to order but it's only recently that they've just begun in the most timid and modest ways to use their power.

In fact they have been restrained from it by the so-called trustee principle. People who have their savings in a pension trust are put in the position of women and children in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The trust law actually does derive from 18<sup>th</sup> Century ... you know property would be held in trust for women and for minors because they were deemed incapable of making decisions on their own and so other experts had to be drawn in to do it for them. Well those who were drawn in to do it for the great pension funds, helped to create the extraordinary world of the

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bubble, I don't think they did so consciously, it was an end result of many hundreds of thousands or indeed millions of people's activity, but somehow it became a world of serial alienation of each individual from the other, in which the activity of each individual actually thwarted the other person, so dyadic relations and triadic ones are fraught with this possibility that we can all become thirds for one another, where all the other for one another and people use others as means to their own ends.

Now I think we have to study these structures. It is the structure of globalisation which, even very powerful politicians find it enormously difficult to control. I don't think we need to give up on democracy but we need to find ways of making it act far more powerfully. At the moment it doesn't act. The so called democracy of corporate shareholders, that's even more of a hollow pretence and even more flawed and corrupted than parliamentary democracies and often are. I also think that within this world of globalisation, really there's a set of structures which tell you, "Well look at all the decisions, the essential decisions have been made, and you must do as ... there is no alternative to that", as the mantra used to go.

And its also a very difficult world to live in, it's a capitalist world to begin with, and we in Britain, and the Scottish definitely helped to pioneer this certainly with the English and some other countries, but did create capitalism. Its helped to produce technological wonders, its helped to make our lives infinitely better than that of our grandparents or great grandparents, there's no doubt about it. It's not perhaps helped to make those lives as rich and fulfilling as they could be, but above all this, and it's a terribly difficult thing to do, excludes many of the 6 billion plus inhabitants of the world, only 1 billion or at the most 2 are able to flourish even in a relative sense within this system.

The others are not always directly exploited or repressed, although that can happen and there's a growing zest for a new type of colonialism, a new type of intervention in the world, but even short of that unfortunately we've created rules or allowed a structure to rule that shouldn't be too difficult to work, and that is one of the gigantic obstacles to progress that we now face. So I think it's an enormously difficult task to think through, but

there is that connection between the aspiration of each individual, and the extraordinary way in which, across different cultures, this will be thought out and will be experienced and symbolised in many different ways, but I think the structures we now have really get in the way of our pursuing that great process of learning and of the forming of new networks of communication of a global sort, that might be capable of taking on globalisation.

There is an anti-globalisation movement which I am quite optimistic about, but I do think it could usefully, and has not yet, attended to the ways in which I think the pension crisis is stimulating millions of people into action, who had previously been somewhat passive, I am talking above all of continental Europe and Brazil and a few other places like that. So far it hasn't really hit these shores or has done so in a more minor way, but in France, Austria, Italy and Germany and many places there has been these tremendous movements, which I think, and I sort of conclude on this point, that in a way there within them something much more fundamental ... I mean they are, and they used to be the old sort of slogan of the left images, for example, workers, self management, workers control, and I think there's some truth in those old aspirations of giving people ... of allowing them to developing their existence on developing a degree of control over their own life and conditions. But there was always a difficulty there of enterprise egoism, there was a difficulty that it didn't necessarily each little group managing its own affairs doesn't necessarily create the possibility of a new and expansive general interest.

So I suppose the difficult task that I see confronting the friends of progress is still that of constructing new channels of communication and seeing that some of the structures that capitalism and the modern world created can help us, the difficulty is that they're presently controlled by too few people in the interests of too few people, and without the awakening of the spirit of all those involved, in fact too many are kept in the role of theoretical minor that too many have thought to be, you know, it's the grown ups who should run the show and they're, as it were, don't speak in front of the children,

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they don't have anything to say about it. I don't think the mass of humanity are prepared to be treated like that any longer, and I think that type of determinism has had its day.

And that's why I would remain unrepentantly a proponent of the ideal of progress. I certainly think there should be all due and a sort of certain sense of chastening after the disasters of the recent past, but many of those disasters, especially the ones that face humanity today, will come from completely turning our back on progress, and the aspirations for human self development and, to a agree, a collective self management, so an expanded concept of democracy.

**RUTH DUDLEY-EDWARDS:** Well I have to admit to having been somewhat disconcerted when I heard the words each of the speakers were speaking for 15 minutes because I was, for some reason, under the impression that we would speak for 3 minutes and then debate amongst ourselves. So I have been listening, and also with another bit of my brain, trying to think of what I might have to contribute of a more substantial nature than I did.

I am immensely attracted by what Theodore Zeldin says, as I have been attracted by what I have read of him. At one level, what he's saying is fantastically ambitious, but on another level it is the essential humility of saying one-to-one, one-to-one, individuals – no isms. Robin is an ism person although he hasn't mentioned some of his isms this evening, but he is someone who believes in ... well I mean he says he believes in progress without actually talking about what progress means because one man's progress can be another man's something very, very nasty.

So I thought maybe, what I might usefully talk about is the problem that I think is caused by, if you like, clever silliness. I have spent my life, I suppose, dodging isms. Isms frighten me, and the more that I write the more that I research, and more suspicious I am of them, and in the end what I learn from all the time, is exactly what Theodore was talking about. I learned from individuals. I spend a lot of time listening to people and talking to people, almost as much as, God help me, reading newspapers. I started out in a very ism world in Ireland. A world in which ... damn close to fundamentalist capitalism and nationalism ruled,

and I couldn't wait to get out to a place where I thought you could say what you believed and speak your mind, which was England, to which I will always be grateful and where I've lived since 1965.

My first real book was about Irish republicanism, which was a book about a man who led the 1916 Revolution, Patrick Pearse, and I was curious about republicanism, not least because my republican grandmother, who lived upstairs when I was growing up, was a completely uncompromising republican. I mean she would have been entirely pro the IRA. She wasn't a stupid woman by any means, she was utterly and absolutely implacable, and I suppose I grew up interested in implacability of what was it that made, you know, quite an intelligent woman unable to understand the down side of it, if you like. You know only the interest in the Revolution and Rebellion of 1916 and the apparent glory of it, no interest in the hundreds of people who were killed and, what we would now call the collateral damage. The poor retches in the slums who just happened to be caught in the middle of fire. All those people who have been written out by history along with the people who have fought the First World War for Britain who have been written out as, somehow or other, traitors.

So her mind interested me and writing a book about Patrick Pearse was most instructive. And particularly instructive again because you had a very intelligent man who did, I think, terrible harm in the end with the very best intention, because his feet weren't really on the ground, and I think he was probably somebody who never really did any more than my grandmother did what Theodore was talking about. These people talked to those people who agree with them. They don't listen to other people, they shout at them, they don't hear them.

And what was the next book ... oh yes, James Connolly who was in the Rebellion with Patrick Pearse, but he wanted international socialism. Patrick Pearse wanted a Gaelic speaking Irish nation which had really gone back fifteen hundred years. Together they brought about the deaths of quite a lot of people, for the very best of reasons. James Connolly had a very considerable and enquiring mind. I think he read



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too much and he was too much an ism person, and he was a syndicalist of times and he was involved in massive left wing rows, but did James Connolly hear people that didn't agree with him? Not much, no. He shouted at them.

And then there was Victor Gollancz. *Victor Gollancz* wanted to save the world in another way and he was a communist fellow traveller. Tremendous desire to do good, no question about that. Extraordinary intelligence. Totally and absolutely hoodwinked in the 1930's by communists because Victor Gollancz was very like an awful lot of people in the 1930's. How many people were capable of saying, "fascism is terrible and so is communism"? They couldn't face it, they couldn't face the talk that the two isms were dreadful, so if you were anti-fascist there were very few people that wanted to look at the truth, the real truth about the Soviet Union, and *Victor* didn't listen to reality, didn't take much account of reality or, like any other of these people, take much account of human nature.

And then there was *The History of the Economist*. Good Lord, I tell you that's a big book. That's some doorstep. *The Economist* was fascinating once again because here were all these rational people being rational, and they believed everybody could be rational. But why did Victor Gollancz believe that they could all be in the arms of brotherly love? Patrick Pearse believes that they would be made perfect, recreated people when the Irish language was restored. All the same absence of a grip on reality.

I think quite like *The Economist* in some ways, I mean I agree with it on a number of things, but particularly in its desire that there should be less meddling and people that deny them, rather libertarian, I would be libertarian in the way it is, I would want less intervention, less meddling and less regulation, less bureaucracy and all the rest of it. But I did get quite a lot of fun really about their eternal belief that if you only explained it clearly enough, everybody would understand and then they would take the rational line. They still have attacks of this quite often.

My favourite bit of *The Economist* really is in 1930's when, really nice, Walter Lake, who was the epitome of the first class mind who really knows that it will be fine if you explain it ... those

bits of ... when *The Economist*, under Walter Lake, would suddenly say, "Herr Hitler is showing encouraging signs of statesmanship", because they couldn't believe really that anybody could be so irrational. And in that they were tremendously English. I mean I would say, and I say this as an Irish person with former baggage that that comes with, I say it as somebody who, as a journalist, as much involved with matters in Northern Ireland, and I also see it in looking at the dealings with the European Union. I'm not talking about Scots, I'm talking about English. The English belief that really all the chaps will be ok in the end, they will see the point, and really everybody's ok and you just have this Kantian view of things, you know, you just give something to these chaps in negotiation, and of course they'll give something back. Well you know they tried it with the French, God help us, they tried it with the IRA, they tried with everybody, like they tried it with Hitler, and it isn't until the back is completely to the wall that they begin to grasp that this isn't a chap that's susceptible to reason.

So what did I do next, I did "*The Orange Order*", but that was a nice change. They weren't trying to rule the world, I must say. Given that, I was really interested in writing about them because nobody ever listened to them. Nobody listened to them. Everybody wrote them off as mindless, nasty bigots, and I didn't think it was quite fair, and I got to know them and I listened to a lot of them, the way that Theodore recommends. I sat for many hours with people, listened to them talking about what their lives were and what the Orange Lodge was about, and why they had come into it, and what their grandfather meant to them, and all that. And most illuminating, I got, of course, written off as a new Orange bigot, or whatever it is I seem to be now.

In a way they were refreshing because they didn't think they were clever, and they weren't particularly clever, I mean some of them were clever but it isn't an organisation that would ... well actually you wouldn't want to run The Orange Order in Northern Ireland anyway if you were that clever. But what I did see, as I see all the time with writing about Northern Ireland, is

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how foolish clever people have been in assessing it.

I have also been a Civil Servant in my time before I started writing. I was a Civil Servant in the late 70's the Labour Government when we were saving British Industry. I did try - truly I tried. We had a great strategy which involved throwing enormous amounts of money at capitalism, but under the influence of Ben, or whomsoever trying to bring in works counsels, or some way of the workers ... anyway it was all a waste of money, and really we just clogged things up and made it worse, and if we had just let industry get on with it, they would have done much better, and the taxpayer would have had to spend a lot less.

I'm a profound sceptic about Europe for the same reasons, too many clever people doing what's beyond them. Even closer to home, you just look at the NHS. How in hell does anybody think they can run the NHS? It's the most terrible employer in the world. It's going to be run by somebody like Alan Milburn or John Reed who've never read anything, in their entire lives. I don't think there is anybody in the world who can run the NHS, its too big. It's beyond people. There are lots of things that we are facing, with lots of problems. They really just have to be decentralised and let go back to Local Authority. I don't think that Robin and his friends are going to be able to solve globalisation, I mean give me a break, this is what we're stuck with. We have to see what we're stuck with and work with it, but not actually imagine that somehow, by writing another book about anti-globalisation, the people who are running around throwing stones every time there's a major economic conference, that somehow they're going to find another ism that's going to cure things.

We've got too clever for our own good, it seems to me. We don't know how to deal with our technology because technological development has come about too quickly. I don't actually know about the fact that our scientists and our technologists have invented too fast, but they have invented too fast for our limited imagination, and our limited abilities. I think more humility from our clever people would be a start, and more listening. And really, I wish I had a solution, but that's the best I can offer.

**PETER JONES:** I'm going to kick off proceedings by challenging Theodore and Robin just a little bit, and perhaps siding with Ruth that, it struck me when listening to you both that, one of the modern paradoxes is that although, as you say, Robin, we are all infinitely better off than our grandparents and our great grandparents, we don't seem to be any happier.

According to all sorts of measurers, whether its economists or psychologists who are looking at this, we are no happier than the previous generations where, despite all this increasing wealth ... and one of the explanations for this is that we are constantly concerned with questions of relative deprivation, that although I might have a lot of money, I don't think I have enough of it, and I don't think I have enough or as much as I deserve.

According to a range of people from Richard Layard at the NSE to Oliver James the psychologist, this kind of problem is the main reason where we're less happy, and that really strikes at the notion of equality that, when we meet people, as you are arguing that we should do, Theodore, one of the first things we do is not, "what can I learn from this person, what can I learn about this person's world, their life, their civilisation which will help me?" but, "is this person richer or poorer than me?" And that kind of search for inequality, which we seem to be engaged on, it seems to me, strikes directly at your proposition and yours, Robin.

**THEODORE ZELDIN:** I ask you, why do you want to be happy? It's a rather old fashioned thing to want. Why are you so concerned by how much money other people earn, because you work for *The Economist*. But more important is not what money they have, but what it is they have that money cannot buy. And that is something, which people give to one another, and what I meant was a different kind of exchange to the exchange which *The Economist* studies, which is what people can do reciprocally.

And this is what happens to me when I talk to people about their lives, and I do that, not by questioning them, but by discussing the problems in my life, I say, "this is the sort of thing I've thought about, and what do you think?" and we

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stimulate each other to think about things in general. Not just to tell one's story, because one can be boring talking about one's story, one must try and see what can come out of one's story, and I think where we have to move forward is not to talk about happiness, which can mean many different things, which, can mean mild contentment, which can be bovine or can be a different animal nature, it can be vegetable, or it can mean moments of ecstasy, which don't last very long. It can mean satisfaction with the status quo, which shows a certain blindness. No I'm trying to think, how can one get that much greater satisfaction which comes from being useful to someone else. The ability to give to others is much more worthy of being calculated by accountants, than what one receives from others, and we haven't got around to that.

Let me just make another point which relates to that. When Robin was talking about self fulfilment as being a basic human desire, I would like to say that it is impossible to fulfil oneself on one's own, and the whole industry of self development which has now flourished with rich employers, simulate, says, "You are really a wonderful person, we're going to get the stuff out of you by encouraging you by going to some preacher who will give you illumination". I don't believe this. I think we infect each other. We catch wisdom from each other like diseases, and sometimes we get it wrong of course, usually. But we do need other people, and its not self fulfilment or self development but reciprocal interest in others.

So where happiness is concerned, we are thinking about oneself, "Am I happy?" What I'm saying is, "Who are you, what is interesting about you, what can you tell me, and your story is much more interesting than my story".

**ROBIN BLACKBURN:** Yes, I am very much in tune with what Theodore has been saying. I think language, for example, is something where we each need others, really innumerable others, and we are more individual really because we are more social because we can speak a language which we never invented ourselves. That we might, a very few of us, make a tiny little impact on it. But really we can all invent our own, quite original, sentences even the 3 or 4 year old can do that. But they're doing it with something. A tremendous

tool that they've been given by others, that's developed over Centuries and Millennia.

I think that, when one says, returning to Peter's question about ... I mean I am interested in this idea about envy. I think it's over-pitched in the question and in the studies you're referring to. But there's something to it as well as language, we do have in common a sort of weird global economic system, and this something, as it were "progressive" about that. I mean we exchange with one another ... it could open up life and fulfilment for the multi-million inhabitants. And there must be some commonality to it because that system of exchange and the economic system, even the question about money, and I do, I'm going to slightly disagree with that, in fact, definitely disagree with it, but there is something true about it, and it shows that its not really a very good measure of progress.

But I simply don't accept this idea that there are huge chasms dividing different human beings from one another. I think they could negotiate, given the right structures, areas of agreement that would be pretty significant about what would constitute a better world. And I think it's a sort of fundamentalist delusion to tell the truth that there's incommensurability to human aspirations and experience and ability to measure whether the world's getting a better place. And the fact that we would be prepared to say, if each had more resources, which is partly what lies behind this idea, even this rather negative idea of envy, which I don't accept it's as widespread and there's something else there too. But let's just have a look, there's something positive even in envy. At least there's a common aspiration of absence of want and a control over better resources.

But ultimately and just finally, I'm going to disagree with this point, because as I'm sure you know, the one thing one would never ask, and I don't think in any culture ... I would be interested to see whether there's any culture, where you would ask of someone when you meet them, "How much do you earn?" Even in our tremendously money obsessed culture, that's the one solecism that none of us ever commit isn't it? We may think it, but we never would dare to say it, and that's why together we add up and are, perhaps slightly better than, what we

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would be taken individually. The sort of questions you would legitimately ask, or would normally ask, is, where you come from or what do you do. Now it might be you will try and discern some sort of clue about income from that, but actually we're pointing to something, to some real connection there, because where you come from or what you do, that is something important about you, and I would say it's something better about you than this preoccupation with money.

**THEODORE ZELDIN:** Would you agree that envy is in fact just another word for ignorance? I see if I ask you, "Do you have more money?" You will not tell me, "Yes I have more money, but my wife hates me and the children are on drugs, and although I have a big house, it is falling down with taxation and all the rest of it". All those things you do not know. All the rich people I have talked to and got to know well, are the most miserable that one can be, and have not reached happiness.

**RUTH DUDLEY-EDWARDS:** But, Theodore, isn't that part of the reason why there is such a cult of celebrity at the moment? Because people actually do believe that they know these people, and they do know that they are suffering from anorexia, or they have just lost their boyfriend or ... and that's why they relate to them so well.

**THEODORE ZELDIN:** In ancient Greece and in ancient Rome they had Gods who had all sorts of little difficulties, and who pinched each other's wives and did exactly the same thing as the pop stars do now. And it's mythology.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** One of the themes that's running through the Book Festival this year is about the enlightenment, and I am reading this book called, "*Darwin and the Barnacle*", for a discussion tomorrow with Rebecca Stott the author of it, and it's absolutely fascinating, because it gets across this process whereby Darwin has developed his theory on the origin of species, and he then spends 8 years studying all these barnacles because he needs to refine his theory.

Now what's absolutely amazing about this book, and I absolutely love it, as you can tell, and where it takes this discussion, is it also gets across what else is going on in society, the development of the railway system and the postal system that allows

him to collect specimens from all around the world. The revolution across the continent. Getting rid of all the myths from religion and what have you. So it really gets across a sense of change, a sense of possibility, a sense of things of progress. Completely gets across a sense of progress, and you can understand how then, progress made sense.

And you think to yourself, well why is it, when you've been talking about progress, we seem to be confronted with no concept of progress whatsoever. Theodore, what you're saying, seems to sound more like self-help for everyone. If Darwin spent 8 years doing this, because he knew he wanted his theory to be taken seriously and he knew he had to impress other clever people, so he spent 8 years doing that. All that effort to make sure that his theory was taken seriously, whereas you seem to be saying, "well we've all got something valuable to contribute, we're all the same so let's just talk to each other. You haven't got to fight for anything, you haven't got to struggle, you haven't got to work hard, you haven't got to prove yourself, we can all just be nice to each other and then everyone can feel value".

And Ruth seems to be saying, well it's almost like, "Go back to the caves", or something, because we got where we are today because clever people stretched themselves. Clever people really pushed us further forward, and you're saying, "Oh clever people". Now the problem is, we wouldn't be here, where we are today, which is far better off, not just economically, but in terms of democracy, in terms of education, in terms of knowledge. We live in a richer society today, and we wouldn't have got here without clever people pushing themselves.

**RUTH DUDLEY-EDWARDS:** I wasn't really suggesting going back to the caves, I would find them deeply uncomfortable. I suppose I'm just trying to talk about a sense of limitations. If I could just give you 2 minutes on the neighbourhood I live in where, I think, there has been true progress except for the harm that's been done by social engineering.

I have lived for more than 20 years in an area, which was English, then the Polls came in during

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the war, then some Irish came in but it's still fundamentally English. When I arrived it was just at the stage when the corner shop was taken over by Asians, the first Asians there. Then there were Hindus, then there was a Muslim takeaway, then we got ... I mean I find Indian restaurants, you always get too many Indian restaurants but there you are. We had, on my last count, something like 21 different communities ... well not really communities, families from different backgrounds, different countries, different races, different religions.

And for me it has been absolutely fascinating how the Hindu began to get on with the Muslim. I mean they wouldn't have talked back home. And he was telling me at great length about his former thoughts of Muslims and his reservations about them, but he even went to a Muslim wedding.

It was how the English, who are an extraordinary people, came to terms with seeing their neighbourhood being changed. And they came to terms with it because it was being done at a pace they could grasp, and also because the Asian guy in the newsagents was wonderful, and would listen to them and sympathise with them about their troubles. And race relations in my little area, which is about 2 miles for Southall, absolutely wonderful.

The real problem has been coming from the white working class youths who have been let down by the education system, and given nothing to live for. No sense of pride, no pride in their own country, a deep resentment from them. They are the victim, and I could go on about this, but I won't because there isn't time. They are serious victims of social engineering.

I fear for what's going to happen on the asylum seeker front, not because people near me are racist, because they're not, but because nobody will hear what they're saying about it. Nobody will hear that actually they haven't got any problem with all the Asians, but there's a real problem now, they think, with some aliens, for instance. Nobody will hear that one collection of immigrants are causing problems because of our particular social background we have. Nobody will listen to these people.

And for the first time I am seeing something I am afraid of. But I suppose the two points I'm

trying to make are, "Yes, of course you can have progress", but it has to be done at a manageable level, and where I think it goes entirely wrong is when people believe that they can find an all encompassing solution. That's not the same as Darwin working away to get his theory right.

**PETER JONES:** Theodore, in the enlightenment people had to prove themselves, not just meet, that wasn't good enough.

**THEODORE ZELDIN:** Yes I think the question has raised something important. He is excited by the enthusiasm of people in the enlightenment and in Darwin and so on, who think they can make the world better. And I'm all in favour of clever people trying to make ... and not clever people, everyone, trying to make the world better, but I am saying that we have to look at the mistakes of all those people. Most of them got something wrong, and most of them failed to predict unexpected results, perverse results, and we will doubtless make mistakes, but I am saying we have to base ourselves, not on some ideology but on experience. What is it that we must try to avoid. At least we must not be so stupid as to repeat mistakes, which have been already made.

And then when you say that, "I am merely revising self-help", I'm saying the exact opposite, and that is a good example of how people think when you try to put ideas to them. They will naturally try and relate that idea to the nearest idea which is familiar to them, and this may sound like self-help, but it is the very opposite. It's saying that people cannot help themselves and need other people to help them, and they need to get satisfaction from helping others. And when you say that I am saying everyone is the same, I'm saying the exact opposite, I am saying that everyone is unique and the more that you look at them, the more you find they are absolutely amazing, and it is these differences which are important.

And you were saying something about people talk to people they agree with, and just reinforce their prejudices in that way. I am interested in getting you to talk to people who you cannot agree with, who you cannot understand, to see the whole variety of possibilities. So I do not say just talk to each other, and everything will be

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fine, far from it. You will, in the course of this conversation, discover that there are enormous gaps in your experience, and that you are only one quarter alive, indeed 1% alive, and you haven't discovered what life is, and so there is an enormous amount still to be done, and of course you will fall flat on your face when you try, but this is what ... we all die in the end and falling flat on our face is not all that different.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** I'm struck by a number of things actually. First of all the idea of kind of talking and listening as a kind of motif of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, kind of reminded me of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, namely *Freud in Psychoanalysis* which seems to be about talking and about listening.

**THEODORE ZELDIN:** No, no. Freud only listened, he did not talk, and you paid him to listen to you.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** There was a lot of talking, whatever, I mean I think a lot of talking was done in *Psychoanalysis*, I mean he didn't talk but he left 25 volumes of work as an alternative to speaking. What I wanted to say was that it seems to me that the idea of talking and listening where its reciprocal, kind of presupposes that the people who are talking to each other are already equal, and that that is precisely what is yet to be established.

**THEODORE ZELDIN:** It doesn't presuppose it. It is designed to create it, and the art of listening is something we haven't learnt. We do not presuppose that people are equal, no. You try and talk to your boss, and he will not pay much attention, but if you succeed in getting him to listen, then a measure ...

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Well how do you get him to listen? In that case you can only get him to listen if the equality is already established. You're saying the boss doesn't listen to you, presumably because he's your boss, and so you are not equal. So the point becomes, how do you establish the equality.

**THEODORE ZELDIN:** The boss will listen to you when the lights go off.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Well yes, but who switches the lights off, I mean who creates the process? It seems to me that both you,

Theodore, and Ruth, do kind of presuppose that by rejecting isms, you also probably ... well I don't know I was wondering in the case of Ruth, whether you reject the notion of structure as well, because that is what determines the basis on which people can actually address each other.

**THEODORE ZELDIN:** Well, I'll tell you another reason why, or how I think you can get the boss to listen. If you get to know the boss, perhaps you cannot get to know your boss yourself, but someone else might get this boss to talk about himself, and you would be able to read what he has written or said, you will discover that your boss is in a state of deep uncertainty, despair, he doesn't know what he's doing, he thinks he has messed up his whole life, he has reached the age of 50 and he is working 20 hours a day, and his family is leaving him, and he doesn't know what to do. Now all the bosses I have spoken to are in a state of confusion, do you not think that these people are ruling you because they know what they want? They would love to know how to do things differently, but they have no alternative. That is why we have to invent an alternative for them.

**ROBIN BLACKBURN:** I don't want to be predictable here, but I think the way to get the boss to listen to you, I mean you can try all sorts of different ways, and you can wait for the lights to go out, but I think that a slightly surer method might be to become active in your trade union, or it might be to become active in the pension that is supplied to many occupational ... you know there are 11 million members of pension schemes in this country, half the workforce, and basically if the pension funds tell a boss that he must worry about X, then he will begin to worry about X, I can assure you.

The pension funds are enormously powerful potentially. To some extent what is really one of the boss's main problems, I mean he may have the personal problems Theodore evoked, but I think the common threat is that he will have, he thinks, a baying pack of front managers demanding value, demanding that he create and increase value, and that will be causing to go through his mind things like, "Well we must cut down labour costs in order to staunch the pension deficit. We've got to sack 500 workers".

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I think unemployment has gone up in Scotland, interestingly enough, with many large companies, especially manufacturing ones, trying to ... you know this pursuit of shareholder value, this pursuit of economy, and really a lot of it to staunch the pension fund deficit, and that's a very powerful cause of anxiety, I can assure you, at the present time.

So what would be truly tremendous is if you have a definite economic structure where the workforce, not only inside their own factory as trade unionists, or simply as staff members, but also in the wider economy in some economic association like a pension fund, able to express democratically their views about whether bad practices can ecologically or in labour terms can be discouraged.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Mr Chairman, I am 73, I have seen a lot of life, and I feel that, progress has been blighted by clever people who have no common sense. In fact clever people sometimes are stupid, and there's a test for cleverness and people pass that and they get promoted. But there's no test for common sense, and so you've got too many people with their hands on the levers of power, and they don't have the common sense to go with that. Now that's what I have seen. So let's say I'm a pessimist about progress. Can I just say to you that I am a happily married man, 48 years, but I am offered to be a disciple of yours, I adored your contribution, your attitude and your view on life. So if I could see you after the show, give you my address, I will become a disciple of yours.

**PETER JONES:** Alright, I think that was a contribution rather than a question ...

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** A proposition.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Well this is to Theodore mostly. He was inspired, apparently, to suggest that two people in communication can create a new Universe, but this installation came from somewhere. So somebody is forgotten here. The dead, or God maybe, that encourages people to feel that they are not complete, that there is something wrong about our lives, that they must find each other or find a common ground in order to be open with each other. And my guess is that maybe in the

developing countries you will find people who are more open to talk without prejudice to each other, including the Western people. And here in the West, people count on each other to, maybe as here themselves, to feel superior to the other, they talk to the other as an object because I came across this very many times. And maybe it's because the inspiration, the spirit, the God is absent from their lives. So I would like to get a comment about that.

**THEODORE ZELDIN:** Yes it is certain that it is not easy to find people who are willing to engage in these open conversations, but I think people are usually willing to talk about themselves. Even if it is simply to assert themselves, and when you pursue that with a sympathetic discussion in which you are trying to understand their position, it is possible to get further beyond simply them boasting or drumming their own ideas up. When you say you need God, some people do need God, some people need gurus, some people need philosophers, some people need pop stars, some people need all sorts of others to stimulate them, and my idea is that we need to find those people who will stimulate us, and we cannot be sure where they will be. I think that the modern couple, where a man and a woman try to stimulate each other and understand each other, is becoming the model on which the whole of society will ultimately try to follow that. That is to say private life will become the model for public life, because in private life you are able to admit your vulnerabilities and your weaknesses and your anxious to help one another.

So if one wants to summarise what I think about the whole meeting that we have had today that should we be thinking about progress, should we be thinking about it in a traditional way? Or should we be making progress in our idea of progress, and I think we have to because we have seen progress go wrong so often in the past. And your right of then to say that our institutions prevent us, and we have got to create new institutions, and we have got to make them ourselves instead of waiting for some higher authority, and some powerful people and others to do it for us.

**RUTH DUDLEY-EDWARDS:** I'm a libertarian about religion too, I'm an atheist, and

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you're all welcome to whatever religion you have. I have seen religion in Northern Ireland being, in some cases, the cause of terrible things, and in many cases enabling people to forgive and to live their lives without bitterness because of the belief they have in God, and I can be impressed by other people's religions. All I can say, is picking up Theodore's point a bit, for me the joy of life and the happiness I have in it, which is considerable, is all to do with laughter and the love of friends.

**ROBIN BLACKBURN:** I am also an atheist, but I am aware that actually a lot of what I would regard as progress, has been produced over several Centuries, including by people who are inspired by religious ideas. The anti-slavery struggles, for example, that I began by referring to. I think, however, it is interesting that when they were doing that, they were entering into a conversation with people who weren't necessarily of their faith. There was a period they did it just amongst fellow believers, as it were, and it wasn't particularly effective. It became effective when it was done quite widely in a sort of inter-faith way, and when it also reached out to the people who were directly concerned with slaves themselves. Without their revolts in Haiti, above all, but in many other places, this idea wouldn't have taken fruit. And also something else important in what you're saying, I think is this idea ... I mean I think conversation is terribly important, but it is rather easy, including on the Internet, which I earlier referred to, just to discuss and that's really a problem of the Internet, that it just encourages like minded people to get together. I think there is something very important about the encounter with people who come from another culture, another situation, and I don't think most great acts of progress ever got achieved just within one culture. I think its always interesting that there was a process of inclusion and enlargement of the cultural space.

I think we are all still living in the aftermath of the Second World War which added up to a bit of progress, precariously so, and I will just finally say that I think the sort of intimate revolution that Theodore's been talking to us about, I think in a curious way its happening, I mean the victory of the Second World War was a victory of big international forces, but recently, things that might have been acceptable before, apparently are not

acceptable any longer. Even the way wars are fought, even when we use much, much less violence than was used before, its still, we find something deeply disturbing about that. And I think that that's a sign of progress, I would say. Its something to do with a conversation that has worked, and that we no longer find that acceptable.

And so I would just finally say that, I think one's got to look beyond the circle of one's own friends. It's great to have friends and they are part of what one does when one lives, but what does one talk to those friends about. I think it would be nice if one was able to talk to those friends, as part of that friendship, and part of the problem with the friendship, because friendships can be a problem too, is if one was talking about, at least sometimes, of matters of concern to our species as a whole or even just our locality as a whole. So I would say the intimate satisfactions and aspirations are tremendously important, but I think we feel an urge in us to go beyond that, and our form of life is now a global one. Its irreversible now, we can't go back, so I think we have to make the best of it by bringing the values of the intimate sphere into these unfriendly structures, which, sadly at the moment, repel those values.

**PETER JONES:** It remains for me to thank on your behalf our three speakers, Theodore Zeldin, who is, I think, a polymath of the humanities. Robin Blackburn, an unashamed progressive, and I'm glad to see that's still alive and well, and Ruth Dudley-Edwards the professional sceptic and scrutineer.

Would you please thank the panel.