It is with great pleasure that we present two Round-Table reviews for this issue of Britain and the World. The first Round-Table focuses on R. A. Houston's rigorous and innovative new book, Punishing the Dead?: Suicide, Lordship, and Community in Britain, 1500–1830. R. A. Houston is a Professor of History at the University of St. Andrews and has written extensively on literacy, madness, identity and the Enlightenment. His new book, the latest in a long line of social histories of Britain and Europe, examines the beliefs, institutions and practices surrounding suicide in England and Scotland. Above all, Punishing the Dead demonstrates the importance and potential of writing a 'completely British history', one that transcends national boundaries to consider and compare the laws, politics and cultures of both England and Scotland.

We are very fortunate to have three esteemed scholars of British and European history as our reviewers for this Round-Table. Julian Goodare, a Reader in Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh, specialises in the history of government and witch-hunting in early modern Scotland. His publications include State and Society in Early Modern Scotland (1999) and The Government of Scotland, 1560–1625 (2004). He has edited two books on Scottish witchcraft and is the director of the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, an online research resource funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Brian P. Levack is the John E. Green Regents Professor in History at the University of Texas at Austin and his research interests centre on the political and


Our second Round-Table focuses on Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon’s thought-provoking new book about the controversial subject of Britain’s counterinsurgency wars after 1945. *Imperial Endgame: Britain’s Dirty Wars and the End of Empire* sheds new light on counterinsurgency efforts in Palestine, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus and Aden. Published in the wake of the high-profile case of former Mau Mau adherents suing the British Government for abuse during the struggle in Kenya and the forthcoming release of previously unseen official documents related to counterinsurgency efforts in numerous former possessions, this book could not be timelier. It is also the first volume in The British Scholar Society’s Britain and the World book series with Palgrave Macmillan.

Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon is an Associate Professor of History and the Cleveland C. Burton Professor in International Relations at the University of Arkansas. His previous books include *The Irish Experience during the Second World War: An Oral History* (2004) and *Turning Points of the Irish Revolution: The British Government, Intelligence, and the Cost of Indifference, 1912–1921* (2007).

The Round-Table on *Imperial Endgame* has the benefit of reviews by three high-profile historians of Britain. R. J. Q. Adams is the Distinguished Professor of History and Patricia and Bookman Peters Professor of History at Texas A&M University. His previous works include *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935–39* (1993), a biography of Bonar Law (1999), *Europe, Crisis and Conflict: 1890–1945* (2003) and *Balfour: The Last Grandee* (2007). He is currently at work on a book about the age of King George V.

Keith Jeffery is Professor of British History at Queen’s University Belfast. His books include *The British Army and the crisis of Empire, 1918–1922* (1984), *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: a political soldier* (2006) and the highly-acclaimed *MI6: The history of the Secret Intelligence Service* (2010).

Our final reviewer is John Lonsdale, Emeritus Professor of History at Trinity College, Cambridge. Professor Lonsdale is the world’s leading expert on the
history of the Mau Mau rebellion. His works include *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (1992), with Bruce Berman, and *Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority & Narration* (2003), with E. S. Atieno Odhiambo.

We hope you enjoy reading the excellent debates in these two Round-Table selections for the September 2011 issue of *Britain and the World*.

Michelle Brock
*University of Texas at Austin*

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It was in 1856, not long after the period covered by this book, that the poet Robert Browning visited the Morgue in Paris, where the bodies of people who had drowned themselves in the Seine were displayed, ‘waiting to be owned’:

Poor men, God made, and all for that!  
The reverence struck me; o’er each head  
Religiously was hung its hat,  
Each coat dripped by the owner’s bed,  
Sacred from touch: each had his berth,  
His bounds, his proper place of rest,  
Who last night tenanted on earth  
Some arch, where twelve such slept abreast, –  
Unless the plain asphalte seemed best.

Browning was clearly sympathetic to these suicides. Not only that, but he expected his readers to share his sympathy. However, this sympathy was a recent development. Browning himself mentioned ‘sin.’ Not long earlier, suicide had inspired horror, loathing – and a desire to punish.

This desire to punish suicide forms the starting point for R. A. Houston’s latest book. Yet it is just the start of where the book takes us. Suicide is an important human topic, to be sure. But readers should not make the mistake of
imagining that the book is simply 'about suicide.' Browning, in his poem, went on to imagine the motives of the three men whose drowned bodies he viewed. This question is certainly addressed in Houston’s excellent book, but it is far from central to it. It is more about social, legal, and governmental responses to suicide, and about what this tells us about society, law, and government.

The social history of suicide is usually understood in retrospect. It is after someone has killed themselves that we start thinking, not only about why they did it, but about what to do next. Almost all the historical sources on early modern suicide were generated in retrospect. Houston’s book is important, not only in engaging with these sources in a more straightforward way than some, but also in showing how they can be drawn out into a broader understanding of society. As we shall see, the words ‘lordship’ and ‘community’ are in the title for good reason.

Another word in the title is ‘Britain.’ This is a fully Anglo-Scottish book, operating with equal skill on both sides of the Border, and pursuing a compare-and-contrast approach that brings many benefits. For several topics there are separate Scottish and English chapters, and the analysis is comparative throughout. This review, from a Scottish historian, will comment in more detail on the Scottish angle.

Early modern suicides were punished in up to three separate ways: forfeiture of movable goods, profane burial, and corporal punishments such as public carting of the body. Houston argues persuasively that these should be considered separately. There is a careful discussion of regional variation, with deliberate emphasis on the north of England, but also other regions. Wales is visited, and the Isle of Man is shown to have good records that receive detailed attention.

The book uses a remarkably wide array of sources, in contrast to previous studies of English suicide relying mainly on coroners’ inquest reports. These have no parallel in Scotland; by contrast, Scotland has fuller records on forfeiture, and in this review I will concentrate on this topic. The fiscal records, mostly in manuscript and unindexed, are difficult to use, but Houston has searched them patiently and compiled valuable data. This is an important nuts-and-bolts investigation, building on work done by Athol Murray and others on Scottish legal, administrative, and fiscal systems.

Punishments for suicide were meted out by agencies of government. One of the central issues for Houston is to understand the interaction of government and people as a power relationship. This comes out particularly well in his detailed study of forfeiture. One might expect forfeitures to be wholly coercive – officials entering a community and removing assets from it – but they were in fact negotiated, with various local interests being taken into account. The crown profited much less from forfeitures in practice than it would have done had it
exacted its full legal entitlement, and in England the royal almoner channelled profits into charitable works.

How did forfeitures work? In Scotland, they were handled centrally, by the office of the treasurer. In theory, the crown seized the suicide’s movable goods through forfeiture – ‘escheat’ was the technical Scottish term. In practice, the goods were reallocated to someone else, usually taking account of the family’s circumstances. Houston shows that officials tried to resolve disputes and to seek some kind of equitable solution. About one-third of escheats were granted to kin, and others went to creditors. These grants were formally ‘gifts,’ and there is an excellent discussion of the reciprocity and inequality manifested in early modern gift relationships.

Forfeiture nevertheless meant that the movable goods of a suicide were handled differently from those of someone dying of natural causes. Even if the escheat was granted to the family, there were legal fees, and ‘compositions’ payable to the crown (a varying proportion of the value of the escheat). The crown’s intervention was, as Houston makes clear, based on punitive principles. And this had a rationale from within the community. People wanted to see suicides harshly dealt with.

This generalised summary should not be allowed to obscure the subtlety of Houston’s detailed argument (and I will return to some details shortly). Broad interpretations are nevertheless part of Houston’s stock in trade, making the book a stimulating and productive read. He likes to draw ideas from some of the great thinkers on the interaction of law and society: Maine, Maitland, Tönnies, Vinogradoff, Weber. A more recent system-builder who is repeatedly cited is Foucault. In my own work on power I have found Michael Mann particularly helpful, and although Houston does not cite Mann, it is interesting to see him referring to ‘physical, financial, or psychic domination’ (p. 171), which seems to echo Mann’s tripartite division of power into military, economic, and ideological.

The exercise of negotiated power over the goods of a suicide is a fascinating case-study of personal ‘lordship.’ Houston delves deep into studies of medieval as well as early modern lordship (he also ranges at times well beyond his declared terminal date of 1830). The sensitive reallocation of a suicide’s goods is shown to be one of the ways in which lords exercised and legitimised their power. They enquired into the interests of the family and the wider community. We are told of a ‘shared language of legitimation based on fairness, charity, and responsibility’ (p. 149), and that ‘good lords would not only take, but also give’ (p. 184). Some of the ‘giving’ of suicides’ escheats was in fact to officials and courtiers rather than to kin or creditors from within the community. Relationships involving lordship were always unequal relationships, of course, and lords did enough ‘taking’ to ensure that they themselves had far more resources than their clients, dependants,
and tenants; but the relationship was nevertheless a two-way one. Houston’s book can be seen as a case-study in the operation of shared values within oligarchic societies, and may profitably be read by anyone interested in the processes that operate in such societies.

Two tiny corrections, and a thought. We are told that, ‘forfeiture of land was called “liferent escheat” ’ (p. 30); actually liferent escheat was temporary forfeiture (with the land still being inherited by the heir), as opposed to permanent forfeiture. And when in 1611 the Catholic marquis of Huntly rushed to the bedside of a Protestant minister who had tried to kill himself, eagerly asking whether he had incurred doubts ‘through reading of the doctors’ (p. 301), these were not the contemporary ‘Aberdeen Doctors’ (who were Protestants and mostly postdated 1611) but the doctors of the early church, such as St Augustine.

Traditional ballads may offer further information on popular attitudes. Several of the ballads in Child’s famous collection tell of suicides: Scottish ones include ‘The King’s Dochter Lady Jean’ (52), ‘Lord Thomas and Fair Annet’ (73), and ‘Clyde’s Water’ (216). The suicides in the first two of these are linked with incest and revenge killings, but in ‘Clyde’s Water,’ Maggie drowns herself on learning of her mother’s betrayal and her lover’s death, and the ballad’s sympathy clearly goes with her.

Let me finish with some more thoughts on forfeitures of suicides. Scotland’s good records allow Houston to track these over space and time – a considerable achievement. Geographically, he shows that there were more forfeitures in areas where central government was more directly involved, rather than in those managed by regional magnates – the central Lowlands and especially the Lothians. There were also more in towns. It is worth pointing out that the geographical incidence of witch-hunting was similar, except that there was less witch-hunting in large towns. This is a sophisticated work on Scottish regional governance.

As for changes over time: Scottish forfeitures rose markedly between c. 1550 and c. 1600, declining again to a low level by c. 1700. The rise, as Houston points out, parallels the growth of other government departments and activities, and is no doubt to be explained as part of a general expansion of government. The seventeenth-century decline is less easily explained, but Houston rises to the challenge, arguing for ‘depersonalised decision-making’ and a shift, ‘from personal, discretionary, and customary conceptions of the law to learned, predictable, and written ones in seventeenth-century Scotland’ (p. 65).

These trends in forfeitures were nevertheless trends in government, rather than in popular attitudes. Houston argues persuasively that government behavior and popular attitudes were congruent, and that government was not overtly predatory; but these trends surely show that government had its own dynamics.
Whether we consider the ‘people’ whose interests mattered to consist of the bereaved kinsfolk of a suicide, or the outraged neighbors, these people were not having a service provided to them as a straightforward response to their demand for it. The Scottish government may have served some of the people most of the time, and it may have served most of the people some of the time, but it did not serve all of the people all of the time.

Julian Goodare  
*University of Edinburgh*

Rab Houston has written an original and compelling study of attitudes and responses to suicide in Scotland and England during the early modern period. The book will undoubtedly become known mainly for its sustained, spirited, and persuasive critique of Michael Macdonald and Terrence Murphy’s influential study of suicide in early modern England. In this review, however, I will focus less on that critique and more on the ways in which the book realises the promise but also reveals the challenges of writing a genuinely British history.

Ever since the 1970s, when John Pocock called for the writing of a ‘British history’ that treated early modern Scotland as an integral part of Britain rather than as a mere appendage of England, few historians have demonstrated how such a history can be effectively executed. Because Scotland and England had few common political, legal or ecclesiastical institutions before 1707, and since British national consciousness was at best inchoate during this period, efforts to write a fully integrated history of Britain during the early modern period have met insuperable difficulties. The only viable approach is to write comparative studies that emphasise both similarities and differences between England and Scotland. Even that approach, however, encounters the difficulty of dealing with a vast network of regional and local traditions in both countries that make generalisations difficult to formulate or sustain.

Houston’s comparative study of the forfeiture of suicides’ property in Scotland and England, which occupies roughly half the book and yields its most original and important conclusions, shows how ‘a completely British history’ (as the blurb on the jacket describes his study) can be written. Very few historians have the command of the legal and political history of both Scotland and England that such a comparison requires, and Houston deploys this broad knowledge in the service of a revisionist thesis regarding the function of lordship in both countries. In Scots law the movable property of suicides escheated to the crown, but the crown almost always gifted the property to others, including kin, landowners, royal officials or neighbours. The purpose of these donations was not so much to
raise revenue but to enhance royal power and to provide equitable settlements with the survivors and creditors of the suicides. The crown received little or no tangible return from such donations but it did derive ‘a clear indirect benefit from an enhanced store of credit among those it ruled’ (p. 60). Houston attributes the concentration of escheated suicides in the Lowlands and Southern Uplands to the crown’s efforts to bolster the authority of lesser lords and elites in those areas, which presented more challenges to effective royal governance than the Highlands and Islands, where great magnates dealt with forfeitures locally rather than by applying to the Exchequer for a gift of the suicides’ goods.

Forfeitures of suicides’ goods to the crown in England, which took place when coroners’ juries returned a verdict of *felo de se*, were handled by different legal and political authorities from those in Scotland, most notably the Lord High Almoner (an ecclesiastical figure Houston has rescued from historical obscurity), local franchises, urban corporations, and manorial courts. Individual lords were less involved in the process than in Scotland, since they were not as vital a link in the operation of royal governance. But in both kingdoms the forfeiture and administration of suicides’ goods served the similar purpose of mitigating the rigours of the suicides’ death for the families who suffered the ignominy and the moral condemnation of the community. However punitive the forfeiture of suicides’ property might appear to have been at law, the operation, mediation and enforcement of the law in this regard reveals the practice of good lordship and lordly discretion, traditions rooted the medieval past. While communities insisted on punishing the dead as a means of deterrence and promoting moral reform, the legal treatment of the suicides’ property reflected the obligation of all those involved in the administration of the suicides’ goods to adhere to traditional standards of equity, charity and distributive justice and to repair the fabric of society after the suicide had destroyed it.

Writing a ‘British’ history of the burial practices and corporal punishments of suicides in Scotland and England is a more challenging task than comparing the laws of the two countries regarding forfeitures. Customs such as driving a stake through the body of the suicide (mainly in southeastern England), dragging and hanging the corpse (officially sanctioned only in Scotland), and burying it in unconsecrated ground or at a crossroads, varied from region to region and sometimes from parish to parish. These practices were also applied selectively and for limited periods of time. The multiplicity of local authorities, the number of overlapping and often competing jurisdictions, and the use of judicial discretion in sentencing criminals in a period of penal experimentation make it impossible to formulate any meaningful generalisations about such practices. Even in England, which had a more highly centralised judicial system than Scotland, there was little penal uniformity. Many shaming rituals, moreover, reflected local or regional
culture. It would be misleading to consider the local or regional adoption of such judicial practices in England as indications of the reception of continental law, especially in northern England, which demonstrated considerable innovation in this respect. Corporations may have imitated continental practice in this regard and may have found inspiration in William Fulbecke’s comparison between the civil law, canon law and English common law in 1601, but as Houston shows, punishments of the suicide’s corpse were often devised to meet local circumstances, and they did not become part of the substantive law of England. Nevertheless, the similarity between burial practices and corporal punishments in Scotland and the north of England, which Houston explores in a number of different contexts, suggests that comparisons between these northern British regions on the one hand and southern England on the other can be just as instructive in writing the new British history as those based on comparisons between the two British kingdoms.

Writing a cultural history of Britain, especially one that takes into account similarities and differences in the religious cultures of Scotland and England, has its own challenges, which Houston meets in the second part of his book, titled ‘Understanding the Dead.’ Central to this undertaking is Houston’s discussion of the secularisation of suicide, for which he reserves his most severe criticisms of Macdonald and Murphy, who interpret the change in English coroners’ verdicts from felony to insanity in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as an implicit rejection of a religious condemnation of suicide and an indication of greater sympathy for those who took their own lives. In taking issue with this interpretation Houston adds to the rapidly growing historical literature that exposes the weaknesses of studies that plot an inexorable trend towards secularisation, rationalisation, enlightenment and modernity. Houston draws a picture of far greater complexity in which the secular has always been present in understanding suicide and the religious has persisted in various forms. Attitudes toward suicide exemplify an enduring ‘hybridisation’ of the spiritual and material worlds. Suicide in Britain did not become ‘medicalised’ during this period because it had always possessed a medical dimension, and it did not become secularised because ‘religion itself changed to accommodate developments in other areas of thought’ (p. 313).

It is uncertain how much Houston’s demonstration that Scots rarely invoked demonic agency as the cause of suicides can tell us about the comparative religious history of the two British kingdoms. He attributes the disparity between England and Scotland regarding demonic invocation in this regard largely to differences regarding standards of proof in the two legal systems and differences regarding the necessity of establishing the proximate cause of suicides’ deaths. But his analysis cannot be easily extended to a broader ‘absence of the devil’ in Scottish
religion or law. Houston cites a study of witchcraft in Fife, a shire that provided more than its fair share of witchcraft prosecutions, which found references to the devil in only 20 per cent of the accusations. But this study does not take into account the majority of trials conducted in Fife on the basis of commissions of justiciary, which almost always required confessions to diabolical activity before the privy council granted local authorities the right to hold the trial in their shire. Nor does Houston take into account the fact that a much smaller percentage of English witchcraft prosecutions (5 per cent in Essex), made any reference to the devil whatsoever, and most of those referred to the witch’s relationship with a familiar spirit in animal form during the large witch-hunt of 1645–7. Most important, the far greater intensity of witchcraft prosecutions in Scotland was based on the widespread Scottish belief that witches made pacts with the devil and sometimes gathered to worship him in nocturnal assemblies, notions that never gained wide currency in England because English courts could not force witches to confess to such fantasies. Far from being absent in Scotland, as the devil apparently was in cases of suicide, he lay at the centre of Scottish, but not English, witchcraft prosecutions.

A ‘completely British history’ of religion will also need to deal with the vexed question of Calvinism in the two countries. Houston is right to argue that Scottish and English Calvinism cannot be equated. Yet one might question whether Scottish Calvinism was as distinctive as Houston suggests in his discussion of the religious dimension of suicide. To be sure, there were major differences between the doctrinal Calvinism that characterised much of the theology of the Church of England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and the Calvinism that took root and flourished in Scotland. But these differences were far less evident in comparisons between the religious experiences of English Puritans and dissenters and those of their Scottish brethren. It may be true that Scottish sermons, in contrast to those of English Puritan ministers, rarely referred to suicide, treating it as just one of many moral lapses. It is unlikely, however, that the explanation for this difference lies in a distinctly Scottish Calvinist soteriology. Conversion narratives in Calvinist communities in Scotland, England and New England reveal a remarkably similar preoccupation with the difficulty of overcoming demonic temptation to sin, and the real danger of eternal damnation. They also recount the frequent temptation of these troubled souls to commit suicide. These themes, which reflect a British and transatlantic Calvinist culture, contrast dramatically with the experiences of orthodox members of the Church of England, and such differences need to be taken into account in a broader comparative history of England and Scotland. Such a history has yet to be written, but when it is, Houston’s study of suicide in Scotland and England, especially his demonstration of the legal differences and similarities
between the two kingdoms, will most assuredly become one of its main building blocks.

Brian P. Levack

University of Texas at Austin

Rab Houston has given us an important and powerful work of comparative history, not merely a 'history of suicide', but a profound set of reflections on how responses to suicide in early modern Britain can illuminate key themes in religion, law, the character of local society, and its relationship with structures of lordship and the priorities of the developing state. A short review can hardly do justice to the full range of the book’s ambitions, and this one will not attempt to do so, focussing instead on its central chapters concerned with burial practices and corpse desecration, and the related issues around cultural and religious change.

Here, as elsewhere in Houston’s book, a prime objective is to depose from its position of primacy an earlier study of early modern suicide, albeit one with an exclusively English focus: Michael Macdonald and Terence Murphy’s *Sleepless Souls* (1990). This beguiling and highly influential work of social and cultural history posited a progressive secularisation of suicide in the early modern period, with an amelioration of previously unforgiving attitudes becoming evident by the end of the seventeenth century. Houston, by contrast, seeks to insist that there was no straightforward evolution from ‘harshness’ to ‘leniency’, but a co-existence throughout the period of both harsh and lenient attitudes, mediated by a variety of contingent factors, legal and political, as well as cultural and religious.

Having sought to establish in the earlier part of the book that forfeiture of goods might be an expression of good lordship, and work to the advantage of the suicide’s dependants, Houston proceeds to argue that it was the treatment of bodies that really concerned the survivors, and that departures from standard forms of burial were understood, and intended, as a punishment. The comparative dimension here is particularly instructive, for while in England a principal sanction was the denial of churchyard interment and the comforts of the burial service, this was more problematic in a Scotland where the Kirk itself rejected the very notion of ‘consecrated ground’ and tended to view burial as a civil matter. Nonetheless, in both kingdoms, ‘to be denied what was normal to one’s social standing marked out a suicide from the rest of the community of the dead’ (p. 215).

What becomes rapidly clear, however, is how differentiated and variable that denial might be. There were regional and national variations. Staking of the body – a practice that ‘has a place in conceptions of the history of suicide that is
out of all proportion to its prevalence’ (p. 212) – seems, for reasons not entirely clear, to have been largely confined to the south-east of England (Houston finds no example of it further north than Derbyshire). The Scots preferred to drag bodies through the streets and hang them on the gibbet. But post-mortem punishments of all kinds were selectively rather than routinely applied, visited upon particularly heinous offenders, and deviants and marginals of various kinds whose ‘micro-political position in the community made them vulnerable’ (p. 4). After an extensive trawl of parish registers and other sources, Houston finds many cases of more-or-less normal burial, or of burial in marginal sites around or away from the church with truncated ceremony (Ophelia’s ‘maimed rites’). Sometimes relatives or neighbours sought surreptitiously to bury the bodies of suicides in the accustomed places. The pattern, such as there is, is one of contingency of attitudes to deviants in their local settings, and of responsiveness to changing external political developments, rather than of any generalised shift from exclusion to qualified inclusion. (All of this, incidentally, chimes closely with the findings of some research I have recently undertaken on the burial of another class of excommunicates – recusant Catholics – in early modern England.) It is hard to dissent in any way from Houston’s overall finding that ‘the language of the body and the treatment of corpses were used explicitly to reaffirm or contest social and religious order’ (p. 14).

Nonetheless, there is some quibble-room in all of this. Houston is emphatic that the staking of suicides’ bodies in England, as well as other forms of profane burial in Scotland (including interment at liminal sites like shorelines) was not, as antiquarians and folklorists have generally supposed, in any way apotropaic in character, designed to ward off evil and protect the living from the depredations of vengeful spirits. Any such interpretation, he feels, is at odds with the Protestant doctrine which held that the souls of the dead went to heaven or hell and stayed there, and raises the question of why these practices were so selectively applied, geographically and temporally.

But it may be that Houston is too categorical about this: it is clear from many sources that Calvinist orthodoxy did not abolish belief in ghosts in early modern Britain, even among orthodox Calvinists. A desire to punish the wicked dead, and a latent fear of their continuing potential to do harm, were not necessarily mutually exclusive. While Houston is aware of the association between suicide and revenancy within popular culture, this is not a theme he particularly seeks to explore, and no ghost stories involving suicides are recounted in the book. Of course, not all suicides returned as haunting spirits. This (potentially supporting rather than undermining Houston’s main thesis) is another area where particular and contingent judgements may have come into play. Individual local circumstances around a perceived bad life and bad death might have generated
rumours of revenancy, just as unofficial apotropaic rituals around death and burial (of which there was a wide and regionalised repertoire) must have been selectively rather than universally applied.

There is another possible dimension here that Houston seems to overlook. The rituals of ‘correct’ burial – face up, feet oriented to the east – were expressive of an expectation of the soul’s reunion with its body at the General Resurrection. Profane burials, not uniquely but perhaps particularly of suicides, might thus be thought to involve a strong eschatological impulse in the desire to ‘punish the dead’. Their inversion of the usual niceties provided a symbolic (and at least partially instrumental?) statement that the profaned corpse did not deserve to rise to glory with Christ at the Last Day. If Houston’s sources are entirely silent about this aspect, it would be interesting to know why.

The oversight, if it is an oversight, is consistent with Houston’s determination to demonstrate that early modern suicide was never seen in overwhelmingly supernatural or religious terms. Where Macdonald and Murphy regarded the declining association of the devil with suicide as the key barometer of secularisation, Houston argues for that association always being a much looser one, with early modern Britons, especially early modern Scots, invoking his name ‘sparingly, contextually, and tactically’ (p. 287). Phrases, in inquest verdicts and elsewhere, about self-murder taking place ‘at the instigation of the devil’ were conventional and formulaic, sometimes merely a kind of metaphor. Perhaps so. But this may involve a rigidity of distinction between the literal and the metaphorical alien to early modern ways of thinking; nor are hackneyed and conventional formulae necessarily worthless guides to structures and patterns of thought. In places here Houston over-refines his case, making, for example, a somewhat pedantic differentiation between the agency of ‘the devil’ and of ‘evil spirits’. As countless witchcraft and possession cases show, both north and south of the border, the two were intimately connected. More productive is Houston’s intuition that proximate and ultimate causes, medical and demonic understandings, need not have been rivals or alternatives in people’s thinking about suicide. Hamlet knew all too well that the devil, ‘out of my weakness and my melancholy / as he is very potent with such spirits / abuses me to damn me.’ (Act II, scene 2). There was (p. 288) a ‘hybridisation’ of spiritual and material worlds at play in all of this.

If the devil was not always there cheering suicides on, did the Church invariably condemn them? In one of the most interesting and provocative parts of the book, Houston argues that the early modern (particularly Scottish), clergy were more flexible and creative in their attitudes than we have hitherto supposed. Noting how suicidal thoughts were sometimes integrated into puritan conversion narratives, and how hopes for the salvation of those dying at their own hand were
sometimes expressed, he identifies a ‘positive side to temptation and despair,’ within Scottish Calvinist culture, suggesting that killing oneself was ultimately ‘no worse than other manifestations of weakness in the face of temptation, and that ‘suicide and salvation were not necessarily incompatible’ (pp. 309–10).

I am doubtful about this. It is fundamentally important that the key examples here are of those who, having attempted to commit suicide, had the opportunity to repent of their actions before dying. These were stories about the temptation to despair (to which the godly and predestinate were of course subject), not the ultimate surrender to it. In declaring how God’s grace might be available to justified sinners even in these exceptional circumstances, the tellers of these tales underlined the uniquely heinous nature of suicide, rather than merely calibrating it on a spectrum of progressive sinfulness. Despair was the characteristic and besetting sin of the introspectively godly (and therefore, almost by definition, the worst of sins). Its exemplar was Judas, the prototypical Christian suicide. God, of course, could do as he liked, but it is hard not to suppose that Calvinist clergy typically saw unrepentant suicide as evidence of reprobation.

‘Suicide was a largely secular event’ (p. 323). I am not sure that Houston’s own evidence entirely substantiates this bold claim. His herculean efforts to reconstruct the contexts and meanings of suicide, via a range and variety of sources that would make many historians gulp before tackling them, tells a rather different story. Punishing the Dead? decisively puts paid to any simplistically linear narrative of the ‘secularisation’ of suicide, but not because suicide has always been an inherently secular matter. The great strength of this book lies in its practical rather than merely theoretical demonstration of how attitudes and values were not just refracted, but produced and reproduced, through a continual interplay of forces: regional traditions, legal structures, the micro-politics of communities, as well as religious prescriptions and ecclesiastical sanctions. This is joined-up history of a high order. If it resists tag-line summary, it is all the better for it.

Peter Marshall
University of Warwick

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE

It was with pleasure and interest that I read through the generous, well-informed, and closely involved coverage offered by the present trio of distinguished scholars. With expertise in the principal topics I approached and the comparative approach I adopted, their refreshingly constructive engagement takes place within the confines of what Professor Peter Marshall disarmingly describes as
‘quibble-room’. I hope to respond in the same spirit of collegial exchange, using the latitude which their measured yet probing observations allow.

As befits a scholar of early modern Scottish governance, Dr Julian Goodare stresses that formal means of implementing the forfeiture of culpable suicides came from government. I agree, though given the thinly spread governmental apparatus, a measure of willingness to use the mechanisms must have existed among interested parties in Scotland. I also speculated that the same could be true of England and I should like to push this point further. The existence there of coroners’ inquests and the beguiling appearance they give of unmediated engagement with the mental world of everyday people have led historians to believe that changes in their verdicts came from below. The office of coroner in England has indeed survived for 800 years by evolving to meet the changing needs of both crown and society. Most coroners were elected locally and they drew their juries from local people who knew the dead person and the geographical location and other circumstances of his or her end. But just as coroners’ elections could become politicised, inquests too could be subject to political influences. One may have been a withdrawal of lordship from the mid-seventeenth century and longer term legal changes in how obligations were construed and enforced. The relative importance of ascending and descending forces for political, social and attitudinal change remains to be proven for England.

Early modern governments were even less servants of the people than are modern ones. My interest was in showing that the monarch and other lords gave as well as took and that led me to emphasise their constructive role in handling forfeitures. Loss of freedom to assign assets after death was, of course, a punishment, and lords from the king downwards had to demonstrate their power over people; sometimes that meant being less than benevolent. I too see the hard face of lordship in the handling of suicidal death, but argue that there is another face as well. Goodare is correct that popular literature is an important source for how suicide was represented and understood. I did look at ballads and other literary forms, but this material (and much besides), was left out during the painful editing process necessary to trim the first draft by a half. At the same time, Goodare’s observation about the similar chronologies of documented suicide forfeitures, witch-hunting, and feuds echoes my own suggestion that the profound and reinforcing changes in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish law, governance, and society require further investigation.

Goodare is one of a number of scholars who have brought home the importance of Scottish history to a wider audience, his work informed by literature on England and the Continent as well as by social and political theory. I too tried to offer a comparative, broadly informed, and conceptually aware treatment of suicide that dealt equally with England and Scotland. For their part
English historians are rising to the challenge of writing genuinely British history, following not only the promptings of John Pocock (as Professor Brian Levack rightly notes), but also the much earlier urgency felt by F. W. Maitland when he wrote to his correspondent, Scottish sheriff George Neilson, on 9 May 1897: ‘I am always wishing that I knew Scotland. I believe that he who knew it would be able to speak some decisive words about English affairs.’ Later Maitland modestly admitted to Neilson: ‘I was oppressed by my ignorance of Scotland.’

Levack was a pioneer of properly Anglo-Scottish history in his *The formation of the British state: England, Scotland and the union, 1603–1707* (Clarendon Press, 1987), while Ronald Hutton’s *The stations of the sun: a history of the ritual year in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1996), Keith Wrightson’s *Earthly necessities: economic lives in early modern Britain* (Yale University Press, 2000), and Alexandra Walsham’s *The reformation of the landscape: religion, identity, and memory in early modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2011) are recent examples of the desire for a truly British (and Irish) perspective on diverse aspects of social history. I incorporated material on Wales in my book, but less than its history deserves and the two books I am currently writing more fully represent Wales (and indeed the north of Ireland) in a ‘four nations’ approach to different aspects of the social history of the Atlantic archipelago. The first is an analysis of relations between rural landlords and tenants shown in tenant petitions, the second a study of sociability and reciprocity demonstrated in distinctive regional wedding customs.

Levack’s first monograph was called *The civil lawyers in England, 1603–1641* (Clarendon Press, 1973) and he gently reminds us that Roman law traditions received into Scots law during the Renaissance were never really adopted into substantive English law. He is, of course, correct. When discussing the intriguing similarities between ways of punishing the corpses of suicides in Scotland and the north of England, I speculated that Continental law codes might have been one source from which local jurisdictions drew their inspiration. This was, however, just a suggestion and I think there is scope to expand our knowledge of the local and regional vernaculars of early modern punishment and the reasons behind them, both legal and cultural. In the book I explained that punishment regimes in the north and far west of Britain are not the only aspect of society where similarities existed and my present work continues the quest I began in my doctoral thesis to explore the contrasts, connections, and correspondences between the component parts of the British Isles.

Levack has also published on both Scottish and Continental witchcraft. English witch belief hardly ever involved the devil and nor did English law require it. Levack’s point about the greater place of the devil in Scottish than English witchcraft actually reinforces my sense that, at the level of everyday
belief, witchcraft (and suicide), was not permeated by the diabolical in either Scotland or England. Centrally issued commissions to investigate Scottish witchcraft were influenced by what lawyers and intellectuals wanted to hear; they needed a diabolical dimension which locally generated cases seldom did – without prompting. The Fife study I referred to was designed to test just this hypothesis and Levack seems to agree that Sabbaths and pacts were an imposition rather than a truly embedded belief. In any case the witchcraft comparison was an incidental reinforcement to my argument and I hope that Professor Levack can allow the validity of other evidence I presented for the low profile of the devil in routine perceptions of Scottish (and English) suicide. His emphasis on the continuing need for systematic and wide-ranging comparisons between the histories of Scotland and England, and between the regions of Britain is certainly well taken.

Levack’s point about religion is also a timely reminder that, while the law is a social fact that shaped the way early modern people thought and behaved, it may not be the only, or even the main explanation of structures and trends in social and cultural life. I suggested that Scottish Calvinist and English Anglican sermons were quite different and that the latter have been read far more negatively than they deserve. However, I still believe that there are differences between Scots and English Calvinist ideas about spiritual trial and salvation and that this distinction is reflected in the different emphases within Calvinism found in North America. Congregations had specific geographical horizons when seeking out clergy and reverse influences (like which American divines’ published works were popular in Britain) were also selective.

Marshall also has extensive expertise in this field, with a raft of books on both Catholics and Protestants in the English Reformation, including one on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century death: *Beliefs and the dead in Reformation England* (Oxford University Press, 2002). As Marshall says in his penetrating critique, I may have been over-categorical in my rejection of orthodoxy about secularisation, medicalisation, and decriminalisation of suicide, a canon that now has a place even in good undergraduate textbooks. I chose to emphasise the over-interpretation of routine legal phrases while recognising (in a discussion of what ‘violence’ meant in the context of suicide), the strength of Marshall’s point that redundancy does not mean irrelevance: ‘things that are routine are not always unimportant’ (p. 85). Early modern people often did conflate the literal and the metaphorical, but they could also make a distinction and it is that I sought to stress against what I saw as the simplification and sensationalisation of early modern attitudes by some scholars. My argument was that in many ways suicide was not ‘the odd man out’ and I chose to emphasise the mundane and the secular. The treatment of some suicides’ corpses may have been as saturated with the supernatural as were many other areas of early modern life though, as Marshall
explains, this too may have been selective and individual rather than automatic and universal. Especially in a Scottish context I am sceptical that belief in evil spirits was the same as belief in the devil. Instead I believe that there were distinctive and pervasive Scottish beliefs in ghosts, dreams, and second sight that had divine rather than diabolical origins.

Marshall’s work on sixteenth-century religion encompasses both the spiritual and the social dimensions of faith. I tried to emulate this approach, but in the chapter on burial practices I chose to emphasise the social exclusion sometimes inflicted on the unrighteous dead. Marshall rightly adjusts the balance by pointing to the possibility of an implicitly eschatological statement, though I was struck by how little the wide range of sources I used mentioned this aspect explicitly. Theologically speaking, unrepentant suicides were surely damned, but my focus on everyday interactions between clergy and potential suicides or survivors of an attempt shows an often humane approach that took account of circumstances. Thus I remain cautious about extracting religious understandings from social ones, because I believe this runs the risk of downplaying the situational and the social in early modern Christianity.

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This is a difficult, sober (even sobering) and quite readable book – perhaps it is a necessary book to all students of postwar Britain or of the postwar world, for that matter. The thought-provoking title tempts one to argue that in some ways all wars are ‘dirty’, even if generally carried out according to the civilised rules of the game, in that they are about violent death on a large scale, even as the most important decisions have traditionally been made for reasons related to national policies by those far from the killing zones. Wars have always been ‘dirty’ in that non-combatants have always died horribly, and in twentieth century wars in vast numbers: in the Second World War accounting for more than double the number of military deaths. They are ‘dirty’ in that helpless prisoners are mistreated or killed sometimes even by combatants whose military codes and whose home nations strictly forbid it. To recognise this does not detract from the many examples of valour and sacrifice recorded in all wars. This book is about the ‘dirty’
little wars of the twentieth century conducted in a resolute, even ruthless, way by Great Britain against irregular forces that played by virtually no rules at all. Given the title of this excellent new study, we might well ask: What went on both in Whitehall and in these restive colonies to warrant such a description?

There have been wars as long as there have been empires. And all empires end, though not necessarily in the same way. By the mid-twentieth century, Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon reminds us, Britain found herself in the last stage of superintending an empire that she had long justified in nearly pedagogical terms. It was, they insisted, a liberal empire held together by ‘Good’ core values being taught by the mother state to those denied the European experience and were in need of learning useful principles (for future use) of representative government, civil liberties, free speech and the usual civic virtues. When that empire grew quickly to the ‘sun-never-set’ scale of Victorian times, the type of pedagogy employed sometimes seemed to its critics a bit too much like that of Dickens’s ghastly Wackford Squeers. Committed imperialists insisted it was more like that of Tom Brown’s dear old Dr Arnold.

The end of the Second World War changed everything, or so it must have seemed: Churchill was out and Attlee was in; the German threat was past, but the Soviet ‘menace’ was taking shape; the League of Nations was gone, but the United Nations represented new hope. And even those to whom the reality was painful were made to realise that the Empire as it had been now belonged to the past, while the future, or at least a future, lay with the Commonwealth of Nations (the word ‘British’ having been discreetly abandoned in 1946). It is in this winding up of empire that Grob-Fitzgibbon finds his subject, and he argues powerfully that certain cases demonstrate that the imperial ‘endgame’ was not exactly the tale of ‘mismanaged disaster’ resulting from ‘ad hoc and uncoordinated reaction to immediate events on the ground’ accepted by many historians (p. 2). Leaving aside the case of India and Pakistan (though they are included in the context of his study), Grob-Fitzgibbon’s tale features the bloody counter-insurgency campaigns in which Britain was engaged in the years following 1945. These ‘dirty wars’ in Palestine, Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus were not haphazard affairs, carried out in isolation from each other, as some earlier studies have suggested. Rather, he argues, ‘the British government developed a concentrated imperial strategy designed to secure the colonies for the Commonwealth in an orderly transfer of power...’ (p. 3). There were setbacks and disappointments, and the cost of the strategy was high, but in general, we are told, it worked.

Palestine went least well, as London struggled against the legacy of the famous 1917 Balfour Declaration and discovered how difficult an adversary the largely European-originated Jewish immigrant community could be. Though
Balfour himself had hoped in vain in 1919 that it might be fobbed off on the Americans, the historic and volatile territory became a British mandate following the Great War. By 1939 London seemed to have acceded to the wishes of the Muslim majority in Palestine both in limiting Jewish immigration into the Holy Land and promising positive steps toward self-governance. Even before the end of the Second World War, Zionists were applying pressure of their own, going so far as to organise illegal military forces, most notably the IZL (the notorious Irgun) which waged a guerilla war against British authority with the stated goal of the immediate creation of a new state of Israel. Interesting lessons were on offer, not least of all that Britain still had the military might to pacify difficult people and territory in the short run, but that no long-run solution would be found in a purely military policy (such as that championed and for a time enacted by none other than the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field-Marshal Viscount Montgomery of Alamein) and resolutely opposed by the Chief-Secretary in the mandate, Henry Gurney. Rather than embrace a policy of more bloodshed in Palestine (which did little to improve the attitude of America toward the Montgomery approach), Britain in 1947 referred the entire question to the new United Nations, which led, of course, in the next year to the relinquishing of the mandate and the creation of the Jewish state. The bloodshed, we know well, did not end there; but thereafter it was to be blood neither shed nor drawn by order of H. M. Government.

The wise Gurney was more convinced than ever that working toward a political solution for what came to be called decolonisation was superior to a purely military one. As it was he had no time to brood over his disappointment in Palestine, for as Sir Henry Gurney, KCMG he was appointed high commissioner in troubled Malaya only two months after leaving the Near East. Supported by the Colonial Office (first under Attlee and Labour and then under Churchill’s Conservatives) and with the failure in Palestine in mind, Gurney successfully pressed his case that ‘a civil rather than a military solution’ (p. 117) was the only hope for pacifying Malaya. Stressing police power over military intervention (with a single central command under General Sir Harold Briggs), Gurney’s plan was eventually successful. His ‘hearts and minds’ plan combined social and economic reform with relentless pressure on the communist insurgents. Eventually, though certainly not without cost, the plan succeeded in that the rebellion was defeated more or less with the support of the Malay majority; and Malaya (eventually federated with several other former British possessions into modern Malaysia) gained its independence in a relatively orderly fashion. And, as Grob-Fitzgibbon rightly reminds us, it became and remains a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Gurney did not live to see the happy result, as he was murdered by communist guerillas in 1951.
Britain's decolonising trials did not end there, of course, and even more challenging was the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, beginning in 1952 just as the light at the end of the Malayan tunnel became discernable. Though without doubt set on the political goal of independence, the overtones of terrible brutality on many sides and almost cultish secrecy among the insurgents characterised by solemn and terrifying oaths, gave the struggle against Mau Mau a strange and especially painful character. To some who fought against it, it seemed to be nothing short of 'witchcraft', in the words of Churchill's Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton.

A policy of fighting ruthlessness with equal and opposite ruthlessness in the first years of Mau Mau killed a great many rebels, but it did not kill the movement which endured for years. Only steady and coordinated police and military action seemed to meet with any success at all in resisting the movement. By the mid-1950s detention on a sort of ‘re-education’ model, with careful mixing of recent captures with pacified former rebels worked to starve Mau Mau of its recruiting base among the Kikuyu peoples of East Africa. By 1961 the Kenyan government felt secure enough to release the last Mau Mau detainees – including leader Jomo Kenyatta – and schedule elections. Within two years Kenya was peacefully independent and Kenyatta its president. Quite astonishingly, the former rebel leader denounced Mau Mau and seemed delighted to keep her new nation within the Commonwealth and acknowledged Queen Elizabeth as its head. Though a bloodier tale than that of Malaya, we are reminded that it eventually came to a more or less similar end.

The final example of the ‘Endgame’ is the smallest in size and numbers, but it is sobering all the same: the case of Cyprus. The island, of course, was culturally divided between communities with Greek and Turkish ethnic roots and had been in British hands since 1878, and a Crown Colony since the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Pressures among the majority Greek population for Enosis, union with Greece, had simmered and occasionally boiled over since Lausanne, and in 1950 an unofficial plebiscite (ignored by the British administration) had almost unanimously declared in favour of unification. Then in 1955, a retired Greek army colonel, George Grivas, announced the existence of his militant EOKA organisation, dedicated to the violent overthrow of the imperial government. And plenty violent they were, leading the Conservative government in London to turn to a model similar to that employed in Malaya – that of placing all security matters into one pair of hands; and also similar to the earlier case was that the hands were those of former commander in British forces in the Far East and ex-C.I.G.S. Field-Marshal, Sir John Harding. An admirer of the work of Gurney and Briggs in Malaya, Harding’s policy was to maintain pressure on EOKA, try to retain communication channels with the leader of Greek Cypriot nationalism,
Archbishop Makarios III, and keep the peace. Though, when contrasted to Kenya or Malaya, the area was small, the ‘dirty war’ was fought with all the brutality the term implies. While terrorist methods were not allowed to triumph, Harding was unable to make much progress toward settlement. If Kenya was the bloodiest of the little wars, then Cyprus saw ‘the greatest number of new coercive measures’ by the British (p. 328). Not the least of these was the levying of collective fines on communities judged to be acting with or in some way in support of the insurgents. Civilian homes and even Orthodox churches were subject to searches for arms and other incriminating materials. Archbishop Makarios was interned in 1956 on distant Mahe Island in the Seychelles (and then exiled to Athens in 1957), and the resultant explosion of violent anger against the British was met with further military and police firmness. The killing continued on both sides.

A breakthrough came only in 1959, with EOKA essentially stymied and Harold Macmillan in place to pick up the pieces after Eden’s self-inflicted wound in Suez. Dirty the Cypriot conflict may have been, but as before the result was a negotiated path toward independence within the Commonwealth – as, more or less, with Kenya and Malaya. Macmillan’s famous ‘wind of change’ speech in February 1960 seemed to set the tone, but, as Grob-Fitzgibbon usefully reminds us, it was more a reflection on what was happening than a plan for a course of action. Britain’s post-war proconsuls like Gurney, Briggs and Harding had striven to separate and then ‘ruthlessly purge’ as much of anti-democratic, anti-Western political sentiment (in their view) as possible before bowing to demands for independence. When circumstances appeared to be as good as could be hoped for, Makarios was allowed to return and Cyprus became one nation, with decidedly separate Greek and Turkish communities, but a nation all the same – again, within the Commonwealth. Sadly, unhappy events beyond the scope of the book under review were to see further Greek-Turkish violence and, in effect, a hard division by the 1980s of the small island into its two communities within one nation. This, however, came well after the close of British authority.

In sum, Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon does well to remind us that while these dirty little wars were only as ‘dirty’ as the British blueprint required and remained ‘little’ in that they were contained within the colonial areas under review. The goal in each case was not to hold on to these colonies, but the eventual transfer of power to the indigenous people of each territory on Britain’s terms. In most cases the plan called for emphasising a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign that stressed to local nationalists the value of an orderly transition. Yet, it is also true that to hold to that design required many troops, many police and much money, as well as steadfast colonial officials. It also cost much bloodshed through the strict
application of imperial power and illiberal tactics. This, in the end, is what liberal empires did. Grob-Fitzgibbon makes a thought provoking and powerful case for the position that it worked more often than it failed; perhaps, sadly, it was all as ‘clean’ as it could be.

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‘Endgame’, my dictionary tells me, is the ‘final stage of game in chess, bridge etc., when few men or cards remain’. This is evidently not quite how Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon sees it with the British empire, for the endgame he describes is one where it seems the game itself changes to something much darker and nastier than what had gone before, and far from few pieces (or whatever) remaining, actually increased resources – principally military – were brought into play with the intention of forcing issues to a conclusion. In this book Grob-Fitzgibbon tells the stories of Palestine, Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus well, drawing on extensive research in British public and private papers, and with a keen eye for vivid detail. For this scholars will be grateful and the book will serve as a handy up-to-date narrative of a significant aspect of Britain’s late imperial history. The book raises important conceptual issues about the nature of the conflicts it describes and the overall coherence of British imperial policy, which are well worth exploring and discussing further.

Book titles are often problematic. Authors are frequently attached to sometimes quirky efforts that they hope might specially illuminate some part of their work. Publishers tend, on the whole, to be more cautious, arguing (with some reason) that clever titles are less desirable than practical and unambitiously descriptive ones, simply reflecting ‘what’s in the tin’. On-line search engines, apparently so important now for selling books, must not be confused by some clever-dick, catchpenny title. In these circumstances (much as Joseph Chamberlain asserted at the 1897 imperial conference) the business might well be quite prosaic. But book titles can also be very revealing, and in this case the terms used clearly embody a central part of the author’s analytical framework. Thus we might for a moment interrogate the word ‘war’.

Generally speaking, ‘war’ involves the use of lethal violence between formally organised and identifiable groups, usually uniformed, acting on behalf of sovereign states, or bodies aspiring to statehood. International law, moreover, makes a clear distinction between peace and war, and certain formalities are required to mark a transition between the two. Over recent years, however, the term has frequently been employed much more casually, and has loosely come to
encompass serious conflict between more-or-less coherent groups. Yet a clear understanding of what war is, and is not, is highly desirable in any discussion of serious conflict such as that which afflicted the British Empire in the twentieth century, and during which the very description ‘war’ frequently itself became drawn into the conflict. This was certainly so during the Irish ‘Troubles’ in the aftermath of the First World War, a conflict whose shadow falls across Grob-Fitzgibbon’s study. He specifically tells us, for example, that Sir George ‘Bobbie’ Erskine, who took over the military command in Kenya in 1953, had served in Ireland for two years during the ‘Irish War of Independence’. In April 1920, as conflict between republicans and government security forces in Ireland was intensifying, the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, famously declared ‘You do not declare war against rebels’. A year later he observed that ‘the Irish job was a policeman’s job’, and that if it became ‘a military job only’ it would fail. So it was to be in Ireland, both in the early 1920s and sixty or so years later in Northern Ireland.

While Grob-Fitzgibbon notes the repeated extent to which British policymakers in successive colonial situations sought to resist the militarisation of their conflicts (as much for financial and political as security reasons), his sweeping and blanket application of the term ‘war’ to all of these conflicts obscures the crucially important extent to which the British security-force actors operated within a legal, political and moral climate which for the most part denied that a ‘state of war’ existed. By assuming from the start that these were all ‘wars’, Grob-Fitzgibbon runs the risk of telling altogether too straightforward a story, missing the nuances and subtleties of civic-minded men (soldiers as well as civilian officials) struggling with the problem of how to respond to the challenge of lethal political violence.

Then there is the epithet ‘dirty’. These, Grob-Fitzgibbon repeatedly tells us, were all ‘dirty wars’. Of course, if there are dirty wars, then there must be clean ones too, though which they are precisely is open to some conjecture (and a book entitled Britain’s Clean Wars might not enthuse many publishers). Perhaps the Korean War, which puts in an appearance in the book, was a ‘clean’ one, not, presumably, in the manner or number of its casualties, or the absence of atrocities, but perhaps because it was fought between orthodox military formations in a recognisably military fashion. If so, this would confirm for us again how important are perceptions of what is appropriate (or not) in ‘war’. Clearly rather taken with the notion of ‘dirty wars’, Grob-Fitzgibbon applies it rather loosely to Suez in 1956. ‘In the way it was fought’, he remarks, ‘the Suez campaign was cleaner than most [emphasis added] of Britain’s other post-Second World War engagements. Yet in the duplicity of its planning, the mistruths the government gave to Commonwealth and other governments, and Eden’s refusal to
contemplate anything other than a military engagement, Suez was perhaps the
dirtiest of all Britain’s dirty wars’. This stretches the concept of ‘dirty war’ to such
an imprecise level that it renders the term analytically unhelpful. But the use of
‘dirty wars’ in the book’s title suggests a possible prejudging of those conflicts, as
much as any purely descriptive terminology.

Grob-Fitzgibbon’s central argument is that ‘Britain’s postwar
counterinsurgency campaigns’ (which, one might remark, are not quite the
same thing as ‘wars’) were not ‘an ad hoc and uncoordinated reaction to
immediate events on the ground’, but part of a ‘carefully calculated’ policy ‘to
allow decolonization to occur on British terms rather than those of indigenous
peoples’. It was, moreover, a ‘concerted imperial strategy’. This is presented as a
novel analysis. Citing a rather limited selection of texts, Grob-Fitzgibbon asserts
that studies of the insurgencies and counterinsurgencies from the 1940s to
the 1960s ‘have failed to place such events in the larger context of British
decolonization, instead compartmentalizing each conflict and exploring them in
the context of violence and state control using the tools of the military historian’.
This may be true of some of the texts which he cites, but it is emphatically not
the case with Charles Townshend’s thoughtful Britain’s Civil Wars which
specifically places the conflicts in a common legal and conceptual framework. And
Georgina Sinclair’s At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial
Endgame, 1945–80 (2006) explicitly puts the policing role in a broad imperial
context. But Grob-Fitzgibbon also neglects those imperial historians, such as
John Gallagher, Ronald Robinson and John Darwin (though the latter does get
a dismissive reference in Imperial Endgame), who have explored the essential
interconnectedness of British imperial experience and policy. ‘Once the British
Empire became world-wide, the sun never set upon its crises’, wrote Gallagher in
the late 1960s, adding that neither policymaker nor historian could approach
those crises in isolation.

Robinson and Gallagher’s seminal work on the nineteenth-century British
empire argued in short that the central concern of Britain’s imperial policymakers
was ‘informal rule where possible; formal rule where necessary’. What happens in
the years after the Second World War (though the ‘endgame’ then had had a
preliminary run-through in the aftermath of the First World War) is a reversion
to this old rule. As in the nineteenth century, economic circumstance and
domestic political attitudes dictated a policy which eschewed formal (and
expensive) political control for more informal forms of influence. As Robinson
argued in an important 1972 essay (‘Non-European foundations of European
imperialism’), then, as later, the technique adopted was for Britain to find local
collaborators to take on the task of government, while essential economic and
strategic interests were preserved. In the twentieth century this was done most
successfully of all in Ireland, where after a nasty civil war, successive Irish
governments kept the peace and posed no threat whatsoever (quite the contrary in
fact during 1939–45) to the security of the United Kingdom, and in Malaya,
where the timely concession of independence in 1957 brought benefits all round (though not to the Chinese minority, consigned to a permanently inferior
position in the face of entrenched Malay political power). But, despite the
assertion on p. 353 of *Imperial Endgame*, it was not ‘ironic’ at all that ‘it was the
end of the British Empire that would save all that the empire had stood for’. The
concession of independence, granted in the majority of cases without very much
violence (‘dirty’ or ‘warlike’ or neither) was both a rational policy option and one
entirely consistent with the British approach to empire as manifest since at least
the early nineteenth century.

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This is an ambitious book, with an industrious and meticulous research apparatus
to support its argument and an eager, page-turning, style to carry the reader along,
full of tense decisions and explosive episodes, narrated with a detail often
remarkable in a work of such comparative breadth. The author’s purpose is
nothing less than a re-evaluation of how well the British played the endgame of
empire after the loss of India, Burma and Ceylon. Decolonisation thereafter,
Grob-Fitzgibbon argues, was neither a defeat nor a symptom of decline, as is for
many the conventional wisdom. To the contrary, it was a strategic success; and the
British will to fight insurgencies, no matter how dirtily, was essential to that
successful outcome, seen in the almost universal accession of former colonies to
membership of the Commonwealth, Aden alone (and Burma-Myanmar, not
mentioned) excepted. Our author backs this argument with case studies of the
high politics and military tactics – much less on the local politics – of the
emergencies conducted in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus, with a sidelong glance at
Aden, all in the shadow of the debacle in Palestine.

The empire’s liberal purposes were proclaimed by successive Prime
Ministers and Secretaries of State for the Colonies – enlightenment, well-
being, liberty and, in due course, self-government within the Commonwealth
of Nations, a usefully opaque destination. Notwithstanding the doubts, dismay,
even disgust, expressed by other historians of decolonisation, Grob-Fitzgibbon
maintains that these aims were fulfilled. He is particularly keen to confute
all the alternative forms of cricketing defeat offered (but not necessarily
espoused) by Ronald Hyam as possible analogies for the demission of imperial
The British were not ‘bowled out’ by anti-colonial freedom fighters, rather the reverse; nor were they ‘run out’ by imperial over-stretch, although more troops were sometimes difficult to find. They did not ‘retire hurt’ through a collapse of will, for late-colonial governors or generals for the most part kept their nerve; nor, finally, despite mounting international criticism, were the British ‘booed off the field’, except by their special friends the Americans, and these were hostile to British actions in two instances only, in Palestine, in any case a mandate, not a colony – and, later, in the post-imperial Suez fiasco of 1956.

In short, if to liberalise the empire in a Cold-War world demanded the official use of force, repression, even criminal brutality, in order to ensure that the moderate nationalists, rather than crazed or communist terrorists, would inherit the political kingdom and adhere to the West rather than swing to the East, then the British proved well up to the task. And in most colonies this pleasing result was achieved without having to crack nationalist heads.

This is certainly a bracing thesis. Grob-Fitzgibbon is well aware of the occasions when it could be argued – and was argued by British and other critics at the time – that less of the mailed fist and more of the kid glove could have averted or at least mitigated the insurgent violence that had then to be politically isolated and forcibly defeated. He does not give such doubts much credence and in this he clearly has a case. If one considers Irgun and the Stern gang in Palestine, the communist guerrillas (CTs or ‘bandits’) in Malaya, Mau Mau in Kenya, EOKA in Cyprus, ‘tribal’ Yemenis in Aden, then none of them were amenable to the negotiated compromises that would have to underpin democratic self-governance – something that, in any case, colonial rule was questionably qualified to teach. Moreover, the sectarian or ethnic competition to inherit the local mantle of imperial power which fuelled much insurgency often possessed international ramifications that complicated strategic calculation. Britain could never satisfy both Jews and Arabs in Palestine, the former with American friends, the latter with oil; nor both Turks and Greeks in Cyprus, the first a fearful minority but linked to an important NATO ally, the latter demanding Enosis, union with a mainland Greece that might at any time go communist. In these cases British counter-insurgent violence seemed necessary in order to restore some prospect of a negotiated settlement acceptable to all sides, local and international. Malaya was easier internationally; its terrorists were Chinese and the People’s Republic was no friend, especially at the time of the Korean War.

Mau Mau seemed simplest of all; it appeared to possess no political character but, rather, a bewitched bestiality, and lacked international friends. It did however

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attract sympathy for its plight under the cruel weight of British counter-measures. This circumstance provides Grob-Fitzgibbon with two instructively memorable episodes. He treats us to the extraordinary moment in 1953, at a Buckingham Palace reception for Commonwealth dignitaries, when the then colonial secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, rounded in fury on Pandit Nehru and his friend Edwina, Countess Mountbatten, for daring to suggest that the British were as brutal as Mau Mau (pp. 258–61). He also calls attention to the Westminster parliamentary debate in 1959 when lethal official violence in Kenya – the Hola detention camp massacre – drew the weightiest, philosophically the most precise, criticism of heedless imperial malpractice one could wish to hear, voiced by that classical scholar Enoch Powell (pp. 364–5). Grob-Fitzgibbon is good at linking murky local crises with the ruminations, disputes and indecisions of metropolitan high-political culture.

But he could have gone further in pursuit of the two major arguments with which he opens the book. In the first he follows others in emphasising the existence of an imperial learning curve – rather than a series of ad hoc reactions to local crises – from Palestine in the mid-1940s to Cyprus a decade later (pp. 2–3). In the second, more provocatively, he proposes that liberal imperialism ‘always’ requires illiberal measures to protect it, without, apparently, losing its liberalism (p. 4).

Grob-Fitzgibbon does follow one imperial servant from one crisis to the next in the person of Sir Henry Gurney, unruffled chief secretary in Jerusalem’s darkest days and then ill-fated high commissioner in Malaya, convinced by his Palestinian experience that military action was never a sufficient answer to insurgent terrorism, if often a necessary one. General Sir Hugh Stockwell, another Palestine veteran, drew the same conclusion (pp. 117–19). But if there was general agreement that hard power was not enough, military methods were nonetheless transferable. As Grob-Fitzgibbon notes, Operation Anvil, to clear suspect Mau Mau from Nairobi in 1954, used as its blueprint the plans for Operation Agatha that, eight years earlier, had aimed to clear Jewish terrorists from Jerusalem. Later on, tracker dogs trained to sniff out bad hats in Kenya were airlifted to Cyprus to get wind of General Grivas. But there was more transfer of skills and knowledge than Grob-Fitzgibbon tells us. He omits to remind the reader, for instance, that Richard Catling, commissioner of police in Kenya’s last colonial years, had been

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deputy head of the Palestine police special branch. He seems unaware that Prendergast, Kenya's head of police intelligence in the late 1950s, had also served in Palestine; that Kenya's policy of villagisation, designed to obstruct 'passive' support for insurgency, was learned from Malaya; or, in an illuminating negative case, that Arthur Young, who reformed police practice in Malaya, resigned from his next commissionership when he failed to get Kenya's civil administration to obey the law – even the law as attenuated by emergency legislation.

Although Christopher Andrew’s *Defence of the Realm, the Authorized History of MI5* is in his bibliography, Grob-Fitzgibbon makes little of the centralised network of British intelligence in the colonies; or of the fact that its officers often took a calmer view of the supposed dangers of nationalism than many administrative officials. And it is odd, to take a rather different example, to find no mention of Frank Kitson, who famously took his experience of 'low intensity operations' – and pseudo gangs of 'turned' insurgents – from Kenya to Malaya and later, as a brigadier in Northern Ireland's 'troubles', back to the island where Britain’s modern education in counter-insurgency had begun.

How far lessons learned in one context were applicable or indeed known in another is of course a question. The main reason, it seems, for including the appalling Palestine story in a volume that otherwise celebrates 'success' is to allow discussion of the inter-departmental debate that preceded London’s decision to abandon careful political exploration for harsh military crackdown in early 1947 (pp. 61–73). The results were catastrophic, imprisoning the British together with the insurgents in the self-consuming logic of violence. Civil officials had feared precisely that outcome but had lost their argument to the more vigorous optimism of that national hero, Field-Marshal Montgomery. Gurney took this lesson in the folly of overweening force to Malaya. The extent to which governors and generals elsewhere were made aware of this prudential precedent is not discussed.

But how about Grob-Fitzgibbon’s second, more confident, argument, that ends up as his 'one clear conclusion'? This asserts that 'liberal imperialism can only be sustained by illiberal dirty wars' and claims that the British 'achieve[d] success' in each of these apparently contradictory pursuits (p. 377). I leave others better qualified than myself to speculate as to whom, today, this message is intended to reassure. But as an historian I am interested in the need both to define 'dirty war' and, equally, to take more account of the essentially political nature of 'successful'

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3 Christopher Andrew, *Defence of the Realm, the Authorized History of MI5* (London, 2009).

counter-insurgency, in which somewhat softer power complemented the hard edge of force. In my opinion our author pays insufficient attention to either.

‘Dirty war’ is a term Grob-Fitzgibbon employs without elaboration. But is it self-explanatory? Some greater definition of terms seems desirable in order to clarify the grounds of argument. In the realm of ‘just war’ theory—a territory our author does not enter, but which is surely relevant to his theme—there seem to be at least five issues to sort out when thinking about colonial states of emergency which are, in effect, states of internal war, if not officially acknowledged as such. These issues are: the justification for going to war in the first place; the legality of its conduct, especially with regard to non-combatants and the treatment of prisoners; the discipline or indiscipline of the official agents of coercion, whether civil or military; the proportionality of the force employed; and, finally, the post-war settlement.5

The first and fundamental issue is that of justification: is the emergency declared only as a last resort and is it defensive in purpose, as ‘just war’ theory would require? Defensive of whom or what is clearly critical. One could argue that, since imperial rule is the fruit of aggression, any violence employed to defend it against its colonial subjects, even against an extremist minority, is ipso facto unjust, or ‘dirty’. All colonial counter-insurgencies would represent the renewal of aggression. Modern empires have claimed good intentions, and they do not lead only or always to hell—except in that sense of humiliation that must smoulder, at least in fits and starts, within the subjects of even the most liberal of empires, and without which no insurgency, now matter how narrowly recruited and terroristic in consequence, would win any support. And one must also ask, more insistently than our author, whether self-proclaimed civilising—today, neo-liberal, democratising—missions can retain their integrity of purpose and, with it, the possibility of nurturing liberal successor regimes, no matter how illiberal the measures they take in self-preservation?6

The British officials and generals, whom Grob-Fitzgibbon studies, asked themselves these same questions. In their minds force was indeed a last resort against a minority conspiracy to create social disorder and lethal terror among law-abiding citizens and it was never the only answer; economic and political reform were also needed. But law and order were preconditions of any such liberal

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5 Here my thoughts have been prompted, in general, by Michael Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars (New York, 1977); idem, Arguing about War (New Haven, 2004); and, in particular, by David M. Anderson, Histories of the Hanged: The dirty war in Kenya and the end of empire (New York, 2005).

6 Questions recently asked in Timothy H. Parsons, The Rule of Empires: Those who built them, those who endured them, and why they always fall (Oxford, 2010).
Successful counter-insurgency would ‘restore the initiative’ to civil government, enabling it to contemplate a phased devolution of power to the more respectable, less sectarian, local nationalists, those mollified by reform and, very probably, auxiliaries in the fight against terror. So one might qualify our author’s ‘one clear conclusion’ to suggest that, on the occasions it was needed, counter-insurgency was not so much dirty work as justified force: it increased the chance (but did not guarantee) that liberal imperialism would conduct an orderly retreat, leaving behind successors more likely than their more militant rivals to adhere to international norms of governance (but I end this review on a more qualified note).

If the fact of counter-insurgent warfare can, on certain assumptions, be justified by such reasoning, did – indeed, could – its conduct also live up to ‘just war’ criteria? Was harm to non-combatants minimised, were captive insurgents fairly treated, or was dirtiness inevitable in practice? There are doubts on this score, even with respect to what many people reckon to have been the last, perhaps the only, ‘good’ war, the Second World War. But the Allies killed more French civilians in order to liberate them than the Luftwaffe killed Britons in the Blitz. Allied soldiers often shot enemy combatants who had surrendered; General Patton actually ordered his men to commit this crime. Churchill received less censure for the deaths of thousands by fire in Dresden in 1945 than Alan Lennox-Boyd, colonial secretary, received for the death by beatings of eleven Mau Mau detainees in 1959. How can one justify the first atomic bomb dropped by ‘Europeans’ on non-whites, let alone the second? Such examples prompt the common reaction that all war, even ‘good’, defensive, war, is necessarily dirty in its conduct, even when there are front lines and uniformed combatants who present legitimate, identifiable, targets.

Colonial emergencies could never be such potentially clean warfare; they were ‘a-symmetric’, guerrilla, wars. Their front lines were not lines but kaleidoscopes, scattering conflict around the subject population’s towns and farms, under their beds and in their markets. Terrorists camouflaged themselves as ordinary people; their tactics were sometimes designed to provoke reprisals against the general population, in order to prove their political point. Insurgents knew as well as incumbents that these were wars for public opinion or ‘hearts and minds’ – a phrase that may or may not have been coined by General Templer in Malaya. The sheer difficulty of identifying the enemy and an equal inability to press

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7 Most eloquently expressed here by Sir Hugh Foot on first taking up the governorship of Cyprus, p. 372.
legal charges against supposed terrorists, for lack of credible witness protection among an intimidated population, were among the reasons why emergencies were declared in the first place. Emergencies removed many inconvenient legal obstacles to the use of arbitrary and oppressive measures against subjects or citizens. Governments’ inability to distinguish between combatant and non-combatant exposed the latter to collective punishments, to often long periods of detention without trial in squalid camp conditions (or worse), and the pains of normally illegitimate force. The protections for combatants specified by international convention were annulled by the legal subterfuge of calling the insurgency civil disturbance rather than war. Moreover, if local people are employed, as they were, as ‘home guards’, police reservists, even regular troops, the bitterness and brutality characteristic of internecine war was an inevitable, foreseeable, further risk to the chances, already slim, that there would be a ‘clean fight’. By definition, one might say, emergency warfare, however justified its cause, was therefore dirty; it was necessarily fought in conditions and under rules very different from formal warfare, itself always dirty in practice, no matter how strict its international laws.

I do not think Grob-Fitzgibbon takes this view, that colonial emergencies are an ineluctably dirty category of war. He seems, rather, to see them as only contingently dirty, that is, when the official agents of coercion break their own rules of engagement – my third element in the assessment of just or unjust war listed earlier. Throughout the book he notes occasions when soldiers ran riot in revenge for the deaths of comrades, but this viewpoint comes across especially clearly in his account of General ‘Bobbie’ Erskine’s attempts to discipline his troops in Kenya (pp. 257–8, 267–8 and 270–75). Our author says less about the torture of prisoners under interrogation, or of the frequency (certainly in Kenya) with which they were shot ‘while attempting to escape’, or when charges were not brought against government allies or agents for well-attested crimes against even elastic emergency laws. These were, by any standard of judgment, instances of dirty war, when soldiers or police acted in contempt even of the minimum rules of conduct or laws protective of the subject population, in committing what can properly be called war crimes. But would even strict adherence to the rules have cleaned up an emergency and made it a just war? Kenya’s attorney-general, John Whyatt, strove to enforce the rules in this belief and was transferred to Hong Kong for his pains.

The proportionality of the force employed against insurgents is not something that Grob-Fitzgibbon discusses, but it raises a crucial issue, that of race. Jewish terror was as well-armed as the British forces (and had in part been trained in the British army), since the latter used neither artillery nor air power in retaliation, thanks to fear of inviting international, post-Holocaust, outrage. No such
inhibition prevented the use of aerial bombing in Malaya, or in Kenya, where it
was admittedly futile in the forested field of battle, or against Arab villages in the
hinterland of Aden – after warnings had been given, to enable villagers to flee
destruction. Yet Mau Mau was armed with more spears and knives than precision
weapons, and Arabs had only rifles and a keen sight. The Royal Air Force, it
seems, (like the atomic bomb) could be used only against enemies judged to be
uncivilised by reason of the colour of their skin. Can such racism in the conduct of
war be anything other than dirty? The use of pseudo gangs, Kitson’s counter-
gangs, armed with weapons similar to those of the insurgents, could, by contrast,
be said to be entirely proportional force, reliant only on the deception and surprise
to which all the best military commanders aspire.

But can, finally, post-war settlement wash clean the dirt of war? The punitive
terms of the Versailles peace settlement in 1919 are often blamed for subsequent
Nazi aggression, so dirtying the origins of the second, ‘good’, world war.
Afrikaners have never forgiven the British concentration camps, the ‘methods of
barbarism’ – as Henry Campbell-Bannerman, leader of the Liberal opposition
and future prime minister called them – in which thousands of women and
children died in the second South African war. It is necessary to Grob-
Fitzgibbon’s ‘one clear conclusion’ that Britain’s post-emergency settlements are
judged better fit for their purpose than Versailles or indeed the treaty of
Vereeniging (1902), given that almost all colonies were content to be counted
within the Commonwealth family of nations – as Afrikaner nationalists were not.

One must first be clear about the context in which post-emergency
settlements might be said to be successful. Counter-insurgencies were, as
Grob-Fitzgibbon rightly insists, particularly political wars; post-war settlements
had to be negotiated with regard to the politics within which the wars had been
fought. None of Britain’s late-colonial wars could have been fought without the
assistance of locally recruited police and troops, nor without local political
support. A ‘loyalist’ cadre among the subject people was often the most important
product of a colonial emergency, certainly in Kenya. The loyalists’ self-interest
was not so much to sustain British ‘liberal imperialism’ as to succeed it in power;
moreover, their existence made decolonisation thinkable. The British had to take
more account of these local allies than of any defeated insurgents, their allies’
enemies. When decolonisation came, the loyalists were best placed to inherit
power, they had scores to settle, and were armed with the necessary skills and
coercive instruments, acquired during what had become a civil war.

Grob-Fitzgibbon does not tell us enough about such people, without whose
existence orderly decolonisation becomes impossible, as indeed proved to be the
case in Palestine or, later, in Aden. Nor does he make much of the softer British
power to which hard military violence was merely the surly doorkeeper, as all
officials agreed at the time. In Kenya the term for even this softer power was sharp enough, namely, ‘the second prong’: economic, social, and political reform. Its aim was to make African loyalism possible and then profitable. Decolonisation then made it powerful, in control of the post-colonial state.9 One could in some instances call decolonisation the continuation of dirty war by other means.10 Among the powers handed over at independence was that of secret intelligence. Britain’s MI5 officers stayed on in many places after independence, often for many years, an asset to new national governments as much as to the former imperial power. Yes, Britain succeeded in retaining almost all its colonies within the Commonwealth. How much more freedom most post-colonial citizens enjoyed in consequence is another question altogether.

One must first disentangle the diverse dirtiness of counter-insurgent war before such a question can be asked about the aftermath of liberal imperialism.

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AUTHOR’S RESPONSE

Publishing a book – much like producing a work of art, penning a poem, or performing a piece of music – is a strange business. What has been such an intensely personal, almost intimate, endeavour has now become known to the wider world, and others are left to judge the results of your often lonely toil. As with all such undertakings, once released, the book (or poem, or performance) ceases to be your own, and you can only hope that the message that was intended to be conveyed is the message that others receive. It is indeed rare for an author to have any form of response once a work has entered the public sphere and for this opportunity I must thank The British Scholar Society and the editorship of Britain and the World. To an even greater extent, I must thank Professors John Lonsdale, Keith Jeffery and R. J. Q. Adams for their thoughtful reviews and the time they have so freely given to prepare them. I can only hope that my reply will continue to foster debate in the generous spirit into which they have entered it, and will be worthy of this Round-Table.

9 Daniel Branch’s important Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, civil war, and decolonization (Cambridge, 2009), is nonetheless in Imperial Endgame’s bibliography.

I must begin, I fear, with my book’s title, and more specifically with my use of the terms ‘Imperial Endgame’ and ‘Dirty Wars’ (the latter of which has been questioned in part by all three reviewers). I confess that I did not use a dictionary when naming the work, but if I had I would have read that endgame, in addition to being the final moves of a game of chess, has popularly come to mean the ‘final stage of an extended process or course of events’. Professor Jeffery suggests that my endgame carries a different meaning, where the process itself (or ‘the game’, to use the extended metaphor) changed. Furthermore, rather than having fewer players involved, my endgame in fact revealed an increase in personnel, a seeming contradiction to the term itself. This is undoubtedly true. An additional commando of Royal Marines was deployed to Palestine to allow the safe withdrawal of the remaining civilian officials in May 1948, and there were more British troops in Malaya in its final five years under British rule than at any other time since the first Briton arrived during the seventeenth century. British strategy and tactics concerning the use of force in its colonies changed (and quite significantly) in the years after 1945, and the British government did seek to ‘force issues to a conclusion’. Yet does this fundamentally challenge my assertion that for the empire, the years 1945 to 1960 did indeed represent its endgame, the final fifteen years of a three hundred year course of events? In 1945, the empire was at its greatest geographic expanse, the culmination of a period of continual growth dating back to the early seventeenth century; by 1960, the feet of the British government were firmly planted on the road to decolonisation, put there at least in part by choice rather than simple necessity. To this author, at least, this can fairly be called an endgame, despite the temporary increase of manpower that was required for the successful achievement of this policy of managed withdrawal.

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12 As I show in Imperial Endgame, this increased manpower resulted in remarkable continuity in personnel between counterinsurgency campaigns, from colony to colony. Professor Jeffery rightly notes that the shadow of Ireland falls across my work, pointing to Sir George “Bobbie” Erskine, military commander in Kenya from 1953, who had served for two years in Ireland during its own ‘Troubles’ in the early 1920s. There were others. For example, Captain John M. Rymer-Jones, Inspector General of the Palestine Police from 1943 to 1946, served in Ireland whilst Erskine was there, from 1920–21. His deputy, Michael McConnell, had transferred from the Royal Irish Constabulary to the Palestine Police in 1922, remaining there through the 1940s counterinsurgency campaign. Indeed, by 1943, more than half of all police district commanders in Palestine had served in Ireland during the Irish War of Independence, with many transferring to Malaya upon the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Professor Lonsdale feels that I could have gone further in emphasising this ‘imperial learning curve’. This is a fair criticism. Whilst the names and positions can be found in my book, a more explicit connecting of the dots would have been helpful. For example, I should have emphasised more clearly that Colonel William Gray, Inspector General of the Palestine Police from 1946–1948, followed Gurney to Malaya to work as
A more substantial objection is offered by both Professors Jeffery and Lonsdale to my repeated use of the term ‘dirty wars’, which is clearly the more controversial assertion of the title and book. I use the adjective ‘dirty’ to qualify the noun ‘war’ and it is useful to take each separately, as each raises a different question. I will turn first to ‘war’. In his review, Jeffery wishes to interrogate my use of the word, arguing that war ‘involves the use of lethal violence between formally organised and identifiable groups, usually uniformed, acting on behalf of sovereign states, or bodies aspiring to statehood’. Furthermore, international law ‘makes a clear distinction between peace and war, and certain formalities are required to mark a transition between the two’. He concludes that the ‘blanket application of the term “war” to all of these conflicts obscures the crucially important extent to which the British security-force actors operated within a legal, political, and moral climate which for the most part denied that a “state of war” existed. By assuming from the start that these were all “wars”, Grob-Fitzgibbon runs the risk of telling too straightforward a story.’ Lonsdale takes a different approach, assuming the existence of ‘counter-insurgent warfare’, but examining it against the concept of just war theory, concluding that by definition, ‘emergency warfare, however justified its cause, was therefore [always] dirty; it was necessarily fought in conditions and under rules very different from formal warfare, itself always dirty in practice, no matter how strict its international laws’.

The first question, then, is: can the counterinsurgency campaigns at the end of empire rightly be described as war? Jeffery argues no. I would agree that in a legalistic sense they cannot, and, indeed, the British government intentionally did not use the word ‘war’ in reference to the Malayan Emergency because Lloyd’s
Insurers would not have covered the cost of losses for the rubber planters had they done so. If the purpose of my book was to examine war as a legal concept, and to see how that concept applied to Britain’s post-war conflicts, I would accept Jeffery’s criticism wholeheartedly and in general share his view that ‘a clear understanding of what war is, and is not, is highly desirable in any discussion of serious conflict such as that which afflicted the British empire in the twentieth century’. Yet the focus of my work is on decolonisation and political strategy more than it is on warfare, and although the violence is described in some detail, the purpose of the work is not primarily to explore the nature of that violence.13

In that context, my use of the term ‘war’ to describe these conflicts falls within the norms and precedents established by British and military historiography over the past half century, and of military theory dating back before then. In arguably the first counterinsurgency manual, Colonel C. E. Callwell termed Britain’s nineteenth century campaigns ‘wars’, a lead that was followed by historians Byron Farwell and Ian Hernon.14 Twentieth century counterinsurgent theorists, including Sir Robert Thompson, David Galula, Roger Trinquier, Robert Taber and George K. Tanham, have all done likewise,15 and in his work, Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies, historian Ian F. W. Beckett describes insurgency as the ‘poor man’s war’ and seeks to ‘restore the balance’ in traditional

13 Professor Jeffrey himself recognises this in his critique of the ‘rather limited selection of texts’ that I list within the introduction of my book. He chooses not to dwell on the fact that I do not give a historiographical overview of the changing nature of war in British and European history. For example, he does not ask why I have not included the works of John Keegan, Geoffrey Parker, William McNeil, Hew Strachan or the other giants of military history in my brief discussion of the relevant literature. Rather, he centres his critique on my decision to ‘neglect’ John Gallagher, Ronald Robinson and John Darwin, who have ‘explored the essential interconnectedness of British imperial experience and policy’. In my defence on this point, I do not give Darwin a ‘dismissive reference’ as Jeffrey suggests, but simply say that in his ‘otherwise comprehensive’ work on decolonisation he gives little attention to the counterinsurgency campaigns at the end of empire, which is true. As for Robinson and Gallagher, I had assumed that their seminal work on informal rule – largely published in the 1960s and 1970s – had sufficiently seeped into the consciousness of all British historians that in a work published in 2011 it was no longer necessary to directly reference them in a short introduction. But perhaps I am mistaken on that score.

14 Colonel C. E. Callwell, Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice, third edition (London, 1906); Byron Farwell, Queen Victoria’s Little Wars (New York, 1972); and Ian Hernon, Britain’s Forgotten Wars: Colonial Campaigns of the 19th Century (Stroud, 2003).

military histories that have been ‘dismissive’ of insurgency and counterinsurgency as a form of warfare. Dismissive or not, British military historians have increasingly included the post-war counterinsurgency campaigns in their works, with Jeremy Black moving seamlessly from the Second World War to India to the Malayan Emergency and the *Oxford History of the British Army* placing the operations in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus side-by-side with the war in Korea without distinction between the two forms of warfare. It is perhaps telling that the most prominent conflict in the post-war world – that in Vietnam – has become known by historians, politicians and the general public alike as the Vietnam War, despite the fact that it does not fit within Jeffery’s given definition of war.

The problem, perhaps, is that what constitutes war has never been a fixed entity, and its interpretation has very much depended on the historical context in which it has been fought. In the first lines of his classic *Art of War* (dating to the sixth century BCE), Sun-tzu declares that, ‘Warfare is the greatest affair of state, the basis of life and death, the Way (Tao) to survival or extinction’. Yet as historian Ralph Sawyer shows, the art of war itself evolved greatly in the centuries and decades prior to Sun-tzu’s writing. Even within Sun-tzu’s writings, there is an allowance for orthodox (cheng) warfare and unorthodox (ch’i) warfare, the latter being characterised by tactics that employ ‘flexible’ forces in ‘imaginative, unconventional, unexpected ways’. Other historians exploring the prehistoric world have shown the great differences in what war has looked like across time, most prominently Lawrence Keeley in his *War before Civilization*. More importantly, Victor Davis Hanson convincingly argues in *The Western Way of War* – what Jeffery describes as ‘war’ in its entirety – is in fact only war as it has been viewed by one part of the world – a western (largely European) tradition that has little relevance to warfare in other parts of the globe. Clearly not all

22 Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA, 2000).
wars are created equal. This conclusion has been supported by Rupert Smith in his *The Utility of Force*, where he states that ‘War no longer exists’. By this Smith means that ‘war as battle in a field between men and machinery...as a massive deciding event in a dispute in international affairs: such war no longer exists’.23 Instead, Smith argues that we have now entered a new paradigm which he calls ‘war amongst the people’.24 In a very real sense, the counterinsurgency campaigns at the end of Britain’s empire were the first of Smith’s wars amongst the people; conflicts that bore little resemblance to the Second World War or the other conflicts of the industrial age, but were war nonetheless.

If, then, we can fairly describe these counterinsurgency campaigns as war, were they dirty wars? Professor Adams points out that ‘in some ways all wars are “dirty”’, a view shared by Professor Lonsdale. The latter, using just war theory as a way to assess the cleanliness or dirtiness of war, raises doubts about whether even ‘the last, perhaps the only, “good” war, the Second World War’, could avoid the ‘dirt of war’. In this, his argument partly mirrors that of theologian John Yoder, who suggests that no war has yet met (or perhaps could ever meet) the criteria that would allow it to be described as a ‘just war’. Yet Lonsdale goes beyond a discussion solely based on just war theory. In his review, he discusses my concept of dirty war together with my claims of British success, seeing success as a synonym for ‘good’ and thus assuming that my argument is that a success – which is the same as an historic good, in his mind – ‘wash[ed] clean the dirt of war’. Before such success can be judged, however, Lonsdale argues that the ‘diverse dirtiness of counter-insurgent war’ must be disentangled. Only if the outcome can be considered a ‘good’ can the policy be deemed a success, and thus potentially justify the dirtiness of action that it necessitated. Yet my naming of the various

24 Smith lists six major trends in defining this new paradigm in war, which are worth quoting at length: ‘The ends for which we fight are changing from the hard absolute objectives of interstate industrial war to more malleable objectives to do with the individual and societies that are not states; We fight amongst the people, a fact amplified literally and figuratively by the central role of the media: we fight in every living room in the world as well as on the streets and fields of a conflict zone; Our conflicts tend to be timeless, since we are seeking a condition, which then must be maintained until an agreement on a definitive outcome, which may take years or decades; We fight so as not to lose the force, rather than fighting by using the force at any cost to achieve the aim; On each occasion new uses are found for old weapons...; [And] The sides are mostly non-state since we tend to conduct our conflicts and confrontations in some form of multinational grouping, whether it is an alliance or a coalition, and against some party or parties that are not states.’ *The Utility of Force*, pp. 19–20.
insurgencies and counterinsurgencies at the end of empire as ‘Britain’s Dirty Wars’ is neither condemnation nor praise of these conflicts. I did not intend the phrase ‘dirty wars’ to be a moral designation. Indeed, I could just as well have called these conflicts Britain’s ‘murky wars’ (as opposed to ‘clear wars’), ‘fuzzy wars’ (as opposed to ‘sharp wars’), or ‘grey wars’ (as opposed to ‘black and white wars’), but chose instead to follow the example of such scholars as David Anderson in his Histories of the Hanged in deciding upon ‘dirty wars’.  

Yet there is an emotional difference between ‘dirty’ and ‘murky’, ‘fuzzy’ or ‘grey’, and my use of the former was more than just happenstance. It might be helpful to turn from war to another form of legalised violence, boxing, to further explore this notion of ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ conflict. When a referee asks for a ‘nice clean fight’ he is not requesting a pleasant encounter in which there is no blood or sweat and the combatants politely take turns to land upon each other a painless punch. Quite the contrary, all he is asking is that the violence occurs within certain recognised rules and norms of the boxing community. The relative severity of the violence is of little consequence. A ‘clean’ right hook landing on the correct region of an opponent’s nasal cavity might inflict far graver damage than the ‘dirty’ biting off of an opponent’s ear, which while painful in the short-term carries considerably less chance of lasting brain damage! My use of the term ‘dirty war’ was intended to imply neither moral condemnation nor a particular level of violence, but simply to indicate that these were wars fought in the grey areas of legality, using unconventional means and creative practice. Thus in my definition of dirty and clean warfare, the 1982 Falklands War would be ‘clean’ whereas the Northern Ireland Troubles would be ‘dirty’, despite the fact that the violence deployed by the British Army and Royal Air Force against the Argentine armed forces was considerably more lethal than that used in Northern Ireland. The one exception to this within the Falklands War was the sinking of the Argentine ship the General Belgrano by HMS Conqueror, an action which has come to be regarded as a ‘dirty’ aspect of an otherwise ‘clean’ war. The reason for this designation, however, has nothing to do with the loss of 368 lives (the violence itself), but

26 David Anderson, Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire (New York and London, 2005). I recognize that Anderson uses this phrase in a slightly different way than I have outlined in this paragraph. As he states, ‘It [Histories of the Hanged] is a story of atrocity and excess on both sides, a dirty war from which no one emerged with much pride, and certainly no glory’ (p. 2). For Anderson, his use of the term ‘dirty’ carries with it significant moral connotation. For me, it has more to do with clarity (or lack thereof) of action, and with violence sitting outside of historical norms of conventional warfare.

27 My use of the term ‘dirty’ here to describe British actions in the Northern Ireland Troubles does not imply immorality, as a strong case could be made for the necessity, morality, and success of most British operations in Northern Ireland.
rather the context in which those losses occurred – the Belgrano was outside the 200-mile exclusion zone that had been established around the Falkland Islands and was purportedly sailing away from the islands. Had the sinking occurred within the exclusion zone, and had the ship been sailing towards rather than away from the Falklands, the loss of life would still have been regrettable, but far less controversial, an unfortunate but ‘clean’ part of war, the existence of which always involves great and often horrific loss of life.²⁸

Professor Lonsdale holds that emergency wars will always be ineluctably dirty, and questions whether I take this view, suspecting instead that I see them only as ‘contingently dirty’. Yet in my conclusion I clearly state that ‘liberal imperialism can only be sustained by illiberal dirty wars’. The difference between us, I think, is not whether we see these wars as dirty, but rather what this dirtiness means for our analysis of Britain’s imperial endgame. This, of course, leads to an essential unanswered question: why is it that liberal imperialism necessitates illiberal dirty wars? It is often said that liberalism is a political form that requires the consent of the majority, with allowance for a minority; indeed, at the heart of liberalism is the right to dissent, the right not to support those who are governing. Yet the reality is that to survive, liberalism as a system needs the consent not only of the majority but of all who live within liberal society. Whilst dissent can be given within the confines of the system, for those who break the rules of the system or – worse – attempt to undermine the system itself, their fate can only be a meeting with illiberal measures. The existence of police forces and prisons attest to this fact, to give just two examples. And what is true in the domestic sphere, within the confines of an already existing liberal society in which liberalism is the assumption, is multiplied several times over in the international sphere where an imperial power may be attempting to establish liberalism (however imperfect) in a society in which it has never existed, and where the people are struggling with what Lonsdale describes as ‘that sense of humiliation that must smoulder, at least in fits and starts, within the subjects of even the most liberal empire’. When one society attempts to impose its will on another, there will always be resistance, no matter how well-intentioned that will might be. Within liberalism, as with other political systems, active resistance must be eliminated before the system can become self-sustaining, before its rules can be put into place and begin to operate successfully. On the international stage, this means that insurgencies will have to be met with counterinsurgencies, which are always dirty to a greater or lesser extent.

²⁸ Indeed, to see the horrific consequences of the violence in this ‘clean’ war one has only to read Ken Lukowiak’s A Soldier’s Song: True Stories from the Falklands (London, 1997).
Which brings me to the close of this essay, where I must respond to Professor Lonsdale’s question about ‘whom, today, this message is intended to reassure’. Whilst I can certainly see how one might take my conclusion as some form of justification – absolution even – for the use of dirty tactics in our contemporary wars of liberal imperialism (which are today more palatably renamed operations of humanitarian intervention, peacekeeping, or other such euphemisms), I can only say that I did not intend it as such, but rather gave it in the spirit of a warning. The historical record seems clear that when a state engages in overseas actions in pursuit of liberal ends (be they the spread of democracy, the opening of free trade or the amelioration of human rights abuses), illiberal measures will be necessary to secure these desired liberal ends. This does not imply the morality or immorality, or justice or injustice, of these means, but it does (I think) necessitate that careful thought be given before any such foreign policy is pursued. In the case of Britain’s imperial endgame, the British met with considerable success both in creating states that were liberal in the context of the Cold War environment, and in employing what I call ‘dirty wars’ to achieve this goal. As I also conclude in my book, whether this success was moral or not, just or not, or, indeed, desirable or not, is a question best left to philosophers and kings.

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