‘Eighteenth-Century Britain and Spain: Do their Imperial Histories Fit into a Common Grand Narrative?’

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Vivid oil painting by Samuel Scott (1702-72),
showing the pitched Anglo-Spanish naval battle (1743),
as the smaller British ship is about to capture the larger Spanish galleon -
during the prolonged rivalry between these two Atlantic imperial powers
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I: Patterns in history?[1]

It is a complex question to ask: do the imperial histories of eighteenth-century Britain and Spain fit into a common Grand Narrative, or over-arching historical account? To which, one instant answer might reflect a mood of postmodernist doubt, stating in multiple languages: *No; no; no.*

Yet the intellectual fashion for nay-saying, influential among leftish circles in the 1990s, has come and gone. Postmodernist theory gained some support in the slipstream of failed communist dreams. The theory, however, was highly implausible – not for prioritising Space as a category for analysis, but in denying the continuing power of Time, which is integrally meshed with Space.[2] Arch postmodernists summarily rejected all cross-temporal links between past and present. Space is prioritised as the promoter of meaning, while temporality leaves only a tiny 'trace'.[3] But Time obstinately refused to disappear. Indeed, the very languages used to debate these questions are historic constructions, inherited from earlier generations and constantly subjected to through-time updatings.

Furthermore, postmodern theorists, while dismissive of historians' claims to interpret the past, have their own very simplified historic vision. They assume a past state of Modernity (and, by implication, an even earlier Premodernity) which has now been superseded by Postmodernity. This transition "is not an ideology or position we can choose to subscribe to or not. Postmodernity is precisely our condition," urges Keith Jenkins in 1997.[4] And Joan W. Scott in 2007 is equally emphatic, rejecting her peer-feminists who disagree: "Like it or not, we are in a post-modern age."[5]

What do these strong assertions indicate if not belief in a narrative that purports to express truths about both the present and an earlier, different past? Moreover, their tale features a schematic rupture from Modernity to Postmodernity, which mirrors an old "progressive" story of dichotomous

transition from "old/bad' to 'new/improved."[6] Little wonder, then, that most historians remain unruffled by postmodernist claims to have eclipsed history. Or indeed that the proposed nomenclature for today's era, based upon an oversimplified dichotomous narrative, is not gaining general currency.

While postmodernist doubts are fading, however, the exhortations in favour of No-history have left an after-shadow, in the form of a left-liberal hankering for Many-histories. This viewpoint seeks earnestly to avoid any imperialism of ideas. Let there be no hegemonic insistence upon one common history. Instead, the cry is: *let a thousand narratives bloom!* Let every group, and every sub-group of every group, have their own "stories".

Upon closer inspection, however, an insistence upon a separate narrative for every possible sub-set of humans, in every possible region of the globe, representing every possible set of beliefs and circumstances, whether divided by gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, class, education, religion, or political affiliation (or any combination of those categories), would fragment knowledge beyond knowing. There would be a myriad of conflicting versions. And there would be no way of judging whether one fragmented narrative is historically more accurate or plausible than any other. Holocaust deniers would have as much right and justice to "their" history as Holocaust realists.

But not all interpretations can be equally sustainable in all circumstances, all the time. When accounts differ diametrically, choices are required. Analysing complexities entails a process of assessment and debate, which acknowledges a pluralism of outlooks – but simultaneously accepts a human capacity to make reasoned judgments about these differences, within a shared framework of thought and understanding. Diversity and commonality can and do cohere, even while some options are rejected, after scrutiny, as 'off-limits'. In parallel, it may be noted that human biology similarly displays a myriad of individual differences within a common genetic template, which has boundaries.

Returning to the quest for a common history does not imply a dictatorial approach or a top-down universal imposition but instead a search for significant patterns, via comparative studies. In that context, British[7] and Spanish[8] imperial histories constitute highly inviting subjects for further analysis, on the strength of the mighty historiographies that they have attracted. Both were composite kingdoms, containing historically distinctive regions within their core territories, as well as gaining impressive but controversial empires overseas. Both contributed massively to the European diaspora over many centuries. Both were also noted language exporters, propelling English and Spanish into leading positions among the world's internationally-used languages. And both were very active diffusers of ideas, religions, and cultural values, which were in turn adapted and refracted as they were disseminated. Hence both countries and their peoples had a global impact, whilst being at times allies and, at other times, entrenched antagonists in the process.

The following essay focuses specifically upon the meta-historical models available for comparative analysis. Two sections explore the strengths and weaknesses of cyclical and linear frameworks, which were often invoked in the eighteenth century. These models had a long history and are still endorsed by some people today, even if often implicitly rather than explicitly.

A final section concludes with a more complex trialectical modelling. This approach explores the three great and interlinked dimensions of continuity *and* gradual change *and*, upon occasions, revolutionary transformations.[9] Spain and Britain thus appear together within a prolonged phase of European and world history. Both were distinctive yet comparable empire-gainers. Both, eventually, were distinctive yet comparable empire-losers. Both demonstrated continuities amongst change – and have left legacies that long outlast the formalities of empire.

II: Cyclical histories

Cyclical theories of history retain a remarkable appeal, despite the fact that they pose problems in application. People are familiar with the yearly succession of the seasons; with the monthly phases of the moon; and with the life-cycle of all living things, from birth to maturity to death. Hence a trajectory of rise and fall, followed perhaps by later rises and falls, before coming to an ultimate end, suggests a familiar narrative.

That pattern was famously evoked by the greatest of eighteenth-century European historians, Edward Gibbon. In his *Decline and Fall* (1776), he analysed the collapse of the Roman empire in the West, which heralded a prolonged Dark Ages. Yet Gibbon offered an implicit promise that there might be another, better European "rebirth" to follow. In his autobiography he stated that he himself lived in an "age of science and philosophy."[10] Within *Decline and Fall* he also referred approvingly to eighteenth-century European culture as a whole. He praised "the reason and the humanity of the present age", contrasting "modern" religious tolerance with the Christian dogma that all pagans were condemned to endless torment after death, whether they had heard the Christian gospel in their lifetimes or not.[11] His history had a polemical message that was predicated upon transformation over time.

Certainly, Gibbon's fellow Britons were familiar with traditional cyclical theories and, in the case of optimists, with change-for-the-better.[12] An example appeared in 1728, strikingly expounded in Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopedia:*[13]

> The Time seems at hand when we are no longer to envy Rome her AUGUSTUS and AUGUSTAN AGE, but Rome in her turn shall envy ours. There is a Time reserv'd in Fate for every Nation to arrive at its Height; and the uppermost Place on the Terrestrial Ball is held successively by several States.

Such an image of the earth's turning globe, complete with a turnover of top nations, encouraged hopeful thoughts. Chambers, himself a cartographer with a world-wide perspective, excitedly addressed his fellow Britons and the new King George II:

> May not the numerous Presages, which usher in Your Majesty's Reign, give us room to expect that *our Turn is next?*

As a prediction, it was a remarkable one, from a denizen of what was then a middle-ranking European power. And, strikingly, it came true. The conjoined might of Scotland and England, legally defined after 1707 as the kingdom of Great Britain, was already gaining strength in the early eighteenth century. The monarch who was still habitually known as King "of England" was simultaneously King of Ireland, Elector of Hanover (from 1714 to 1837), the ruler of a swathe of overseas colonies and, theoretically too, titular claimant to the throne of France.

By 1850 these early aggregations had expanded very significantly. Admittedly, the claim to France was dropped in 1800/1, at the time of Britain's Act of Union with Ireland (well after the advent of the first French Republic) and Hanover went its own way in 1837.[14] Moreover, there was a major shock in 1783. When the thirteen American colonies became independent, Britain's first overseas empire was severely curtailed. Nonetheless, that defeat had remarkably little impact on the country's long-term expansionist dynamic.[15] Britain continued with its *ad hoc* accumulation of overseas possessions, and by the mid-nineteenth century it had the world's largest overseas empire and was, briefly but undeniably, the global "top nation". Moreover the territories directly and indirectly under its sway were to continue growing until well into the twentieth century. In this way, Britain eventually surpassed both its eighteenth-century colonising rivals, France and Spain.

This achievement was the more notable in the light of early eighteenth-century demographic statistics. Britain was not initially one of Europe's most populous powers. In 1750 France with some 22 million was Europe's demographic giant, albeit wracked with fears that it was losing population,[16] while England/Wales and Scotland together housed

some 7,250,000 residents. That total compared quite closely with c.8,000,000 people living in the historic regions of Iberia under the aegis of the Spanish monarchy at the same date. True, the British kingdom was linked with a further 3,000,000 people in Ireland and that country was just launching upon its pre-Famine demographic surge, leading to levels which have still not been matched to this day.[17]

Nevertheless, population pressure at home was clearly not the sole or even the chief driver of colonial expansion. Mid-eighteenth-century Spain had already gained the greatest overseas empire of all the European powers, with its central/south American heartlands in Mexico and Peru.[18] Similarly, the much smaller Portugal was one of the earliest exemplars of Europe's outwards dynamic. Its explorers gained forts and trading posts in India and the East Indies, while other colonizers settled along the lengthy Brazilian coastline,[19] rivaling but not outmatching the imperial sway of its mighty Iberian neighbour to Portugal's north and east.

Instead, expansionist outcomes stemmed from a complex and never static balance of power, which was liable to change in every generation. On the one hand, there was the potential might and purposiveness of the imperial power; and, on the other, was the equally variable acquiescence and/or enforced subjugation of the colonised peoples - both features also being regularly affected by the intervention or non-intervention of other interested parties. There are many other contextual variables too, which change structurally and significantly over time (technology; communications; state formations; relative economic might; and ideologies of support or condemnation). Yet, at the core, there remains the fluctuating power balance between the imperialists and the imperialised.

For Ephraim Chambers, the rise and fall of successive powers was decreed by God-given fate, taking the form of a cyclical sequence. However, such a belief offered no further explanation of how, when and why such regular transformations should take place. Insofar as a rationale for cyclicality was offered, it was usually expressed in terms of the "natural" life-cycle: from birth to death. However, nations and empires were and are not organic bodies. They do not have inexorably specified maximum lifespans, dictated by genetic inheritance.

Hence organic arguments for the rise and fall of empires tended over time to be embellished by explanations which highlighted the relative moral and political merits of the competing systems of rule. Such a stress was particularly gratifying to the winning power in any competition. For British commentators in the eighteenth century, it was flattering to attribute successes over Spain to British virtues and Spanish defeats to Spanish defects. This type of argument seemed to have an inner logic, even though it was ultimately tautologous. For Britons, Spanish defeats were taken as proof of Spain's national defects, which in turn were taken as proven by the facts of defeat. Such arguments, albeit circular and self-serving, appeared to explain the outcome of epic confrontations.

Outside observers of eighteenth-century Spain freely criticised the alleged inertia of its system of government and the assumed flaws of the Spanish character. These views were typically expounded in an exaggerated and mythic form. Later, they were summarised collectively as the Black Legend, which was much resented in Spain.[20] But it is worth stressing that, insofar as these ideas were taken seriously, they did gain historical salience, which affected people's behaviour and attitudes. Thus the role of entrenched beliefs buttressed the wider political/cultural suspicions between English- and Spanish-speakers. Indeed, versions of the Black Legend are still controversially attached by some commentators to American-Hispanicist politics to this day.[21]

One characteristic that was considered as especially notable by British onlookers was Spanish pride and ceremoniousness, especially on the part of Spanish men. "They walk with so much Gravity, that 'tis hard to determine whether they move or stand still", wrote an anonymous English author in 1701, drawing upon his own first-hand experience of living in Madrid.[22] He attributed the bodily decorum of Spanish men particularly to their wish to keep cool in a hot climate: "Nay, even when they Dance they preserve their grave Air." In fact, such accounts were generalised from the stately etiquette of Castilian court society.[23] There was plenty of counter-evidence for Spanish liveliness in other contexts. The exuberance of their popular dances was readily observable in all

parts of the country. So one English traveller to Barcelona in 1775 was disturbed by an erotic performance of the Fandango. Its "wantonness" was such as "no modest eye can look upon without a blush!" confessed Henry Swinburne (then aged thirty-two). Indeed, he added, with unintended comedy, that: "A good Fandango lady will stand five minutes in one spot, wriggling like a worm that has just been cut in two."[24]

Much more damaging, meanwhile, were accounts of greed and hypocrisy. "They [the Spanish people] have an incomparable Zeal to plant the Catholick Religion in those Places where Gold-Mines are found." So observed the anonymous English gentleman in 1701, with finely honed sarcasm.[25] The precious metals of the New World were admired and coveted, while the Spanish motivations for their discovery were impugned. Such aspersions, of course, appealed especially to Protestants. They feared any world-wide spread of Catholicism, especially when funded by fabled and apparently inexhaustible wealth. Hence the motivations of the *conquistadores* were viewed with hostility.

Accusations of Spanish cruelty resonated most strongly in Britain and the Protestant world. "A Signior is bloodthirstie and tyrannous", declared a Dutch text, translated into English for circulation in 1599.[26] Such charges were supported by evidence from Spain's behaviour in a number of conflicts:

> It is enough, yea too much knowne in our Netherlands, and not only in *Europe, Asia* and *Africa*, but also in the farthest part of *America*, whereby he [the Spanish Signior] sheweth himselfe to bee sprung from the cruell *Goths* and blood-thirstie *Wandals* [sic].

Genealogically speaking, this alleged lineage was implausible. However, the point of such rhetorical condemnation was plain enough. It invoked the opprobrium of history by linking the Spanish people with the "barbarians" who had overthrown the classical empire of Rome. They were irredeemably

cruel and seemed to Spain's critics to be so, not only around the world but also through time.[27]

Another example of hostile perceptions appeared in a tract from 1740, at a time of high rhetoric with Britain and Spain on the verge of renewed commercial and colonial warfare. The title left no room for doubt, proclaiming: *Old England for Ever: Or, Spanish Cruelty Displayed – Wherein the Spaniards Right to America is Impartially Examined and Found Defective, their Pretensions Founded in Blood, Supported by Cruelty, and Continued by Oppression.*[28] The "poor Indians" who lived in the Spanish empire were heartily pitied and their mistreatment by the Iberian colonialists condemned.

Needless to say, there was much hypocrisy in such rhetoric. Britain had a far from unblemished record - not only in its callous treatment of indigenous peoples in its own colonies but also in its increasing prominence in the international slave trade. So the tears for the "poor Indians" were highly crocodilian. Nonetheless, the British felt able to be self-righteous because of Spain's already notorious reputation. In particular, the zeal of the Spanish Inquisition in eradicating internal dissent was widely feared – and denounced not only overseas but also by Spanish liberals in the nineteenth century and after.[29]

However, such writings are more informative about the beliefs and propaganda of the combatants than they are as explanations of change. Spanish laments about the free-booting and bellicose Britons were equally uninformative as to why the two countries often found themselves at war.

Appeals to one nation's character traits cannot explain why that nation should rise at one point in history but subsequently fall at another. Moreover, while in some eras there have been single hegemonic powers, at many other times there have been prolonged contests between rival powers. That state of affairs was readily apparent in the eighteenth century, as the expanding

British and French empires contended with the established empires of Spain and Portugal, as well as with the contracting commercial dominance of the Dutch Republic. The intricate waxings and wanings of their various fortunes cannot be attributed to their assumedly static and homogeneous national characteristics. None had a monopoly of all the "winning" qualities. And none were predestined by character as history's "losers".

Problems of explaining long-term causation beset and finally sunk the twentieth-century's most famous exponent of cyclical history, Arnold Toynbee. His *Study of History* analysed the rise and fall of "civilizations" as the outcome of an integral process of "challenge and response". But again the argument proved to be tautologous. Successful "civilizations" – or "cultures" in today's more modest terminology - would overcome challenges and prosper. While failing ones would not. Yet why and when would the collective way-of-life of a distinctive group of humans move from one category to another?

Extending the organic metaphor, Toynbee tried an analogy with the human psyche: "Success seems to make us lazy or self-satisfied or conceited."[30] Hence he argued that prosperity and predominance would promote over-confidence and eventual failure in the case of historical "civilizations". That proposition may be true (or a truism) about human attitudes in some cases, even if not in all. But even as a generalisation about it hardly begins to address the intricate causations that promote or delay the waning or outright disappearance of once great cultures.[31]

Why should the Roman empire last for some 500 years in the West[32] but for more than twice that in Byzantium?[33] Why did the Spanish transatlantic empire last for some 400 years[34] and the British empire for perhaps 350?[35] Were the Byzantine emperors less prone to become lazy and conceited than were the later Europeans? Or did the surviving Roman empire in the eastern Mediterranean face fewer powerful rivals and fewer logistical difficulties than

did the globally far-flung commercial empires of the sixteenth century and later? Indeed, when there are many competitor forces for imperial sway then the speed of rise and decline tends to accelerate, especially once global habitations are settled and known, leaving no more seemingly 'empty' frontiers to conquer.

Imperial lifespans are anyway approximations, since empires are usually founded sporadically and often end in stages. They may have long after-lives, in the form of quasi-imperial influence, which has at best an imprecise chronology. And, of course, the variant forms of "empire" are notoriously difficult to define,[36] some powers taking the title specifically, while other world-hegemonic powers reject, at least officially, both the label and the concept.[37]

Toynbee himself focused upon early human history, when entire "civilizations" eventually disappeared. But he had much less to say about later eras when many powers have risen and competed, but not in fact departed - even after serious defeats. Such variations refute a general interpretation of national or imperial histories in terms of organic life cycles from birth to inevitable death. At best, the model remains generalised and prone to tautology. At worst, it seriously underplays specificities and fails to account for historical variations. Thus, while casual references to cyclicality can still be found, the edifice of cyclical theory has generally disappeared as a serious explanatory framework.

III: Linear histories

Perhaps straight lines offer a better framework? A favoured alternative model sees history as marching along a common pathway towards a targeted goal. It makes for good, purposive narratives, with a start, middle, and clear ending. Generally, however, a strict linearity has also gone out of fashion. There are allowed to be many deviations and variations on the route and more than one

possible destination. Nonetheless, some notion of the “march of history” often persists, being cited especially (but far from exclusively) in the context of technological “Progress”.

On the other hand, such linear accounts can risk being teleological, with connotations of an inevitability that later events may too easily disprove. One swashbuckling account, by Francis Fukuyama, came not from a specialist historian but from a foreign policy analyst. His study of *The End of History* (1991)[38] was much mocked, since momentous and historic events have by no means halted. But in fact Fukuyama’s title referred to “the end” in the Hegelian sense, as history’s evolutionary target, rather than its imminent termination. Even so, his arguments remain disputed.[39]

Specifically, Fukuyama’s claim that history’s highway is leading all countries to embrace American-style liberal democracy has been countered by rival pronouncements, such as predictions of the coming world hegemony of a politically authoritarian if economically liberalizing China.[40] On the other hand, the Arab Spring of 2011 is in turn refuting those analysts who claimed that an interest in democratic participation is confined to citizens of the western world.

Belief in a pre-determined linear pathway can give a heady boost to those who believe. Such sublime confidence, however, usually requires an ability to ignore evidence to the contrary. Professional historians cannot allow themselves that luxury. They have therefore become understandably wary about invoking anything as provocative as historical inevitability. Simple narratives, especially in the name of “Progress”, have generally and rightly been discarded. However, their judicious vigilance has prompted too much of a flight from the study of long-term trends. There are major and cumulative deep developments in human affairs, which have great momentum and are difficult, though not impossible, to deflect or to withstand. Hence the roles of compound progression or long-term trends still merit attention.

Considering the case of western and central Europe from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, one of the most notable diachronic factors was the very powerful outward dynamic from this distinctive world-region.[41] It was seen in the emphatic spread of European populations, languages, commerce, technologies, ideas, and political domination into the wider world.

Of course, there are qualifications. European expansion, extra-regional trading networks, and population migrations were far from unknown before the sixteenth century. Many of its peoples had notable histories of wandering. For example, the English-speaking "English" at the time of Chaucer were historically descended from a gradual fusion of Basques, Celts, Romans, Vikings, Teutons ("Anglo-Saxons"), Danes, and Norman French. Nonetheless, from the sixteenth century onwards the outward dynamic from the European world-region was intensified, aided by ever more sophisticated technologies of ship-building and armament-manufactures.

Mighty new empires began to spread across the globe: sea-borne and commercially sustained by Europe's Atlantic coastline states - the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, the British, and the French. And land-based - the short-lived Swedish empire in the seventeenth century,[42] the tessellated Austro-Hungarian empire for much longer;[43] the expanding Prussian kingdom that became the short-lived German Reich in 1871;[44] and the geographically extensive and long-surviving Russian empire.[45] Indeed, its control was expanded post-1919 and post-1945 by the Soviets, albeit not under the same nomenclature. Thus over many centuries, the Europeans extended their dominance, including across Eurasia. By 1858, Tsarist Russia had found its own "new America" by the Pacific, which led to the foundation of Vladivostok as a strategic naval port,[46] looking across the Sea of Japan (East Sea)[47] towards Tokugawa Japan.

Meanwhile, the contrasting history of that country offered a striking reminder that there was an alternative to expansionism. From 1603 to 1868,

the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan maintained the opposite policy of confining its power to its own territory. More than that, it also closed its borders, as far as possible, to the outside world and especially to travellers from western Europe.[48] The successors to the Portuguese explorers and missionaries who reached Japan in sixteenth century were rebuffed. The minority Japanese tradition of Christianity was fiercely persecuted. And Dutch East India traders were restricted to a segregated depot on an island in Nagasaki Harbour. Yet this state of affairs could not last for ever. Hence the enforced opening of Japan after 1853 proved to be ultimately explosive, both for Japan and its neighbours. Nonetheless, this alternative history showed that closure was and is one potential response to international cultural, demographic and trading contacts, provided that the enclosing power has the capacity to enforce the policy.

Reverting to the contrasting European case, the causes of its dynamic expansionism were notably diverse. In part, the outwards movement of colonial settlers was a response to demographic pressures, especially as population growth accelerated in the eighteenth century. But, far more importantly, the process was fuelled by the confidence supplied by the mixture of advanced technologies of shipping; of trading acumen; of economic imperatives; of explorers' boldness; of successful and gunpower-fuelled armies and navies; of strong state powers; of organised and missionary-zealous religion; of access to literacy, book culture and stored knowledge; and of cultural belief in historical destiny.

Indeed, some of the first seizures of overseas territories by these European powers were made by explorers and adventurers, rather than by organised nations. It took great cultural confidence to lay claim to foreign territory, in the name of a distant authority, rather than simply to visit as a willing trader or an appreciative traveller. The imperial appropriations worked to consolidate the power of the imperial "home" countries (sometimes

designated as "core" economies) and the economic dependency of the "colonies" or "dependencies" (or "peripheries"). But the pattern was notably dynamic. Interactions and economic impacts running in complex directions, as in the case of the triangular trade between Britain, Africa and North America.[49]

An example of the haphazard way in which overseas possessions were garnered or not garnered can be seen in the history of Hawai'i. In 1794, one Captain George Vancouver (who had voyaged there initially with Captain Cook) raised the British flag. However, as this news was not relayed to London, the British empire asserted no "rights" to the Hawai'ian kingdom. At a later point, in 1843, the French invaded. Shortly afterwards, the British flag was raised again - but again no formal claims followed. This example was the reverse of the aggressive imperialism displayed elsewhere. Eventually, Hawaii was annexed as a USA territory in 1898, gaining full statehood only in 1959.[50] And to this day it marks its hybrid history by incorporating the Union Jack into the Hawai'ian state flag.[51] It is thus the only part of the USA that displays a visual memento of the old British link, although ironically it was not one of the original colonies and was never administered from London.

Like the bullish Captain Vancouver, many Britons who travelled the world in the eighteenth century had an engrained pride in their own claims. They were primed to see their cause as that of "Progress". When viewing Spain, they could contrast what they saw as British freedoms, enlightenment and "true religion" as against Spanish repression, darkness, and "bigotry". Gradually, however, as Spain became less feared, the old Black Legend began to mutate into a Grey version. Belief in Spanish "cruelty" was being replaced by belief in Spanish "torpor".

When Henry Swinburne's *Travels* in 1775 took him through Iberian regions with extensive rural unemployment, he reported the resulting idleness as a matter of pure laziness. He sniffed that: "thousands of men in all parts of

the realm are seen to pass their whole day, wrapped up in a cloak, standing in rows against a wall, or dozing under a tree." Such extreme inertia made people mentally apathetic, he concluded, before adding more kindly: "The Spanish is by no means naturally a serious, melancholy nation: misery and discontent have cast a gloom over them, increased, no doubt, by the long habit of distrust and terror inspired by the Inquisition." Swinburne did, however, find some light relief to mitigate the gloom. "Yet every village still resounds with the music of voices and guitars; and their fairs and Sunday wakes are remarkably noisy and riotous."[52]

Qualified sympathy was thus extended to the Spanish people, with Swinburne's severest criticisms being reserved for their religious and political leaders. That position was favoured among numerous British liberal reformers by the early nineteenth century,[53] many of whose spokesmen were in contact with their Spanish equivalents to encourage reforms within Spain itself.

Of course, such declarations showed a signal complacency about the record of the British overseas. Travel writers in general tended not to criticise their own compatriots; and even many abolitionists, who opposed the British merchants and their involvement in the slave trade, still did not challenge the existence of colonialism *per se*. In fact, the rhetoric of "Progress" was broad enough to contain a variety of approaches to empire. Conservatives could applaud British colonialism as bringing good governance, law, education, Protestantism, and economic development to "backward" people, while liberals viewed the process more regretfully, as an interim stewardship until the said "backward" people were "ready" to manage their own affairs. Either way, Britain's motives for gaining its very diversely constituted empire were publicly represented as benevolent, tutelary, and educative, rather than exploitative, rapacious, and oppressive.[54]

Spain, when viewed from that complacent British perspective, seemed to be quite different. Its empire was held to be both tyrannous and incompetent, with a static economy, an uninventive culture, and the reviled Inquisition as an institutional sign of its intolerance and closure. With such a combination of

characteristics, it seemed "bound" to fail, as it did not match with the "coming" narrative of Enlightenment and Progress.[55]

Increasingly, a virtuous mix of political liberalism and economic freedom was assumed to be required for countries claiming to be on the "side" of history. Those that took a different pathway were seen as becoming becalmed in a "backwater". A much later repetition of that view can be found in a standard history textbook from 1963:[56]

> The fundamental weakness of Spain as a colonial power, and the ascendancy of British, Dutch and French imperialism over her, lay in the backward and intransigent nature of the Spanish political and social institutions, in Spain's static economy, in her religious intolerance ..., in her general unwillingness to swim with the current of social change, but most of all in the vastness of the problem which she undertook to handle.

Only the very last phrase of this account referred to what was actually involved in the immense task of ruling the huge Spanish empire, with its shifting boundaries, interests, and ever-changing arenas of conflict. The problem with both the Black Legend, as with the weaker Grey Version, was these interpretations conveyed a very static vision.

Accusations of inertia and illiberalism could not explain how Spain had the dynamism to expand in the first place. After all, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the combined monarchies of Castile and Aragon expanded their control over the entire Iberian peninsula, married their family into the central European Habsburg dynasty, gained the Low Countries (after 1581 reduced to the "Spanish Netherlands"), and simultaneously won enormous territories overseas. The glittering culmination of this expansive phase occurred in 1580. Then Philip II's dynastic claim, pressed adroitly during a succession crisis in the neighbouring kingdom, brought Spain the resources of Portugal and Portugal's entire overseas empire as well.

Gaining and holding these additional global assets from 1580 to 1640 proved to be the apogee of Spain's imperial extension, when viewed in

retrospect. In practice, however, the Spanish-Portuguese union did not last for much more than two generations. The two empires had not been integrated; and opponents within Portugal fought to reclaim their independence, under the new Bragança dynasty.[57] Theirs was a doughty achievement, since it is logistically easier for controlling powers to crush breakaway movements in contiguous terrain than it is to hold onto breakaway movements in territories that are geographically distant. Indeed, the contemporaneous revolt of the Catalans (1640-1659) within Spanish state borders did not achieve separation.[58] Hence Spain's failure to hold onto Portugal turned out to be a highly significant failure in the long term. (Later, in the course of warfare in 1801, the larger kingdom did gain the border enclave of Olivenza/Olivença, near Badajoz – which remains disputed between the two countries to this day).

It took, however, a very long time for Spain's other subject territories to seize their independence. Spain's viceroyalty system in central and south America maintained a cautious balance between devolution and centralisation. Hispanic power was judiciously administered with frequent adjustments for changing times. Hence it can well be argued that, for a relatively small country (in demographic terms), Spain sustained its overseas empire remarkably well and for a notably long period.[59] It had established successful power structures and the Catholic church had inculcated a common religion.

After 1783, it is true, the imperial context began to change markedly.[60] The actions of Britain's American colonists set a dramatic precedent. Their articulation of a principled claim to national independence from imperial control was noted instantly in nearby Mexico. Nonetheless, had Spain not been weakened in the 1800s and 1810s by dynastic civil wars and by French military intrusion, it still might have held onto more of its colonies for longer than it did – although no doubt not for ever.

Here the argument turns from a static and incompetent Spain to a more realistic focus upon the interactions between Spain and its colonies. One easy view was that the gold- and silver-mines of America provided a perpetual fountain of fabled wealth. From the start, however, there were others who took a less star-struck view. Thus Juan de Mariana's *Historia General de Espana* (1592) commented shrewdly: "From the Conquest of the Indies have come advantages *and* disadvantages". That sober remark was in itself an antidote to monocausal explanations. And Mariana added a complex cost/benefit analysis, which compares favourably in its depth with the already cited twentieth-century textbook account:

> Among the latter [disadvantages], our strength has been weakened by the multitude of people who have emigrated ...; the substance we used to get from our soil, which was by no means bad, we now expect in large measure from the winds and waves that bring home our fleets; the prince is in greater necessity than before because he has to go to the defence of so many regions; and the people are made soft by the luxury of their food and dress.[61]

Both Spain and Britain experienced intricate exchanges of power/resources/responsibilities/expectations/costs/benefits between the home country and the colonies. These assessments, which remain much debated, varied considerably over time. The British economy achieved much more positive synergies with its imperial possessions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, boosting its commercial and industrial transformation with colonial raw materials and consumer markets,[62] than did Spain with its colonies, although Spain's transatlantic trade was much more vigorous than is sometimes realised.[63] Yet the balance sheets were never static, given that there were huge costs as well as advantages. Hence narratives that invoke a single linear trend, such as the triumph of "Progress" over darkness or the victory of "Modernity" over despotism, are vastly over-simplified. If many Britons (though not all) considered the British empire to be a "good cause", in

comparison with the tyrannous Spanish version, then it should be recalled that anti-imperialists in the colonies, and also in mainland Britain and Spain, disagreed. For such critics all empires were and are oppressive.

Hence the next progressive cause became decolonisation and "liberation". Yet that remedy has proved complex in turn. Decolonisation has not by any means removed all tyrannies. "Progress" and "Modernity" remain elusive. Many accordingly fear that "Progress" never happened and that "Modernity" is too nebulous a concept to have explanatory traction,[64] with or without the gaining and loss of empires *en route*.

Fundamentally, it remains difficult to fit big complex events into straightforward linear accounts, powered by a monocausal single-fuelled engine of change. To say that Britain and Spain shared in Europe's outward dynamic, in terms of population migration, imperial acquisition, international trade and cultural diffusion, does indicate something important in terms of European history – and specifically of the history of Atlantic Europe. These broad trends, however, took different forms in different places at different times. Indeed, there were counter-trends and outright reverses. Moreover, as these permutations unfolded, they generated a lot of conflict, not only between Europe and the wider world but additionally between the acquisitive European powers themselves.

Similar problems recur if seeking to define these developments as part of a homogeneous stage of "capitalist" expansion, based upon free labour, paid in monetized wages. Both Britain and Spain's commercial economies at home were sustained not just by entrepreneurs and independent settlers in the colonies but also by institutionalised slavery throughout much of the New World. Their labour forces did not signal a unified "stage" of economic organisation. Nor did the paradoxes end there. Infamously, the "liberated" colonies that became the United States of America after its much-vaunted "Modern" revolution, retained slavery in some states for almost a century

after Independence. The American constitution shied away from naming the "unfree" as such, referring obliquely to "other persons" or "persons held to service".[65] And the so-called "peculiar institution" was ended only reluctantly, and after a bloody civil war.[66]

Events have therefore not upheld the alternative of Marxist model of economic progression via a revolutionary transition from one homogeneous economic stage to another: viz., from feudalism/serfdom via capitalism/wage-labour to communism/communal-ownership. Again, the story is not simply summarised by an inexorable "March of Red History". Economic stages of development are not uniform. Moreover, they are not all begun and ended by revolution, *en route* to a linear destination. There is more to history than "forward march" or "forward jump".

III: Trialectical history

Somehow pluralism and intricacy have to be incorporated into the big picture, without sacrificing either the particular detail or the wider context. There are, after all, perceptible long-term trends: currently seen, for example, in the global spread of literacy, the intensification of urbanisation, and the changing technologies of mass communication. Nonetheless, history also incorporates variability, in the form of competing and sometimes conflicting developments.

Moreover, important elements of continuity, which are often lost or underestimated in many accounts, also need to be incorporated into the analysis. That addition is needed particularly for linear and revolutionary models which highlight transformation but underestimate inertia.

Accordingly, my own analysis posits a three-fold dimensionality to all in-time processes, summarised by the invented word: *trialectics*. This interpretation sees history as emerging from an interactive mixture of continuities (persistence) *with* slow-moving trends (momentum) and, more

sporadically but also significantly, *with* rapid transformations and shocks, whether generated internally or externally to the system (turbulence).[67] These elements are found in varying proportions and conjunctions, linked together integrally and seamlessly. Thus persistence, momentum and turbulence mesh in time – just as do longitude, latitude and altitude in space.

These interlocking dimensions of history should not be viewed strictly as historical causes in themselves. Instead, they provide the enabling framework within which causation happens. Each feature exercises its particular pull but is simultaneously tempered by the operation of the others. So the specificity of every period and sequence of events is maintained, while simultaneously the identifiability of these interactive dimensions of historic experience helps to explain the workings of the overall big picture.

Continuity, or the power of persistence, has been too often overshadowed or even frozen out of many accounts by the greater excitements and visibility of "change". Nonetheless, enduring forces contribute essential ballast to the system. Continuity acts as a stabiliser and it helps to reinstate order after even the greatest upheavals. Moreover, one manifest form of persistence can be seen in the role of vested interests, both in imperial and colonial societies. Such groups are often found consciously sustaining old empires, and, albeit in different guises, persisting within post-imperial societies too. A trialectical vision of history is thus not surprised by discovering that transformations may not be as thorough as at first seems likely.

Gradual micro-change, meanwhile, was and is the most common form of "change" (a term so vague that it needs further breakdown into its micro- and macro- versions). Throughout the period from 1500 to 1900, and in some cases even later, the long phase of world-wide European expansion has already been acknowledged. There were key variations within this story. Thus the Dutch colonial empire, early to expand, was among the first to contract.[68]

Longest lasting was the contiguous land empire under the Russian Tsars. As already noted, the global role of this great power did not end in 1917. It continued under Soviet Russia and indeed its geo-political dominance was further extended into central and eastern Europe from 1945 to 1989/91. This hegemony was a form of "imperium", even if Marxist theoreticians fought shy of redefining "imperialism" as the "highest" stage of communism.

Within the dynamics of colonial acquisition, meanwhile, it was often hard for politicians in the metropolitan power to know whether bold expansion or cautious consolidation was the best policy. There were always potential dangers of imperial overreach. That state of affairs at once weakened the empire and encouraged its opponents and rivals. Turbulence – the third dimension - thus provided a disruptive force within the framing mix. In the early and mid-twentieth century, it undermined the extensive and apparently well-entrenched British empire, over which the sun "never set". Eventually, it did.[69] Not only was opposition generated within the colonial territories but domestic critics of imperialism began to multiply too.[70] Britain's pluralist political and religious culture encouraged liberal and radical movements. These were at first limited and then more substantial - against the slave trade, and then anti-slavery itself, and then anti-colonialism.[71]

At the same time, it can readily be seen that the turbulence of opposition was not an automatic response to imperial rule. In the case of Spain, the loss of Portugal and its overseas empire in 1640 was an undoubted check upon Spanish power. But, because the fight was led by monarchical claimants seeking to regain the old kingdom, the struggle did not take an ideological form. The Portuguese did not enunciate universal principles, which were readily exportable to colonial situations in other parts of the globe. Thus there was not an instant "Portugal effect" in the Spanish overseas empire in the seventeenth century, even though the Portuguese may well have been encouraged to resist by a covert "Dutch effect", which stemmed from the

earlier success of the United Provinces in seceding from Spanish rule, *de facto* in 1609 and *de iure* in 1648.[72]

Later, however, when entire colonies fought against an established empire on grounds of declared principle (as well as an implicit self-interest), such actions had potentially great ramifications elsewhere.

> When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them [the people] under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

So ran the Declaration of Independence by Britain's thirteen American colonies in 1776. Their resounding message had clear potential to impact upon "subject" peoples in similar circumstances, especially those with economically thriving settlements, a degree of literacy, and a developing political climate of resistance to any form of rule identified as oppression.[73] Empires ruled by "foreign" and distant powers were therefore vulnerable to turbulence from rebellions and war, leading eventually, by complex timetables, to transformed outcomes.

Mexico's liberation provides a telling case-history. Once Spain's authority was weakened by internal dynastic wars and by French invasion, a group of visionaries issued their own Declaration of Independence in 1810, adopted constitutionally in 1813. The wording was reminiscent of the American declaration, albeit the freedom of "Northern America" (including Mexico and California) was claimed in the name of the Catholic faith. After that, it took over a decade of fighting before Mexico gained its freedom in 1821.[74]

Throughout the insurgence, which was undertaken in the collective name of all "the people", it was notable that there remained endemic tensions not only between the Spanish-born Mexicans and the *Mestizos* (people of mixed Spanish and Amerindian ancestry) but also deep divisions between the entire

Spanish-linked Mexican elite and the multitudinous Amerindians. These masses were justly resentful at their inferior status. Moreover, their lowly position was not ended at Independence,[75] any more than slavery was instantly abolished either in Mexico or in the southern states of the USA. Hence the powers of continuity are often seen in persistent social structures. These deep patterns of social organisation are hard to change quickly, whether by political fiat, or by sustained policies, or by revolutionary upheaval.

New regimes, in their turn, are often keen, after periods of upheaval, to enshrine new continuities within their popular cultures. In the USA, for example, the breakaway turbulence was transmuted into to a deep reverence for the new but "unchangeable" constitution. That attitude persists today, even when various updatings (such as the revision of America's uncivilized gun laws) appear highly necessary to outsiders.

Nineteenth-century Mexico also saw a positive "invention of tradition" in the form of an annual festival to commemorate Hidalgo y Costilla's 1810 call for independence. On the eve of 15 September, the President in Mexico City rings the great bell of the National Palace. Costilla's declaration is reread to a huge crowd, sometimes comprising as many as half a million spectators, in the *Plaza de la Constitución* or *Zócalo*. And on the following Independence Day, there is a dawn parade.

Intricate trade-offs between these examples both of continuity and of various forms of change generated a constant tension, yet also provided history with a constant sheet-anchor or ballast – or inertia, in the eyes of those seeking transformation. Old systems are undermined or overthrown. New regimes arrive, but often retain an apparently surprising amount from the former state and society. Or traditional systems are reinvented in another guise. Hence colonial liberation movements have often failed to transform their societies as much as the "liberators" initially hoped.

Cultural norms, religious beliefs, and political traditions, may appear at times to be variable and contingent factors. And they do at times change, sometimes fundamentally. But they are often very deep-rooted and, for reformers, hard to eradicate. Such persistence applies not only to the identities of imperial countries but also to regional and local loyalties within them.

Common elements of tradition in the histories of Britain and Spain may thus be identified, as well as their continuing differences. It was not only the Iberian colossus which was attacked as a conservative force.

Interestingly, for example, neither the British nor the Spanish kings actually used the higher-ranking title of Emperor within their own home nations. Charles I of Spain was a King-Emperor, it is true, by virtue of his Austrian Hapsburg heritage, being simultaneously the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. However, upon his death, the posts were sundered. His son and successor in Spain, Philip II, was king but not emperor. Like his forebears, he was aware that he ruled over a country which contained distinctive regions, with their own histories and languages. Henry Swinburne was a tourist who was ready to generalise about "the" Spanish people. Yet he also felt able to identify the "manly" Castilians, the business-like Catalans, the "sullen" Valencians, the too-talkative Andalusians, the "fiery" Biscayners [Basques], and the "plodding" Galicians.[76]

Equally, there was an engrained pluralism within the British polity and within the emergent British empire. Notoriously, that multi-headed imperial hydra contained a highly variegated range of constitutions. There were kingdoms, self-governing dominions, city-states, and direct-rule colonies; and there were regions under Britain's hegemonic sway, which did not submit to formal rule. Hence it is apparent that there was no single "colonial project", maintained coherently over many centuries. This point is worth stressing. Literary and cultural scholars sometimes refer allusively to a singular colonial "project" as though there was one common endeavour on the part of all

imperial officials and colonists.[77] Yet in fact the actual processes of expansion and consolidation included much improvisation and a general "muddling through", to use a phrase coined in the mid-nineteenth century by the radical MP John Bright.

Notably, in the British case it was not until 1876 that Queen Victoria became Queen-Empress. Her titular status was elevated by the conservative premier Disraeli, to match that of the Russian Tsar/Emperor. His Eurasian land empire then seemed a threat to British rule in India. However, liberal opinion at home was very uneasy at the innovation. So she became Empress of India, *not* of Britain. And the new title did not survive for even three-quarters of a century, ending in 1947 with Indian and Pakistani independence.

Clearly, there were trialectical forces at work here: melding contingencies and revolutionary turbulence with long-term trends, and stabilising both by underlying continuities. For neither country was the story one of "good" imperialists versus "backward" subject peoples. Both Spain and Britain deserved many of the criticisms thrown at them as imperial powers. And various of the charges that they made against each other were also true. But they were also able to learn from their own and other imperial experiences. Spanish liberals in the later eighteenth century, for example, were aware of the criticisms levelled against their colonial record, just as were British literals in the nineteenth century. So the story includes repression, exploitation and cruelty – and opposition to those things too.

Historians thus should not just invert the "Progress" narrative into one of "bad" imperialists versus "good" oppressed peoples. There were divisions and contests within the colonies as well as outside. The elite among the colonised population usually made its peace with the imperial power, in return for the underpinning of its traditional social position. And, as already noted, independence did not by any means guarantee fair treatment of all those newly "liberated".

Once Europe's outwards dynamic seemed irreversible, if uncertain in its outcome. It constituted a prolonged phase in world history, from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. Now, however, things have changed. There is a reverse trend, still active today, which militates strongly against formal empires and, to a lesser extent, against informal hegemonic quasi-empires. There are signs of a new global pluralism, even though old patterns of influence often survive as cultural imprints long after official decolonisation. Here the world seems to be at another turning point. The future is unclear, teetering between persistence and many forms of change.

Above all, then, a trialectical Grand Narrative does not proceed with unilinear inevitability. It incorporates resistance and inertia as well as different forms of transformation. The whole process, moreover, generated much conscious commentary, chiefly but not exclusively from the victors. Europeans, in the course of meeting the much wider world, became aware of their massive impact, not just by enforcing long-distance military and political rule, but also by exporting peoples, goods, religions, cultures, laws, and languages. And the reverse was true as well – sometimes after a time lag. The wider world impacted upon Europe too. This return exchange often occurred in subtle and subterranean ways; but also directly in terms of inward flows of peoples, goods, religions, cultures, laws, and languages.

All these interactions remained specific and contingent, with often unforeseen consequences, as J.H. Elliott has recently stressed.[78] Yet that conclusion alone is somewhat banal and disappointing. The undoubted role of turbulence and surprise is too much of a truism to constitute an explanation of the whole story. Contingencies interact endlessly with both trends and deep structures. Indeed, Elliott's own expert analysis contains much evidence of long-term processes of change, as well as profound forces of tradition. Global power inequalities began with one-sided dominance and subjection, while ending with transference and repositioning within global pluralism. But old

and new inequalities also persist, as challenging reminders that there are many brakes upon change.[79]

IV: Balancing power against resistance

Epic events, like the waxing and waning of empires, attract many commentators. In seventeenth-century Spain, Juan de Mariana was the foremost historian observer from within the country of the *conquistadores*. The same process was witnessed from afar by England's Francis Bacon. He was respectfully admiring: *"I have marvelled sometimes at Spain, how they clasp and contain so large dominions with so few natural Spaniards."*

Bacon, however, noted sagely that any imperial collapse would offer rich pickings to all rival powers: "Every bird taking a feather; *and [that fate] were not unlike to befall to Spain, if it should break."*[80] He proved to be correct. Spain did eventually, later rather than rapidly, lose its plumes. And that same prognosis ultimately applied to the British empire as well.

Argumentative historians continue the tradition of observation and analysis. They have not been deflected by the brief-lived postmodernist rejection of Time and the past. There is a common human history and it includes epic global encounters of migrant humans. In the process, there are observable imperial rises – and imperial declensions. History unfolds as a process which can be defined as one of organised complexity, not one of randomised chaos. The fates of empires reflect the changing balance between the imperial power and its colonial allies, on the one hand, and potential resistance from internal and external sources, on the other. But these forces of power and resistance do not operate in a vacuum. Wider cultural and political attitudes towards empire and nationhood also set the frame. Spain and Britain can thus be analysed as classic imperial rivals and exemplars, in a mighty phase of Western European pre-democratic expansionist history that has only just passed – and whose legacies simultaneously persist.

ENDNOTES:

[1] The author expresses warmest thanks to all the Barcelona Conference participants for fruitful discussions of the original lecture and to Tony Belton, Xabier Lamikiz, John Stone, and James Thompson for critical readings of the subsequently expanded written text.

[2] F. Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 16: "I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time".

[3] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 66, 67-73.

[4] K. Jenkins, "Introduction" in K. Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 3.

[5] J.W. Scott, "History-Writing as Critique" in K. Jenkins, S. Morgan and A. Munslow, eds., *Manifestos for History* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 20, 33.

[6] P.J. Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 124-31.

[7] The authoritative five-volume Oxford History is indispensable: see N. Canny, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire, I. The Origins of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); P.J. Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire, II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); A. Porter, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire, III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); J.M. Brown and W. R. Louis, eds, *Oxford History of the British Empire, IV: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and R.W. Winks, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire, V: Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[8] For a pioneering study, see J. Lang, *Conquest and Commerce: Spain and England in the Americas* (New York: Academic Press, 1975) but the undoubted new *locus classicus* is J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). See also J.H. Elliott, *Spain, Europe and the Wider World, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). A further study by this seminal historian provides new reflections on his motivations for writing comparative history: see J.H. Elliott, *History in the Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 186-7.

[9] Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History*, pp. xix-xx, 17-18,122-4, 219-23, 247-52.

[10] E. Gibbon (1737-1794), *Memoirs of My life and Writing*, ed. J.B. Bury, *Autobiography of Edward Gibbon ... Edited by Lord Sheffield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 19.

[11] E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* 6 vols (London: 1776), Vol. 1, p. 473.

[12] M. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History,* trans. W.R. Trask (London: Arkana, 1989).

[13] E. Chambers (1680?-1740), ed., *Cyclopaedia: Or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences,* 2 vols (London: 1728),, Vol. 1: dedication.

[14] The 1800/1 Act of Union (39 & 40 Geo. III c. 67) renamed the country as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the name surviving until 1922 when the Irish Free State (minus the six counties of Northern Ireland) was established.

[15] P.J. Marshall, "Britain without America? A Second Empire?" in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of British Empire, II: The Eighteenth Century*, pp. 576-95.

[16] See A.A. Rusnock, *Vital Accounts: Quantifying Health and Population in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and C. Blum, *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction and Power in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

[17] By 1841 the population of all Ireland was just over 8 million: W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick, eds, *Irish Historical Statistics: Population, 1821-1971* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), 3. By contrast, in 2008/9 the Irish Republic had almost 4.5 million residents, while Northern Ireland had almost 1.8 million (together 6.3 million): see Central Statistics Office Ireland www.cso.ie; and Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency www.nisra.gov.uk/demography.

[18] W. Doyle, *The Old European Order, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 5-6. See too W.S. Maltby, *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2009); H. Thomas, *Rivers of Gold: The Rise of the Spanish Empire* (London: Penguin, 2013); B..Yun-Casalilla, *Iberian World Empires and the Globalisation of Europe, 1415-1668* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[19] C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (London: Hutchinson, 1969; 1991); R.M. Levine, *The History of Brazil* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2003).

[20] H. Kamen, *Imagining Spain: Historical Myth and National Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. xiii-xiv, 172-305; J.N. Hillgarth, *The Mirror of Spain, 1500-1700: The Formation of a Myth* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); and D. Howarth, *The Invention of Spain: Cultural Relations between Britain and Spain, 1770-1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

[21] For continuing debates in the USA, see Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? America's Great Debate* (London: Free Press, 2004), pp. 18-20, 221-56, 313. With thanks to James Thomson for this reference.

[22] [C., T.], *A Short Account and Character of Spain: In a Letter from an English Gentleman now Residing at Madrid to his Friend in London* (London: 1701), p. 4.

[23] Elliott, *Spain, Europe*, pp. 260-1, 270-1; G. Redworth and F. Checa, "The Courts of the Spanish Habsburgs, 1500-1700", in J. Adamson, ed., *The Princely Courts of Europe: Ritual, Politics and Culture and the Nobility* (London: Weidenfeld, 1998), pp. 47-51.

[24] H. Swinburne (1743-1803), *Travels through Spain, in the Years 1775 and 1776* (London: 1779), p. 46.

[25] [C. T.], *Short Account*, p. 11.

[26] Anon., *A Pageant of Spanish Humours: Therein are Naturally Described and Lively Portrayed the Kinds and Quallities of a Signior of Spaine – Translated out of the Dutch by H.W.* (1599), 12th characteristic [no pagination].

[27] Hillgarth, *Mirror of Spain*, pp. 309-27.

[28] Anon., *Old England for Ever: Or, Spanish Cruelty Displayed – Wherein the Spaniards Right to America is Impartially Examined and Found Defective, their Pretensions Founded in Blood, Supported by Cruelty, and Continued by Oppression* (London: 1740).

[29] Kamen, *Imagining Spain,* 126-49: "Myth of the Inquisition".

[30] A. Toynbee (1889-1975), *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press abridged edn, 1972), p. 211; Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History*, pp. 55-6.

[31] See esp. J.K.J. Thomson, *Decline in History: The European Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

[32] The Roman Empire is conventionally dated from 27BCE (when Octavian Caesar gained the title of Augustus) and had a prolonged demise in the West, often dated from 476CE (deposition of Romulus Augustus).

[33] The Roman Empire in the East also dwindled over many years, its final collapse dating from 1453 (fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks).

[34] Spain's transatlantic empire began in Cuba in 1496; and one significant ending came in 1898, with the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. But Spanish Guinea did not become independent until 1968.

[35] Britain's overseas empire is sometimes dated from 1584 (Raleigh's failed colony at Roanoke, North Carolina) or, more plausibly, from 1624 (settlement of St. Kitts in the West Indies). Its demise was protracted, one milestone being 1947 (independence of India and Pakistan) and another 1997 (reversion of Hong Kong's lease to China). In 2012, however, Britain still holds fourteen overseas territories, some simultaneously claimed by other powers.

[36] J. Richardson, *The Language of Empire: Rome and the Idea of Empire from the Third Century BC to the Second Century AD* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); G. Barraclough, *The Medieval Empire: Idea and Reality* (London: Historical Association, 1950); W.J. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism* (1977; London: Weidenfeld, 1980); and G. Bennett, ed., *The Concept of Empire: Burke to Attlee, 1774-1947* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1962).

[37] For debates; see C. Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000); W.E. Odom and R. Dujarric, *America's Inadvertent Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); N. Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); and S. Burman, *The State of the American Empire: How the USA Shapes the World* (London: Earthscan, 2007).

[38] F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

[39] See H.L. Williams, D. Sullivan and E.G. Matthews, *Francis Fukuyama and the End of History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).

[40] M. Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); S. Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: How China's Authoritarian Model will Dominate the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

[41] See the synoptic G. Williams, *The Expansion of Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Overseas Rivalry, Discovery and Exploitation* (London: Blandford, 1966).

[42] B.J. Nordstrom, *The History of Sweden* (Westport: Greenwood, 2002), pp. 45-51.

[43] P.H. Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495-1806* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); A.J.P. Taylor, *The Hapsburg Monarchy, 1809-1918: A History of the Austrian Empire and Austria-Hungary* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981); and A. Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Hapsburg Empire, 1815-1918* (London: Longman, 2001).

[44] M. Stürmer, *The German Empire, 1871-1919* (London: Weidenfeld, 2000).

[45] See H. Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); A. Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History* (Harlow: Longman, 2001); D. Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire: Political Leaders from Lenin to Gorbachev*, trans. H. Shukmam (London: HarperCollins, 1998); and R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia: From Tsardom to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[46] J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 62, 84-6.

[47] The name of this almost tideless Pacific sub-basin is a compromise between rival nomenclatures favoured by Japan, North Korea, and South Korea.

[48] A. Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 10-59.

[49] See P.J. Marshall and G. Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of the Enlightenment* (London: Dent, 1982), pp. 299-303; R.A. Stafford, “Scientific Exploration and Empire”, in Porter, ed., *Oxford History of British Empire, III: The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 307-19; and, too schematically, Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System, II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (New York: Academic Press, 1976; 1980).

[50] G. Daws, *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1977), pp. 38, 73-4, 112-19, 289-92, 381-91; and context in G.Y. Okihiro, *Island World: A History of Hawai’i and the United States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

[51] M.M. Quaife, M.J. Weig and R.E. Appleman, *The History of the United States Flag from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 154-5.

[52] Swinburne, *Travels*, pp. 369, 372.

[53] Howarth, *Invention of Spain*.

[54] A classic expression appears in Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden” (1899), albeit written about the Americans in the Philippines rather than the British: see R. Kipling (1865-1936), *The Complete Verse* (London: Kyle Cathie, 2002), pp. 257-8.

[55] Kamen, *Imagining Spain*, pp. 172-205: “Myth of Perpetual Decline”; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World,* pp. 403-4, 406-10.

[56] J.A. Crow, *Spain: The Root and the Flower – A History of the Civilization of Spain and the Spanish People* (New York: Harper Row, 1963), p. 223.

[57] Maltby, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 112-13, 135, 137-40; J.M. Anderson, *The History of Portugal* (Westport: Greenwood, 2000), pp. 102-4, 107-9, 111-16.

[58] J.H. Elliott, *The Revolt of the Catalans: A Study in the Decline of Spain, 1598-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

[59] Maltby, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 161-5; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, pp. 124, 125-30, 137-8, 173-7.

[60] Ibid., pp. 292-68.

[61] J. de Mariana (1536-1624), *Historia General de España* (Toledo: 1592), lib. 26, cap. 3.

[62] See variously J.M. Price, “The Imperial Economy, 1700-76”, in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of British Empire, II: The Eighteenth Century,* pp. 78-104; P.J. Cain, “Economics and Empire: The Metropolitan Context”; B.R. Tomlinson, “Economics and Empire: The Periphery and the Imperial Economy”; A. Offer, “Costs and Benefits: Prosperity and Security, 1870-1914”, all in Porter, ed., *Oxford History of British Empire, III: The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 31-52, 75-87, 690-711; D.K. Fieldhouse, “The Metropolitan Economics of Empire” in Brown and Louis, eds., *Oxford History of British Empire, IV: The Twentieth Century*, pp. 88-113; and A.J. Christopher, *The British Empire at its Zenith* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[63] See D.R. Ringrose, *Spain, Europe and the “Spanish Miracle”, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 83-162; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World,* pp. 405-6, 408-10; Xabier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and their Overseas Networks* (London: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2010); J.K.J. Thomson, “The Spanish Trade in American Cotton: Atlantic Synergies in the Age of Enlightenment”, and Javier Cuenca-Esteban, “Statistics of Spain’s Colonial Trade, 1747-1820: New Estimates and Comparisons with Great Britain”, both in *Revista de Historia Economica: Journal of Iberian and Latin American History* 26 (2008): pp. 277-313, 323-54.

[64] P.J. Corfield, "POST-Medievalism, Modernity, Postmodernity?" in *Rethinking History*, 14/3 (2010), pp. 379-404 (also in PJC website as Corfield Pdf/20); P.J. Corfield, *Time and Shape of History*, pp. 131-44; and A. Compagnon, *The Five Paradoxes of Modernity*, trans. E. Philip (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[65] G. Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (London: Vintage Books, 2008), pp. 221-5.

[66] See *inter alia* K.M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1989); and S. Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 294-9, 304-32.

[67] Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History*, pp. 18, 122-3, 211-16, 231, 248, 249.

[68] Compare J. de Vries and A. van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and E.H. Kossman, "The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century" in M.C. Jacob and W.W. Mijnhardt, eds., *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment and Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 10-21, 28-31.

[69] Britain's empire reached its greatest extent under the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, with the acquisition of Samoa and Germany's African colonies, but in 1922 began its contraction, with Egyptian and Irish independence.

[70] See variously J.A. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); J. Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); J. Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 305-655*;* and T. Stockwell*, Ending the British Empire: What did They Think They were Doing?* (Egham: Royal Holloway Inaugural Lecture Series, 1999).

[71] N. Owen, "Critics of Empire in Britain" in Brown and Louis, eds., *Oxford History of British Empire, IV: The Twentieth Century*, pp. 188-211.

[72] M. Rady, *From Revolt to Independence: The Netherlands, 1550-1650* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990).

[73] Elliott, *Spain, Europe*, pp. 210-29; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, pp. 369-403.

[74] J.E. Rodriguez, ed., *The Independence of Mexico and the Creation of the New Nation* (Los Angeles: University of California Latin-American Centre, 1989); T.J. Henderson, *The Mexican Wars for Independence* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2009);. M. Ricketts, *Who Should Rule? Men of Arms, the Republic of Letters and the Fall of the Spanish Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[75] T. Halperin-Donghi, *The Aftermath of Revolution in Latin America*, trans. J. De Bunsen (New York: Harper Row, 1973), pp. 29-31, 34-8; J. Adelman, ed., *Colonial Legacies: The Problem of Persistence in Latin American History* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[76] Swinburne, *Travels*, pp. 368-9, 372.

[77] An example is found in A.D. Morris, *Colonial Project, National Game: A History of Baseball in Taiwan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

[78] Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World,* p. 411. Elliott, *History in the Making*, pp. 93-4, 189, again reiterates his stress upon contingency, noting (p. 189) the importance of giving space to 'the unexpected, the contingent, and the unpredictable'.

[79] For a discussion of legacies, see J.M. Fradera, *The Imperial Nation: Citizens and Subjects in the British, French, Spanish and American Empires*, transl. R. MacKay (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[80] F. Bacon (1561-1626), *Essays* (London: 1625; Everyman edn, 1904), pp. 85, 159.