Saturday: APRIL 23, 1:30 — via ZOOM ---- SDIS Monthly Lecture

The Challenge to Democracy and the War in Ukraine: How Are They Related?

by

Peter Gourevitch

Peter Gourevitch is founding Dean of the School of Global Policy and Strategy, at UCSD, and former chair of the Political Science Department.

He is the author of Politics in Hard Times: Comparative Responses to International Economic Crisis (translated into Spanish, Chinese, and Italian); co-author with James Shinn of Political Power and Corporate Governance, co-editor with Janice Stein and David Lake of The Credibility of Transnational NGOs, and former co-editor with David Lake of International Organization, the leading academic journal of international relations.

A graduate of Oberlin College, he received his Ph.D. from Harvard, where he was Acting Director of the Center for European Studies in 1971-72 and 1975-76. He taught at McGill from 1974-79. He chaired the Selection Committee of the International Affairs Fellowships Program at the Council on Foreign Relations from 1995-2004. He received fellowships from Guggenheim, Russell Sage, and the Center for Advanced Studies in Palo Alto, and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1995.

ABSTRACT

A large number of publications speak of challenge to democracy and the risks of civil war. Suddenly a major war in Europe erupts. How do these interact? Did the weaknesses in democratic structures tempt Putin to strike where he saw vulnerability? What can we learn comparing the US today with the crises of democracy in earlier periods and in other countries? What can be done at home and abroad?
The Scholars Notebook is issued monthly during the academic year, except December, by the San Diego Independent Scholars.

SDIS strives to promote opportunities for active learning and scholarship, for its members and for the San Diego community.

Public service activities of SDIS include free public lectures and cooperative educational projects with other organizations. SDIS members enjoy a variety of regular discussion groups, presently via Zoom.

SDIS, established in 1982, was instrumental in the founding of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars, an organization that unites eight similar organizations and has international membership.

For more information see https://sdscholars.org or contact sdisask@gmail.com
In March, the Biosciences Group explored the following issues, with discussion often being based on quotes from pertinent references:

**We feel that we consciously control our lives. Do we?**

"[Research] suggests that what we think of as free will is largely an illusion: much of the time, we are simply operating on automatic pilot, and the way we think and act … is a lot more susceptible to outside influences than we realize" Gladwell, *Blink*.

“Relevant information is discounted, misinterpreted, ignored, rejected, or overlooked because it fails to fit a prevailing mental model or mind-set…. Mind-sets tend to be quick to form but resistant to change.” Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*.

**If free will is iffy, do we nonetheless have free won’t?**

If we have previously made a conscious decision to avoid an unconsciously arising action, can we do so? (Research suggests that this can be possible.)

For judgments or decisions that are likely influenced by unconscious biases, are there ways to detect those biases and reach a more balanced decision? (Heuer outlines several useful strategies.)

**Is it easier to modify external circumstances than to eliminate everyone’s biases?**

“Even increased awareness of cognitive and other "unmotivated" biases … does little by itself to help....” Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*.

“… we can spend the next twenty years trying to address the fundamental problem of unconscious racism in our society. Or we can try, in an immediate and practical way, to fix the flawed snap decisions that distort the course of justice. What if the legal community took a page from the classical music world…and put screens in the courtroom … [or put the defendant] in another room entirely, answering questions by email or through an intermediary….“ Gladwell, *Blink*.

Our April Zoom meeting will begin with a summary of useful background information on the Human Social Brain, presented by a member with expertise in the field. Thereafter, we will discuss the presented material, including its relationship to certain questions asked earlier this year by the group.

Please join us! We welcome new members and visitors.

Contact Dorothy Parker at if you have questions.
A lively discussion of our subject, “grace” occupied the participants at our March meeting. The larger portion of time was spent considering the religious meaning of the concept, defined as what God gives mortals out of his free will.

One member said that various religions regard the dispensation of grace differently: Catholics who have committed sins or misdeeds lose grace; they can re-acquire it if they undergo penance, but other faiths adhere to the belief that God decides who is deserving or undeserving of grace and there is no way to change His decision. Still others believe in pre-disposition; that is that one’s possession or absence of grace is decided at birth. A discussant added that the concept of original sin goes back to Paul.

When another asked which came first: the religious meaning of “grace” or the meaning that deals with beauty of movement, the answer immediately came back: the aspect that refers to beauty. Evidence was cited in the Latin language & pictorial depiction of the “Three Graces” as female personae. This version of “grace” is most often applied to females; although there is a male association with the concept that goes back to chivalry. Good manners is often associated with “grace.”

Those present chose “reality” as the concept to be discussed at the group’s next meeting; they will Zoom at 1:30 on April’s 3rd Wednesday, the 20th.

Gerry Horwitz

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PHYSICAL SCIENCES GROUP

2 p.m. — Wednesday — April 20 — via Zoom

"The Physical Sciences Group explored "causality" in quantum field theory, the idea that no information can travel faster than the speed of light (e.g. two events that are spatially separated but occur at the same time cannot be causally connected). It turns out that the quantum probability distribution from an event occurring a given spatial point at a given time is non zero at another point in space and time, even if the two points are not causally connected (Einstein’s "spooky action at a distance"). However, the information about event 1 cannot affect any measurement at point 2 unless the two points are causally connected - so causality is preserved. Furthermore, this leads to a very profound result. Causality in quantum field theory implies that every particle has an antiparticle (same mass opposite charge). Indeed, within the fabric of quantum field theory, every particle having an antiparticle, implies that causality holds. The next meeting of the Group is being postponed because of travel and holidays, to Wed., April 20, at 2pm.

Alvin Halpern
WORKS IN PROGRESS

3 p.m.— Thursday — April 21 — via Zoom

The SDIS Works in Progress (WiP) Group met via Zoom on Thursday, March 17. Members had received materials by one of the group’s authors, who was revising and rewriting two books published more than a decade and a half ago. The author supplied a list of her primary considerations for updating one of the two works, sections of chapters from the original volume with notes on what needed to change. She opened a discussion about how she might proceed with what seemed to her a daunting task.

The respondent offered some clear, concrete suggestions on what might easily be added to enhance the already interesting book, how the previously published sections could remain through a follow-up section, and what additional research might be extended. Members contributed comments, asked questions, and generally approved of what had already been done.

The WiP Group will be hosting a lecture and discussion on self-publishing presented by Phil Stover (right) on Thursday, April 21 at 3PM via Zoom. Phil is a member and on the executive board as treasurer of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS). He worked for San Diego Unified School District for eight years, serving as CFO, Special Projects Officer, and Deputy Superintendent. He then went on to the Sweetwater Union High School District in Chula Vista as Interim Superintendent after they had major administrative issues.

Having enjoyed his “challenging times in San Diego,” he is now retired, writing and speaking on Mexican history. His books include an expansive survey, Religion and Revolution in Mexico’s North: Even unto Death, which was awarded a non-fiction prize by Writers Digest and has been adopted as a textbook at Arizona State U. He has published three other books and is finalizing one on the organizational behavior of American public school districts, as well as For Thy Kingdom, a historical and doctrinal case study based on the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre.

His SDIS presentation to WiP, based on a previous session for NCIS, will be recorded and available for members to watch in the future. This online meeting will be open to all SDIS members interested in self-publishing. If you are not a member of WiP, please contact Dorothy Parker or Ken Krauss in advance to receive the link to the Zoom session.

Ken Krauss
FILM GROUP

10 a.m. PROMPTLY — First Wednesday — April 6 — via Zoom

We look forward to Show Boat, the film of the first "serious" musical comedy, which changed the genre on Broadway and somehow, despite its more serious content, managed to become a hit that influenced virtually all shows that followed it.

Show Boat, the 1927 Broadway musical, with music by Jerome Kern and book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, was based on the novel of the same name by Edna Ferber. Although there was a 1929 movie that, like The Jazz Singer, was a partial talky, that was based on Ferber's book, the 1936 version brought the New York stage version to the screen and featured some of the original cast, including Hattie McDaniel, Helen Morgan, and Paul Robeson.

Many of the songs, such as "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," "Make Believe," and "Ole Man River," have remained standards. In spite of the controversial content and Hollywood's usual avoidance of social issues, the film takes on American racism. MGM remade Show Boat in 1951 with Ava Gardner in the role of Julie, a biracial singer who, once her background is exposed, must leave the ensemble on the river boat. Gardener's singing voice was provided (supposedly) by Lena Horne, who in an earlier biopic by MGM on the life of Jerome Kern, appears as Julie in scenes excerpted from Show Boat.

Our March film, Ed Wood, inspired varying reactions from our two viewers who had seen the movie when it was first released. One loved it on first viewing and loved it even more now. The other disliked it years ago and still disliked it. Others had “I'm glad I saw it” opinions. Director Tim Burton (known for his off-beat films such as Beetlejuice, Edward Scissorhands, and The Nightmare Before Christmas) stayed true to his love of the quirky. Wood’s 1950s films were similarly quirky and carried such titles as Plan 9 From Outer Space.

The title character, Ed Wood, played flawlessly by Johnny Depp, was a transvestite who made no apologies for cross dressing when showing up on movie sets wearing his girlfriend's (Sarah Jessica Parker) skirt and angora sweater. Wood’s attitude was forever positive in spite of being considered a failure as a moviemaker. His hero worship and subsequent mentorship of then has-been Bela Lugosi brought Lugosi out of retirement and back to the public eye and earned a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for Martin Landau. Burton treats his subject with sensitivity and even admiration, focusing on his positive traits and seeing him as a kind of genius, rather than a failure as a director.

Barbara Heckler and Ken Krauss
READING EXPERIENCE

10 a.m. — Third Monday — April 18 --- via Zoom

The first in this Study Group’s new series, which is about various Groups, took place in March with an enthusiastic consideration of Kevin Fitzpatrick’s *The Algonquin Round Table New York: a historical guide.*

The book, which profiles all thirty members of the “Vicious Circle”, as they were sometimes called, also outlines the history of the Algonquin Hotel where they met for lunch for almost ten years, as well as of New York’s live theaters and newspapers during the 1920s. The discussion contained many laughs at the witticisms, talents and successes of the various persons, but also a certain sadness as the circle fell apart along with the lives of a number of the participants.

The next meeting, on the third Monday morning, April 18 at 10, will be a Zoom discussion of a very different group and a very different book: Stephen Birmingham’s *Our Crowd: The Great Jewish Families of New York*

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Gerry Horwitz

INSIDE POLITICS

10 a.m. — Second Saturday — April 9 — via Zoom

The regular date for our class has been permanently changed to the second Saturday of every month at 10:00 a.m.

The Agenda for our April meeting promises to be filled with serious political topics, as usual. We will be substantially into the second month of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and most of us have been witnessing death and destruction imposed on Ukraine by the armed forces of Russia on live television every night.

As I am writing this report, both sides are engaged in talks over a negotiation table in Turkey, and I think all of us are hoping for a diplomatic end to this gruesome war. I am certain the ratings for CNN are through the roof, if my home is any example. Topics for our Agenda will include what steps Ukraine is willing to take, if any, in order for Russia to agree to withdraw its forces from Ukraine and cease firing upon innocent civilians.

Also sure to be discussed is whether Ukraine is willing to become a neutral country (whatever that means), and agree never to become a member of NATO. Another topic certain to make the agenda is President Biden’s recent unscripted remark that Vladimir Putin cannot continue to remain in power in Russia.

Another event sure to be included in our April Agenda is the Supreme Court confirmation hearing of Biden’s nominee, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson. Judge Jackson is the first African-American woman to be nominated to our highest court, guaranteeing significant attention being paid to what already is a highly visible event on our screens. Much attention was paid by several Republicans on the Judiciary Committee to Judge Jackson’s record of sentencing defendants convicted of child pornography. By the time our April class is held, Judge Jackson may already have been confirmed by the full Senate, the only question being how many votes, if any, Judge Jackson will receive from the Republicans.

Let us all hope that the war in Ukraine will be over by the time the May issue of the SDIS Newsletter is published.

Al Korobkin
# April 2022

SDIS meetings and events listed are via Zoom

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