

David Goodhart



H E A D



H A N D



H E A R T

**The Struggle for Dignity and
Status in the 21st Century**



PENGUIN BOOKS

HEAD HAND HEART

‘David Goodhart is among the most insightful analysts of Anglo-American society, and of why the elites in our two countries so badly misunderstand the values, needs, and worth of most citizens. If you dream of a society that is more just and humane, offering more people more routes to dignity, prosperity, and happiness, then you will love *Head Hand Heart*’ Jonathan Haidt

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Ariana Huffington

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Kirkus Reviews

‘If Britain had “public intellectuals” in the way France does, David Goodhart would be an A-lister’ Emma Duncan, *Times*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Goodhart is the founding editor of *Prospect* magazine and one of the most distinctive voices on politics today. His *The Road to Somewhere* was a *Sunday Times* bestseller and lauded as the book ‘most likely to inform what a post-Brexit Britain might look like’ (*Economist*). He is currently head of the Demography Unit at the think tank Policy Exchange, and was previously director of the centre-left think tank Demos.

DAVID GOODHART

Head Hand Heart

*The Struggle for Dignity and
Status in the 21st Century*



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*To my children, in the hope that they might finally read
something I have written*

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Preface

I wrote most of this book before the Covid-19 crisis struck. Yet the crisis and its likely consequences have a direct bearing on its main theme: the lop-sided distribution of status that has become such a feature of rich societies in recent decades. For one thing, it has made the unthinkable thinkable. If we can close down society and economic life for months and collectively underwrite at least some of the cost, then it becomes a bit easier to imagine that we might adjust the status balance in our educationally stratified, post-industrial societies by a few degrees.

Most of us have wanted things to return to normal as swiftly as possible, but these coming years will also surely prove a hinge moment for politics in those rich countries in Europe and North America that have been overwhelmed by the crisis. There are several ways in which the crisis will enable, in the language of this book, Hand (manual work/basic jobs) and Heart (care work) to claim back some of the prestige and reward they have lost to Head (cognitive work) in recent decades.

At the most macro level a new version of globalization is now possible, summed up in one of the wittier slogans of the crisis: workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your supply chains. Full-scale deglobalization is highly undesirable and is not going to happen; we have learned the lessons of 1930s protectionism. But some restraints on what economist Dani Rodrik has called ‘hyper-globalization’ – the globalization that has favoured large corporations, financial markets and mobile skilled professionals – can be put in place.

The crisis has been the hour of the nation-state and national social contracts, at least in Europe, though in the United States it is the

relative weakness of the central state that has been exposed. National democracies are likely to claim a greater say in the next phase of globalization. There will be some reshoring and shortening of those long, vulnerable supply chains. Lowest-cost globalization which regrets the closure of the manufacturing plant but sees it as a price worth paying for cheaper goods from Amazon will no longer win the argument so easily. Most of us are producers as well as consumers, and we might be prepared to pay a few pounds more for a smartphone produced closer to home.

Some of this sentiment was strengthening before the crisis. World trade fell slightly in 2019 partly as a result of the argument between the United States and China about what constitutes fair trade arrangements. The existing model of helter-skelter globalization has been producing too many losers, not least the global environment.

Western society has been dominated in the past two generations by *centrifugal* forces that have spread global openness and individual freedom but weakened collective bonds and enabled Head work to claim undue reward while Hand and Heart work has diminished in dignity and pay. The knowledge economy has placed cognitive meritocracy at the centre of the status hierarchy, and the cognitively blessed have thrived, but many others feel they have lost place and meaning.

Recent political trends, surely reinforced by the pandemic, suggest we are moving into a more *centripetal* phase, in which the nation-state will be consolidated and economic and cultural openness will be a little more constrained. This phase will place more stress on localism, social stability and solidarity, and it will be more sceptical of the claims of the cognitive class and more sensitive to the humiliations built into modern, achievement societies, including for ethnic minorities.

As I was writing the book in 2019, I would not have dared to imagine those public appreciations of the Hand and Heart workers that became such a dominant image of the early weeks of the crisis. People were applauding not just those working in health services but also those who maintain the hidden wiring of our everyday lives – the supermarket shelf-stackers, the bus drivers and delivery people, those who maintain the food and drug supply chains and remove household waste. In a brief inversion of the status hierarchy, many of the

truly key workers turned out to be people who did not go to college, maybe those less adept at manipulating information. Not all are Hand workers in a literal sense, nor the factory workers of old, but all do essential jobs, and in the UK at the height of the crisis it was males in those frontline jobs, especially older ethnic minority males, who were twice as likely to die from Covid-19 as the wider working population.

The pause for reflection that the lockdown imposed on normally hectic, achievement-orientated societies, and individuals, may leave the deepest traces of all. Many of us, perhaps especially the fortunate, better-educated people who could work from home, were forced to reconsider what we value most deeply. As we looked up from our busy, mobile existences, we often met a neighbour properly for the first time and actually felt rooted in a physical community. And then, stepping out from our front doors, we smiled and nodded at strangers even while politely giving them a wide berth.

This new sense of rootedness and connection along with the heightened awareness of our mortality can spill over into a mawkish sentimentality and a ‘safetyism’ that eschews all risk and refuses all trade-offs. Think of all those people who didn’t want lockdown to end. At the other end of the spectrum, many people have desperately wanted to reclaim their old freedoms, including the freedom to treat our fellow citizens with normal indifference. Some predict not so much a gentler, more caring society emerging from the crisis but a wilder and angrier one, a new roaring twenties. Perhaps the Black Lives Matter eruption was a premonition of that.

But the care economy has been at the centre of the crisis, and that in itself is likely to prompt some re-evaluation of mainstream economic and political thought. Just as old attitudes to large-scale government debt, and even printing money, have had to be revised even by conservative-minded politicians, so we may be pushed to reconsider our attitudes to productivity and even the very idea of the economic sphere.

Rich western societies already spend a large part of GDP on care, health and welfare; this share is likely to increase another step in the wake of the crisis. And we will need to more openly acknowledge that what we want in many parts of the care economy, from ICUs to elderly care homes, is *lower* productivity, not higher. We want fewer

beds per nurse, not more. This is true in large parts of the Heart economy, in health and in education. And if we are to upwardly revalue the public care economy, and fund better the Cinderella parts such as elderly care, then what about the work done in the private care economy of the home looking after the young and the old? Should that not also be valued more too and not just seen as a shadow world of lost opportunity?

That raises big questions about the gender division of labour and how to revalue domesticity without undoing the freedoms that women have achieved in recent decades. Our enforced confinement in the home caused much family tension, couple separation and even violence. But it was also a reminder to many people of the primary value of family and the hard work of nurture and education that takes place within its walls. If Britain's health service is, as the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, declared, 'powered by love', then how much more so the care delivered in the private realm of the family.

This is how I see the crisis as strengthening the Hand and Heart and readjusting the status balance somewhat with Head. To put it in political language, I see the crisis, particularly in Europe, as reinforcing an unusual coalition – a conservative preference for the local, the national, and the family, along with a social democratic preference for higher social spending and modest collectivism, combined too with a renewed concern for the environment. But that is what I thought before the virus struck too, as you can see from reading this book, so I have to plead guilty to Covid confirmation bias – the tendency to see your own assumptions about how the world should evolve confirmed by the pandemic.

There are two main counter arguments to these claims. The first is that, contrary to Head being reined in by the crisis, the Head experts – whether highly educated medics or vaccine scientists or epidemiologists – have proved their vital importance and therefore dispatched the populist disdain for expertise. The second points out that the institutions that have become even more central to our existence during the crisis – the big tech digital platforms – are the epitome of the disembodied world of data-manipulation that tends to reinforce a Head worldview.

Both points have validity, but I don't think they carry enough weight to dislodge my Covid-19 rebalancing thesis. Moreover, the first claim misunderstands the complaint against experts. Only a rather small number of people (though more in the US than Europe) in what one might loosely call the populist movement have ever been against the 'hard' scientific, technical or medical experts. Their argument was, and is, against economists, social scientists and highly educated people in general, passing off their often liberal presumptions about, for example, European integration or immigration as neutral truth. And while the digital platforms have indeed proved their worth in the crisis, they have often done so not by reinforcing the 'belong anywhere' message we have associated with them in the past but rather by making it easier for real local communities to support each other via Facebook or WhatsApp groups. Indeed, so successful have they been that they have truly established themselves as utilities comparable to water and electricity, and they will thus surely come to be subject to some of the same degree of regulation as the traditional utilities. But that is another story.

In the meantime, I think there are some grounds for optimism emerging from the crisis. In our open, fractious societies, divisions and disagreements have noisily continued – not least in the reaction to the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis – yet, below the surface, there has also been a greater sense of common destiny than usual, at least in most of Europe if not the US. Arguments between liberals and conservatives, and left and right, will continue, yet I think there is a decent chance that one legacy of the crisis will be to acknowledge a wider range of human aptitudes in our allocation of reward and prestige – which will help us to achieve the better balance between Head, Hand and Heart that this book is advocating. The bleak alternative is that the scars left by the epidemic will exacerbate our pre-crisis divisions and resentments.

PART ONE

Our Problem

I

Peak Head

We need to apply ourselves to something we do not yet quite know how to do: to eradicate contempt for those who are disfavoured by the ethic of effortful competition.

Kwame Anthony Appiah

What has gone wrong in rich, western democracies? Political polarization. Economic stagnation. A weaker sense of common interest. Disappointed expectations among the university-educated mass elite. A rising tide of depression and loneliness. A crisis of meaning. Even before the Covid-19 crisis struck there was a mood of despondency in our politics – a sense that losers were outnumbering winners in nations buffeted by invisible global forces, that the public realm was being slowly poisoned by social media, and that mainstream politics was failing to accommodate a widespread yearning for stability, belonging and purpose in mainly Godless western countries. But there’s an overarching explanation for many of these discontents that is hiding in plain sight. In recent decades in the interests of efficiency, fairness and progress western democracies have established systems of competition in which the most able succeed and too many of the rest feel like failures.

And who are the most able? People with higher levels of cognitive ability, or at least those *certified* as such by the education system. One form of human aptitude – cognitive-analytical ability, the talent that helps people to pass exams and then handle information efficiently in their professional lives – has become *the gold standard of human esteem*. And those with a generous helping of this aptitude have formed a new kind of expanded cognitive class – a mass elite

– who now shape society, and do so broadly in their own interests. To put it more bluntly: smart people have become too powerful.

How is this different from the past? Seventy years ago, just after the Second World War, when we lived in somewhat less complex societies, the people who ran government and business were generally brighter and more ambitious than the average – as they still are today. What’s different is that, back then, skills and qualities other than cognitive-analytical intelligence were held in higher regard. Education had not yet emerged as the main marker of social stratification. In the 1970s most people in rich societies left school with no qualifications at all and as recently as the 1990s many professional people lacked university degrees.

In the language of political cliché, the ‘brightest and the best’ today trump the ‘decent and hardworking’. Qualities such as character, integrity, experience, common sense, courage and willingness to toil are by no means irrelevant, but they command relatively less respect. And when such virtues count for less it can contribute to what social conservative critics call a ‘moral deregulation’ in which simply being a good person is not valued, and it becomes harder to feel satisfaction and self-respect living an ordinary, decent life, especially in the bottom part of the income spectrum.

Without us really noticing it, something fundamental has got out of kilter. As I write at the end of April 2020, it is too early to tell whether the Covid-19 crisis will contribute to a better balance between aptitudes based on Head, Hand and Heart. But we need one. The three aptitudes overlap to differing degrees, but the modern knowledge economy has produced ever rising returns for ‘Head’ workers – who are highly qualified academically – and reduced the relative pay and status of much manual (‘Hand’) work. At the same time, many aspects of caring (‘Heart’) work, traditionally done mainly by women in the gift economy of the family, continue to be undervalued even as care work has become an increasingly critical part of the public economy and was so widely applauded (literally) at the height of the crisis. An economic and social system in rich countries that once had a place for a range of aptitudes and abilities – in the skilled and semi-skilled jobs of the industrial era, on the land, in the military, in the church, in the private realm of the family – now favours the cognitive classes and the educationally successful.

The diminishing sway of those older structures and ways of life is a necessary condition of freer, more open societies, especially for women. But what many of those institutions also provided were forms of unconditional recognition, based simply on being you, and a role and a purpose for the many people, both men and women, whose strengths lie elsewhere than in the cognitive-analytical. Just doing your duty and making a contribution brought a degree of respect.

Moreover, whereas until recently different social classes and groups and regions had their own separate leaders and hierarchies and measures of prestige, today in most developed countries there is something more like *a single, common elite* that has passed through the same funnel of higher education and then into the top quartile of professional and managerial occupations. (At the very top these national elites merge into a semi-global one that studies at the same universities, works at the same corporations and institutions and consumes the same media.)

For most of human history, cognitive-analytical ability was scattered more or less randomly through society, with only a tiny minority attending university, religious seminaries or similar elite academies. But in recent decades in rich countries, a huge sorting process has taken place, in which most of the young exam-passers are swept up and sent in unprecedented numbers into higher education. This has triggered a significant decline in the status of much non-graduate employment and also made promotion from below much harder for those without the passport of a university degree.

This does not mean, however, that we now live in a true meritocracy. Family income and the educational background of your parents still correlates strongly with educational and career success, and indeed with performance in IQ-type tests. The children of two-parent professional families are far more likely to be brought up by parents who are well connected, understand what is required for children of even middling academic ability to enter good universities and obtain higher-status professional jobs and have the wherewithal to invest heavily in them.

The evidence also suggests that most rich societies are at least somewhat open and that many of the cognitively able from lower social classes can, and do, rise via higher education (helping, thereby, to legitimize the status quo).

The end result may be the emergence of a partially hereditary meritocracy, especially in the US. (Though a few seem to get there by playing the system.)* Many people, particularly members of the cognitive class themselves, might protest that progress has always been driven forward by the cognitively blessed and that modern, technologically advanced societies simply need more clever people – especially in software and computer science – than ever before. Moreover, they might add, the so-called Flynn Effect (named after the New Zealand academic James Flynn) shows that *everyone* is getting brighter, that average IQ levels have been rising throughout the twentieth century as a result of both improved general nutrition and living conditions and human minds adapting to a more demanding cognitive environment.¹ They argue that as long as the social biases mentioned above are ironed out, through greater spending on education and a sustained effort to give people of all backgrounds a fair chance at joining the cognitive class, all will be well.

This book disagrees. In the tradition of Michael Young's dystopian satire on rule by the cognitive elite *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, Daniel Bell's *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* and Charles Murray's *Coming Apart* – a socialist, a centrist and a conservative – it argues that today's 'achievement society' has replaced one system of domination by another.

It is true that the knowledge created by human reason continues to drive forward civilization, and in our data-based economies this is not about to decline in importance. The Covid-19 crisis has underlined the vital significance of cognitive virtues such as medical expertise, pharmaceutical innovation and the mathematical modelling of epidemiologists. (Though it has revealed too our dependence on those performing vital non-cognitive Hand and Heart functions.) It is also true that the opening up of the cognitive class through the expansion of higher education has broadened the base of privilege. IQ + effort – in Michael Young's formula for describing what is required to excel in the meritocracy – is undoubtedly a better selection criterion

* This was placed in the spotlight in early 2019, when overt corruption, including getting other people to sit an applicant's exams, was uncovered by the US Department of Justice to get undeserving candidates into top colleges including Yale and Stanford.

than nepotism or patronage. A cognitive class that puts innate talent to good use in invention and innovation is obviously preferable to a hereditary one, and certainly produces more prosperity. So a meritocratic society has a lot to be said for it: by putting human ability to work, it creates a dynamic and wealthy society that appears to be fair, or at least fairer than the alternatives, and creates opportunities for some people born into disadvantage.

But inclusions often require new exclusions, in this case of those who do not have the good fortune or aptitude to acquire a university degree – which is still a majority of adults in most rich countries. And people no more *earn* their upbringing or innate intelligence than they earn being born into a rich family.

Further, although IQ-type tests and exams measure raw cognitive ability, they do not capture things like social intelligence and imagination that we today associate with a rounded, capable person. Intelligence is a complex, fuzzy and often highly context-dependent phenomenon, as I will unpack in Chapter 3, but in the UK, US and France, though less so in parts of continental Europe, it is the most abstract forms of reasoning that have historically attracted the most prestige.

Michael Young argued sixty years ago, in his critique of meritocracy, that people blessed with advanced cognitive skills can feel *less* obligation to those of below-average intelligence than the rich felt traditionally to the poor. Meritocracy sharply divides winners from losers in the education system, while giving losers less psychological protection from their low status.

There will, of course, always be hierarchies of competence. But it is important to distinguish between meritocratic *selection systems* for highly skilled jobs and a meritocratic *society*. The former is necessary and desirable: you obviously want capable nuclear scientists running your nuclear programme. But the latter is not the hallmark of a good society and is potentially a source of mass resentment.

There are two challenges to this critique. The first is this: can you have meritocratic selection *without* a meritocratic society? I believe you can because there is not a single scale of human worth. A broader valuation of human qualities and aptitudes than those promoted by a cognitive meritocracy is an achievable goal. Human flourishing is compatible with a wide range of abilities and aptitudes.

The second challenge, often expressed by people who have clambered up into the elite from ordinary or disadvantaged homes, runs like this: I agree meritocracy is not perfect, but can we have a proper one first before you start attacking it? Do you really want to go back to a dominant class selected on the basis of inherited property and status?

No, of course, I do not want to turn the clock back, I want an elite as open as possible and as much social fluidity as a fair society requires. And in principle it ought to be possible to have plenty of upward (and downward) mobility based on cognitive selection while also respecting and rewarding those who have other skills and aptitudes. But in practice this is hard to achieve. Not everyone can be above average. And if high mobility is the main mark of the good society, as both centre-left and centre-right politicians have often argued in recent years, then we are in trouble, because mobility inevitably slows when 'smart produces smart'. What then?

How close we are to that point and how much mobility we can expect in a fair society is contested, as I will show in Chapter 3. It depends on how much family, class and environmental factors can tilt the system in favour of the only moderately able and how much ability is heritable. Given that both of those factors are clearly of some significance, and assuming we continue to live in relatively free societies that allow families to pass on advantage, the meritocracy either will be partial at best or will ossify into a hereditary system. In practice meritocracy tends towards oligarchy.

One of the most difficult balancing acts of open, modern societies is also seldom articulated: namely, how to constrain our partial cognitive meritocracies in a way that prevents disproportionate levels of status, prestige and remuneration flowing to high-cognitive-ability jobs without at the same time disincentivizing the cleverest and most ambitious. To some extent intelligence should be its own reward, but the contribution some of the most talented people make requires some special recognition.

The pleasure of mastering a task and performing it as well as you are able is available to people of all abilities. It is properly the case that more complex and difficult tasks, such as designing a building or

helping to invent a new Covid-19 vaccine, will receive, and deserve to receive, more esteem and reward than delivering parcels or cleaning offices.

But it is also the case that a significant proportion of jobs that require quite high levels of academic qualification are demonstrably less useful and productive than many low-qualification jobs. Can we really argue that the work of a junior account manager in a City PR firm is more useful than that of a bus driver or an adult care worker? Moreover, many jobs in law, finance and other highly remunerated professions are often zero-sum: one individual or corporation wins and another loses. Public welfare has not been enhanced.

A successful society must balance the tension between the *inequality of esteem* that arises from relatively open competition for highly rewarded jobs and the ethos of *equality of esteem* that flows from democratic citizenship. It is a tension that pits economic inequality against political equality. That means a democratic society that wants to avoid a powerful undercurrent of resentment must sufficiently value and reward a broad range of achievement embracing both cognitive and non-cognitive aptitudes and must provide meaning and respect for people who cannot – or do not want to – achieve in the examination room and professional career market. After all, half the population must always by definition be in the bottom half of the cognitive ability spectrum, or indeed any spectrum you care to choose.

In recent years, we have failed to get the balance right. Indeed, it may be the case that industrial societies, for all their failings, were better at distributing status and self-respect, especially for men, than the post-industrial societies we have become.

For many people on the left, this is mainly a problem of income and wealth inequality that can be solved by more redistribution and greater investment in education. Yet despite noisy claims to the contrary, income inequality has not, in fact, been rising sharply in many of the countries, including Brexit Britain, where there has been the biggest push-back against the cognitive class status quo.² If income inequality was the driving force behind political alienation and national populism, how come it is also thriving in the most equal societies on the planet in Scandinavia?

It is true that slow or non-existent wage growth is harder to bear when a small minority, most notably bankers, seem insulated from austerity. And thanks to the rise and rise in house values in certain parts of rich countries there is a lottery aspect to wealth distribution – in the UK one in five baby boomers is worth £1 million or more³ while younger people struggle to get on the housing ladder.

But this misses an even bigger – though less tangible and measurable – story about esteem and how valued people feel in the social order. Angus Deaton, the Nobel prize-winning economist, who has pioneered the work on ‘deaths of despair’ in the US (suicides and deaths from drug and alcohol abuse), says he is struck by how *little* material deprivation has to do with such deaths. Recent happiness research, similarly, finds income to be of little significance in levels of well-being.

I call myself a social democrat and would like to live in a fairer and more equal society. But I think a big part of our problem lies in the undervaluing of everything that is not cognitively complex. If we attached more value, both in terms of prestige and income, to the carers and the skilled trades, income would naturally spread more evenly across society and economic growth would be more consistent and stable.

Western rationalist philosophy, from Plato to Descartes, reinforced by Christianity, has tended to privilege the mind as the source of immutable truth and understanding and looked down upon the body as the source of irrational appetite and moral inconstancy. Embodied, emotional labour such as nursing and care for the young and old has suffered lower prestige as a result, along with the fact that they are overwhelmingly female occupations.

And all too often, cognitive ability and meritocratic achievement is confused with moral worth. The Latin root of meritocracy – *meritum* – means worthy of praise. It creeps into the language of everyday life. Newspapers are far more likely to highlight the accidental death of a promising 22-year-old medical student than a 22-year-old who works as a hairdresser. And how often when you hear someone describing positively a new friend or work colleague will they say before anything else ‘Oh, he/she is so smart’? What they usually mean is quick and entertaining. How often do you hear people described as generous or wise?

There's also a clear trend in modern politics to place a special value on cognitive skills. High cognitive or analytical ability and success in the knowledge economy correlate strongly with support for the modern liberal virtues of individual autonomy, mobility and hostility to tradition – the opposite of parochialism. Creative and intellectually gifted people tend to have an interest in the free flow of ideas across borders and boundaries. They may also have an interest in the relatively free flow of people across borders providing them with multinational career options. These habits of mind dominate in the expanded higher education sector of modern societies, making it hard for highly educated people to understand small-c conservatives.

ANYWHERE'S AND SOMEWHERE'S

This was one of the themes of my last book, *The Road to Somewhere*, in which I described the value divides in British society revealed starkly by the Brexit vote. On the one hand is the group I describe as the 'Anywheres'. They make up about 25 to 30 per cent of the population; are well educated (mainly with at least an undergraduate degree); often live far from their parents; tend to favour openness and autonomy; and are comfortable with social fluidity and novelty. On the other hand is a larger group of people I call the 'Somewheres'. They comprise about half of the population; are less well educated; more rooted; and value security and familiarity. They place a much greater emphasis on group attachments (local and national) than the Anywheres. (There is also an Inbetweener group who share the two worldviews almost equally.)

Anywheres are generally comfortable with social change because they have 'achieved identities', a sense of themselves derived from educational and career achievements, which allows them to fit in pretty much, well, *anywhere*. Whereas Somewheres tend to have 'ascribed identities', rooted more in place or group, which means that they are more easily discomfited by rapid change to those places and groups.

The Anywhere/Somewhere divide is very loose and fuzzy and full of overlaps and inconsistencies, and, however useful it might be for

explaining big social trends, most individual lives are too idiosyncratic to fit neatly within the divide. Nor does the divide map neatly onto the high/low cognitive ability divide. There are Anywheres of below-average cognitive ability and Somewheres of very high cognitive ability. In any case, as we shall see, there is some disagreement about what cognitive ability actually is and whether it is well captured in IQ tests or exams. Most of us know highly able people who have been poor at passing exams, and people with impressive academic credentials who appear quite dim.

Both the Anywhere and Somewhere worldviews are decent and legitimate, but the values and priorities of Anywheres have come to dominate modern politics and all mainstream political parties. And the Anywhere answer to everything from social mobility to improved productivity has been the same: more academic higher education, in the quintessentially Anywhere institution of the modern university.

The Anywhere/Somewhere divide has certainly been exacerbated by the narrow focus on cognitive ability of recent decades. Yet, as David Lucas, the children's author and illustrator, has persuasively argued, society needs the cognitive skills of the knowledge economy but also needs the craft skills of artisans, technicians and the skilled trades, the imagination of artists and the emotional intelligence of those in caring jobs.⁴ He observes that the chronic undervaluing of Hand and Heart skills has unbalanced our societies and alienated millions of people. It also lurks beneath the surface of many contemporary crises, from mental health to recruitment problems in nursing and adult care.

Of course, bright people from whatever background should travel as far as their talents will take them and for many of the very brightest young people attending an elite research university is the most appropriate way to nurture their abilities. There are also many other people, some smart and creative, whose intelligence manifests itself in a non-academic way who are not suited to higher education and would do better going straight into jobs. But today's American, British and indeed European 'dreams' have become too narrowly defined as going to university and into a professional job. This isn't surprising when in the US 93 per cent of House members and 99 per cent of Senators hold at least bachelor's degrees, compared to a national US

average of 32 per cent, and more than 90 per cent of British MPs are graduates, up from less than half in the 1970s.

Politicians of all stripes make the same point. In his celebrated speech about inequality at Osawatomie, Kansas, President Obama said that ‘a higher education is the surest route to the middle class’. Left Democrats like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren go even further and demand ‘college for all’.

Not everyone can be a winner, however you design the game. In some fields such as law, medicine, technology, and some corners of business, ‘winner takes all’ markets have provided exceptional rewards to exceptional people – people like Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk – who have both high cognitive skills and practical knowledge of something that gives them a big first mover advantage in new digital markets. Below them is a wider group of highly educated, and highly credentialized, people from top universities who have the intelligence and personality attributes to propel them into the top layer of jobs. Another level down is what one might call the rank and file of the cognitive class, the mass elite. These are people who have, in recent years, been directed into the expanded higher education sector by parents, teachers, financial incentives and, too often, by the lack of other post-school options (at least in the UK and US). In the UK there are now more graduates than non-graduates among the under-thirties. Many have earned valuable qualifications and launched successful professional careers; too many others find themselves with degrees of little value in jobs with only school leaver cognitive requirements (and student debts to pay off).

Moreover, it is not clear that people in these last two groups are necessarily cleverer than the average citizen – after all, the majority of people achieve average or above-average scores on IQ-type tests. Their entry into the cognitive class is just as much attributable to background, social convention and the character traits – self-discipline, application and so on – that make academic success possible. Nevertheless, they often acquire expectations of professional status that, especially in the case of the mass elite group, are not satisfied by the relatively routine jobs they often go into.

Studying Sanskrit or *Middlemarch* at university can be a personally enriching experience, but, looked at through another lens, many

university degrees, especially in the humanities, are not so much about what you know but a signal to employers that you have certain attributes. And from the point of view of the graduate your degree level is something that fixes you in a hierarchy above, or below, your peers.

Making many occupations like nursing and policing graduate-only is not necessarily wrong, but there is an element of ‘if you can’t beat ’em, join ’em’ about it: if an undergraduate degree has become the only route to respect and prestige for an occupation then why should nurses and police officers be denied it? But as the sociologist of education Randall Collins has pointed out, this can lead to a cycle of credential inflation that ‘could go on endlessly, until janitors need PhDs and babysitters are required to hold advanced degrees in child care’.

In the UK there has been some attempt in recent years to offer better options to the half of school leavers who do not go on to university, with a training levy on bigger employers to promote apprenticeships. But in the UK, unlike in many continental European countries, it is almost impossible to compete with the prestige of the university route, and the lack of a well-trodden, properly funded, sub-university, vocational/technical route has left the economy starved of essential workers. In 2017 42 percent of UK employers said they were struggling to fill vacancies for skilled trades jobs.⁵ It is a similar story in the US.

Meanwhile Heart jobs in social care for the elderly, early years education and child care continue to be undervalued (and often underpaid). Most nursery workers earn around £17,000 a year, and a child-minder, even in London, is paid about £6 an hour per child.

Today’s women’s equality movement has focused primarily on breaking glass ceilings and competing equally with men in the world of professional careers. It has been more ambivalent about trying to raise the status of caring and nurturing roles, which are traditionally identified as female. Women now have many more opportunities than in the 1950s or 1960s, and fewer are volunteering for caring roles. Not many men are picking up the slack. Hence, in part, the crisis in social care and in nurse recruitment.

Of course, as noted, Head, Hand and Heart are artificial distinctions, in reality they always interact and overlap. The Heart and Head are combined in the modern graduate nurse, who has become a quasi-doctor. And many skilled trade Hand roles, like a plumber

or car mechanic require cognitive diagnostic skills that are not that different to the problem-solving abilities of a medical consultant. The distribution of cognitive status can sometimes seem quite arbitrary.

BELONG ANYWHERE

Yet Head abstraction and detachment increasingly dominate our culture. The ethos of the digital giants like Google and Facebook is self-consciously unrooted and global. It is best summed up in Airbnb's oxymoronic slogan: 'Belong Anywhere'. Advances in technology reduce opportunities for craft, and the need for human contact or attachment to specific places, though tech company platforms can also be good at enabling local communities to come together more easily. By contrast, it is the undervalued *embodied* skills of Hand and Heart that promote belonging and attachment. (The reduction in face-to-face contact during the Covid-19 crisis made us more dependent on digital attachment. But in the medium term this crisis will surely weaken the 'Belong Anywhere' worldview.)

Across the developed world, the one quality-of-life indicator that is said to be *declining* is mental health. Mental well-being depends on a sense of meaning and purpose, and a feeling that we are part of something larger than ourselves, useful to and needed by others (as confirmed by happiness research). It is our attachments that give us meaning and purpose. The most powerful route to meaning is through love, mutual dependence and serving others. In other words, the realm of the Heart.

This can apply to the Hand too. Productive work with your Hand and Head on a farm or in a bicycle repair workshop produces the pleasure of being immanent, in this place and time, the awareness of being much more than a disembodied intellect, a brain in a jar. The American philosopher Matthew Crawford wrote a book – *The Case for Working with Your Hands* – which is partly about the *intellectual* satisfaction of Hand work.

Yet, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, achievement, success, even happiness, have increasingly become associated with physical mobility and disconnection from presence and place, custom and

practice. (This is reflected in political philosophy by what Patrick Deneen has called the ‘false anthropology’ of social contract theory, which imagines an impossible pre-social, isolated ‘individual from nowhere’ contracting into society.)⁶

And the fact is that joining the world of cognitive achievers often does require geographical mobility, especially in the UK, where this is reinforced by residential universities. In a speech in 2017, Justine Greening, the UK’s former Secretary of State for Education, said: ‘All the years I spent growing up in Rotherham, I was aiming for something better . . . a better job, owning my own home, an interesting career, a life that I found really challenging . . . I knew there was something better out there.’⁷

The longing to spread your wings and seek fame and fortune in the big city is a common enough impulse across all times and in all places. Yet the unselfconscious way in which a (then) British cabinet minister doubts whether it is possible for an able, ambitious person to live a fulfilled life in a town of 120,000 people (which is a thirty-minute commute from Sheffield, a city of more than half a million) reveals something flawed about modern Britain. Many towns like Rotherham lose 20 to 30 per cent of their brightest eighteen-year-olds every year to university. Many of them never return, exacerbating the country’s geographical divisions.

The American writer Michael Lind has described this as Hubs versus Heartlands: the former are home to most of the professional class and are where high-end business and professional services are located, the latter are where you find most goods production and mass services. The Hubs are socially liberal, home to most ethnic minorities and astonishingly unequal: the gap between richest and poorest in New York City is comparable to Swaziland.⁸ The Heartlands are particularly neglected in Britain thanks to an over-mighty capital city. (The so-called ‘red wall’ of traditionally Labour seats that turned Tory in the 2019 UK election were Heartland seats, the Hubs remained mainly Labour.) But there are similar patterns in parts of the ex-industrial US, France (where the Gilets Jaunes movement was a cry for recognition by the French Heartland) and Germany, especially eastern Germany.

Peter Lampl, of the UK’s social mobility charity the Sutton Trust, says that ‘it is those who are most mobile who are most likely to

find success' and wants to encourage more people from lower socio-economic groups to enjoy the 'migration premium'.⁹ But not everyone wants or needs to uproot themselves. Even if they did, there are limits on how many people can rise up into the cognitive class. Yet all of us need to feel we have a valued place in society, from where we can participate and contribute, even if we are not mobile high achievers.

As Joan Williams pointed out in her book *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America*: 'For many perfectly able working class people their dream is not to join the upper middle class with its different culture but to stay true to their own values in their own communities, just with more money.' And physical mobility has in fact been declining quite sharply in the US in recent decades. Michael Lind, in his book *The New Class War*, says that 57 per cent of Americans have never lived outside their home state and 37 per cent have never lived anywhere but their home town. And according to an Upshot analysis published in the *New York Times* in 2015 the typical American adult lives only 18 miles from his or her mother. The number of people crossing a county boundary for work has halved since the 1950s and now stands at just 4 per cent of the working population.¹⁰

This brings us to the central challenge for democratic politics in all rich countries. How to achieve an open society, and elite, while continuing to value relatively stable, meaningful, communities? How can ambitious people follow their desires and leave without making those who stay feel that they have been left behind and diminished? How can the stayers have the same opportunity to live successful and fulfilled lives, in their own way, as the leavers?

The technology of connection that makes it easier for leavers to stay in touch may also make it easier for stayers to feel they do not need to leave to be part of what matters. But the Anywhere-dominated political class has not been addressing this dilemma and for a quarter of a century has ruled too much in its own interests: promoting mobility, pushing for the most open possible economy and society and hugely expanding generalist, academic higher education.

The ethos of service and duty that used to underpin so many professions often seems to have been replaced with a claim to moral leadership by the better-educated. And the political focus on social mobility, on moving up and out, often sounds like a form of cognitive

class narcissism – ‘you too can be like us’ – combined with a belief that ordinary lives are less valuable.

Meanwhile, the political class has felt able to ignore some of the basic political intuitions of the Somewheres: the importance of stable neighbourhoods and well-managed national borders; the idea of national social contracts, and placing the rights of national citizens ahead of universal rights; the evolution but not abolition of the gender division of labour. And they have failed to grasp the need for narrative and recognition among those who cannot thrive in a professionalized Head-based economy. Ideas like the dignity of labour and working for the common good of the nation, the enterprise or the public now seem positively quaint. And while for many professional people work is a central source of meaning and identity, for around half the population in both the UK and US a job is just a way of earning a living, with people finding meaning in other aspects of their lives.

Highly educated Anywheres, because they are often more articulate and better trained in assessing information, flatter themselves with the belief that their values flow from reason and evidence. In fact, as with Somewheres, their priorities and intuitions usually come first, and invariably facts are found that fit with them – so-called motivated reasoning. They are also just as subject to ‘group-think’ as Somewheres, as British Conservative politician Michael Gove was pointing out in his famous comment about experts. And experts have not covered themselves in glory in the past twenty years: the failure to predict how Iraqis might respond to invasion; the failure to see the financial crisis of 2007/8, or the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump. Perhaps, too, the failure to properly prepare for Covid-19, which had, after all, been very widely predicted. Very few of us, even populists, are hostile to scientific or medical experts (apart from anti-vaccine people), and the status of such experts is likely to rise in the aftermath of the crisis. But many people will remain sceptical about political and economic and social-scientific experts passing off their often politically driven views as objective truth.

The Head, Hand and Heart triumvirate have slipped more out of kilter in the US and UK than in most of continental Europe, which retains stronger communitarian traditions and respect for ‘practical and vocational intelligence’ and people doing basic jobs. It is also

in the UK and US where in the twentieth century there has been most reliance on IQ-type tests – the eleven-plus in the UK and SAT tests in the US – which claim to reveal *innate talents* rather than test how hard people have worked and how much they know. And it is no surprise that it's in the Anglo-Saxon countries, with Brexit and Trump, that we have seen the biggest backlash against cognitive class hegemony, despite – or perhaps because of – such a large proportion of graduates.

THE END OF PEAK HEAD

Later in this book I will trace what has happened to each of the three broad streams of human aptitude – Head, Hand and Heart – in the past seventy years. I will also sketch out some of the heated debates about the nature of cognitive ability, how it is distributed and whether it is properly measured in IQ tests (see Chapter 3).

The book will trace my own journey too, from a leftish journalist who saw politics mainly through the prism of economic motivations (and for whom data was key) to my growing sense, in the last decade or so, of people's need for meaning and recognition, and the power of emotion and storytelling, in our politics and daily lives. As the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari has put it, in the modern world we exchanged meaning for power. But too many people feel they have lost meaning without acquiring power.

Questions of value underpin all these arguments. What is human worth? What is cultural value? As Jonathan Sacks, the UK's former Chief Rabbi, has complained, without God we have increasingly adopted a utilitarian and economic definition of human worth, and questions of meaning and value have been relegated to the private sphere.

One of the reasons why the language and methods of cognitive assessment have swept all before it in recent years is because they appear to be fair and easy to measure. Indeed, one of the reasons for the academic drift in education is that it is easier to mark and measure *written* tests than tests of manual skill or speaking ability. This means that people with reasonable ability in writing skills and a university degree are often preferred even in forms of employment,

such as a manager in a department store, suitable to someone with high social intelligence or so-called domain-specific skills derived from long experience of doing one thing.

Is a better balance between Head, Hand and Heart achievable? Yes. Human norms and values lie behind the market signals of supply and demand, and they can change with surprising speed, as we may witness in the light of the Covid-19 crisis. In most European countries at least 40 per cent of the economy is under direct or indirect public control (a bit less in the US), and the corporate sector is sensitive to shifts in public attitudes and values. Consider the way in which environmental or gender equality concerns have impacted the business plans of big corporations in recent decades.

One of the forces currently driving change is political pressure from voters who don't share the interests of the cognitive classes. And there are other trends that suggest the Head will soon face a more even contest with Hand and Heart.

A dystopian trend was suggested by American journalist Nicholas Carr, in his book *The Shallows*, in which he argued that we are all being made dumber by the internet.¹¹ Carr argued that sustained exposure to the internet is reordering our synapses in ways that make us crave novelty and struggle to focus. This may bring improvements in some fields, but overall it means significant losses in linguistic facility, memory and concentration.

But there are some other more positive trends and forces that will, I believe, strengthen Hand and Heart. One such force is the simple fact that, while Hand and Heart may have been economically diminished relative to Head in recent decades, they remain vital human impulses. Consider the modern focus on cooking. Coverage on television and in newspapers is enormously greater than thirty years ago, which is surely a reflection of the continuing desire for meaningful Hand experiences on the part of many people who no longer use their hands at work except on a keyboard. The same might be said for programmes on gardening, renovating houses and repairing things.

Consider too what people do when they retire. It invariably involves something embodied and rooted, a sporting or 'making' hobby of some kind. Similarly, consider the centrality of sport and acting/singing celebrity in our public culture. Although these activities often

require significant cognitive ability, they are rooted in Hand and Heart, closer to craft or artisanal skills than essay writing/analytical ability. And still a way out of the working class for men is the skilled physicality of becoming a sportsman, and for women it is beauty, the working-class schoolgirl spotted by the modelling agency (or entering the world of stylists, high-end hairdressers, Instagram style influencers, and so on). In fact, human leisure, recreation and ritual is almost all Hand and Heart-based, though with significant aspects of Head too. Artisanal skills are also being rediscovered in some corners of the economy, especially in food and drink production, often by affluent young professionals.

Indeed, a shift away from Head and towards Hand and Heart seems to be programmed into many of the biggest social and economic trends: in the knowledge economy's declining appetite for all but the most able knowledge workers, the growing concern for place and environmental protection, including more labour-intensive organic farming, and the inevitable expansion of care functions of various kinds in an ageing society. These trends are likely to be reinforced by the Covid-19 crisis, which revealed that most of the 'key workers' who support our daily lives were Hand and Heart workers, mainly people without university degrees.

There is one very big fact that modern politics will need to confront in the next decade. Political parties of both centre-left and centre-right have taken as axiomatic that modern society will see a continuing expansion of secure, middle-class, professional, graduate jobs. Both education and social mobility policy are based on this assumption. Yet it is almost certainly wrong. The knowledge economy does not need an ever-growing supply of knowledge workers (see Chapter 9). It still needs a top layer of the cognitively most able and original, but much of the work required of middle-ranking professionals is already substantially routinized, a kind of digital Taylorism.

The American economist Paul Krugman spotted this back in 1996. Writing for the *New York Times* but imagining himself looking back from 100 years in the future, he saw that manipulating information was going to lose its value: 'The prophets of the "information economy" seem to have forgotten basic economics. A world awash in information will be a world in which information per se has very little

market value. And in general when the economy becomes extremely good at doing something, that activity becomes less rather than more important.¹² (Luciano Floridi points out that before the internet the value of information was contained in aggregating the answers. Now the answers are free online, the value lies in convening the questions.)¹³

According to the British academics Phil Brown and Hugh Lauder the proportion of jobs in big corporations requiring a significant application of cognitive skill and judgement is in sharp decline – with as few as 10 to 15 per cent of staff with ‘permission to think’. And it is precisely the more routinized aspects of professional work in the law, accountancy, medicine, public administration and so on that will in the near future be vulnerable to both Artificial Intelligence and to being exported to low-wage economies. It is much easier for an algorithm to replace a mid-level accountant than a refuse collector or a child-carer.

This suggests that the rapid expansion of the traditional university sector over the past thirty years will stop. Already in the UK nearly one-third of graduates are working in non-graduate jobs five years after graduating, and the graduate pay premium over those who don’t go to university is dwindling to almost nothing for young men from non-elite universities. The disappointment of a substantial section of young people who felt that they had been promised entry, via higher education, into a secure, high-status world of professional accomplishment is one of the factors behind Labour’s shift to the left in the UK and the Democrats’ shift to the left in the US. It may also have been a factor behind the Black Lives Matter protests, at least in the UK.

The neglect of higher Hand skills, especially in the UK and the US, will have to be reversed. Britain in the last two decades has over-produced general bachelor’s degrees and basic apprenticeships and neglected the technical skills that are still required to make the world function smoothly. This has partly been obscured by free movement of people from the EU, which has helped to plug the gap. Similar trends are observable in the US, though less so in continental Europe, especially the Germanic countries, where employer-based vocational training remains strongly embedded. Even in Germany, however, there has been a sharp rise in university participation in the past decade.

Automation has cut mainly blue-collar jobs, but Artificial Intelligence is now coming for the more routinized end of professional jobs.