



2018 Summer Reading List for the First Minister

About the David Hume Institute

The David Hume Institute is an independent, non-partisan, evidence-based policy institute that has been operating at the heart of Scottish policy debate for more than 30 years.

Events that are open to all

We host thought-provoking events which bring together expert speakers and an informed, interested and engaged audience. Our speakers come from across the political spectrum, both nationally and internationally.

Research on some of the country's most pressing challenges

We aim to produce original research with a strong emphasis on economic and education policy issues. Our research is independent and evidence-based and we share our ideas with policy makers from all sides of the political spectrum.

We take the perspective of the Scottish public rather than that of any interest group. To safeguard our independence, we receive no government funding and do not undertake commissioned work. We are rigorous in obtaining the best available evidence from our own data analysis and from published work.

See www.davidhumeinstitute.com for more information.

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A summer reading list for the First Minister

The David Hume Institute is delighted to present its inaugural First Minister's Summer Reading List. Bringing together some of the best recent writing from Scotland and beyond, the list is intended as a fresh way to stimulate debate about the state of the nation and the world.

Nicola Sturgeon is known for her love of books and reading, but we have the office of First Minister in mind rather than any particular incumbent. In Australia, where the Grattan Institute runs a similar reading list, there have been four Prime Ministers since its launch in 2010.

The books on the 2018 list deal with issues of importance to all of us, from poverty and gender, to the future of the European Union and the importance of figuring out how to work together.

While the Institute does not endorse every view expressed in the books, they are all good reads, based on evidence and with something of significance to say. We hope the First Minister – or indeed any Scot – will find them thought-provoking and an enjoyable addition to their summer break.

Our intention was to list six books, but there are actually seven on the final list, the last two of which we recommend as a pair. We'd like to cheat further by suggesting in this introduction that everyone ought to read David Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Much has been written on this work, but we were taken recently by Nobel economist Paul Krugman's account of coming across it in college: "*this wonderful, humane book [which says] that nobody has all the answers*". He added: "*What we know is what we have evidence for. We do the best we can, but*

anybody who claims to be able to deduce or have revelation about The Truth – with both Ts capitalised – is wrong. It doesn't work that way. The only reasonable way to approach life is with an attitude of humane scepticism... You look at people who are very certain, and have these beliefs of one form or another and you think, "Maybe they really know something!" And what Hume says is, "Actually, no. They don't."

Hume apart, here are our choices (in no particular order):

- *Fire and Ashes*, Michael Ignatieff (2013)
- *Testosterone Rex*, Cordelia Fine (2017)
- *Poverty Safari*, Darren McGarvey (2017)
- *After Europe*, Ivan Krastev (2017)
- *The Passion of Harry Bingo*, Peter Ross (2017)
- *The Infidel and the Professor*, Dennis Rasmussen (2017) and *The Undoing Project*, Michael Lewis (2017)

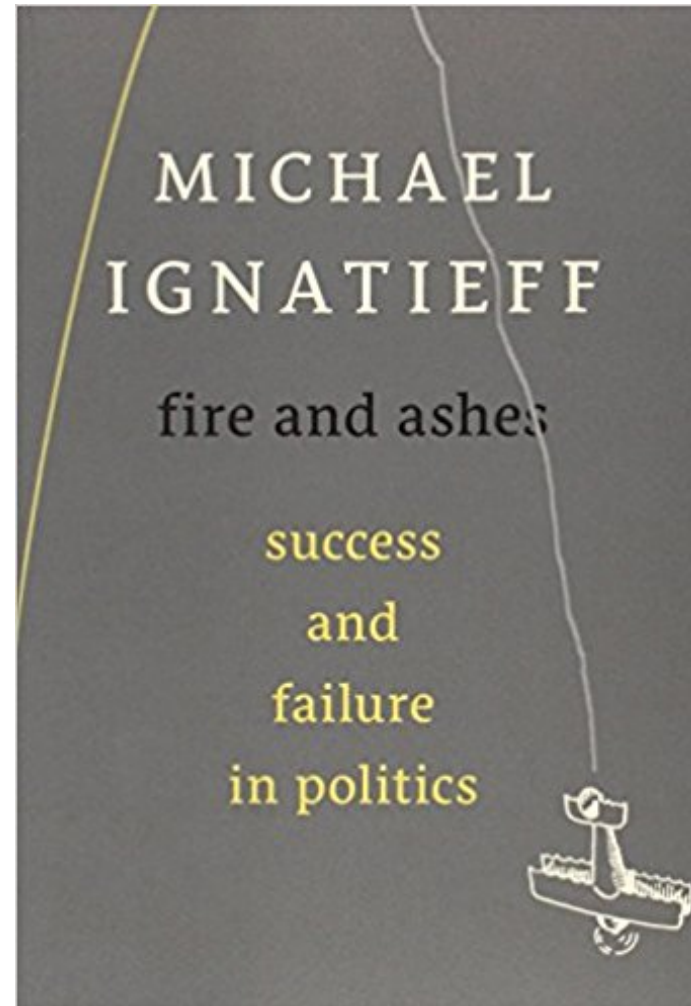
Fire and Ashes, Michael Ignatieff (2013)

For twenty-five years, Canadian Michael Ignatieff divided his time between the UK and USA, a prominent writer, broadcaster and public intellectual. In 2004, however, three men knocked on his door and asked him to return to Canada in order to lead the Liberal Party, then in government. Contrary to some (as it turned out) prescient advice, he said yes.

Fire and Ashes tells the story of what happened next with frankness, not least regarding his naivety in believing that a sharp intellect and well-honed policy agenda would lead to popular and electoral appeal. Having identified this weakness, Ignatieff's political opponents punched the bruise: 'Michael Ignatieff: just visiting', ran one attack ad.

These critiques were brutal but resonated, partly because they chimed with what many voters already believed. At the 2011 general election, the Liberal Party crashed to a catastrophic defeat and Ignatieff even lost his seat.

Not only is the book beautifully written, but it contains the author's key insight, that much of contemporary politics consists of what he calls a "*battle for standing*" rather than any genuine engagement with ideas. He lost that battle in Canada, but the lessons he derives will be familiar to any veteran of subsequent political contests on both sides of the Atlantic.



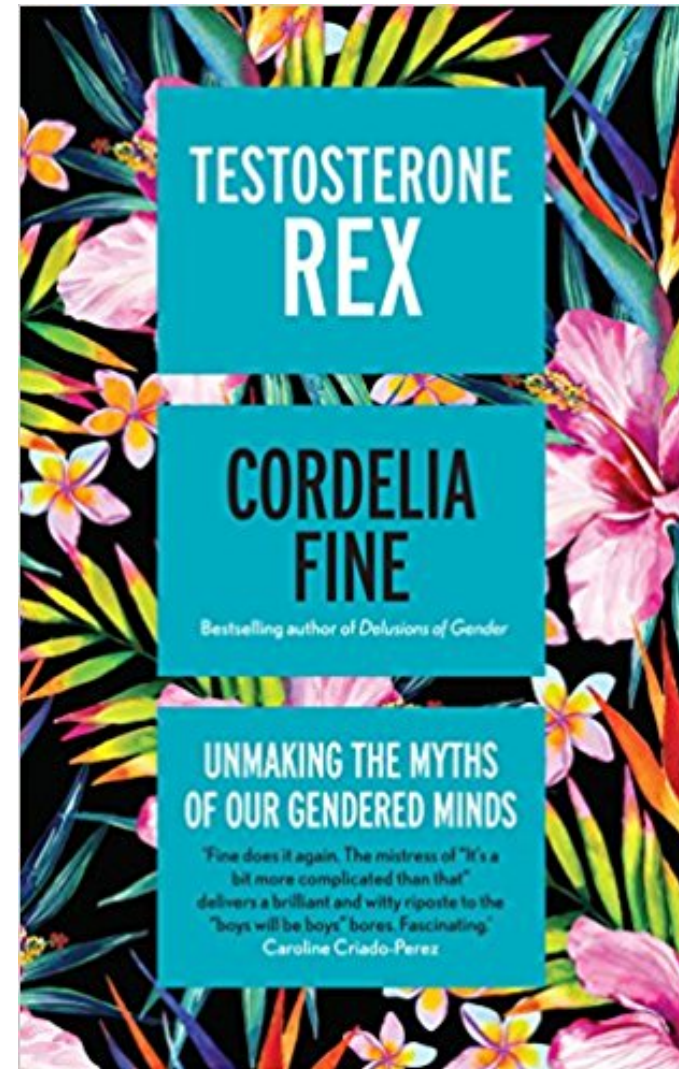
Testosterone REX: Unmaking the Myths of Our Gendered Minds, Cordelia Fine (2017)

In her latest book, Cordelia Fine challenges the myth of “Testosterone Rex”, what she calls the “*familiar, plausible, pervasive and powerful story of sex and society*” that suggests gender inequalities are the product of evolutionary differences between men and women.

This narrative holds that these differences were fixed in an “*ancestral past*” that rewarded competitive men and caring women, a divide supposedly re-created in each successive generation by sex hormones and male and female brains.

Not so, argues Fine, Professor of the History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne, deploying engaging anecdotes and empirical analysis to show that sex does not create distinct male and female natures. Rather sex, hormones, culture and evolution work together in ways that make past and present gender dynamics only a serving suggestion for the future – not a recipe.

Testosterone REX brings together evolutionary science, psychology, neuroscience and social history to move beyond old “nature versus nurture” arguments, and is thus a timely contribution to contemporary debates about gender equality.

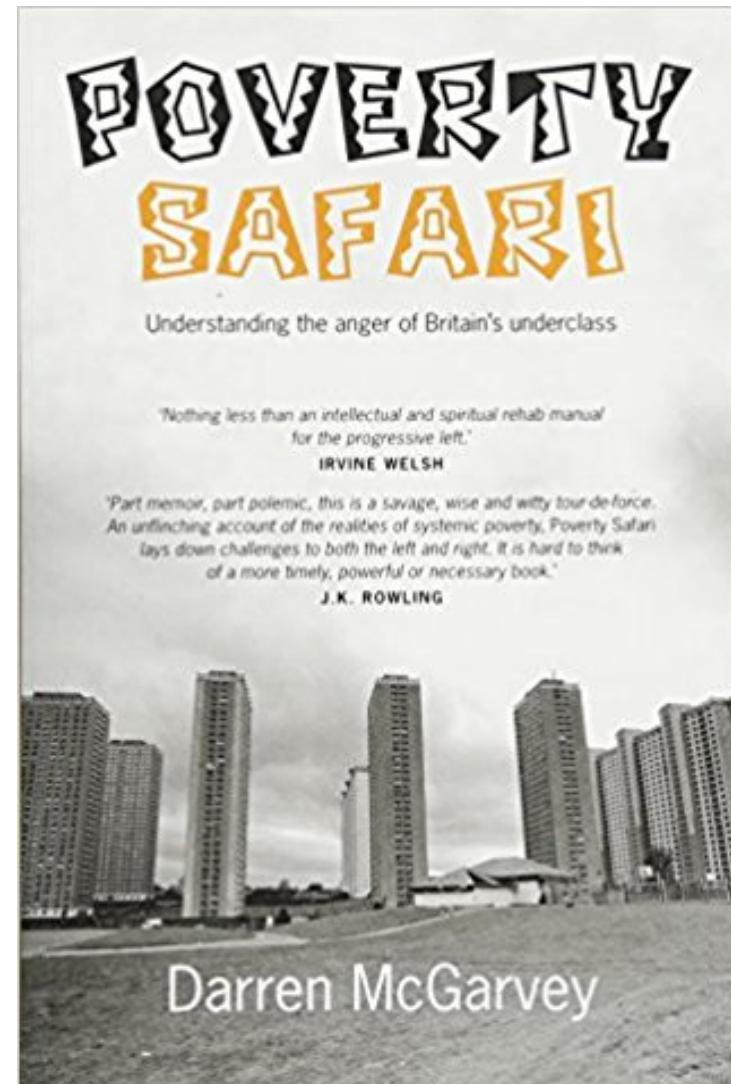


Poverty Safari, Darren McGarvey (2017)

Born into a dysfunctional family in a deprived area of Glasgow, rapper and writer Darren McGarvey's enquiry into poverty is based upon first-hand experience and self-analysis, with one reviewer referring to "a freshness which reminds me of some of the writings of early Enlightenment thinkers who used their own experience and observation as their basis for thought".

McGarvey also scrutinises the lens through which he has understood his experience, interrogating his own attitudes and prejudices, and discussing what he has got wrong in the past and changed his mind about. Most importantly, he pays explicit attention to how we can move beyond polarisation and focus instead on what different classes and political tribes have in common.

McGarvey's resulting analysis transcends traditional Left and Right. He is clear that the challenges facing those who live in places like Pollok are linked to badly-managed economic change, poverty and inequality, but at the same time he's also convinced of the importance of agency and personal responsibility, again drawing on his own experience in working through the addictions caused by the "soup of stress" in which he grew up. "You are no use to any family, community, cause or movement", writes McGarvey, "unless you are first able to manage, maintain and operate the machinery of your own life".



After Europe, Ivan Krastev (2017)

There are many reasons for pessimism about the future of the European Union: the UK is about to leave; the Euro continues to look fragile; and an ascendant populist Right has found that bashing Brussels is a vote winner. Even the EU's most ardent supporters have begun to contemplate a world *After Europe*.

Ivan Krastev believes that a healthy dose of pessimism can be constructive. His extended essay makes a lucid case that European disintegration is now likely – not in order to cheer it on, but to encourage a sober assessment of the EU's woes.

He argues that the European project was a risky gamble on the proposition that the spread of liberal democracy would give rise to a post-nationalist world. Instead, technological progress and mass migration have prompted “*anxious majorities*” to demand the protection of borders and question the loyalty of cosmopolitan elites. Even if the EU can survive this challenge to its founding ideology, it will emerge fundamentally transformed.

Having personally experienced the sudden demise of the Soviet Union, Krastev is keen to remind the reader that the end of a long-standing multi-national union may sometimes be closer than expected. But his rejection of historical determinism also contains a warning to those who wish to hasten such a breakup: surviving repeated crises, even by sheer luck, may yet lend an ailing political union a fresh veneer of legitimacy.



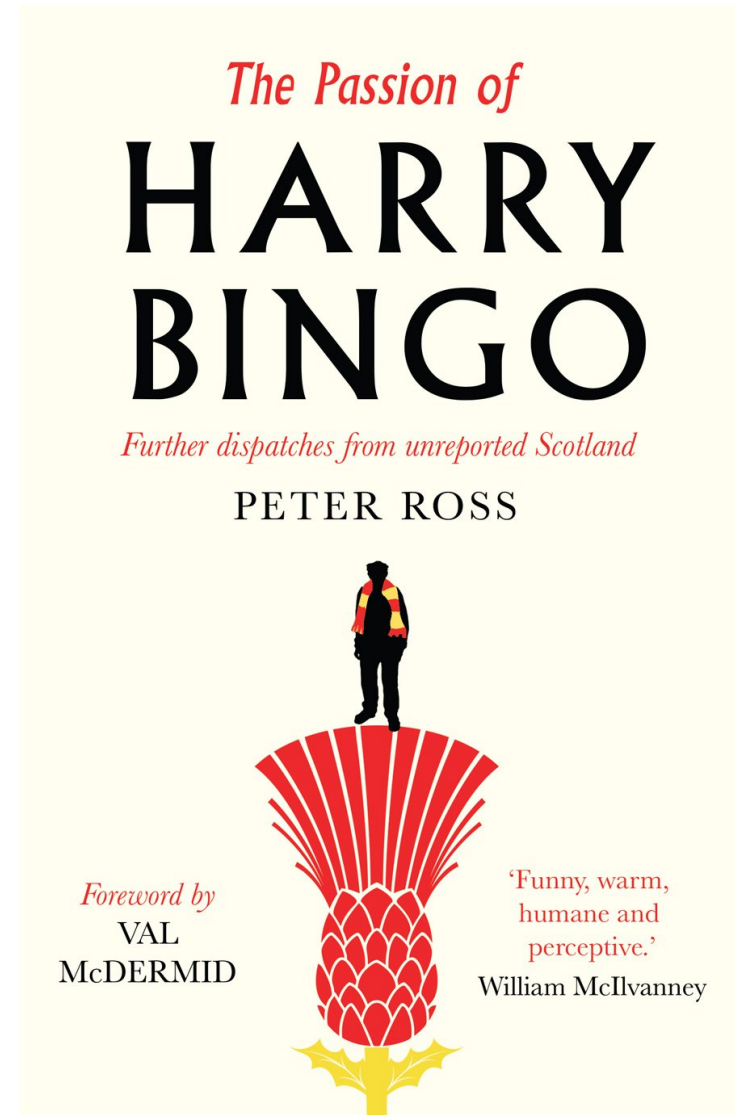
The Passion of Harry Bingo, Peter Ross (2017)

This collection of writing does two things. First, it is a snapshot of modern Scotland, beginning as the 2014 referendum campaign drew to a close and pulling together 42 tales that, as a set, constitutes a state-of-the-nation narrative told through the stories of people the length and breadth of our country.

From Partick Thistle fans and crazy golf enthusiasts, to Glasgow drag queens and the men keeping alive the traditions of the “Clavie King”, this collection of writing honestly presents the rich and diverse lives of people across Scotland.

It is also a robust defence of reporting. Peter Ross's accounts don't come with the author's bias or with a particular agenda at play. Journalism, he says, “*has a vital task in simply recording life as it is lived*”. This is really what sets this book apart. In tumultuous political times, it is a deep breath to bring on a moment of calm reflection.

Anyone who thinks they know our country – regardless of their own standpoints – should pick up this book, because in its pages you'll find the unvarnished truth, not from a commentator, a politician or an academic, but from those who can sometimes seem missing from our national debate, the people of Scotland.



The Infidel and the Professor, Dennis C. Rasmussen (2017)

It is remarkable both that two thinkers of this stature were best friends for decades – and that this is the first book to consider that friendship and how they influenced each other's thinking. The evolution of what Hume called the “*experimental science of man*” into a set of strictly delineated disciplines has separated Smith and Hume into the domains of economics and philosophy. And, while history is full of conflict and fights, it is lacking in stories of friendship and what can be gained from “*argument amongst friends*”.

Their friendship reflects one of the characteristics of the Scottish Enlightenment: ideas were tested in an environment that practiced civil discourse. Indeed, the practice of tolerance – of difference, dissent, and argument – was one of the most important characteristics of that intellectual period. The advances made in the Enlightenment were possible in large part *because* the Scots vigorously disagreed with one another. But critically, they knew how to engage other points of view in a way that made progress possible.

The Undoing Project, Michael Lewis (2017)

Michael Lewis' latest book explores another intellectual collaboration, this time between psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, whose ground-breaking research on human irrationality ultimately led to Kahneman's 2002 Nobel Prize in Economics. Lewis's book charts their relationship from their first encounter in 1968 through to Tversky's death in 1996. It is a compelling story of how an intense – and sometimes fraught – professional partnership proved fruitful enough to fundamentally change our understanding of human behaviour.

