

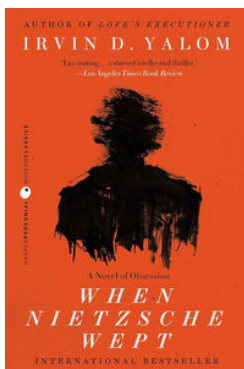
TEPSA'S READING CORNER

a reading list to stimulate debate

In this edition, **Jim Cloos** shares:

Reading recommendations for 2026

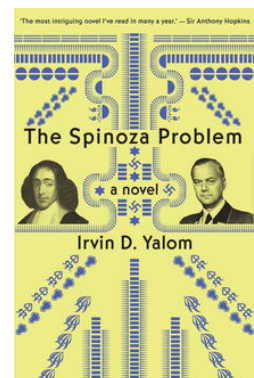
'And Nietzsche Wept' by Irvin D. Yalom



Mingling reality and fiction to convey knowledge and to incite reflection. The novel centres around the characters of Friedrich Nietzsche and Dr Josef Breuer, one of the fathers of psychoanalysis. They never met, but they could have and

and nearly did, as Yalom found out after having written the book! Nietzsche is suffering from debilitating headaches. Lou Salomé, who had had an affair with him, secretly sees Breuer and asks him to treat the philosopher. She engineers a meeting between them. Breuer tries a 'talking cure' with him. It turns out that the doctor himself battles with his inner demons and needs help, and why not from Nietzsche? This is an astonishing book on the redemptive power of friendship, but also a foray into philosophy and the budding throes of psychoanalysis. You will learn a lot by reading it, and you will have a good time.

'The Spinoza Problem: A Novel' by Irvin D. Yalom



A fictional parallel investigation into Baruch Spinoza and Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi ideologue and champion of anti-Semitism. Why the 'Spinoza problem'? Because Rosenberg cannot understand why a 17th-century Jew

should be so admired by Wolfgang Goethe and other illustrious Germans. During the Second World War, Rosenberg seized Spinoza's library. Yalom invents a fictional interlocutor for each of them, a Portuguese Marrano for Spinoza and a young psychiatrist for Rosenberg. He alternates chapters on the life and thought of Spinoza with those of Rosenberg. It is fascinating, erudite without being heavy, with lively dialogues and fascinating portraits of the respective eras.

'The Luminaries' by Elena Catton



A modern Victorian story. Epic, intricate, gripping, rich in characters, sweeping in scope. A human comedy playing out in the second half of the 19th century in the South Island of New Zealand, around the gold fields. Walter Moody arrives from Scotland and stumbles upon a secret gathering of 12 men in his hotel. They discuss a series of strange events and crimes that happened in the community. The author, in 19th-century fashion, is in command, including via asides and digressions. She plunges us into a vortex of events and emotions and personal stories. I loved it, it is a page-turner and the language is challenging, rich and beautiful.

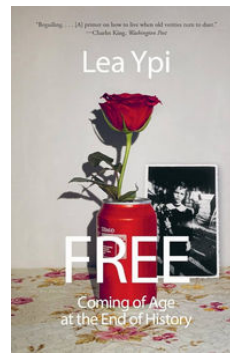
'Goodbye to Berlin' by Christopher Isherwood

Six interlinked sketches, set in 1930-33 Berlin. A first-person account, without being autobiographical. The glamour and the sleaze of Berlin, its descent into political and social unravelling and decay, all of this preparing the ground for the Nazi takeover in 1933. As the author writes about a social gathering: "This evening is the dress rehearsal of a disaster. It is like the last night of an epoch."



'Free: Coming of age at the end of history' by Lea Ypi

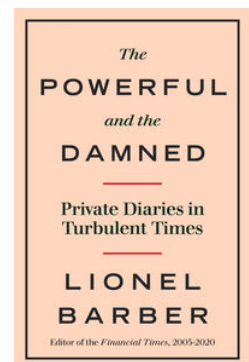
The end of history in Albania. Ypi, who now lives in England, left Albania in the 1990s, after the chaos and the civil war of 1997 caused by the collapse of a massive Ponzi scheme. She describes her childhood in the



Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha's 'prison', the secret language of her parents to talk about the regime, the surveillance and brainwashing. Finally, the death of the tyrant, and, soon after that, the arrival of capitalism with its false promises of democracy, and the disillusionment resulting in many people leaving the country. Ypi still believes in the idea of socialism as a theory of human freedom. Really worth reading!

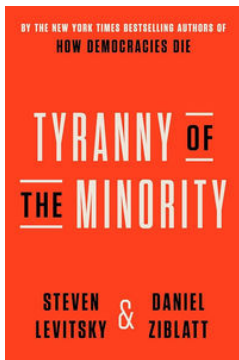
'The powerful and the damned: Private diaries in turbulent times' by Lionel Barber

Barber arrived in Brussels just after the Maastricht treaty. He is one of the best journalists I have met as far as reporting about the EU is concerned. Here he writes about his 15 years (2005-20) as editor-in-chief of the Financial Times, where he hobnobbed with the mighty and the fallen. It is a big tribute to his standing that when Japanese media company Nikkei bought the Financial Times in 2015, they asked him to stay on for another five years. A time of big challenges worldwide and for newspapers, which had to transition to the digital world. Fascinating account of his meetings with the most powerful men (mostly) on earth. A great read.



'Tyranny of the minority: Why American democracy reached the breaking point' by Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky

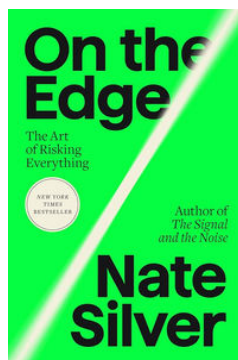
A useful reminder of how flawed American democracy is - and note that this book was finished before Trump's re-election! The foundations of the old system are under siege. The key theme here is the attempt of a



minority of conservatives and extreme-right ideologues to use all possible loopholes in the system to thwart the will of the majority: they exploit gaps in procedures and laws, instrumentalise the law for their purposes, practice selective enforcement (for my friends everything, for my enemies, the law), and lawfare (crafting new laws to target rivals). This is a book Europeans should read carefully, because the Trump administration, with the help of its European stooges, is working hard to bless us with the same kind of perverted democracy.

'On the edge: The art of risking everything' by Nate Silver

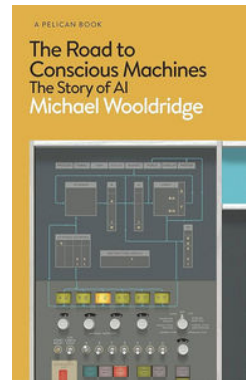
From the author of 'The signal and the noise'. The first 50-odd pages are tedious for people not interested in poker or in betting on sports events. I nearly gave up but then things started getting much more interesting. Silver distinguishes two major attitudes among the modern elites shaping the society in America and elsewhere: the "river" and the "village". The latter are the classical elites in universities, the government, and the traditional media; the former are the risk-takers in innovation and venture capital and high-tech, whom he focuses on. He quotes G.B. Shaw: "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man." He talks about the rise of Silicon Valley and the progress in artificial intelligence (AI). He also describes spectacular scandals and failures like that of Sam Bankman-Fried, the founder of the FTX cryptocurrency exchange, who ended up in prison.



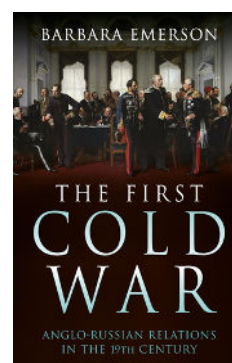
For European readers, whatever they think about American capitalism, this is an important book to understand it and its effects on our societies.

'The road to conscious machines: The story of AI' by Michael Wooldridge

This is the story of AI told by a man who has devoted his life to the subject and who vows to explain it in plain English; he succeeds in doing that. Three questions. How has AI developed over the years? In fits and starts, by a process of trial and error. How is it changing our world? Massively by the incredible optimisation of specific tasks. Are the fears about the future effects misguided? Yes, to some extent; despite the many breakthroughs, there is not yet a silver bullet for general AI. Many of the dystopian predictions in the public debate are far off the mark. Even the best systems cannot exhibit any meaningful understanding of what they are doing. (Question: Is this still true today? The book came out five years ago, a long time in AI.)



'The first Cold War' by Barbara Emerson

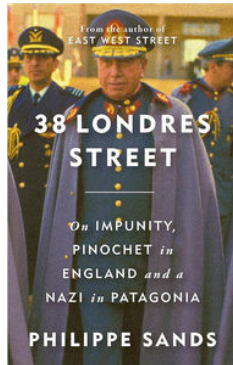


On relations in the 19th century between Russia and Britain, based on archives from both sides. Unlike in the 20th-century Cold War, here the reigning families remained close and there were no ideological differences, but great power games. They fought over Persia, the Ottoman Empire, Central Asia. The Great Game saw Britain fretting about Russian meddling with British India and Russia desperate to secure access to the Southern seas. It was only with

the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, based on their joint fear of imperial Germany, that the situation changed fundamentally. A great book by a very knowledgeable author.

'38 Londres Street: On Impunity, Pinochet in England, and a Nazi in Patagonia' by Philippe Sands

The book deals with Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet's arrest in London in 1998, following an extradition request from Spain, and the legal and political debate on how to proceed with this request. At the same time, Sands examines the case of Walther Rauff, a Nazi who specialised in death trucks during the Second World War and found refuge in Chile after 1945. What's more, when Pinochet took power, he also rediscovered his old torturer's instincts and became a player in the repressive machine. It has the feel of a legal thriller.



'Munich 1938: La paix impossible' by Maurizio Serra (in French)

Maurizio Serra
de l'Académie française
Munich 1938
La paix impossible



A remarkable and timely account. The parallels with the issues surrounding Ukraine are disturbing: ignorant peace emissaries (Lord Runciman in 1938, Steve Witkoff in 2025). A national minority being exploited. A world of power, to the detriment of rules and agreements. A must-read.

All the opinions expressed in this publication are the sole view of the publication's author, and do not represent the position of the author(s) whose work is reviewed, of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) or of its Members.

Editing and formatting: Allegra Wirmer (TEPSA)

Jim Cloos is TEPSA Secretary-General. In February 2021, after a long European career, he retired from his job as Director General in the General Secretariat of the Council. He has been an avid reader in many languages since his childhood (his father was a schoolteacher, and the family lived in an apartment above the school and the library!). He is known for having told his staff that reading a good novel was sometimes more useful for understanding society and the world than struggling through tons of bureaucratic jargon. He has eclectic tastes and reads all kinds of books, except poetry, alas. As an adolescent he read 'Huckleberry Finn' four times (in German); later, he did the same with 'War and Peace' (in Russian).

