

## **Regret is an affliction, not a political programme**

### *Thought for the Day*

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Identity matters. It's part of the glue that holds society together. Think about how you react when you hear about someone with the same name as you, or who came from the same place or background, or went to the same school. That's why hate crime is so destabilising – because it undermines everyone who identifies with the victim.

But that kind of identification has a positive side too. That's why I took some pleasure in the news last weekend that Glasgow University, where I studied and taught for most of my adult life, has agreed a partnership with the University of the West Indies to undertake research and raise awareness of the history of slavery and its impact around the world.

That approach contrasts quite sharply with “Rhodes must fall”, the campaign a few years ago that wanted to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes in Oxford because it paid tribute to a key figure of Britain's imperial history. But it's not just about imperialism. Academic institutions, cultural foundations, even local amenities and football clubs, all rely on patrons to survive, so should it all be given back because people today abhor how the money was made?

We shouldn't wipe out the memory of the ills of the past; instead we need to learn from them, shine a spotlight on them – perhaps instead of removing a statue, we should put a plaque on it to explain its history and its context.

A couple of weeks ago, I read the final lecture by Amos Oz, the prizewinning Israeli author who died last year. In it he talks about the impossibility of turning the clock back. Regret is an affliction, he says, not a political programme. We can't go back; instead we can write a poem, paint a picture, publish a pamphlet, commission research.

That's what Glasgow University is doing, and that to me seems a fitting way to respect those who have suffered.