

# **APOCALYPSE TV**

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*Philosophical Dialogues*

Jonathan Bowden

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**TSTC**

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Fortunato Depero's *Skyscrapers & Tunnel* (1930):

Do they make the most  
of a tubular scene-scape  
designed without cost  
and collapsing into date  
*crepe* rape spate fate constant ingrate?

Dedicated to Dorothy Bowden (1931-1978)



Above: a pencil sketch of the author by Michael Woodbridge

# **APOCALYPSE TV**

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**Chapter 1**

**SEX, DEATH, FRED AND ROSE**

*Location: a house in South London*

*Samuel:*

What's this Sounes book you've been reading, then?

*Jonathan:*

It's this book on the West case, called *Fred and Rose West*. Why do you ask?

*S:*

Well, I didn't follow the case too carefully, but what I did learn I found baffling. What was it all about? How can a person - or rather two people - be led to such maniacal killing? I mean, they look so - *normal*. I think many people were shocked by that. I mean, the typical photos of Brady and Hindley make them look like the fiends they were. But Fred and Rose - even the *names* are normal. And in photos they look like just another couple you would see anywhere.

*J:*

One never knows. Behind the facade of many people lies hatred, bitterness, a desire to take revenge on society, to indulge in the tormenting of others. For all I know, my dear Thomas, I may be staring at a serial killer right now.

*S:*

I know I'm many things, my dear Frederick - but serial killer I am not. So you can drink your tea in peace.

*J:*

Ah, I can relax.

*S:*

But seriously...isn't it possible Fred just, well, *slipped* into murder to begin with, perhaps by killing someone by accident? And then he proceeded to fulfil his role as a murderer, and then pulled his wife into it?

*J:*

Not a very convincing scenario, I have to tell you.

*S:*

Something was said about his first wife having been one of his victims.

*J:*

It's pretty likely. He killed before he met Rose. My view is that he was a killer pure and simple. He was a sexual pervert, in a sense an exponential sexual pervert. A lot of sexual perversion is connected with impotence.

*S:*

Was there any evidence in the book that he had sexual perversions and all that?

*J:*

Oh, yes. They were both obsessed with pornography; she was obsessed with going with as many men as possible; she worked as a prostitute by choice, not because she was forced into it. He was also sexually obsessive, but probably, so evidence in the book suggests, not exactly impotent, but not exactly priapically gifted either. In other words, a lot of his violence was sexual fixation, the imprisonment of the body, his inability to get beyond the body, but also, sexually speaking, he wasn't that much of a performer anyway. There's a famous incident in the book where he has sex with Rose and another woman - they used to have kinky sex parties and so on - and the other woman said to Rose, "He's not very big, is he?" And instead of throttling her, since he'd been humiliated, he did nothing; he went away and got some tea for both of them!

*S:*

But isn't this a man who is supposed to have killed about sixteen people?

*J:*

But what they used to do, there was a sort of initiation into this type of perversity. They would begin with mild stuff, just endless carrying on between the two of them, as they were fascinated with each other when they were young. She married him when she was extremely young, she went to live with him in a caravan, against the advice of her parents, but they got beyond that,

and wanted to involve other people. She was interested in women's bodies and there's evidence she was bisexual to some extent. But she was basically polymorphous, just like Sade. Sade's sexuality begins heterosexually, then he becomes obsessed with anality, then he goes in for multi-orifice experience, then he goes in for cruelty, then sexual pantheism. It's ultimately about an unfolding of energy; it's not about sexuality at all.

S:

Maybe, but there's such a gap between all of that and killing sixteen people! Were all the murders sex murders?

J:

Basically. Rose had a 'dungeon', a secret room, where she would have sex with her clients, which contained sexual paraphernalia. But most of those victims were women, and Fred and Rose would go out on the prowl in Gloucester and beyond, looking for young, vulnerable women, strays, runaways, and so on.

S:

Did they actually go out looking for women? The impression I got - I haven't read the book, this is just from the media reports - is that they would just take in lodgers.

J:

They did that as well, but it didn't matter how they got them in; it's what they did when they got there. Often they'd just have sex with the kids, and then they left the next day. Police are still tracing several women who passed through Cromwell Street. There's little evidence they were murdered; they probably just passed through and left. However, some would stay, and get more sucked into the games Fred and Rose wanted to play, and it would begin to go beyond the bounds of kinkiness with their clients.

S:

Were most of the victims killed in the course of sexual activity, say strangulation and so on?

*J:*

Some were choked, throttled, beaten to death in sexual transports, but others were killed afterwards, following various sexual acts which they didn't consent to, in order to shut them up. Certain women were released after they were abused. One woman, who was crucial to the trial, came back with a can of petrol and either threw some near the door or stopped herself doing so and went away; but certainly she thought about torching the whole house.

*S:*

But what's the explanation of it all? I find it very hard to explain. Was Fred involved in the occult, did he have any occult interests?

*J:*

There's no evidence of that. He was educationally sub-normal; she was probably more intelligent than he was.

*S:*

Educationally sub-normal or low IQ? He must have been pretty sharp; for a start he was a good decorator, and built very solid extensions to the house.

*J:*

According to psychiatric examinations, he was a pretty low-level intellectual specimen: he couldn't read, he couldn't write...

*S:*

What about his childhood. Is there evidence he was abused as a child?

*J:*

Yes, there is considerable evidence in his case, and even some in Rose's case. Some would say his father was bordering on insane. I think the dynamic of these things is quite understandable, like drug addiction. Certain types of sexual perversion have an energy of their own. It's like certain people who begin with soft core pornography - most men are satisfied with Pamela

Anderson calendars, and they don't want to go beyond that. But there's a proportion of people who are fixated, semi-mystically, upon the body. Nakedness isn't enough - they want to see people doing something; then they want to see people doing something slightly more direct, slightly more invasive and intrusive. And it goes on and on, and in the examples of those very, very, few men - and it's nearly always men - who engage in this type of activity, there is a progression and an extremism in their hunt for pornography.

S:

As I understand it the Wests filmed their victims, and the police destroyed all the evidence, the video tapes and so on. There was a very early trial, years ago. One woman came forward and pressed charges against Fred and Rose for rape - she'd escaped.

J:

They were found guilty of indecency, but not imprisoned. There was nothing in Fred's background to suggest he'd been involved in outright criminality before. But the police found a lot of kinky material, which they ordered destroyed. Later, they videoed certain acts, which was used in evidence at the trial; but it was the earlier material they'd bought which was destroyed.

S:

Do you remember that London student who was acquitted of sexual harassment a while ago? I remember thinking at the time that there is this 'magic line' which society and the law sets up. Anything which is done before that line is crossed is OK - buying porn in the shop, watching porn movies, frequenting the most disgusting places, indulging in whatever practices you like - all this is very well, but when it trips over the line into something non-consensual, you're jumped on. So, basically, you can be exposed to any temptation, no matter how grave - you can be exposed to all occasion of wrongdoing, and then you're OK until you cross this boundary marked by consent.

J:

In a libertarian context the boundary has to be consent but even consent is now a movable feast. Take, for instance, the so-called Spanner Case. When we went to the Institute for Contemporary Arts the other week, they had a pamphlet advertising a debate on the Spanner Case, consisting of a lawyer, a jurist from Nottingham University, and various other people - the editor of *Fetish Times*, the editor of *Skin Two*, which is a sado-masochistic publication.

S:

Now I wonder what conclusion the ICA would have come to on the Spanner Case?

J:

Well, the ICA's view on the case is that these men - who were beating each other's genitals with various implements, including spanners, and were getting their jollies from it - should have been allowed to do it. Basically, they took the libertarian line - the acts were consenting, and so permissible. Yet at the trial they couldn't plead not guilty, because you can't consent to assault, so they were nearly all convicted. Some had no previous criminal record and were given suspended sentences; some were jailed.

S:

They intended to cause grievous bodily harm, didn't they?

J:

They wanted grievous bodily harm to be done to them, within certain parameters. It's also the case that they were all homosexual men as well. The point is that society has moved away from an absolute moral standard in relation to sexuality. Therefore, if you adopt the liberal perspective, everything is all right as long as it's consensual, and ultra-liberals are trying to force the dividing line back even further, to acts causing grievous bodily harm which are non-consensual. I attended a political meeting once of right-wing and left-wing libertarians, under the auspices of the National Association of Conservative Graduates, at which Bill Thompson from

Reading University spoke, and Peter Tatchell, and Beatrice Campbell - the whole gang of ideological sexual libertarians was there. And Tatchell's wind-up remark to the audience, as soon as he got on his feet, was as follows: 'Every man has the right to have his genitals sandpapered in the security and privacy of his own apartment.' And he got very extreme about it.

S:

This was the National Association of Conservative Graduates! What sort of reception did he get?

J:

He was widely cheered, because you have to understand these people are libertarians. The NACG is really the continuation of the 'sound faction' leadership of the Federation of Conservative Students. On a traditional definition, these people wouldn't even be described as conservatives - they're extremist liberals.

S:

This raises one of the paradoxes of liberalism. One the one hand, there is this magic line called 'consent': do what you like as long as everyone involved consents; as soon as someone doesn't consent, there is a question mark over the activity. This is not the way the law sees it, but it's the way the morality accepted by society sees things more and more. One the other hand, liberals - not the extremist libertarians, such as the ones you just mentioned, but ordinary 'mainstream' liberals - say everything is determined. They want to find an explanation for Fred and Rose West's behaviour, so they look to their childhood, to their upbringing, they look to what they were exposed to in the formative stages of their lives, and they look for the determining causes, and they say: 'The poor guy is a product of his environment'. First, they want to say that the criterion of acceptable behaviour is *choice* - the will is, in the end, completely insulated from all influences. So a person can buy pornography until they're blue in the face, watch pornographic movies, go to prostitutes, engage in pederasty, all of which is legal - and all of that is acceptable, because the person's will is supposed to be so powerful that it can instantaneously stop short of

other behaviour which society (and the law) deems unacceptable (for the moment), such as paedophilia or sado-masochism. But the idea that choice is all that matters puts pressure on the supposed unacceptability of even these activities, so that even children are regularly trumpeted in the liberal press as being capable of choosing for themselves. Still, as soon as the activity is considered unacceptable, according to the tastes of the time, liberals start scurrying, looking for the *determining causes* of such wicked behaviour - a bad childhood, deprivation, or whatever. All of a sudden choice goes out the window, because liberals refuse to believe anyone can be *evil*, or make evil choices of their own free will. Actually, it's ruled out by definition in the liberal philosophy, since choice is good *of itself* as the act of an autonomous agent - who instantly ceases to be autonomous when he does something liberals or society at large find offensive! Their attitude is thoroughly paradoxical.

*J:*

I must say that I find your thinking unduly moralistic, old man! It's too absolutist. It won't wash in the modern era. Your morality appears to be almost too certain, undeviating, imposed from on high, semi-totalitarian, 'divine' in inspiration. The truth, my dear Thomas, is that morality is a movable feast. It's a relative social construction. Different human beings, different cultures, different races, have completely divergent views as to what is moral and what is not. Take animal liberation, for example - a cause for which you once, I believe, had a great deal of time. In the West, animal welfare is high on the agenda. In China, however, it's considered a delicacy to scoop the brains out of a monkey and eat them while the monkeys' still alive! The fatal flaw in your thinking - as it seems to me - is that you believe in moral absolutism (basically Judaeo-Christian) as the foundation stone of human order. I do not. In my perspective, my dear chap, you cannot have civilization without barbarism. Barbarism is *necessary* for civilization. You cannot create great art without it - and art is the highest value in a society without God.

You see, old man, human beings create gods - Odin, Apollo, Christ, Osiris, Buddha, etc. - in their own image. Religious creation is an artistic act - just like all other forms of human advance. Without barbarism, my dear Thomas, there is not the necessary tension in the society to create properly or effectively. To create is to destroy; to destroy is to create. On this particular view of things, at any rate, destruction is necessary, pain is necessary - the clash of Will against Will is necessary. Rampage, ferocity, warfare, endless destruction - the vista of Kali spearing Siva, dancing in the flames - it is all glorious, it portends new human creation - a panorama of rage without limit, creative beauty without limit. It only has to be constrained when it goes too far; when it threatens the very order of civilization with its destructivity. Then it becomes a danger to the strong as well as the weak. Then the 'anatomy of human destructiveness' - to use Erich Fromm's famous phrase - begins to challenge the veracity of artistic creation itself. Then you need Law - a convention; a human convention - to punish anti-social, instinctive and barbaric urges. But without those urges, as I say, there can be no contrasting civilization - no higher culture; no tragic depths.

*S:*

An admirably clear statement of your position, my dear Frederick, but I must say I find it almost monstrous in its amorality. Morality without absolute, objective standards leads to sheer nihilism - anything goes, any outrage, any crime - and why should the preservation of social order be the limit? On your view, there can, by definition, be no limits - our descent into Hobbesian barbarity is the logical conclusion of everything you have said - a world in which life is 'nasty, brutish and short'.

*J:*

An overreaction, old man, but let us return to the subject that occupied us in the first place. The libertarian view, and indeed the view of most liberals (if you scratch the surface hard enough), is that if you want to have your genitals sandpapered, you aren't driven, you aren't insane, you

know what you're doing - it's completely volitional. They have no conception that many of these people are driven, or in a demented state, or trapped within a particular sexual paradigm. Since it's volitional, it's just a choice - like having a cup of tea, only more pleasant. What happens when someone else is affected against their will? There was a big debate about the Spanner Case in the *Guardian*.

S:

Did anyone die in that case?

J:

No.

S:

Well, in the case of Bowie, which was an Australian High Court case, a man, in order to increase his and his girlfriend's sexual pleasure, placed pressure on the arteries of the neck of his girlfriend. This was consensual, and they'd done it before, but on this occasion she died - she suffocated. The High Court found that this was murder - reckless murder. So the fact that it was consensual had nothing to do with it. And that's basically the common law situation. The legal system at present does not recognise consent as a defence to crimes of violence.

J:

That is why libertarians of left and right are organising around the idea of consent, because they want to make it the basis of all of these forms of activity. And the doctrine of consent is obscured by the fact that in every society that has ever existed there has always been a 'red zone', a zone hived off from society where people engage in these sorts of acts. A lower level is found in prostitution, where men can indulge similar fantasies, for payment; so you have a form of consent, given that it's a business transaction, though like every transaction it's hedged about with various qualifications; a pimp, for instance, is usually lurking in the background to make

sure things don't go too far. So you can ask: why don't these men go into the red zone, which every society has as a safety valve, to indulge their fantasies?

S:

Because they can't commit murder...

J:

They can't go the whole way. Which means that the red zone is too moderate for them, too tame.

They want to go further.

S:

They want to, or they're forced?

J:

They force themselves to go.

S:

But hold on, that's the problem. Some liberals say - the libertarians say - they *want* to go, and that by definition what they want is acceptable. But other liberals say - the left liberals - that these people are products of their environment, they're victims of society.

J:

Well, to go back to the debate in the *Guardian* about the Spanner Case, it is interesting to note that it took an anti-libertarian perspective for once. The *Guardian* position on these things has a paternalist streak to it, and they said, quite interestingly given their overall perspective, that people cannot be allowed to torture themselves or others in their own homes, in a civilised society. Now this is a turn up for the books...

S:

Is the *Guardian* normally libertarian on issues of sexual privacy and so on?

J:

Most of the time. However, like most liberals, when the Guardian has to *face* some of the material that comes up in these debates, they move back to a more conservative position. *Guardian* liberalism is based on the idea that everyone's civilised, everyone's quite well educated, everyone lives in a nice house with a nice garden, everyone is cultured - it's a caricature, just like a don in an Iris Murdoch novel. Everyone is well balanced and wants the best for everyone else, and so everyone will come to a judicious and rational conclusion about social matters. Of course, life's not like that, and the Fred Wests of this world cut through that scenario with a knife. The *Guardian* can't handle those sorts of people, and so they retreat to conservatism. You know the old American adage, 'A conservative is a liberal who's been mugged by reality'.

S:

And yet you only need to fly south or south-east of here for a few hours, and you'll find places where these sorts of issues don't even arise. You will find places where people are executed for adultery, and where promiscuity is severely punished.

J:

That's true, but don't forget that it's the more absolutist social structures that breed hypocrisy. You can fly even further south-east, for instance, and find countries which profess to have a strict attitude to sexual morality, and yet where the sex industry is blatantly on show, and at least tolerated by the state, if not protected outright: Thailand, or the Philippines, or Morocco, where people who want to engage in such activities know where to go, as long as they ask the right people.

S:

But it's primarily a question of what the law sanctions, as a reflection at least of society's *official* attitude. The point is, we mustn't assume that the Western liberal viewpoint is as entrenched as it

is - because it's not. It's very much a position that has sprung up, in its extreme form, in the last thirty or so years. It's never been *known* before then in the history of Western culture. People - especially liberals - like to think liberalism has been around for thousands of years - and it has not. Murder has existed for thousands of years, of course. So there's a difference here: we're looking to the criteria by which the state enunciates and promulgates rules and regulations according to which people are meant to live on pain of punishment. Those criteria are what is important. To say that something, say murder, is rife in a particular society, or that children are sexually available, doesn't answer the question of what the *laws* of that society are.

*J:*

It is true that the West has moved from the position it used to adopt before the Enlightenment -

*S:*

I don't think it's an Enlightenment issue. Rather, it's a late twentieth century issue.

*J:*

But it's also contradicted by the popular views of society. The truth is that the majority of Labour and Conservative voters would have no time for the Spanner Case, no time for the ICA, no time for the editor of *Fetish Times*. They would proscribe that sort of activity. But the political class fears charges of illiberalism and authoritarianism, so they do nothing.

*S:*

True, but it is still a late twentieth century phenomenon. One the one hand you can trace the development of liberal sexual mores and the availability of that sort of temptation and occasion of wrongdoing to before the Enlightenment, back to the Reformation.

*J:*

Come on, you can trace it back to the beginning of mankind...

S:

No no, you don't understand. It's not a question of what is *practised*, but of what the *codes* are of a given society. Basically, I would rather live in a society which was hypocritical, in the sense that the rulers did do what the law punished while everyone else obeyed the law, than one in which everyone did what the law allowed even though what the law allowed was morally wrong.

J:

That's the socially conservative view. In ancient Greece a degree of brothel culture, slaves used for sexual purposes, and homosexuality and bisexuality existed, but they were proscribed by law or at least by prevailing social opinion, and the society was based on the family as the building block of the city state. And there was the general view that if you weren't married, especially if you were a man, you weren't really male. In such a culture, these things were zoned off from the mainstream, even though amongst the elites there was a certain tolerance of them. Which is quite different from what exists now.

S:

I mean, it's not *states* which are hypocritical, it's *individuals* who are hypocritical. If the state has the right sort of moral and legal code, then that's all right. If people disapprove of what they ought to disapprove of, and the law forbids what it ought to forbid, then if individuals, and that includes kings and princes and presidents and prime ministers, are hypocritical, then that is on their heads; and if the law doesn't punish them, that's a fault in the administration of justice, not in the law itself.

J:

They'd be living in a society whereby their own law, so to speak, would punish them if they acted in a certain way.

S:

People condemn Saudi Arabia, which is incredible. They'll hold up Saudi Arabia as an example of a country where there is supposed to be hypocrisy at the highest level - remember I showed you those photos of King Fahd and his one-step escalator and fountain in his private jet - where the kings have multiple wives, and the royal family goes to Monaco to gamble, and they visit prostitutes in London and Paris -

J:

Many of them do!

S:

And the *Guardian* readers and all of the liberal establishment are regularly up in arms about Saudi Arabi and would love the government to be brought down - and have been doing their bit, as happened with the Saudi dissident who caused the BBC Arabic service to be axed - and yet they would much rather have a society like ours in which sexual libertinism is rife, and sexual crimes like the Wests' happen so regularly now that they're barely even newsworthy, and eighty year-old women are raped - I can't remember how many such stories I've read in the last few years - they'll prefer that; but give them a society in which a man who rapes an eighty year-old woman gets his head chopped off, while the rulers themselves visit prostitutes in Paris, and they'll condemn that heartily. The liberal establishment is far more hypocritical than the Saudi royal family. Frankly, my dear Frederick, I don't think the liberal establishment can cope with a case like Fred and Rose West. Or Dunblane.

J:

Why?

S:

Because they haven't got a coherent view. On the one hand, some of them will say that someone like Thomas Hamilton was a product of his upbringing, of his environment - they can't cope

with the free choice to do evil - and on the other hand, some of them (often the same people) will say, 'We're all free to do what we like, our personal choices are by definition acceptable'; but they can't handle a person's free choice to do *evil*.

*J:*

But many of them have admitted that. Major said Hamilton's crime was inexplicable, it was beyond him. Blair agreed in the Commons.

*S:*

Precisely. They didn't say it was *evil*.

*J:*

But hold on, both the Scottish Secretary and his opposition spokesman visited the school after the massacre and said what Hamilton did was monstrous, but they couldn't necessarily understand it.

*S:*

But the fact that they say they can't understand it is an indication that they can't handle such cases, because otherwise they would have to have the sorts of laws which would make that sort of thing much harder.

*J:*

Yes, that's true. But they're all pressing for gun control, for a start, aren't they? And while one may dispute the details of the legislation, the general response of wanting to make access to such weapons much harder is, from the liberal point of view, quite rational. Still, it could be argued that such laws are a case of shutting the gate after the horse has bolted. The truth is that the vast bulk of the people who have guns have no desire to commit such crimes, and never would. If we had the toughest gun control laws in the world - and in some respects we do - Hamilton still would have got those weapons. So gun control is a red herring.

S:

I take the point, but I still want an answer to my question - what was Hamilton's problem? Apparently he thought that people believed him to be a paedophile, because he liked to work with young boys.

J:

He was a paedophile.

S:

We don't know that.

J:

Let me give you a scenario. Major says it's inexplicable, how can someone do such things? I say rubbish, it is explicable. He's a paedophile, in all probability. He wants to commit acts with these young boys, he surrounds himself with young boys. He runs twenty youth clubs in as many years, in different locations, out of grubby cellars, the backs of vans. He gets into more and more trouble with local authorities and with parents. The rumours about him in mid-Scotland grow and grow. Every public institution - the NHS, social services, local government, and so on - they all have a file on him, his odd needs, his odd requests, his letters to them in purple ink underlined three times. They know he's a crank and an obsessive, though most people thought he was a harmless crank; after all there are many such people wandering around who commit no crime. He gets into financial difficulties. He begins to dwell on the fact that he's an outsider, that people think he's a paedophile, which he may well be. He begins to collect guns. He gets obsessed with the training of pre-pubescent youngsters, and works himself into some sort of state, whereby he thinks that by killing the children in the town that will not allow him near children, thinking he's a paedophile, he will be absolved of the pain; he can't have the children, so no one will.

S:

There were complaints that he was mistreating the boys, making them go out in cold weather and sleep on hard floors; but that's not paedophilia.

J:

No, but there are indications he was a member of certain Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) networks in Scotland, and he was known to social services departments in Scotland. True, there was not much in the way of direct evidence; but in such cases, there rarely is.

S:

OK, so suppose your scenario is right, then it's just like the Clwyd child abuse tragedy, which was for a long time covered up by the government, inasmuch as these things are allowed to go on, people with suspicious backgrounds are allowed to continue in positions of responsibility for children, so it's no wonder they end up doing something worse than simply having an unhealthy interest in children. They might be suspected, but nothing is done to remove them in the first place. Gun control is legislating after the fact, as you pointed out. What about the laws in force in the first place?

J:

Are you right about the Clwyd case? It's mainly the local government that wanted to suppress it for insurance and legal reasons, but the central government wanted to release the information.

S:

Often it is the local authority, as with Dunblane, where it was primarily the local authority which had the knowledge and responsibility over whether Hamilton got to run boys' clubs; and it took a lot to get them to take any action. Sometimes the central government covers up such cases, which are now a regular story in the media, and sometimes the local authority - it doesn't matter which tier of government does the covering up. It all comes down to the utter inability to deal

with these sorts of cases. Politicians talk about ‘inexplicable acts of monstrous evil’, but they don’t understand at all what it is that leads a person to commit evil in the first place.

*J:*

On your view, then, Major, Blair and others can’t cope with such cases because they don’t understand human evil.

*S:*

Ultimately, yes. They don’t understand, and they don’t *want* to understand that people are - they don’t understand *temptation*...they don’t understand *opportunity*. They don’t understand the idea of an ‘occasion of wrongdoing’, they don’t understand what tempts people (though they, as politicians, are regularly tempted themselves), they don’t understand what leads people in a certain direction, they don’t understand what influences people.

*J:*

Why don’t they understand that?

*S:*

Because they have this atomistic view of the individual. The individual, for them, is an isolated unit that makes a given choice at a given time. They don’t understand the *history* of an individual. The only time they bring the history of a person into it is to say, ‘This person is a product of their surroundings’ - at least left-liberals do so - and they immediately look for *causes* of their actions, e.g. abuse as a child, deprivation, or whatever. Just look at New Labour’s slogan - ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’. They want to punish the actual offence, and remove the causes, which for them are simply poverty, unemployment, and other material factors. But they leave out the *essential*, what no government is prepared to tackle - the innumerable occasions and opportunities which exist to commit evil in the modern permissive, liberal society.

J:

But is it illegitimate to look at material causes? Surely they are highly influential.

S:

They should be looked at, of course. Such things can have an influence on a person, but by the same token they are exaggerated, because for every person who is brought up in an abusive family and who goes on to commit serious crime, there are maybe a hundred who are brought up in similar families who go on to be decent, upstanding citizens, because they have learned to overcome their own handicaps and to recognise bad influences for what they are. People do have free will, they can overcome their surroundings, no matter how bad. By the same token, people are influenced by the examples they're set. Instead of looking at the availability of pornography, the low age of consent, the fact that young girls can be lured into quite legal sexual relationships with older men who can exploit them, the talking heads in our society look for *determining* and hence exculpatory causes of anti-social behaviour, rather than at the bad *influences* which act upon free will.

J:

Is the age of consent low? It's sixteen.

S:

Of course. Terribly low. Actually, let me qualify that. I don't think an age of consent such as sixteen, or even *lower*, is wrong *in itself*. It would, however, have to be based upon familial obligation.

J:

Like an arranged marriage? Is that what you have in mind?

S:

Yes, marriage. But having said that, I think the reality of a society in which there is education to a tertiary level expected -

*J:*

What's that got to do with the age of consent?

*S:*

No, it's got to do with what's expected of people, where their bread and butter is going to come from, that sort of thing.

*J:*

You mean that if you go up to tertiary education the age of consent should be higher? And if you don't have those opportunities it should be lower, or stay the same?

*S:*

No, I think this society expects people to procreate at a later age, but before that it expects women - and men, for that matter - to be educated and to experience a carefree life of liberation. It may not be what everyone experiences, but it's the paradigm held up to us in the media and by the chattering classes. If there's sex without any responsibility, without any moral and social framework to it, at an age like sixteen, it means that young women are vulnerable to exploitation by older men (as are young men!) -

*J:*

This is miles away from the Wests and the Hamiltons of this world. As you said, a large number of people can come from abusive backgrounds and get beyond it, overcome it - they don't do a Dunblane. Similarly, a large number of men can look at 'dirty' magazines, but will not go out and commit anti-social and criminal acts. There are many lines they will not cross, even though in relation to mainstream social standards they will have crossed a few, say if they visit prostitutes. Many mass killings do not even involve sexuality, such as the Port Arthur massacre, the Hungerford killing...these acts are quite specific and disconnected from ordinary crime, and I would say even disconnected from ordinary perversion, if there can be such a thing.

*S:*

Yes, and by the same logic you could say the same about possession of dangerous weapons. Many people possess dangerous weapons and never use them in a criminal way.

*J:*

Everybody wants to grieve over these events by engaging in the mock therapy of gun control. People want to do something, they feel helpless. But how can you track down those who are psychologically predisposed to these sorts of action? You can't.

*S:*

They're not getting at the root of the problem. People want to do something, so the first thing they do is try to take away the opportunity people have to defend themselves, by banning guns altogether and indiscriminately.

*J:*

It's a moral spasm in one sense, but not in another. If you look at the police's response, it's rather cynical and resigned. They know you could store the guns in gun clubs, you could ban all such guns (allegedly there are a million illegal guns in private hands in this society anyway). It wouldn't make any difference.

*S:*

Can I just say, my dear Frederick, that I wasn't for a minute suggesting that sexual perversion is at the root of all serial killing; I was talking about certain types of case, such as the Fred West case, which clearly involve a sexual motive. Now the libertarian is going to say, 'Fred West should have had access to whatever he liked: snuff movies (if it's the extreme libertarian talking, and if there are such movies), pornographic magazines...

*J:*

The libertarian would never allow snuff movies, since they involve non-consensual killing. But

if they're Hollywoodized and stylised, with special effects and so on, he would find them acceptable.

*S:*

But they would say, at least, that West should have had access to whatever he liked, as long as consent was respected. That sort of position totally ignores human nature. Temptation is one of the primary factors in the commission of evil.

*J:*

But don't you believe, at bottom, that people such as West and Martin Bryant are demonically possessed? Don't you believe that is the root of human evil?

*S:*

No, I never said that serial killers are ipso facto possessed.

*J:*

But you asked at the beginning of the discussion whether Fred West dabbled in the occult.

*S:*

Yes, I asked that, but not because, if there had been evidence to that effect, he would necessarily have been possessed by the Devil, and so his crimes would have been committed under the influence of demonic possession. Rather, dabbling in the occult is evidence of a person who has made a pact with evil, as it were, who has made a choice -

*J:*

Many occultists wouldn't go along with that; there's more than one view on the occult and, some would say, more than one type of occult. I don't agree with the possibility of demonic possession at all. However, the 'demonic' exists within man, and if people become obsessed with destructivity they become obsessed with evil and its metaphors. If they go home and drool over things, and they think, 'Wouldn't it be great to act out such-and-such', then sure, it's indicative of someone who has become wedded to a path of heedless destruction for their own pleasure.

S:

In any case, this government, and no government for decades, has got the strength, or the will, to do what's necessary. One reason is that there are enormous commercial interests involved in the whole pornography industry. And it's essential for any government nowadays, of whatever persuasion, if not to align itself with big business, then at least to do nothing seriously to interfere with its operations. For instance, can you imagine any government trying to ban advertisements which use women in an overtly sexual way? Can you imagine any government in the West trying to ban pornography, or ban films of a provocative nature?

J:

That's a quagmire they don't want to get into.

S:

It's inconceivable. It shows just how far we've moved in about thirty years. When did the Lady Chatterley trial happen?

J:

1962.

S:

Then there was the *Oz* trial, slightly later. It was a *live issue* at that time whether pornography should be allowed or not. Now, it is not merely *accepted*, or *normative*; it is *inconceivable* that a government would ban even page 3 women. That's why Clare Short was ridiculed, and part of the reason why she continues to be ridiculed, since she's seen as being on another planet as far as this is concerned.

J:

She should be ridiculed.

S:

Over page 3 women?

*J:*

I don't agree at all with the reasons why she wants to ban those pictures. The reasons are that it's against women, it's anti-feminist, it's politically incorrect, it causes undue, sexually extremist attitudes in men, it's embarrassing to see it over the breakfast table, and so on. The truth of the matter is that what has happened to sexually explicit material and propaganda which has, as it were, come up from underground over a century, is that once you cross the line, you can stop virtually nothing. And what's happened is that a momentum has developed, so there's a great difficulty here. When John Major got up in the Commons and said, 'I would act on pornography, but there is no national consensus, and no consensus in this House', he's quite right. Once you start with sexual imagery, you can't stop it. And you have to follow through, logically, in a way many intellectuals would feel uncomfortable with. Most intellectuals aren't concerned with 'dirty' magazines; they're concerned with the latter-day D.H. Lawrences, and with 'classic' literature like that of Lawrence himself. They're concerned with banning sections of Proust, among other things!

And purveyors of pornography use precisely this logic, they use the almost subliminal connotations of Grecian and pagan beauty, and classical art, to defend their own money-making, which does indeed involve a degree of sexual exploitativeness. But exploitativeness is a complicated thing. Many women offer themselves for work in the industry, there's a lot of money in it for them, there's also an element of the female which wants to put itself on show.

*S:*

But aren't you removing sexuality from the notion of the sacred? You talk about Grecian imagery and attitudes, but there's no way of understanding Grecian attitudes without understanding the religion of the Greeks. If sexual explicitness is tied up with a concept of the divine, and of creativity, then the female form is naturally associated with such ideas. And, in some ways, with the idea of destruction. When it's tied up with the sacred, it has a different

form. The page 3 girl doesn't have anything at all to do with the sacred. Indeed, what function *does* the page 3 girl serve in modern society? You can ask, 'What function does a statue of the half-naked Diana do in Greece?', and you can say exactly what the function is. But what is the function of the page 3 girl?

*J:*

To stimulate psychic and physical auto-eroticism, and to increase the circulation of tabloid newspapers.

*S:*

And are these functions which we ought to deem worthy?

*J:*

But, my dear Thomas, the one has led to the other. When the *Sun* started in the late 1950s it wasn't owned by Murdoch, it was a pro-Labour paper, with a relatively morally and socially conservative outlook. In the 1970s and 80s it became a so-called hard-right Tory and populist paper, and the sexual explicitness began in the 70s, in the wake of the lifting of what liberals would call 'repression', and the advent of 'sexual liberation'. And it's got more blatant, despite Mr Murdoch's alleged conversion to some form of Christianity!

*S:*

What a hypocrite. Remember the big News Corporation conference, when one of his deputies hired a stripper for a joke, to strip in front of all the conference delegates? Murdoch was so horrified, it is said, that the bloke was sacked the next day. There was a little mention, not in the Murdoch papers of course, but in the rest of the press, of the hypocrisy of not banning page 3 women - and this was supposed to be the 'family man' who sacks a bloke for hiring a stripper!

*J:*

Page 3 girls have, of course, led to other things. The *Sun* is tame now, compared to the *Sport*, which is openly owned by a pornographer, David Sullivan, who's worth £250 million - he left

school at 16 to become a pornographer, deliberately, so as to make an enormous amount of money, and now owns Birmingham City football club. The *Sport* is actually a pornographic magazine published as a newspaper; while the *Sun* is *just about* a newspaper, or rather newspaper/adult comic, mixed with sexually explicit elements. You see the progression? The next question is what will be beyond the *Sport*, as far as ‘newspapers’ are concerned. Even David Sullivan says: ‘I’m a decent bloke: I’m not having paedophilia, bestiality, and homosexual stuff in the *Sport*. I know when to stop.’ But what does the next Sullivan know?

S:

I think it will be paedophilia next. In fact, already there have been well-publicised accusations that fashion magazines like *Vogue* contain proto-paedophilia, because of the waif-like, anorexic young teenage models who regularly appear in such magazines. Women’s groups in particular have charged that they pander to paedophilia per se, as opposed to pornography in general. And then there was the furore about models being dressed in schoolchildren’s outfits...and Clinton’s recent very public attack on the fashion industry for promoting so-called ‘heroin chic’, in which the models look gaunt and their eyes glazed over, as though they have just been injecting heroin. This sort of material, by its very nature, has to get harder and harder, so as to satisfy male lusts which, almost by definition, cannot be satisfied.

J:

It’s interesting that the model-in-school-uniform appearance is essentially fetishistic, and used in an iconographic way. The point about the models is significant. If you look at many ‘supermodels’, there’s an unattractiveness to them. They’re thin, they’re anaemic, they’re wasted - there’s even a subtle homosexual element, whereby these women are often not sexually desirable, rather they’re slightly freakish. And there’s also a childlike element. So, compacted into a large-scale industry - which is what the fashion industry, particularly in Continental Europe, is -

S:

And run by homosexuals, who have, if not overtly, at least a covert desire to make women look as freakish and as unattractive as possible...

J:

Well, there's a considerable number of homosexual designers. There are all these things, which are bound up with the nature of this industry. Increasingly, this society needs to keep itself alive culturally through the use of pornography, because there is no debate about what life is about in general - which includes sexual questions, but to be discussed in a way that they are not in the media.

S:

In a way which includes the factors of nature and biology.

J:

An important question I'd ask is, what *is* pornography? Why is it attractive? The women are not real; no woman, even in a sexually provocative way between a man and a woman in private, behaves in the way that women depicted in pornography do. It's not *inhuman*, it's just *nonhuman*. Women don't look like that. You must remember that when people are filmed engaging in sexual activity (or at least simulating it), or photographed in this way, there's an *industry* around them: there's twenty men standing around, there are enormous arc lights, there are cameras everywhere - it's a totally stylised and unnatural performance. In a sense it's *asexual*, beyond the body, unnatural, a laminated, filmic gloss, that has nothing to do with real sexuality at all.

S:

That's quite right. The way sex is depicted in movies is spurious. So what is pornography?

*J:*

It involves the taking of the reptilian part of the brain - if one wants to use that evolutionary idea of parts of the brain - and cutting it out from everything else that's human, and reworking it by means of an enormous industry that flings it back in people's faces again and again. There's no reference to privacy, to quietness, to individuality.

*S:*

And above all, there's no reference to the ultimate, which is the sacred in human nature.

*J:*

I wouldn't use the term 'sacred', old man; 'spiritual', perhaps...beyond the body.

*S:*

Just to go back to the question of temptation, I've noticed that so-called 'table dancing' is coming into this country, from America, where it is a big thing. There are some porn entrepreneurs who want to bring it to London. It involves men, many - perhaps most - of whom are otherwise respectable, businessmen and so on, going to a bar, buying a drink, sitting down, and having a woman take off her clothes and dance within a foot of them, right in front of them. They can give them money, but they cannot touch them, they cannot solicit them in any way, nor can the women solicit them or go off with them. They can talk to them, but that's all; and the naked women is right 'in their face', as it were.

*J:*

All of that is just virtual reality sex. One thing we haven't mentioned is the proliferation of sexual phone lines, of computer-based sexuality, all of which gets further and further away from the idea of body-to-body contact. Even an image of a woman in a magazine is a human image; but with these things, you can't even see the other person, so it's become almost totally disembodied. That's not the sort of spirituality, if you want to use that word, which I had in mind

when I said sex has got to be about more than the body! *More* than the body, indeed - but not *without* the body, in a virtual reality booth!

S:

Is it not a form of institutionalised insanity?

J:

Perhaps it's an institutionalised form of mild sexual insanity.

S:

The sort of thing Freud would have had a field day with.

J:

It's polymorphously perverse sexuality. The generation of the erotic without any 'getting down to it'.

S:

These businessmen, whom you might have seen interviewed on TV about table dancing in America, can sit in front of the camera with a straight face, and say they enjoy it, that they go there maybe three times a week before they go home to see the missus, they have a quiet drink with their friends, they know some of the girls, they talk to them, they give them a bit of money, it's relaxing -

J:

It's social work.

S:

It's a form of unwinding for them. Do they get tempted to grope one of the women, to grab them, to try to rape them, to propose to them?

J:

I'm sure they don't intend to propose marriage!

S:

I mean to propose lascivious acts! No...they would have the viewer *believe* that they can sit there and not be tempted by a woman with her breasts three inches away from their face.

J:

I'd be tempted, I must say.

S:

Any man would be tempted, and you can bet they are tempted, but don't admit it.

J:

Then they're lying.

S:

Well, if they say they're tempted it loses all legitimacy as a form of public entertainment. If one of them says, 'When I see this woman with her boobs in my face I really want to grab her and throw her on the table', that would be it, it wouldn't get off the ground as a commercial enterprise. In order to bring it into this country it has to be acceptable, and for it to be acceptable you have to have men in business suits saying they're not tempted.

J:

In their own way, these men are really expounding a libertarian way of looking at things. They wouldn't put it that way, of course, they wouldn't have read a Libertarian Alliance pamphlet in their lives. But what they're implicitly saying is, 'Here I am, I haven't read a pamphlet by Brian Micklethwaite or Chris Tame or any other of the libertarian gurus, but I'm rational, I'm unaffected by this, it's just a pleasant experience which is a grade up from having a bacon sandwich, it's just sexuality which is consumed at a given moment without any impact upon me.' When the truth is that, physically and emotionally, they will be in quite a state if a woman does that in front of them. So it's a total denial of reality.

*S:*

Why men would want it, I confess, is beyond my comprehension.

*J:*

Well, there is an impersonal and objectifying aspect to it.

*S:*

One of them said it made sex with his wife a lot better. One said it was safe in this age of AIDS and other sexual diseases.

*J:*

Why do these chat lines exist?

*S:*

You pay 40p a minute or whatever, and you can rack up a £100 phone bill in no time talking to a woman you never met before about your fantasies; and it's not as though she's giving you any therapy as such, she's just sitting there panting at the other end. And she's probably some woman in slippers and a night-gown with her cup of cocoa in front of her and a fag hanging out of her mouth.

*J:*

And her false teeth in a glass on the table. But why do such things exist? Partly, no doubt, because of the immense fear of AIDS.

*S:*

I don't believe that, my dear Frederick. I think it's spurious, despite the fact that you hear that excuse in the media all the time. It gives legitimacy to the idea that all men would go off and have sex with women willy nilly, given half a chance.

*J:*

Some would, some wouldn't.

S:

I don't think the sorts of reasons I mentioned are really what's at the heart of it. I think the reason men engage in such practices is that the fantasy element, and the temptation element, are *intrinsic* to them. And there's also a sense in which it's self-perpetuating. All their mates do it, and if you're not the sort of person who goes along with it you're a bore, so it's partly about wanting to be one of the boys, a fun person.

J:

But that would only be true if it involved a bunch of men, say from the office, who all knew each other. The bulk of pornography is not like that, it's about lonely men, who are in a way themselves victims of the pornographic industry. I'm not keen on the leftist doctrine of victimology, but there's a degree to which, if you look at the sorts of men who go in for pornography - lonely, sad, tired, middle aged, running to fat, often physically quite unattractive to women - there's a degree to which this huge industry, which uses up so many women, is also exploiting so many men.

S:

Sure. The men are exploited as well.

J:

Look at phenomena in this society such as junk food and ready-made consumables. A lot in this society is standardised, mechanised, just so many units of production and consumption. The pornographic industry is a part of that cycle. It's almost the sexual equivalent of the ball bearing industry; certainly that's how the owners of the industry think of it.

S:

But you're not addressing the individual need here. What is it?

*J:*

Well, the average man who consumes the products of the sex industry suffers from sadness, loneliness, absence of spirituality, absence of relationships with women, a *certain* amount of peer group pressure, but that would not be a factor in the man who uses the industry alone. The fact that it's available; the fact that society does not really say it's wrong, and does not set up major obstacles or impose large costs in using it; these are also factors. It's like homosexuality, which is probably partly genetically caused: without hurdles put in front of you, as there was, say, in the 1950s, you are more likely to go with your inclinations.

*S:*

All of those defences have gone. All the hurdles have been swept away, and they were swept away in such a remarkably short period of history that the mind boggles.

*J:*

There's another point which, I think, goes deeper than all of those. And that is the great sadness which the pornographic industry feeds off, in both women and men - men and women who are trapped in the body, who can't go beyond the body, into their own minds, into culture, into language, into the use of their intellects and spiritual faculties to *create*.

*S:*

It caters to the basest parts of human nature.

*J:*

Just as certain things can *raise* a human being - light, form, shape, beauty, whether in a woman or not, the performance of a play which takes you into your life, which speaks to you - there are things which degrade rather than ennoble. And though I don't *despise* the body, in some sort of neo-Platonic sense, and though I don't say that the sexual appetite is in any way disgusting, the truth is that there is the higher as well as the lower, and that here you have an industry which feeds off the lower, without any spirituality, without any grace. If you look at the literary

pornography which we saw in Charing Cross Road recently, those reprints from the 1890s and the early part of this century -

S:

Wordsworth Classics, no less!

J:

Even with them there was a degree of literary grace, a degree of abstraction and mediation, even for what it was then! Now that's all been junked. Fred West doesn't want to read long, literate sentences in order to get excited. He wants to go straight to the image, straight to the body...which shows the lessening, the coarsening and the cheapening of the thing.

S:

And that's how people destroy both themselves and others around them.

J:

Even the marquis de Sade, who was a pervert, demented, and spent his life creating vast intellectual edifices to justify his perversity - even he channelled his sexual obsessiveness into literary and artistic forms; and in a way, once he had done it, there was really no need for anyone else to.

S:

Well, perhaps, my dear Frederick, but Sade was as much a pornographer as someone less intelligent and articulate than he.

J:

But surely that is better, even in a pornographer, than *absence* of intelligence and articulacy.

S:

Well, at the very least Sade did try to connect his obsessions with philosophy...rather, he paid lip service to artistic norms; but today, not even that tiny hurdle exists, the sort of thing which

would have stopped, say, a French peasant from reading Sade. The reality of pornography is that it takes you away from human obligations: to your family, to children, to society.

*J:*

But, my dear Thomas, a lot of people in this society don't *have* families.

*S:*

They have parents who need to be looked after, for instance; there are all sorts of obligations which everyone has. Fred West had children. Though he had sex with most of them, didn't he?

*J:*

He had sex with some of them. And he had several adopted children as well. There is an important point in that, because, don't forget, the novels Sade wrote that are remembered are the 'dirty' ones, the blasphemous ones; but he also wrote some rather light, minor works - such as *Eugénie de Franval* and *Aline et Valcour* (even *Adélaïde de Brunswick*) - that were in a sense moralistic, and are largely forgotten today. In the same way, though at a much lower level of conceptualisation, the Wests also thought they were a family of love as well as a family of death. They had children, they loved them, some of them were in many ways quite well brought up - Sounes' book does make this point. But in the back room there would be the screaming and the bondage and the throttling and so on. So even they were split. Rose says in the book that, despite everything they may have done, they were still a loving family.

*S:*

Did the children believe that?

*J:*

The children seem to be split; some have sided with Rose, gone to visit her in Durham prison, and so on. The ones who weren't abused or destroyed were, it seems, well looked after. The ones who were in fact harmed tended to be from the first family - the one he wanted to repudiate, as opposed to the children he had by Rose.

S:

Most of the serious crimes we see today aren't sexually motivated, of course, but it's just that crimes such as those of Fred and Rose are symptomatic of the inability of society to come to terms with the lack of barriers between the individual and evil. There are hurdles that a society can erect, if it wants to - and which most have, throughout history - to make it difficult for the individual to commit evil. Still, one must not deny the individual's freedom of the will, the possibility that they may well decide to jump all the hurdles which have been put in their way. One must, though, avoid libertarianism, the idea that all there is is the individual's freedom to choose, in which society should play a minimal role. And one must also deny determinism, the idea that there really *is* no choice to be made, that the individual is simply a product of heredity and environment, and that where the circumstances can't be changed they should be used to exculpate. Society has to find the middle way, where barriers are erected between a free individual and evil. Once those barriers are removed, as they all but have been in the last thirty years - though the process can be traced back to the Enlightenment, and before that to the Reformation -

J:

Say you.

S:

I'm not denying that people committed evil before the Reformation! All I'm saying is that from the Reformation onwards the emphasis is distortedly on the individual, not just the individual's freedom to choose good or evil, but the individual's personal interpretation of what *constitutes* good or evil. This is something that comes out in the philosopher Charles Taylor's book *Sources of the Self*, and in the sociologist John Carroll's book, *Humanism: the Wreck of Western Culture*. Once society abrogates the responsibility which it has to *tell* people what is good and evil - not to make it up, but to *reason it out* and come to an effective conclusion - it is left to the individual

to interpret morality however they see fit, and to society merely to stand on the sidelines, as it were, and, like a Greek chorus, applaud the individual when he chooses good - or rather what seems to the bulk of people to be good - or condemn him when he chooses evil - or what seems to the bulk of them to be evil.

*J:*

To be fair, a liberal might say that they were *prepared* to intervene - assuming they had the civil authority. In Tasmania, Martin Bryant goes berserk, he shoots thirty-odd people dead, he runs from a blazing house, and is not shot by the police but taken into custody. He was tried, he was institutionalised. The liberals of this world would say that by virtue of making that judgment the society *has* erected hurdles, and so has not abrogated responsibility for the guidance of people towards creation and away from destruction.

*S:*

These are not hurdles, these are *punishments*. They are a post-facto matter. One of the main problems in the discussion of punishment nowadays is that there is far too much emphasis on the *deterrent* element and less on the *retributive* element. No one is saying that people should not be deterred in some way from committing evil, but all of the burden is now put on the prospect of punishment, and none of the burden is placed on social institutions, customs, habits, mores.

*J:*

So you're saying that all reaction nowadays is after the fact.

*S:*

Yes, but this also involves the attempt to make punishment do what it's not designed to do. The threat of punishment is designed partly to deter people from crime, but primarily to give the individual his just deserts. An interesting question is whether, if everyone *kept* the law, the law would have no function, given that its purpose - I'm talking here about the criminal law - is primarily to punish the guilty. But if everyone kept the law, wouldn't the law be at worst a

failure, at best redundant? The answer is that the law also has a *promulgatory* function, so that people know what the law *is*. If everyone obeyed it, then, the law would then be a success, because the system *stated* the law, and people respected it. It is implicit in that idea that the law has the function of preventing evil, or wrongdoing.

*J:*

Of course, the liberal position, once you get beyond the cant, is that evil doesn't really exist. After the Dunblane shooting, there was a supplement in the *Guardian*, a well-known liberal newspaper, to the effect that the Dunblane incident was a refutation of key liberal values, which, if the refutation were taken seriously, would lead to a rethink of certain jurisprudential liberal ideas. Liberals are descendants of the Pelagians, for whom man is naturally good, naturally moral, or at least capable, through his own efforts, of making himself moral. If you believe, as the right-wing philosopher T.E. Hulme said at the beginning of the century, that man is naturally evil - an extremist version of the idea of Original Sin - you must erect structures in society to repress tolerance of malevolence and decadence. But to say this is to move away from the liberal mindset, according to which such structures are never designed to *repress*, but simply as a natural expression of the innate civilization and socialization of man.

There's an important liberal novel written by C.P. Snow in the 1960s, and based upon a famous murder case which was very important for liberal ideology during the decade in which they really entered the public forum in a major way. The novel was called *The Sleep of Reason*, and was based on the Brady/Hindley murders, the so-called Moors murders of the late 1950s. Snow transmutes the case into one involving two lesbians, who torment and kill a young boy as part of their sexual fantasies. Now C.P. Snow is a new liberal who goes beyond classical liberalism, accepting the idea that everyone should be free, that traditional moral structures are false and old hat, that they deny human instinct. But at the same time the Moors murders, which he uses as the basis for his novel, confront him with the old ideas again, which he thought that he

had transcended. One of the characters in the novel tells the liberal politician in it, who in many ways represents Snow, that by removing traditional structures more social destructivity will occur, there will be more ferocious crimes. To which the liberal politician says that we just don't know, perhaps they would occur in any society no matter how repressive.

*S:*

That's a good example of the 'know-nothing' approach to history: 'We don't know if there were sex crimes in the Middle Ages, we don't know which societies work best', and they'll go back and cite this or that example from, say, Greece or Rome, with no interest in whether the case is typical of the time, or anomalous, or whatever.

*J:*

Snow is saying, in effect, that if everyone were a don, if every one were a scientist like him, if everyone had civilized and creative lives, perhaps the law would never need to coerce, and everyone would obey it instinctively. But, of course, life is not like that, and not everyone, thank goodness, is like C.P. Snow.

*S:*

That shows the snobbery inherent in liberalism; the refusal to accept that people are capable of freely choosing evil, that not everyone lives the kind of refined, bourgeois life of a C.P. Snow - which is not to deny for a minute that the refined bourgeoisie are capable of evil! But it's a patronisation of everyone who is outside the liberal establishment.

*J:*

But then look at such people, the ones who tend to affect a generalized benevolence, who love the idea of 'doing good' in the abstract. Such people, who are so often luvvies on the outside, sometimes have inner lives that resemble Fred West's! Often they try to deny the moral vapidty, the absence of rage in their own outer lives, by an inner life of hatred and bile. Indeed it is often the ones in society who affect the softest values, who also have the hardest hearts.

## **Chapter 2**

### **HITLER WAS A FEDERALIST!**

*Location: the lobby of a comfortable hotel*

*Samuel:*

Where are we?

*Jonathan:*

What do you mean, where are we?

*S:*

Where *are* we?

*J:*

You chose the location for our little ‘chat’, as you put it. And quite a pleasant hotel lobby too, as far as lobbies go. If it weren’t for the sound of a symphony orchestra playing the Beatles in the background, I could come here more often.

*S:*

No, no. I mean - *where are we?* It’s 1997, the millennium is almost over - and how many human beings throughout history have had the privilege of living through a change of millennium? - and I for one haven’t a clue as to where we are.

*J:*

I hear an existential crisis coming on.

*S:*

Not quite that drastic, my dear Frederick, but I am a little perplexed. I’ve been reading Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*; do you mind if I quote you a passage that intrigued me?

*J:*

Go right ahead; you won’t find me refusing the chance to hear some words from the great man himself.

*S:*

I’m not sure I’d say ‘great’, but anyhow, let me give you his words: “What constitutes our aversion to ‘man’ today? - for we suffer from man, no doubt about that. - Not fear; rather, the fact that we have *nothing* to fear from man; that man is first and foremost a teeming mass of worms; that the tame man, who is incurably mediocre and unedifying -

*J:*

Sounds like most of your colleagues in Academe!

S:

Perhaps, but let me continue: “- has already learnt to view himself as the aim and pinnacle, the meaning of history, the higher man; - yes, the fact that he has a certain right to feel like that insofar as he feels distanced from the superabundance of failed, sickly, tired and exhausted people of whom today’s Europe is beginning to reek, and insofar as he is at least relatively successful, at least still capable of living, at least saying ‘yes’ to life...”

J:

Looking round this hotel lobby now, I can see his point.

S:

Indeed, but what is he on about, philosophically speaking?

J:

Well, Nietzsche was writing at the end of the 19th century, and looking about him at the humanity of his era, and saying that they suffer from an absence of moral fibre, that humanity has reached a certain pitch, from it would begin to decline, as he thought it already had. We’re now over a hundred years on, and we can say with all honesty that what he observed then is more radically so now.

S:

I wouldn’t have thought that in the 19th century a description such as that would have been particularly accurate. It seems, in fact, as though he was thinking a hundred years ahead.

J:

He always said, “People will read me many generations after my death, and then they will understand what I was saying.” The interesting thing about Nietzsche is his prescience. In his era he was an Outsider. Germany was becoming the most powerful country on the Continent, and yet he repudiated Germany. All his circle were nationalistic and anti-Semitic, and yet in his own, personal, one-man ideology he repudiated that.

S:

And didn’t he repudiate Christianity at a time when it was quite strong and resilient, and the main force of social morality?

J:

Yes, but he knew it was rotten and decaying, and would eventually collapse.

S:

Which, in terms of its practice, the number of its adherents, and the fraction of those who actually *believe* what Christianity teaches, it has.

J:

He was the loneliest thinker in Europe, and demonized for his rejection of the dominant social structures of the time.

S:

Perhaps it was just such isolation which helped him see things with great prescience?

J:

Indeed.

S:

Still, I have to say that the quotation I read out reveals an extraordinary misanthropy - “man is first and foremost a teeming mass of worms”!

J:

The paradox, my dear Thomas, is that lovers of humanity must always hate humanity, because you *want them to be better*. Can we ever be satisfied with what we are?

S:

No, but “teeming mass of worms”; he sounds like a man getting over a bad love affair.

J:

As we have sat in buses, as we both have done, in the centre of this town, we’ve always had to suppress an urge to do commit a gross act of violence against the other passengers, haven’t we?

S:

Speak for yourself!

J:

I speak for everyone who has ever sat on a bus and really *looked* at what Nietzsche would call the tired, exhausted, almost robot-like figures that sit falling asleep over their newspapers and their shopping bags. There is a degree to which misanthropic hatred is just the other side of civilized affection. Don’t you want to yell out at these quasi-androids: “Wake up!!!”?

S:

But what brought that out in him? In one sense he was accurate when writing about Christianity then, because, although it was thriving in general, it was on the ropes in many countries. For instance, he was writing fifteen years after Bismarck’s attack on the Catholic Church in Germany - the so-called *Kulturkampf* - which almost decimated the Church there, and led to widespread and ultimately self-destructive compromises with the then-emerging democratic parliamentary

system. Is it that Nietzsche looked around him at such phenomena, and thought, ‘Something is rotten here’? What did he see?

*J:*

What he saw was the beginning of what has reached its culmination in this century. In the 1870s across Europe, there weren’t any liberal democracies as we understand it - not all men had the vote, and women certainly didn’t, since there was no doctrine of female emancipation. In this society, middle class people in rural areas didn’t get the vote until the 1880s, and the full equality of women before the ballot box didn’t occur till the 1940s. Nietzsche saw, in his time, that the doctrine of full equality which we take for granted was just coming up, like a weed, just beginning to make itself felt. And there was nothing to stop it in a culture which was increasingly placing value upon mediocrity, was increasingly unheroic. Nietzsche saw Christians beginning to latch onto these ideas -

*S:*

And believed, did he not, that such ideas would eventually destroy their religion.

*J:*

Precisely. And, moreover, that such ideas at least partly originated from it.

*S:*

I would take issue with him on that matter, but in general it seems that what he saw was the modern world.

*J:*

Yes.

*S:*

But could he have predicted what would happen to Germany?

*J:*

There’s a danger, as we sit here in 1997, of telescoping centuries of German history into what happened between 1933 and 1945. In Nietzsche’s time, alliances were shifting every few years, and nothing was truly predictable. The idea that we would enclose Germany in a ring of steel, with Russia and France, and go to war twice in a hundred years, decimating the Continent - that could not have been foreseen. Nevertheless, Nietzsche did predict a reaction against the mediocre, a time of new Caesars, new dictators, new wars.

*S:*

But surely, if he’d been around at the time, he wouldn’t have approved of Hitler.

*J:*

So they say, Nietzsche has survived in university courses throughout the West because that is the official view. And it is *probably* the correct view, if you look at his commentators like Kaufmann and Hollingdale. Their point is that he was not a German nationalist - he claimed to be a Pole when he had no Polish blood, precisely because Poles are one of the nations hated by Germans. He also claimed, correctly, that many Jews supported him intellectually...

*S:*

And yet his thinking ultimately holds Jewish morality responsible for the sickness not just of Europe but of the world! Anyway, which Jews supported him?

*J:*

Lou Salomé, with whom he may or may not have had an affair; Paul Rée...And they supported him, of course, because he was anti-Christian, and German Christians, whether Protestant or Catholic, held the Jews responsible for the death of Christ.

*S:*

But they must have seen he was also attacking Judaism?

*J:*

But many of these Jews were secular-minded intellectuals, who shared more with Karl Marx - even though they would not necessarily have shared his political views - than with their religious brethren.

*S:*

I'm still trying to see the world as Nietzsche saw it - though I suppose that's trying to see the world through the eyes of a syphilitic maniac...

*J:*

Well, that may be your mistaken view...

*S:*

But if I had looked about me then, wouldn't I have seen a society that still paid homage to nobility, that was essentially aristocratic, structured along class lines - in short, hierarchical and inegalitarian?

*J:*

It was a very bourgeois society. The junkers did have a large amount of political power after unification in 1870, true...but Nietzsche is talking about an emerging ethos, the growth of large centre-right and centre-left parties, partly despised by the old aristocracy, but destined to take over.

S:

And you had the Catholic centre party, and parties supporting the military, and more extreme parties of the right and left. In that sense, I suppose, Germany at that time was a sort of pre-modern modern country.

J:

But everyone tends to underestimate the degree of modernity that existed in the late nineteenth century. Everyone views German history retrospectively, as if people then could see what would happen later. No one could possibly foresee the emergence of one of Europe's most revolutionary regimes after the total defeat and smashing of the society between 1914 and 1918.

S:

And yet now Germany goes out of its way to be the most liberal humanist country on Earth.

J:

Because of the extreme reaction to the power morality which the National Socialist regime preached and practised between 1933 and 1945.

S:

For which many respectable academics and intellectuals hold Nietzsche responsible.

J:

Perhaps, but one should also remember that academics have been saying such things for a long time. For instance, the British classicist Ernest Barker produced a pamphlet in 1914 saying, 'we are fighting against Bismarck, we are fighting against Kaiser Wilhelm II, against the Prussian Reich, against the psychology and philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.' He has been a talking point for a quite a while!

S:

Didn't he go through a vogue quite early?

J:

By the time of his death in 1900 he had already become something of a cult figure, perhaps the major non-fiction intellectual writer in Europe for a ten to twenty year period, influencing poetry, art, theatre, philosophy, before the First World War. And the vogue spread to England and even America, especially among German-American writers like H.L. Mencken.

S:

Surely, then, this had a profound effect on later German political thought.

J:

Of course, but when you ask a question like, 'Would Nietzsche have repudiated Hitler?', it depends what you mean. If Hitler had been gunned down in 1938, he would have gone down as one of the greatest German leaders since the Middle Ages. Nietzsche was never one to repudiate the consequences of a thought, because he saw the consequences of action as part of the thinking that precedes action. In an ordinary sense, his view of life is completely opposite to the one which Hitler cobbled together as a political philosophy - crude, racially based, Darwinian, founded on extreme anti-Semitism and pan-German nationalism. These are not Nietzsche's views. And he is not really a political philosopher anyway, his views on such matters being quite sketchy and poetical rather than logically thought out. *Ethically*, whether he would have repudiated what Hitler stood for is a different question.

S:

What we do know, however, is what he would have seen had he been around now - and it would, I presume, have made him sick. He would have seen it as the continuation, war aside, of the processes of bourgeois decline and of the growth of liberal humanist hegemony, which he saw beginning in the late nineteenth century. But one of my disagreements with him is over the date of the decline. Liberal humanism has replaced the Judeo-Christian moral code, has seen it largely collapse, but the collapse has taken place over a far longer period than Nietzsche admitted, stretching back four centuries. It is really with the so-called Reformation and Renaissance that we see traditional morality slowly replaced by a later distortion which has only reached full flower, or rather full putrefaction, in this benighted century of ours. And no doubt Nietzsche had a strong whiff of the rotting carcass in his own time.

J:

But, my dear Thomas, he holds post-Jewish morality, i.e. Christianity, as *responsible* precisely for the liberal humanism he deplores; for every 'do good' social theory that has arisen over the last hundred years, whether partially or wholly evacuated of religious content. 'The last shall be first and the first shall be last'; love the poor and the meek and the humble; love those at the fringes of society; does this not all come from Christianity itself? Isn't it true that you agree with Nietzsche over what he attacks, but disagree with him over the *reasons* for attacking it?

S:

His repudiation of the society which is not ordered in a hierarchical way, in which there is no sense of *noblesse oblige* - certainly I would agree with that. But in what way is Christianity responsible for the sort of society he rejects? Perhaps we might return to this important matter;

but before we do, allow me to raise a point which seems to contradict the Nietzschean theory of decline. I was thinking recently about the so-called ‘windfall tax’ which the Labour Party is planning to levy on the privatised utilities when it is in government. Now here is a classic example of what has gone wrong with social ethics. It seems that nowadays you have to *suck* the money out of corporations to get them to pay anything towards the good of society. The whole ethos of corporations now is to avoid tax, to avoid social duty. We are inundated with the ideology of humanism, of ‘love thy neighbour’, and yet where is it unselfishly practised by those who are the heirs of the old aristocracy? In some ways, Nietzschean morality is alive and well!

J:

And that is paradoxical, because there has been a reversal within liberalism. Between about 1910 and 1970, liberalism was indeed humanistic - the state should intervene to improve the lot of the least well-off, the poor needed to be looked after, and so on. But what has happened is that some of the forces of inequality, of life as warfare, which had gone underground, have resurfaced as a form of late or post-liberalism, as a kind of libertarianism, a morality of dog eat dog, of capitalism as red in tooth and claw, which sees the weak go to the wall. Notice that the people who advocate these things can’t be too right-wing, since there is an area of right-wing thinking that has been so demonized by the Second World War that it is not safe to stray into it. What, after all, is the real difference between the philosophy of the American Jewish woman writer Ayn Rand - so-called ‘objectivism’ - and Nietzsche’s? Nietzsche extends the morality of struggle into areas of actual physical combat, whereas she restricts it to the economic.

S:

That’s one difference, but another striking one is that there is no *noblesse oblige* in her philosophy, whereas there is in Nietzsche’s.

J:

That’s because of the extreme libertarianism of Rand’s philosophy, the atomistic and classless view of society which not even Nietzsche accepts. And the weakness of such an outlook is that it does not admit that only very few people can be free in that extreme sense. Rand’s extreme individualism, taken to its logical conclusion, means that you will have tyranny.

S:

Nietzsche seems to think of society in terms of *classes* of people - using, I suppose, the classical model as his ideal - where the dominant class has an inherent sense of obligation, to use a word Nietzsche would not have used.

J:

Yes he would - obligation *and savagery*. That is what he liked about the aristocracies of the ancient world. The sort of world view you are touching upon, my dear Thomas, essentially has the Middle Ages as its inspiration. His has the ancient world, a world with a tiny nobility, and a society based upon caste and upon slavery. Because the distinction between human beings was so great, you could allow the positive - the *noblesse oblige*, the solicitous element - to come out. For Nietzsche, cruelty is necessary for life, and all civilization has to be based upon a degree of cruelty, even a degree of evil, as it was in the ancient world.

S:

But is it not true that, if we look around us now, we see that the modern world has all the worst elements of his philosophy - the cruelty, the savagery - without any of the compensating order and stability which he praises.?

J:

Untrue. In a way, the modern world has ended up with an odd synthesis: left-humanist views prated about in the media, available on every television screen and from every editorial mouthpiece; and at the same time a rather harsh society, judged purely on economic grounds.

S:

The grounds on which nearly everything is judged today.

J:

Indeed. Now he considers this economic materialist viewpoint to be axiomatically middle class. It's not the viewpoint of the slaves or of the elites. The aristocracy has now lost power and is a weak, desiccated, rather runtish class in contemporary society - a once triumphant class that is has now declined to the point of ridicule.

S:

Something which Nietzsche would deplore.

J:

Yes, but he would say that when a class declines it should go quickly, and not become a laughing stock.

S:

Still, people have an instinct to survive, and presumably the aristocracy has an instinct to find a place for itself.

J:

True. However, I think you exaggerate the savagery of this society. There is a savage element, and you can die in the gutter and nobody will do anything to help, but there is still an enormous social infrastructure: £90 billion a year on welfare, keeping people going -

S:

All of which is slowly being taken away -

J:

But that's due to economic competition from forces elsewhere on the planet -

S:

Perhaps, but that's not the sort of cruelty I had in mind anyway. What I had in mind was the cruelty involved in corporate immorality; not just the cruelty of individuals but of groups, the rapaciousness of certain economic groups. For instance, the decline of competition. Just going to the corner shop to buy some chocolate, I saw an advertisement for a Walls ice cream, and thought, 'Another bloody Walls ice cream' - Walls controls the entire ice cream market, at least in this part of the country. And what do they produce? Undersized, overpriced, tasteless, unappealing trash. Whatever happened to competition? Why doesn't the government bring in a law *limiting* the size of multinationals? No multinational could have, say, more than a certain capitalization, or number of employees. This should be *forced* from above, thereby encouraging smaller companies to manufacture ice creams, for instance, competing on price and quality. It's no use Walls saying, 'Well, we had that once, and we won!', because it's not a question of *winning*, and competition is not primarily an economic necessity - it's a *moral* necessity.

J:

But that's the Marxist conundrum. Marx's solution was deeply mistaken, and disproven by events, and has collapsed and gone into history. But his *critique* of capitalism and of its tendency not towards individualism but towards a kind of collectivism, towards corporate anonymity, monopoly and oligopoly, and the absence of competition - a lot of that was accurate.

S:

Presumably that's why many centre-left parties were integrated into capitalism during this century, in order to humanize aspects of Marxism and make possible the break-up of some monopolies, through anti-trust laws and the like.

J:

Getting to the heart of what you said, Nietzsche's point is that economic warfare - small firms done in by larger ones, the rigging of markets, the increasing size of corporations - is a fake and cheap form of warfare. What he would rather see is overt physical warfare, especially over ideas.

S:

Isn't that one of the reasons liberalism is antithetical to his outlook? After all, liberalism is precisely an economic view of man, wanting to get beyond war into economic struggle. We might all be in competition, in larger and larger economic and trading blocs - as Orwell foresaw - but at least it's not military, as it has been twice this century on a global scale. In which case the cruelty of economic life, for Nietzsche, would be no more than an excrescence of humanism.

J:

Cruel, but not cruel enough.

S:

In other words, sublimating man's innate physical aggression, and more importantly his innate belligerence over ideas as opposed to, say, ice creams.

J:

Remember that novel you liked, by that politically incorrect existentialist writer of the 1950s, Bill Hopkins -

S:

You mean *The Leap*?

J:

In that novel, he talks about the nascent economic union in Europe - the Iron and Steel Community, the forerunner of the EEC and then the EU. Now the main character in that book, Plowart, says that it is dishonest warfare: the warfare of small people, gathered together into big, anonymous units so that they're safe. Notice that in Ayn Rand's novels, capitalism is seen as some sort of heroic battle between individuals, which may have some relevance to the more creative side of economic life, such as inventions, perhaps even advertising. But it has little to do with business. Business is Walls ice cream, not Roark (from *The Fountainhead*) on a mountain-top, dreaming of new skyscrapers...

S:

But Hopkins, the author of *The Leap*, doesn't he nevertheless have a slinking admiration for the economic moguls, the Murdochs of this world?

*J:*

He does, but he still regards them as sub-standard warriors, the characters in a warfare that produces bloated, greedy titans. But they have some energy and ingenuity, and he would say that in a world of slaves, even the flabby slave masters of today have a point. Rupert Murdoch is the closest we can get to Julius Caesar, and isn't that an indictment of our civilization?

*S:*

Murdoch as second-rate Julius Caesar...he'd probably take that as a compliment!

*J:*

Instead of Caesar before a conquered enemy, deciding whether to put him to death, you have Murdoch investing in Playboy TV -

*S:*

Or making the great strategic decision as to whether he'll syndicate *The Simpsons* in South-East Asia...

*J:*

Indeed.

*S:*

Nevertheless, the liberal humanist is going to say, 'I accept that there is a paradox in my society. On the one hand I deplore the rapaciousness of the multinationals, with their lack of compassion for those under them and the need to extract money from them like a dentist extracts a rotten tooth. Still, this is a sublimation of mankind's aggressive tendencies, and isn't it a good thing? We have international co-operation as a way of locking nations into a system in which it is harder and harder to go to war. We have the emergence of ever larger supranational units. We have the benign dictatorship of the United States. We have the sublimation of aggressive tendencies into sporting and cultural, as well as economic, pursuits. Isn't all of this better than the sort of world Nietzsche would prefer?'

*J:*

The reply to that is twofold, one of which is my criticism of it, and the other is yours.

*S:*

Well, from my point of view there's no religion, nothing to believe in, no overarching ethic.

*J:*

My criticism is similar, but comes from a different direction. There's no great art, no tragedy, nothing of monumental merit being created at this time, even though there are individuals who

are doing their best, creating many interesting and provocative things. But none of it adds up to anything of what you might call ‘eternal’ significance.

S:

What our views have in common is the idea that this is a *mediocre* society, without a profound view of *itself*.

J:

Yes, in which even so-called ‘high’ art does not deal with the most profound issues of human life and destiny. Everything has been flattened out: it’s the religion of the small man, the war of the small man.

S:

I remember that film from the 1970s, *Rollerball*, in which there are pseudo-gladiatorial contests which get the masses worked up for half an hour, almost in a mood to kill and destroy; and then they go back nerd-like to their offices.

J:

Which is just a cinematic version of what you get on Sky Sports, with the background song (to the rugby league) saying, ‘there is only one religion’.

S:

This seems to me to be the ultimate indictment of society, not the triumph the liberal humanist makes it out to be.

J:

For the liberal humanist it’s a triumph, because the thing they fear more than anything is *pain*. The worst thing in life is pain. Whereas for Nietzsche, without pain there *is* no life.

S:

On that we agree, then, my dear Frederick, because for me suffering is an absolutely *inescapable* part of human life.

J:

Remember, at the end of Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the controller says to the Savage, ‘What do you want?’, and the Savage replies, ‘I want beauty, I want pain, I want death, I want laughter...’ And the controller looks at him in amazement, and says, ‘What you’re asking for is the right to be unhappy’, to which the Savage says ‘Of course’. Could one even imagine the existence of Shakespeare’s writings without tragedy and pain? If everything were reduced to the blandness of the Muzak we’re being forced to listen to in this hotel –

S:

And the biscuits -

J:

I quite enjoyed them, actually. In any case, we'd all be living corpses.

S:

As, arguably, many of us are already. But what I want to say to you is that religion has always recognized this: not just Christianity, but every major religion, except perhaps the ones, like Buddhism, which preach the extinction of all feeling in a state of Nirvana. Christianity has never advocated the extinction of all feeling, neither in this life *nor* in the next. True religion regards the flattening out of all sensibility as contrary to human nature.

J:

But if we had Archbishop Carey, or ex-Archbishop Runcie, with us, we wouldn't be getting that message. And their views, which predominate in modern society, are essentially a mixture of Christianity and liberal humanism. Every time I turn on the television and listen to a cleric, I'm listening to a slightly left-of-centre politician.

S:

Or a social worker with a dog collar on. Which is precisely the point. They don't believe in anything anymore, except 'being nice to people'; and clapping and hugging the person next to them.

J:

And Nietzsche's point is that the reason they are like that is because of something endemic in their faith all along.

S:

Whereas the reality is that they have moved away from what the true understanding of their faith must be.

J:

So say you, but for Nietzsche the sort of humanism he saw emerging in the late nineteenth century, and which we see all about us now, is right at the heart of Jewish morals and Christianity per se, in all of its phases.

S:

But one can trace the decline back to the sixteenth century - *that* is where it begins. And as for Judaism, surely he wouldn't have said that the ethical world view of the Old Testament bore any resemblance to the unctuous humanism of the present day.

*J:*

No - he loves the Old Testament.

*S:*

Well, that's Jewish morality.

*J:*

But he divides Jewish morality into two types: the Old Testament, which is the tribal, fierce, patriarchal morality of a people in struggle - and that he admires, since he sees it as close to the Greeks, the Persians, and the pagan world in general -

*S:*

Indeed - the sacrificial Judaism of David, Solomon, the temple, the Prophets...

*J:*

But what he dislikes is the Pharisaical Judaism of the later period, and which inverts heroic, martial and aristocratic values.

*S:*

Precisely the morality, my dear Frederick, criticized by Christ Himself.

*J:*

Maybe, but where you differ from Nietzsche is over his view that, while the Pharisees were wrong, Christ was rebelling against them but not moving towards his way of seeing things; rather, he developed the logic of late Judaism (late in the context of the ancient world) to its extreme. Whereas you see Christ as attacking late Judaism and replacing it with something different, he sees Christ as replacing it with a view that is even more Pharisaical, and offering it to non-Jews. For Nietzsche, Christianity is just Pharisaical Judaism for Gentiles.

*S:*

Quite a misunderstanding of Christianity, my dear Frederick: Christ was not *rebellious* against anything. Certainly He criticized the pridefulness of the Pharisees, and their valuing of law over humanity; but He did not seek to replace Judaism with something new - as He Himself said, 'I come not to abolish the Law but to fulfil it.' So Nietzsche defines his own position in terms of another which is a complete distortion of Christianity itself. Certainly, Christianity teaches that the meek shall inherit the Earth, that the first shall be last and the last shall be first, and so on, but that does not deny the *sacrificial* character of Christianity. Christianity is a constant warfare, and every true Christian must be a soldier.

*J:*

Yes, my dear Thomas, but a warfare against human nature, which is inevitably barbaric, inevitably competitive and hierarchical. And inevitably destructive. And because it is these things, it can also be calm, solicitous and creative. This means that his morality, and the morality of the Old Testament, are closer to the pagan world than Christianity.

*S:*

If this is what Nietzsche thinks, then he did not go to any good lectures on theology; but let us leave such matters aside, and let me put to you this proposition: that Nietzsche's indictment of modern society is not simply that it is bland and unheroic, but that modern man is incapable of any authenticity whatsoever. Even the paganism about which he waxes so lyrical has, in its modern recrudescence, become a farcical pastiche, full of dancing around trees and folk songs around the fire; whereas in truth, paganism has an ethic which is so bloodthirsty that it would make the face of the average *Guardian*-reading 'white witch' turn a shade of grey. Not that I, for one, would wish to see its return.

*J:*

For Nietzsche - who understood theological disputation perfectly well - humanity is living an enormous lie, because the safest, most mediocre and most comfortable elements are on top - gingerly perhaps, since they themselves have to disacknowledge a certain amount of cruelty in order to be able to stay on top. Whenever one goes into a room, one sees people smiling inanely, saying in their minds, 'Like me, love me'. Most of your colleagues in your own establishment are like that. What they need is some chastisement, a harsh dose of reality, at least enough to get them into a state of wanting to believe something, of wanting to reject other things, of wanting to create and to soar above the mediocre. For most people, their ideology is neutrality: the safety of the bank clerk, the safety of the man in the middle. Of course, the minute people start really believing in things, and rejecting other things, you have division, factions, mutual distrust -

*S:*

One of the main things liberal society cannot tolerate - the absence of concord.

*J:*

If every academic in every university started having real opinions, the whole system would shut down...it would almost collapse. Remember how you were kicked out of Monsieur G's salon? Just for saying that you didn't care about what was happening in Bosnia?

*S:*

Thanks for reminding me - just what I needed.

J:

Monsieur G was apoplectic. What did he say? 'I was in the war, you know, and I killed many people; if I had a gun I'd shoot you now'.

S:

Ah, true humanism.

J:

Yes, humanism in the raw - humanist violence in the name of 'caring'. In such a small moment much was revealed. Here is a man who has a salon, a Continental thing which he has imported into London. He invites all sorts of people but there are *ground rules* - unstated, but there all the same. The main one is: do not, under any circumstances, say anything in opposition to orthodox liberal opinion. Even though, *officially*, this was a salon whose very *raison d'être* was the discussion of ideas among intellectuals. So when you said, 'I don't care about what's happening in Bosnia', meaning 'Sure it's bad, but thousands of people are dying in wars all around the world, every minute of every day, and I have no intention of spending every waking moment in a grief-stricken state of mourning over it, especially not when I'm reminded of it by rich dilettantes living in Chelsea' -

S:

Well put, my dear Frederick -

J:

When you said that, you were in effect condemning unctuous liberalism itself: the sanctimoniousness of it all; the wearing of red AIDS ribbons-

S:

It's a fad now - there's a differently coloured ribbon for every cause.

J:

- the 'We all care about everything and everybody' attitude of the chattering classes - but by saying, or rather implying, that, you were effectively jumping up and down on Monsieur G's very body. You were saying, 'Monsieur G., I will not worship at your secular shrine.'

S:

Hence my being refused re-admission at such an august event as Monsieur G's salon for the discussion of ideas and opinions. No room there for anyone who is likely to give anyone else a hard time over their views. Still, at least I'm in the company of that artist Albert Loudon - wasn't he also expelled?

*J:*

Yes, for having ‘a thuggish face’. The implication being that he was too working class for a salon in Chelsea.

*S:*

Whatever his artistic talent, which is considerable. The group that he belongs to, the so-called ‘Outsider artists’, are precisely the sort of creative individuals who have been forced to the very margins of the art world, because they have a vision, or rather, visions, since they are extreme aesthetic individualists, which do not fit into the acceptable artistic categories. In many ways they are Nietzschean artists.

*J:*

Ploughing their lonely furrows, as it were. Mind you, Monsieur G and his family made their money by dealing in art, and so ironically, by excluding Loudon, he spat on his family’s own profession and source of wealth.

*S:*

Or not so ironically, given his distaste for most forms of modern art, and for the secular religion which it constitutes in the eyes of the so-called ‘cultured class’. He sees it as a materialistic cult, in which art functions both as currency and as object of worship. And yet he excludes Loudon for being raw, uncouth, unable to communicate other than on the canvass, a man who loathes the very materialism and commercialism which Monsieur G has gone so far as to excoriate in print!

*J:*

Ah yes, a situation Nietzsche would have found only too familiar.

*S:*

The cruelty that wears its heart on its sleeve. The chattering classes are quick to show their disdain for the creative individuals on the fringes of society because they don’t like the look of them, or because they’re beneath them, uneducated, or crude, or whatever - but let anyone criticize the handwringing, no-costs humanism of the Channel Four news, and they’re a bloody *monster*. Certainly the suppression of individuality, or of individual creativity, in modern society is something I can side with Nietzsche on. Just look at what has been called the McDonaldization of society, the grey homogeneity of it all. And have we now got an emerging ‘European culture’, something different from the individual national geniuses which made up the old European culture?

J:

Well, the beginning of the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth is now the European national anthem.

S:

Yes, and I simply cannot listen to it anymore, so trivialized has it become.

J:

You know that Theodore Adorno, the left-wing writer, spoke earlier this century of Beethoven with the Cornflakes, the standardization of culture, mass-produced by a veritable culture industry.

S:

Don't many governments speak about the 'arts industry'? And most Western countries have arts ministries - need we say more? Just as we have a sex industry, a sports industry, so we have a culture industry. Don't you feel that, somehow, this is *imposed* on us? This movement towards homogeneity does not come from ordinary people, as opposed to the chattering classes and their paymasters. It's an agenda.

J:

Yes, in the sense that it's an agenda imposed on us by people who think they know best. If you listen to the official line in the media, you get the impression that the view from above is that the people are still a bit barbaric, still a bit primitive, prone to occasional bouts of political incorrectness, what they see as 'bigotry' or 'nationalist prejudice'. These people have to be reminded every so often that they must be more humane, that they must *like* people who are different from them; and, in the long run, that they should all try to be more *similar* to each other, not stand out from the crowd, or exaggerate group affiliations. A position Nietzsche abhors, since discrimination, in the sense of choosing between distinct alternatives, is just *part of life*. And now it is not just a crime, but a *thought* crime.

S:

But surely this is being done for the best of reasons, at least as they understand them. Because if we don't impose this sort of uniformity, we'll have Bosnias till the end of time. And none of us want that. So don't they have a point?

J:

But what they don't realize, my dear Thomas, is that it is *because* of this imposed uniformity, not *in spite* of it, that we will have more Bosnias. In fact Bosnia is just such a case in point: far more bloodshed in that part of the world is *because* of the artificiality of the *Pax Yugoslaviana*

than because of the existence of distinct ethnic groups living next to each other. I've even heard it said that liberals *create* Nazis.

S:

I think that is going a little over the top, my dear Frederick.

J:

Perhaps, but is there not a tiny grain of truth in the idea? Who would not lay some of the blame for the wars we have seen in the Balkans this century at the feet of the Western powers with their state-building designs, in total disregard of the deep ethnic differences of the region?

S:

At the risk of being facetious, might I say that when I hear 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' being played by a symphony orchestra, as I do now, I want to shoot the speakers out of which such drivel is emanating. If that's what it means to say that liberals create Nazis, then so be it.

J:

Totalitarian Muzak, brought to you by McDonalds...

S:

The more you tell people to be nice, the less they'll do it. And again, if I may hark back to religion as it has been practised throughout the centuries - religion does not tell people again and again to be nice. Religion brings people up in a certain way, imposes a set of values on them, a hierarchy and a structure, and lets people get on with it, within those boundaries. One has an enormous amount of freedom *within a structure*, and that is not as paradoxical as it sounds. If you come to me, having lost your way, and you ask me whether you should turn right or left, let me ask you: would you be more free if I told you you *must* go right, or if I said to you, 'It's up to you - you have to work it out yourself, and all I can tell you is that you'd better go the right way!'? Now, we have no structure, simply the bland injunction, 'Be nice'.

J:

Nietzsche's whole point is that such a structure should be imposed, but it cannot be religious. There must be another way.

S:

But does Nietzsche differ all that much from the liberal humanist on that score? The liberal humanist says, 'Nietzsche was right - God is dead, religion is dead; so we have to find another structure to impose on people' - namely, a structure whose basic axiom is, 'Be nice to others, especially the less fortunate, because in some ineffable way they are better than you, and you are

guilty'. And who is less fortunate than whom, and what being nice *means* in practice, depends on our best available theories in sociology, psychology and anthropology.

*J:*

He would say they've got a large part of that outlook from what you would call late Christianity, and what he would call straight Christianity. But leaving that aside, he would also say that if you want the possibility of evolutionary growth - another of the tenets of both liberal humanism and élitist anti-humanism - you have to permit the harsh side, the dark and destructive side. Without destruction there can be no creation, and without struggle there can be no great victory. If, on the other hand, you want wall-to-wall Beatles Muzak such as we're listening to right now, then carry on as you have been doing for the last two centuries.

*S:*

I accept that there is at least a superficial coherence to the Nietzschean view in this respect, and in this it differs from the liberal outlook, which has incoherence at its very core. On the one hand we are told to value the unfortunate, the vulnerable, the dependent; and on the other our society aborts them, euthanases them, extinguishes millions of them from the face of the Earth. Why? because the liberal also values *autonomy*, the freedom to 'choose'. To choose what? To negate the better values of liberalism itself, by pretending that there is no ugliness, no handicap, that people are better off dead than dependent? Is this not the paradox at the heart of every liberal society, that it forces people to be free to destroy its very foundations?

*J:*

I detect a whiff of Nietzsche again - cruelty and destruction in the name of evolutionary growth!

*S:*

Which ends in totalitarianism. So is Nietzsche not the liberal's philosopher after all; and the totalitarian's? And are these not two sides of the same materialistic coin?

*J:*

If you mean, 'Can there really be good without evil, pleasure without pain?', then I reply, 'No'. The greatest works of art contain the greatest cruelty, the greatest pain, the greatest struggle. Without these, you have nothing but Muzak and video nasties. If I may hazard an unscientific guess, I am pretty sure the market for video nasties fell apart in Bosnia when the war started, and that the part of the UK where there is the smallest market for such items is Northern Ireland. When cruelty and death, that is, *life*, stares you in the face, you have no taste for the ersatz.

S:

But the liberal response is obvious - video nasties are hardly a high price to pay for relative peace and stability. If the loss of great art is what it takes to have peace, then so be it.

J:

And yet does the liberal humanist really think that life will lie down compliantly forever? You yourself pointed out the cruelty at the heart of the liberal system. Why should we believe it will not get even crueller? And that life will not reassert itself again, as in every society which lives by an artificial structure which is contrary to human nature?

S:

Can we not say, then, that the dialectic between the Nietzschean and the liberal is summed up in the question, 'Which is better - bread and circuses or meat and warfare?'

J:

Admirably summed up, my dear Thomas.

S:

And what if the bread and circuses are guaranteed to lead to an even greater form of warfare and barbarism than even Nietzsche could have imagined?

J:

Highly problematic - we might be on the cusp of the new millennium, but that doesn't mean we can see into the future, old man. And don't forget that we mustn't look at things from too enclosed a space. We do not know how the emerging power of Asia will affect the world in the future, for one thing. Far from seeing the European Union, as so many so-called sceptics do, as the triumph of German totalitarianism, we can equally plausibly see it as nothing more than a framework for managed decline. Dictators and world conquerors have tried, for several millennia, to force the European peoples and nationalities into one by the sword. And again we see an attempt to bring Europe together, only *this* time in decline, as a way of fending off competition from other regions such as Asia and the Americas.

S:

If I recall, Jacques Delors made several references to Charlemagne, didn't he?

J:

Yes, because the leaders of the new Europe like to think of European history as developing linearly to an Omega point, if I may borrow an expression from Teilhard de Chardin. Whereas previous attempts at unification failed, at least in the long term, because they were carried out by

the sword, this time we are told that it shall be achieved with the consent, nay the enthusiasm, of the masses...

*S:*

Let us leave aside the odd unhelpful referendum result.

*J:*

Indeed.

*S:*

And we are to have our glorious unity under the banner of Beethoven and his Ninth!

*J:*

So let us also leave aside the fact that Beethoven wanted to dedicate his Third Symphony to Napoleon, and then crossed that out when he crowned himself Emperor!

*S:*

The modern European cadres don't appeal to Napoleon, of course, though in reality Napoleon was one of the great European federalists! They like to think of themselves as Carolingians, but that's safe because it's too long ago for anyone to care about it.

*J:*

And in Nazi Germany, many of the ministries, up to 1938, were named after parts of the Carolingian empire. There was a great worship of the Carolingian achievement in that movement.

*S:*

Ignoring, of course, that what Charles the Great achieved was a unified Catholic empire under the spiritual leadership of the pope! Conveniently forgotten, of course, as with most European history!

*J:*

The point, my dear Thomas, was the unification, not the Catholicism. Nevertheless, as an historian once said to me, if in a hundred years we have a radically centralized European state, who knows how the rulers will deal with a man like Hitler, who wanted to federate Europe - by force, admittedly, but then so did Charles the Great, and he succeeded; moreover, Hitler wanted an ultimately peaceful German imperium. One wonders, if Hitler had not killed so many innocent people, perhaps he would end up on the cover of European Union history books, in a positive light! Here was a German who wanted to create a new order among the European peoples, through force. So did Napoleon. But the difference from the modern EU is that,

allegedly, it is all being done with consent. And the claim is that we have progressed from the barbarism of the great dictators.

*S:*

And haven't we? The current 'European project' is clearly more peaceful than any that have been undertaken before.

*J:*

Perhaps - perhaps, at least for now. Will it be peaceful in the future? And even if it is, won't the price be Beethoven with your Cornflakes?

*S:*

Again, a small price to pay, is it not, for concord and harmony among our great European peoples?

*J:*

Concord and harmony, such as there is at the moment - itself debatable - only ever exists among peoples who are declining, and who need to huddle together for mutual protection.

*S:*

Well, the federalists in Britain do, it is true, appeal regularly to Britain's decline, her loss of Empire, and so on, to support their project. What other place can Britain have in the world if not as part of such a powerful bloc as the EU? This is their claim, at least.

*J:*

I don't deny that it is possible to build powerful federations, and for there to be broad consent among the peoples who are brought together, at least after they have got used to being together. Otherwise no empire would last more than a few years. The point is that the coming together itself rarely happens successfully by consent. Even the USA required bloody wars, including of course the Civil War, for federation to succeed.

*S:*

Perhaps one can also regard the First and Second World Wars as European civil wars? Perhaps, in fifty years, European children will read about these wars in their history books as proto-wars of European unity?

*J:*

'As Europe struggled to become whole, through the slaughter it will now avoid, thanks to the Herculean efforts of such farsighted visionaries as Kohl and Mitterand...'

S:

Apparently there is already in existence a Euro-history book which says that Agincourt was not a victory for the English crown, but a loss for the French because their horses all had diarrhoea. The idea being that it is no longer politic to blame a European nation for being defeated, for getting anything wrong.

J:

So what are they going to do about Hitler? Already some critics say that the chapters on him in some history books are dangerously bland and lacking in righteous indignation.

S:

In a sense, then, are they not acclimatising the memory of Hitler, and hence of Nietzsche - at one remove - to contemporary European norms? Yes, they were 'monsters', but we can still bring them in from the cold, so it is thought. They were, on this view, an inevitable part of the evolution of the European idea.

J:

This idea of 'the end of history' - remember Fukuyama's book - seems to be casting its shadow over politics and society. Everything can be brought in, harmonised with everything else in larger and larger systems. It's almost a Hindu way of thinking! Even the demons can come in from the cold.

S:

But maybe that's the way the humanist project has to function if it is to survive. In the coming European brotherhood, everyone must be brothers; as soon as people are no longer brothers, they become outsiders -

J:

- and possible monsters -

S:

- and a possible threat. So in a sense it has to keep growing on its host, like a parasite, or else it dies.

J:

If I may put it more prosaically, if the system does not internalize the nature of its own enemies, it will eventually be overcome by them. There's almost a cancer metaphor in the offing here. As Nietzsche would say, you go against the nature of the body, you take over the body - in this case the body politic - and you keep on agglomerating more and more alien matter. Why is it that *On the Genealogy of Morals*, one of the major acts of intellectual terrorism in Europe in the last

two hundred years, is published by Cambridge University Press? After all, it is rank intellectual terrorism.

*S:*

It's a way of neutralizing it.

*J:*

It's almost like Holst's *Planets*, where Mars, which stands for war, is incredibly violent, the sound is demonic in a way - and yet it is all integrated into a generalized 'coming together'. It's almost as if we've reached the point where, although political incorrectness is the last secular sin, there is a dream that even it can be neutered by absorption and conversion into the material of the host.

*S:*

But is that only a dream, or does the European Project carry the seeds of its own destruction?

*J:*

It may collapse through not being able to ingest this sort of material. Maybe, in the end, there is meat that is just a bit *too* strong, too raw and bloody. They may well choke on it.

## **Chapter 3**

### **ROOM 101, DOWNING STREET**

*Location: a park in central London*

*Jonathan:*

So, my dear Thomas, you've started reading *1984* as a result of Tony Blair's electoral triumph?

*Samuel:*

I have to tell you, I felt so depressed as a result of the election, I felt so powerless, that I started reading it - it was the only act of rebellion I could think of.

*J:*

We're now dominated by the reign of the plastic people. But why this connection between Blair's victory and *1984*? I find it a little hard to fathom, old man.

*S:*

Well, it's not so much the fact that the Tories got thrashed - they deserved it - but that although everything seemed to change, and a wave of euphoria swept the country, I knew that nothing had changed, everything would remain the same. One set of middle managers replaced by another set. I thought of Orwell's book - Eastasia, Eurasia, who were Oceania at war with? It didn't matter. Who was ruling them? Identities didn't matter - just the Party. And so it seems here and now: one big party, Tory, Labour, Liberal Democrat - it's all the same. And the electorate know it, which is why they are so volatile, and ready simply to vote out of office whomsoever's in power, in the forlorn hope of change. They lurch from one side to the other, but they stay on the same ship.

*J:*

So you wanted the Tories to get a kicking, and they got it. So what's the problem?

*S:*

I wanted something different.

*J:*

You didn't want so many Eurosceptics to be put out, isn't that right?

S:

Perhaps, but everyone agrees they are the only politicians left with any character, with any individuality, with any real *beliefs*.

J:

You're right about the vote being essentially an anti-incumbent one. The people came out in their droves and, in the quiet of the voting booth, asked themselves: 'How do I get the Tory out?' Hence the massive tactical voting, which took even Blair and Ashdown by surprise. Blair said later he only expected a majority of about 45.

S:

Yes, they voted in the most anti-incumbent fashion possible, even to the extent of voting for the Sportsmen's Alliance Anything but Mellor Party!

J:

I think there was a special anti-incumbent sentiment in Putney, old man.

S:

So now you know why I started reading *1984*. How does power work? How is it possible to have democracy without freedom, a perpetual revolution without any change? OK, so resorting to Orwell's nightmare was perhaps a little extreme, but I must tell you how startled I was by the accuracy of the book. I'd read it before as a teenager, but understood hardly anything.

J:

It's partly based on Dante's *Inferno*. Hell is where Winston is tormented by O'Brien in the bowels of the Ministry of Love. Heaven is a strange sort of individualistic concept for Orwell, and is embodied in Winston's days in the room with Julia, looking at the paperweight and the concrete reality it represents, in contradistinction to the monstrous denial of the past carried out by the Party. The meaningless greyness of the first part of the novel is a kind of purgatory, in a

modernist Fritz Lang sense. And of course you have the inner and outer circles, represented by the Inner Party and the Outer Party.

S:

He didn't consciously model the book on Dante, did he?

J:

Oh, yes. It's in his letters and remarks of the period.

S:

But it's astonishing how accurate the book is, indeed how increasingly accurate it is becoming, if you know what I mean. It's not just the familiar things that everyone knows, such as the telescreens monitoring everyone - done today in a myriad ways, by closed circuit television, interactive multimedia and computing, plastic money, and so on - but the reality control, the doublethink, the destruction of family life, the social control, the drudgery of work...

J:

You remember the Parsons, the family that lives next door - Mr. Parsons, the boring drudge who exudes cold sweat and lives for the next Party rally, who can talk about nothing but pig iron production and the latest economic figures...

S:

The way everyone rabbits on nowadays about economic growth, whatever that is, the markets, the latest inflation figures...just the same.

J:

Although Orwell was very much having a go at his own side, the sort of boring obsession with economics he found in left-wing groups up and down the country. The book is full of 'in' jokes against left-wingers and their ideology, even though he too was on the left, in an unctuously humanist sort of way. In the book, the proles are officially worshipped as the great workers sustaining society and making military victory possible with their endless labours, while in

reality the Party despises them and regards them as so much worthless cattle, drinking, urinating in public bars, stinking...

S:

At that level, the book is clearly an anti-socialist rant. But so much of it is relevant to modern society, particularly all the ways, subtle and not so subtle, in which public opinion is manipulated, people are degraded, brainwashed into thinking there is such a thing as meaningful political change - for the better.

J:

That is where the nature of modern censorship is so important to understand. If you look at the way the Party uses censorship to control opinion in *1984*, it's ultimately based upon power, brute force. For all the nefariousness of memory holes for discarding unwanted facts, copious alteration of newspapers and books to fit in with the latest Party line, it is all based in the end on the Party's ability to inflict physical pain, not so much on the proles but upon their own errant members. That is what keeps everything together. Modern liberals would say that society needs a certain amount of standardization, it needs people to hold to roughly similar viewpoints, but it does not rely on naked physical force to get its way.

If you look at what goes on in the cellars of the Ministry of Love, people have their teeth kicked out, they're starved, beaten senseless, tortured - it's physical, and ultimately based on the primal fear that everyone has, though it differs from person to person. For Winston, of course, it's rats.

S:

We don't have that, of course, but we do have other things, for instance Waco, which is an example of reality control since it is a fact that the ATF and FBI burnt down the Waco compound using flame-throwing tanks - it is on film, thoroughly documented. And not just that, but the lies and distortions of reality that surrounded the way the Waco case was presented to the

public. Sure, David Koresh did not sound like the easiest person to get along with, and perhaps had a major personality problem. But the people who were there stayed of their own free will, it was not some den of child abuse and brainwashing; it was a sect, for sure, following a false prophet, but I wasn't aware that that was against the law in the USA.

*J:*

Wait a minute, old man. The FBI and ATF say the Branch Davidians set fire to their own complex, whether by design or by accident, after the bungled raid on the complex which led to the shooting of one of their own men.

*S:*

Shot by another one of their own men who had already entered the building, *not* by any of the Davidians, as is proven by the film, which itself has hardly been seen on mainstream television. Whether it was an accident or not is hard to say, though it's hard to imagine how it could have been an accident, given that the officer who was shot was on the roof outside the room his colleagues had already entered - the shots that came through the walls out of the room were clearly government bullets from a government automatic weapon, fired outwards, but at whom? There were no Davidians on the roof! The entire fiasco was reality-controlled in truly Orwellian fashion, from beginning to end. A careful government-initiated media campaign of vilification in order to soften up the public - just like the Two Minutes' Hate in *1984* - so that the public was convinced these were dangerous lunatic cultists, who needed to be sorted out. And they were - over eighty dead, women and children gassed by the government in their blockaded cellar, and the complex razed to the ground. The government had said they were going in to save the children from sexual abuse, an allegation proven to have been pure fiction, according to evidence from the survivors, and all other circumstantial evidence. The whole government campaign rested on false allegations by one or two renegades from the compound who had fallen out with Koresh and wanted to pay him back.

J:

So you're saying Waco was some sort of government plot? Steady on, old man.

S:

They marched in and burnt the whole thing down. Their own citizens. And also British citizens, since some had followed Koresh away from the Seventh Day Adventists, from which the Branch Davidians were a breakaway.

J:

But why would the US government have done something as monstrous, and frankly difficult to believe, as you say?

S:

To set an example, no doubt. To show that religion must not get out of control, but must remember that the highest authority is the Party, as O'Brien would have said - or rather, the state, since parties matter less and less in Western society.

J:

So you would say that under the bland censorship of Radio 4 and the luvvie brigade, there does indeed exist the possibility of physical violence if people step too far out of line?

S:

Well, yes. I mean, these acts, of which Waco is the most egregious in recent times - but there are others, such as the Randy Weaver shootout and various showdowns the government has with people who are either law abiding or else guilty of offences which are minor in comparison to the brute force used against them - these sorts of confrontation are symptomatic of the way the US government - and I take the US government to be emblematic of your average Western liberal democracy, in respect of how it would act in certain circumstances - will act to back up democracy with physical power. That's why the recent movie, *Beavis and Butthead Do America*, has gives such a disturbing portrayal of the ATF and FBI. I'm *sure* the makers of that movie had

Waco in mind, and what it shows is that this cynical picture of big government has filtered through into popular culture, to the extent that most Americans don't even trust their government any more.

*J:*

An interesting extension of what American blacks have considered for a long time, that both state and federal governments are institutionalised opponents of the Negro population, almost occupying powers, given the status which blacks see themselves as having, of second-class citizens who always find the law against them when it comes to a confrontation with whites. Now it's the *whites* who see government ranged against them. What rap music has wailed about for many years, Beavis and Butthead are now echoing for devotees of popular, semi-trashy white culture.

If we turn to Britain for a moment, and look at censorship of the media and other forms of communication, particularly artistic and political in the last twenty or thirty years, we can see that it has been varied. There seems almost to be a confusion among would-be censors as to what exactly they should censor! Let us not return at length to pornography, which we've already covered in another conversation, but I note that liberalism increasingly can't ban forms of pornography except for the very sadistic and perverted kind, such as necrophilia, paedophilia, acts involving farm animals, etc. But even to be associated with censorship of that sort of extreme material causes a lot of pain in the liberal mind.

*S:*

Well, *Crash* has just been censored by Westminster City Council.

*J:*

Ah yes, the movie about people getting their jollies from watching car accidents. I trust you have seen it, Thomas?

S:

It wasn't on my 'must see' list, to be frank.

J:

If you wanted to see it you wouldn't need to worry if you were in Westminster. You could walk just a few hundred yards beyond the boundaries of that council, into Camden, and see it as often as you like!

S:

I'm gratified to know that.

J:

And even Camden Council, or rather the feminist-dominated women's committee, banned *9 1/2 Weeks* in the 1980s, but you could have walked into Westminster and seen it. And that indicates the degree of confusion that exists about censorship in this society. There are certain things they want to censor, in particular forms of religious fundamentalism, particularly Islamic but also restorationist Christian, and forms of extreme political radicalism of both Right and Left, though more the right than the left since the end of the Cold War. That is a relative given in this society, for example among the Jewish lobby: extreme anti-Zionist or pro-Palestinian literature, much of which emanates from the extreme Left, especially the Trotskyists, is very hard to find in your average high street bookshop; and so it has been pushed into conceptual ghettos on the fringes of society.

Look at Jim Allen's play *Perdition*, in the 1980s. Allen was a para-Trotskyist - whether he was ever a member of the Socialist Workers' Party, for instance, is neither here nor there, as he was a cultural and intellectual fellow traveller - and he wrote this play called *Perdition*, which received a reading in the Conway Hall, in Red Lion Square in central London. This venue is a refuge for 'outlawed' opinion, and was set up by a small, Protestant 'ethical society', which stands for absolute free speech - although they tried to ban the National Front from using their

premises. In any case, the play was read there under the auspices of various left-wing and Arab groups -

S:

Was it performed in the West End?

J:

It was scheduled to be put on at the Royal Court's 'upper theatre', but was banned by Stafford Clark, who now has his own company but was artistic director of that theatre at the time. It was banned because there were many historical errors in it, as was pointed out by establishment Jewish historians such as Martin Gilbert. Allen's supporters also acknowledge this. But, after the play had been cleaned up, it was still considered too anti-Zionist to be performed in the West End or at any major theatre. The play said that the Zionists in Palestine collaborated with the Nazis to get certain rich Jews out of Nazi Germany, while allowing their poorer brethren to go to their deaths. And there are indeed documented instances of that, as shown by anti-Zionist Jewish writers such as Alfred Lilienthal and Leni Brenner. You could turn it around and say... so what? Rich people in groups who are under threat will always find friends, and will always find a way out. Put in those terms, it's less controversial than it was made to seem. However, it was controversial enough to upset a large number of people, and was regarded as a left-wing view that was not acceptable. So the play was blacklisted, as was Allen himself, who has hardly been heard of since.

S:

But it wasn't government censorship, was it?

J:

No, it was a combination of denunciation by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, by the Chief Rabbi, by key Jewish figures in the Tory party and the Labour party, by the liberal media, and the knowledge that Trotskyists did not accept the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Many liberal-

minded people don't like what Israel has done to the Palestinians in the last fifty years; however, it is accepted that the Jewish people have the right to a state, which Arabs, Trotskyists and others regard as occupied Palestinian territory.

S:

So was there a threatened boycott of any theatre which staged Allen's play?

J:

Stafford Clark and the people associated with him didn't want their careers ruined by this incident. There is a feeling that if you say certain things and associate yourself with certain tendencies you will find it very difficult to get work in the future. You can go back to your attic and tap away on your computer and write forty volumes, but they won't be published, or if they are they will, to use the words of David Hume, fall still-born from the press. They won't be reviewed - unless you make yourself into such a hate figure that you become a *bête noire*, the victim of the ritualised *auto da fé* of this society - someone like David Irving, for instance, who has made a career out of being as unacceptable as possible on all sorts of fronts. But I'm sure the hierarchy of the Royal Court Theatre didn't want that to happen to them. From a purely liberal point of view, they should have said: 'Here is a play which disprivileges the existence of Israel, which is pro-Palestinian - but it expresses a viewpoint on history, and this is a democracy, and as far as we're concerned it can go ahead.' It might be a cliché, but it's still true, that a democracy isn't worth its name if it can't allow the expression of dissident views, including radical Left and Right, and in our society radical libertarian views, pro-Muslim views –

S:

Muslim views, at least ones of a more orthodox nature, don't get much of an airing...

*J:*

No, that's one of the demonised viewpoints, and people are well aware that the Muslim ghetto and the far Right ghetto - even though in this society they're opposed to each other - do overlap, and share certain ideological and cultural views.

*S:*

Multiculturalism means everyone living together happily, but not everyone's voice being given a fair hearing.

*J:*

The multicultural society is a melting pot which allows a certain degree of fragmentation, but in the end has to censor certain viewpoints, at least relatively by not giving them access to the mainstream media.

*S:*

Real freedom of speech would be if the current head of the Muslim 'parliament', if there is one, being allowed to have a half-hour slot on Radio 4 prime time to denounce the excesses of Western liberalism. That would be real free speech. Censorship doesn't work by government passing an act of parliament saying 'Thou shalt not read X' -

*J:*

Relative censorship.

*S:*

It's informal but effective.

*J:*

It's through networks and involves a conjunction of circumstances. Go back to the Jim Allen case, because you can pinpoint the way it works. He writes a play, he's a far left-winger and so can't be accused of being a 'Nazi', or of being politically incorrect, he's not a religious fundamentalist, indeed he's a militant atheist. But he hits one button too many - it's a play too

far. What's he done? He's attacked the existence of a modern democratic state, he's attacked a minority which suffered heavily in Europe in the middle of this century, he's trodden on all sorts of liberal toes, albeit from a leftist angle - the play is too crude, he had to retract certain factual errors. It's all a bit too brutal and offensive, and if you're liberal minded you really don't want to be associated with that sort of thing. There's free speech and free speech, old boy.

S:

It's all very similar to the Helen Demidenko case in Australia, which became a few years ago the most famous literary scandal in Australian history. She wrote a novel about her experiences as a child of Ukrainian immigrants, whose family was involved in crimes against the Jews in World War II. It was presented as the search of a young, modern Australian girl for the truth about her ethnicity, her family's past, and so on - all very chic to the literary establishment. Only she clearly played down those crimes in her book, trying more to understand than to condemn the most horrendous atrocities, and even going so far as to blame the Jews for what the Ukrainians did to them!

Now, despite the fact that the tone of her book was not one that endeared it to the Jewish community, and would have been condemned as rank fascism if written as a work of history, or as a political tract, Demidenko won prize after prize, and instant fame. But, it turned out, her name was not Helen Demidenko, but Helen Darville, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Darville from Scunthorpe. She had carried out a massive literary fraud, and the controversy raged for months afterwards. Needless to say, she was condemned in vitriolic terms by Jews, non-Jews, and every columnist in the country, and she has not been heard from since.

An important point about her case is that Darville did a disservice to her work by getting quite a few of her facts wrong about what went on in the Ukraine in the 1930s, as was pointed out early on by a number of columnists, including a prominent Jewish academic. She went overboard in blaming the Jews for the entire Russian Revolution. As a result she has been

castigated for her historical inaccuracy, which has been used as an indirect means of accusing her of rank anti-Semitism.

*J:*

She could claim, for her part, that it's a novel, and that the Ukrainian characters, including the narrator, are telling it as they saw it. Inevitably, especially after the lapse of several decades, they are going to have subjective, biased, even prejudiced views of what they experienced.

*S:*

There was, of course, the complicating factor of her impersonating a descendant of Ukrainians who had been in the war -

*J:*

An allowable artistic device, surely.

*S:*

I suppose. But the point is that true multiculturalism would be allowing her to publish and say, 'Look, historical accuracy in a novel is not central. I'm not writing a history textbook, I'm telling it the way the Ukrainians see it, and there can be no doubt that many, though not all, Ukrainians, do explain their experiences under the Soviets, and in the war, in this way.'

*J:*

Absolutely. That's the way they see it, and they have a right to see it their way. And Black Americans have the right to say, as many do, 'Forget the Holocaust for a moment, and think about the millions of dead in the Western slave trade.' Each group sees things from its own viewpoint. There is also a methodological point which should be mentioned, that in the 1970s and 80s the most fashionable cultural philosophies were Deconstructionism and Post-structuralism, viewpoints which embodied pure relativism, saying almost that each viewpoint is as good as any other viewpoint...

S:

Rather extreme and unjustifiable, I would say.

J:

Perhaps, but these theories have been, and still are, enormously influential, and have profoundly affected the way many historians operate. Many historians would say there *is* no historical truth, at least no incontestable interpretation of contingent historical facts. The fact is that there are radical neo-liberal views that would say, to Allen and others, ‘Go ahead, publish, put on your play - it’s a viewpoint.’ Moreover, the Ukrainians were undoubtedly subject to terrible massacres in the 1920s and 30s, and have a right to have their viewpoint aired, even if it means the Establishment’s having to come to terms with the fact that there seems to have been more than one genocide in Europe this century.

S:

We don’t hear much about the Ukrainians and others, such as the Armenians.

J:

Here is a woman, Darville/Demidenko, using artistic licence and pretending to be an Australian-Ukrainian with something to say, with a viewpoint. Is that any different to Elie Wiesel? All groups are like this, Ukrainian, Irish, Armenian, Zanzibarian.

S:

Which makes me ask, my dear Frederick, what determines which views get a decent airing in this society and which don’t? I mean reality control, to use Orwell’s term, depends on the identity of the controller.

J:

I think it’s a mixture of things, and one of the reasons why we are not assailed all the time with the suffering of the Armenian people under the Turks, or of the kulaks and peasantry under the Soviets, or of a multitude of other cases of massacre and misery, is that the various groups who

have suffered greatly but are not talked about very much is that they are not well represented among Hollywood producers.

But among liberals you do find a certain relativization of suffering, and the view that what happened to the Jews this century is not unique, and that you must class the Armenians, and the Zanzibarian Arabs, and the Ibo, and the Cambodians, and the Ukrainians, and even the Irish famine victims, as being in the same boat: all human, all done down, all have a story to tell, all have rights, all must be compensated in some way, as for instance has happened to aboriginal groups in Australasia and the Americas.

*S:*

But what most liberals say is that there was something unique about the Holocaust, in terms of its character as the attempt to exterminate an entire people by means of the highest technology at the disposal of the state, that it was carried out scientifically and with a precision of method unequalled in human history.

*J:*

Well, that may or may not be true, but here we are getting into a very difficult and emotionally-charged area in which talk of censorship is highly controversial. So I think we should look at the question in a broader context, putting aside the so-called 'revisionist' arguments which are held by a range of obscure writers around the world, who say that either the Holocaust did not occur, or if it did the figures were grossly exaggerated - although it must be admitted that the official Auschwitz death total has been reduced from around 4 million to 1.1 million, and that Prof. Norman Stone, ex-professor of history at Oxford, has said the highest figure for the Holocaust is 4.5 million. The broader point is that there is a degree to which absolute free speech is never tolerated in a democratic society, though there is a relative ordering of what is and is not to be permitted. It is noticeable, for instance, that in this society all talk of race is highly moderated

and regulated, in terms of what can and cannot be said. Talk of differences between races has virtually been banned from mainstream academic and media discussion.

S:

Although we have had a recent resurgence of so-called ‘scientific racial theory’ in the form of the book *The Bell Curve*, co-written by a Harvard academic who was also Jewish, and which has a mainstream publisher and is available in your local Waterstones - or was, though maybe not now.

J:

A book which provoked an enormous outcry in the USA, I believe, and has led to a flurry of books attacking it as ‘racist’, provocative, and so on. Interestingly, many of the books written against *The Bell Curve*, when you boil it down, end up saying it shouldn’t have been published. And you have some other books along similar lines, like *The G Factor* by the Edinburgh academic Chris Brand, which was dropped by the publisher and still hasn’t been published, and which led to Brand’s being virtually ostracized at his own university.

S:

But he has taken his battle onto the World Wide Web, documenting the entire case. And there is a book on measuring intelligence, by an academic psychologist, published by Routledge a few years ago, which tried not to couch the findings in racial terms, but which made pretty clear implications.

J:

So you have this virtual ban on mainstream discussion of controversial issues like the Holocaust, the study of race, and various other issues. The very idea of talking about them makes the liberal establishment uneasy, because of their associations with certain ideological movements of a more or less fascistic nature, which dominate our view of twentieth century history. At the same time, however, the issues are being discussed at the fringes, not just the fringes occupied by

extremists and the so-called 'loony right', but by mainstream academics, in a book here and a book there, in cultural magazines, surfacing every so often in a newspaper only to disappear again.

S:

Look at the book on race by Prof. Baker of Oxford, published by Oxford University Press in the 1970s, hailed as one of the most thorough and up-to-date scientific studies of race and racial difference yet published. Now it can only be reprinted by an obscure American publishing house no one has ever heard of.

J:

What this seems to show is that much of the censorship which exists today is relativistic, depending on pressure here, pressure there, certain things are in, certain things are out. Look at the two concepts of sex and race. In the 1860s and 70s, virtually no intellectual discussion of sexuality was possible - it was not permitted. The only intellectual book on sexuality was Kraft-Ebbing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which was written in Latin! Now, the entire society is inundated with talk, from the most highbrow to the most vulgar, of sexuality -

S:

And usually, the more perverted the sexuality which is discussed, the better!

J:

Well, almost anything can be said. But as for race, virtually nothing can be said now, but in the 1870s and 80s *anything* could be said - the situations are exactly reversed. And it was no accident that the famous book by the French aristocrat Gobineau, *An Essay on the Inequality of Man*, written in the 1830s, was one of the founding works of modern anthropology. A slightly embarrassing fact for anthropologists, but a fact nonetheless.

S:

And then there's Konrad Lorenz in modern times, who founded the discipline of ethology, the study of animal behaviour. He was a racial elitist, was he not?

J:

Yes -

S:

But he was never censored, and he won the Nobel Prize, didn't he?

J:

Yes...his books cause a certain shuddering in left-liberal circles, partly because his viewpoint, although not racist as such, is biological and based on radical Darwinism. His Nobel prize was for his work on animals and behavioural psychology. I remember a left-wing biology lecturer once saying to me, 'There's a book in our library which I try to keep hidden under the shelf.' I said, 'Oh, what's that?', and he replied, 'Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression*. It's a brilliant book, but I don't like my students reading it.' I said, 'Why? You're not in favour of censorship, are you old man?' To which he responded, 'Hardly. I'd allow everything, myself, but at the same time Lorenz's theory of how territoriality and aggression are instinctive and biologically determined is not exactly a socially constructive thing for my students to read, is it?'

S:

This is it. In the modern academy, as I understand it, you cannot talk explicitly about such things. If you wanted to mention them, it would have to be obliquely, briefly, and with plenty of arguments against such views. You couldn't give a course of lectures on race, or on genetic influences on, say, intelligence - it simply couldn't be done. That's a form of censorship. No one tells you not to lecture on certain things, you just know you shouldn't, and what the consequences might be. Most censorship in our society is, in fact, *self*-censorship. No one passes

an edict, unlike Nazi Germany where there were public book burnings and everyone was invited along to watch.

*J:*

Or like the Soviet Union, where a certain proportion of books were taken to a secret annex of the Moscow Central Library, and stored there. You had this amazing mishmash of *Playboy* magazine next to Solzhenitsyn, highbrow banned books next to trash which ‘corrupted’ public morals.

*S:*

Well, they got that last bit right!

*J:*

And you had Robert Conquest’s books exposing the Ukrainian famine and the Great Terror of the 1930s, in both of which millions perished, next to novels by Harold Robbins. It was all lumped together, and party scribes would go over these texts, reading them, thinking about them, writing learned essays on why they were wrong, or decadent, and so on, seeing what elements of truth were in them that could be used by the system against the Western ideology from which such texts sprung.

*S:*

Say, doesn’t the British Library also have a room which contains material that is deemed ‘unsuitable’ for the general public?

*J:*

That’s true. It was revealed in the 1980s when a civil servant whistleblower who worked in the library went to the media, and later published an academic monograph on the subject! The area is called something like the Reserve Section. Eighty to ninety per cent of it is pornography - an overhang from a more prudish age, one suspects. But the system is illogical. Take Henry Miller. The editions of his pornographic novels which were published underground by Girodias in Paris

in the 1930s are in the closed section, but the ones published in the 1960s, 70s and 80s are on open access! So they're a bit confused as to whether or not to censor some of these sorts of work, or at least restrict their access...

S:

To those carrying out bona fide research.

J:

As I was when I checked the closed section in the early 90s.

S:

I'm sure your 'research' was above board, my dear Frederick.

J:

Indeed it was - wholly academic.

S:

But you must have come across some politically sensitive material in that section as well, no?

J:

There is.

S:

Isn't *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* one of those works not on open access?

J:

My experience of the British Library is that, in a sense, everything is available to those doing genuine research. There is, remember, a form of vetting, no matter how mild, for those wanting to use the library in the first place. Generally you need to say what your project is, and you get a pass for as long as you need the specific documents you want. I don't think undergraduates can get a permanent card, but academics can. You have to jump through a few hoops to get in, so I don't imagine your local paedophile would be allowed into the closed section in order to indulge himself, as it were.

S:

Sure, it's not exactly the Soviet Union - a few limitations, but not too severe, it seems.

J:

I tend to think it's almost a sort of peer group pressure...if someone sat in a nice wooden chair at the old Reading Room - now, of course, they're moving to the car park-bunker in Euston Road - and had on the table, say, Francis Parker Yockey's *Imperium*, or Gunther's *Racial Science*, or *The Protocols*, or Butz's *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, or some other extremist literature, and people were going by and looking over your shoulder, and librarians with their trolleys were glancing at what you were reading, there'd be a sort of frisson, you'd be looked at in an odd sort of way, and their eyebrows would arch slightly. I doubt anything would happen to you, it wouldn't be noted down, but there is a degree to which certain types of literature, no matter who reads them or why they're read, provoke a certain kind of reaction. And, perhaps, if you ordered such things through the inter-library loan system -

S:

It might be noted down.

J:

Yes, it just might. One type of literature we haven't mentioned is anarchist, which is not extreme left-wing, rather it's beyond the left. I am sure that a lot of anarchist literature, especially the material which extols violence and tells you how to do it, works such as *The Anarchist Cookbook* -

S:

Which I saw prominently displayed in large quantities in the local Waterstones.

J:

True, but I imagine that was something of a dare, and attempt by the owner to project an image of the shop as ‘cool’, as where you can get anything. Still, you won’t find it in the vast majority of bookshops, and anyone ordering it may well have their details marked for reference.

S:

I haven’t seen it in Waterstones since the stock went; I imagine it sold out, but I might be wrong.

J:

That particular shop is trying to say, ‘We can sell what we want’, and indeed they sold *The Bell Curve*, another hard-to-get book, though it has a mainstream publisher, as well as David Irving’s self-published biography of Goebbels. I should think this particular Waterstones is an exception.

S:

They’re not stocking Irving’s book on Nuremberg, and I haven’t seen *The Bell Curve* there in a long time. Maybe they were, er, ‘spoken to’. Irving can’t get his books published by mainstream houses anymore, and can hardly ever get his books on the shelves. Indeed shops like W.H. Smith take it straight off the shelves if they are alerted to the fact that they’re stocking Irving.

J:

Yes, that’s the way censorship works in this country now, and in the West generally.

S:

It’s informal.

J:

Whenever he publishes a book - and he’s basically engaged in high-quality vanity publishing now, with his own imprint, and his own publicity, and he drives a van stocked with his books around the country, trying to persuade shops to take them - whenever a book of his comes out, every major newspaper reviews it, he gets pages of comment; and yet no one will stock him.

S:

Well, he's too big to ignore, that's why he gets reviews.

J:

Yes, he's become a sort of iconographical hate figure, a conceptual *bête noire*, the victim of a periodic Hate Week, to go back to 1984.

S:

Hate Week, and the regular Two Minutes' Hate for members of the Party, is one of the things in 1984 that caught my eye as being so true of modern society. A Two Minutes' Hate against Irving, a Two Minutes' Hate against Jim Allen and his play *Perdition*, a Two Minutes' hate against Chris Brand, who was not off the television for a solid fortnight while his book and his ideas were being excoriated, and who now can't get his book published; though, thanks to the Internet, which the state is trying desperately to control, he has been able to take his war to the public, and tell them what his book is about, why the criticisms are unjustified, and so on.

Not that I'm totally against all forms of censorship, I should add. I agree with the liberal view that there should be *some* censorship of material which genuinely harms the common good, which promotes violence against the social order, and the like. But books which constitute sober attempts to document the events of the past, sober attempts to interpret politics or science, those sorts of books should, on the whole, be available at least to a wide range of intellectually-minded people. And they simply are not at the moment. If it weren't for the Internet, who would know Chris Brand's side of the story? What access has he had to the media to answer his critics? He was headline news for two weeks on the BBC, and now he's gone. So who's going to be the object of the next Two Minutes' Hate?

J:

But the contrary point, my dear Thomas, is that every society senses that there are certain 'in' books and certain 'out' books, that certain texts are disprivileged and others not. The interesting

thing about this society is that it is the first modern society which has said, ‘We are against censorship’. Every society before ours - and by ours I really mean the liberal dispensation which has taken root since the 1960s, but which was growing for a long time before that - would *never* have said it was against censorship. Anything sexually explicit, including what is incredibly tame by modern standards, was banned.

S:

And in the 18th century, for instance, anything which smacked of atheism...

J:

Yes, and censorship of such works would have been considered, not as a ‘dirty job’ which had to be done with a lot of hand wringing, but as a moral duty, as the right thing to do. Ours is the first society to carry out censorship of whole categories of politically, religiously and socially radical texts, whilst proclaiming officially its moral opposition to censorship.

S:

Hence the informality and anonymity of the process, which the writers who are censored not knowing most of the time whom even they are supposed to be fighting against.

J:

Indeed - freedom of expression enshrined in the written and unwritten constitutions of the West, censorship everywhere.

S:

Doesn’t that mean modern society is suffering from a sort of moral schizophrenia? And doesn’t that engender a confusion as to just *what* is to be censored?

J:

That’s why you often get some elements of the liberal state censoring something, and other elements promoting it. Reviews of books by an author you can’t find - such as Irving - alongside denunciations of videos which are available everywhere. There is, actually, a logic to the way

ensorship works in this society, but there's also a strong element of irrationality. This is seen in the fact that there is no coherent front against censorship. When, for instance, a play by a left-wing film-maker sympathetic to the IRA is made, you can wheel onto centre stage the talking heads you know will be in favour of it. But you could almost say that 90% of those talking heads would not be for it if it presented the Loyalist paramilitaries sympathetically. Or if it was film that looked at, say, Combat 18 and said they were human beings like the rest of us - a British version of the Australian film *Romper Stomper* - you know that the establishment would be against it.

The only movement that I can think of, which would be against censorship in *all* its forms, would be the Libertarian Alliance, which is a right-wing liberal individualist grouping, in the old sense of 'liberal', and which believes in total freedom of expression -

S:

And has no political influence whatsoever.

J:

Except when it aligns itself with larger groups that are in favour of allowing some particular thing which is censored at the moment. The L.A. defends freedom of expression no matter what the subject: they defend free speech for paedophiles, and supported Tom O'Carroll when he published his book *Paedophilia: The Radical Case*. O'Carroll was not, I think, a member of the L.A. but he did belong to the debating club which revolved around the philosopher Karl Popper in the 1980s, and which defended that 'open society'.

S:

And yet the viewpoint of the Libertarian Alliance is pretty much the view of the mainstream chattering class in the USA, or at least one significant part of it, since freedom of expression is sacred there, and censorship is virtually impossible.

*J:*

It's true to say that most of the literature we have been discussing is freely available in the USA, but it would be wrong to think you could go down to your local high street shop and buy it. You have to write to anonymous box numbers, search the Internet (which you can do here as well, of course), know about small movements that don't get much publicity, and so on. One analogy with Britain is hard core pornography, which you can get here, but you have to do a bit of work, know whom to contact...

*S:*

I'm sure you're not speaking from experience.

*J:*

Indeed not, my dear Thomas. The material, as I understand it, is accessible, but there is a degree to which society makes one feel grubby if one goes hunting for it.

*S:*

But the law protects freedom of speech in America in a way it doesn't here.

*J:*

That's right, which is why the issue is slippery and confused here. In the USA they have erected a jurisprudential ethic, a legal and constitutional structure which, let's face it, finds it hard to condemn anything which is in print.

*S:*

And Congress can't even think of passing a law that would ban a certain category of literature.

*J:*

What tends to happen is that the state is totally secular, but because there is a residual Protestant basis to the opinions of many people in American society, they, through religious pressure groups, influence politicians to steer the society in one direction rather than another. So, in a way, they end up with the same sort of mess we have here.

S:

Yes, they have books which, while available, are not the sorts of thing you would have on your bookshelf, or show your friends, or that you'd want the local sheriff to know about. And they'd never be made into a Hollywood movie, or a TV series.

J:

An interesting case in point is the novel called *The Turner Diaries*. This book has now been brought out by a mainstream American publishing house. Originally it was published underground by a fringe, extremist political organization, and sold tens of thousands of copies, which for an underground novel is an enormous number. What this mainstream house has done is to put a swastika on the front, and to get an orthodox, liberal ideologue to write a short, politically correct essay as an introduction, saying this is the most dreadful novel published in the latter part of the twentieth century - you have to read it because it is so frightening, you need to know what we're up against. William Pierce, who wrote the novel under the pseudonym of Andrew Macdonald, has allowed this to be done so he can get the book on the shelves of every bookshop in the country. I think it's in hardback, because that means they can increase the price, and claim it as a disincentive to certain impressionable people who might otherwise buy it. I say 'impressionable', because it has been claimed that the people who blew up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City - whether it was Timothy McVeigh and others, or others without him - were heavily influenced by the book, which contains just such a scene.

S:

Perhaps, but it's pretty clear that the explosion was supposed to be revenge for the government attack at Waco. If the guilty people were also influenced by *The Turner Diaries*, so much the worse for that book; and the murder of 168 people in the Murrah Building was, in any case, a heinous crime. Nevertheless, I think that if the FBI and ATF had admitted publicly that they burned down the Waco compound, killing over 80 innocent men, women and children, and had

they made a public apology and compensated the families of the victims, the Oklahoma bomb would not have happened. And I'm sure many Americans feel the same way.

*J:*

I believe *The Turner Diaries* is pretty bloodthirsty, by all accounts, though I don't imagine it is any more so than your average thriller, or *Robocop*, or whatever.

*S:*

Sure, it's not the violence per se which has caused the outrage, but the political dimension. *Robocop* is probably the most violent film I've ever seen, but the context is condemnation, of sorts, of the breakdown of law and order in society, a common theme of late twentieth-century Hollywood action movies.

*J:*

Sure, McVeigh, or whoever blew up the building in Oklahoma City, could have based his plan on *Rambo*, or *Terminator*, or one of a dozen other movies, and there would have been very little fallout.

*S:*

Perhaps a few screams from critics like Michael Medved, a bit of communal soul-searching, then - pass the popcorn, please, I like to chew when I'm watching a man's head being blown off! I mean, I can't imagine Sylvester Stallone would have been banned from ever appearing in another Hollywood movie. Imagine the ramifications!

*J:*

Here, with Oklahoma City, you have the single worst act of domestic terrorism - and now the novel which is supposed to have inspired it is published by a mainstream publisher, after a bout of ritual vilification.

S:

There's cynicism for you. Who said American isn't ruled by the Almighty Dollar? Or maybe it's the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* syndrome: there's this frisson, people want to know - what's this book *really* like?

J:

In a way it could be said that militant political incorrectness is the last taboo. It used to be sexual perversion, sado-masochism, and the like -

S:

All that literature is freely available, not just in the USA but here, in our own local Virgin Megastore.

J:

The Marquis de Sade has been available since about the 1960s, although at first not in every shop. Now it's stocked under 'Classics of Modern Literature'. No frisson there. But political incorrectness, especially ideological incorrectness, is the ultimate taboo for liberals. You have to be careful what you print and how you market it, because you might ruin your publishing house. But the market is there. You've got Camille Paglia with her political incorrectness about sex and gender, Thomas Sowell, a black intellectual with views about race that have made him an outcast, Herrnstein and Murray on genetics and intelligence - all of these have sold very well indeed, but it's not polite to praise them. If a male academic said what Paglia has said, he'd be out of a job, or a white who said what Sowell has said, or a non-Harvard non-Jew who said what Herrnstein said.

S:

And you've got Chomsky on multinationals, American government, Zionism - he would never have a voice if he were not a respected academic in other areas, and also Jewish.

*J:*

He has come out with anarchist, semi-conspiratorial rants against the whole American establishment -

*S:*

And even wrote the foreword to Faurisson's revisionist book on the Holocaust.

*J:*

Which outraged public opinion, no less than his extreme anti-Zionism has alienated the Jewish community.

*S:*

And yet he's allowed to publish freely, to appear on the media more than any other intellectual, to speak at venues up and down the country and across the world, even though he's always complaining that he's being censored. But the Jewish community says he's an example of how they are in fact not against censorship, because if they were they would have silenced him of all people. What's the expression again - the licensed court jester?

*J:*

Yes, he's the licensed dissident, the apostate it's generally OK to let into your university - although many campuses will not have him. Perhaps the extremism of his views is neutralized by his immense reputation in linguistics.

*S:*

Well, the same can't be said for Linus Pauling and his views in cancer and vitamins, which didn't escape censorship despite his Nobel Prize; nor William Shockley and his views on race and intelligence - his Nobel Prize didn't help much. And there are others.

*J:*

True, it is complicated. I imagine Chomsky is helped by the fact that he is a Jewish cultural insider with all the right contacts but all the wrong opinions!

*S:*

He says he had his views from an early age, and was writing politically subversive stuff before he even knew about linguistics.

*J:*

Perhaps it's because America has a polity and a culture which is believed by many European left-wingers to be well to the right of social democratic standards in the rest of the West, that the only permitted rebellious viewpoint is a straightforward leftist 'against-the system' viewpoint. The one that is really disprivileged in the USA is an 'ultra' viewpoint, basically a revolutionary right-wing perspective. Chomsky is tolerated despite being an anarchist - though he doesn't appear to advocate violence against the state - and despite believing that literature which is revisionist about the Holocaust should be tolerated, something which has caused him no end of grief. He gives the impression of being a genuine freethinker, of not being just another intellectual clocking into a viewpoint with a swipe card.

*S:*

If anyone challenges the American system for suppressing free speech, liberals can point to Chomsky and say, 'Well, we haven't suppressed him' - the licensed dissident. But he's loathed, particularly by the Jewish community.

*J:*

And yet he talks everywhere, and I'm not aware that he's ever been physically threatened.

*S:*

I'm sure he's had physical threats against him.

*J:*

But in comparison to someone like Irving, or Faurisson -

*S:*

Who get threatened on a regular basis, and sometimes even beaten up.

J:

And who get the ritualistic Trotskyist mob protests on their doorsteps at 5 in the morning.

S:

Irving, of course, has been banned from Australia. And I recall Chomsky's being banned from certain campuses.

J:

I know that there has been physical confrontation of Camille Paglia by militant feminists, on American campuses. She's perceived as a threat, because she says things like, 'Date rape's a load of nonsense', and she once said, 'The prospect of a rape that mightn't happen adds sexual excitement to an encounter between a woman and a man' - or something similar. Only Paglia could say it. And she's also said that 90% of Western culture worth preserving is produced, and has always been produced, by white men - and three cheers for them! Again, only Camille could say it. Both her and Sowell, as examples of 'allowed scapegoats', are very odd people, who could be dismissed as crazed eccentrics and who are relatively obscure from a professional academic viewpoint. And they are so dismissed, regularly.

S:

Getting back to *1984* if I might, my dear Frederick, there were other elements of it which I found had echoes in the modern world.

J:

Such as?

S:

Well, the *surveillance* aspect. Big Brother and modern surveillance of the populace seem to be to be merging almost entirely. In fact, a recent book by Simon Davies is called *Big Brother*, and examines the welter of techniques now being used, developed or contemplated by governments as ways of watching their populations. Closed circuit television, ID cards which are on the way,

biometric systems, psychometric testing, satellite monitoring, everything designed to watch a person's movements, and even more ominously, to penetrate their minds, understand their character - all of this is, to me, a kind of non-literary censorship; one's movements, and maybe thoughts, are censored, as they are in Orwell's dystopian nightmare.

*J:*

And warfare, of course. The Chechnyan leader Dudayev was killed by a Russian 'smart' missile after his car had been targeted from the heavens, and the Islamic terrorist Abu Ayash was killed by the Mossad after his mobile phone was detonated by remote control from an aeroplane.

*S:*

Yes, an important point, that modern surveillance is by and large an outgrowth of military technology. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying people should be allowed to do whatever they want in public -

*J:*

No public bonking in your ideal state then, old man?

*S:*

I'm afraid not, Frederick - you'll have to go elsewhere.

*J:*

I wouldn't dream of committing such an outrage against decency.

*S:*

You distract me. What I was saying, was that although there has to be regulation of public behaviour, the breakdown of moral and social codes, which has been so stark since the 1960s, all of these indirect, subtle and relatively unobtrusive ways of controlling people's behaviour, have gone into abeyance and their function has been taken over by the state. But since the state does not tend to act in a customarily sensitive fashion, but rather through law, through brute force - that's

all it knows - we are now so restricted and so inhibited that it is a form of censorship beyond what is necessary for public order and the common good.

*J:*

Well, the state does not have an overarching ethic in the way it used to - though contemporary liberals would vehemently deny that, saying that the role of the state is to keep society and individuals together despite the diversity and pluralism which exist, in religion, politics, race, culture, and so on - to prevent these differences from breaking out into open physical confrontation.

*S:*

But at what cost? A person cannot even walk down a main street anymore, without the knowledge that they are, frankly, being watched by cameras manned by anonymous officials of the state.

*J:*

Wait a minute, old man, from a modern liberal viewpoint one of the most serious dangers to the citizen is, quite simply, other citizens, and that all of these cameras drastically reduce the sorts of crimes of which everyone lives in such fear.

*S:*

Do I feel safer? Is crime deterred? It seems pretty well established that such monitoring has reduced certain sorts of *public* crime - but it also seems to be displaced from city centres to people's houses, in the form of burglaries. So, when I'm walking down the street I do feel a little bit safer; though I also know that if someone is intent upon attacking me they will do so whether I'm being watched or not. And I know there's probably a higher risk of my being burgled.

*J:*

There's also a paradox, in that while the citizenry is observed by the rulers, the rulers are never observed. In other words, we don't have a camera looking at the Cabinet, but they have a camera

looking at us. And we don't have a camera looking at the police, but they have one looking at us. Sure, we get to watch the politicians all the time, far more, than we ever used to, but what we're really watching is actors, role-playing. At the extreme, in wartime politicians occasionally have doubles, as happened in World War II.

*S:*

They're all so plastic and interchangeable nowadays that we might as well be watching doubles, or even triples! Yes, we see things now that we never would have dreamed of twenty years ago: cameras going into Cabinet at the first meeting of the Blair government, cameras in Downing Street - unthinkable until only a few years ago - we see cameras going in and out, the lobby, the scratches on the wall...we even see Cherie Blair in her night-dress at six in the morning!

*J:*

Set up by the *Sun*, apparently, by Murdoch - which would have pleased Tony no end, given that he went to Australia to see Rupert prior to the election to 'win his support'.

*S:*

He probably said, 'Rupert, don't you go filming my wife in her night-dress at six in the morning', and Murdoch probably replied, 'Up yours, you pommy baaaastard.'

*J:*

As long as Rupert said 'Vote Tony' on the day, I doubt that anything else would have mattered.

*S:*

We see things we've never seen before, and yet do we see anything?

*J:*

Remember the telescreens in *1984*: they're on all the time, they can't be turned off, the proles have them as background muzak to their drinking...and do we really look at all the advertisements that bombard us twenty-four hours a day, in the Tube, on buses, in the street, on TV, in newspapers? Most people don't really see them, they don't study them. There was a

collective psychic trauma in East Germany when communism collapsed. The Germans, being a serious-minded people, believed they had to *read* every single advertisement that went up, as though it was important public information. Well educated East German families would sit cretinously in front of their televisions studying each and every advertisement - they thought it was the new Marxism and they had to learn it! 'Beanz meanz Heinz. Fifty-seven varieties! Ja, so zat must mean zere are fifty-six varieties as vell as zis one ve are now looking at.'

S:

It is the new Marxism, in its way - more materialist propaganda, and even studied in our schools, where texts of advertisements are pored over for their deep literary and artistic qualities. The manipulators of public demand must be quietly very satisfied.

J:

And, like the telescreens, we can't turn it off. We have a proliferation of semi-pornographic media, invasive, ever present, and yet in a strange way it contains its own rebelliousness. In 19th century Britain, the sort of advertising we have today - Pamela Anderson half naked on a bearskin rug to advertise toothpaste - would have been considered virtually a 'Satanic' image. Now it's used as a staple - a rebellion against what the standards were then, and yet tamely conformist now. Conformism and rebellion in the same image, opposites together, so as to contain all true opposition.

S:

But that, my dear Frederick, is the essence of the modern liberal dispensation. In *1984*, the Party absorbs everything, including dissent. It writes its own counter-revolutionary book, it invents its own sedition - it is the author of its own manual of dissent against the Party, as Winston discovers to his horror. The Party is so strong, and understands itself so well, that it can create its own opposition, thereby neutralising all opposition, real or invented.

One might say that, despite all the parallels I see existing between *1984* and now, we haven't reached the stage, I don't think, where Western governments are producing their own dissenting material; but what we do have, on a lower level, is that just as the Party in *1984* produced pornography for the proles, so we have big business producing pornography for the masses, in effect with the connivance and consent of the government.

*J:*

Certainly it appears that Western liberal education is producing, shall we say, identikit morons, all brought up on the same intellectual junk food: people who can't even *understand* true left-wing ideas, or right-wing ideas, or, dare one say it, *any* ideas. And if you can't *understand* what constitutes a rebellious idea, or a conformist idea, you will never do anything.

*S:*

That is our modern Newspeak, the vocabulary in which certain unpalatable ideas just cannot be formulated. American educators who are worried about this call it the 'dumbing down' thesis, the idea that the population is being made dumb, deliberately, through so-called 'progressive' education, in order to reduce the individual to a stupor of passive mediocrity.

*J:*

You also have the phenomenon where enormous capitalist monopolies and multinationals are adopting *left-wing* views - synthetic, standardised, politically correct gestures. Take Benetton, an enormous international firm, which adopted the most unctuous form of politically correct ideology, displaying massive advertisements depicting people dying of starvation, AIDS, all sorts of miserable images, in order to promote their woollen pullovers and coloured T-shirts. Now, none of this has anything to do with Benetton's stock price; corporations are adopting synthetic liberal positions in order to neutralise all hostility: environmental destruction, much of which multinationals contribute to themselves, endangered species, pollution, racial division - all of it grist for the capitalist mill. The system contains all contradictions within itself.

S:

To save the individual the trouble of getting angry or rebelling for himself. When I see a starving person in a Benetton advertisement, I can think, 'Oh good, someone's getting angry about starvation. At least I don't have to think about it, why it happens, what causes it. I'm sure people far more powerful than me are trying to sort it out right this minute.' Benetton, bless them, are protesting on my behalf.

J:

In other words, the prospect of rebellion is contained within the structure before anyone even begins to wave their fist.

S:

Indeed.

J:

Traditionally, the old hard-left thesis was that capitalist corporations which took their raw materials and labour from the Third World at knock-down prices were responsible for the hunger depicted on such a poster. So Benetton - as a typical example, which is all they are, Body Shop being another - have obviated the critique before it's even been registered. Maybe Body Shop don't exploit anyone, maybe they haven't cut down a single tree - but that's not the point. It's what they do *on behalf of the system*, in terms of their unctuous handwringing for the sake of us all, which is significant from a meta-political point of view.

Here is an international corporation which sells clothes - if I may keep using Benetton as our example - made from labour in India and other Third World countries, since there are no mill workers in Lancashire anymore. They're generally paid very low wages, though not necessarily starvation wages –

S:

What about Manchester united footballs made by nine year-old kids in Bangladesh for five pence an hour?

J:

Well, something like that may or may not be true...

S:

You hasten to add.

J:

Indeed. But the point is that most people have to plough through several layers of argument before they get from colourful sweaters to capitalist oppression: international corporations, Third World, slave labour...isn't New Labour all about stopping these awful things...and they see a Benetton advert, and they have their own criticism thought out and graphically presented before them, on a huge billboard, before they've even got to stage one of the argument in their own minds. Remember that couple which took McDonald's to court - the famous McLibel trial, which they ended up losing after a year or so in court? It's as if McDonald's were to have a big poster showing an abattoir with stinking carcasses hanging up in various states of dismemberment, and at the bottom they said, 'McDonald's: Good Food For All the Family'. They would have neutralised all criticism from animal liberationists, vegetarians, environmentalists, and the like, before anyone could put pen to paper. Examples like Benetton and Body Shop show just how sophisticated big business, advertising, and the state have become.

S:

If that's right, it is arguable that we're on the way to a *1984*-type scenario, only many of the functions - perhaps most - carried out by the Party in Orwell's novel are carried out by big business, the media, and advertising, in a semi-private sort of way. It's as though state control of

the population has been privatised, without any privatisation taking place. Rather, it's just the inevitable development and evolution of the sort of society we live in. The state connives at, and consents to, this control. They don't need to manufacture their own pornography for the masses, as long as it's being done for them, for free - indeed bringing in millions in taxes - by the private sector.

*J:*

Taken to its extreme, it becomes almost a game. Advertisers think, 'What can the public take?', and then you see a poster for Heinz Beans, showing a bucket of vomit and the slogan, 'Get these beans down your neck'.

*S:*

You filthy proles.

*J:*

Well, I don't think *that* would be in the slogan! A little too blatant, my dear Thomas.

*S:*

Beyond Orwell.

*J:*

Remember the recent advert for the British Army: it showed no tanks, no guns, no planes, just soldiers as UN social workers around the bed of a dying child in Bosnia. The idea that they're warriors, employed by the state to kill and maim, is absent. An Orwellian inversion, if ever there was one - 'Join the army - be a good Samaritan'.

*S:*

The question, 'What can the public take?', really means: 'To what extent can the public be cretinised so that rebellion, of any sort, is no longer possible?'

J:

Look at recent elections in Britain, France, the USA: socialist parties come in on a platform of conservative policies; conservatives come in and implement many left-wing policies; parties junk their traditional policies, take on their opponents' in order to get into power - they end up, as it were, *becoming* their opponents.

S:

Which means there is no longer any opposition. Just one big party, really, despite the different colours and hairstyles. Time and again, people are interviewed at election time, here, in France, or wherever, and they say, 'right, left - it makes no difference'. And they stay away in droves, coming out only if there's a chance of getting rid of the incumbent, as happened in the last British election. They can only be motivated by negative reasons, in the forlorn hope that they're actually going to see some *change*, or rather, change for the better. To take a trivial example: in the last election here, as in all recent British elections, we've had Tories blue, Labour red, Liberal Democrat yellow. And what was the big story one day during the campaign? Tony Blair came out wearing a blue tie. And on another day John Major wore a red tie. The journalists wanted to know - had they betrayed their principles? What a confusion! All that careful colour coding mixed up, sending the electorate into a tizz. And that was not untypical of the level of debate. It says far more than any talking head would want to admit about the state of politics in the West.

J:

What it suggests is that the public is so pre-literate, post-literate, illiterate -

S:

Unliterate, aliterate, non-literate, deliteratised - sorry, we're getting carried away.

J:

Do control yourself, my dear Thomas. What I was saying is that the ruling elite regards the public with such disdain - and not perhaps without reason, after a generation of sub-standard education, cretinisation, as you said, advertising, television, supermarket magazines, and what have you - that what really matters in campaigns is the colour of Blair's tie, Cherie's hairstyle, whether they're smiling - which they always do, simultaneously, inanely. The hard edges of politicians have to be smoothed away. Odd-looking men like Robin Cook and John Prescott - who are, in fact, realistic, not plastic or synthetic, but the sort of people you run into on street corners or in Sainsbury's - they have to be managed, dressed in inappropriately expensive suits, told to improve their diction, talk slowly and cautiously, not to say what they think all the time, and so on.

An interesting point about the USA is that the Republicans are red, and the Democrats blue, contrary to what you'd expect. The colour coding is there, but goes against the European norm of blue for conservative, red for socialist/progressive. This probably has an historical explanation in terms of the original leanings of the two parties. They also have animal mascots - a donkey for the Democrats, an elephant for the Republicans.

*S:*

Animal coding. Is it supposed to make the voters all warm and fuzzy inside, like when they see Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck? How much more inane can politics be? It shows, quite simply, that the people in power are now so confident of the inability of the masses to form articulate political judgments, that they adopt Pythonesque, Silly Party labels.

*J:*

Of course there are historical reasons for the animals, and I'm sure it all makes sense when it's explained in tedious detail. But the objective and the effect are the same - to trivialise the entire process, for a population which is increasingly capable only of thinking at the level of colours and mascots. Don't forget also that the terms 'Republican' and 'Democrat' are meaningless. In

America all republicans are democrats, and all democrats republicans, in reality. So the names themselves are trivial.

S:

American dissidents often speak of the Republicrats, to show their disdain for the system!

J:

It all connects up with Political Correctness. Remember that MP for Luton, at the last election, who gave a campaign speech, which was recorded and leaked to the media, in which he ranted and raved in the most politically incorrect terms imaginable. Did he do it on purpose, to impress the many people in Luton who hold the same views despite the tedious conformism regurgitated at them in the media? Or was it a spasm brought on by the unbearable tension of not being able to speak your own mind? Or what he just drunk? Whatever...

S:

There's a tension in the governing class as well, but that's a tension that can be managed. I mean, the MP for Luton is no more; Tony Blair is Prime Minister. It can always be managed, they can squeeze out people like that. Whereas we don't have a choice; if we want to 'rant', we have to do so in the privacy of our own homes. Very few people have access to the media, which is concentrated in so few hands that, although it's not strictly managed by the Party as in 1984, it's managed by fewer and fewer people, whose hirelings spend their lives going through a series of revolving doors from newspapers, to TV, to radio, to politics, to advertising, and back to newspapers again. Do you want to hear Edwina Currie on Radio 5? I don't, any more than I wanted to hear her on *A Week in Politics*.

J:

I think it's fair to say that the prevailing liberal ideology is based upon fear: the deep-seated, left-liberal fear that the bulk of the population needs to be educated, that they are at bottom uncivilized and illiberal -

S:

Synonymous terms in the liberal vocabulary.

J:

And that the prevailing liberal ideology is a very thin skin on an otherwise highly conservative fruit, and so the masses need to be indoctrinated, all the time, lest they slip into barbarism - tribal and anarchic chaos.

S:

But doesn't that show the contempt in which the population is held by the establishment? The population requires management.

J:

But all rulers have that view, my dear Thomas.

S:

Some rulers want to promote the good of their people, some rulers want simply to keep them under control. Yes, any good ruler will be both a positive and a negative side to the people they rule; by the same token, unless a harmonious balance is struck, we end up with social control of a kind which does very little to promote the common good, and very much to line the pockets of the establishment, who have the privilege of hearing their pontificating voices day in, day out. At the extreme, we have *1984*.

J:

An interesting point about Orwell's book is that it is very much a satire of much of the left-wing discussion he witnessed in the 1930s and 40s. He gave it quite a savaging, to the point where the left finds it uncomfortable to read even to this day. The class for whose benefit the Party is supposed to rule, namely the proles, is quite clearly the most despised, disgusting, and irredeemable part of society - in the eyes of the Party itself. Orwell places enough redemptive moments in the book to invest the proles with a human decency and warmth which he, through

Winston, believed they had. But that was not how, in his eyes, the left-wing intelligentsia with which Orwell associated saw the working classes. They were too enamoured of Stalin and the Revolution to have any time for the masses.

S:

When rulers begin to see the ruled as essentially a threat, as people who must be controlled, then the basis of society is undermined - some would say the legitimacy of the so-called 'social contract' is put in question, though I don't think it's too helpful to talk of social contracts.

J:

But doesn't all rule involve the rulers in imposing their views on society? Isn't the only thing that matters the quality of the views imposed? Liberals would say their society is no different in essence, except that, despite the imposition of certain basic values such as 'tolerance', liberal society has the greatest degree of freedom of any society there has ever been. And this is said to be for the public good. In *1984*, on the other hand, the Party has no illusions about whether it is acting for the public good. It exists solely for power - pure, naked power. And here Orwell is satirising certain power ideologies. The left, however, always denied it was obsessed with power, and projected that fear onto its right-wing opponents.

Perhaps it could be said the contemporary liberalism has, through various social mechanisms, obviated the need for that sort of power ideology in government. Certainly liberalism can be quite brutal, and is well capable of sorting out its opponents from time to time, and yet it has developed and refined a sleight of hand - it censors, and is against censorship, it stands for not persecuting its opponents, and yet makes sure they never get anywhere...

S:

It proclaims loudly that all thought is allowed, and yet, because of the destruction of the education system and the propaganda subliminally projected through the media, a whole host of thoughts can't be had.

J:

In a sense we have got *beyond* Room 101. There is even a popular TV programme called *Room 101*, in which celebrity talking heads like Germaine Greer and Clive James proclaim their most hated things, such as salami sandwiches or Jackie Collins novels, and have them ceremoniously dumped in a fake fire. And by that ritual all the viewers' pet hates are cathartically destroyed. But what is destroyed? Trivialities, meaningless nothings - this is the extreme of anger which the people seem capable of reaching -

S:

No, this is the extreme of anger which the people are *allowed* to be capable of reaching. The conceptual limits of hate have been set: you can hate Jackie Collins novels, but no more. We don't need rats in face masks to get you to conform - we don't need that sort of brutality. We can let you rebel just enough to make you feel that you have achieved something worthwhile, some real challenge to the system. Have your say - burn a Jackie Collins novel today! But don't stop buying those Jeffrey Archers.

J:

Interestingly, Room 101 in *1984* is based on a room in Senate House in the University of London - a genuine room 101.

S:

Orwell got it from there?

J:

Yes, and you know why? Because Senate House used to be the headquarters of the BBC. He worked for the BBC, and so is satirising the organization itself, which used to broadcast pro-Imperial propaganda from room 101.

S:

Force is always there, my dear Frederick. We can have all the bread and all the circuses in the world, all the cathartic TV programmes, all the Two Minutes' Hates - but force is always in the background, and as we saw in the USA with Waco, it will be wheeled out, every now and then, *pour encourager les autres*. Remember who's in charge.

J:

Maybe, but the liberal will reply that this is very different from the brutality of Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and the rest, which we have seen this century. They would say: 'You've got problems with the liberal state? OK, go and live under Pol Pot, and come back - if you can - and tell us which you would prefer. Will you dislike the liberal state so much then?' Has not the liberal state moved to a more civilized level, a level beyond the routine use of physical force to maintain order?

S:

But which is more terrifying - control of the mind or control of the body? In *1984*, the Party controls both, but Orwell makes it pretty clear, when Winston is being tortured, that in his view there is nothing worse than physical pain. I cannot agree with that.

J:

What modern liberalism offers us, in true utilitarian spirit, is a physically painless 'tyranny'.

S:

Almost, but not quite. Still, I think anyone who underestimates the insidiousness of the subtle control of opinion found in the West is making a serious mistake. I detect an irony here. The vast bulk of people fears the sort of physical tyranny depicted in *1984* more than a mental tyranny, precisely because they have been manipulated into thinking that physical pain is the worst thing in the world. This is just what the prevalent utilitarian philosophy, handed down to us from the 19th century and lovingly transmitted, in various forms, by the modern academy, tells us we

should think. Contrary to that, I would contend that there are spiritual and psychical pains far worse than the greatest bodily torture, and that our society, racked as it is by suicide, alcoholism, marriage breakdown, depression, and mental illness, is witness to that fact.

*J:*

Even if this were true, my dear Thomas, you will have a hard time convincing the man on the street that what he believes in, or doesn't believe in, is more important than whether he has his fingernails pulled out by the roots.

*S:*

Maybe, but don't you agree that there is a pain worse than physical pain?

*J:*

I do, but I also think only intellectuals, or people who live for the mind, can be aware of it.

*S:*

I doubt that, but even so, society cannot just cater for the bulk of the population. It has to have certain values which must be promoted even if they are not what most people think about from day to day. The denial of creativity, the suppression and homogenisation of culture in modern society, creates in those who care about these things a kind of spiritual pain which, although it does not leave one awake at night screaming, nevertheless reminds one that we are not in a healthy state.

*J:*

It should be said, though, that while liberalism is not a majority view, and is in many ways imposed, it is also a very intellectual view, formulated in the 18th and 19th centuries by a small intellectual and cultural elite in Europe. And in a way, the reason it has survived for so long while most other social systems created by intellectuals have bitten the dust, is that it goes with the laziness of the majority. It goes with the sort of mental sleep in which most people spend their lives, at least in prosperous and technologically advanced countries.

*S:*

More stupor than slumber, I would say...

## **Chapter 4**

### **ALIEN NATION**

*Location: a cafe in York*

*Jonathan:*

So you want to talk to me about urban myths - the terrorism of the modern mind?

*Samuel:*

No beating about the bush with you today, old man.

*J:*

I always get straight to the point.

*S:*

Well then, let me give you a quotation from G.K. Chesterton to start proceedings - one of my favourite quotations. 'When man stops believing in God, he does not believe in nothing, he believes in anything.'

*J:*

That presumes, old fellow, that one believes in God in the first place!

*S:*

As any rational mind should.

*J:*

So say you; I for one consider myself a perfectly rational non-believer. But let us leave that to one side, and consider the quotation in broader terms. It is true that modern man fills up his mind with an enormous amount of detritus, much of it bought from Woolworth's, Menzies and W.H. Smith.

*S:*

A sample of which material I just happen to have before me on the table, for your delectation.

*J:*

You are always well prepared, old chap. What have we here? *Fortean Times*, *The X Factor*...

S:

Actually, *The X Factor* is quite good; though I don't mean to indulge in some gratuitous advertising, not being connected in any way with the organization which produces it. The magazine does contain some useful information, though they do make rather silly mistakes. One issue referred to 'the prophets Fatima and Garabandal', who prophesied certain calamities. Needless to say, they meant to refer to the Virgin Mary, who appeared at Fatima in Portugal and is also believed by many - thought wrongly, in this case - to have appeared at Garabandal.

J:

I like the way you say 'appeared', old man - the fantastical cannot appear. Just look at some of the cover headlines on these magazines: 'UFOs - Video Evidence'; 'The Doomsday Science of the Aum Shinrikiyo Sect'; 'Out of Body Experiences'; 'Alien Abductions - Fact or Fiction?'

S:

'Bizarre!' - 'Terrifying!' - 'The Stories You Won't See Elsewhere!'

J:

I suppose, looking at these headlines, I tend to agree with Chesterton at one level, though I disagree with his basic formulation. All of the stories we see in these magazines are in the news, and the magazines are offering us reasons *behind* the headlines, the low-down *behind* the facts, or rather alleged facts.

S:

*Fortean Times* has become so lurid: 'I Shot Bigfoot - But He Got Away'; 'Abducted - Some Of Our Ufologists Are Missing'; 'Saucers Over Scotland'.

J:

The interesting thing, though, is that there is a range of such stories in the media, periodically. They come, they go, they fill up the media horizon for a short time and then they disappear. We can run through a few of them.

S:

Good idea - we have a list that we prepared several hours earlier, do we not?

J:

We do not - the list is in my capacious memory. Don't make the reader doubt our spontaneity, old fellow.

S:

How gauche of me.

J:

Well, we can kick off with BSE/CJD.

S:

Not quite out of the news yet - isn't the jury still out?

J:

Not as I see it. We know at least one person who predicted a major epidemic, which seems to have been disproved. He thought, and maybe still thinks, there will be people walking the streets of Old England calling, 'Bring out your dead!'. Somehow I have my doubts. Look at the famous scientists who have nailed their colours to the mast - Lacey, Dealler and others. Lacey was on the radio the other day, and was being rather clever. Verbally, he covered himself in relation to his original theorizing, saying we *could* have a few hundred dead, or anything up to half a million!

S:

We *could* have. Indeed, no scientist worth his salt would speak with certainty on a subject such as BSE/CJD. So Lacey is no different to the rest, at least superficially. But the truth is that his whole media persona, the fact that everyone wanted to know his latest thoughts, depended on the fact that he spoke *as though* he believed the deaths *would* be in the hundreds of thousands. So any backtracking by him is, in my opinion, rather disingenuous.

J:

He fed the public's hysteria, and to some degree even caused it, I would say. He became a media scientist and talking head because he was predicting apocalypse, not because he was being like the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee and speaking cautiously and in measured tones. Now that the hysteria has died down - and it seems maybe thirty, maybe even a few hundred people will die from new-form CJD, but that the leap from cow to man is too great for there to be a CJD 'holocaust' - the prophets of doom are lying much lower.

S:

But it could be argued that without vociferous dissidents and doom mongers we might not have had the vigorous measures against BSE/CJD that have been implemented.

J:

Your typical *Guardian* journalist may indeed say that whistleblowers have some such purpose. A whole whistleblower culture is emerging, especially in the U.S. You take your story of malfeasance to the media, and exaggerate it because unless you scream disaster from the rooftop no one will listen to you...

S:

Hardly something only a *Guardian* journalist would admire, my dear Frederick. Whistleblowing can serve a very good purpose, though I am wary of the idea of a culture of 'dob in thy neighbour', especially if the dobbing-in is to the State. In any case, to go back to CJD, we can't look into the minds of Dealler, Lacey et al. and say whether they intended to cause a panic, or at least to fan the flames.

J:

Knowingly or unknowingly, however, they did so. And, in my view, mistakenly, since from the beginning I have maintained that the overwhelming evidence against the 'bring out your dead'

scenario is that there have not been any mass deaths of intermediate species, such as dogs and cats, who have been fed the drossiest meat of all.

S:

I must admit that I am less sanguine than you, though more cautious than the doom mongers. I think we just do not know yet, and may not know for decades, but I agree that the evidence you just cited is significant, and counts heavily against the doom hypothesis. Still, the knowledge of the utter detritus that is labelled as pet food - an excellent article about which is in *Nexus*, a magazine I have not brought along - as well as the rubbish humans eat in burgers and other products, means that I would not be surprised if we *did* all start dropping like flies.

But the fact is that the doom mongers played a prominent part in the crisis, planting hypotheses in a soil already fertile and receptive to apocalyptic ideas. They could not have had half the prominence they had, as opposed to being dismissed outright as crackpots and relegated to the fringes of scientific lunacy, if society did not *want* to hear the worst. Which prompts me to ask: do you think that society has, as it were, a death wish?

J:

No. There is a search for what might finish us on certain fronts, and human beings are excited momentarily by the prospect of extinction; but they then move away from it. It's like the moth, which is attracted to the flame that will consume it, but usually does not get too close for too long, or else it's history. Contrast these momentary crises which society regularly experiences, with the more sober truths about what is really killing us. More people die of CJD-1 than of the new variant, which is similar to the original but significantly different (hence the initial scientific panic). Far more people are killed by hepatitis, meningitis, and a host of other diseases, than will, in my humble opinion, ever be done away with by the latest 'fad' disease. And yet who talks about them? What attention do they get in the media?

S:

It's not so much the science, the empirical question of whether or not we're all going to die from CJD-II. The question is about the psychology of it, and what's motivating people. You've got this recent 700-page Penguin book, *The Coming Plague*, telling us how we're all going to be wiped out by internationally transmitted microbes which resist all known drugs and are being spread around the world by mass migration and international travel...

J:

Yes, that ties in with World Health Organization warnings that diseases we thought had been virtually eliminated, such as typhus and tuberculosis, are making a comeback.

S:

And there's another book, called *Is the End Nigh?*, by three Australian scientists, in which each chapter is devoted to exploring a way in which the world could be consumed by an impending apocalypse: the transmission of deadly viruses by mass migration, environmental destruction, urban decay, economic ruin through 'globalisation', and so on. All backed up by empirical evidence - these are not redneck fundamentalists, but thoughtful academics. Needless to say, I've only found the book on sale at half-price in the second-hand section of Foyles. Clearly the world is none to interested in what they have to say, as it wasn't in the days of Noah.

J:

Well, I don't know about that last bit, old man. Do you mean Noah the second-hand car salesman? But it is interesting to note how scientists have become the main doomsayers in society. The pyramidologists, occultists, New Agers, *Fortean Times* sub-editors, and the like - they tend to be discounted, though they're still there, feeding off the latest scientific 'discovery' of how we are going to meet our collective Waterloo. And that's because it's the scientists we defer to in contemporary culture, the white-robed High Priests of Knowledge.

S:

Clearly there is also a market for such books; perhaps the book by the Australian scientists was remaindered because it sold new for £35! But there are plenty of scientific or pseudo-scientific mass market paperbacks that say similar things. And as for *Fortean Times* and its ilk, such magazines are now in W.H. Smith and Menzies, whereas they were only available by mail order or in obscure shops only a few years ago. The market which now exists consists of people who want to believe anything, but who also seem to have a death wish of their own, a morbid desire to see their rotting societies collapse altogether.

J:

A little overstated, I think. Look, the reason that BSE/CJD caught the public imagination is that, with the exception of a fringe of radical vegetarians and vegans, virtually everybody in this country consumed meat between 1980 and the mid-1990s. So when scientists get up and say, ‘You might all die of a horrific brain disease’, people take notice, because it directly affects them. Most wars since 1945 - Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf - are rather tangential, fought by professional soldiers, and having a mass impact only through the television set. There isn’t really all that much which can have an impact on bourgeois societies like ours.

Most people have had sex between 1980 and the mid-1990s as well, so naturally the HIV/AIDS scare had as much of an impact as the BSE/CJD scare. Such things hit people where they live, because they relate to health, to the possibility of death from everyday activities.

S:

Yes, weren’t we all supposed to be wiped out by AIDS?

J:

So they said. And there were the associated scares of AIDS from mosquitoes, from drinking out of the same glass as an infected person, and so on. Who talks about that now?

*S:*

Well, I note that it has now been scientifically established, apparently, that HIV is transmissible through saliva. But no one seems to be getting too worked up about it. The World Health Organization brought out studies saying that millions would be dying every year. Granted that includes sub-Saharan Africa, where tens of thousands have died, so it is said; but still, there is no mass panic, as there was, say, during the post-World War I influenza pandemic.

*J:*

The fact is that in the West AIDS has remained in all essentials a homosexual and drug-user disease, with little or no impact on the vast bulk of the population.

*S:*

Contrary to the frantic desire of the homosexual lobby for it to become a heterosexual disease. Clearly, in this particular case, the doomsayers had a political agenda.

*J:*

Yes, although that tends to be the exception. Look, for instance, at the scare about salmonella in eggs. There's probably low-grade salmonella in most eggs, which is why you cook them. But the Edwina Currie scare sent the nation into paroxysms for several weeks. I think the politicians are fenced in, in a way. You have a media which is increasingly shrill --

*S:*

How much more shrill can they get?

*J:*

-- you have the endless desire on the part of the population for titillation and excitement. Since the vast majority of people have no overarching system of belief anymore --

*S:*

You hit the nail right on the head.

J:

I thought you'd say that. People want to find fads and fancies to *energise* them, for want of a better way of putting it. They want to be threatened.

S:

I would put it by saying they want their god with a small 'g', whether it be money, sex, power, food, whatever...

J:

But they don't want too much risk. They don't want too much violence, or danger, or pain, but they are hunting for some sort of prospect of destruction, some sort of manageable risk.

S:

Naturally, when you stop believing in Hell - the real risk of endless destruction and pain - you look for a surrogate, though one you can cope with. Or maybe one you cannot cope with, if society takes its death wish to the ultimate conclusion to which it leads.

J:

Spare me the religious hyperbole, my dear Thomas - my explanation is far more 'this-worldly', and hence more reasonable.

S:

But I can't see how else to explain modern phenomena such as the ones we are talking about. I do not believe that society has always been as susceptible to such scares as it is now. In the days when the ultimate scare was supernatural - the threat of damnation - and ever present, food scares took a decided back seat. Sure, there have been scares in the past - just look at that amazing book, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. But I doubt that there has ever been the sort of lurching from one mass panic to another that we have seen in the last few decades. Sure, the very existence of the media make this possible, but it wouldn't be real without some definite psychological predisposition on the part of the public.

J:

Perhaps there is, as I would put it, an element of human attraction to the 'dark side'. Many people get pleasure from stories, images and narratives which involve destruction, violence, horror, extreme pain and so on. If they thought they would experience such things in real life they'd be appalled, and yet they gain genuine pleasure from contemplating such things in imaginary contexts. And the correlation with media scare stories is that the media do tend to give their stories a fantastic, almost other-worldly flavour - especially at the down-market end. Facts are blown out of proportion, the mundane is de-emphasized, the reader is sufficiently distanced from the story to experience *schadenfreude* without any sense of imminent personal danger.

S:

Tell me, my dear Frederick, do these scares worry you?

J:

Well, you could mean various things by that, but I should say that, in general, I stand back and watch them with near-complete indifference. I am but a spectator at this human tragi-comedy.

S:

All rather haughty and elitist, old man, but let me ask you - are you a Fortean? Charles Fort was a relativist. His view was that everything was open to investigation; whether it was true or false didn't matter. Or rather, whether it could even be *established* as true or false didn't matter. All that mattered for him was the act of investigation itself, the exploring of the previously unexplored. A mystery was simply a datum in need of investigation.

J:

I would say the reverse, namely that what is true and false is vital, and that one can establish empirically, to a certain degree, what is true and false. So I look at these things from the viewpoint of a kind of 'absolutist relativism' - absolute in terms of scientific fact; relative in the context of cultural specification.

S:

‘Absolutist relativism’? I admire your Hegelian dialectic - you are a true disciple of the father of contradictions.

J:

But I am not a Hegelian, my dear Thomas, though it is fair to call me a dialectician.

S:

Truth matters, and yet it doesn’t?

J:

No, no...I’m not making it up as I go along. I’m trying to say that my consciousness is the sole reliable criterion of empirical fact. Structures are contingent, but my judgments about them are refreshingly absolute.

S:

Indeed. But it’s about time we had some argie bargie, eh?

J:

Don’t distract me from my ‘pregnant’ line of thought.

S:

Hush! The Great Man gives birth!

J:

As I was saying, when I look at *Fortean Times* - ‘Vampire Wizard Boy’, ‘Talking Trees’, ‘Phantom Flesh Rotter’ - I say, absolute nonsense!

S:

But you don’t *know* that!

J:

If somebody came to me with real evidence that I could take seriously, such as a video of someone’s having a conversation with a tree - which talked back - I would have a look at it. I’d

be pre-disposed to disbelieve it, though, since I've seen Hollywood movies with talking trees, and this film I'm looking at could be just a bad version of one of those.

S:

But these magazines relativize everything and make it equally banal and insignificant. 'Saucers over Scotland' and sensationalist rubbish like that, it trivializes the problem of UFOs, which is an important and far-reaching question when looked at soberly. The vast majority of films and photos of alleged alien craft are frauds, forgeries, objects of gross misinterpretation, and so on. But there is also well known to be a hard core of photographic evidence - something which is admitted by sceptics and believers alike - which has defied all attempts at explanation based on publicly available knowledge. Of course, this doesn't mean there *is* no explanation, and that the explanation must be that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. Rather, I support the view that the unexplained films are of top secret government technology, a view shared by many of the more sober-minded people who research this question. 'Saucers over Scotland' and similar headlines push rational explanations such as this well into the background. But let us move onto some other scare stories, else I shall send you to sleep with tales of classified CIA technology.

J:

A good idea, my dear Thomas, though I might not fall asleep, being as I am a creature of the night.

S:

Yes, your daily routine does put you rather 'out of synch' with the rest of us, old boy, but at least you haven't yet taken to calling me at four in the morning, otherwise I'd be, shall we say - out of sorts.

J:

But speaking of creatures of the night, what about all the Satanic child abuse scares of the 1980s and early 1990s?

S:

A subject covered heavily by the *Fortean Times* which, note well, came down off its Fortean fence and decided Satanic abuse was absolute nonsense, worthy only of ridicule. I complained to them about this uncharacteristic closing of their otherwise self-proclaimed open minds, and they replied with a certain understanding, but then went right on mocking everything to do with the subject. Not something old Charles Fort would have found to be in the spirit of his enterprise. Forteanism is not supposed to be about the *a priori* ridicule of stories which you don't believe. The true Fortean doesn't *have* an opinion, at least publicly, but tries to uncover all the evidence.

J:

Well, the truth is that Forteans are not really 'relativists', they're part of an alternative or counter-cultural circle. If you look at the sorts of advertisement you see in the back of the magazine, you find occult books, New Age products, alternative health care, and so on. Now the so-called Satanic child abuse scares of the '80s were largely channelled through the Christian right, in particular the Evangelical movement, which had been pretty successful in infiltrating the social work and other counselling professions.

But the New Age/alternative ways of thinking which Forteanism taps into are *predisposed* not to believe anything that comes from the Christian right; they're opposed to what they see as fundamentalist, anti-New Age, and so on. So their veneer of relativism and of open-mindedness begins to fall away when stories with even a tangential relation to Christianity are being investigated.

Putting aside all the 'My Wife was Raped by a Werewolf in Oregon' stuff, the *Fortean Times* does have a serious intent --

S:

They're not Fortean all the way --

J:

They can be Fortean and serious, but the point is that, like every other movement, they have limits and underlying dogmas beyond which they will not go.

S:

I find your diagnosis convincing. Anyway, it's impossible to be a relativist about the unexplained. You can't say, 'Any old mystery is as good as the next'. Mystery for mystery's sake is a sign of pathology in a person's thinking. Surely we pursue mystery because we want *solutions* - we want to know whodunnit, why, where and how.

J:

The truth is that the people who started *Fortean Times* have a particular axe to grind, and although they would recognize that at least two thirds of what they publish is actual nonsense, one of their central dogmas is belief in at least the *possibility* that some of what they say is true; even though they know as well as anyone that von Daniken forged at least part of his evidence, that most photos of UFOs are frauds or have a perfectly natural explanation, that tales of Madame Blavatsky's mystical revelations, spirits, mediums and fairies are on the whole just so much rubbish. And yet people still become Theosophists and almost worship Madame Blavatsky, people still chase UFOs, believe in fairies and try to contact their dead relatives. People will always try to find a way to disprove alleged debunkings and to justify their mad pursuits.

S:

Because people are always looking for something to believe in. They have to have mystery, but they also have to have hidden realities, something behind the phenomena. A perfectly healthy and natural impulse which religion will satisfy - if only people would take tried and tested

systems of belief more seriously than the latest crop circle or dancing goblin. Nevertheless, as far as Satanic child abuse goes, I simply cannot say that it never occurs, and have myself read pretty convincing testimony that it does, graphic stories in mainstream newspapers, and so on.

*J:*

Hasn't anyone told you not to believe all you read in the newspapers, old man?

*S:*

Yes, and I don't, but I don't think some of the stories I've read are made up.

*J:*

Do you know of any convictions?

*S:*

I don't, at least in Britain, but there may have been elsewhere. In any case, hasn't anyone ever told you not to believe everything you hear from a judge?

*J:*

True, but the standard of evidence in a criminal case is very high, and the fact is, every case that has come to court has not passed muster. I was once asked by the former religious affairs correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* whether I believed in Satanic child abuse, and I said, 'It doesn't happen. It's more a case of some paedophiles dressing up as Satanists than Luciferians pretending to be paedophiles.'

*S:*

You draw an unreal distinction, I think. If a paedophile surrounds his acts with the trappings of Satanic ritual, that makes him a Satanic child abuser in my book. Do you really want to rule out Satanic abuse? Do you say it never happens?

*J:*

I can't tell you it never, ever happens, but the fact is that Satanists are ideologues, in their own way. Their beliefs about destruction and chaos are manifested in certain well-defined patterns of behaviour. Most of the rituals, Black Masses and so on, have been written down.

*S:*

Yes, but while those rituals primarily involve adults, there are some which are known to involve children, or at least adolescents.

*J:*

But all that means is that there are Satanists who are perverted by their *own* standards. Satanism and paedophilia do not go together any more than Catholicism and paedophilia, and yet priests have been known to commit child abuse, as you're well aware.

*S:*

But Catholicism does not teach, 'Do what thou wilt - that is the whole of the Law'. Satanism does. A significant difference as far as their attitude to paedophilia is concerned, I should have thought.

*J:*

Look, bank managers are paedophiles, so are librarians, feminists, Catholics, and Satanists. All sorts of people get into all sorts of things!

*S:*

Come on, my dear Frederick. Christianity does not glorify evil. Satanism does. You can't just lump all these groups of people together. Satanists glorify sexual perversion, vice, unnatural acts of all sorts. It's their *teaching*. That's the difference.

*J:*

Maybe Christians are right to say that Satanists are more pre-disposed to that sort of conduct. But the Paedophile Information Exchange, which once existed and advertised openly in gay

magazines, used to bring - and maybe still does - people of all walks of life together to indulge their common interest, shall we say.

S:

Perhaps, but surely you can see why, say, male homosexuals would be more likely to be drawn to young boys than bank managers - that's *why* the Paedophile Information Exchange advertised in gay magazines, I presume.

J:

Possibly, but the connection there is more probable than in the case of occultism.

S:

I'm not talking about any occultism, but about Satanism in its true form. Anyway, the fact is that paedophilia is a grave problem: Britain, France, Belgium, the USA, Canada; politicians, judges, police officers, civil servants, priests (though they do not deserve the name) - ad nauseam. Not every scare is false, and there have been many convictions. The trouble is that when *every* story is magnified out of all proportion, sensationalised, and perhaps distorted, no one knows what to believe any more.

J:

That's what happened with the scares in Britain in the 1980s --

S:

When perfectly law-abiding families were shattered, torn apart, and indeed some *still* have not been brought back together.

J:

As even feminists such as Beatrice Campbell pointed out at the time...

S:

Feminists in defence of the family - what a refreshing change!

J:

The level of journalism in this country has been continually degraded since the 1960s, with the result that every story with the potential to shock, every ‘urban myth’, every tale capable of gripping the imagination of an increasingly illiterate public brought up on journalistic slop, is magnified out of all proportion, fact is liberally mixed with falsehood, and the whole seething mess is spooned down our throats every morning along with the Cornflakes.

And human nature being what it is, people tend to swing around emotionally: ‘It’s all true’, ‘It’s all false’. No in between, no room for nuance, for half-truths, for complexity, something with which the modern mind is increasingly unable to cope.

S:

We’re floundering. We’re psychologically rudderless at the moment, and we’re lurching from one extreme to another. We haven’t got a clue what to believe. ‘Snuff’ movies are another scare. When were they a big deal?

J:

Around the mid-’80s, and connected with the radical feminist movement...

S:

In a ‘snuff’ movie somebody is supposed to be filmed actually dying, aren’t they?

J:

Yes.

S:

But has anyone ever seen such a movie?

J:

There are in existence films in which it *appears* that a prostitute, for instance, is beaten to death or strangled in the act of sexual intercourse. However, it seems that nearly all of these things are simulated.

S:

Nearly.

J:

I never say ‘all’ in such murky cases. Apparently the Mafia have been behind some of these films, just as they were behind many pornographic films, and probably still are.

S:

Were ‘snuff’ movies a scare in the media?

J:

Yes, in the ‘80s, and it was primarily the feminist movement behind it, though also Evangelicals.

S:

But no one talks about ‘snuff’ movies anymore; it’s gone.

J:

Yes, although there was a slight reappearance; scares are often repackaged like consumer items. Satanic abuse is arguably a recycling of the ‘snuff’ movie scare. New myths tend to envelop old ones, and some of the abuse scares in the ‘80s had a decidedly ‘snuff’ movie element, in that there were allegations of paedophile Satanists producing videos of children being killed. There’s a kind of syncretism about it.

S:

I don’t think anyone is designing these scares, no one is churning them out on a production line, but their effect is to make everybody sceptical. ‘Syncretism’ is a good way of describing it, in that every scare is as good - or bad - as another. Look at the downing of TWA flight 800. Now it’s extremely important to know who did that, and you’ve had eminent journalists investigating whether governments were involved, the intelligence brotherhood, this or that terrorist group. But in this great epistemological soup which now exists, where one scare blends into another and horror stories of all shades slop around along with distortions, misinformation and

*disinformation*, the really important stories get submerged, and are hardly ever tackled and resolved in a proper way. And maybe that's just the way the State likes it.

It's interesting how the more important - and hence sensitive - political stories are cropping up regularly in the alternative Fortean-type magazines. The *Fortean Times* tackles the odd one, and the *X Factor* has at least one in every issue, right next to stories about magnetic men and alien autopsies. All very admirable in its way, but I have, I confess, very little faith in the ability of human beings to separate truth from falsehood in the present day.

*J:*

Perhaps, but then people are driven by a desire for entertainment, diversion...

*S:*

Bread and circuses. Look, I don't doubt for a minute that most major scares have some kernel of truth in them. Sure, some people have died from BSE/CJD, some have been victims of Satanic abuse, some have joined cults and been brainwashed - indeed among the many scares there are some grave dangers. But the main factor in their ability to grip the public imagination in a frenzy, usually for a limited period of time, is that people want to find a solution to their problems. They want to point the finger, and many have a secret death wish for their own society.

*J:*

But people also want entertainment - 'I shot Bigfoot but he got away'. You have to look at it at that level as well. In the magazines which market this sort of stuff there's always an element of self-deconstruction, of undercutting irony, so that people won't think the writers are fundamentalists about the sorts of thing they actually, to some degree, believe in.

*S:*

They don't want to be dismissed as loonies, cranks, conspiracy theorists...

*J:*

Single issue ranters, that sort of thing.

*S:*

Well, that's the bread and circuses of the modern liberal society.

*J:*

But it's also a bit different from entertainment, it's in an alternative kind of area. If you look at some of the specialist bookshops, like the one I know that deals almost exclusively in comics, graphic novels, sword and sorcery books, movie and music books, and so on - it's also got a bit of Fortean, fiction-as-fact, alternative material, mythology, New Age as well. So you've got this blurring of the boundaries between what's entertainment, what's news, what's fact, what's fiction. Infotainment, as the Americans call a lot of this.

*S:*

Well, there are various strands here. One is the blurring of the boundary between fact and fiction - that's what contributes to the scepticism which surrounds Fortean-type publications.

*J:*

And with the 'liberation' of television that is accentuated all the more. You'll have scores of channels, a fuzzy mix of news, entertainment, advertising, shock-horror, the tabloidization of factual reporting. In fact, news is relatively inexpensive to produce, especially if a station merely subscribes to wire-feeds and employs few if any real reporters. It's drama and film which is expensive, and so you can cut costs by putting more drama into the news itself.

*S:*

Tell me, my dear Frederick, don't you think it's sad that on the one hand, people want to be entertained, diverted, made to forget - and yet at the same time they want to be told the cause - preferably the single cause - of all their problems? They don't have any system of belief any

more, they have no organized religion, and so no standard against which they can measure events and find explanations.

*J:*

It's also political ideology which has collapsed. During the '60s, '70s and early '80s, the radical left was quite strong. Now, with the implosion of the Soviet Bloc, the radical left is extremely weak.

*S:*

Yes, and there's no coherent right-wing ideology in the West any more.

*J:*

You have a few revivalist right-wing movements, mainly on the Continent, such as the Front National.

*S:*

I bet you don't find many Front National members reading *Fortean Times*.

*J:*

That's because most of them don't read English, old man.

*S:*

I meant the French version, as you well know! Not many of them would read it because they're too busy with the serious business of ideological activism to worry about whether flying saucers have been seen over the Dordogne.

*J:*

There's another irony here. The world which *Fortean Times*, *Nexus* and their ilk inhabit is mainly the world of pagan New Age thinking, of environmentalism, animal liberation - all strands which have a well-documented historical presence in far right ideology. And yet such magazines are always quick to dissociate themselves from any hint of far right associations. But the overlap is there, and well known.

S:

It's part of the 'return to nature, return to the soil' aspect of rightism, isn't it? Blood and soil and all that stuff. David Icke has been accused by the left of importing extreme right-wing thinking into his New Age books. *Nexus*, the Australian magazine, has also been targeted as being semi-fascistic, a charge I find it very difficult to see the grounds for. It certainly delves into conspiracy theory (albeit less frequently the more commercial it becomes), but then so do many strands of the left.

J:

The ecological movement, if it took its ideas to their logical conclusion, might well end up with something looking like a coherent ideology, but it doesn't suit them to do that. It suits them to keep their views fragmented, to concentrate on the ozone layer, rather than present a coherent outlook which might well appeal to a large number of people.

S:

But there was the success of the various Green Parties in the '80s, wasn't there? And they had a relatively comprehensive platform. The problem was, it usually involved killing off a third of the human population, so as to save endangered tree lizards.

J:

I think you exaggerate there, old man. Only a quarter. But they did at least have a relatively coherent Green ideology. David Icke is interesting. He begins as a sports commentator with a green tie on BBC, he then moves on to organic fruit juice, he then becomes one of the central people in the Green Party during their most successful period. In media terms he then goes totally off the planet, becoming a sort of shell-suited purple lunatic with multiple wives, talking about conspiracy theory and impending global catastrophe...

S:

And reprinting, almost word for word, the infamous *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*.

J:

Yes, using the term 'Illuminati' instead of 'Jews'. A trifle clumsy, I would have thought. Then, of course, he became an unperson in media terms. They've decided he's a lunatic who doesn't matter, but for a while they took him seriously, especially when some members of the neo-Nazi group Combat 18 attended some of his meetings. He was prime-time news for a while.

S:

And now he tends watermelon on the Isle of Wight, or something.

J:

Yes, he's been in orbit for a while now. But the interesting thing is that the media, for a short time, were faced with the unpalatable fact that there is an irreducible, right-wing element to Green ideology. Icke is an extreme example, of course, but even the Green Party with its dictatorial ideas about population and living standards, both of which they wanted to be reduced either by consent or by *force* if necessary - all that shows a strong overlap with right-wing blood-and-soil ideology. Like it or not, it's a fact. Sure, you can have a left-wing Green viewpoint - Earth Mothering, caring and sharing and all that - but the irreducible right-wing viewpoint is there, and certain people are uncomfortable about it.

S:

You know, my dear Frederick, it's amazing how eco-scares have taken off. Ever since Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* in the '60s, the environmental movement has been snowballing. Now Carson argued that pesticides like DDT were destroying the soil, our crops, our health. And there is a certain amount of truth to that: we *have* been ruining our planet, we *have* lost touch with natural methods of production. But nowadays it's one eco-scare per week. We've got global warming –

*J:*

About which many scientists are highly sceptical, though they rarely rate a mention in the media. And there's deforestation.

*S:*

Desertification.

*J:*

Acid rain; though hardly anyone talks about that any more.

*S:*

Pollution in general.

*J:*

Overpopulation.

*S:*

Alleged overpopulation. Did you know that the entire population of the world, if they stood shoulder to shoulder, could fit on the Isle of Wight?

*J:*

On the assumption that David Icke would let them. Anyhow, I don't think that's a viable solution to the problem. It would be rather crowded. A bit of a tight fit. And imagine the stench of all that B.O. In any event - think of having to share all that space with one's undisguised inferiors. It's a nightmare.

*S:*

Just an interesting thought.

*J:*

Pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, all sorts of cides.

*S:*

Species going extinct.

*J:*

Yes. Although there seems to be quite a bit of truth in that. We are losing much of at least the savage fauna of the planet. And the irony is that the West is preaching to the developing world and accusing them of doing exactly what the good old capitalist West has itself handed down as the Gospel of Development for generations. No wonder the so-called Third World isn't too keen on listening to the sermon! Why should Brazilian loggers listen to Jonathan Porritt?

*S:*

Well, because then they could buy all the nice anti-pollution gadgetry that we've made just for them. We created the problem, now we offer them the solution.

*J:*

Admirable dialectic, I say. We want you to develop, we don't like your poverty and muck and mire, but you mustn't destroy your lovely butterflies and monkeys, or your forests, and you mustn't get ahead of us, but you must listen to our advice.

*S:*

A confused message, it seems. No wonder they call it Cultural Imperialism. Look, all the eco-disasters waiting to erupt have some grain of truth to them. But as I see it, it's part of the 'apocalyptic feel' of the end of the twentieth century to magnify each one of them into a reason for thinking that The End Is Nigh. I've read two books that have recently come out, by academics, on the end of the world. One is by a respected Philosophy professor in Canada who has made virtually his entire career out of writing about this topic; and another is by a group of Australian scientists, of what seems to be a politically conservative bent. They bring out every doom scenario they can think of for saying we're finished.

*J:*

Really, old man, I hope you don't go in for that stuff. I believe in the future - the prospect of a future of great, creative individuals.

S:

Well, I don't go in for every scare story around, but I do think we're on the way out, as it were. One way or another.

J:

What nonsense! Nonsense that's now starting to percolate through to the public at large. We've recently seen a book called *The End of Time*, a kind of exposé by the former religious affairs correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*. He's cottoned on to all the catchphrases, the myths, the cults - all to make money.

S:

Like us, really.

J:

But not nearly as sophisticated, old man.

S:

We're getting a bit self-reflexive. Should this be in the dialogue?

J:

But I believe in self-reflexiveness in all things, including my monologues, and our dialogues.

S:

Now you're being self-reflexive about your self-reflexiveness. Should that also be in the dialogue? We're in danger of entering an endless loop.

J:

Put it all in, my dear Thomas, and allow me to continue. This author I was just speaking of combines in his book certain concepts of apocalypse, our yearnings for it, its cultural manifestations, eco-scares, and religious cults. Everything but the kitchen sink. I told him it was no more than a commercial enterprise, but that if it was all tied in to more overarching

suggestions for social change, liberal society would stand up and take it more seriously. To which he replied, ‘Well, I’m a Tory, I’ve got no time for that.’

S:

Liberal society certainly took the *Unabomber Manifesto* more seriously.

J:

That’s because he was blowing people up, old chap!

S:

Yes, I know that. What I mean is that the manifesto itself, though I haven’t read it, is supposed to be erudite, well written, and profound in its analysis of society’s malaise. *That* is partly why it’s hard to get hold of, not just the fact that its author was a serial bomber.

J:

It’s interesting that the manifesto is on sale in the granddaddy of all left-wing bookshops in London, Compendium, and also in Housman’s Bookshop in King’s Cross. Displayed in the window!

S:

If you tie some of the ideas of the manifesto - extreme anti-technologism and anti-industrialism -

J:

By a mathematics professor who rejected it all, or so it seems.

S:

- and if you tie that in to the various scares about the loss of social cohesion due to forces we know not what, you have a socially dangerous mixture.

J:

I regard what the Unabomber did as an interesting exercise in intellectual terrorism. Here you have a man who creates his own anti-social ideology, and sends lovingly produced wooden bombs through the post to all sorts of academic and technical institutions of a kind he himself

has qualified in and was once associated with. And yet it seems he lived alone in this shack without gas, without electricity, carving these bombs.

S:

I was just thinking of eco-scares, my dear Frederick...

J:

Clearly you were paying attention to my every word, then.

S:

Most of them. I mean, remember the scare about the melting of the polar ice caps, and how the seas would rise and we'd all drown? It still crops up on documentaries now and again. Maybe there's truth to it, maybe not. If the scientists can't even agree, how can I know what to think?

J:

Yes, you have scenarios of future ice ages, future floods, future deserts, the end of life as we know it...

S:

Again, though, there is some truth in some of these stories. As far as I can see, the climate in Britain has been warming. Maybe in 50 years' time London will have a climate similar to Paris.

J:

I'm not complaining.

S:

But there's always *something* which people are focusing on as the cause of their imminent destruction - as though they *want* to be destroyed by something.

J:

Well, Freud had a view of the 'death wish', didn't he? I don't believe it's true, but I suppose it's a metaphor for the aimlessness of life without a purpose.

S:

No, it's all sex for him, old man.

J:

Sex *and* death.

S:

Yes, yes, and Jung has his views, and they've all got some view or other.

J:

Don't be so dismissive. After all, they're dealing with primal archetypes, and in my view there's no creation without the prospect of destruction, no life without death, no flourishing without decay.

S:

Perhaps, but there's also what happens *after* death - to your immortal soul, my dear Frederick. Is it eternal life for you, or eternal death?

J:

A load of old nonsense! Life in this world, or death in this world - that's your choice.

S:

We *have* no choice. To that extent I agree with you. We all die. But unlike you, I don't believe in the hope of endless future creativity. We will all be destroyed, but I can't tell you when, or how. Surely you believe that in your heart of hearts?

J:

I believe in an endless succession of Big Crunches. Disaster will happen, but we will go on.

S:

You believe the human race is immortal?

*J:*

No, because there is some scientific evidence that eventually our Sun will burn out, and there's an end on't.

*S:*

So you do believe we are going to become extinct.

*J:*

We will live forever. The human mind is an endless jungle. Only we are ingenious. We will eventually leave this solar system and possibly colonise other planets before the sun explodes. In any event, this will all be long after you and I, and our tape recorder, have become specks of specks of specks of cosmic dust.

*S:*

Well, I believe that you've substituted a spurious form of immortality for the true immortality of the human soul.

*J:*

You mean one spurious form of immortality for another.

*S:*

I despair of you, old man.

*J:*

Do not despair, as I thrust forward into new vistas of creative realization.

*S:*

C minus.

*J:*

Now, now.

*S:*

I am tough but fair.

*J:*

Look, in terms of you and me three hundred million years is meaningless. In *that* sense, the human race is limitless, as of now.

*S:*

But that fateful comet may strike tomorrow, old man; or in 2028. Then you'll see a limit all right. But I admit we've had silly panics. Remember when Shoemaker-Levy 9 slammed into Jupiter in 1994? That fly-by-night false prophet Sister Sophia took out front page newspaper advertisements warning that the collision would be so bright and so forceful that no one should travel in an aeroplane around that time, that there'd be shockwaves felt on Earth, etc. I must admit, she even had me going for a while. I certainly believe in cosmic warning signs, but one must be very careful about false prophets. Needless to say, Sister Sophia has not been heard from again.

*J:*

She had her fifteen minutes of fame. Remember when there was a scare about some Chinese space probe which looked like it just might come crashing down into the middle of Hull? There was even a 'Hull watch' on the local radio. People are obsessed by the prospect of disaster. They also like to watch boxing, motor racing - to see a crash, to see somebody die, even though they wouldn't admit that was their motivation.

*S:*

And it doesn't have an impact on them in any real sense. Like when Ayrton Senna died, and everyone experienced ten seconds of media-induced sadness. But the crash is replayed endlessly on television.

*J:*

Did you know that there is an Ayrton Senna Avenue in Reading? Yet people are still fascinated by destruction. And a lot of the scares and scams we've been talking about have the idea of

destruction at their core. I think that even drug-taking has at one level a kind of self-destructive urge as its motivation; and at another a desire to go beyond the self, to experience a kind of creation and transcendence.

S:

Yes, only for such people what they lack is religious belief, and they try unsuccessfully to replace it with chemically-induced pseudo-spirituality. A poor substitute, don't you think?

J:

But I do not see it in your terms, my dear Thomas. Life just *is* about creation and destruction, death and rebirth, in the physical and the mental realms. It is about the sense of conflict which underscores meaning. No need for your transcendent God, old chap; there's enough spirituality to be found in our own creative powers, if only we look hard enough.

S:

To worship human creativity - and human destructivity - as you do, Frederick, is to worship a false god. An idol if ever there was one. And, like all idols, bound to disappoint.

J:

I am never disappointed by the power of individuals to transcend the teeming masses with their works of greatness. So I don't follow your thinking.

S:

To go back to drugs for a moment, if I may, your view on the subject is rather different from most, isn't it?

J:

Yes, whereas most civilized people believe it to be in some sense 'immoral', I consider it futile and unnecessary, since chemical stimulation is not needed for a sense of well-being, for artistic illumination, imagination, a sense of forward movement in one's life. We have it within ourselves to enter the sorts of states of mind that drugs are supposed to make possible. Now I'm

not denying, of course, that some great artists have used drugs; but no one can write, or paint, or compose music, while *on* drugs or intoxicants. You have to stop in order to create; but if you can stop, you didn't need to start in the first place. On the other hand, many people can't stop, and for them creativity is impossible. So, on my view, for the truly creative person drugs are unnecessary, if not a positive hindrance, whilst for the uncreative person they are pointless, and will never supply their creative lack.

S:

So drugs have a certain kind of immorality about them on your perspective as well, don't they?

Drug-taking is at least in some cases a kind of 'sin' against creativity.

J:

Yes, in a very attenuated sense of 'sin', old man.

S:

Ernest Hemingway said that the test of a true writer is whether he can write with a hangover.

J:

That's *after* you're drunk. But when you're intoxicated you can't even focus on the keys, as Hemingway discovered. Many writers have thought they created the greatest short story that *Harpers* magazine would ever print, written while drunk, only to see in the cold light of day that they had produced absolute doggerel!

My view on this, by the way, is shared by many artists. William Burroughs said it was impossible to create while on drugs, and he had ingested every chemical stimulant known to man. His essay, 'Letter From a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' - in the *British Journal of Addiction* - is one of the best essays on drugs ever written.

S:

I take a broader view on drug use. I see drug use as wrong because it interferes with a person's reasoning faculty *as such*, and so prevents their pursuit of the truth, rather than just their artistic

creativity, which is not something many people pursue at all. It stops them thinking, and our job as rational creatures *is* to think and to understand the world rather than escape from it through stupefaction. We're being derelict in our very duty as human beings by using drugs.

*J:*

I don't entirely disagree with that, Thomas. But I do find it a little rationalistic and even mechanistic a view of human beings which you've expressed. There is also an emotional element to drug use. Even the two traditional/licit drugs in society, alcohol and tobacco - which is quite enough, in my view - are taken, by many people, for emotional, subjective, pathetic (in the strict sense of the word) reasons. That's also why a third of the adult female population takes anti-depressants.

*S:*

Yes, I'd say that it's primarily emotional reasons which prompt people to take drugs.

*J:*

In my view, drug-taking is, in a way, the anti-creativity of uncreative people, people who don't have a song or a poem in them, but who think they can share in the creative experience by artificially altering their state of mind. Only about ten per cent of people are really concerned with creativity, with moving forward, transcending supposed limitations on human achievement.

*S:*

But what if, as you may well believe, only ten per cent of people are genetically *capable* of high creative achievement? Then why should you castigate the rest as uncreative, and say that if they take drugs it's because drugs are a surrogate form of pseudo-creativity?

*J:*

Well, I'd say your statistic is overly generous, for a start, as far as the achievement of true greatness is concerned.

S:

But then how can everyone have a song or a poem in them?

J:

I'm not saying they should, only that the inferior people should listen and learn from the truly creative ones, and not seek refuge in artificial forms of entertainment.

S:

So you wouldn't have them all on Soma?

J:

No, because it wouldn't do them any good, they wouldn't be able to appreciate the higher art that was being given to them. They wouldn't be in a fit state to receive a vision of greatness from the truly magnificent.

S:

Spoken like the Nietzschean that you are, old man.

J:

Indeed.

S:

So you say people need to be in a fit state either to create or to receive from those who do create.

J:

Yes, but if someone needs a couple of joints before they can create that Hieronymus Bosch-type masterpiece, I won't stand in their way.

S:

So you wouldn't want to subject them to several viewings of *Reefer Madness*, and warn them they might turn into a werewolf?

J:

I don't think so.

S:

Yes, scare stories are dangerous when they're turned into government propaganda. But they're also dangerous when they're turned into alternative politics, which is why one of the most dangerous movements in the USA is the militia movement, which has taken various scare stories - black helicopters over America, an imminent UN takeover - and turned them into the basis of a resistance movement which has caused a bit of anxiety for the government, as well it should. And this has been mixed in with all sorts of conspiracy theories, alternative religious ideas such as neo-paganism and forms of radical Christianity, some left-wing concepts such as Situationist ideas of media manipulation and the Spectacle (as in Waco), and anti-Big Finance, and turned into the basis of a veritable alternative mini-society with its own forms of communication, advertising, support networks, and so on.

J:

I venture to suggest that if David Icke were an American he'd be a non-commissioned officer in the militia!

S:

I'm sure many of his ideas are derived by first- or second-hand contact with these movements in the US, judging by his books. And this all mixes in with *Nexus* and other magazines, as we said before, with articles on various conspiracies, how the banks control your lives, the conspiracy of established medicine to stop people learning about genuine cures for cancer and other illnesses...

J:

Yes, Teddy Goldsmith, brother of the late Sir James, and editor of the right-wing *Ecologist* magazine, has recently published an issue on the Cancer Conspiracy. Sir James was once asked, 'Are you a Jew?', because his father was Jewish and his mother wasn't, and he replied, 'No, I'm not a Jew, I'm a pagan'.

S:

I must say, I've never seen *The Ecologist* in W.H. Smith.

J:

That's because it's pretty serious stuff, arguably at a higher intellectual level than *Nexus*, and also because it is funded by the Goldsmith millions and sells about ten thousand copies through private subscription. I doubt if Teddy would even want it to be on general sale.

S:

I must say, I heard him on a recent TV documentary which, for once, set about debunking the global warming scare, and was not impressed by what he had to say. He showed almost religious fervour in his prophecy of doom, but he had no statistics, no scientific reports at his fingertips, no arguments, just blind assertion, looking almost superciliously at the interviewer as though he was *obliged* to believe him because he was Teddy Goldsmith, whose word was truth! The fact is, as the documentary amply demonstrated, there are many highly respected scientists who simply do not believe that we are experiencing global warming, or that a disaster deriving from that is just around the corner.

J:

Apparently, when Sir James was near death, he consulted an Ayurvedic spiritualist doctor, who told him, 'You must go off the drugs and painkillers', which he did, spending the last forty-eight hours of his life in utter agony.

S:

So much for alternative medicine. But let us move on to another subject - UFOs. This subject is a staple among magazines like *Nexus* and *Fortean Times*, and the way it's treated does not enhance their reputation at all. As far as I'm concerned, the kernel of truth in the UFO phenomenon is that yes, there is a hard core of, say, ten per cent of UFO sightings, documented by credible witnesses with no motive whatsoever to lie, such as policemen, air force pilots and

the like, which are unexplained, but which do not have an ultimate explanation in terms of extraterrestrial visitors. These sightings, I believe, are of things which are firmly terrestrial - so-called 'black' technology. They are sightings of black technological entities from the United States, Russia and other countries, part of their covert military and intelligence programs, which if they were ever revealed in the mainstream media for what they are, would - allegedly - damage those research programs. I have no doubt they have extraordinary flying machines, unlike anything we are familiar with, which can be manoeuvred and manipulated in all sorts of remarkable ways. That's the kernel of truth in UFOs, as I see it.

*J:*

Remember the famous incident of several decades back, which has been in the news a lot lately?

*S:*

You mean Roswell.

*J:*

Yes, the 'big daddy' of UFO scares. The mainstream air force view, as I understand it, is that it was alternative technology, maybe barrage balloons made of new materials being tested for later use in planes and helicopters.

*S:*

But the US government has now admitted that Roswell was not a balloon. They *used* to say that, but now they've withdrawn it. Whatever it was - and I agree it was alternative technology - it wasn't a balloon.

*J:*

That's how states get into trouble. They put out one line, then withdraw it amid embarrassment, and put out another.

S:

It's part of their standard operational disinformation campaign. I suppose the likes of you and me will never know what it was exactly, but the point is that the 'alien visitors' rubbish is partly government disinformation mixed in with the general propensity on the part of the population, especially the trainspotters, to *believe* that there are little green men.

J:

People like a story, and to a large extent people convince themselves that what they saw was beyond human understanding. It's like a court case, where each side passionately believes that its version of events is true, that it alone knows what really happened.

S:

I find it hard to understand how people who seem to be quite normal and rational can believe so passionately that they were abducted by aliens. It's possible that in some cases the alleged memories are infused into them, as so-called 'screen' memories, by government agencies to prevent their recalling having witnessed certain top secret state activity, e.g. 'black' military technology. It's reasonable to think that such 'memories' can be induced, from what I've read. And John Mack, the Harvard professor whose book gave alien abduction testimony more credibility than it deserves, is known to have had associations with state intelligence agencies like the CIA.

J:

Then again, a proportion of the population will always have weird beliefs about themselves, and not necessarily induced. I think artistic creativity, imagination, visual fantasizing have a lot to do with this. If you look at many modern novels, not to mention films and plays, you see a kind of fantasizing which, within the confines of the approved art form known as the novel, film, and so on, has a certain integrity. But when it begins to slop out, as it were, into other areas, people tend to get worried, and alarm bells start to ring. If you read the transcripts of many accounts of UFO

sightings and abductions, you find they often resemble poor novels, which a publisher, if he received two hundred pages of the stuff in a jiffy bag, would say, ‘Well, it’s all right, but I’ve read ten like it’.

S:

OK, you’ve got the people who give such testimonies for money, or for publicity - they just want to be on *Strange But True* at 10 p.m. on cable. And you’ve got the incurable fantasists. But what about people who sincerely believe that aliens have performed sexual experiments on them? Are we to believe with Freud that only women would make such claims, and that they manifest a kind of hysteria?

J:

The fact that sex comes up in so many of these stories, I mean I don’t want to get too Freudian, but don’t you think, old boy, that even if there were aliens the last thing they’d want to do is have sex with an Oregon housewife?

S:

If you look at medieval (and post-medieval) accounts of Satanic possession, you find that a lot is said about the incubus and the succubus, different kinds of demon which do indeed perform sexual acts with humans, mainly women. An important part of theology is devoted to the study of such phenomena, and they are taken very seriously indeed.

J:

My dear boy, the demonic is truly a human characteristic! But there again, maybe what we’re dealing with is an archetype, a kind of fantasy that mingles repressed sexuality, sublimation, projection, all sorts of psychological phenomena, and which takes on a paradigmatic Christian form in one period of history, and a quasi-technological form in another.

S:

So now you’re mixing some Jung with your Freud? A little ad hoc, don’t you think?

J:

But look - the fact is that it is nearly always women who come forward with these stories.

S:

As they did with their stories of infantile sexual acts with adults which Freud notoriously put down to fantasy, having dismissed the idea that there was any reality in their tales. He was comprehensively refuted later, as Jeffrey Masson's book demonstrates. Furthermore, some of the statements I've read about alien abductions read like chapters from the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and yet I doubt any Oregon housewife has read that famous medieval treatise on diabolical possession.

J:

Don't take Luciferian possession too seriously. It's a myth of the primarily destructive part of consciousness, what mystics call 'the left' --

S:

Funnily enough.

J:

-- but it is also quite possible that humanity has so deeply absorbed these narratives that they come out in different forms without anyone's consciously referring back to earlier forms.

S:

A kind of collective unconscious, you say?

J:

Well, I do not want to import all the Jungian theoretical baggage. I'm happy to leave it at the suggestion that most alleged witnesses to alien abductions are simply rehashing stories they've heard, films they've seen, science fiction they've read. They've absorbed it, fantasized about it on and off, links have been made in their unconscious, perhaps, with earlier forms of such narratives, again which they may or may not have read or heard about themselves. And from that

psychic mix, as it were, such testimonies spring up. I find that eminently reasonable as a working hypothesis.

S:

And that's pretty much the attitude of the *Fortean Times*. Although they are supposed to be open-minded about everything, in fact they have a quasi-covert methodology, which is to regard many things, such as Satanic child abuse and alien abductions, as deriving from urban myths and archetypes which have been floating around perhaps for centuries.

J:

However, I would question whether that was entirely their view of things. I think there's a 'harder' element to them, even though it's covered over by commercial dross and the magazine has declined markedly so as to be able to sell well in W.H. Smith. Putting that aside, I think they partly believe that aliens exist, or at least want to believe that it's not *all* down to urban mythology. Whereas I don't believe they exist at all.

S:

What do they believe and what don't they? You say they partly believe in aliens, but they wholly don't believe in Satanic abuse.

J:

Because they have their own 'political correctness', and such a thing does not sit well within their own worldview. So they're not really relativist.

S:

No one is.

J:

Some of us are more relativist than others - in the sense that we believe in the dialectical strength of contraries, but also in the absolute certainty of our own judgment moment by moment. Ask Heraclitus.

S:

That's a matter of opinion. In any case, it seems you were saying before that many alternative ideas are kept in ghettos, and that society regards them as harmless as long as they stay there. But when they seep out and mix with other ideas, such as radical views about economics or society or politics, then the alarm bells go off.

J:

Yes, they become threatening. I remember a senior cleric once told a friend of mine that the good thing about the establishment of the Church of England is that although it has led to a generalized blandness in mainstream religion, and is terminally boring and dull, at least it has kept a lid on some of the more 'bizarre' kinds of spirituality.

S:

It used to, but not now, since bizarreness is at the heart of Church of England worship nowadays. In any case, it is so irrelevant as an institution that any lid it once provided has long since fallen off the pot, if I may pursue the metaphor. Everyone knows where to find alternative magazines, books, videos, Web sites, the lot.

J:

OK, so the next line of defence is to say, 'Keep this stuff in a few magazines and specialist bookshops, and make sure the magazines have lurid headlines like "I shot Bigfoot but he got away"'. But the more serious magazines, like *Lobster* and *The Ecologist*, are still only mail-order. And yet ideas found in the more underground press do still manage to find their way to the edges of the mainstream.

S:

Yes. We saw the *Sunday Times* run a series of articles questioning whether HIV causes AIDS, a dissident view if ever there was one. The *Sunday Telegraph* ran a feature on one of the most radical ideas around - did man really walk on the moon? UFOs, Roswell, they get into the press

with regularity, along with other Fortean; indeed the editor of *Fortean Times* now writes a regular column for one of the major papers, though I don't expect anything too close to the wind from him, and I haven't been disappointed.

More importantly, there was Ambrose Evans-Pritchard's long campaign in the *Sunday Telegraph* against Clinton, which involved a pretty sympathetic portrayal of the militia movement. He tapped into numerous alternative news sources, not least from the Internet, and gave them and their contents some currency.

*J:*

Yes, because of the Internet it is now virtually impossible to keep many once-forbidden ideas from mass circulation. In that sense the playing field has changed greatly.

*S:*

You can't have ghettos when you've got the Internet. But then with the Internet you have far more junk - 'noise', as it's called - than you have facts, so it brings with it the requirement of being able to sift signal from noise, of knowing where to look, what to look for. And now the transnationals with their oligopolies are getting in on the act, more and more of the Internet will be 'tamed' and domesticated, sanitized and filtered. And we may end up back where we were before it came on the scene.

*J:*

Yes, the Internet functions like a gigantic skip for all the intellectual detritus of mankind. Meanwhile, censorship of the Net is coming more to the fore, with child pornography and extreme right-wing propaganda the twin targets allowing censorship to penetrate an otherwise unregulated marketplace. Particularly with child pornography, it's a useful target since no one, except perhaps the most radical/jaundiced libertarian, would go to the wall for the right of paedophiles to put their stuff on the Net. And I suppose the extreme right is not far behind in

many liberal people's minds, so they are a convenient way in for social engineers who have a far broader agenda of censorship and control.

S:

Look, I'm happy for paedophilia to be banned from the Net, I'm content for there to be censorship; but by the same token, if it meant that alternative, unsanitized, radical viewpoints had to disappear, I would say that in the *current* state of society, that would be a bad thing, and that *perhaps* the non-censorship of paedophilia was a price that had to be paid to keep alternative politics on the Net.

J:

You use the Internet a great deal; have you seen any child pornography on it?

S:

Now what makes you think I'd look for it, my dear Frederick?

J:

I have no doubt about your probity, old man; what I mean is whether you've come across it while aimlessly surfing. No pictures of kiddies in close proximity to sheep?

S:

No, never seen naked children, boys' locker rooms...sure, I get junk e-mail advertising 'Hot Sex' and whatever, as does everyone else. But I think the problem of paedophilia on the Net, as such, is grossly exaggerated precisely so that the mums and dads get worked up enough to ring their local radio station and demand action.

J:

So there we are, it's a myth! What usually goes through my mind when I read about people who want to ban child porn from the Net is that they are also the ones who want to ban revisionist histories of the Second World War, which are also well established in cyberspace. Indeed, there's a book on Holocaust denial by Gill Seidel, a lecturer at one of the post-polytechnics -

S:

You mean new universities --

J:

Yes, new in the sense of changing their letterheads. Anyway, this book contained a foreword by a psychologist which jumped from talk about UFOs and related phenomena, which are a bit of fun in his view, to Holocaust denial, which is far more insidious. See the correlation: some people think that Forteana are the thin edge of the wedge leading to Holocaust denial, right-wing extremism, and so on.

S:

The line is drawn for us. I know the editor of *Nexus* has even been warned, by people he at least thought meant business, not to publish articles on US government involvement with drug-running, which he has done in the past. He has also become leery of publishing articles on banking, which he used to do. He has, as it were, been advised not to touch those sorts of subjects.

J:

I remember that the mainstream magazine *Business Age* published an alternative account of Robert Maxwell's death, which involved the claim that the Israeli secret service killed him for stealing from their government. We'll never know the truth, I assume.

S:

I haven't seen *Business Age* on the W.H. Smith shelves in a long time.

J:

I saw a copy in the train station recently. So with that bit of specious cause-effect reasoning, let us draw matters to a close.

## **Chapter 5**

### **ART ATTACK**

*Location: a park near a London gallery*

*Samuel:*

So, we have just seen a veritable feast for our eyes - the exhibition called *Sensation*, the choicest pieces from the collection of that renowned connoisseur, Charles Saatchi. I don't think I have seen an exhibition quite like it. In turns nauseating, appalling, alienating...at other times trivial and banal. Just as good art should be, wouldn't you say?

*Jonathan:*

Actually, I found it enjoyable. The monumental nature of some of the pieces worked, in my opinion. The painting of Myra Hindley made of children's handprints - an interesting idea.

*S:*

Not in the eyes of the people who vandalised it, nearly causing the show to be cancelled.

*J:*

Perhaps, but that was something of an over-reaction. The piece was quite effective, though the effect would have been diminished if it had been less monumental. Plus there is the fact that the picture of her from which it's taken is so well know, almost an icon of our time.

*S:*

And what was your general impression of the exhibition?

*J:*

Some of the work is quite strong, and as I say I did enjoy it, but on the whole one would have to say it is in general pretty tired, clearly a demonstration of late post-modernity. Stepping back, then, it has to be seen as essentially derivative from Modernism itself, an attempt to blend *Brit Pop* culture with already well-explored forms of expression from within Modernism. If you go through each exhibit, you see that virtually all of them have some precedent in twentieth-century art.

S:

Perhaps you are alluding to Damien Hirst's delightfully preserved bovine cross-sections? Did Marcel Duchamp pickle animals?

J:

No, but he pioneered the idea of anti-art, ready-made art, art that wasn't art, if you know what I mean.

S:

I'd hate to confess I did not.

J:

The cow, the shark in formaldehyde - the idea comes from technology, from taxidermy, forensic science, exhibits in natural history museums. The same goes, to a degree, for the Chapmanworld exhibit...

S:

Oh, you mean the child pornogaphy - kiddie mannequins with genitalia coming from their faces. Is Chapmanworld one person?

J:

No, Jake and Dinos.

S:

A couple of regular guys, eh? For crypto-paedophiles.

J:

Well, it's true that they're exploiting something in the ambiguous and slightly 'terrifying' nature of dolls. There used to be, not far from where I lived, a shop called The Dolls' Hospital, where dolls were repaired. It was something of a local landmark. I used to go past it in the bus, from where I could see the panoramic corner window at the top of the shop, at which there was an array of doll parts - heads, limbs, torso, in all sorts of positions, looking quite grotesque.

S:

Do you remember when the Beatles released that compilation album called *Yesterday and Today*, around 1965? The cover showed them in blood-soaked butchers' coats, with strips of meat hanging off the furniture, and parts of dolls strewn about the place. That caused a furore and they had to junk the cover (now worth a fortune, of course).

J:

Yes, there is a gruesome and surreal element to the use of dolls. Perhaps Chapmanworld were drawing on the work of Hans Bellmer, a German artist of the 1920s and '30s.

S:

Did he make dolls with genitals coming out of their faces?

J:

Not quite, but there is a similarity of sorts. So there you have another point of repetitiveness, or derivativeness, in the *Sensation* exhibition.

S:

With the added bit of original pornography. And what about Marc Quinn's cast of his head, made out of his own frozen blood? Try as they might to stop the inevitable, the thing was slowly melting, and didn't have much face left. Not the sort of art object I'd want to have in my living room - or kitchen.

J:

Again, it's really just a reworking of the concept of the death mask, which is as old as civilization itself. If it had been made out of clay it wouldn't have caused a stir.

S:

Eventually it will turn into a great, steaming pool of stale blood. But then again maybe that's what the artist wants - 'anti-Art', a kind of subversion of art collecting, making Saatchi pay a lot of money for what will eventually be fit for nothing but flushing down the loo.

J:

If you look at, say, Viennese Actionism of the 1960s, you will see the use of excrement and other grisly and abattoir-related bits and pieces. My criticism of *Sensation*, ultimately, is that what the crowds think is a big shock - a big Wow - is not much of a thrill, and is quite derivative and unoriginal in the history of Modernism.

S:

But why are people shocked? It can't be put down totally to the fact that the media primed us for it.

J:

There's a little bit of that. In fact, there's a kind of disjunction between the way society views such art - even allegedly 'progressive' elements such as *The Independent* and *The Guardian* - and the art itself. The art itself is unoriginal, but people think that it represents some new outrage.

S:

Actually, I wonder how many people were shocked. Did you see anyone in the exhibition who looked put out? Most were suitably po-faced and nonchalant about it all.

J:

A few were grinning uneasily, but perhaps all the media comment beforehand forewarned people, and to some extent disarmed them. Some people would certainly have had a little jolt, especially by the 'paedophile' art of Chapmanworld.

S:

But no one attacked it. No one attacked the blasphemous *Last Supper*. All that was attacked was the Myra Hindley portrait.

J:

In the first weeks there were demonstrations outside against the whole show, though it's true they were focused on the Hindley picture. That picture, which hits you not long after going in, because of its size and location, was the focus for the exhibition. And the early brochures and publicity highlighted that picture, and made it the motif of the show. But of course it's not reproduced in publicity now.

S:

Tell me, old chap - would you say the show on the whole qualifies as Degenerate Art?

J:

Well, it depends on what you mean - you must define your terms. The term 'degenerate art' can be overused and easily 'demonised' because of its political associations - the Nazis had exhibitions of 'degenerate art' in the 1930s. I think, rather, that *Sensation* represents art at the end of Modernism, art as decay, decay as art - to borrow from the idea behind Stewart Home's exhibition of the early 1980s - *Culture of the Ruins; the Ruins of Culture*. That exhibition was attacked, but the rumour was that the artists did it themselves in order to attract attention. The point is that Modernism has come to an end.

S:

But what we have just seen is supposed to be *post*-Modernism!

J:

The term is not very helpful, I think. Post-Modernism is no more than Modernism itself at the very fag-end of its existence. What we've seen, even though it has a certain anti-populist and radical feel to it, is essentially old hat. The problem is that art is essentially about mediation, about an idea in the mind of the artist being conveyed to the viewer.

S:

In that sense there wasn't much mediation in what we've seen. Just unsubtle, in-your-face images.

J:

Yes. Take the hunk of meat in the glass cage with the flies hovering all over it.

S:

No thank you, I've just eaten.

J:

I mean conceptually, old boy. Now, such an exhibit is art in a way, since it's a structured space. And it's in a gallery, since the building says 'gallery' outside and people pay money to come and look at it. But real art involves sculpting - in the broad sense - a *meaning* from the material. What does that hunk of meat *mean*? What do the flies *mean*?

S:

I don't know what they meant, but I do know that they stank.

J:

Unless meaning is, to use an unfortunate expression given the topic, *carved* out of reality, or at least *projected* onto it, the hunk of meat remains just what it is. Art has to *transform* pre-existing material, and simply putting a bleeding carcass into a box and covering it with flies does not amount to a transformation.

S:

So what you're saying is that this particular exhibit - and perhaps many others like it, the Hirsts especially - are *too real* to count as art.

J:

Yes, in a way.

S:

And note how the most realistic exhibits have the most surrealistic titles. Damien Hirst's shark in formaldehyde is officially called 'The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living'. The very bizarreness of the title is evidence, to me, that not enough meaning has been implanted into the material itself, and the artist feels bound to compensate by adding a title which is *so* meaningful as to be grotesque.

J:

Not bad thinking, my dear Thomas. So my point is that art without metamorphosis is not art, and that without transformation the artistic heritage of the last two or three millennia is meaningless.

S:

But maybe you're being a bit too harsh? After all, take Hirst's cow: he has bisected it twenty times, producing neat, clean sections, which he has then lovingly placed in custom-made plexiglass tanks, all lined up so you can see from one end of the animal to the other. That amounts to a transformation, doesn't it?

J:

Yes, some of the strength of the work comes from that. But it's not enough. There's a lot of skill required in taxidermy, but it is rightly not treated as an art form. Damien Hirst has simply taken taxidermy to a new level. He has certainly not raised it to the level of art, however. Indeed, it is arguable that traditional taxidermy required *more* skill than Hirst has ever demonstrated. Perhaps his only real skill is in being able to persuade people to part with large sums of money to purchase his products. Look: horror, blood and guts, the visceral - this has all been part of the tradition of art. But true artists are able to transmogrify the gory elements of reality - to paint, sculpt, shape and reshape the nature of what it is to be human.

S:

So then would you call Damien Hirst a craftsman rather than an artist?

J:

Perhaps a minor craftsman, adapting prior Modernist forms and pretending they're original.

S:

What about the shark? True, it has now decayed to the point of looking more like an OAP shark on benefit - but it still has some power.

J:

Ah yes, but the power comes from the shark itself, not from anything Hirst has done with it.

S:

The blow-dried lamb looked cute and affecting.

J:

Yes, but most people would prefer it with mint jelly and mushy peas.

S:

It did look quite tasty, didn't it?

J:

I think the shark worked better than the Chapmanworld mannequins, which were in my opinion quite poor, and 'degenerate' in the sense that they represented the decay and exfoliation of late Modernist sculpture.

S:

What about Tracey Emin's tent - *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*? Was it not arresting?

J:

Maybe she should have been 'arrested' for what the tent says she did!

S:

Poor Tracey, what a mixed-up woman.

*J:*

Pornographic *artistes* like Sarah Young make videos of themselves having sex with twenty men at once, so Tracey's tent is hardly a novel contribution. She just stitched up a tent to say the same thing.

*S:*

Ah, a tent you have to *enter into* in order to read little stories about her bed partners and her aborted unborn child. What an unsubtle concept: Tracey's patchwork womb.

*J:*

I'm sure Sarah could have rigged up something similar if she'd put her mind to it. She's done a sexual version of *Hamlet*, from which the Shakespeare has been completely removed. She plays Ophelia, and says in a hybrid Cockney/Essex girl accent, 'Hello, I'm Ophelia', and then drops her knickers, after which there is endless bonking.

*S:*

Rather Pythonesque!

*J:*

So Tracey the Tent is hardly moving beyond a similar 'artistic' level. That, when coupled with decaying animals, elephant dung stuck onto pseudo-African paintings - a travesty of all that is really good in tribal art - and videotape of a woman's intestines hardly make for true art. It is very late, and very, very tired.

*S:*

Well, I for one happened to enjoy Mona Hatoum's tour of her digestive tract. I saw the full-length feature version, in surround sound, at the *Rites of Passage* exhibition at the Tate.

*J:*

I suppose she needed a certain amount of courage to plunge the endoscope into her gullet.

S:

All in the name of art, old boy!

J:

You may say that. I couldn't possibly comment. I will say that *Sensation* did have some power, but mainly because of the sheer size of some of the exhibits, and the glorious neo-classical rooms of the Royal Academy. Bare white walls give everything a starkness.

S:

In-your-faceness.

J:

How lexically inventive of you - I don't think.

S:

I think Mr. Saatchi will end up disappointed, if he hasn't made his money back on entrance fees.

J:

Or sold out before the crash.

S:

As I've no doubt he will. But the fact is, in maybe thirty or forty years' time - who knows when - 99% of the exhibits we have just seen will be virtually worthless.

J:

The organic pieces will have decayed into nothingness. A few heat waves and the head made of blood will be red liquid on the floor.

S:

Blood on the carpet.

J:

Quite. But even the Hirsts, already wasting away, will be in pieces. Indeed entropy is part of the show, conceptually. There is after all an irony in the art of Hirst, Whiteread and others. They are

living in a declining civilization, and they know it - at least subconsciously. There is a self-referentiality to this art.

S:

But you hardly see Hirst running around saying, 'Oi, I did that shark 'cos I'm tryin' to symbolise that we're in a, like, decaying civilization'.

J:

No, but then most visual artists are not intellectuals. You have exceptions, of course: van Gogh's letters to his brother about the nature of painting are excellent. But most visual artists simply take certain forms and iconography from the culture around them, and replicate them in various ways. They symbolise, unconsciously, what the culture *already* means.

Art which is obsessed with dung, with putrefaction, with sex and death, chaos and entropy, is art which knows its time has come.

S:

What I'd like to know is whether dying movements are replaced by new ones relatively soon, or can they remain in their death throes for decades, maybe centuries?

J:

Well, the artistic culture of modernity been going on for nearly a century already. Pure Modernism was really over by 1930. But there's another point I'd like to make about this show. It was a display of *British* art. Now, British art has always been about great individualists swimming against the current: Blake, Turner, Gainsborough, Sickert, Bacon, L.S. Lowry, Lewis -- they are *all* individualists. Their styles don't relate much to each other or to art history. They are men with an *individual vision*. Even cutting-edge artists of today like Albert Loudon are very much out of the mainstream, giving expression to their personal vision.

S:

And you think that typifies British art as such, as opposed to Continental art?

*J:*

Yes. And the point I wish to make is that the work in *Sensation* is *generic*. It is part of a movement, indeed a movement that really died decades ago. And it is simply an embodiment of Continental theory and Modernist practice as developed earlier this century.

*S:*

But are you saying that it will take an individual to create a resurgence of true art?

*J:*

Yes, at least in this society. Even the ‘school’ of Francis Bacon, Lucien Freud and others, which came to prominence in the 1950s and ‘60s, consisted of no more than a group of men who met in pubs in central London, drinking and enjoying each others’ company. The School of Paris painted alike; the School of London consisted of individualists who drank together.

*S:*

So, then, where do we go from here?

*J:*

The way I see it at present, perhaps the last great movement in Western art, at least for a long time, may well be so-called *Art Brut*, or Outsider Art. That will, in a way, show Modernism going full circle.

*S:*

Why? Because early Modernist art was itself labelled by many as degenerate, art by madmen, by the insane?

*J:*

Yes, that’s how it was often regarded. So it may be that as Modernism breathes its last, it will return to its original source. Remember that one of the main reasons Modernism got started was the advent of photography, which took over the ability to represent, in a fully Realist fashion, all

forms. What future did representational art have? Hence Modernist artists retreated within, and began seeing things from an internalist perspective.

*S:*

That may be right, but it's only part of the story, of course. Modernism was a response to technology generally, not just photography. It did not retreat from technology, it embraced it. Also, the withdrawal to the 'inner space' of the mind, begun already with Impressionism, was a response to the decline, in the surrounding culture, of objective values, common morality, mind-independent truth.

*J:*

True, but I am focusing on one aspect. The more technology exploded, with photography becoming cinema, then television, and now computer art, the more painters, i.e. those who still work with the traditional media of paint, brush and canvas, have retreated to increasingly non-representational forms, with the result that in the extreme case of Abstract Expressionism the paint becomes its own subject matter.

*S:*

By the same token, photography has itself become more and more abstract, as it has exploited new technology.

*J:*

It's not so much the new technology, but the increasing difficulty of finding an original image. Everything has been photographed, at least to the limit of technology. And with new techniques of micro-photography the world of the small-scale is being well covered too.

*S:*

So technology itself is now driving art, it seems.

*J:*

That is part of our late-twentieth century predicament, my dear Thomas. Where once the vision dictated the materials, now the reverse is true.

*S:*

Doesn't that mean we are trapped? Where can we go?

*J:*

One problem is that in modern society there is an endless promiscuity of the image. This is a highly visual culture.

*S:*

We're soaked in images, especially from television and public advertising.

*J:*

What it means is that society has made it that much harder for individuals to depict life in an original way.

*S:*

So how is the artist to transcend this limitation?

*J:*

Simply by painting pictures the like of which have not been seen before.

*S:*

But it is hard to envisage what it would be like.

*J:*

Well, if you look at the paintings of Frank Auerbach - an artist of Germanic ancestry who lives in Kensington - you see images that have not been seen before, layers of paint that add up to something original. He works frenetically, fourteen hours a day. He knew Freud, and Bacon, and Graham Sutherland. Freud himself is not that uninteresting, veering in a way toward photography but shunning any idealization of the human form.

S:

You mean he paints grotesque bodies in degrading poses.

J:

Steady on, old chap - not quite. It relates to *cinéma vérité*, in some ways a kind of ultra-realism that penetrates to the ugliness of the flesh.

S:

Now you steady on. The flesh is not ugly - the human body is a beautiful object. Although we are made in the image of God chiefly in respect of our souls, we are also God's physical handiwork, and have a kind of corporeal resemblance to Him. Hence the Incarnation of Christ as God and Man.

J:

Now you know I don't accept any of that, my dear Thomas. It's pure myth. Such antiquated thinking is merely Christianity's contribution to a dying and derivative culture.

S:

You may say so, but millions disagree with you. I must say, though, that the human body, especially when not looked after, can be quite ugly. That occurred to me when looking at the set of hideous family photos in *Sensation*.

J:

You mean the ones that included the photo of the cat flying across the room?

S:

Being thrown, I should think.

J:

Yes, not the sort of living room I felt a desire to spend a lot of time in. But notice how many people were recoiling from the photos, as though they'd been assaulted. People don't like to be reminded that most of them look like that, especially in their natural habitat, i.e. their living

room, in front of the telly. They're bloated, flabby, sweaty, looking like beached whales in front of a flickering light.

S:

Speak for yourself. When I watch television I assume a dignified pose, and can be described as nothing other than svelte and ready for action.

J:

You mean ready to change the channel.

S:

Possibly. But to return to the more engaging subject of the exhibition, I think the real problem is that it had no transcendence, no spirituality. The exhibits are rooted in muck and mire, the flesh, blood, death, sex. All very well, but not very satisfying.

J:

That's why it was called *Sensation*. The ambiguity of the word is no accident. The only shock people are able to feel is the enervation of their senses.

S:

Once, in a more enlightened age, people were not shocked by decapitated corpses, by disease and death, but by the thought of what awaited them beyond this life if they did not measure up.

J:

I don't know if I would call the pre-Enlightenment age you allude to as enlightened, but it is true that, at least in modern society, the only thing that can wake people up from their spiritual torpor - and I use the term 'spiritual' in my own sense - is a jolt to their nerve endings. And, as we know, the more they are jolted, the harder the shock needs to be. In some ways, a better exhibition than *Sensation* - at least a more honest one - would have consisted of electrodes attached to the walls, to which people could freely attach themselves and discover the pain of real sensation.

S:

That brings to mind the *Rites of Passage* exhibition I mentioned earlier. One of the exhibits there was a ladder whose rungs contained a noxious gas. The gas began to escape from its confines, sending a highly unpleasant odour into the room, and forcing its evacuation. I believe this was unintentional.

J:

Art attacking the viewer - *literally!*

S:

Indeed, and the thought that occurred to me was - excellent! If art can attack the viewer, then it now becomes legitimate for the viewer to attack the art, and I had visions of scores of dissatisfied art buffs who, instead of demanding their money back for all the tripe they had been exposed to, decided instead to take to the exhibits with axes and mallets. A satisfying thought, no?

J:

Your suppressed love of destruction is admirable.

S:

I try to keep it under wraps. But tell me, is there such an art form as 'comic art', where someone creates an exhibit with the *sole* purpose of making people laugh? Imagine people going into the gallery, and rolling about with laughter, howling with merriment at objects which were created expressly so as to amuse them!

J:

No, old chap - that's called music hall.

S:

I'm serious! This could be a new art form!

*J:*

There is an intentionally humorous aspect to some of the things we have seen. There is sometimes an intention to provoke a wry smile, which you find among post-Modernists. The bathtub made of soap, the delightful little wax cadaver --

*S:*

That was my favourite exhibit, in fact.

*J:*

These must have been created with a certain sense of irony or jest. But I doubt that any artist wants to have his viewers rolling about as though they'd been listening to Les Dawson.

*S:*

Ah, but that's what they *should* do, in this dry and humourless age. Why *shouldn't* the viewer hit the deck in paroxysms of amusement? Maybe this is my new vocation.

*J:*

Don't give up your day job, as they say. I'd do some market research if I were you.

*S:*

I want to see the punters losing their breakfasts.

*J:*

Actually, some people would find the Chapmanworld exhibits funny in a grotesque sort of way, rather than offensive.

*S:*

Especially if you'd had a couple of lagers. 'Oi! Get a load o' that girl with the willie coming out of her face!'

*J:*

Not the type one is likely to find at the Royal Academy.

S:

More's the pity. Art for the people, I say!

J:

As far as art for the people is concerned, you'd find most Marxist critics not having nice things to say about *Sensation*.

S:

How do you mean?

J:

They'd say it was anti-art, bourgeois entertainment designed at the same time to shock the masses. They'd also say it was no more than a show to enable Burlington House to pay its debts and Mr. Saatchi to enhance or at least maintain the value of what is of dubious intrinsic value itself. That's why it's been advertised so aggressively.

S:

I should think the RA would have paid off a few debts, judging by the attendance and the hefty admission fee.

J:

It was packed when we were there. Mostly with people under forty.

S:

Emaciated young women.

J:

I'm sure you were paying careful attention to them.

S:

No, only to the art, my dear Frederick. Speaking of which, another thing I noticed about the exhibits is that, although most of them were three-dimensional, none were beautiful from a *tactile* point of view. Not that you'd have been allowed to touch anything anyway, but I saw

precious little that attracted me texturally; nothing I would have liked to touch, everything all chipped and cracked and peeling. Ugly. ‘Don’t touch the exhibits’. Thanks, but I had no desire to touch them, so they needn’t have bothered with the warning signs.

*J:*

The work is deliberately rebarbative, so that is part of the reason. And since the work is not saying anything anyway, the textural dullness and the intellectual vapidness coincide to give a general feeling of not having seen anything worthwhile. It’s like the difference between, say, *War and Peace* and the novels of Sven Hassel. Hassel is good for a ten-minute read, but no one feels uplifted afterwards, as though any of the content has permanently entered their consciousness. Compare that with Goya, or Bosch.

*S:*

Well, there was a plastic reproduction of one of Goya’s war etchings: bloody heads and torsos minus genitalia.

*J:*

Yes, the *Disasters of War* etchings, reproduced for us courtesy of Jake and Dinos Chapman.

*S:*

Ah, so that’s where the missing genitals went - they stuck them to their kiddie dolls!

*J:*

The brochure says: ‘Three Spanish soldiers are tied to a tree, their bodies mutilated and castrated. The work is at once tragic and ironic, horrifying and sublime.’

*S:*

Ironic? Sublime? Forgive me, but I must have missed that.

*J:*

The point is, we do not have the Chapman brothers to thank for any of the aesthetic qualities the image might happen to have: it is Goya we should thank. The Chapmans have added nothing

except for some 1990s ‘video nasty’ realism. That is the sum total of their artistic contribution to that particular work. And, of course, their bright, plastic reproduction *subtracts* much of what makes Goya great - the darkness, the shadows, the mystery.

S:

Come to think of it, it would have made a good set of display mannequins for a sado-masochist clothes shop. A T-shirt on this torso here, a helmet on that head there...

J:

All right, enough, I get your drift.

S:

I suppose it could have been made by Jeff Koons in a rare suicidal moment. Pop art for depressives.

J:

That’s part of what detracts from it and from similar pieces we saw. It’s trying to turn pop art into something serious, which it essentially isn’t. Warhol intended pop art to be friendly, inviting, bright and breezy, just like the pop culture it came from. When the genre is turned in a more macabre direction, it becomes something dry, humourless, and distinctly un-post-Modern.

S:

In a word, just plain gross.

J:

You have exceeded your accustomed heights of lexical subtlety.

S:

In a way, it’s a kind of sub-standard Madame Tussaud’s, like the model of Sid Vicious which we saw, a bad resemblance, and taken directly from the famous scene in *The Great Rock and Roll Swindle*, when he sings ‘My Way’ and then pulls a pistol and starts shooting the audience.

*J:*

Perhaps that is what the artists in *Sensation* are trying to do, only with considerably less panache.

*S:*

And we should have the right to fire back at them, as I suggested earlier. Still, you and I differ considerably over what can be done to remedy what is obviously a parlous situation for modern art. For you, it's a great individual who has to come along and, as it were, re-define art, whereas for me there has to be a total cultural re-orientation.

*J:*

There may be both. Individuals start movements, and there may well be social and cultural forces unleashed which re-orient art, giving sustenance to the work of this or that individual, and leading to the spread of a new way of thinking. Consider the way Romanticism was unleashed in France, partly as a reaction to the French Revolution and the desire to go back to classical norms. Large scale cultural forces will inevitably be unleashed - they will shape art and be shaped by art.

*S:*

Well put, but the fact is there has to be a spiritual regeneration. There can't be more materialism because we've done it, it's exhausted. Photography killed off many forms of representation, and computer technology may well do away with traditional two-dimensional forms altogether.

*J:*

There has been a lot of representational art in the twentieth century, both within and outside Modernism. It's interesting to note that twentieth century neo-Classicism has never really gained critical acceptance because of its alleged authoritarianism and its association with undesirable political regimes. At least, I mean the more representational forms, as opposed to Bauhaus and other movements of classical inspiration but abstract design.

*S:*

I imagine you're thinking of the *Art and Power* exhibition we saw at the Hayward Gallery?

*J:*

Yes.

*S:*

Well, how would you contrast those two exhibitions?

*J:*

I found *Art and Power* more interesting conceptually than *Sensation*. *Art and Power* contained, of course, much that is inimical to Modernism, especially in its monumental, authoritarian and strictly realistic forms. On the other hand, authoritarian art overlaps with Modernism, as we saw in the Futurism which grew out of Mussolini's Italy. Lenin and the Bolsheviks encouraged Constructivism and Formalism for ten years after the revolution, though there was eventually a fierce reaction against it.

Even now, there is a suspicion of neo-Classicism among critics and historians, who think it smacks of authoritarianism. Hence artists like Arno Breker who are its major exponents this century have not really found their place in the pantheon.

*S:*

Does such a political association matter? Anyway, artists are always letting themselves be compromised, whether on left or right, because they have to live and they need sponsorship.

*J:*

These were artists who received sponsorship from a particular regime at a particular time. Artists have always needed patronage, and the artists who criticize Breker can now consider themselves lucky they were not working in Germany then. But they still get their government funding, which is often targeted at Politically Correct causes, so in essence I can't see how they are any different.

*S:*

I must say I found the *Art and Power* exhibition fascinating. I consulted every exhibit for several minutes, read the descriptions very carefully and made sure I did not miss anything. It must have

taken me about two hours or more. I came to *Sensation* hoping at least for a laugh, and didn't get one, and though it was of a comparable size I whipped around it in just under an hour. That says something.

*J:*

About you or the exhibitions?

*S:*

Both, perhaps. I found *Art and Power* conceptually more interesting, deeper, more pleasing to look at, more resonant with history, and even more inventive, especially the Futurist material.

*J:*

Even the Modernist work in *Art and Power* was of a higher order, and more in line with the thrust of Modernism, up to around 1940, by which time Modernism in the true sense was well and truly over.

*S:*

I think that the starkly Realist work was also better than anything in *Sensation*, because for one thing it used traditional materials, and because it required craftsmanship, and also because it *said* something, even if what it said was not always politically correct. Monumental Socialist Man with a hammer above his head - it's not exactly an image I associate with, but I recognize its depth and ideological resonance.

*J:*

When art refers to philosophical and ideological thought beyond itself, it necessarily takes on extra layers of meaning that whimsical, sardonic post-Modernist work simply does not have. *Sensation* is all about the body, the flesh, nerve endings. And in the end, that amounts to very little.

*S:*

For man is but dust, and unto dust he will return.

*J:*

No no, old man, I'm not with you there. Man thrusts forward, moves on to new planes of creativity. The individual dies, but his creations live on.

*S:*

How admirably anthropocentric of you. Instead of Socialist Man, you admire Creative Man, wielding a paintbrush above his head!

*J:*

I admire creative man in all his intellectual glory, but not the ants swarming around him.

*S:*

It's hard to see how, in our relativistic and unideological age, we can ever regain a sense of depth in our artistic creations. I suppose that's what post-Modernism is all about: a grand celebration of nothing; of ignorance. But tell me, what were the guiding principles of Modernism? Have they been lost? What does Modernism have to say to anyone now?

*J:*

Modernism was art for industrial, technological society. It was an attempt to get back to the inner consciousness of man and away from representation, which was becoming increasingly dominated by photography. Its aim was to translate the vigour and energy of industrial life into painting and sculpture - as well as other forms, like literature. It was not afraid of new forms, particularly non-representational ones.

Modernism has always had an elitist and politically incorrect element to it: just look at the founding fathers, such as Yeats, Pound and Eliot, not to mention Lewis, Pirandello, Marinetti, Céline, Ortega y Gasset, and many others. It has never totally associated itself with liberal humanist values or conceptual egalitarianism, which is why liberalism has never swallowed Modernism completely. Of course there was mass popular hostility to Modernism as well. But then one of Modernism's greatest exponents, Wyndham Lewis, said the vast bulk of

humanity was mentally worthless anyway, so it simply didn't matter if they did not comprehend it, as it was not for them.

S:

A bit harsh, I think, but I see what he's saying, in the sense that art does not *have* to be popular. Didn't you once tell me that Lewis was one of the few truly great British artistic individualists this century, who almost single-handedly invented an art form?

J:

Yes, Vorticism, which was wholly original. Lewis was painting abstract art almost before anyone else. An interesting thing about him is that he predicted Modernism's demise. In the early 'fifties, in his *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*, he said Modernism was coming to an end, and was increasingly repetitive. And he's been proved essentially correct.

You should also note the mismatch between liberal humanism and some of the art we saw today, which is *post*-Modernist. Liberal humanist values are sentimental, soft-edged, at their core; but the ugly, rebarbative element in *Sensation* was playing with libertarian ideas of freedom of expression which are in fact *illiberal*. By which I mean that liberalism has created a space which many artists fill almost by abusing that freedom of expression, taking it as a licence to show decapitated corpses, genitalia in various states of mutilation or distortion, blood and entrails, decaying flesh. So, in a way, many of the artists we've seen are ranting and screaming at liberalism itself.

S:

But the concepts themselves are tired, having been explored to death in the 1960s and before. When the concepts get tired, conceptual art gets boring.

J:

Yes, and if they were to tie their essentially illiberal art to more extreme political ideas, such as those from the right or from occultism, to take two examples, their state grants would dry up

overnight. *Sensation* is offensive, but only at the level of sensation itself, not the level of ideology. And that is something liberalism can tolerate.

S:

A blasphemous *Last Supper* was there, as I mentioned earlier.

J:

But most people passed it by without a blink, as it was one of the more moderate pieces.

S:

In Australia recently, Christians, as well as Muslims and Jews, managed to close down a whole exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, because the artist - Serrano - was showing a foul photograph depicting a crucifix immersed in urine. The protests took everyone by surprise: no one expected there to be such strength of feeling. A young man damaged the photo in protest, before the closure. Pity that doesn't happen here, to show that there are limits to what's acceptable. If artists can abuse the public, the public should be able to abuse them, even to the point of putting them out of business. Now that would be a form of populism I could handle. If I'd had a hammer I would have smashed the blasphemous *Last Supper*.

J:

And you would have been downed by five guards, and I would have dissociated myself from you.

S:

I knew I could count on you.

J:

Any time.

S:

Why aren't feminists getting up in arms about some of the pornography we saw at *Sensation*?

J:

Well, the direct action feminists seem to have come and gone. They really had their heyday in the '80s with the influence of Andrea Dworkin and Valerie Solanas. Solanas was the one who shot Andy Warhol. At the time she belonged to SCUM, the Society for Cutting up Men. She blamed Warhol for ruining her life and shot him, and Warhol (who was bisexual, or sexually ambiguous anyway, if not asexual), true to narcissistic form, made large silk screens of his wounded stomach. 'I've been shot, I'm a martyr for my art!' Solanas, last seen in dungarees, seems to have gone down the memory hole.

An interesting thing is the small number of people who have flirted with conceptually authoritarian art, such as Ian Hamilton Finlay who was exhibited in the ICA a while ago, and was denounced by several European politicians. Finlay is obsessed with power and the use power has always made of art. He is interested in the way, for instance, revolutions have influenced art, and his ICA show was on the French Revolution. His attitude toward authoritarianism is equivocal. I think he actually had a European grant withdrawn in the 1980s. His art takes images similar to some of those we saw in *Sensation*, and immediately invests them with an extra depth of meaning by putting them in an ideological and historical context. He also made some Runic sculptures using ancient but politically explosive symbols like the swastika. Various German politicians took great umbrage against that, for obvious reasons.

S:

What effect do you think electronic technology is going to have on art? If I recall, apart from the video of Mona Hatoum's intestines, the show we've just seen had little in the way of electronics. Certainly there was no computer art. But then are computers a good thing for the development of art?

J:

There was indeed a certain primitivism in *Sensation*. But I don't mind that so much, because the artist must always come before the instrument. Look at television, which could be an extraordinary art form - it should be total art, sound, imagery, movement - and yet look how poor most television is. I suppose that in the right hands cyber-art could also be extraordinary, but I doubt whether any minds currently at work, and which could make something aesthetic out of cybertechnology, are even interested in it.

S:

Perhaps, but I have my doubts about cybertechnology, television, even cinema to some degree. I mean, they simply lend themselves to naturalism, as media. They demand an aesthetic of movement, action, colour, excitement. Now, great art can contain all of that in abundance, but it's not of the *essence* of art. Art is primarily symbolic, I would say, so I tend to think you need more static media, such as the traditional ones.

J:

That's a little regressive, my dear Thomas. The lesson of Modernism is to grasp the new and to make something of it. All that concerns me is that the people in control of television, cinema, and the emerging cyber-art, have sub-standard intellects, are commercially minded, steeped in the vulgar, and so unable to transcend crass materiality.

S:

So where do you see art going in the future?

J:

I think it will go two ways. Post-Modernism will die a relatively quick death in the next ten or fifteen years, being as it is the fag-end of an already moribund Modernism. There may be periodic attempts to revive movements that are so old they look new. But the main currents, I think, will involve on the one hand extreme individualism -

S:

To go with an individualistic age.

J:

- and on the other hand a certain return to the academic tradition, and more representational forms. Several artists who have been ignored, or not thought highly of, or even 'demonised', may see their reputations revive in the next century.

S:

Is there anyone you have in mind?

J:

I think Dali, especially late Dali, and Arno Breker will see their fortunes rise.

S:

But Dali's never been outside the mainstream, his reputation is assured.

J:

No, but he's not seen in a correct context. Dali is both within and outside Modernism. He returns to a totally individualistic and personal kind of Catholicism late in his career, which is on the whole not liked by modern critics. But I think he may well come to be seen as a bridge between something that was before Modernism and something that will come after it. Breker may take a hundred years for his reputation to be secured, enough time for him to be dissociated from Nazism. Many critics regard him as the greatest exponent of Classicism this century, though they don't make a noise about it.

S:

I don't think we're going to last a hundred years, old chap.

*J:*

I'm including the fifty-odd years that have already passed. In any case I don't follow you in your apocalyptic musings. Another artist I'd like to mention is Ernst Fuchs, a disciple of Breker, though Jewish.

*S:*

Curious.

*J:*

Fuchs founded a school called Fantastic Realism after the Second World War, in Vienna. He draws on both Old Testament and Greek mythology.

*S:*

The former is not mythology, my dear Frederick.

*J:*

In your eyes, but in any case you know what I mean. Fuchs is a representational painter, who in some ways combines Dali's detail and fantasism with Breker's classical allusions and monumental scenes. Fantastic Realism is on the edges of both Modernism and Surrealism.

*S:*

But you regard Modernism and not Surrealism as the dominant force in twentieth-century art.

*J:*

Modernism is the art of the twentieth century, there can be no doubt about that. But this century is coming to an end. And so has Modernism.

*S:*

But Modernism does embrace a wide variety of forms, including Surrealism.

*J:*

Sure. Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Hyper-realism, Futurism, Vorticism, Constructivism...

S:

Enough! Too many isms! But it seems to me they are all non-realisms - oops, another ism - and each is non-representational in its own way. But tell me, who in your opinion was the great harbinger of Modernism, the person or movement who really made it all possible? I mean in art rather than literature.

J:

That's difficult, but in British art I would say Blake. But he is not really part of the great European tradition, as his art is so personal, so individualistic, based on his own occultistic, mystical vision. The thing I didn't like about *Sensation* is its *a priori* unoriginality, as it were. I mean, when Blake went to the canvas, he knew what vision he wanted to depict, but he changed it in all sorts of ways; at least that is my understanding of him. But when Damien Hirst decides to cut up a shark and stick it in formaldehyde, *that's it*. It's just a concept. There's no sense of his beginning with a creative moment and then taking it further, twisting it, heightening it - there's no real vision, no development, no moulding.

S:

Mona Hatoum has a vision.

J:

Of her gastro-intestinal tract.

S:

Yes.

J:

It's a 'concept', and it's amusing, and that's the end.

S:

What about the Continent? Who is the great precursor of Modernism?

J:

That's hard to say. There's always a national element in Modernism: Futurism is Italian, Surrealism French, Expressionism German, Vorticism British...

S:

Wouldn't you say post-Impressionism is the harbinger of Modernism?

J:

To an extent, along with the Symbolists and Fauves. In some way it might be thought that pre-Modernism is found in certain kinds of hallucinatory and revelatory art, especially of a religious kind. One thinks of Bosch, Brueghel, Huys, Gerard David, Grünewald -- a tradition of the grotesque, the bizarre, the fantastic. And of course you have such types as Munch and Beardsley, the latter being an excellent draughtsman; whereas the loss of the line, of linearity and draughtsmanship, was all too painfully apparent in *Sensation*.

S:

Perhaps that's one thing we'll see in the future, a return to draughtsmanship, as well as craftsmanship in general. Just as there's been something of a return to tonality in music and narrative in fiction.

J:

This is part of the idea of a return to 'academicism', as I mentioned earlier. But a lot of twentieth-century academic art is virtually worthless because of its lack of passion and energy. What I hope is that the new academicism will absorb some of the energy of Modernism, while building on representationality, spirituality and ideology.

S:

I think that might be the triumph of hope over reality. I would like to think you're right, but it's easy to fall into the trap of making predictions which are no more than embodiments of one's hopes.

*J:*

True, but then we cannot know how things will develop.

*S:*

But what you're saying is that we may go forward to the past.

*J:*

Or back to the future.

## **Chapter 6**

### **SPEAK NOW OR FOREVER HOLD YOUR PC**

*Location: a coach bound for Edinburgh*

*Samuel:*

So, do you think we're going to get this book of ours published?

*Jonathan:*

Not with something as politically incorrect as this... What we need is a chapter on political correctness so the prospective publishers are left in no doubt that they shouldn't publish this book!

*S:*

A bit pessimistic, old chap! They need to see how fresh, vigorous and refreshingly original this book is! Look at what we've covered - sex, serial murder, art, Europe, politics, conspiracies...

*J:*

I see you're consulting a little notebook. We don't want to give the publishers the idea that this is all pre-scripted, you know.

*S:*

We haven't talked about my favourite person, President Clinton.

*J:*

Is that what your notebook tells you? All right, then, let's hear what you think of him, bearing in mind that this is all completely spontaneous.

*S:*

Now I'm tensing up. See what you've done?

*J:*

You're so tense, old man - you should smoke some pot. Like Bubba himself, who as we all know smoked pot but never inhaled.

S:

You know, PC is such a bizarre phenomenon. I mean, the things you can talk about and the things you can't talk about. Don't you think Big Brother makes it up as he goes along? Remember you were saying a while ago that in the nineteenth century you could talk about race -

J:

Yes, you could talk about race, eugenics/dysgenics, for instance. You could try to relate biology to human behaviour and character. Now, that massive book *Race* by Prof. John Baker, which was brought out by Oxford University Press twenty-five years ago, has to be reprinted by some publisher in the Deep South of America nobody's ever heard of.

S:

But what you *couldn't* talk about last century, at least in polite company, was sex.

J:

Yes, that's been one of the big reversals - sex and race. Now talk of race is impossible in polite discourse, whether what you say is cultured and intelligent or stupid and bigoted - it doesn't matter.

S:

But you can talk about sex until you are blue in the face.

J:

Or if you're Stephen Milligan, you can perform it until you're blue in the face.

S:

You're sailing close to the wind, old boy.

J:

Hold your PC, my dear Samuel. In modern polite society you can speculate out loud about whether a transsexual is a frustrated cross-dresser with proto-lesbian tendencies, or whether he's

actually a homosexual pathic who is so heterosexual in orientation he wants to become a woman, so he can be rogered properly.

*S:*

That's what I was thinking.

*J:*

Your sarcasm does not escape me. In 1889, to wonder about such things in mainstream discourse, subtle and nuanced as they were, would have been regarded as 'off'. Talk about normal marital sex would have been taboo as well. Now it's OK to discuss whether a man in a dress can keep his old penis with his new vagina or not. Or maybe have the penis cut off and stuck on his forehead.

*S:*

Can he have them both?

*J:*

There are, allegedly, some that do. So they can have sex with themselves.

*S:*

Hermaphrodites, I think you mean.

*J:*

Yes.

*S:*

Some insects are like that, I believe.

*J:*

Maybe there's a subconscious attempt on the part of many people, at the end of the millennium, to revert to the lowest forms of life, behaving like insects and amoebae, reproducing asexually, pleasuring themselves in their multimedia sex-cocoons, like Japanese newly-weds.

S:

I fear we're getting side-tracked, and becoming increasingly incomprehensible.

J:

Speak for yourself, my dear Samuel. My remarks are always crystalline in their clarity.

S:

The point is, I think, that it's OK to talk about sex because it's not a threat to anyone. Or at least not a threat to the existing social order.

J:

It's a threat to some people, who get very worked up over the fact that it's everywhere you look, that we're bombarded with quasi-pornographic images every minute of the day. It's noticeable that many liberal-minded people of the 1960s are more conservative about this than they once were. Why? Because they're in their middle age and they've got children.

S:

And they're worried about their being exposed to sexual imagery which is more explicit than anything that has ever been. Mind you, I don't detect all that much pulling back on the part of the flower-children-turned-television-producers. There's a mild worry, that's all. But discussion of sexuality is not seen to be a threat to the established order in the way that talk of cultural identity, racial identity, religious identity are. They are just too sensitive as issues. And yet I would say that liberals are quite wrong in the sense that explicit sexuality of the sort paraded everywhere these days *is* a threat to society, even more insidious than the other issues. It eats away at the social order, even if that order is avowedly liberal, as ours is. In the end society will be destroyed by it, since all traditional bonds, such as family, are wrecked by sexual permissiveness. Maybe liberals know it, maybe they don't, but they'll see the final result eventually, just as they should be able to see our descent into barbarism right now, with spiralling divorce, abortion, child abuse, pornography, domestic violence, and so on. *No* society can survive such a cancer.

J:

My dear boy, ‘barbarism’ as you put it - primitivism, as I prefer to call it - has its positive side - often an extreme traditionalism that is far less decadent than contemporary *mores*. But it’s the obsessiveness with which sexual issues are discussed nowadays that I find interesting. Look at the intensity with which Bill Clinton’s sexual misbehaviour is pored over, while his financial and other crimes barely get a mention, outside the fringe media.

S:

There’s Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, but then he stands out like a dog’s hind leg, since his colleagues barely touch the more important issues surrounding Billy Boy. Clinton has spent decades getting away with every felony or misdemeanour he’s ever committed, sexual or not. But his end may be near...

J:

This is the man who hates smoking, and yet when the Paula Jones harassment case collapsed he lit up a big cigar in Bongo Bongo Land, or wherever he was, and played the drums!

S:

With his secretary under the table, giving him a...

J:

Yes, I get the picture. “Hey Hillary, hey there darlin’, fetch me them budget papers while...oh, Jessie-Mae, oh, don’t stop, oh Hillary, can you check whether...oh Jessie-Mae, yeah, I like it like that, you’re fantastic, babes...*your kneepads, darlin’...OJ...balance mah budget...hell of a way to eat a tortilla...mmmmmmmm....*”

S:

“Hey Tipper, would ya like to see the text of mah speech on the deficit, or would you like to have a good look at *this!*”

*J:*

The guy's uncontrollable.

*S:*

Yet everyone knows the name Gennifer Flowers, but few people can name all of Billy Boy's corrupt chums in Arkansas who have gone to the wall to save his presidency.

*J:*

And who cares, because he's come to resemble so many of his electors in terms of sexual perversion and fiscal dishonesty that a vote against him is a vote against themselves, and nobody likes to vote against themselves!

*S:*

Everyone knows what he's like, and no one cares, partly because they're all so disillusioned.

*J:*

Bob Dole ran against Clinton with no real policies, but at least he had a tiny whiff of possible integrity about him...

*S:*

I would stress the 'possible'. But he fell off the platform...

*J:*

Yes, and he's deaf, and kept going on, "I was crippled in the war, but hell I ain't bitter. Vote for me, you bastards."

*S:*

You shouldn't say 'cripple'. What about disability rights?

*J:*

I don't give a damn about disabled rights! I don't care a bit about twisted runts and the like.

You're far more pro-cripple than I am, old man. I'm totally merciless.

*S:*

Well, I'm interested in people's disabilities, and believe people should be helped if they need it, but I don't want other people's handicaps thrust in my face.

*J:*

Absolutely. Particularly if they haven't had a wash in a couple of days. The fact is, I do not go all goopy-eyed when the Elephant Man turns up on my doorstep.

*S:*

Does that happen often?

*J:*

Fortunately not! If it did, I'd say to him, "Just wear a sheet, you suppurating bastard!"

*S:*

Political correctness has brought us to the point where you can talk about anything trivial until the cows come home, but if it's serious, potentially divisive, ideological, then no, sweep it under the carpet.

*J:*

Well, we've managed to sweep a few things back from under the carpet in our conversations.

*S:*

Yes, we've talked about sex, mass murder...

*J:*

Not exactly trivial.

*S:*

No. And we've talked about Nietzsche --

*J:*

And the future of European politics.

S:

Ideas of the end of the world.

J:

Apocalypse-mongering, you mean?

S:

Not always mongering, I don't think.

J:

Urban folklore, conspiracy theories...

S:

Banned literature.

J:

The question of censorship in a liberal society.

S:

These things are just not talked about seriously in the mainstream press and other media. *Fortean Times* has become a joke, as we discussed in an earlier dialogue. The mainstream media won't take any of these issues seriously. There are endless *Guardian* colour spreads on 'Is The End of the World Nigh? We Visit an Obscure Japanese Sect to Find Out'...

J:

But what they're really interested in is Gazza and Ginger Spice!

S:

You have injected some more soon-to-be-meaningless references in what is supposed to be a timeless piece of literature by us.

J:

I think 'literature' is a bit strong, Sam. In our consumer-driven, throw-away McDonalds society, I feel it a bounden duty to fill our musings with the detritus of modern culture. Let our work be as ephemeral as the mental landscapes of the people who are likely to read it.

S:

Well then, if it's ephemera you're after, let's throw in Clinton's rogering...

J:

Did you know Ginger Spice was a topless Turkish dancer?

S:

I didn't know she was Turkish. My, you seem to be obsessed with ol' Cross Eyes.

J:

She's not Turkish, old man! But I didn't know she was cross-eyed.

S:

But then who cares. I mean, I did know about the topless dancing, but I learned that before I gave up watching TV.

J:

We're calling our magnum opus *Apocalypse TV* and now you tell me you've stopped watching TV!?

S:

Well, it's not all bad news: I'm still watching for the Apocalypse.

J:

I've never even *had* a television.

S:

So who are you to talk? The antediluvianism of both of us is beginning to show as we limp towards the end of this massive enterprise.

*J:*

You may limp - I *stride* with the sure-footed confidence of --

*S:*

Spare me.

*J:*

Perhaps we have to face the fact that we've been talking about things we know very little about.

*S:*

Just like the mainstream media!

*J:*

Anyway, you watched television for a good twenty years before you gave it up - allegedly.

*S:*

I have. And I did, so I'm well placed to comment upon matters of social import that I have garnered information about from my many wasted hours in front of what used to be called the Boob Tube.

*J:*

Television by its very nature reduces everything to two-dimensional flatness, both literally and figuratively. It is the ultimate egalitarian medium for our officially equal-rights society. When you look at the technical resources it has, able to combine music, word and moving image, you could almost imagine it as the total art form. But of course its very totality makes it available to everyone, with different people contributing different skills or appreciating dissimilar aspects of the medium. And since it is an expensive medium its content has to be reduced to the lowest common denominator so as to make it pay. Maybe 2% of everything that's ever been broadcast will be the sort of thing anyone would want to watch a century from now.

S:

It's the three Ss: sex, sport and shopping. That's what makes television, and the whole of modern consumer society, go round.

J:

Don't mention that play with the rude title!

S:

You mean *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing*?

J:

Why could I see that coming...

S:

A fine piece of work, I am led to believe, not that I have any intention of verifying this first-hand.

J:

I detect a note of bitter irony in your voice...

S:

Well, there's the West End for you.

J:

The point about PC, Sam, if we can drag the discussion back to a more intellectually robust posture --

S:

Don't be so *a priori*.

J:

You know me, I'm just in the moment, as always. Anyway, political correctness has two sides to it. One is a serious attempt to reconstruct language and prevent discourse which is elitist in character and inegalitarian in scope, on matters primarily of race and sexuality. These are key

matters for this society. They're not the most important matters in every respect but they are central to much modern discussion. Linked to that is endless dross about obesity, and the way you treat animals, renaming gingerbread men gingerbread persons or shapes, getting rid of golliwogs on jars of marmalade, and so on.

S:

And censoring Enid Blyton because it's making fun of disabled people to have a character called Big Ears, or whatever.

J:

We had a boy with big ears at our school, and we used to drag him round the playground and beat him up.

S:

Oh well then, we must make sure our prospective editor reads about that! Childhood brutality in its raw nakedness - *Lord of the Flies* relived.

J:

I'm in good company. Jack Straw, the current Home Secretary, allegedly admitted to being a bully, holding boys down and urinating on them and kicking them in the head.

S:

If that's wrong we may have committed libel.

J:

What I *meant* to say is that *some have said that they believe, from something they read or heard, that perhaps Jack Straw may have been induced, in his youth, to behave in what we might now call a non-Blairite manner...*

S:

That's better.

*J:*

It's interesting to see what happens to bullies. Some become Home Secretary, others end up begging in the streets!

*S:*

At what point does political correctness cease being a joke and starting being a danger?

*J:*

When it leads to discriminatory legislation - quotas, zones, one form of prejudice replacing another. What the partisans of such discrimination call 'justice'. In other words, when it leads to active discrimination against people who are male, white, European, middle class, heterosexual, able bodied, of normal size...in other words, Mr. Normal.

*S:*

And what about Mrs. Normal? A wife who stays at home looking after her children, doesn't want to go out to work, supports her husband, sees herself as having a well defined role within the home. The vast majority of women, that is, despite all the propaganda to the contrary.

*J:*

Indeed. So when it becomes active prejudice against such people, and contrary to such people's prejudices - because everyone is prejudiced against everyone else - we have what I would call a dangerous, anti-social situation.

*S:*

But after all, *is* there such a thing as normalcy? The liberal elite loves to tell us we're all abnormal in our own way, we're all freaks, there *is* no paradigmatic lifestyle.

*J:*

I should point out, of course, that liberalism is a very broad church and has many different forms, so when you or I talk about liberalism or 'the liberal elite' we are only talking in generalities.

S:

Of course, but that makes me wonder whether we are giving liberals a ‘fair go’, as they say.

J:

Well, the Marquis de Sade didn’t feel constrained to counterpoise his extreme views with a presentation of sexual normality.

S:

But he wasn’t published for two hundred years.

J:

Maybe that will be our fate.

S:

Aren’t we a living example of the triumph of liberalism? The fact that we are able to have discussions like the ones we’ve had, in obscure locations, talking about strange ideas in a forthright and challenging way, is a testament to the breadth of the church that is liberalism.

J:

Hold on, let’s see if we’re published first. They can tolerate Brett Easton Ellis writing about people cutting up women on their ironing boards prior to attending a *chic* Manhattan party; but whether they’ll choke on our discourse as they read the typescript over their Cornflakes, well, who knows?

S:

I think they’ll find us immensely stimulating, thought-provoking and different.

J:

We could always run a libertarian line: the most shocking thing of all is what you have not yet been shocked by. It is interesting to note that the media are flirting with the idea that politically incorrect views in the sexual area might be permitted, because they need something to shock people with. What can shock people now? Is it Satanism, hard-core pornography, paedophilia,

extreme right-wing politics, the justification of criminality? - even though there is so much hero worship of criminals in the fictional media, so it has lost its *frisson* to some degree.

S:

As far as sexuality goes, you once talked about the walrus as symbol of political incorrectness.

J:

Yes, I've always enjoyed Nature programmes because they present the earthy, biological and evolutionary side of life, especially when you have a lispng David Attenborough whispering: *'And here we see the walrus males squaring off against each other...the cows are lined up on the foreshore [UUUGHHH...GLUG-GLUG-GLUG...UUGGGHHHHH...WWWAAHHH-THOM, BURP, THOM-THRIBBLE-RRRRRRRRR]...the bulls smash their heads into each other while the cows tremble with delight and reveal their private parts to the victor, who moves across the sand to mount the cows one by one.'*

S:

Sounds like backstage after a heavy metal concert.

J:

Oh?

S:

Er, I've read about it. Anyway, the walrus certainly is politically incorrect in every way: fat, male, ugly, maintains a harem, the women are passive spectators at an orgy of male violence...but while Attenborough programmes are everywhere, could you show on BBC a film about medieval knights jousting over a fair maiden? No, that would be politically incorrect and sexist.

*J:*

Unless it were an ‘accepted part of the canon’, like, say, *Ivanhoe*, and could be treated as basically fictional. Did you know Tony Blair declared *Ivanhoe* to be his favourite novel of all time?

*S:*

Well, I’ve no doubt he is an immensely well-read man.

*J:*

And would enjoy reading about knights jousting over fair maidens given that he has to look at Cherie over the breakfast table every morning.

*S:*

My dear Jonathan, do we want to put that in?

*J:*

That’s *just* the sort of thing we should put in. Stop worrying about what editors will think: the only way we’ll have a chance is if we make this book the moral equivalent of heroin.

*S:*

Sorry?

*J:*

I mean dangerous and addictive. Which reminds me that another thing everyone can talk about which was once taboo is drugs. It’s an odd area, since political correctness doesn’t have a lot to say about it. Although the politically incorrect left-wing magazine *Living Marxism*, now called *LM* --

*S:*

Because it’s too embarrassed to say what it is.

*J:*

Yes, that's right! But the point is that *LM* talks about a general prevailing culture of emotional correctness in relation to matters such as drug usage. By the way, did you know that the RCP, the Revolutionary Communist Party which is behind *LM*, favours horizontal recruitment?

*S:*

Surely not.

*J:*

You're thinking, 'My chance has come'.

*S:*

I think you've bought into an urban myth.

*J:*

Well, I knew a woman who was in RCP and she was a bit like that.

*S:*

I don't think 'a bit like that' would stand up in court.

*J:*

She offered me her body but I had to turn her down thinking it could be diseased. She would begin with a discussion of Engels's *Anti-Dühring* and end by getting down to it, or wanting to in my case. Engels, of course, attacked the anti-Semitic basis of Dühring's anti-socialism.

*S:*

Too many antis for me, old man. But anti-Semitism is a curious element within PC, or rather opposition to it. Anti-Semitism is politically incorrect but doesn't figure in discussion as much as racism in general. And yet it should be more of a subject of discussion; very little is ever said about the anti-Semitism of some of the father figures - in a very broad sense - of the modern liberal state, such as Freud and Marx.

*J:*

Marx's writing is littered with anti-Semitic references - even though he himself was Jewish, albeit from a Lutheran convert family - as well as anti-homosexual and racist references: he described the socialist Lassalle as a thick-lipped Negroid Jew who was probably homosexual!

*S:*

Poor Lassalle, he had everything wrong with him as far as Marx was concerned!

*J:*

Marx's anti-homosexuality was bound up with his Jewishness, in my opinion, Jews being in general anti-homosexual because of their belief in the perpetuation of their race. It's not just a crime against religion for orthodox Jews, but it's a form of race crime for all Jews.

*S:*

And Marx was not too partial to Slavs, was he?

*J:*

No, at times he comes close to adopting a pan-German nationalism. Indeed nationalism has always been a difficult issue on the left; witness the debate over 'socialism in one country' during Stalin's time. But where you have nationalism, so you have the seeds of ethnic pride and alleged racial prejudice.

*S:*

Well, yes, but the left is, theoretically and in practice, overwhelmingly committed to globalism and full of hatred for nationalism, despite the various debates within its camp. But getting back to PC, the way I see it is that it's absolutely impossible to take political incorrectness out of contemporary debate. At a lower level, I recently heard about a new cinematic vogue, so-called 'gross-out' movies, in which everyone is made fun of: women, gays, the disabled...

J:

Blacks? Jews?

S:

I'll tell you when I see one.

J:

Political correctness really is premised on a single objective - to restrict radical right-wing ideas. There has also been a more extreme but less successful version of PC - Critical Race Theory. It's one step beyond PC, and aims at banning all texts containing generic references to classes of human beings, whether racial, sexual, religious, political, whatever. But 'mainstream' PC intellectuals want nothing to do with it. After all, without referring to groups of people as having common qualities, all meaningful discourse becomes impossible.

S:

You could still talk about the weather.

J:

But you couldn't say, 'The British love to moan about the weather', because that would be generic, and so banned.

S:

What about, 'All advocates of Critical Race Theory are intelligent people'?

J:

I should think they'd allow that one.

S:

But then if CRT is absurd, maybe it's a *reductio ad absurdum* of PC altogether? After all, where do you draw the line between what generic statements can and can't be made? If it's politically incorrect to say, 'Jews have a knack for business', is it OK to say, 'The English are lazy'?

*J:*

I hope you mean that second one as an example of a typical falsehood.

*S:*

Of course, though I've observed how little the chattering classes worry about trashing Englishness and everything English.

*J:*

The fact is that books by the most impeccably credentialed liberals are full of statements which say Russians are like this, or Americans like that, or women are like this, or 'gays' are like that. Classification cannot be done without. Some generic statements will be true, others false, but we have to make them otherwise we can't engage in a simple conversation.

*S:*

Note how, when it comes to something like football hooliganism, the talking heads are very happy to say, 'The English are notorious for this', or whatever. Anything working class, I've noticed, and the stereotypes come flying, even on Radio 4.

*J:*

Supporters of PC have no problem with talking about Dead White Males, such as Shakespeare, Milton and Dickens. But suppose someone started talking about black intellectuals as Dead Black Failures, like C.L.R. James, Booker T. Washington, Ralph Ellison, the same people would jump up and down. James is interesting because he was a Trotskyist and a racist, one of the earliest advocates of Black Power.

*S:*

You know, I'm wondering just where we are with political correctness. In some respects it seems to be dying out, retreating into little pockets full of die-hards; but it doesn't take much for the PC wagon to start rolling again, say when it comes to talk about gay rights, or race, or the role of women.

*J:*

It is more fashionable now to lash out at some of the extremes to which PC can go. For instance, the Left likes to kick up a fuss about attempts to ban the word ‘manager’ - which, etymologically, has nothing to do with ‘man’ anyway - or gingerbread men, or trivial things like that, because they see it as diverting people’s attention from ‘the cause’, i.e. the underlying socio-economic inequality of society. They think it trivializes the whole debate, which of course it does; not that I myself believe in equality of any sort, other than the equality of True Genius...

*S:*

Are you in that lofty class?

*J:*

Naturally! But what I was saying is that the non-shallow parts of the Left are more worried about discrimination against women than about whether it’s all right to talk about gingerbread men or chairmen. As a distinguished academic of many years’ standing yourself, I assume that at some time in your long career you have had to sign a form saying, ‘I, Dr. Samuel Meyer, do solemnly swear that I will never discriminate against anyone on the grounds of sex, race, political belief, religious affiliation, intelligence, literacy, height, weight, eye colour...’

*S:*

But what if one has done all of the above?

*J:*

Then you must cast it from your mind, exercise self-censorship - after you have confessed your ‘sins’ and engaged in what Communists call ‘self-criticism’.

*S:*

I would have to debase myself.

*J:*

Yes, wallow in your own illiberal filth.

S:

It is all hypothetical, of course.

J:

Naturally.

S:

I do have a problem, though, with the idea of not discriminating against students who are, shall we say, not very smart.

J:

That might be *just about* possible, but you would be heading into dangerous waters and flirting with ideas of genetic determinism that could lead to ‘genocide’; so you would have to curb your ways. Crimestop, old man. Don’t even *think* about it.

S:

But what if an intellectually challenged student were to come knocking? One might become suddenly bored and not want to talk to them. That would be a form of discrimination.

J:

Unless they were female, bleached blonde, and scantily clad. In which case you would invite them in for a long discussion about Hegel, would you not?

S:

Absolutely not. I would banish them from my office, saying ‘Out, brazen hussy!’

J:

So you wouldn’t attach them to your desk with handcuffs.

S:

No, I leave that to presidents of the United States.

J:

What was that famous case in Australia about the master of a college?

S:

Yes, the master of a college at the University of Melbourne, who was accused by two female students of fondling them, and had to resign in disgrace even though he was not convicted. One of Australia's leading feminist authors wrote a book which was sympathetic to his plight and bemoaned the fact that feminism had 'come to this'. There was a huge outcry from her 'sisters', who accused her of betraying the cause. And recently she was viciously attacked by Radical Feminists in a poisonous collection of pseudo-academic essays. Yet she was right at the vanguard of the wimmin's movement in Australia.

J:

Actually, I have *some* sympathy for these post-feminist women who are coming to see through some of the nonsense of their movement; but not much. Really, this woman should not have put herself in her invidious position in the first place. She should have bled and bred and kept house for her man, which is what women are for. Not that I'm speaking from a sexist or 'reactionary' position, of course.

S:

I'm stunned into silence...I do fear, old man, that people reading this will indeed accuse you of sexism.

J:

I shall defend myself against all accusers.

S:

Even the term 'sexual politics' is a politically correct term. As if sex was really a matter of power rather than morality.

J:

Yes, PC is an attempt both to construct thought and to construct the parameters within which thought occurs. It's a total intellectual package. The idea that there was such a thing as 'sexual

politics' did not even exist before about 1900. The very term 'heterosexual' - which all heterosexuals now use about themselves - is a created term.

S:

Created for a political purpose, as was the term 'teenager', which was invented as a means of 'giving voice' to an allegedly ignored section of society; or rather, an ignored section of the market for sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll.

J:

This is a very interesting area because, prior to this century the term 'homosexual' didn't exist. There was a range of terms: Zoophyte, Urnate, Uranian, Homo-sexual (with a hyphen), Invert, the Third Sex of Edward Carpenter. On the rare occasions the subject was even talked about in public, people didn't even have the terminology to describe it as something 'normal' or accepted. When Michel Foucault - who died of AIDS from bugging Tunisian boys - wrote his famous three-volume *History of Sexuality*, he discussed the origin of such terms, and why certain terms such as 'homosexual' became accepted and others did not. The terms 'gay' and 'straight' have an interesting origin, coming from Victorian underground sexual discourse. Female prostitutes would often be described as *gay*, sometimes ironically. There's a famous cartoon from *Punch* where someone says to a prostitute, 'If you're so gay why do you look so miserable?' Everyone would have understood what that meant! And prostitutes used to describe all other women as *straight*. So the terminology has been taken over and applied to homosexuals. The gay movement has, interestingly, taken over certain vulgar and originally derisive terms and now uses them of itself, such as 'queer' and 'queen'.

S:

But that's part of the politically correct doctrine that it's all right to use degrading terminology of yourself or your 'persecuted' group, so as to disarm outsiders who can no longer use it for the purpose of abuse. Makes sense, I suppose.

*J:*

Note how ‘straight’ is also used by criminals of those who do not engage in criminality. Criminals are *bent*, and homosexuals used to be called bent, though not so much now. Again, this points to the deprecatory sense in which terms for homosexuals, prostitutes and other groups who have ‘come in from the cold’ were originally used.

*S:*

I would say the irony is lost on most of them now.

*J:*

Perhaps, but that link between criminality and certain forms of sexuality is rooted in the language of society, and is virtually impossible to eradicate.

*S:*

‘Queer’ is the word that is all the rage at the moment. To say ‘We’re queer and we’re proud’ is to glorify being abnormal, which is a fascinating phenomenon.

*J:*

Thirty to forty years ago the term ‘queer’ was a term of extreme abuse and you would have been regarded as grossly ‘politically incorrect’ if you said you were queer in *any* way, not just sexual. Now, although some homosexuals balk at the use of the term, it’s pretty much accepted in that group. The black film director Spike Lee uses the term ‘niggah’ (with different spelling from the usual) in a similar way, though this has not quite caught on among American blacks outside the gangster rap ghetto.

*S:*

I can’t imagine Jews walking around calling each other kikes.

*J:*

No, not really! But I think it's a certain masochism and effeminacy that makes queers - for let us call them as they call themselves - latch onto former terms of abuse. As far as I can tell, lesbians don't engage as much in this sort of terminological self-flagellation.

*S:*

Maybe because there aren't as many terms of abuse for lesbians as for male homosexuals?

*J:*

Possibly; feminists of course would put this down to our allegedly Patriarchal Society in which men are turned on by lesbianism and off by male inversion.

*S:*

But it could be merely that there is far less female homosexuality than male, hence society has had less opportunity to face it and so show its disapproval by inventing disparaging terminology.

*J:*

A more prosaic explanation, but perhaps more likely.

*S:*

Part of the symbolism of political correctness, it seems to me, is the idea of universal persecution. We're all 'gay black whales', victimized and threatened with extinction.

*J:*

Yes, the 'victim culture' which is sometimes noted, and that has come under attack from some quarters for its nauseating tone. I remember Linda Bellos, the former Women's Officer at Hackney council. She was allegedly always going around telling people she was a black, disabled, working class, Jewish (she converted, apparently) lesbian mother. "I'm an identikit of all oppression," she declared about herself, 'I'm a patchwork quilt of all the victims on this planet.' It's a sort of secular martyrdom! Only in her case it wasn't much of a martyrdom as she

ended up a Women's Officer in Hackney on thirty thousand a year! What a great job - have Sapphic coffee mornings and do some photocopying in the afternoon.

S:

Remember that cabinet minister under Reagan? I think it was James Watt, who was energy minister or something like that. He was asked about the composition of the cabinet under Reagan and whether it was top-heavy with White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Men; to which he retorted with something like: 'Well, you know, we've got a woman, a black, two Jews and a cripple.' He lost his job. No one would even *think* of saying such a thing now, even as a joke.

J:

Some people would. I make jokes about cripples all the time!

S:

I mean among politicians.

J:

Yes, I think the ordinary man in the street finds the endless moaning about disability rights appalling, and that in reality - by which I mean society outside the BBC and the House of Commons - nothing much has changed since John Lennon used to make spastic faces into TV cameras (obviously one of the few good things about 'our John'!).

S:

I don't know. In the privacy of their own homes I suppose people make fun of everything they always made fun of - race, religion, disability - but in public it's a different story. It's probably only Northern comedians like Bernard Manning who make 1970s-style politically incorrect jokes now, and when they do they end up being excoriated in those bastions of PC, the tabloids.

J:

But you can still get Bernard Manning tapes everywhere: it's just about the only type of political incorrectness that's allowed, scurrilous, scatological, comedic, sociologically lower class. But

anything that is serious and ideological, like Chris Brand or Herrnstein and Murray on race and IQ, and you have censorship, books being withdrawn from sale, torrents of abuse from all the usual quarters, and generalized frothing at the mouth. It's harder when you have a social conservative like Thomas Sowell, who is black, and says things any white academic would be hounded out of their job for saying. He is just about tolerated, but kept on the margins. The same goes for Camille Paglia and her views on women, but her publicity seeking has given her a high profile.

S:

And she's a political lesbian, which helps. At a tenth-rate university.

J:

What's good about her is that she's so inverted - even though she likes low-cut dresses and all the rest - that she almost adopts the male position on many subjects. Sometimes she says things even the most chauvinistic man wouldn't dare say, like 'Ninety per cent of everything worthwhile in world culture has been created by white men - just accept it!' But she's freakish in modern society, even though her opinions were the norm forty or fifty years ago.

S:

The fact is that politically correct society has to have safety valves, and as long as academics like Sowell and Paglia can be labelled as freaks, or self-hating traitors to their group, or 'mavericks' (always a useful term), then they can go along doing their thing as society's licensed court jesters.

J:

It's similar, in some ways, to the Fool in English drama who is allowed to say things no one else can.

S:

So at what point does political incorrectness become no longer a laughing matter?

*J:*

When it is translated into political action. In fact, society seems to be inching towards the position that it is all right to have non-PC views, as long as you don't act on them. This seems to be a kind of regression to the mean, back to what liberalism classically stands for. Perhaps the sort of militant PC which has turned some ideas almost into thought crimes - you can't even *think* them - has seen its high water mark.

*S:*

I wouldn't be too sure. Liberalism is a velvet glove which contains an iron fist. Thought crimes are essential to liberal thinking, which like any ideology *wants* people to think a certain way, and *stigmatizes* them for not doing so.

*J:*

But liberals are divided over the logic of political correctness. Taken to its extreme it implies the necessity of mass censorship. If you applied it ruthlessly you would have to ban all soft pornography, all hard right-wing propaganda, a significant element of libertarian propaganda, any blatantly anti-male feminist material, much alternative comedy (such as tongue-in-cheek extreme right-wing rants which disseminate unacceptable ideas without advocating them)...where would it end? What about religious texts? What about the Talmud, which has references to Gentiles as cattle?

*S:*

Or the Koran, which is not exactly pro-women's lib. Or the Old Testament with its anti-homosexual strictures. Or the New Testament with its remarks on the Jews. It would be impossible! And I wonder whether this sort of censorship is what advocates of PC really want.

*J:*

But then what *do* they want?

S:

Control. Power.

J:

But the control has to be open-ended, existential, operating from one day to the next according to shifting principles which coincide with nothing more than instrumental self-interest.

S:

That, if true, makes PC a form of hierarchical control, a kind of ideological tyranny of the very sort liberals profess to be against!

J:

It's also a form of prejudice and bigotry, because the one thing that upsets liberals is people who are illiberal. Drop a 'homophobic' remark at a party in Islington and you'll bring forth looks of pure hate. And yet liberals say they are *against* hatred, especially of someone because of their ideas.

S:

Liberalism is supposed to be about loving everyone. Except, perhaps, those who do not love liberalism.

J:

I certainly do not love everyone. I believe in a life full of semi-cosmic hate. (Remember, I'm not a universalist!)

S:

How healthy of you, old chap! But I think you have a point when you talk about control. Liberalism is the maintenance of power by an elite who have no agenda other than their own ideological interests.

*J:*

That is why there are so many rifts in it, why it doesn't really hold together. For instance, it doesn't deal with the prejudices of minority groups. There was an UN survey of this country done recently which revealed that ethnic minorities, in particular Asians and blacks, had ferociously politically incorrect attitudes towards each other!

*S:*

That sort of thing cannot be destroyed. You simply can't wipe out the entrenched, thousand year-old views which ethnic groups have of each other. You can indoctrinate people until they're blue in the face but such prejudices won't go away and, if anything, will come back fiercer than ever after decades of repression, as we saw in the former Yugoslavia. If that pseudo-country had not been invented, as it was by the Western allies, there still would have been tension as the different groups squabbled over territory, but you would not have seen a full-scale war caused by reaction against what was in reality no more than Serbian imperialism.

That is why we need to allow the ventilation of controversial opinions, we need more discussion of so-called 'banned ideas', because if we don't there will eventually be a reaction against the liberal establishment the like of which they will never have expected.

*J:*

And which they won't want to publish!