

In praise of prejudice

By Bernard Adamczewski

It is strange that today, when so much thought and energy is devoted to the achievement of the greatest economy of effort with respect to most attainments, be they industrial, political and academic endeavours, or in personal relationships, the one device of our intellect which truly provides the shortest of shortcuts from premise to conclusion, namely prejudice, has come into disrepute.

Anyone who today admits to being prejudiced, or embarks on any course of action without at least maintaining the pretence of being open to a full and impartial revelation of all the facts, whether readily available or not, is regarded as someone whose opinion can be dismissed as being of no value. It is of course regarded as desirable to have an opinion; in fact the possession of a sufficient number of appropriately tempered opinions is seen as a sign of character, provided only that the consequences of any such opinion are not too rigorously pursued and that the ragbag of such views is always ready, like a windsock, to swing into the direction from which the wind of fashionable thought currently blows strongest. The ability to change one's outlook with agility is thought to indicate great flexibility of mind and is seen as the hallmark of the truly liberal character.

However, in spite of the progressive strides made in our times towards relieving the individual of the burden of decision in most, if not all matters that vitally concern him, there are still some minor aspects of life where the pursuit of some line of action is still a good second best choice to making sure that every step one might take is in accord with the most up-to-date analysis of what is now the right thing to do.

And it is here that a little prejudice comes in most handy. For any collection of prejudices relieves their owner of the boring task of having to reconcile that *potpourri* of opinions which inevitably accumulates in the attics of the mind in the course of time.

Prejudices are after all to ideas what convenience foods are to the chore of cooking. Like convenience foods they come hygienically packaged in handy sizes and in a variety of eye-catching wrapper colours. Once encapsulated in a good coating of prejudice any impression or concept can be conveniently stored for practically unlimited periods without any danger of suddenly turning sour or developing some horrible fungus. Some as yet not fully understood - even by the most enterprising researchers - system of psychic palletisation allows for the greatest utility of storage and handling. These benefits that prejudice adds to ideas in their raw, unprocessed state, also contribute significantly to their marketability. In fact it can be said that nowadays ideas are virtually unsaleable without this vital ingredient.

In the ancient city-states of Greece, whose economies were very small by modern standards and exceedingly unsophisticated, it was just still possible to maintain a kind of open street market for raw ideas. But even then the general stench and rot produced was such that amongst the stall-holders of longer standing, Diogenes, for instance, died holding his breath and the general public, taxed to the limits of its endurance, saw no recourse but to condemn to death one of the most boisterous of the purveyors, Socrates.

What was difficult then, would naturally be quite intolerable today. One needs only to imagine what would happen if any issue of real importance to an individual or to humanity at large were to be cooked with the addition of real ideas in their raw state: the Sunday glosses would go out of business, the intensity of one's social conscience could no longer rise commensurately with one's private income, nor could statesmen conduct their economic, political and physical wars in the cause of peace. In short utter chaos would result.

Our tastes have become subtle. We have acquired a refinement of mind not hitherto achieved in history and so it is that prejudice must now provide the spice of life which our cruder forebears used to physically import from the East for direct oral consumption. To hang onto one's personal set of prejudices

has thus become an important task in the development of the modern individual's character. In our advanced and sophisticated age the need for its ethereal stimulation can be as little considered a luxury as the possession of a second lavatory, car or television set.

The fashionable younger reader, by now perhaps provoked into the discovery that he finds himself without a significant prejudice and who suspects that there at last lies the secret cause of the drabness of his ideas and life in general would, however, be very wrong to assume that all he has to do is to resolve promptly to pick up a suitable prejudice on the way home from work and, hey-presto, achieve a general rise in status and quality of life.

Just as one swallow does not make a summer, one prejudice does not make a character. Besides, whatever their detractors might try to convey, prejudices do not simply suddenly appear in the world out of some avernian act of spontaneous creation. Rather they are the seedlings of the Giant Morality Weed; sprouting as they do from the frail seed of opinion a few of them eventually grow into the mature weed itself, whose fruits are then generally enjoyed as principles.

But growing the full weeds themselves can also not be recommended, partly because there is already an abundance of them in all varieties and partly because their cultivation in traditionally believed - though no one has actually proved the need for this - to be associated with physically strenuous feats such as walking on water, or being assaulted with both fire and darkness in the night of the Full Moon in May. On the other hand, just growing the prejudices like seedlings, as children grow bean shoots in cotton wool at school without allowing them to mature into the full plants, is both relaxing because of the ease with which ultimate judgements can be reached, and stimulating because of the gritty variety and contrast which such a collection contributes to the expression of one's personality.

A good collection of prejudices, properly balanced in variety and intensity of development - as illustrated for the benefit of

the novice in the appended tables - allows its owner to adhere to conveniently contradictory sets of beliefs. In fact once you have acquired a prejudice or two their contradictory complements soon grow either in an obvious or in a disguised form. The proof of a prejudice is, as it were, in its indigestibility.

But some importance must be attached to the achievement of a proper mix and this - even at the do-it-yourself level - requires an elementary understanding of at least the principal classifications. Firstly there are those prejudices for or against things or matters one does not, cannot, or is not expected to do anything about. These allow one to relate behaviour to an established principle, which of course goes a long way towards removing the burden of personal responsibility for what one does. Prejudices in this category also have the added attraction of setting standards for other people to live up to, which is always an agreeable and advantageous thing to be involved in.

Secondly there are prejudices for or against things or matters one does do something about. These can always provide a widely acceptable justification for actions which one may specifically undertake for any private reason whatsoever.

And finally there are those prejudices for or against things or matters about which one might have to do something. These have the advantage that they allow the spontaneity of one's actions not to be clouded by any cumbersome requirement for thought.

This is the method of classification *sub specie liberalitatis* or *ex tempore*, as the philosophers would say, depending on whether they considered the degree of freedom afforded or the relationship to time and circumstance the more important. Other classifications of prejudices are possible and have been established. In our limited present context only the method of classification by adherent. or, in the philosophers' terms, *de beata spe*, is worth a brief mention.

The appended tables, for which no claim for completeness can be made, are based on this classification method. Not only do they serve

to illustrate this method but they may even be useful as the starting point for a novel and pleasant pastime in which the prize would go to the player who could cultivate the most extensive and contradictory set of prejudices most quickly. To eliminate any unfair advantage that older members of the family circle may have, pre-existing prejudices should be subtracted from the final score.

The tables list:

a. Prejudices for the younger revolutionary . These are typically represented by those shown under the headings "AGAINST but also AGAINST". But a number of the sets of prejudices in the "FOR but also FOR" category will clearly be seen to be suitable too.

b. Prejudices for the liberal optimist. These are mainly found in the "FOR but also FOR" group, although depending on the particular blend of liberality or cheerfulness some of those in the "AGAINST but also FOR" heading could be adopted by such persons.

c. Prejudices for the undoctinaire socialist are primarily found in the "AGAINST but also FOR" category, whereas

d. Prejudices for the socially conscious conservative are listed under the heading of "FOR but also AGAINST"

Whilst students of these tables should note how each prejudice is always associated with its contradictory complement, it is only fair to point out that in practice this characteristic alone may not always be the sole criterion of satisfaction. After all it is the string that makes the parcel, not the contents.

Finally, for the slower reader, a brief word on the essential connection between "having prejudices" and "having an open mind". This is really quite simple - if one leaves all decisions to one's prejudices (and with a well developed set this can generally be done quite well) then one's mind can be kept as open as a dovecote through which doves of peace, other doves and emancipated winds can waddle and blow, in and out, without obstruction.

The Libertarian Alliance is an independent, non-party group, with a shared desire to work for a free society.

FOR	but also	FOR
health foods Che Guevara Originality the simple Life Socialism psycho-analysis, private and expensive		taking drugs and being stoned Love not War being well adjusted central heating freedom universal free medical treatment
FOR	but also	AGAINST
Feeding the Starving Millions high standard of living French cookery housing the homeless Israel travel abroad		mass production making money self-indulgence housing estates creating an Arab refugee problem tourism
AGAINST	but also	FOR
apartheid motorways television competitive examinations advertising prejudice		preserving primitive people a second family car appearing on it individual academic distinction things fashionable what is natural
AGAINST	but also	AGAINST
state bureaucracy computers being told what to think museum charges		free enterprise monotonous jobs that turn human beings into machines thinking museum art