

Geachte aanwezigen, ladies and gentlemen, dear mr Dalrymple.

I am very honored that I may serve as a discussant today. I read mr Dalrymple's books *Life at the Bottom* and *Civilization or What's Left of It* as well as the recent book *Romancing Opiates* and I was very impressed by the vivid descriptions of Dalrymple's prisoner-patients and his attempts to re-educate them. I also liked the articles on Stefan Zweig, Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, and the Parisian banlieues Dalrymple is very much an essayist, which means that his books are accessible, very moving and thought provoking. However, because of the essayistic style, it is not easy to refute or substantiate mr. Dalrymple's thesis. We may read and listen to Dalrymple's experiences and then discuss our own encounters with prisoners, drug addicts or members of the underclass and see whether they are different or the same, but that would be unsatisfactory, I think. So what I propose to do is the following. I have tried to turn mr. Dalrymple's argument into some sort of political program and I am going to present that program as I understand it and raise some questions for our discussion along the way.

Dalrymple's basic message seems to be this. If we want to live a good life, we ought to follow a number of basic rules.

- We must not steal, cheat, molest or murder other people.
- We must be responsible adults when it comes to relationships. Thus, ladies, don't fall for commitment phobics (to speak with Bridget Jones), convicted criminals, rapists, married men, alcoholics, drug addicts, or lazy, unemployed guys. I was reminded of the beautiful scene at the end of *As Good as It Gets*, a movie picture starring Helen Hunt and Jack Nicholson. Hunt is a waitress and a single mum, taking care of her asthmatic son. Nicholson is a compulsive, neurotic, homophobic writer who falls in love with her. At the end of the movie, he is waiting on her doorstep, and she exclaims "Why can't I have a normal boyfriend? Just a regular boyfriend, one that doesn't go nuts on me!" And then her mother explains to her: "Everybody wants that, dear. It doesn't exist." Dalrymple seems to argue that normal responsible boyfriends do exist and that we should seek for them, especially if we think about having children. Although I do sympathize with Helen Hunt in her role as Carol and with Bridget Jones and a huge number of other women for whom the world seems to be crowded out with wrong men, whom you can't diagnose as wrong when you first meet them, not even when you first consider falling in

love with them, I can see that Dalrymple has a point. We should aim for responsible fathers if we want to start a family.

- We must work to earn our daily bread.

These are the rules to live by. Sensible, plausible rules, and for many of us: not that difficult to follow. I think we can all agree that the world might be a better place if we could just manage to follow these rules.

Now, who will teach us these rules?

1. The first and most obvious answer is of course: Our parents. Most parents do teach these rules. Children know that they are not supposed to beat up their classmates, they know that they must not steal and kill. The vast majority of parents will also teach their children that they must work hard in school, since this will enlarge their chances to find a nice job that will enable them to make a decent living. Many parents try to stay together, even if their relationship is not the bed of roses that it was supposed to be. Many parents do not cheat on each other, and if they do, they are genuinely sorry and willing to seek counseling. In spite of all this, divorce does happen, and sometimes children are hurt in the process, although their parents try to prevent that. Still, I think even parents who ended up divorced will tell their children that a stable, enduring relationship is worth aiming for.

Many people learn the Dalrymple rules, the easy way. Their parents do a good job educating them. However, being a prison psychiatrist Dalrymple meets a lot of people whose parents did not teach them the moral rules. Who or what should step in, if people do not have morally sound parents?

2. The school. I think many schoolteachers teach the Dalrymple rules about stealing and working as a matter of course. They may be more hesitant to teach their pupils how to maintain a relationship. This is not because they disagree with the rules, but because they do not want to hurt their pupils and they know that children can get hurt if you criticize their parents. Children have a great capacity for love and many children love their parents despite the fact that they are arguing all the time, despite them being alcoholics, drug addicts, prison inmates, or angry divorcees. My question to Dalrymple would be: should schools be more outspoken in this respect? Should they condemn certain behavior more openly, at the risk of hurting children?

3. Other citizens. Suppose we come across people who obviously don't follow the rules. Are we allowed to criticize their behavior? I think many of us will lack the courage to do so, but even if we were brave enough, many of us would probably hesitate to judge other people very harshly. This has to do with embarrassment. I can teach my son how to behave, I can tell him off if he behaves badly. I'll probably do the same thing with any child under the age of, say, thirteen, playing in my house, but I would hesitate to go beyond that. I think I would be afraid to get hit or hurt, and I would feel awkward, because for me, it has always been relatively easy to do the right thing. I have not been sexually molested as a child, my parents gave me breakfast every morning, my parents were middle class teachers, they were never in jail, and did not walk around carrying weapons. Of course, I had my share of grief and disappointments, nobody is without scars, but compared to many patients of Dalrymple, I was very fortunate. Some children and teenagers have terrible parents, and they end up being sent from one foster family to another. Now, as a relatively privileged citizen, do I have the right to judge my less fortunate fellow citizens? Can I tell my less fortunate neighbor that she should get rid of her lover and find a decent man instead? Can I tell an unemployed fellow citizen that he should not live on social security benefits, but that he should collect garbage instead? Can I tell him that, implying that I myself would rather collect garbage than live on the dole, something I truly believe I will do if and when the case arises? Can I tell him that despite the fact that I have never been put to the test yet, and if I am lucky I will never have to collect garbage in my life? I would like to ask doctor Dalrymple, if he thinks we are morally obliged or entitled to educate our less fortunate fellow citizens, and how we should do that? What can we say if our less fortunate fellow citizens reply that it is easy for us to behave, because we have been fortunate all along?

And one additional remark on this matter. Mr Dalrymple's civilization quest is very much addressed to the underclass, while the top dogs in society are left in peace and can enjoy their excessive salaries and their luxurious lifestyle. Shouldn't there be a few extra commandments for the upper class, or do we assume that they deserve everything they have been given by fate, by their family and by their social network?

4. The welfare state. Mr Dalrymple is not a great friend of the welfare state. He seems to think that life on the dole can make people lazy, irresponsible or both. There is undoubtedly an element of truth in that. But is the British underclass really a product of the British welfare state? When I read the writings of John Stuart Mill who lived and died in the nineteenth century I don't get a very flattering picture of the underclass either. And if the underclass were a product of the welfare state, one

would expect the underclass to be more or less civilized depending on the generosity of the welfare state. Hence, one would expect the underclass in the US or the UK to be far more civilized than the underclass in Sweden or Denmark. To my knowledge, this does not seem to be the case. So what should be done about the welfare state? I think we can all agree that the welfare state can tell us to go to work when there is work to do, but how far should it go? If there isn't any proper work, will we get an allowance of some kind, or should we go to charity or the church, like we used to in the nineteenth century? This problem might be even more acute once we have children. If there are children, doesn't the state have an obligation to make sure that they can be taken care of, that there is food to nourish them and so on? And doesn't this mean that there should be a welfare state of some kind? Or would Mr Dalrymple agree with Charles Murray, who argued in his book *Losing Ground*, that the welfare state should be abolished altogether, because mothers and fathers on the dole set a bad example for children?

5. The next possible institution to teach us the rules is the criminal justice system. Part of Mr. Dalrymple's argument seems to be this. We should stop being benevolent, kind and understanding to citizens who don't follow the rules. We should not pamper criminals with therapy and social workers, we should incarcerate them to make them see the error of their ways.

I have two questions about this part of the program. The first one is: does the criminal justice system manage to teach the moral rules? One thing that puzzles me is that Dalrymple's prison inmates apparently didn't get this message, despite their being incarcerated. So, you cut up a fellow human being with a knife. The judge sends you to prison for, say, eight years for manslaughter, but apparently you need your prison psychiatrist to point out that you were morally wrong. Why didn't you get this message when you were sentenced? Is there something totally wrong with our prison system? Or do most criminals learn a lesson in the court room and does Dalrymple get to deal with the ones who listened too much to their tender hearted defense lawyers?

The second question is this. Is incarceration really the way to go? Apparently in the United States they have chosen to go in this direction. In parts of that country, a large percentage of the black male population between sixteen and thirty spends his life in jail. This may be a good way to protect society. Hopefully the juvenile delinquents are past their prime once they get out of prison and won't be that much trouble any more. But is this because prison was a useful moral education for them or is it because they have grown too old to participate in gangs?

6. And the last person to teach us the rules would be our doctor or psychiatrist, that is mr. Dalrymple himself. I understand from the books that many patients or clients see the error of their ways when Dalrymple points out that they should find a job instead of stealing or fooling around with their no good lovers. They see the error of their ways, but does that last? Do they change their lives? In medicine it is customary to compare treatments in a systematic way and then to find out which one fares better. For instance, if I were a psychiatrist dealing with depressed patients, I might want to know if medication would be better than therapy or vice versa. Psychiatrists do that kind of research all the time. Have you ever considered putting your ideas to the test in a randomized trial in which some patients would be treated with moral rectitude whereas others would receive a regular psychiatric treatment? Or would you say that your clients are not sick in any normal sense of the word and that they cannot be helped by any sort of therapy? In your latest book, this seems to be your position on drug addiction; junkies are not sick and therefore we need not bother about clinics and therapies. That seems a sensible position, but as a concerned citizen I would want to know what would happen. If we quit helping junkies and criminals, will they stop being junkies and criminals? Or will they keep being junkies and criminals, but will we save money that we may spend on other things?

And if there is time left, we might also discuss the way multicultural society changes our answers. In the Netherlands a large percentage of the prison population is from foreign descent. Does this change your argument and in what way? Have foreign delinquents been taught different rules? Or is the problem that they feel alienated from the school, other citizens, the welfare state and the criminal justice system? And how is this to be helped? Can it be helped at all?