

The authors reply as follows:

SIR—Dr Watkins implies that our paper implicates consanguinous marriages in the Bradford Asian population as a major cause of excess perinatal mortality and congenital malformation. The paper does not in fact state this but does propose that the high level of consanguinity might be relevant.

We have demonstrated that the high incidence of congenital abnormality in the Asian community remains despite making allowances for social class. Therefore, other factors including consanguinity require to be studied in more depth before firm conclusions regarding causation can be established.

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SIR—Elwood and Gallacher, in your issue of December 1984, say there are at least three separate views on the evidence on lead in petrol. They omit the most important view of all, that in our pursuit of health we should seek amenity not merely a reduction in morbidity. Lead has no physiological function in the human body, there is no threshold below which damage does not occur, and any additional quantity absorbed by those who have already been exposed will put them at risk. Consequently, it should be the duty of those professionally committed to the public health to urge the complete elimination of lead from our man-made environment.

Popper is a poor guide to those who wish to change the environment in this or any other country. He does not believe in the possibility of a social science and therefore separates the physical sciences from what we would call the social sciences. We believe they form a unity and that our social policy should arise out of our science and not be separated from it, as it so manifestly is in relation to environmental pollution in this country. Science is knowledge, but not just any knowledge. It is knowledge that has been acquired socially and tested and proved by human practice. Its use enables men and women to improve the production of the needs of their daily lives. The object of all science therefore is to change the physical world and to change society.

In a society where the means of production were owned by the people who produce, and where the state was a state of producers, the application of a calculus of priorities to cleaning up the environment,

or to providing a certain level of health, educational or social services, or to producing other goods, would be a prudent method of proceeding. But in our class-divided society, to refrain from demanding an environment free from lead merely lines the pockets of the owners of big business and leaves the most vulnerable at risk.

It is much better that medical men and women recognise and acknowledge their prejudices than that they pretend that they can temporarily put them aside. Worst of all is the belief that there can be a state of 'scientific' purity in which there are no prejudices.

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The authors reply as follows:

SIR—Cameron and Jones make three criticisms of our paper, two of which concern the argument presented and a third Popper's view of social science.

Cameron and Jones suggest that we omitted to consider the increased social amenity that might be derived from elimination of petrol lead. This is unfortunate as the argument from amenity was one of the underlying issues of the paper. We considered society as "a problem solving institution in which improvement is facilitated by the freedom to evaluate critically the effects of society's activities". We consider the ideas of improvement and amenity to be interchangeable in this context.

The second point of misunderstanding concerns relations between values and science. Cameron and Jones suggest that to refrain from removing petrol lead "merely lines the pockets of the owners of big business". A careful reading of our paper will show the absence of economic theory and a lack of value judgements about which social policy should be followed. We confined our evaluation of social policy to its empirical basis, ie, whether it was likely to achieve its stated objectives. However we acknowledge that from our review it could be inferred that removing lead from petrol would be unlikely to increase overall social amenity and so has little point. If considering an ineffective policy to be pointless is construed as a value judgement, we are sure it is one Cameron and Jones would agree with. Nevertheless we fail to see the connection between a potentially ineffective social policy and the stratification of society.

The misrepresentation of Popper's views on social science can be quickly dealt with. The only form of