

---

**PRESS & TELEVISION**


---

ening activities that occur routinely, newspaper editors devote more space to "hazards that are relatively serious and relatively rare." For example, toxic shock syndrome was extensively reported in the media, although the number of cases (nine per 100,000 menstruating women per year at the peak) was "about equal in frequency to tuberculosis."

Journalists usually offer little statistical information either about the relative risk of a hazard or how dangerous an activity might be compared to other alternatives—for example, the risks of injury while skiing and while jogging. Of 624 stories from magazines, New York newspapers, and evening network-news broadcasts that the authors surveyed during four months in 1984, only five percent told how many deaths each year were traceable to a particular hazardous activity or product. Twenty-four percent *did* point out the size of the population at risk from the hazard.

When the media offer statistical information about risks, they frequently use misleading data. For example, journalists often report the *potential* number of people who could be killed by a nuclear power accident, but fail to report the *actual* number of people killed so far by nuclear power, a miniscule total. Moreover, only 16 percent of the stories surveyed compared the possible costs and benefits of a risky activity. In most stories, journalists imply that the costs of an activity outweigh its benefits, while failing to give the reader the information needed to reach an independent assessment. "*None* of the media," say the authors, "is very informative in providing information about risk."

---

**RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY**


---

*Islamic Ideals*

"Islam: Resistance and Reassertion" by Amin Saikal in *The World Today* (Nov. 1987), The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 10 St. James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE, United Kingdom.

What is the nature of the current Islamic resurgence? Saikal, a political scientist at the Australian National University, finds that the movement rejects both capitalism and communism. As Muslim theologian Muhammed Iqbal says, "both fail to recognise the Lord, deceive mankind . . . they are two millstones, that pulverise the human kind."

According to Saikal, the leaders of the world's various Muslim movements, such as Iqbal in India and Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, all agree that the essence of Islam is *tawhid*—the idea that every aspect of life is unified under God. *Tawhid*, they stress, should guide the Muslim state as much as Muslim spiritual life.

These beliefs do not make the resurgence movement fundamentalist. The new leaders argue that Islamic principles should not be applied as if "frozen in time." Rather they must be interpreted by theologians (*mujtahiddin*) to fit changing historical circumstances.

Muslims, Saikal emphasizes, "cannot fulfill Islam in its entirety without creating Islamic governments in their societies." Such a government, he

---

 RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY
 

---

says, would be a "theo-democracy." God's word is law and therefore the only legitimate basis for state action. But the correct interpretation of God's law is determined through consultation (*shura*) and consensus (*ijma*) among Islamic scholars. Knowledge of the Koran is the only requirement for a believer to participate in an Islamic government. *Shura* does not bar direct and indirect elections for the head of state and legislative assembly. The authority of the state, however, lies in the community of Muslim faithful; the Islamic faith thereby rejects the establishment of an elite ruling class or a dictatorship.

Because Muslims are combating the erosion of their faith, the *jihād* (holy war) is considered defensive in nature. Thus the *mujahideen* (warriors in the way of God) in Afghanistan, while they may take the offensive against Soviet forces, have been "involved in a wholly defensive war."

The primary goal of today's Muslim leaders is to cleanse their society of foreign influence and help Muslims "rediscover and re-embrace their Islamic faith." Far from being reactionary, says Saikal, this resurgence offers a God-centered alternative to both Western liberal democracy and Marxism-Leninism.

### *An End to 'Progress'?*

"The Columbus Argument" by David Stove, in *Commentary* (Dec. 1987), 165 East 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

In his book *On Liberty* (1859), English philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) defended innovation with the following argument. Pioneers, Mill taught, have always been denounced for their new ideas. But what progress humanity has made has come from individuals who have created new principles of belief or behavior. Therefore innovators should not only be tolerated, they should be welcomed.

Since Mill's day, says Stove, a philosopher at the University of Sydney, Australia, this anticonservative thesis (which he calls the "They All Laughed at Christopher Columbus Argument") has become one of the commonplaces of our time, routinely cited by revolutionaries seeking to overturn the existing social or political order. Stove contends that the natural consequence of "the Columbus argument" is to believe that *all* new ideas *must* be tolerated, which "has brought us to the uncontrollable violence and irrationality of life" in contemporary Western societies.

The Columbus argument fails, the author maintains, because it rests on what Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) called "a one-sided diet of examples." Not every advance is good; evil dictators and butchers (Lenin, Pol Pot, Robespierre) have been as innovative in their crimes as Copernicus or Galileo were beneficial in their science.

Moreover, Stove argues, "innovators-for-the-worse" *must* always outnumber those who better society. Consider a television set, with thousands of intricate parts. Most people, lacking the knowledge needed to make repairs, would worsen rather than strengthen the quality of the set if they attempted to change it. Human societies "are incomparably more complex" than television sets—so intricate that "no one understands them