

Agonistic self-abuse: can Britain survive?

The Free Life Investigative Team

This summer, as last summer, an epidemic will ravage the United Kingdom. It is not borne by a virus or bacterium. Despite dramatic physical symptoms, it is essentially a sickness of the mind and soul, promoted by unscrupulous racketeers employing the media, and flourishing wherever there is emptiness and despair, among the forgotten outcasts of our unequal society. Like so many dangerous fads, it appears to have been invented in the United States, though some authorities trace it back to the outlaw bands of ancient China, where life was cheap.

Its practitioners refer to it, with nervous giggles, by the deceptively cosy name of "jogging", but medical researchers who have amassed an alarming dossier of its devastating effects, prefer the correct clinical term: agonistic self-abuse. Whatever we call it, many experts argue that this appalling scourge has blighted more lives than any other illness.

Could it be that "jogging" represents an insidious threat to the very fabric of our society? Or is it merely the symptom of a deeper malaise? Will it spontaneously vanish, as rapidly as it appeared, or is prompt and drastic government action urgently required? Can venerable sacred cows like "liberty of the individual" (that is, of the historically precipitated bourgeois individual), *habeas corpus*, free speech and privacy still be maintained when society itself is threatened with disintegration? *Free Life* is of the opinion that despite the pressing nature of the problem, rational discussion and informed debate must come first. We set out to answer the simple question: what are the facts about this alarming practice? Our team of investigators, under the direction of David Ramsay Steele (who has 'A' level Economics), scoured the country, interviewing social workers, physicians, and others who have had to cope with the sometimes appalling effects of agonistic self-abuse, as well as soliciting the

views of eminent social scientists and even contriving interviews (at great personal risk to the investigators) with the unhappy "joggers" themselves. The facts our team has uncovered make disquieting reading, and suggest to any responsible citizen that time may be short for Britain, or the World.

FACT: Doctors are unanimous that repeated jogging induces far-reaching distortions in the nervous, circulatory, digestive and respiratory systems. The full effects of agonistic self-abuse on the human body are as yet unknown.

FACT: Laboratory experiments in which rats were attached to a mechanical apparatus which made them 'jog' incessantly, showed that in 98 per cent of cases, emaciation and exhaustion were present after five years, in 42 per cent of cases there was also specific organic damage, and in 15 per cent of cases, death supervened.

FACT: More deaths occur every year in Britain from "jogging" than have occurred in the whole of human history from the ingestion of heroin.

FACT: Since "jogging" affects the chemistry of the central nervous system, scientists believe that it must have permanent and irreversible consequences for the personality, moods, values and mental health of the jogging addict. The study of these effects is still in its infancy, and little is known about them, but they could be enormously damaging.

Epidemiology

Our research indicates that "jogging" spreads mainly by personal contact and irritation. One of the chilling aspects of jogging dependency is the well-corroborated propensity of many addicts to strive to 'turn on' other people. Approaches vary. In some cases there is a blatant hard sell, including preposterous promises that self-abuse will supply the practitioner with eternal youth, peace of mind, an escape from all personal problems and a god-like awareness of the mysteries of nature. Alternatively, a more insidious, 'soft' ploy is adopted. The inexperienced victim is told that anyone can do it, that a little bit can't hurt, and that many of his acquaintances have done it. The 'pusher' may say, in disarmingly casual fashion: "I'm jogging round the park in the

morning. Care to come along?" The victim is usually quite incapable of gauging the full consequences of taking such an apparently innocent step. The body of the unhabituated neophyte naturally rebels against the abuse it receives: pains in the joints, abnormal tiredness or fits of coughing may occur. But the astute 'Pusher' knows how to handle the situation, with a carefully balanced combination of contrived concern and cavalier belittling of the seriousness of the symptoms. The confused victim is made to feel that if he persists, these unpleasant side-effects will disappear, and unimaginable delights will then be in store. At the same time he is patronised and treated as a freshman who has yet to demonstrate that he can take 'the hard stuff'.

It is also the tyrannical pressure of the peer group, manipulated shamelessly by the media, which the young person with a normal sedentary family background finds himself powerless to resist. Mrs Brenda Gloy, a Manchester mother of six, wept copiously as she informed our investigator of her two jogging daughters, ages 13 and 16, one of whom is in hospital with a broken ankle, the other with appendicitis which came on without warning during an uninhibited orgy of "jogging". "They're neither of them bad girls", she protested defiantly. "We've done our best to give them a Christian background and proper guidance. But all their friends were doing it. They were made to feel that it was "smart" and "grown up". What could we do?"

Those tell-tale signs ...

In response to this cry from the heart, we consulted **CEASE** (Campaign to End the Agonistic Self-abuse Epidemic), who supplied us with the following chronological breakdown of symptoms:

Stage One: Early signs, like diarrhoea, breathlessness or aching tendons should never be ignored, for it is at this point that a cure is most promising. Unfortunately, the addiction can be so insidious that if it is very gradually begun some of these symptoms barely appear. The solicitous parent must therefore rely upon psychological symptoms (blushing, stammering, petty fibbing, etc) as well as direct observation of the practice

itself. As soon as the parent has well-founded suspicions the child must be strapped down to prevent all movement of the limbs, and a doctor called at once.

Stage Two: An addict at this stage displays less apparent suffering showing that the body has become adapted to the unnatural practice, and cure is now extraordinarily difficult. To the trained eye diagnosis is almost instantaneous because of the numerous bodily deformations. The normal, wholesome, well-rounded belly is replaced by an unnaturally taut musculature. An almost skeletal thinness pervades the whole frame. The eyes are disturbingly bright and the pulse exceptionally sluggish. Cramps in the leg muscles are common, but worldly-wise addicts soon learn the trick of doing special exercises to counteract the pains. Doctors have despaired of finding a reliable cure for this stage of the disease, and many therapists fall back on tried and trusted folk remedies like plenty of good home cooking and the gift of a car with comfortable seats.

Stage Three: In this terminal stage, numerous drastic bodily malfunctions appear, ranging from atherosclerosis to peritonitis. The addict experiences comprehensive physical deterioration, often so dramatic that cure is spontaneous, though it is, alas, too late to restore the body's normal workings.

Withdrawal effects

In a controlled experiment, a dozen habitual "joggers" were assembled for two months at a special sanatorium, and deprived of any opportunities to indulge their craving. On the first day of 'cold turkey', most of the patients manifested no more than a slight increase in irritability, though one or two of the chronic cases became difficult and had to be sedated. After two or three days nearly all subjects presented with constipation, short tempers, palpitations, raised blood pressure, dizziness, nausea, incongruity of affect, hiccups, disorientation, nail-biting and fallen arches. Most revealing were the attempts of some addicts to sneak furtive "jogs". "It was pathetic", commented one qualified observer confidentially. "These people were reduced to level of wild beasts. They simply couldn't live without their "jogs". Some who persisted

in "jogging on the spot" had to be tied down. Some of them pleaded on their knees for "just one little jog!". They had been reduced by their illness to a pitiful state of *chronic dependency*."

Social and Psychological Predisposing Factors

Eminent social scientists are unanimous in the opinion that agonistic self-abuse cannot be explained in a purely individualistic and accidental fashion, but instead is deeply rooted in the murky undergrowth of the contemporary social order. Distinguished sociologist Professor Vivian Craven: "Jogging is essentially a solitary vice. 'The *loneliness* of the long-distance runner' is proverbial. Even when jogging is performed in groups, relaxed conversation is difficult, and each individual is preoccupied with his own body, imprisoned within a self-imposed sensory deprivation, in which the exaggerated attention to muscle and respiratory functions shuts out the world. Not only is jogging *solitary*, it is a stark emblem of *aimlessness*. The jogger leaves a spot, but pretty soon returns to it. Despite all his efforts he has not really moved. Notice that the very word "jogging" suggests a repetitious vertical motion, abstracting from situational change or any kind of progressive development. It is as though the jogger wished to suspend the laws of time and dialectical evolution, to escape from social reality into a pristine, petty bourgeois 'inner self'. In its *loneliness* and *pointlessness*, jogging is a perfect expression of the anomie inseparable from capitalist social relationships."

Sharply dissenting from this somewhat complacent mainstream view is Dr Ronnie Stirk, writing in *New Left Review*:

"Craven's text, like that of all empiricists, is 'anthropological' in its constituted aprioricity. Craven assumes, with the scholasticism of the humanist ethos epitomised in Giotto's frescoes, that there is some identifiable 'person', some determinate species of individual, endowed with 'needs' and even 'thoughts', which is the subject of the moment in the capitalist social formation denoted in Craven's text as "jogging". (It is a great concession to Craven that I repeat his

term, for it is thoroughly idealistic, schematic and ahistorical.) The concept of "jogging" has to be constructed within a problematic of the underdetermination and diverticulation of absolute surplus value as mediated by the ideological state apparatuses, particularly chiropractors. There is nothing for it but to begin with *Capital*, Volume III, Chapter 15, not so much the words themselves as the white spaces surrounding the words, though the punctuation marks are occasionally filled with rich insights." (Dr Stirk is the author of *Epistemological Rupture and Episcopalian Rapture, a Statistical Fabrication of Chiliasm among Thirteenth-century Galician Termite-breeders*.)

An alternative perspective has been presented by the outstanding psychoanalyst Dr Helmut Pflungk:

"The crude symbolism of the "jogging" syndrome is naturally too obtrusive to be overlooked. The *rhythmic motions, flushed appearance, contorted features, sweating, groaning, gasping* and not infrequently *sudden collapse* are so clear in their meaning that only the wilfully blind, or pathologically bereft of insight, could fail to understand. Agonistic onanism is all too evidently a shallow surrogate. But its true significance is a riddle to which I can finally announce the solution."

It cannot be accidental that we speak of 'jogging the memory'. The jogger, we may reasonably surmise, is engaged in *trying to remember something*. But what? Who he is, perhaps: his identity. We have all (have we not?) experienced the sensation of being sure we have forgotten something, we know not what. This is normal. But to turn such a concern into a daily ritual is decidedly abnormal, and an alarming symptom of disintegration of ego stability. How should we interpret the persistent, ceremonial and distracted attempt to remember? Clearly, as a repression of the profound need *to forget*.

"It is apparent then, that the jogger, by an unconvincing piece of play-acting at endeavouring to recall something of dreadful import, is actually intent upon *forgetting it*. The 'jogger' tries to forget himself. He is seeking oblivion because the reality of the

universe and his place in it has become too awesome to acknowledge. This amazing discovery is unique to me, and must rank as one of my greatest contributions to science."

"To 'jog' is not unlike to 'Jag', i.e. to achieve euphoria and oblivion by intoxication. There is medical evidence that "jogging" changes the composition of the blood, which is to say, introduces toxins into the bloodstream, and is therefore quite literally intoxicating. 'Jagging' is in turn related to *jagen*, to hunt, again bearing out my theory that the "jogger" is pretending to hunt for something, no doubt his lost soul. The association with intoxication is heightened by the similarity with 'jug, and with the frenzied abandonment of the jig, though jogging must be seen as no more than a zombie-like caricature of a merry dance. We are forced to conclude", added Dr Pflungk with a wry twinkle, "that for the unfortunate jogger, the jig (if you will permit the pleasantry) is up."

But Dr Pflungk's interpretation is dismissed with acid contempt by Professor Hans Earache, who calls it "metaphysical Freudian twaddle". Crisply, Professor Earache explained.. "Agonistic self-abuse is a behavioural disorder with a large genetic element in its causation. My study of 5,000 identical twins separated at birth demonstrates the preponderant influence of heredity. This is promising because it means we can isolate the likely sufferers at an early age and provide them with expert help in special treatment centres. Aversion therapy has not been too successful as yet, and the most promising approach seems to be minor surgery, to some of the leg sinews. Ultimately, of course, the ideal is to modify the personality of the patient so that all desire for jogging disappears, but at present progress in that line is rather slow."

Dicing with Death

Bizarre though it may sound, a growing number of joggers contend that their pastime is harmless or even virtuous, and have organised to demand what they perceive as their rights. We met Des Joplin, leading spokesperson for the Joggers' Liberation Front, who told us: "All human progress throughout history has been accompanied by joggers. We have uncovered evidence that

Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein were secret joggers. The fascist bosses of the sedentary society are plotting a holocaust against joggers. These fascists are completely lacking in tolerance or sympathy. They are sub-human shit-heads who deserve to "be strangled by their own hammocks." Joplin's exposition was interrupted by a bout of rasping coughs, but with shaking hands he gave our investigator a copy of the JLF's demands:

IMMEDIATE DEMANDS OF THE JOGGERS' LIBERATION FRONT

- (1) Complete freedom to jog in any location at any time, day or night.
- (2) Compulsory Provision of jogging tracks, shorts and plimsolls by all schools, department stores, factories, offices and municipal departments.
- (3) Employers to be compelled to hire a 50% minimum quota of joggers, to give all their jogging employees six months' paid convalescence each year and to pay all their medical bills.
- (4) Five hours per day compulsory jogging instruction for all schoolchildren. Courses in Jogging Studies to be provided in all universities and polytechnics.
- (5) Immediate abolition of world poverty, disbandment of US imperialism and unconditional support for the progressive people's liberation struggle in Northern Kalimantan.
- (6) Closure forthwith of all nuclear power stations, and a massive government research effort to explore ways of converting the pounding of joggers' feet into domestic and industrial energy.

As our investigator read these demands, he was surrounded by a hostile crowd of militant joggers, clad in shorts and plimsolls, sporting badges with the slogan "Jogging is Joy", and reeking with the offensive odour emitted by human bodies subjected to over-strenuous exercise. They demanded to know why he persisted in the fascist posture of being seated, and were about to physically compel him to start jogging. To avoid an ugly incident, our representative made an excuse and left.

Free Life