

who?

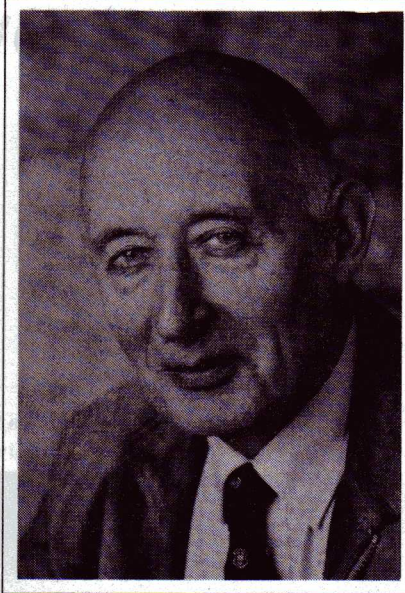
DAVID WILLEY

David Willey is chairman of the Optimum Population Trust and editor of *Better World*. He has a French wife, Yvette, a biologist from Lyon. They have two sons.

In 1949, he won an open scholarship in classics from the Royal Grammar School in Lancaster to Oxford University's Exeter College, where he read 'Greats' (Latin, Greek, Ancient History and Philosophy). After graduating in 1953, he spent two years in the army, eventually as an officer in the Manchester Regiment.

After the army he found himself unable to decide what career to follow and decided to postpone a decision. Since then he has earned a living in different ways, ranging from sorting nuts in Australia to teaching English on television in Finland, from supervising wood imports in Canada to writing and editing language text books in Switzerland. He has been the owner or part-owner of a quick printing shop in England, an adventure travel company in Denmark and language schools in six European countries, and generally been involved in enough business ventures to realise that he is not cut out for that sort of thing. He still has not decided on a career.

His 'working' life has been punctuated by environmentally-malign travel and mini-expeditions of many kinds: by car around North America after working his passage there on a Norwegian ship carrying



coal from Germany and by Land Rover overland to Australia; on foot in the Andes, Atlas, Himalayas, Ruwenzori and Tassili; by trimaran to the West Indies, by felucca down the Nile and by canoe up the Caroni, and underwater looking for a sunken city in the Aegean; with dogs in Greenland, reindeer in Lapland, mules in Morocco, camels in the Sahara and elephants in Thailand. As he prefers English food, he has found all this time spent abroad quite hard.

He cannot remember when he first realised that the world's 'happiness potential' was being eroded by the rapid growth of human population but it was long before he first heard the word 'ecology'.

He believes that the optimum population of the world is the population of an optimum world, i.e. one in which average human happiness is maximised, and is therefore a *Utilitarian* concept. While greatly admiring John Stuart Mill, he wishes that he or Jeremy Bentham had given Utilitarianism a name which was both more attractive and less likely to invite misunderstanding; he can understand too why many people find it difficult to accept that a person's motives are irrelevant to the rightness or wrongness of an act, even after allowing for a possible distinction between motive and

intention, and suspects that some of Kant's thinking could well be grafted onto Mill's ideas. (He suggests that a strong dose of Utilitarianism would be the best antidote for recent widespread outbreaks of pseudo-liberalism.)

He does not believe that we can count on a change in human nature to bring about a better world. Human-beings will remain as they are, i.e. 'all right really' - but capable of acting terribly if put in a position where they have no alternative but to act badly. He is puzzled therefore by the notion of original sin and sympathises with the British monk Pelagius, who was declared a heretic in the fifth century because of his common sense espousal of the importance of personal responsibility.

In view of the fact that neo-Malthusians are the only people with a realistic approach to the challenge of achieving sustainable development, he considers it is misleading to regard them as prophets of doom. Their message is one of hope: 'It doesn't all *have to* end in tears, not if we tackle population rationally'. While achieving a balance between human numbers and natural resources would not solve the world's major problems, it would at least make them soluble.

While he regrets the fact that today's optimum populationists will all be long dead before the world's population approaches anything like the optimum, he feels that they may console themselves with the thought that their situation is not unlike that of the people who designed the great cathedrals and knew they would never live long enough to see them completed.