

The Diary: Jeremy Paxman

Jeremy Paxman

Most people seem to know of the charity Crisis in its “at Christmas” incarnation, providing food, shelter and everything from haircuts and chiropody to tea and pantomime for homeless people. But the homeless are with us all year round, and I went the other day to one of the weekly philosophy classes run for Crisis by Paddy Gormley, a charming philosopher whose mission in life seems to be to act as the reincarnation of the 18th-century Bishop Berkeley, who claimed that the world was a figment of our imaginations.

This time, though, Gormley’s subject was worldly hierarchy. Perhaps there exists somewhere a perfect society without hierarchy of any kind. But it is terribly hard to think of a human organisation — social, religious or political — that does *not* have some sort of pecking order.

You get a very different perspective on this sort of thing when the speakers are without even the dignity of a roof over their heads. A quiet man with a rather knocked-about look agreed that it was hard to think of a political system that wasn’t hierarchical, adding bleakly: “The problem is, the wrong people are in charge.”

They always are, I thought.