

Letter to Financial Times, January 14, 2015

Ridicule helps satire, and free speech, keep its edge

Sir, Bill Allan suggests that the use of satire may be appropriate to the exercise of free speech but that ridicule would be counterproductive as a means of persuasion and should be avoided ([Letters](#), January 12). The problem with this formulation is that ridicule is usually intrinsic to good satire and as such remains crucial to the conduct of debate, indeed may give debate its sharp edge.

Deployed as such, ridicule is intended to mobilise a constituency of opinion rather than to persuade the other side of the wrongness of its position.

William Cobbett, the late 18th-early 19th century English radical journalist, while living in America as a Pittite Tory, took the nom de plume “Peter Porcupine” to help sharpen his polemical edge. Recalcitrance, after all, may be as intrinsic to the exercise of free speech as the more benign expression of difference.