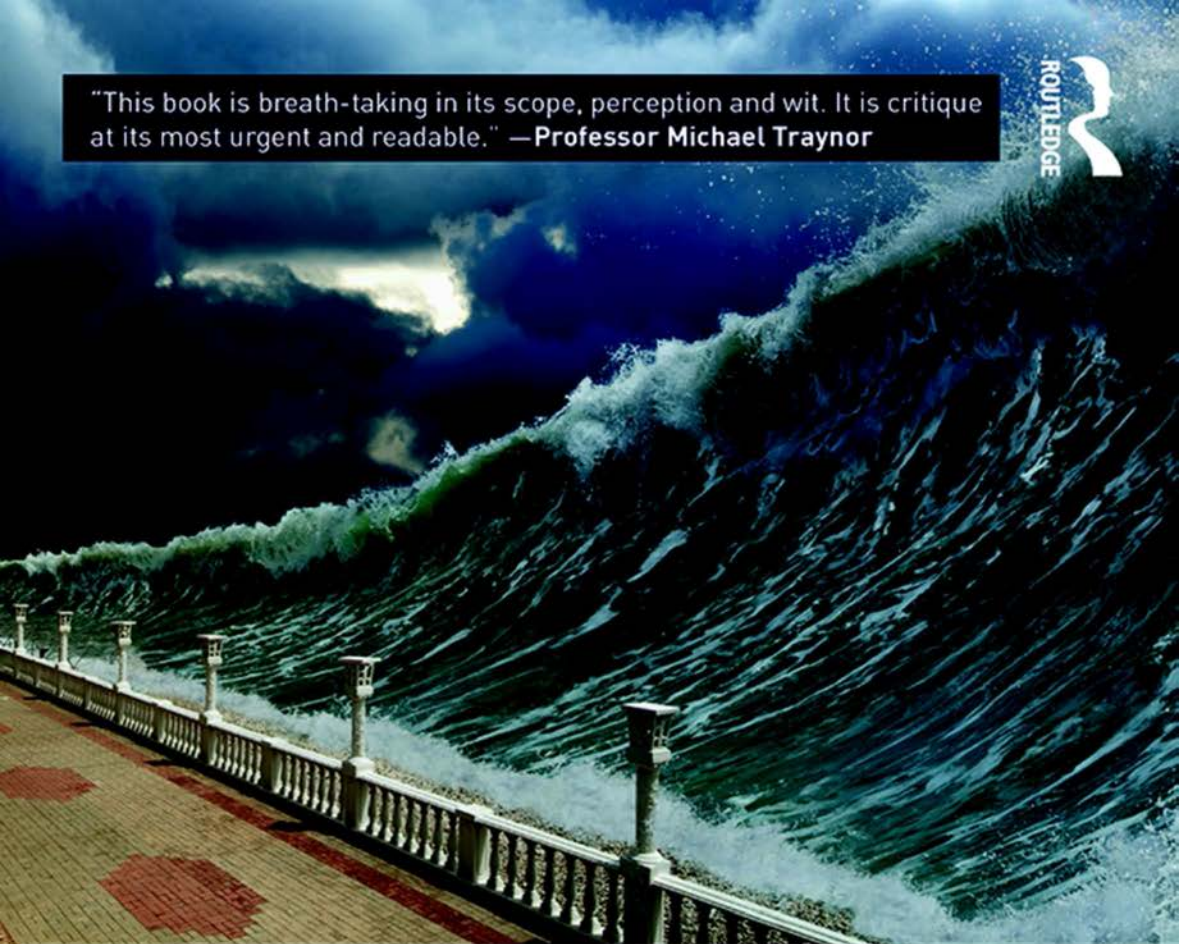


"This book is breath-taking in its scope, perception and wit. It is critique at its most urgent and readable." —Professor Michael Traynor

ROUTLEDGE



CBT:

THE COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL TSUNAMI

MANAGERIALISM, POLITICS, AND THE CORRUPTIONS OF SCIENCE

FARHAD DALAL

‘This book is breath-taking in its scope, perception and wit. It is critique at its most urgent and readable.’

*Professor Michael Traynor, Middlesex author of Nursing
in Context: Policy, Politics, Profession*

‘Dalal gives us a devastatingly forensic critique of the weaknesses of CBT and the supposed “science” that backs it up, and of the ruthless professional politics that have led its proponents to win the battle for the nation’s souls. His term “cognitivist delusion” says it all. But in addition, as with his previous books, he lays bare the deeper intellectual and cultural histories that have conspiratorially allowed the “mental health professions” to short-change citizens in the service of materialist capitalism and a society dominated by elites.’

*Professor Andrew Samuels, Department Of Psychosocial
And Psychoanalytic Studies, University Of Essex*

‘CBT is often presented as an alternative to psychiatric drugs for depression and other mental disorders. But in this erudite, thoughtful investigation of the “CBT Tsunami,” Farhad Dalal details how it is built upon the same flawed foundation that gave us “safe and effective antidepressants”: neoliberalism, the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, and bad science. A refreshing, and much needed, critique.’

Robert Whittaker, Author of Mad In America

‘This book is an analysis of the triumph of CBT as a method of “treating” “depression” but its argument also offers an urgent critique of the dysfunctions of our hyper-rational culture. By splitting nature from humankind, and then splitting emotion and ethics from reason in the latter, Dalal notes we have ended up with a perversion of Enlightenment values where the only things that count are the things that can be counted.’

*Paul Hoggett, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy and
Chair of the Climate Psychology Alliance*

‘We live in alienating world where malignant individualism and rapacious neoliberal capitalism are destroying the belongingness and social cohesion that give our lives meaning, as well as degrading the planet we live on. In the therapy professions, these forces are thwarting relational ways of working, and replacing them with government-run machinery to provide industrialised therapy. This book is what we have all been waiting for: a robust, detailed and psychologically sophisticated critique of the frightening place where modern managerialism, regulation, compliance and performativity have taken us. It provides evidence that our narrow view of “evidence-based practice” is not enough.’

*Rex Haigh Consultant Psychiatrist in Medical Psychotherapy,
Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust*

‘This is an absolute masterpiece and should be read by anyone interested in anything to do with mental health or psychotherapy or economics or neoliberalism. Farhad has a wonderfully clear, engaging, intellectually rigorous, at times witty, style; but with a great talent for making complex phenomena easy to understand.’

*Sami Timimi, Director of Medical Education Lincolnshire
Partnership Foundation NHS Trust*

‘This book could be the Apricity that is needed in these times: in a scholarly way it honours value-based ideas, and names those ideas that have been hijacked and corrupted. Watch out! It takes no hostages and introduces no heroes; it is a great read for those of us who appreciate challenging, perspicacious and compassionate analyses.’

*Professor Margie Callanan Programme Director of Clinical
Psychology Doctorate, Salomons Centre
for Applied Psychology*

‘Dalal’s book provides a vital contribution to our understanding of the politics and ethics of contemporary mental health treatment, and of the managerial and reductive pursuit of happiness which is a symptom of our times.’

*David Ferraro, President of the Lacan Circle of Melbourne &
blogger Archives of a Divided Subject*

‘Under the sway of neoliberalism, the “happiness industry” is in full flow and cognitive behaviour therapy is the technology of treatment for those who fall by the wayside. In this combative and passionate book, Farhad Dalal draws on his expertise in psychotherapy and critical thinking to reveal the corruptions of argument and evidence on which the dominance of CBT is based. The book is a much-needed and timely reminder of the dangers inhabiting simplistic responses to complex social and personal conditions.’

*Prof. Stephen Frosh Professor of Psychosocial Studies,
Birbeck, University of London.*

‘With devastating irony and a poetic turn of phrase, this tightly argued yet wide ranging essay about politicised behaviourism in psychotherapy today is both highly instructive and entirely persuasive. . . . Farhad Dalal redeems the possibilities of Group Analysis from the corrosions and dilutions of neo-liberal economists and administrators. It is good to have him on our side!’

*Earl Hopper, Ph.D., Mem.Inst.GA, CGP, DFAGPA. Psychoanalyst,
group analyst and organisational consultant
in private practice in London*

‘Dalal lays bare a “tragedy-in-progress” which will concern anyone for whom mental health or the direction of travel of twenty-first century healthcare is important.’

*Dr. Douglas Board; Coach and Organizational
Consultant; MaslowsAttic*

‘A powerful critique unpacking the rhetoric surrounding CBT. Both shocking and deeply convincing.’

Oliver James Clinical Psychologist - author of Affluenza

‘A powerful and courageous book chartering, among other things, the deep inefficiencies and failings of our IAPT-based CBT services.’

*James Davies Reader in Social Anthropology & Mental Health
University of Roehampton, author of Cracked: Why
Psychiatry is Doing More Harm Than Good*

‘In this most timely contribution, Dalal forensically lays bare the limitations of CBT as a response to human distress and the grandiosity of many of its claims and shows how the systematic adoption of CBT causes injury to our image of ourselves. An invaluable resource for those wanting to understand and to stand against the absurdities of hyper-rationalism.’

David Glyn - President, Group Analytic Society International

‘Farhad Dalal shows how our current cultural fixation with hyper-rationality has led to CBT dominating the psychological therapies as part of our Neo-liberal post-truth era. This is a vitally important book if we are ever to relearn how to come to our senses.’

Prof Del Loewenthal University of Roehampton, UK

‘This is a seminal contribution . . . A brilliant tour de force that lays bare the working of power relations in obfuscating scientific methods and perpetuating falsehoods on important policy questions of our times. Lies appear to thrive not only through outright falsifications but also through orchestrations of selective disclosure, the currency of false promises, and misrepresentation of what constitutes efficacy and public good. Farhad Dalal masterfully takes us through the jungle overgrowth that institutionally militates against healthcare and human well-being.’

Dr Ajeet N. Mathur, Indian Institute of Management

‘This is a masterful analysis of the hidden forces, delusions and tyrannies which corrupt and toxify science. The book draws on scholarly research not only to interrogate CBT practice, it also articulates an ethical vision of what Good Science and its values ought to look like.’

*Prof. Charalambos Tsekeris, Academic Researcher (National
Centre for Social Research, Greece) and Professor Extraordinary
(Stellenbosch University, South Africa)*

‘A timely and crushing debunking of dominant mental health paradigms, opening up possibilities for a more humane approach to human suffering, rooted in rigorous socio-political analysis.’

*Graham Music, Author Nurturing Natures: Attachment and
Children’s Emotional, Social and Brain Development.
London: Psychology Press (2nd edition)*

‘This is one hell of a book! Brilliantly written.

In his closely and passionately argued book, *The Cognitive Behavioural Tsunami*, Farhad Dalal issues a complex and thought-provoking challenge to the claims of Cognitive Behavioural Therapies as the pinnacle of effective psychotherapy. Implicit in his critique are such fundamental questions as: Do we have the right to suffer? Is human suffering a medical problem? Does personal happiness equate with mental health? Can one’s capacity to suffer reflect mental health rather than mental illness? What does it mean to “treat” suffering?

Dalal argues against the over valuing of hyper-rationality that has come to pervade models of contemporary psychotherapy. He outlines the corruption of science in the service of politics and profit. Though written primarily within the perspective of mental health services delivery in the United Kingdom, Dalal’s book mirrors the same economic and political forces seen in the United States in a once deeply personal field of human encounter, now increasingly defined, manualized, and controlled by government and market forces, insurance companies, and the pharmaceutical industry.

This book raises fundamental questions of the ethics and human essence of our psychotherapeutic endeavours that speak urgently to the future of psychotherapy.’

*William F. Cornell, Author of Somatic Experience
in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*

‘An important book for those worried about the clinical value of CBT. Dalal presents a rich and fundamental critique of CBT as well as the systems that support it. Dalal is an independent thinker who courageously challenges the DSM and the power politics of psycho-therapy.’

*Dr. Robi Friedman, Past President of the International
Group Analytic Society*

‘Farhad Dalal’s passionate and informative analysis of the questionable foundations of CBT, and of the professional and political contexts in which it has risen, is presented with his characteristic engaging directness. You do not have to agree with everything he says to be convinced of the importance of his powerfully-stated message: that the CBT behemoth, loaded high with good intentions and false hopes, should be halted.’

*Barry Richards Professor of Political Psychology
Bournemouth University, UK*

‘Another brilliant book from Farhad Dalal! This time his target – well deserving the sue of heavy weaponry — is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, together with the idiocies of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual. Dalal demonstrates that they are symptoms of a much more general affliction of modern society: “hyper-rationality” and the corruption of science.’

Stephen Mennell, University College Dublin

‘Farhad Dalal employs critical analysis with surgical precision to debunk the mythology surrounding and supporting the science of CBT.

The book will confront, inspire, provoke and enlighten any reader with an interest in how CBT has morphed from a treatment dealing with the fear of flying and spider phobia into a powerful political-scientific movement, which claims to cure almost all “mental disorders” on an industrial scale.’

*Professor Stig Johannessen, Faculty of Health Sciences,
Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway*

‘Farhad Dalal’s book looks behind CBT’s moral and rationalistic justification for its dominance in the field of psychotherapy. Dalal succeeds in illuminating the dark politics that drive this process, exposing their self-serving actions for what they are. This eloquent and fascinating book exposes the reader to the cost we are paying for this therapeutic approach: the reduction and diminishment of the human subject and the silencing of other therapeutic alternatives.’

Dr. Avi Berman, Tel Aviv University



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CBT: The Cognitive Behavioural Tsunami

Is CBT all it claims to be? *CBT: The Cognitive Behavioural Tsunami: Managerialism, Politics, and the Corruptions of Science* provides a powerful critique of CBT's understanding of human suffering, as well as the apparent scientific basis underlying it. The book argues that CBT psychology has fetishized measurement to such a degree that it has come to believe that only the countable counts. It suggests that the so-called science of CBT is not just 'bad science' but 'corrupt science'.

The rise of CBT has been fostered by neoliberalism and the phenomenon of New Public Management. The book not only critiques the science, psychology and philosophy of CBT, but also challenges the managerialist mentality and its hyper-rational understanding of 'efficiency', both of which are commonplace in organizational life today. The book suggests that these are perverse forms of thought, which have been institutionalised by NICE and IAPT and used by them to generate narratives of CBT's prowess. It claims that CBT is an exercise in symptom reduction which vastly exaggerates the degree to which symptoms are reduced, the durability of the improvement, as well as the numbers of people it helps.

Arguing that CBT is neither the cure nor the scientific treatment it claims to be, the book also serves as a broader cultural critique of the times we live in; a critique which draws on philosophy and politics, on economics and psychology, on sociology and history, and ultimately, on the idea of science itself. It will be of immense interest to psychotherapists, policymakers and those concerned about the excesses of managerialism.

Farhad Dalal has been in independent practice as a group analyst and psychotherapist for over thirty years. He also works with organizations. His previous books have questioned received wisdom in a range of territories including psychotherapy (*Taking the Group Seriously*), racism (*Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization*) and equal opportunities (*Thought Paralysis – The Virtues of Discrimination*).



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CBT: The Cognitive Behavioural Tsunami

Managerialism, Politics and the
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Farhad Dalal

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Introduction

Hyper-rationality

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has come to dominate the field of psychological therapy, particularly within the NHS in the UK, but also in other sorts of institutions such as prisons and schools. This state of affairs is reproduced in many other countries across the world. If you go to your GP because of feeling depressed for some reason, in your ten-minute consultation your GP is almost certain to offer you anti-depressants or/and the ‘one-size-fits-all’ manualized treatment called CBT. The ‘treatment’ will try to teach you to replace your ‘negative’ thoughts with ‘positive’ ones. Your CBT therapist will have little interest in *why* you are depressed (perhaps you have been bereaved) because they think depression to be an illness, rather than a reasonable response to a devastating life event. According to the latest edition of the psychiatric bible, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual V* (DSM V, 2013), if you are still grieving *a whole two* weeks after your bereavement, it is because you are suffering from a mental disorder, because you should have come to terms with your loss by then.

How on earth did we get here? How is it that so many of the great and the good, researchers, regulatory authorities as well as hard-nosed economists and commissioners all come not only to think that there is nothing odd about this way of thinking about human suffering, but also that it is a sensible, scientific way of thinking?

In part, this has come about because in more recent times in *some* quarters of the academy, the notion of scientific knowledge itself has become progressively corrupted and degraded by the self-serving manoeuvres of a number of interest groups. This is somewhat ironic, because the function of the scientific attitude when it first emerged during the Enlightenment was precisely to expose the self-serving rationalizations of the then ruling elites to be fantastical fictions, not facts.

Once upon a time in the west . . .

Once upon a time in medieval England, anyone caught simply *reading* the Bible in the English language, would be in deep trouble, branded a heretic and quite likely burnt at the stake. The official Bible – the Vulgate – was in Latin. The Church said that to render the Word of God from ‘high’ sonorous Latin into the

low commoner's tongue – English – was heresy as it would defile it. In this way the priest rationalized and protected his privileged position as gate-keeper between God and mammon. The Bible's impenetrability for the masses served the interests of both princes and priests, who used self-serving Biblical readings not only to claim that they were chosen by God to do his work, but also to give divine sanction to their political intrigues. Pope Urban II used biblical imagery to launch the first of the Crusades by conflating the Saracen with Satan, and in the same breath declared a *fatwah* on Jews everywhere. In June 1643, the Puritan English parliament actually passed a law – *The Covenant to be Taken by the Whole Kingdom* – which was supposed to be a Covenant with God. This celestial legal contract was an agreement between the English parliament and the Almighty, in which the Almighty agreed that the English would do God's work on earth (expanding His Kingdom), and He in turn would look after them. It was also agreed that God would replace Jews with the (Protestant, Puritan) English as his Chosen People.¹

Having sole access to the word of God, the utterances of priests and princes had absolute authority. To question the proclamations of Kings was treason, to question the Church was heresy. Either was a sure way to book a place in the medieval torture chamber.

Then, in the late Middle Ages this despotic world order began to be challenged right across the land that would come to be known as Europe. Perhaps surprisingly, it was philosophy that was in the vanguard of this revolution. Philosophers like Locke, Hume, Descartes and Kant were amongst the first to challenge this tyranny. The radical revolution that they triggered transformed the world; it came to be called the Enlightenment because it brought the Light of Reason into the darkness of superstition. Kant cried out to humanity at large: *Sapere Aude!* Dare to think for yourself! (literally, 'Dare to know'). Intrinsic to the Enlightenment were the ideas of equality and freedom – the freedom to question, the freedom to think. And think humanity did. Rational thought became the organizing principle of society at large. Science itself grew out of this movement, bringing us unimaginable benefits in all kinds of arenas from technology to agriculture to leisure to medicine.

Physics envy: only the countable counts

But then, things began to change. Entranced by the predictive powers, advances and insights of the natural sciences, all kinds of disciplines and social practices began to suffer from a kind of 'physics envy'. And so, they began to try to emulate the empirical methods of natural scientists in order to garner for themselves the prestige of being a 'science'.

Today, it is hard to move without falling over all manner of things that claim to be scientific and evidence-based: evidence-based policy, evidence-based probiotics, evidence-based decision making, evidence-based fitness, evidence-based software engineering, evidence-based teaching, evidence-based investing, and of course, evidence-based psychological treatment.

However, the version of evidence that has come to prevail has meant that the virtues of the rationality of the Enlightenment have become perverted and distorted into a kind of hyper-rationality. Whereas Enlightenment rationality valued the freedom to think and question all things and anything, hyper-rationality uses a distorted and corrupt version of science to close down thinking. Rule-following comes to triumph over questioning and thinking. Where Enlightenment rationality brought freedom and light, hyper-rationality brings authoritarianism and darkness.

The virtues of rationality itself cannot be overstated. It has brought untold benefits to our lives and our ways of life. But the extreme versions of rationality, hyper-rationality, are corrosive to these very ways of life. As William Barrett put it, ‘the untrammelled use later thinkers made of human reason [i.e. hyper-rationality], applying it like an acid solvent to all things human or divine’ (Barrett, 1990, p. 26).

Hyper-rationality is the use of a reductive version of rationality in contexts that are not suited to it. Hyper-rationality insists that only evidence-based claims are valid. This sounds fine until we discover that hyper-rationality insists that this evidence be only of the arithmetic kind, because numbers and measurements are objective and real. If something can’t be counted, if it can’t be measured, *then it does not exist; it is not real*. This belief then allows all kinds of bizarre things to take place.

The Neem tree

For example, for over 2,000 years, components of the Neem tree have been used by farmers in India as pesticide. In 1992 an American agricultural company called ‘Grace’ patented a version of the pesticide. Having patented it, they claimed to be the legal owners of all such uses of the Neem tree. If any Indian farmer then used the Neem tree as a pesticide on his plot of land, then he was breaking the law and would be sued by Grace. Understandably, the farmers were outraged and took to the streets in protest. But protest counted for nothing, because in patent law, a challenge to the novelty claim of the patent could only be allowed if it could be demonstrated that the prior knowledge had previously appeared *in a printed publication*, preferably in a ‘scientific’ journal, at some time before the application for the patent. In other words, the legal system required *documentation*, something tangible as ‘proof’. Patents are supposed to be granted when they meet the legal criteria of ‘novelty, non-obviousness and utility’. In this case, the patent claim was neither novel nor non-obvious, and its utility was already well known. But this being folk knowledge, there was no evidence of the approved kind in print. Because of this, the courts declared that there was *no evidence*. The observable visible reality, the actual use of the Neem tree by farmers for millennia, was declared anecdotal and dismissed as unscientific.

In this hyper-rationalist world, it is the presence or absence of documentation that is the ultimate arbiter of truth and reality.

Encouraged by the findings of the courts, three years later two Indian researchers, Sumin K. Das and Hari Har P. Cohly at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, jumped on the same bandwagon. In 1995 they patented ‘the use of turmeric in wound healing’. Being Indian, they of course, knew that Indian families had used turmeric paste for millennia to help speed up the healing of cuts, bruises and wounds. Their use of the patent law was entirely exploitative, cynical and self-serving. Astonishingly, their patent also granted them the *exclusive right* to sell and distribute turmeric. In one fell swoop, not only had they commandeered the uses of turmeric, but also all commercial activities around it. They were going to become very rich indeed.

Eventually, after years of legal battle, both patents were revoked. In the Neem tree case, the patent was revoked after a manager of an Indian agricultural company was able to demonstrate that he had been producing oil from the tree for the same use as the patent, but prior to the patent. And in the turmeric case, written evidence for its prior use was produced from ancient Ayurvedic texts from 500 BC. However, there remain a large number of patents in place on other uses of the Neem tree as well as turmeric. This kind of bio-piracy is only able to take place because the procedures and protocols of patent law are hyper-rationalist.

The point to be underlined is this: that *the idea of evidence itself is up for grabs*. What counts as legitimate evidence (real, objective data), is determined by the ruling definition of evidence. This ruling definition also has the effect of *ruling out* other kinds of evidence, even though it is also objective and there for all to see. This is the kind of hyper-rationalist reality that we find ourselves beleaguered by, in which so-called evidence or lack of, is being used to mystify and deny the existence of self-evident realities.

As things stand today, *in order for something to count, it has to be countable*. But further, and more worryingly, in some contexts the number itself becomes more real than the thing it is apparently representing, so much so that in some instances the numbers *become* the reality.

Rationality, Truth and Madness

The activity of science is supposed to be the production of objective knowledge by rational means. The ‘means’ themselves are a mix of observation (empirical evidence) and logical argument. CBT claims to produce scientific knowledge in this way, and on this basis assert that its claims are rational, objective and value free. In short – that they speak the truth.

Because the claims of CBT are rational, then any that question them are bound to be irrational. Why else would they deny the objective reality staring them in the face? They must be mad, or at the very least misguided. Even more, the notion of truth evokes its opposite – the lie. What this means is that anyone that questions the truth of the CBT thesis must not only be somewhat mad, in some way they must also be bad. It is in this sort of way that the evidence-based therapies buttress themselves and dismiss those that question them as deluded anti-science Luddites.

However, the arguments of this book are that the claims of CBT are not rational but hyper-rational, and that its observations as well as its logical arguments, fall far short of the standards required by good science.

Neoliberalist efficiencies

Hyper-rationality has infiltrated all levels and arenas of social life. It is the basis not only of much of what passes for psychological science, but is also the basis of neo-liberalism and the ethos of New Public Management. These three territories powerfully come together, to interlock, bolster and sustain each other, to create a peculiar world view that is promoted as both normal and sensible, despite its peculiarity.

This book is primarily about the first element of the unholy trinity, about the ‘science’ of psychology, and more specifically about the psychology of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. But in order to better understand how CBT has come to prosper, the book will also consider the other two components of the trinity: managerialism and neoliberalism as it was in their interests that CBT should flourish. In return, CBT supplied them with hyper-rationalist legitimations for their endeavours. In this way the argument of the book also functions as a broader cultural critique of the times we live in.

A key doctrine of hyper-rationality is a distorted and amoral take on ‘efficiency’. We can see it in play in the workings of neoliberalism. To begin with, neoliberalism uses a shallow and instrumentalist definition of efficiency having to do with profit and money, to rationalize and legitimate deregulation. It follows this up by calling on efficiency again to legitimate the austerity measures that are deemed to be necessary to repair the damage done by the deregulation in the first place. The actual implementation of austerity itself is devolved to managerialist bureaucrats who do the dirty work of decimating our public services and institutions. But the dirty work of making ‘cuts’ and causing harm is made to look sanitary and rational by alluding to ‘cuts’ as ‘savings’ – and camouflaging it to make it look as if it is all taking place in the service of increased efficiency. These cuts then result in human distress, distress which is framed as a mental disorder. By this means managerialism and neoliberalism sanitize their activities and then, in a gesture of good will, offer CBT treatments for the unfortunates who are deemed mentally ill. It is in the name of efficiency that bureaucracies fund CBT over and above the other forms of therapy, on the basis of the claim that CBT’s efficacy has been scientifically demonstrated; it also just happens to be the case that CBT treatments are inexpensive and relatively quick to implement (that is, they are ‘efficient’). In sum, CBT is a managerialist creation, not the scientific one that it claims to be.

Command and control

The watchword of hyper-rationality is ‘command and control’; its expectation is that we should be able to control everything: not only the world, not only the functioning of organizations, but also our very beings. This ethos is shared by