

What Then Must We Do?

Abstract

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What Then Must We Do?*

David Smail

SUMMARY: This article critiques the taken-for-granted assumptions about the importance of an individualistic perspective in psychotherapy and challenges therapists to be modest in their efforts to offer comfort, clarification and demystification. Implications for the scientific community and localised endeavour are explored.

KEYWORDS: Proximal power, distal power, the clinic, psychotherapy, social action

That is the question that Leo Tolstoy, having surveyed the misery of the ordinary Russian people, tried to answer in 1886. It is also the question that people pose – often somewhat resentfully – when confronted by the kind of objections to the social and psychological status quo that I have raised. ‘It’s all very well to criticise, but have you got any better ideas ...?’

The role of critic in the psychological world tends not to be a comfortable one, and invites various dismissive diagnoses from those who seem to feel affronted: ‘pessimist’, ‘depressive’, ‘arrogant’, ‘cynic’, and so on. It is not to avoid these diagnoses that I attempt an answer to the ‘What must we do?’ question here – I shall probably not escape them come what may. I merely want to demonstrate that an answer is not difficult to find. The difficulty, as the oblivion into which Tolstoy’s wonderful book has sunk demonstrates so well, is in putting any answer into practice.

We are faced at the societal level with exactly the same problem that faces the client of well-conducted psychotherapy: we can see clearly enough the events – among them our own actions – that have led to our predicament, but the means of rectifying them are still beyond our reach. As I have argued elsewhere,¹ tragedy

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David Smail was the first editor the Psychology and Psychotherapy Newsletter, a forerunner of this journal, a critic of the Psy complex and an inspiration to many. A memorial conference, ‘Power, Interest and Psychology: Developing David Smail’s ideas’ is being held on Thursday, 12th – Friday 13th November at the Novotel, Birmingham. Details <http://www.kc-jones.co.uk/davidsmail>

offers a far better model for human distress than does the fatuous optimism of magical voluntarism: however hard we struggle to rectify the errors that insight reveals, we are still overtaken by their consequences.

And so the 'answers' that I consider below are not given in the expectation that they are to be easily achieved, or indeed achieved at all. Perhaps, at most, they may help to retain a kind of hope.

In keeping with the 'proximal–distal' dimension that I have used to consider the causes of distress, so also the implications for what we should do may be categorised according to the readiness of their availability to us as individuals. There are, it seems to me, four spheres in which action may conceivably be taken. Ranging from the proximal to the distal, they are the clinical, scientific, philosophical and ethical/political spheres. I hope it goes without saying that in what follows I am not pretending to offer an exhaustive analysis of what may be possible, but merely picking out some of the more important issues that suggest themselves for our attention.

Implications for 'clinical' practice

We cannot, I think, escape the clinic. Although it is almost certainly not the most appropriate site in which to address the kinds of psychological distress and suffering that afflict people in present-day society, there is no other that is obviously more appropriate. Although the long-term answers to those of our woes that are potentially amenable to influence may lie much more at the distal reaches of social organisation, it is (as clinicians are the first to point out) still *individuals* who suffer and seek some remedy to their pain. It would be a callous society indeed that stood back and offered them nothing just because nothing much is likely to provide any real 'cure' at the personal level. It is incumbent on us to do what we can, even if we cannot do much. In a fractured, largely urban society in which, thankfully, religion no longer plays a significant role, the clinic, in one form or another, is the place people will turn to when in difficulty, and it is for the foreseeable future in the clinic that we shall probably be doing the little that we can. As it is, however, the clinic is profoundly inadequate for the task at hand.

No one is more aware of this inadequacy than those who encounter the clinic – whether as practitioners, consumers or simply observers – and are able and willing to reflect on their experience of and role within it. For counsellors and therapists trapped within the horizon set by their immediate interests, such reservations about the scope of psychological help are likely to be angrily dismissed as 'nihilism'; but there are signs of an emergent critique of therapy that acknowledges the *modesty* of the therapeutic contribution – particularly in relation to its neglect of social factors – while at the same time offering a persuasive defence of its practice.² While this literature is scattered and shows – mercifully – no sign of coalescing into any kind of unified movement or school, what its contributors tend

to share is a recognition of the 'ordinary' humanity of the therapeutic relationship and its role as a source of solidarity rather than a technology of 'change'.

For my part, I would emphasise the following as legitimate concerns for the psychology of distress:

Demystification. Although itself not a concept taken up by counsellors and psychotherapists in their theoretical reflections, 'demystification' describes quite well what the best of them spend much of their time doing in practice. For it is indeed the case that people seeking therapy often start out with very little idea about what is causing their troubles. Conventional therapies spend a great deal of time in what one might call the demystification of the proximal sphere, i.e., unpicking with clients the events and relationships in their immediate experience which give rise to all the phenomena of psychological distress, self-accusation and self-deception that are familiar to most practitioners (I have tried to describe the foremost among these in *How to Survive Without Psychotherapy*).³ Elsewhere I have called this process 'clarification', and it is perhaps the most developed of the three principal planks of therapy (the other two being 'comfort' and 'encouragement'); that is to say, it is the process that therapists of all schools spend most time thinking and writing about, and attempting to teach. Insofar as there can be said to be 'skills' of therapy and counselling, the arts of listening carefully and helping to clear ways through people's confusion probably can be developed through guided practice, and hence tend to form the core of most schemes of 'training'.

However, having, so to speak, cleared the conceptual undergrowth obscuring the client's view of his or her immediate predicament (so as to achieve 'insight'), most approaches to therapy consider that the work of clarification is done and that it is now up to the clients themselves to switch on their 'responsibility' and put matters right in ways that I have suggested are quite likely impossible. The notion that a 'clinical' predicament could (through 'outsight') be demystified to the point of showing that there is *nothing* a client could do about it precisely *because* it is not his or her fault, but the outcome of distal influences over which s/he can have no control, is unacceptable to most therapists not because it is unreasonable but because it is from a professional point of view extremely inconvenient. From the client's point of view, however, it need not be inconvenient at all, but constitute rather the lifting of a heavy burden of moral apprehension, if not outright guilt, that was completely unmerited. The aim of therapy then becomes to clarify what it is *not*, as well as what it is, possible for individuals to do to influence their circumstances and, given the limited powers available to most of us to act upon our world, the most 'therapeutic' outcome may well be achieved by the former.

Such an undertaking leads to a very different kind of dialogue from that characteristic of conventional therapy. Rather than there being a progressive emphasis on the 'inside', culminating in the patient's assumption of responsibility for a moral universe of which s/he is supposedly the author, there is likely to be a literal process of 'enlightenment' in which the person is released from all kinds of mystified responsibilities and helped to see him- or herself as embodied and located within an external reality highly resistant to individual influence and totally impervious to wishfulness. The implications of such a dialogue are indeed radical – even, given the nature of current Western society, subversive – but they may still be therapeutic.

Rescuing subjectivity. I have already written (Smail, 2012; Chapter Three) of the ways in which contemporary consumer capitalism turns us inside out as well as outside in (i.e., hopelessly confuses our public and private lives), disembodies, dislocates and dissociates us in such a way that we have no clear idea of what legitimately constitutes ourselves in relation to others.

An obvious implication of this observation *at the theoretical level* is that we need to re-embodiment, relocate and re-associate the human subject such that s/he is lifted out of the realm of ideality and placed in a proper relation with the body, the world and other people (with all the limitations on magical voluntarism that that implies). This, no doubt, should be the work of academic writers and researchers who take reality and society seriously, and there are encouraging signs that such work, particularly in the form of 'critical realism' is gaining ground in clinical awareness.⁴

What we may be able to do *in practice* is probably more limited. While therapy as such has little or no power to reconstruct the kind of public space that would support, value and make use of our subjective experience (this being essentially a political matter), it may at least work to undo some of the damage that its essentially disciplinary ideology has done in calling into question the very foundations of our sense of personhood. The moral and aesthetic strictures lying at the heart of so much 'humanist' therapy need to give way to a recognition that we are, as subjective individuals, *all* uniquely, chaotically and (at least potentially) creatively *peculiar*.

As a matter of fact I suspect that in practice (as opposed to their official pronouncements) many counsellors and therapists adopt an approach to their clients which affirms rather than subverts their vulnerable subjectivity (this, no doubt is why therapy is so often seen as a preferable alternative to the 'medical model' of psychiatry). Nevertheless, this is not a securely established aspect of therapy in general, and far too many clients will have experienced an increasing rather than a lessening strain on their subjective experience of self as the result of therapy.

But what does it mean to 'affirm vulnerable subjectivity'?

The rehabilitation of character. The notion of 'change' lies at the heart of virtually all approaches to psychotherapy and counselling. At first glance it seems, furthermore, self-evident that it should. Asked what it is that should change as the result of therapy, most practitioners would, I suspect, refer to some aspect of the client's 'self', i.e., something inside the person. At one extreme this might be, for example, aspects of a hypothetical construct like 'the unconscious'; at the other, the internal cognitive processes that are taken to control behaviour. It is this insistence on change that in my view tends to cancel out many of the otherwise valuable insights that therapists have articulated over the years. People are not allowed to be themselves.

Take as an instance of this the 'client-centred' approach of Carl Rogers. As Rogers's work gained in influence at about the middle of the twentieth century, it did indeed bring with it a great sense of liberation: much of the grim, covert moralism of 'dynamic' psychotherapy seemed to fall away, and the emphasis Rogers placed on 'unconditional positive regard' and 'empathy' seemed to allow subjects to escape the yoke of therapeutic discipline and, precisely, come to be themselves.

But, as the professions of therapy and counselling burgeoned, 'positive regard' turned out not to be unconditional, and empathy to be not so much an end as a means. For these constructs were treated as merely *instrumental* in the altogether superordinate task of bringing about change. The upshot of this is to place a new burden on patients, for they are freed from an external therapeutic discipline (mediated by 'interpretation', 'the analysis of the transference', etc.) only to have to repay the warmth and empathy of their therapist by successfully changing themselves. The Rogerian counsellor is not *just* warm and empathic: the warmth and empathy carries with it an expectation – all too easily turning to an obligation – to *change*.

Much of the time, however, change is precisely what clients cannot do: not because of incompetence or ill will, but because the powers by which change could be effected are, quite literally, beyond them. To all the other senses of inadequacy and guilt that they may be carrying, then, is added the guilt of being unable to reward their counsellor's kindness with an appropriate therapeutic adjustment of self.

The answer to this dilemma, I believe, is to remove from an otherwise benign emphasis on acceptance and empathy their element of instrumentality. They should be, simply, ends in themselves. The best word I can think of for an appropriate, non-instrumental approach for therapists and counsellors to take to their clients is *compassion*: not so different from 'empathy', perhaps, but a little warmer, recognising not so much that it is necessary to stand in the other's shoes, but that we *already are* in each other's shoes. If pricked, we bleed.

What clients have to change, if they can, is not their selves, but their world, and in their attempts to do that both they and we have no realistic alternative to accepting that they are who they are. I, you, everybody is not so much a 'personality', with all the assumptions that tends to bring of a modular self to which potential structural adjustments of various kinds may be made, as a *character*, a body inscribed by its experience of the world, indelibly expert in its own idiosyncrasy. We may *feel with* others whose predicaments form no part of our own experience, but such compassion need bring with it neither the wish nor the hope that they should change. Images of suffering demand not that the sufferer changes him- or herself, but that the suffering should be relieved. The starving child needs food, not moral uplift.⁵

The appropriate role for therapeutic psychology is to record, celebrate and wonder at the extraordinary diversity of human character and to reject immediately any notion it may be tempted to conceive of making moulds for people. We are *really* not there to judge or shape people, and we need nurse no secret agenda for change. Such change as therapists and their clients may pursue together has no need of mystery, nor even delicacy, but is a down-to-earth matter of what powers are available to the person to make a difference. And if the person, as is often the case, can do nothing, the compassionate acceptance of who they are may still be a comfort.

Reinstating the environment. There is no reason why 'clinical' psychology should be seen as synonymous with therapy. Indeed, it is only in relatively recent times – particularly with the rise of the 'dynamic' therapies of the twentieth century – that the doctoring of the self has come to be seen as the principal business of psychology. The focal concern of psychology with the making of individual subjectivity in no way implies that subjectivity is necessarily *self-made*. Personhood, along with the subjective awareness of it, is the outcome of an interaction of a *body* with a *world*, and it therefore behoves the psychologist to pay careful attention to the constraints and influences of both .

As is the case with the emerging discipline of 'community psychology',⁶ it makes as much sense now as it did to Plato to consider the ways in which individuals are shaped by their environments, and to distinguish environmental influences that are benign from those that are malign.

If this seems entirely obvious, it is salutary to remember that the whole thrust of 'therapy', and much of the weight of 'evidence' from social psychology, has been to suggest that the environment does not have a defining influence on individual psychology, and that not only can people somehow choose whether to be influenced by it or not, but that pretty well any damage done can be repaired. Earnest debates take place as to whether, for example, poverty and unemployment,

loss, brutality and violence contribute to mental disorder, crime, and so on. The fact that human beings are complex, resourceful and resilient means that simple cause-and-effect answers to such questions are not unequivocally demonstrable, and so it is easy to conclude that the pain and havoc wreaked by the ills of society are actually factors of, for instance, weak or vulnerable ‘personalities’ rather than of the ills themselves. This answer is of course exactly what is required by a global, corporate plutocracy that depends for its survival on the unremitting exploitation of a mass of ‘consumers’ who must a) be stuffed to bursting point with rubbish, and b) be rendered as far as possible incapable of accurately criticising their condition.

But the relation between environmental influence and personal psychology is complex not because it is mediated by some indefinable aspect of the ‘human spirit’, but because environmental influence is in itself far more complex than we have hitherto considered. Because psychology (and especially therapeutic psychology) has been so preoccupied with supposedly interior factors of motivation and cognition, etc., its considerations of environmental influences has frequently been extraordinarily crude and casual – to the extent that it could be argued, for example, that siblings share a ‘similar environment’ or that the influence of TV violence could be measured by showing violent cartoons to toddlers and observing their behaviour immediately afterwards.

In fact, of course, people know perfectly well that huge advantages are to be gained from occupancy of favourable environments, and the more they have been beneficiaries of such environments, the better they know it. Moralistic homilies and visions of a compensatory after-life are strictly for the masses. The occupants of corporate boardrooms and big country mansions pay unwavering attention to, for example, the kinds of educational establishment attended by their offspring and the quality of ‘lifestyle’ they submit themselves to.

How environmental influence works, how it interacts with embodiment, how some social relations become crucial while others glance off apparently unnoticed, constitute questions of enormous subtlety and difficulty and provide material for generations of study. This is, furthermore, a perfectly proper study for ‘clinicians’. Rather than attempting to peer into the murky depths of a metaphorical psychic interior, populated only by the hypothetical constructs of our own imagination, we need to get down to the much more difficult and demanding task of trying to tease out the ways in which environmental influences combine and interact to shape our subjectivity.

Care does have to be taken, however, that we do not allow our ‘clinical’ and scientific interest to expropriate the political role of the citizen. Some ‘critical psychologists’ show an alarming tendency to professionalise politics in exactly the potentially disabling way that Ivan Illich identified in other professions.⁷ For example, in their book extolling the virtues of ‘critical psychology’,⁸ Prilleltensky and

Nelson seem possessed by overweening hubris in their vision of what professional ‘critical psychologists’ can achieve in the pursuit of the public good.⁹ We would do better, I think, to bear in mind Russell Jacoby’s observation that the point is:

... to realise to what extent even the most extended therapy remains therapy: a choice in how to treat the individual that leaves untouched the social roots. In that sense there is no such activity as radical therapy – there is only therapy and radical politics. Need it be said? There is no shame in aiding the victims, the sick, the damaged, the down-and-out. If mental illness and treatment are class illness and treatment, there is much to be done within this reality. But the reformation of the social reality is another project, which if it is not utterly distinct from therapy, is not to be confused with it.¹⁰

Scientific implications

I don’t want to get into an argument about what does and does not constitute ‘science’, and I certainly don’t want to align myself with the narrow Anglo-American scientific orthodoxy that tends to get dismissed by its opponents as ‘positivistic’. But neither do I want to subscribe to the neo-Romantic position often taken up by anti-science, in which rhyme is preferred to reason.

What seems to me important, for ‘clinical’ psychology anyway, is what I take to be the broad project of science rather than the particular content of its methodology. By this I mean a commitment to achieving and communicating an understanding of the world and its occupants that is based on experience, reasoned argument, painstaking and sceptical checking and, ultimately, an appropriate (though very rarely total) degree of consensus (Habermas’s ‘communicative action’).¹¹ It seems to me that this process is likely to be essentially materialist and realist, though of course critically so.

The integrity and value of science in this sense depends on its being unconstrained and unperverted by special interests or by the kind of Authority that forms itself into a dogmatic ruling orthodoxy. And that kind of freedom is of course precisely what, in our neck of the social-scientific woods, we have not got. What has come to be put forward as ‘scientific’ in clinical psychology and psychotherapy is a set of dogmas that is shaped and maintained almost exclusively by interest in relation to the ruling discourses of power and aimed resolutely at obscuring the causes and consequences of emotional and psychological distress.

I have already identified the two main sources of interest involved in this state of affairs. The first is the proximal interest of clinicians who, whether consciously or not, perceive their livelihood to depend ultimately on their personal ability to bring about cure (though they may find a more intellectually diplomatic word for it). This is the source of interest that guides much of the research activity and

clinical case discussion in the literature on therapy and counselling. It makes sure that only certain kinds of question are asked and only certain kinds of 'finding' considered relevant: questions about therapeutic *technique* presuppose clear-cut answers that, when they are not forthcoming, are taken to indicate simply the need for more research.

The second, more distal, influence is broadly political, and seeks to maintain a fiction of personal psychopathology as the explanation for mental 'disorders'. The drive, for example, for 'evidence-based practice' in 'mental health' services is imposed by central management diktat and countenances only research projects that conform to a primitive set of quasi-medical assumptions dressed up as 'science'. Inspired by Fordist and Taylorist principles (i.e. the conveyor-belt, deliberately depersonalised and managerially controlled methods of production developed towards the beginning of the twentieth century), the Business model of knowledge which has come to prevail in the last twenty years is technicist and crudely pragmatic. It assumes that knowledge production is achieved by posing appropriate sets of designer questions and must be directed and controlled by management. Once produced, knowledge is to be transmitted thereafter by means of off-the-shelf 'training' modules.

This approach to the managerially directed division of labour in 'science', whereby centrally determined questions are farmed out to technicians for a kind of algorithmic 'research' process yielding packaged knowledge that, in turn, is further disseminated by operatives versed in the techniques of training, rules out just about everything that is creative, intelligent and worthwhile in scientific discovery and teaching. For these latter are processes that take place at the very forefront of human endeavour (i.e. are not manageable 'skills') and depend for their significance and fruitfulness on qualities of understanding and enquiry that are not specifiable technically in advance. The kinds of flexibility and resourcefulness, sensitivity and intelligence that are the hallmarks of, for example, good scientists and teachers cannot be contained within a packaged 'spec' of the kind so beloved of business managers (the myth of specifiability is a core feature of Business culture), but are the result of a kind of nurturing husbandry of inquisitiveness and creativity whose results can be only hoped for, not guaranteed.¹²

By deliberately excluding the kind of intellectual originality and adventurousness that is characteristic of real achievement in the sciences as much as the arts, Business may well protect itself from unwanted surprises, but it does so at the expense of producing a dumbed-down, uncritical environment that is deadeningly third rate, uncreative, and ultimately (because essentially stupefied and imperceptive) profoundly ineffective.

Just as one example, the corruption of science by business interest in the pharmaceutical industry could almost stand as a microcosm of current society.

Impecunious scientists whose public funding has been withdrawn are induced to have articles published in learned journals under their name, but which have in fact been written by ghost writers in the pay of the drug companies.¹³ In this way an appearance of independent *evidence* is used to create a spurious *authority* to underpin *make-believe*.

Though no doubt intellectually demanding in many respects, the scientific method is at its best the least coercive as well as the most accurate way we have of establishing what is – while acknowledging the limitations of these concepts – ‘real’ and ‘true’. The effectiveness of the scientific method, fundamentally libertarian at its core, is not lost on those wishing to co-opt it in their interest; but to do so they have, of course, to pervert it.

At the crudest level there is simply the possibility of fiddling the figures – an approach widely adopted in recent years by, in particular, governments who wish to ‘demonstrate’ that what isn’t the case, is (e.g., the ceaseless manipulation of employment and other statistics). Beyond this, however, is the far more insidious intrusion of corrupting power into the scientific community itself. Instead of ‘the evidence’ flowing from the unconstrained agreement of unbiased observers struggling in good faith to arrive at the most objective assessment possible, it becomes a kind of bludgeon with which to silence precisely those same observers. Scientific procedure and activity becomes reified as ‘the science’ (as in ‘doing the science’), the ‘quality’ of which is established by authoritative pronouncement rather than by free, on-going debate within the length and breadth of the scientific community.

The social sciences are particularly vulnerable to this kind of corruption, nowhere more obviously than in the case of the evaluation of the effectiveness of psychotherapy. The interests of a booming industry combine with those of a handful of academic ‘authorities’ such that the latter use their status within the system to *assert* the effectiveness of therapy, basing their ‘argument’ on a tiny (and entirely questionable) handful of studies and in the face of mountains of counter-evidence which have accumulated over decades.¹⁴ ‘Scientific’ debate, in such circumstances, becomes an adversarial contest in which ‘evidence’ is treated like a kind of rhetorical football, depending for its credibility on the relative status and visibility of the academic players.

This kind of corrupted ‘evidence’ is not the only basis on which professionals and academics seek to ground their authority. As the reaction to ‘positivist’ science has taken hold – in Britain, at least – over the past couple of decades or so there has been an increasing tendency within the social sciences to resort to what Philo and Miller¹⁵ call ‘obfuscation and abstraction’ as a kind of indirect authority for assent. There has always been a tendency on the intellectual left – particularly perhaps among Continental thinkers – to take complexity and opacity as an indication

of profundity and significance (in the psychotherapy field one thinks instantly of Jacques Lacan and his minions). This can quite easily turn into a kind of intellectual terrorism where, for example, angry but obscure 'theorists' descend on conference audiences to harangue them into submission with the sheer virtuosity of their mind-numbing (though essentially meaningless) intellectual gymnastics.

Though very far from being concerned with evidence of any kind, successful proponents of the authority-through-obscurity school share with scientists of the authority-through-status school a kind of meta-status of authority-through-celebrity. It is hardly surprising that in a society obsessed with celebrity, knowledge eventually becomes the preserve of a kind of Olympian priesthood of 'names' who circulate endlessly around the higher-brow media, pronouncing with absolute confidence on matters for which there is in fact no evidence at all.

The outcome of this state of affairs is disastrous, for the process whereby we arrive as a society at objective judgements about reality has become corrupted and rendered untrustworthy at its very heart. Scientific argument becomes a contest of authority based on status (a concept *fundamentally* inimical to the scientific method) and ordinary people understandably turn from a power-ridden perversion of 'objectivity' to essentially magical systems which, though equally if not more misleading, seem at least subjectively satisfying.

As far as research in 'clinical' psychology is concerned, we need to recognise that (as, no doubt, in many other areas) no further progress will be made until we have re-established an environment for theoretical speculation and practical enquiry that is both independent and secure. That is to say, the discovery and development of knowledge (recognising and communicating what is true about the world) is completely inimical to the play of interest and must, as far as is humanly possible, be separated from it. The one-dimensional culture of the corporate plutocracy, interested only in profit, is incapable of producing the conditions in which intellectual pursuits flourish. For the kinds of unconditional patronage and guaranteed independence necessary will not only be seen ideologically as needlessly wasteful and unacceptably out of managerial control, but would in fact inevitably constitute a threat to the corporate regime itself. As soon as the cultural unidimensionality of Business is shattered by the introduction of non-bottom-line dimensions, it finds itself vulnerable to orders of criticism that threaten its very survival.

Business is definitely not out to further the disinterested pursuit of scientific evidence. The principal alternative open to it is, as we have seen, the development of increasingly convoluted systems of make-believe to run alongside the extremely banal technological processes of knowledge production that are managerially controllable.

Philosophical implications¹⁶

The great paradox of the 'linguistic turn' that has excited so many psychologists within recent years is that, at the same time as helping to construct a mythical, essentially interior world of 'discourse', it radically undermined our ability to talk about a real, exterior world. In this state of affairs the philosophical task becomes that of rehabilitating the concept of truth, which in turn means deconstructing constructivism! In this we may look for help once again to 'critical realism' (see previous section).

There can be no doubt that language is of the first importance in the formation of human conduct and society. But this does not mean that language is generative of reality itself. The over-excited embrace (and often only rudimentary understanding) in broadly 'therapeutic' circles of notions of 'discourse', 'narrative', etc., claiming their origin mainly in the writings of French post-structuralists such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard, has resulted in an almost psychotic disregard of the real circumstances of people's lives.

Of course words do not directly reflect an incontrovertible reality or 'hold a mirror up to Nature';¹⁷ *Of course* language can never give direct access to Truth. And of course language is absolutely essential to our understanding of and interaction with the world and each other. But this does not invest language with some kind of magical power of creation in which it brings worlds into being. Certainly language is the principal medium of persuasion, but it persuades by pointing to something other than itself, something that *is the case* rather than something that is merely *said*.

It is easy to see how we can be misled by our linguistic ability into investing it with magical power; but only the machinations of power, surely, can explain the extent to which the world has come to be presented as dematerialised at the highest intellectual levels. Foucault spoke, after all, of the 'discourse of power', not the power of discourse, and yet it is this misconception which seems to have gripped the imagination of the 'constructivists'. Language does not *describe* reality, they say, in contemptuous dismissal of the 'grand narratives of the past'. No, but neither does it bring it into being.

Language allows us to place our experience at a distance from us, to hypostatise and manipulate it. Otherwise, we could only *live* our experience – or be lived by it, rather in the manner of dreaming. Inevitably, we are constantly tempted to believe in the actuality of our imaginings (which is why scientific enquiry has to be so sceptical and so painstaking), but when we take imagination as definitive of reality (or alternative realities), we have sunk into collective madness.

It is in the interest of any powerful minority that has been able to shape society to its own considerable material benefit, and at the cost of depriving the majority, to obscure not only the processes by which it has achieved its position but also

the very nature of reality itself, particularly the significance of people's experience of pain. There is enormous scope for such obfuscation in the time-honoured and entirely familiar ideological and rhetorical manoeuvres ('spin' and PR) that aim at convincing us that black is white. But to insert at the highest levels of philosophical thought the premise that there is no such thing as reality is a coup indeed.

While we may agree that in the past a too heavy-handed positivist authority attempted to claim a special relationship with Truth that allowed no use of linguistic concepts other than its own (i.e. that language could indeed be used to describe an independent reality), we need to recapture a view of language as *articulating* our relations with the world *as best we can*. We can in this way acknowledge that any form of 'ultimate' reality must always remain a mystery beyond our grasp, but that that does not mean there is no such thing as reality. Some things are more real, some statements more true, than others. Reality is sensed in embodied experience before it is articulated in words – that is to say, it is rooted in our subjectivity – and what we *say* needs always to be checked against other kinds of evidence, including where necessary every other possible intimation we may have of our living existence in material reality.

Psychology, I often feel, has neglected the nature of our attachment to the world. Even more fundamental than our relations within society – and certainly more fundamental than the creations of our imagination – is a rootedness in the physical environment encountered by us as infants as we taste, smell, feel, hear and see ourselves into existence. Of course the world cannot be detached in our awareness from what we – and others – make of it, but nevertheless the demands on us of physical reality are, ultimately, uncompromising. The entire project of mankind has, after all, been to understand and elaborate the nature of the world and our place within it. It may be that we need to move on from psychology's preoccupation with meaning-systems (ideality); not, certainly, to a kind of retro-naïve realism, but to the next turn of a dialectical enquiry into truth that anchors us once again in something beyond our *selves*.

I have often wondered whether the rock-bottom basis of a secure subject might be traced to his or her passionate embrace, from the very first moments of existence, of the world as physical environment. It is as if the infant is presented with a choice: to accept the evidence of its senses, or to bend to the demands of ideological power. Ideally, of course, powerful others (in particular parents) will help the infant interpret and elaborate its experience in ways that are as consistent with reality as the best understandings of the time allow. But often they do not, so that the infant is faced at the very outset of its existence with the dilemma that the Inquisition forced on Galileo much later in his life: whether to abide by the truth and court furious oppression, or earn a quieter life by abandoning it in favour of permissible make-believe.

What prompts what will seem to some, I'm sure, such wild speculation, is my observation over the years of people who have clung on to an obstinate – indeed ultimately unshakeable – trust in their own judgement *no matter what* censure and punishment are brought to bear on them. Such people (I think of them as heroes) are, to be sure, few and far between, and I have puzzled endlessly over what could make such a stance in the world possible. It has only recently occurred to me that this may not so much be a relationship with a special *person* as the relationship with *the world* itself: as if by some miracle of personal history the penny dropped right at the outset for *truth* rather than *authority*. What a profoundly liberating possibility that would be!

Ethical/political implications – let us not mince matters

War and globalisation go hand in hand, leading, in the post-Cold War era, to the destruction of countries and the impoverishment of hundreds of millions of people. In turn, this global economic system is marked by an unprecedented concentration of private wealth. The institutions of war, police repression and economic management interface with one another. NATO is not only in liaison with the Pentagon and the CIA; it also has contacts with the IMF and the World Bank. In turn, the Washington-based international financial bureaucracy, responsible for imposing deadly 'economic medicine' on developing countries has close ties to the Wall Street financial establishment.

The powers behind this system are those of the global banks and financial institutions, the military-industrial complex, the oil and energy giants, the biotech conglomerates and the powerful media and communications giants, which fabricate the news and overtly distort the course of world events. In turn, the police apparatus represses, in the name of 'Western democracy', all forms of dissent and critique of the dominant neoliberal ideology.

This 'false consciousness' which pervades our societies, prevents critical debate and masks the truth. Ultimately, this false consciousness precludes a collective understanding of the workings of a World economic and political system, which destroys people's lives. The only promise of global capitalism is a World of landless farmers, shuttered factories, jobless workers and gutted social programs with 'bitter economic medicine' under the WTO and the IMF constituting the only prescription.

The New World Order is based on the 'false consensus' of Washington and Wall Street, which ordains the 'free market system' as the only possible choice on the fated road to a 'global prosperity'.

Michel Chossudovsky¹⁸

The alternative to a soulless neo-capitalism that tries to bury its rapacious self-interest behind a rationalist – and pitiless – technology requires a revival of our moral sense.

It is inconceivable that emotional suffering could be banished from our lives. Being human entails suffering. At the same time, there can be little doubt that a rearrangement of the ways in which we act towards each other could bring about a very significant lessening in the degree of emotional pain and anguish that has become so commonplace in our society that it is barely noticed.

An ethical vision of peace, justice and freedom is not hard to establish; the landscape of Eden is easily recognised. What is not easy to understand and resist are the many ways in which the means of achieving that vision are concealed and obscured.

Morality arises through the experience of a *common* humanity and its affirmation in the face of power. Morality is not an individual, but a social matter; it makes demands upon us which extend beyond our finite, individual lives. It is about resisting those forces which seek to drive wedges between us in order that some may feel and claim to be more human than others.

Our common humanity rests upon our common embodiment. We are all made in exactly the same way. We all suffer in the same way. Most immoral enterprises seek in one way or another to deny this truth and to justify the greater suffering of the oppressed or exploited on the grounds of their being 'different' in some way – physically, racially, psychologically, genetically, and so on. Absolute, self-conscious immorality, on the other hand, makes use of its knowledge of our common embodiment to inflict maximum pain and threat: the torturer does unto others as he would not have done to himself, and the terrorist, choosing victims at random, implicitly acknowledges the equivalence of all people.

The history of the 'civilised' world is one in which powerful minorities have sought (ever more successfully) to impose and exploit conditions of slavery on an impoverished majority. This is necessarily always an *immoral* undertaking, because it denies the continuity of humanity between slave and master while seeking ideologically to obscure that denial.¹⁹

At the turn of the twenty-first century there seems to be no moral guidance to point a way out of our predicament. The moral voice, stripped of authority, has been drowned out. God is well and truly dead; the Market has triumphed; only the fittest shall survive. Can there be a moral counter to the new Business barbarism?

One problem is that, unlike the kinds of arguments that establish scientific knowledge, moral arguments are not progressive and cumulative, nor are they ever conclusive. Moral argument and social critique constitute a running battle with ruling power, and even though they may be dealing with eternal truths, they will never find a form in which these can be asserted once and for all; the best they can hope for is to find ever new ways of reformulating and restating their insights such that brakes are applied to the ever-expanding ambitions of self-interested power.

A further difficulty is that, insofar as they are successful, moral argument and praxis will be corrupted and co-opted in the interests of power. Christ's message becomes 'The Church'. Because power is power, it holds all the cards, and will *never* be defeated – only impeded. Perhaps Marx's greatest mistake was to assume that capitalism contained the seeds of its own downfall. Seemingly he hadn't conceived of movable goalposts.

For anyone hoping to win the moral high ground once and for all on the basis of a knock-down argument or a conclusive act of rebellion, the inevitable dominance of a corrupt and corrupting power is likely to be a cause of despair. For such a person the insights into venality, stupidity and corruption of, say, a Swift, turn to absolute cynicism rather than merely profound disillusion. For the over-optimistic, not only are illusions destroyed, but idealism too is crushed.

Illusions and ideals

But there is a big difference between illusions and ideals. The loss of illusion is a necessary process on the painful road of enlightenment; the loss of ideals is spiritual death. The only redeeming prospect is that, unlike bodily death, spiritual death need not be final. Spirit is not a personal possession, but a property of common humanity; it does not die with the individual body, but is in a completely literal sense immortal. Resurrection is possible.

Ideals are in this age poorly understood. People are clear enough about goals, objectives and 'targets', but moral purposes which are *designedly* unachievable faze the Business mind. Ideals are not just unlikely to be realised – by their very nature they can *never* be realised. Nevertheless, their existence is what makes life worth living. The disenchanting world in which the Terminator stalks, stripped to its bare steel bones of all pity and compassion, will find its re-enchantment only through a revival of idealism.

Thus, the essential moral insight is that human existence *has* to be informed and guided by ideals which are more than merely achievable personal goals, and that we must operate by moral rules in a game in which we shall always be defeated. There is absolutely no necessity that a life lived in pursuit of good rather than evil will be materially rewarded in this world or a next; such a life does not permit of final achievement and satisfaction. *There is no spiritual nirvana, no final solution, no ultimate certainty; no City of God, no Kingdom of Heaven, no end of history.*

Every inch of moral ground gained will be lost and will have to be re-taken over and over again. Every moving argument will be negated and will have to be restated in a form unanticipated by power; every morally uplifting tale will be culturally silenced or revised and will have to be rewritten in a newly subversive guise.

If this view is seen as unduly bleak, at least it guards against a futile optimism that risks handing the world over to those who know how to exploit it to their

advantage. Comforting stories are welcomed by oppressive power as useful ways of maintaining the status quo.

In the past we have been able to take morality only when laced with religion, hitched to a terrifying authority or a fatuous promise of everlasting life. Our task for the twenty-first century is to see that a moral society is one supported by human ideals far more profound, stable and enduring than a childish dependence on supernatural fantasies or the expectation of material reward. The reason why we have to do this is simple and we all know it: no man is an island.

Nothing could suit corporate plutocracy more than for people to believe that the real satisfactions of life stem ultimately from the cultivation of privacy: that subjective well-being, that is to say, is a matter of 'personal growth' *from the inside*. One-dimensional Business culture in fact closes down public space such that the 'real' world' (i.e., the world of the market economy) becomes simply a given that people have to accept without question: 'resistance is useless'. If the many can be persuaded that they have no say in the shaping of material reality, and that personal satisfaction is purely a matter of self-doctoring and private consumption, the world is left wide open for exploitation by the few.

When the only public meanings available are the grim and unassailable 'realities' of the market, people are left to scrabble together for themselves makeshift ways of sharing experiences that actually cannot be accommodated within the Business model (an example would be the rituals of grief that have developed rapidly in recent times – impromptu roadside shrines, greater emotional demonstrativeness, etc.). Quite apart from feeling politically impotent (and demonstrating our alienation by shunning the 'democratic' process in unprecedented numbers), we have to cast around for ways of making *communal* sense of experiences that inevitably arise from our existence as embodied beings but are no longer served by abandoned – and often discredited – traditions.

It is of course understandable for people to feel that one answer to the heartlessness of the outside world is to retire into the realm, if not of the inner self, at least of the private life of home and family, etc. However, I suspect that this kind of strategy is built on the false premise that inner space, privacy, is somehow independent of public structure. In fact, if anything, the opposite seems to me to be the case. For individual people, hell is more often to be experienced within the confines of the family (or indeed the agonies of introspection) than it is in the spaces beyond, and public structures of meaning – what one might broadly call cultures – that have evolved over time to accommodate the concerns of embodied human beings may offer an escape from privacy that actually lends meaning and significance to once-private suffering. As I have already indicated, a decent, caring, multi-dimensional public world makes *use* as well as *sense* of private pain and confusion. One of the most tormented and abused, and admirable people I ever

met was rescued as child from total perdition by films and books which, among other things, uncovered, to her amazement, the possibility of love.

There can be no doubt that this Business takeover of just about every aspect of life has been successful almost beyond belief, so much so that it is virtually impossible to envisage how the process might be either reversed or overthrown.²⁰ There was, to be sure, a great deal that was unsatisfactory about the traditional orthodoxies that prevailed before the takeover, and to attempt to return to the intellectual, moral and spiritual institutions we used to know would indeed be retrograde in the worst sense. We need to recover the multidimensionality of public space that we have lost, but without the stuffy authoritarianism and entrenched inequalities that often went with its principal features.

In his brilliant book *The Power Elite*, written almost fifty years ago, C. Wright Mills wrote:

The knowledgeable man in the genuine public is able to turn his personal troubles into social issues, to see their relevance for his community and his community's relevance for them. He understands that what he thinks and feels as personal troubles are very often not only that but problems shared by others and indeed not subject to solution by any one individual but only by modifications of the structure of the groups in which he lives and sometimes the structure of the entire society.

Men in masses are gripped by personal troubles, but they are not aware of their true meaning and source. Men in public confront issues, and they are aware of their terms. It is the task of the liberal institution, as of the liberally educated man, continually to translate troubles into issues and issues into the terms of their human meaning for the individual. In the absence of deep and wide political debate, schools for adults and adolescents could perhaps become hospitable frameworks for just such debate. In a community of publics the task of liberals would be: to keep the public from being overwhelmed; to help produce the disciplined and informed mind that cannot be overwhelmed; to help develop the bold and sensible individual that cannot be sunk by the burdens of mass life. But educational practice has not made knowledge directly relevant to the human need of the troubled person of the twentieth century or to the social practices of the citizen. The citizen cannot now see the roots of his own biases and frustrations, nor think clearly about himself, nor for that matter about anything else. He does not see the frustration of idea, of intellect, by the present organisation of society, and he is not able to meet the tasks now confronting 'the intelligent citizen'.²¹

For people to be able to understand *and act upon* the powers and influences within society that bring about their personal misery and confusion, we need to reopen the ethical space²² that allows us to share and evaluate our subjective experience

in solidarity with others. The structures that will enable this are not *therapeutic*, but *political*.

A conventionally left-wing, social democratic political system might theoretically be aimed at creating the kind of personal environment where individuals could flourish as both public and private beings. It is sobering to reflect that even this relatively modest ideal has become so far out of reach as to appear simply absurd. For national governments no longer determine their own policies, and the influences of global corporate plutocracy intrude at every level of social organisation to further their own interests.

In the absence of any traditionally organised opposition, all we can do, perhaps, is resist as best we can. A lot of people are of course already doing this. Informed and committed minorities are often active at local levels to expose and combat abuses stemming from, for example, bureaucracies responsible for health, housing, policing, etc. Human rights issues, the exploitation of consumers, and so on, may also arouse the opposition of people otherwise disillusioned with conventional politics and form them into effective campaigning groups.

Even so, it may be wise not to get too excited about the implications of such movements for the wider political scene. Few corporate leaders are likely to lose much sleep over campaigns aimed at encouraging individuals to exercise their will in, for example, areas of consumption that do not directly affect their comfort. Punitive taxes may well bring people out on the streets, but concerns about the ethics of, say, sportswear production in faraway places are likely to have only a slight effect on people's buying habits, if any. However passionately they feel, it is vain to expect that the piecemeal dissent of scattered individuals is going to make much of an impact, and even effective, 'single-issue' action will, not least in view of the tacit interests of popular media, easily be contained within the relatively narrow arena in which it arises. The apparatus of power is too well developed to allow such dissent to get out of hand.

At more distal levels, the Internet has made possible both the dissemination of information and possibilities of communication that have fostered large-scale protests such as those seen in recent years at Seattle and Genoa. These latter – not unlike the student unrest of 1968 – have certainly demonstrated that it is possible to move supposedly democratic powers to repressive action, but it is also true that organised power has recourse to such a wide range of resources that it is hard to envisage being able to do much more than provoke it to reveal its coercive base.

This is of course not to say that powerful regimes never collapse: the disintegration of Eastern European communism is still a vivid memory for many of us. But though people caught up in such events may experience them as, for instance, the triumph of good over evil and dance in the streets at what they see as the dawning of a new era ('Things can only get better!') it is more likely that they

are the upshot of seismic economic movements at the most distal reaches of the ordinary person's comprehension. As with so much else, the activist or protester is likely to feel that *involvement* in events is the same as *origination* of them. The masses may well be the instrument of revolution, but they are far less likely to be its cause, and it may take a while to discern who are its true beneficiaries.

One of the easiest mistakes to make is to suppose that persuasion is an important factor in bringing about organised opposition. One of the most potent mythologies of ideological power is that reasoned argument leads to changes of heart, that debate is the engine of change.

In her mordantly compelling *Lugano Report*²³ Susan George vividly draws attention to the inadequacy of rational argument as a means of influencing people. In starting to consider alternatives to the potentially disastrous practices of global capitalism, she writes:

This section has to start on a personal note because frankly, power relations being what they are, I feel at once moralistic and silly proposing alternatives. More times than I care to count I have attended events ending with a rousing declaration about what 'should' or 'must' occur. So many well-meaning efforts so totally neglect the crucial dimension of power that I try to avoid them now unless I think I can introduce an element of realism that might otherwise be absent.

... because I am constantly being asked 'what to do', I begin with some negative suggestions. The first is not to be trapped by the 'should', the 'must' and the 'forehead-slapping school'. Assuming that any change, because it would contribute to justice, equity and peace, need only to be explained to be adopted is the saddest and most irritating kind of naivety.

Many good, otherwise intelligent people seem to believe that once powerful individuals and institutions have actually *understood* the gravity of the crisis (any crisis) and the urgent need for its remedy, they will smack their brows, admit they have been wrong all along and, in a flash of revelation, instantly redirect their behaviour by 180 degrees. While ignorance and stupidity must be given their due, most things come out the way they do because the powerful want them to come out that way.

In other words, most things come out the way they do in accordance with the interests of the powerful. Nowhere is the myth of rationality more obvious than in interviews conducted in television newscasts. Disputants A and B, representing, for example, opposing views on nuclear energy, genetically modified food, immigration policy, etc., attempt to make a rational case for their standpoint and yet are never themselves moved by reason. This is, of course, because they are *interested parties*, and indeed are chosen as such by the interviewers. Their

views are formed and maintained by their interests, and any debate is utterly futile because their views will change only when their interests change. The politician 'making a case' for a given course of action is perhaps the purest example of how interest shapes conduct. And because we repress interest in favour of, among other things, a mythology of rationality, politicians, as they struggle to hide interest behind reason, are always revealed as liars.

It is essential to note, however, that politicians are not qualitatively different from the rest of us. In our case also our actions are more easily understandable and predictable from an analysis of our interests in relation to the networks of power we inhabit than they are from our beliefs or 'cognitions'.

This is not to say that reason does not have a place in human society – it is particularly important, as I have tried to show, in the conduct of scientific investigation. But this is a very unusual, artificially created environment needing all kinds of special protection for its survival. If we are to account for the ways in which we act towards each other in the real world, we need to develop a far more sophisticated – and indeed tolerant – understanding of the workings of power and interest.

For many readers, this will, I think, be a very bitter pill to swallow. For among those readers there will be many, I suspect, who strive to live ethically and are responsive to information that enables them the better to do so. For such people it is hard not to conclude that change based on a reasonable appraisal of the good is possible, because it seems to them that that is the way their lives have been lived. But whatever makes it possible for some to criticise their lot, and even to move against the influences that shape it, there will be many more who will be fairly easily ruled by deference to Authority and seduced by make-believe and the deregulation of pleasure.

I anticipate that this last observation will be condemned as 'cynical', but I do think that that would be a mistake. The central argument of *Power, Interest and Psychology* is, after all, that it is not the personal apprehension of right or reason that moves us to action, but the flow of power and interest within the social networks in which we are caught up. As long as we can be convinced that changing the world is down to individual action, that the political is personal, nothing much will change.

Some people will, I know, find what I'm saying dispiriting, but I in no way feel it incumbent on me (nor do I expect anyone else) to offer solutions – indeed to do so would seem to me simply foolish. The world is in a bloody mess and even though I know, as do many others, what it would look like if it weren't, I have no more viable idea than anyone else how to get there. I do believe, however, that an extremely important step on the way is to *take really seriously the fact that we are a society, not a collection of individuals, and that we live in a real world that is as impervious to optimism as it is to wishfulness.*

It does seem likely, though, that – perhaps in the not too far distant future – the effect on the real world of current economic structures and policies will alter very radically indeed the physical conditions of our existence. Solidary action may once again arise, as it has in the past, from our having nothing to lose but our misery.

Endnotes

1. Smail, D. 1997. Psychotherapy and tragedy. In House, R. and Totton, N. *Implausible Professions: Arguments for pluralism and autonomy in psychotherapy and counselling*, pp. 159–70. Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.
2. To take four recent examples, see:
 - Paul Gordon, 2004. Night thoughts of a sceptical therapist. In Paul Gordon and Rosalind Mayo (eds). *Between Psychotherapy and Philosophy*. Whurr Publishers.
 - Peter Lomas, 1999. *Doing Good? Psychotherapy out of its depth*. Oxford University Press.
 - Terry Lynch, 2004. *Beyond Prozac*. PCCS Books.
 - Taiwo Afuape, 2004. Challenge to obscuring difference: Being a Black woman psychologist using SELF in therapy. *Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 4, 164–75.
3. The most recent edition of this book forms half of the double volume *The Nature of Unhappiness*. Robinson, 2001.
4. See for example:
 - Roy Bhaskar, 1989. *Reclaiming Reality*. Verso;
 - Ian Burkitt, 1991. *Social Selves*. Sage;
 - Margaret S. Archer, 2000. *Being Human*. Cambridge University Press;
 - David J. Nightingale and John Cromby (eds), 1999. *Social Constructionist Psychology*. Open University Press.
5. This may seem obvious now, but it certainly did not to some of the worthiest Victorian social reformers – see for example Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, in which her socialism remains obstinately attached to her protestantism. The present-day therapist, politician, 'communitarian', etc. who links betterment in some form to responsibility in some form is thus still stuck in a century-old mould.
6. A good account can be found in Orford, J. *Community Psychology: Theory and Practice*, Wiley, 1992.
7. Ivan Illich, 1977. *Disabling Professions*. Marion Boyars.
8. Isaac Prilleltensky and Geoffrey Nelson, 2002. *Doing Psychology Critically*. Palgrave.
9. See my review of Prilleltensky and Nelson's book in the *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 2003, 13, 328.
10. Russell Jacoby, 1975. *Social Amnesia: A critique of conformist psychology from Adler to Laing*. Harvester. pp. 139–40.

11. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols., trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984 and 1987) (German edition, 1981).
12. For similar reflections on the state of knowledge and truth in the contemporary world, see Frank Furedi's *Where Have All The Intellectuals Gone?* 2004, Continuum.
13. All this documented in *The Guardian*, 7.2.02.
14. This phenomenon is encountered in almost pure form in the volume edited (in utterly good faith but with dismaying results) by Colin Feltham: *Controversies in Psychotherapy and Counselling*, Sage Publications, 1999. For a powerful critique of the corruption of the psychology industry see Tana Dineen's *Manufacturing Victims*, Constable, 1999, and also Susan Hansen, Alec McHoul and Mark Rapley, *Beyond Help*, 2003, PCCS Books.
15. Greg Philo and David Miller, 2001. *Market Killing*. Longman.
16. Much of this and the following section has been published in D. Smail, 2004, *Psychotherapy and The Making of Subjectivity*. In Gordon, P. and Mayo, R. (eds), 2004. *Between Psychotherapy and Philosophy*, pp 130–40. London and Philadelphia: Whurr.
17. Richard Rorty, 1980. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Blackwell.
18. From the *Statement* of the Centre for Research in Globalisation, as set out in their website at www.globalresearch.ca
19. Anyone who thinks slavery no longer exists should consult *Disposable People*, by Kevin Bales (Univ. California Press, 1999). Not only is the practice of slavery widespread, but exists on an unprecedented scale. Bales is careful to consider only 'true' slavery – people being forced to work for nothing. People having to work at meaningless jobs for next to nothing is little better.
20. In his book *Decline of the Public*, Polity Press 2004, David Marquand provides an informative account of the rise of public-spiritedness and the public realm in Victorian times, and its fall in our own. He also gives indications of some of the things we need to do to reverse this decline – but perhaps without taking full account of the formidable powers ranged against any such effort.
21. Mills, C.W. 1956. *The Power Elite*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, p. 318.
22. For a masterly, and too neglected, exposition of the concept of ethical space, see the late Roger Poole's *Towards Deep Subjectivity*, 1972, Allen Lane The Penguin Press.
23. Susan George, 1999. *The Lugano Report*. Pluto Press. p. 181.