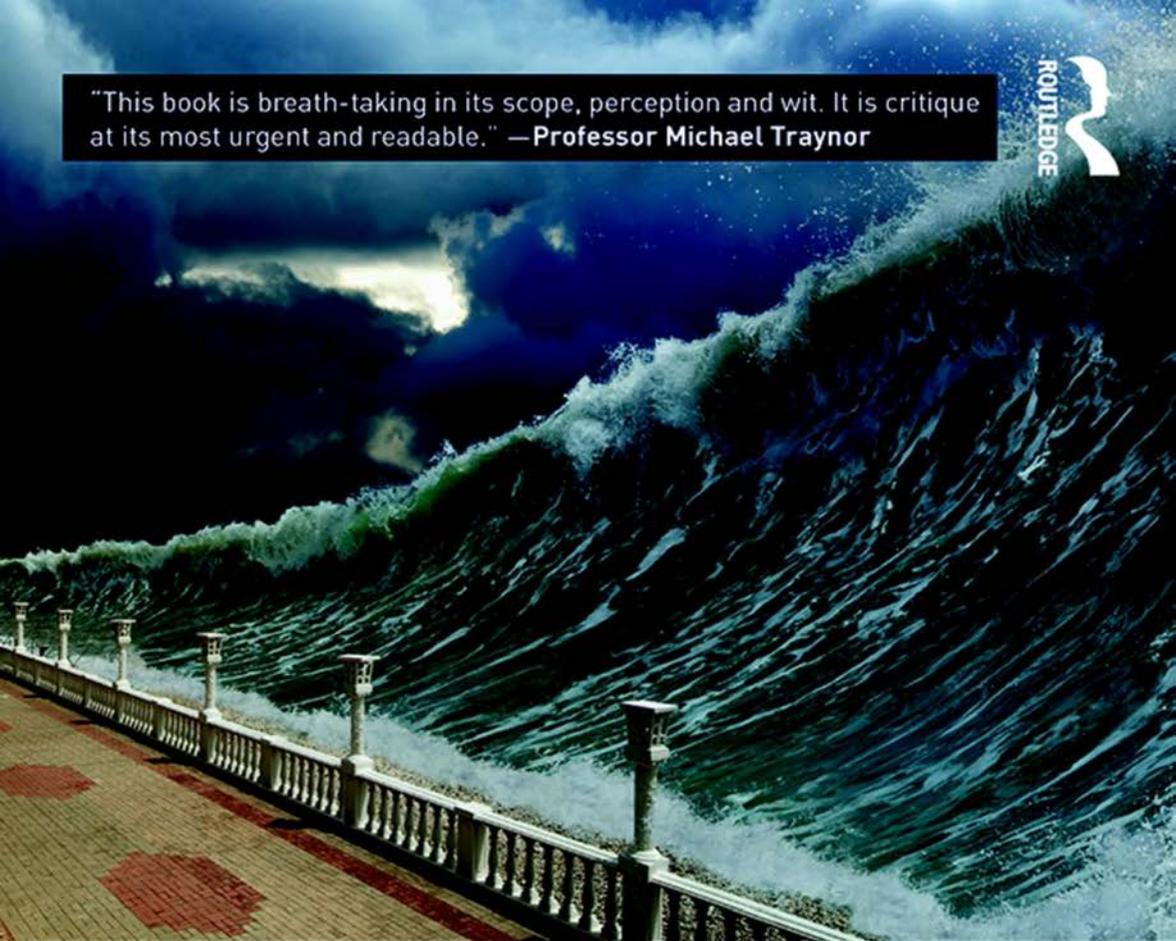


"This book is breath-taking in its scope, perception and wit. It is critique at its most urgent and readable." —Professor Michael Traynor

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 neoliberalism 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

both managerialists as well as cognitivists. Richard Layard, the godfather of CBT in Britain, informs us that ‘Human beings have largely *conquered* nature, but they have still to *conquer* themselves’ (Layard, 2005, p. 9). If we can’t control something, then this is because we have yet to figure how it works. ‘The inner life . . . determine[s] how we react to life . . . So how can we gain control over our inner life?’ (Layard, 2005, p. 184).

Once we have learnt how to take control of our inner life, then we ought to be able to make it do what we want it to do. In this way, its command and control ethos claims to be able to conquer inner psychological life itself. As we will come to see, it is believed that you should be able to *choose* and determine what you feel and think. If you feel depressed say, then it is because you have not yet understood how to take control of your inner life. This is where CBT will come to the rescue: it will explain to you how your inner life works; it will then train you in techniques to control its workings. If, after all this, you still cannot control your inner life despite having understood the mechanism, then either this is of your choosing, or it is because you are still in the grip of your mental illness. In which case you will be the beneficiary of an additional diagnosis granted by the researchers: ‘CBT resistant’ (for example, Otto and Wisniewski, 2012).

Hyper-rationality is infused by two other doctrines that go along with that of ‘efficiency’, these being atomization and decontextualization. We will come to see how these doctrines start to play out in the course of this book.

The rhetoric of the proponents of CBT would have us believe that the reason that it has come to dominate the psychological field, is simply because it is the best in the field, the most efficient player. But as we will come to see, CBT has succeeded not because it is the best player in the game, but because (along with its allies) it has adapted the rules of the game to favour its own method. In other words, CBT’s success is a political victory masquerading as a scientific one.

The virtues of CBT (and their corruption)

CBT is not entirely without virtue, and in a sense the problem is not with CBT itself, but the hype that surrounds it and the use it is put to further specific ideological, professional and political agendas. In its original avatar, the scope of CBT was limited. Its technology was developed to help people recover from phobias, such as fear of flying, obsessive behaviours, and so forth. In this it succeeds very well, and in these areas it is very often the ‘treatment of choice’. Problems became apparent when CBT’s ambitions expanded to colonize *all* forms of psychological suffering. As we will come to see in the next chapters, in this task CBT was aided and abetted by the merchants of happiness who appropriated CBT for their own ends.

This resulted in the production of a powerful polarization – at one pole happiness and health, at the other, mental illness and mental disorder. The dichotomy is so powerful that it makes it seem that the only available territory resides at one or other of the poles, leaving no place to stand anywhere between mental illness and mental health. This either/or dichotomization has come about in the following way.

It is true that some people inhabit alternative realities filled with terrifying paranoid delusions and the like, and as such they could be said to be ‘mentally ill’. However, there is no ‘opposite’ to this, in the sense that there is no such thing as a state of ‘mental health’. What there is, is ordinary human suffering, which we all suffer from, and which we more or less find ways to manage to live with, for better or worse. Modern CBT has colonized not only this territory, the territory of ordinary suffering by medicalizing it, it has also commandeered the territory of the genuinely mentally ill (schizophrenia, psychosis, and so on); it has lumped all this together and dumped it at the pole called mental illness. It is by this means that we find ourselves caught in the dichotomy: either you are happy and ‘have’ mental health, or you are not happy and therefore you ‘have’ a mental disorder.

In this way, CBT has joined forces with the pharmaceutical industry and psychiatry in their project of medicalizing ordinary human suffering, and then selling (patented) treatments for that suffering.

The structure of the book

The situation we find ourselves in is the seemingly unquestionable ruling status of CBT in the field of therapy. The work of this book is to question it. To this end, the ‘unpacking’ takes place in a number of different ways and directions. The deconstruction will call on philosophy and politics, on economics and psychology, on sociology and history, and ultimately, on the idea of science itself.

The official CBT narrative is an unproblematic linear one that is premised on two axiomatic beliefs. The first is the uncritical acceptance of the existence of the ‘mental disorders’ found in the DSM as ‘facts’. The second is the belief that positivist, empirical scientific research methods are an appropriate way of searching for potential treatments and then testing their capacity to curing these self-same ‘mental disorders’. On this basis, treatments for mental disorders are tested under controlled conditions by scientists. This produces scientific evidence regarding whether or not the treatment actually works (the evidence base). If this evidence is thought to be convincing by the National Institute for Clinical and Health Care Excellence (NICE), then it will authorize the use of a manualized version of the researched treatment. The treatment is manualized in order that it replicates the successes of treatment that was researched. Once a treatment is validated in this way, the job of delivering it to those troubled with a mental illness, is passed onto the statutory agency Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT). IAPT also produces empirical evidence about its functioning and delivery of the treatment. It produces prodigious amounts of data that appears to demonstrate that the providers are delivering outcomes at the level that the research says should be the case. This data is further scrutinized by government bodies for example, the National Audit Office (NAO). Annual reports emerging from the NAO, IAPT and NICE all seem to confirm that all is well and as it should be in the world of CBT. The whole endeavour is evidence-based, from the bottom to the top. And the evidence repeatedly shows that everything is copacetic in the CBT world. These are simply the facts.

But linearities should always be treated with caution. They tend to be created by imposing a particular ideological reading of events to make them seem rational, inevitable and therefore incontrovertible. Ideological readings edit out the twists and turns, as well as the complexities, contradictions and power struggles, to make it appear that they were never there in the first place. The fact is, CBT's narrative about itself is a political narrative that masquerades as a scientific one.

For these sorts of reasons, the book will not begin where the official narrative might suggest: with CBT treatment and research, as this would collude with the value-free decontextualized account that CBT gives of itself. We cannot fully get to understand how the cognitive behavioural tsunami came to be, without examining the 'climate conditions' that made the tsunami a possibility in the first place. We need to get to know something about the prevailing winds and currents, and the consequences of their interactions with the subterranean shifts taking place in the tectonic plates of science, politics, economics and ultimately, psychology; all of which had to come together to make the tsunami possible. This over-stretched metaphor is a way of saying that much of this book is about the conditions and contexts that came together to produce the cognitive behavioural tsunami.

Having said that, there is the danger that the account given here will simply replace the official linear narrative with another linear narrative. The structure of the book, consisting as it does of five parts, is an attempt to guard against this. Each of the parts is embedded in a mix of particular discourses and disciplines, producing narratives that throw different kinds of light on the tsunami. But the parts do not neatly dovetail – further, each of the parts necessarily parses over the same sort of territory. This has necessitated in some repetition, in order that each of the parts has some semblance of coherence.

In **Part I: The Tsunami**, chapters 2 and 3 are an account of how the cognitivist tsunami began and how and why Layard's Utilitarian Happiness agenda came to power that tsunami. In the UK, the Cognitive Behavioural Tsunami was inaugurated in 2005 with the publication of Richard Layard's bestseller *Happiness*. A year later this was followed up by *The Depression Report: A New Deal for Anxiety and Depression Disorders* authored by Richard Layard, David Clark and other luminaries. A decade later Layard and Clark celebrated the success of CBT in their book *Thrive: How Better Mental Health Care Transforms Lives and Saves Money*.

Chapter 2, 'The Tsunami Begins', takes a close look at the substance of the Depression Report as well as the politics around it, as it was this Report that convinced the Labour Government of the day to fund CBT to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds. Never before had any kind of psychology been supported and promoted by the State in this kind of way and to this extraordinary degree. It was the economic argument that contained in that report that won the day.

Chapter 3, 'The Merchants of Happiness', unpacks Richard Layard's book *Happiness* which was first published in 2005. Although it is well over ten years old, it remains seminal and highly influential. CBT texts that have followed have not added much to the original thesis. The reason then, for looking deeply into this book rather than other more recent texts, is because not only did *Happiness* kick

off the tsunami, it is still a fair encapsulation of the CBT landscape and remains very influential to this day. The chapter will describe the kind of Utilitarian philosophy that Layard advocates, the ways that this is used to conceptualize life's problems, and the (cognitivist) solutions that follow from it.

CBT likes to present itself as unique and distinct from every other form of psychotherapy; as though it had sprung fully formed from the mind of Aaron Beck. But in fact, all the techniques of which CBT has claimed ownership are found in other models of psychotherapy. How was it then that CBT was able to construct its identity in this way? This is the question addressed by **Part II: Politics of Identity Formation**. Chapter 4, 'Master Myths and Identity Formation', introduces some of the ideas of the sociologist Norbert Elias, which are then drawn on in the following chapter, 'The "Psy" Wars'. Chapter 5 is a social history and overview of the power struggles within the 'Psy' professions in the US and UK. It details the politicized machinations between psychiatry, psychoanalysis, behaviourism, cognitivism and clinical psychology over the last 80 or so years. The weapon of choice in these battles was positivism, which they each wielded with increasing fervour, one against the other, in their efforts to prove themselves to the scientific fraternity. It was in this way that the positivist vision was fostered, which in turn facilitated the burgeoning of CBT.

Part III: Cognitivism, turns its attention to the genesis of the cognitivist conception of the human condition that has come to preside in CBT. This conception started out in the discipline that came to be known as economics. The first theories of psychology were created during the Enlightenment by philosophers who were only latterly called economists, and at the same time philosophers we would now call psychologists were writing treatises on economics. This is the territory traced by Chapter 6 – Homo Economicus. In this chapter we encounter Utilitarian economics and also Milton Friedman's neoliberalist economics, both of which continue to dominate and organize all aspects of the world we live in, including the provision of psychological treatments. But the role of economics is not limited to the part it played a few centuries ago in the genesis of cognitivism. The Friedmanesque turn that economic theory took into neoliberalism in the latter half of the twentieth century, came to play a key role in the rising fortunes of CBT. To understand how this played out requires us to engage with New Public Management or Managerialism.

Chapter 7 is a critical account of the ways in which Managerialism uses the rationalist cognitivist ideations developed in economics and CBT to inflict psychological mayhem and destruction not only on the 'workforce' but also the 'customer'. Managerialism furthers the neoliberal agenda by representing the casualties it creates as not casualties at all, but as unfortunates suffering from a 'mental illness'. It then makes the (kind) offer of treating these illnesses with CBT and the new scientific technologies of Happiness and Resilience.

Parts IV and V endeavour to get to the heart of the matter.

Part IV: Dispensing CBT, comprises three chapters. Chapter 8, 'NICE: naughty, but not nice', focuses on the body that has the task of examining

evidence-based scientific claims for treatments. Based on this evidence it makes recommendations for treatments of choice – this mainly features CBT. We will find managerialism writ large in the political machinations taking place within NICE as well as IAPT. Chapter 9 is a description of CBT treatment itself. When stripped of jargon, CBT treatment amounts to little more than the injunction: think differently, feel different. Chapter 10 uncovers the hyper-rationalist managerialist practices being deployed within IAPT. These practices not only end up short-changing patients by significantly diluting the intensity and duration of treatments that they are entitled to, they also put practitioners under unbearable amounts of stress. But the art of managerialism is one of making it appear that none of these things are happening and that the institution is meeting all its goals and targets.

Part V: CBT Research focuses in on the research itself – the head of the beast as it were. Ben Goldacre’s notion of ‘Bad Science’ is insufficient for the situation we find ourselves in because bad science can be the result of ineptitude and incompetence. The more accurate term for the prevailing situation is ‘Corrupt Science’; this being when bad science is deliberately and wilfully promulgated as ‘good’. This is the kind of science that prevails in the CBT landscape; it is both corrupt and deceitful. But one cannot fully understand the extent and depth of the corruptions without contrasting it with good science, which is the subject of chapter 11. Chapter 12, ‘The Corruptions of Science’ is then better able to delineate some of the chicanery used to bewilder us into thinking that Bad Science is Good Science.

Finally, Chapter 13 introduces ‘third wave’ CBT and looks at two interlinked studies which found Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) to be efficacious in the prevention of Depression. The fact that the second study replicated the results of the first was greeted with much excitement and was convincing enough for NIICE to approve its use as a preventative measure in certain circumstances. MBCT has gone through all the scientific requirements; it sits on the list of IAPT approved therapies and is considered to be a great CBT success story. This chapter looks closely into these studies and finds the situation to be otherwise. It is these findings that give the final chapter its title: ‘Statistical Spin; Linguistic Obfuscation’.²

Note

- 1 Chosen then, but alas, no longer. Ronald Reagan (and more recently, Donald Trump) declared that the celestial baton had moved to the USA. ‘Can we doubt that only a Divine Providence placed this land, this island of freedom, here as a refuge for all . . . who yearn to breathe freely? . . . God Bless America’. R. Reagan, 17 July 1980, Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25970>.
- 2 A version of chapter 13 was previously published in *The Journal of Psychological Therapies in Primary Care* 2015, 4, pp 1–25, ‘Statistical Spin: Linguistic Obfuscation—The Art of Overselling the CBT Evidence Base’.

The tsunami begins . . .

Reverse engineering: hugs, tails and unhappy dogs

On arriving at a conference on ‘Happiness’, we were greeted by a number of smiling people, each carrying a placard announcing, ‘Get Free Hugs Here!’. Curiously, not many of the delegates took up the free offer. Over two days we were repeatedly told that there was now a *Science of Happiness* which had not only discovered what made people happy, it could also teach unhappy persons the skills which would make them happy. What’s not to like about a science that advocates that one’s happiness is at least, if not more, important than money? The scientific ‘discovery’ behind the offer of a free hug was the fact that happy people tend to have more physical contact than unhappy ones. Sure, I wanted to be happier, but for some reason I was not drawn to the idea of hugging and being hugged by a random stranger.

The so-called ‘scientists of happiness’ have forgotten the first lesson of empirical science: that correlation is not necessarily causation. For example, we observe a dog wagging its tail. We notice that only happy dogs wag their tails. We notice that unhappy dogs do not wag their tails. We deduce from this, that if unhappy dogs wagged their tails, they would become happy. We develop a treatment protocol which teaches unhappy dogs to learn to wag their tails. If they learn how to wag their tails, and then *choose* to wag their tails, then they will become happy. Q.E.D.

The offer of free hugs is born out of exactly this kind of error. CBT techniques assume that it is possible to use this kind of reverse engineering to change feeling states. Happy dogs wag tails; therefore tail wagging should generate happiness. Happy people tend to have more physical contact; therefore increased physical contact will generate a feeling of happiness. Of course, all this is based on the premise that it is possible to *reengineer* human behaviour in this mechanistic way in the first place.

But a hug is no abstraction. I do not feel better for hugging anonymous strangers; that would be a form of prostitution. On the other hand, I do feel happier and better when I hug and am hugged by those who are meaningful to my emotional

life. Moreover, and most importantly, the impulse to hug is an *expression* of tender feelings for the other, and not an instrument to increase *my feelings of wellbeing*.

This is our first glimpse into the mechanistic mind-set that is CBT. Actions are stripped out of their contexts, contexts which make actions meaningful. Stripped of meaning, actions become empty instrumentalized techniques, so-called ‘skills’. Is hugging a skill? When a hug is reduced to technique to *make myself* feel happier, then the role of other person is rendered functional rather than meaningful: they are simply an object to be used in the service of adjusting my emotional state.

The father of this new Science of Happiness and Positive Psychology was Martin Seligman, one-time president of the powerful American Psychological Association. He used his time in the presidential office to place positive psychology at the centre of the Association’s concerns.

However, the first claim to fame of this advocate of happiness was the infliction of unhappiness in the name of science. Seligman started his career in psychology by torturing dogs to the point of what he called ‘learnt helplessness’ (Seligman, 1972). He did this by giving them electric shocks at random through the floor so that they were unable to escape the shocks by jumping away. This was done repeatedly until the dogs resigned all hope and lay down on the floor even whilst being shocked, simply whining. His great finding was this: that when these dogs were put in new situations where there was the possibility of escaping from the shocks, they did not try to do so. They had truly given up. The dogs were now deemed to have *learnt* helplessness. Seligman supposed that there was a corollary between learnt helplessness and depression. He thought that depression was a form of learnt helplessness due to having lived through previous experiences of helplessness. Depression was now being defined as being stuck in a state of *imagined* helplessness despite a change of circumstances. *Depression then becomes construed of as the opposite of happiness.*

The Happiness ethos has proliferated into all kinds of territories and to an extraordinarily degree. It has found favour not only with those involved in the ‘health’ industry, but also governments and HR departments within organizations globally. Journalists, universities, GPs and politicians all refer to it and its sister discipline – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) – as established scientific fact.

The unlikely figure behind this seismic cultural shift that made the psychological wellbeing of citizens politically respectable was not a psychologist, but an economist called Richard Layard.

A chance meeting . . .

Layard was born in 1934 into the privileged classes. Despite being educated at Eton and then Cambridge, his sympathies lay with the disenfranchised; his values were those of the Labour Party. He played an influential role in the expansion of university education in the 1960s. At the London School of Economics, he specialized in unemployment and inequality.

Richard Layard was a Utilitarian and of the view that it was in the nation's economic interests to support and promote the psychological wellbeing of their citizens. He was casting about for how to go about doing this. Then one evening in 2003 at a tea party for the great and the good at the British Academy, Layard bumped into David Clark a leading figure within the world of CBT. It was this chance meeting that would light the fuse that was to trigger the CBT tsunami.

Very quickly they discovered that their interests dovetailed. They realized that by working together they could further each of their interests, Layard's agenda for happiness and Clark's desire to advance the fortunes of CBT. An opportunity arose almost immediately after this meeting in 2004 when the Government's regulatory body, The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) gave CBT its seal of approval, recommending it as the best of all psychological treatments for anxiety and depression.

Layard and Clark used this moment to produce a short but powerful manifesto, 'The Depression Report: A New Deal for Anxiety and Depression Disorders' (2006), calling for a change in the Government's priorities regarding its citizens' wellbeing.

Layard, as a part of Labour Party aristocracy, had direct access to Cabinet Ministers and the Prime Ministers at that time, initially Tony Blair, and then his successor, Gordon Brown. The manifesto itself was published under the auspices of the Mental Health Policy Group at the Centre for Economic Performance (of which Layard was the Director) at the prestigious London School of Economics. This combined with the list of nine authors, all high-status establishment figures, not only gave the *Depression Report* immediate prestige and credibility, it also allowed it to make its way onto the agenda of the Cabinet.

The Depression Report: A New Deal for Anxiety and Depression Disorders

The argument of the Report and its recommendations, written in clear, concise and compelling language, was convincing enough for the hard-nosed and hard-pressed Exchequer to release hundreds of millions of pounds. It is worth going through the report slowly otherwise we will be swept up by its powerful rhetoric, as was the government of the day.

At its most condensed, the Report claims that *CBT is the royal road to happiness*. The slightly less condensed version of the report is this: It begins with the assertion that the natural state of persons *should* be that of happiness. This is 'mental health', a corollary of physical health. Someone in a state of mental health will be in a positive state of mind most of the time quite naturally, without efforts. If someone is not able to do this, if they are not-happy, then this is because they are suffering from a '*mental illness*'. The treatment for this illness is CBT.

The point bears repeating: unhappiness is a symptom of a mental disease called depression or anxiety or something else. Treat the illness, disperse the symptom,

and you will once again be happy. This is how human suffering has become medicalized. The Report begins by describing the scale of the *problem*.

depression and chronic anxiety are the biggest causes of misery in Britain today . . . [and that] *one in six of us would be diagnosed as having depression or chronic anxiety disorder*, which means that one family in three is affected.

(Bell et al., 2006, p. 1; emphasis in original)

The *solution* put forward in the report is a trumpet call for the ‘new’ ‘*evidence-based psychological therapies that can lift at least a half of those affected out of their depression or their chronic fear*’ (Bell et al., 2006, p. 1; emphasis in original). They go onto say that:

These new therapies are not endless nor backward looking treatments [for which read psychoanalysis]. They are short, forward-looking treatments that enable people to challenge their negative thinking and build on the positive side of their personalities and situations. The most developed of these therapies is cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT).

(Bell et al., 2006, p. 1)

There is unfortunately a problem with this solution, which is that

we do not have enough therapists. In most areas waiting lists for therapy are over nine months, or there is no waiting list at all because there are no therapists . . . The result is tragic . . . at least half of them could be cured at a cost of no more than £750.

(Bell et al., 2006, p. 1)

The solution to *that* problem, says the Report, is that the government should invest in training ‘10,000 new therapists within the next seven years. *Some 5,000 of these should be ‘clinical psychologists*’ (Bell et al., 2006, p. 10; emphasis in original).

The ‘business case’ for pursuing this course appears to be a no brainer:

someone on Incapacity Benefit costs us £750 a month in extra benefits and lost taxes. If the person works just a month more as a result of the treatment, the treatment pays for itself . . . we . . . have a solution that can improve the lives of millions of families, *and cost the taxpayer nothing*.

(Bell et al., 2006, p. 1; italics added)

the total loss of output due to depression and chronic anxiety is some £12 billion a year . . . Of this the cost to the taxpayer is some £7 billion . . .

These billions of pounds lost through inactivity are a huge cost when compared with the £0.6 billion a year which a proper therapy service would cost.

(Bell et al., 2006, p. 5; emphasis original)

Who would not invest 60p in order to earn £7.00? That's a dizzy 1166 per cent return – a stockbroker's dream. It is perhaps not surprising that the government of the day should have taken the 'findings' of the Report seriously, as it was backed by nine 'experts' – prestigious scientists and influential members of the establishment. The government took the Report at face value, believed it and proceeded with its advice. The advice being that not only could the government increase the wellbeing of the inhabitants of the nation, but also in pursuing this good deed, the economic benefits were such that *it would end up with more money in the bank than it started out with*. So it came to pass that the UK government went ahead and poured millions upon millions into this venture, training the requisite number of CBT therapists and rolling out the therapies through the institution called IAPT – Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies. A key reason as to why the Report was so readily embraced, had to do with the fact that the ground had already been well prepared a year earlier, with the publication of the economist Richard Layard's hugely popular book: *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*. It is with this work that the Cognitive Behavioural Tsunami really began. Although the book is now over ten years old, CBT texts that have followed it merely reproduce the same thesis. Further, the book and its author continue to have enormous influence on politicians and the public generally. For these sorts of reasons, it is well worth looking more deeply into it.