

class, self and culture and contextualize their meanings in the contemporary moment.

REFERENCE

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NOT JUST PRIVATION OR ADVERSITY

Therapy culture. Frank Furedi, 2003. London: Routledge; ISBN 0 415 32159-X, 245 pp. £14.99.

This book is about the expanding idiom of therapeutics in contemporary life. The central idea is that we are increasingly living our moral and political lives through affect, as the historic split between ‘reason’ and ‘emotion’ is reconfigured. We now, Furedi argues, make sense of the world through a prism of emotion, as the language and practices of therapy pervade all spheres of life.

Furedi’s main thesis is that every aspect of life, not just privation or adversity, has become a potential site for therapeutic intervention. The upshot is that social and political problems can now be re-cast in individual terms. They cry out, not for political remedies, but instead for the kinds of ‘support’ and treatment that only the new army of psychological experts can offer. What is new is not an interest in therapy – there have always been therapies of various sorts – but the ways in which contemporary public life has become emotionalized, with feelings operating as the main currency in cultural and political argument and action.

In this book, Frank Furedi takes us on a detailed tour of ‘therapy culture’. The book is packed full of examples that can not fail to convince us that there is definitely something a bit dubious, if not downright nasty, in the woodshed. From the enormous public outpouring of grief on the death of Diana, through the shock of 9/11, to the widespread sorrow and horror of the Soham murders, we are witnessing, Furedi argues, a new sensitivity to trauma, damage and the need for healing, as the therapeutic code overwhelms other codes of meaning. Traditional moral meanings attached to concepts such as trust, guilt and responsibility are wrenched from their bearings as the therapeutic ethos encroaches. Moralities are

newly negotiable, but only on a therapeutic terrain. It all sounds very worrying.

Much of the book is given to convincing the reader that the tentacles of the therapeutic extend from the personal, through the social and cultural, to the political, and back again, transforming personal and political life, and instituting new forms of governance. But surely there is no longer much dispute about the triumph of the therapeutic in contemporary western culture. Philip Rieff for example, talked about it in the 1960s; Christopher Lasch and Jaques Donzelot had something further to say in the 1970s; and Nikolas Rose picked up the baton too in the 1980s. Given this, Furedi perhaps uses up too much space making his case that there is an issue here.

What is much more interesting – and this is the point that Furedi, disappointingly, really only takes up in the last few pages of the book – is whether we should regard these developments as a good thing, or as a bad thing. ‘Does it matter?’, he asks, by way of ‘final thoughts’. I wish that he had raised this crucial issue much earlier, and given it rather more detailed treatment. Furedi answers his own question in the affirmative. It matters, he thinks, because it compromises rights, justice, agency and even subjectivity. It matters because it marginalizes certain ways of thinking, feeling and being, potentially stifling dissent much more effectively than overtly coercive measures ever could. It matters because it transforms the boundaries of citizenship, upsetting the possibilities of privacy and promoting reliance on professional authorities.

Furedi evidently regards the encroachment of the therapeutic ethos as a sinister development. But lest we be tempted, under his influence, to cast rather too superior a sideways smile at what has been termed the Oprahfication of culture, it is worth remembering that every downside has its upside. Barry Richards, for example, might argue that, though the therapeutic is a mixed development, requiring complex assessment, on balance it is to be welcomed as carrying great potential for increasing human well-being and creativity.

Clearly, there is a whole story to be told around the therapeutic that parallels the one Furedi tells. Might not ‘therapy culture’ mean something quite positive? Could it, for example, lead to a deeper appreciation of the complexities of life, both personal and political? Or, as in the work of the late Ian Craib, to a critical examination of what it is that we actually mean when we talk of ‘feelings’ and ‘emotions’? Far from diminishing the self, is it not possible that therapy culture could alert us to the multidimensional nature of the self, or the essentially social nature of each individual? And so on. Clearly, when ‘emotions’ are equated, in the traditional way, with processes

that go on *inside* individuals, the real dangers of manipulation by the therapeutic ethos become visible. What Furedi does not see is the possibility that the therapeutic might provide a language to interrogate and critique such individualized and oppressive thinking.

I enjoyed this book, and found it compulsive reading. I have an instinctive sympathy with the author's thesis that therapeutic culture, far from being enlightened and liberating, is more likely to impose a new conformity through the management of emotion. But I found the sociological analysis, ultimately, limiting. The therapeutic turn is obviously here to stay, so the most challenging question that faces us is whether, and how, we might harness it towards creative and liberating outcomes. But perhaps that is too therapeutic a question.

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OUR WORLD, OUR LIVES

The power of identity, second edition. Manuel Castells, 2004. Oxford: Blackwell; ISBN 1405107138, 537 pp. £17.99.

The power of identity is the second in the trilogy *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, first published to much acclaim during 1996–98, and currently being re-issued as a new edition. The book opens with a Maya Angelou poem written for the inauguration of Bill Clinton in 1993, extolling the virtue of living and actively shaping our destiny, and ends with a 10-page treatise upon the nature of social change in what Castells terms 'network society'. The 400-plus pages in between confirm Castells's position as a foremost authority on contemporary society, and the role of individuals and agencies within it.

This is not, as the author himself acknowledges, 'a book about books' (p. 2), but one of grand ideas, and in that approach Castells echoes the work of other heavyweight contemporary social theorists such as Beck, Giddens and Touraine, whose influences are all acknowledged. Potential readers interested in a detailed engagement with key thinkers, or what Castells terms 'bibliography', are advised to 'consult the many good textbooks on each matter' tackled (p. 3) instead, and I would concur. What this text does provide is a cogent analysis of the relationship between individual actors and political processes – both global and local – as mediated through technology, national and supra-national institutions and personal and collective identities.