

## CAN WE DISCUSS POLICY IF NOTHING IS WHAT IT SEEMS TO BE?

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In this paper we will seek to establish the truth of two propositions. First, one of the most pervasive, yet unremarked, features of modern society is that nothing is what it seems to be — and is frequently its opposite. Second, our own behaviour and social arrangements are governed by myths similar to those which so obviously strongly determine behaviour in "primitive" societies.

So important are the myths and systems connections which govern our society that they need to be made explicit, and ways of handling them found, if we are to make any real progress. The belief that we live in a "rational" society which has somehow got beyond such myths is itself one of the most powerful myths to be confronted. If we refuse to discuss it we preclude discussion of many vitally important issues.

In my previous analyses we came across numerous examples of social policies, arrangements, and concepts which were commonly misconstrued or which had goals, purposes, and effects which were not what they were most widely believed and assumed to be. Indeed, many of their functions and effects were often precisely the opposite of what was believed or claimed. We saw, for example, that, so far as could be judged, the main function of market mechanisms is, not to do things as efficiently as possible, but to create the maximum number of jobs for those who would otherwise have become idle as energy-positive agriculture and replaceable fuels were displaced by energy-intensive agriculture and fossil fuels. The present paper will bring several such examples together.

In one sense, this paper illustrates how close we have come to an Orwellian world dominated by double-speak, double-think, and centralised control ... a world in which the impact and effect of language is often the very opposite of its literal sense, a world in which those skilled in the art of double-talk are revered as sages. In another sense, we will extend our challenge to much received wisdom. It is to be hoped that, once so many ensnaring thought ways have been exposed for what they are, it will be possible to make more progress discerning a way for ward.

It will become apparent that the activities which employ most people and provide them with a purpose in life — in "defence", in education, in financial institutions, and in the market process in general — are supported by a network of interlocking myths. To move forward we will have to understand the sociological functions of these myths and the hidden functions of the institutional arrangements associated with them. Because they are so interconnected, the problems we face cannot be tackled one at a time. They cannot be tackled without an understanding of systems processes. Otherwise we will either find ourselves crying into the wind (as is the case when we call for preservation of the rain forests, the protection of furry animals, reductions in the consumption of fossil fuel, stopping the dumping of nuclear waste at sea, imprisoning the financiers who have committed the most serious crimes against mankind, or engaging in only trivial action (as when we re-cycle beer

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cans, only to find that the environmental costs of collecting them outweigh the "savings" made).

Where the relevant issues have already been discussed it will be sufficient to remind ourselves of them. Where the topic is new, a more extended discussion will be presented.

We are not, of course, alone in attempting to debunk harmful myths by exposing the true meaning of apparently innocuous words used in everyday discussion. The authors who have contributed to Sachs' remarkable *Development Dictionary*, have, for example, done much the same. There, Esteva shows that the word "development" should often be replaced with the word "destruction"; Lummis that an emphasis on equality is typically a facade for imposing inequality; Gronemeyer that "helping" usually means "enslaving"; Berthold that talk of "market processes" is a facade for physical enforcement — that many decision makers see the market, not as a self-regulating mechanism, but as something to be manipulated to impose particular courses of action and noting in passing that market mythology has always been used in this way (for example as a justification for press-ganging labour into factories or criminalising begging in such a way so as to force people into workhouses where they could not escape forced labour); Illich that "needs" are propagandist inventions; and Alvares that "science", supposedly grounded in public debate, critical thinking, and uncertainty, amounts to the authoritarian imposition of dogma.

We do, however, go beyond these authors in illustrating the persuasiveness of these phenomena and the way in which they function to organise and perpetuate our society. It is their *embeddedness* which poses such a problem for those seeking a way forward.

### **EXAMPLES OF NOTHING BEING WHAT IT SEEMS TO BE FROM THE FIELD OF ECONOMICS**

In my earlier works we established that the society in which we live bears little resemblance to the image of a market economy conjured up in the minds of most people when the term is used or as envisaged by Adam Smith. The main actors are giant corporations and governments, not individuals. We live in a managed economy in which control of the spending of some 75% of GNP in some sense rests with governments. Most customers are government or corporate purchasing agents, not the private individuals spending their own money and whose image springs to mind when the word is used. Competitiveness depends mainly on firms' political acumen, not the quality of their products. "Costs" do not reflect the cost of the land, labor, and capital involved in providing the goods or services. This is partly because many vital costs are externalized to the general community and the future, partly because prices are mainly determined by public servants, and partly because the largest single element in the price of goods and services consists of the taxes which pay for public provision.

Banks do not depend on lending their depositors' money but conjure "loans" out of thin air — with the result that their true interest rates are usurious, amounting to many times those claimed. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) might be more appropriately termed the World Bank for exploitation and destruction. Competitive tendering leads to growth in the number of bureaucrats. And competitive tendering in the funding of research and innovation leads to the trivialisation of research.

International "debtor" nations do not conform to the image most commonly evoked by the term — i.e. hordes of profligate consumers who could not delay gratification of their wants until they had earned the necessary money — but (typically) ruthless leaders who, pressurised by far from disinterested arms manufacturers and their bankers, arranged loans to purchase excessive armaments to protect their positions and siphoned off large amounts of the money into their own Western bank accounts. Economic theory legitimises the use of

terms like debt, debtor, and interest, none of which mean what they appear to mean and which often mean the opposite. A debt is typically a means of facilitating the sale of a product which would otherwise not be marketable. The vending company and its bank obtain a double benefit: They have sold something which would otherwise have been valueless and lent nothing but obtained interest on it. When, as often happens, the "debtor" defaults on repayments of this fictional loan, the banks are able to reclaim the purchase — or, better still, some really useful asset such as a factory. The foreign purchaser of the factory — i.e. the original vendor of the product — is then able to get a grant — not a loan— from the Third World country's government to transform the factory into a useful asset. Under such circumstances, who is really indebted to whom?

Within nations, debt is typically imagined as pertaining to consumer spending by those who insist on immediate gratification of their wants instead of first saving the money. In fact, it consists mainly of government and corporate debt. Even when debts are incurred by individuals, they tend to be used to purchase chimerical investments: Real estate, company shares etc. which are traded at ever-higher prices.

It is widely believed that the money required to improve the quality of life has to be "earned by manufacturing industry". However, the main developments needed to improve the quality of life depend on arrangements made by the public service. The problems we face are management problems, not financial ones. Wealth — on which money gives one the right to draw — is a product of organized activity. One does not have to have money to *create* wealth. The money needed to orchestrate wealth-creating activity does not have to be "earned by manufacturing industry" or borrowed from international banks. New, much more sensitive, information-based accounting tools are urgently needed, as are more efficient ways of orchestrating wealth-creating (i.e. quality of life enhancing) activities and means of enabling people to give effect to their priorities and preferences. Contrary to the public image, the money-based economic marketplace very rarely provides any of these - especially the last.

Public servants are said to consume wealth. They are, in fact, the most important creators of wealth (and work) ever known.

It is implied that the growth of "The Service Economy" means that we now have more people offering direct help to others than ever before ... yet the reality is that the "services" which are counted include such things as the generation of the computer programmes without which most modern production plants and banking systems could not function. There has, in fact, been little change in the funds (adjusted for inflation) devoted to health care, welfare, etc. over the past 40 years.

Since most customers are governments and giant corporations, privatisation results in governments — and not (as generally claimed and understood) private individuals — gaining more control over the economy.

We have now seen several times that beliefs about the efficiency of market processes are without foundation. In reality, market processes create the maximum amount of useless work whilst enabling us to talk loudly about the opposite.

In fact, economics, presented as the science which deals with the rational allocation of scarce resources, turns out to be a ragbag of mythologies which facilitate work creation and the generation of scarcity. The truth is that, over the past few centuries, there has been an over-abundance of human resources and cheap energy. The problem has been to find ways of legitimising the creation of work and means of compelling everyone to participate in that, essentially nonproductive, "work". This has been done by creating a defence industry which produces rapidly obsolescent products, by building obsolescence into product design, changing fashions, *creating* "scarcity" by manufacturing demand through advertising, and by promoting market mythology in order to lead people to do things in the most *inefficient*, or

wasteful, way possible. The problem for the future is to redeploy the available resources in such a way as to increase the quality of life in the context of a dramatic reduction in the consumption of energy. This is necessary, not so much because of a shortage of energy, but because of the inability of the planet to absorb the products of combustion. In short, the "science" of economics turns out to be the art of *dis-economics*, spurious job creation, and exploitation.

Insurance, which is presented as a means of protecting people from the hazards of ill-health and the vagaries of nature, is in effect about inflicting hardships and degradations on those who do not join the system and creating *insecurity* for those who do. What looks like a service industry is about control of manufacturing companies and the Third World. These companies not only undermine social security at home, they, through their control of trade with, for example, China, not only exploit their populations and destroy their quality of life, but also exploit and undermine their family-based social security arrangements.

Beyond the mis-representation of "insurance" lies a verbal smokescreen about the importance of "industry". Despite the image of manufacturing which is normally associated with this term, the companies concerned mainly make their money by *financial* manipulation.

The "viability" of enterprises is said to depend on economic factors, yet their viability — together with the more general myth that centralised production is efficient — depends on decisions (taken by public servants) about which costs will be counted and especially about which costs will be loaded onto the producer and which spread over the whole community.

GNP and "economic development" are not what they are thought to be and are presented as being. They are presented as if they were indices of quality of life - but they index quality of life neither on a collective nor an individual basis. Ironically, we could all have higher quality of life if we abandoned GNP and conventional forms of "economic development" and embraced the New Values and lived in a sustainable way.

"Economic development" itself usually means the opposite of what it is thought to mean. Far from being a blessing it *primarily* involves social disintegration, environmental destruction, and the collapse of the societal arrangements needed to offer a future, personal security, and a high quality of life. "Market processes" are not usually market processes at all, but processes in which the value of the tokens has been rigged by public servants and the managers of the TNCs. The processes which are described as "Market mechanisms" do not automatically commend themselves to us but are forced upon us by the forces of law and order and military might. The market process does not deal with the conditions of life which are most strongly associated with life satisfaction, but mainly with the goods and services which are *least* strongly related to quality of life. The market process actually operates to *drive down* the quality of working and family life, although these are the most important sources of life satisfaction. Advertising uses the most important sources of life satisfaction as a backdrop or subtext to suggest that purchase of the goods or services in the foreground will lead to those satisfactions.

The basic image we have of our society is in fact utterly misleading. The media presents our society to us as a market economy, as an efficient society, as a rational and civilised one, as a society offering high quality of life to its members. Yet all of these images are utterly deceptive. The USA, which is presented as the most efficient nation on earth, is, in reality, the most inefficient, the most exploitative, the most destructive, and the most degenerate. Its apparent efficiency arises from not counting the cost of its massive consumption of fossil fuels, its exploitation of other peoples, the environment, and future generations — i.e. its overwhelming contribution to the destruction of the planet. On all meaningful indices of disintegration it is the most degenerate society in the world: Its crime rate is enormous; it treats its poor in the most demeaning, de-humanising, and degrading way; its levels of isolation and stress are enormous (and not only among the poor); its family and

child-rearing practices are headed for disaster. In its quest to impose its ideology on the world it adopts the most deceptive and destructive policies ever, and its defence policies are the most unethical ever invented — propelling us most forcefully toward global disaster.

### EXAMPLES OF MYTHS AND THEIR FUNCTIONALITY FROM THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

The "educational" system operates in many ways which contradict widely held beliefs about what it does. Both the hidden processes themselves and the widespread acceptance — indeed wholesale endorsement — of the conventional wisdom about education make it very difficult to achieve effective reforms.

There is no doubt that the educational system confers some important benefits on those who pass through it — such as the acquisition of the 3Rs between ages 7 and 11. Most adults can name one teacher who changed the course of their lives. Nevertheless, about two thirds of the money spent on post-primary education confers few *educational* benefits on those concerned. Most of the knowledge acquired and assessed is out-of-date when it is taught, forgotten by the time it is needed, and does not relate to the problems with which ex-pupils have to grapple. Tackling these problems requires unique combinations of up-to-date, specialist, knowledge.

But, as we have seen, the most serious problems of the educational system do not lie at this level at all. They stem from the fact that the educational system performs sociological functions which conflict with its manifest educational functions. As we saw, while claiming to advance those who are most competent and capable of contributing new ways of thinking about and doing things, it acclaims, promotes, and advances a disproportionate number of those who are least able to make their own observations, take the steps necessary to get control over their lives, and act in the long-term public — as distinct from short-term personal — interest. Such people are well suited to the task of perpetuating the kind of society we have and the mythologies around education secure them in those positions. The educational system also manufactures scientifically unsupportable differentials between pupils and associates these with lifetime differentials in access to the good things in life (or at least opportunities to avoid demeaning and degrading treatment) in such a way as to induce both pupils and parents to go through the motions of supporting what they know in their hearts to be both a fraudulent educational system and society.

Another problem is that the way in which school subjects are taught actually precludes the development of the more general competencies which are supposedly nurtured. Thus, as Friere has shown, the way reading is taught tends to preclude the development of the ability to find and use the information and ideas one needs to tackle the problems which are personally of the greatest importance. The way writing is taught — with its emphasis on following "correct" rules and spelling — precludes the development of the ability to use written material to evoke emotions and thus action and, more importantly, the development of the wider competencies required to communicate effectively — for these rarely depend on written material. The way literature, science and history are taught promotes the acceptance of cultural myths and *prevents* the development of the very insights and competencies which would be required to analyse the workings of society and mount experiments which would lead to both a growth in understanding and the introduction of effective change into society.

In the short-term, those who are advanced and promoted are ideally suited to *all-show-and-no-substance* jobs in insurance, the World Bank, "aid" agencies, welfare agencies, the "defence" system, the public service, the food industry, politics, government, the "educational" system itself, and the "research" industry. But, much more seriously, the tendency of the educational system to disseminate false consciousness and promote those

who are most anxious to say what their superiors want to hear and those most inclined to engage in "double talk" makes it extremely difficult to conduct any rational discussion of wider social processes and thus find a way forward. In all these vitally important ways the educational system, by doing the opposite of what it proclaims to do and is widely thought to do, helps to cement and perpetuate the social order. Yet the widely accepted myth that it does what it claims to do makes it extremely difficult even to embark on the research which would be necessary if it were to do what it claims to do.

The educational system also operates to legitimise the rationing of privilege. Most people think that the advantages which accrue to those who do well in the system have been earned by hard work and are merited by superior intelligence or ability. Yet when wider aspects of competence and multiple talents are considered, this is demonstrably not the case.

The much publicised policies initiated by the Thatcher government to "increase" choice in education actually operate — intentionally or not — as a means of getting choice *off* the agenda. There is to be less variety between schools. The goals, methods, and time allotted to different subjects are to be centrally decreed and neither tailored to pupils' needs nor open to experimentation. So are the things teachers are to be taught in colleges of education. Parents and pupils will only have a choice of provider, not a choice between dramatically different types of educational programme directed toward different goals. The means that have been introduced to evaluate pupils, teachers, and schools do not involve the collection of information on the *most* important outcomes of the educational process. As a result important differences between schools do not show up. Consequently, neither pupils nor parents can meaningfully choose schools which will engage with and develop their children's particular motives and talents or those which will confer most benefits on society. The important defects of "good" schools and of pupils who are advanced in the system cannot show up.

It is useful to say a little more about the way in which current teaching methods stifle the development of the competencies and understandings which are most urgently required. The way science and history are taught in schools and universities leads people to accept — i.e. fail to question — terms which relate to fictions — terms like money, interest rates, and "the marginal value of labour". It also leads them to accept the panoply of graphs generated by thought (as distinct from empirical) experiments touted by economists. An image of science as being concerned with *certainty* — rather than debate, argument, and advance in understanding — chokes off questioning and the attempt to invent better ways of thinking about things. One should learn what is there and not dream of adventuring into new areas without thoroughly reviewing the available evidence. Anyone whose results are not bullet proof does not merit the name scientist. The process chokes off all genuinely questioning, enquiry-oriented activity.

Schools, universities, and the media are said to teach "culture". But the "cultural" material is pervaded by images which confirm and reinforce the myths of society. Images of the market place; images that competition promotes achievement; images that material possessions buy happiness; images that it is OK to behave in self-interested and destructive ways; images that it is more important for a wife to have a paid job than to provide unpurchasable psychological support for her family; images that the main problems to be tackled involve infringements of property and ownership rights rather than the much more general problems of society; images of the legitimacy of domination by military might; and images depicting members of the public service and the teaching profession as loafers. Book characters, film stars, and advertising models all project an image of ourselves, our friends, and our neighbours which hardly resembles what we see in a mirror or when we look around us. We come to believe that we look like something other than we do, could look like that (if only we had the clothes, the perfume, the food, the cars, the lifestyle), once did look like that,

or might have looked like that. It is the ultimate in self-deception. *We ourselves* are nothing like what we take ourselves to be. Our society is nothing like what these books and films have presented it as being and led us to believe that it is.

Academic "research" seems to be more designed to legitimise the allocation of favourable positions in academe to those with pleasing linguistic skills than to advancing understanding of, and finding ways of tackling, important problems. Little time is available for serious research and both the terms of employment and the way in which both research proposals and the results of research activities are evaluated preclude it. Out of every 1000 publications in the journals of the American Educational Research Association only about 20 contain new data and in only 5 is the data substantial. Most of the rest re-arrange old material in response to the need to publish or perish. The investigative research-orientation of the universities is a fiction. There are, for example, very few studies in the early-childhood education area. Yet the vast enterprise of Headstart is based on conclusions drawn from a study of just eighteen children. The (highly debatable) conclusions drawn from the few studies carried out are reproduced in hundreds of textbooks and thousands of journal articles. Hundreds of thousands of academic staff throughout the world teach them to millions of "students". There is a huge inverted pyramid based on a few people doing what the whole upside-down pyramid claims to be doing. And the picture is as true in the physical and biological sciences as it is in the social sciences.

An authoritative — really authoritarian — image of science is projected by its teachers so that it is possible to choke off those with enquiring minds and those interested in generating new ways of looking at things — even those interested in forging anti-theses, essential though these things are to the genuine advance of science. This unscientific image of science then comes to pervade the "scientific" community, so that the peer review process eliminates most proposals to do genuinely scientific — enquiring, adventuring — work as "unscientific". The publication process places a premium on the number of references cited and wordcraft instead of on the advance in understanding that has been achieved. And the time-scales of contract research preclude thought and place a premium on reports which give the impression of being "thorough" and "authoritative" (by reviewing literature) instead of advancing understanding.

The academic functioning of universities has come to mirror that of commercial life. The name of the game is to obtain funds. This depends on the same principles as survival in the commercial world. One must focus on the presentation of the proposals. One must sell oneself as something other than one is. One must make false claims. One must make political contacts. One must generate creative advertising and publicity. One must secure contracts. One must run down competitors. This message is communicated to students in no uncertain terms. The universities no longer offer students — through direct acquaintance — a vision of, and insight into, an alternative society.

The way "policy research" institutes in particular are funded and supervised breeds a tendency to avoid asking awkward questions and a tendency to echo the concerns, ideas, and phrases of paymasters so as to secure further funding.

The remarkable thing is that, in Britain (less so in America and Japan) many people notice the bogus nature of the claims of educators and researchers and generalise their cynicism — their not entirely articulate observation that nothing is what it is said to be — to other institutions in society.

Our point here is, not that there has been a conspiracy to arrange things in the way that has been described (for we have already discussed the extent to which that may have been the case — and have seen that, while there is indeed some evidence of conspiracy, most of what happens does not occur as a result of any overall plan). It is that the situation which is so obviously dysfunctional in the long-term has evolved as a result of feedback loops which

operate to perpetuate the system as it is. The most remarkable things we have seen are: (i) The way in which the system is maintained by a nested set of myths or fictions in which things are typically the opposite of what they are said to be, and (ii) The way in which the educational system perpetuates the society we have by both teaching convenient myths and actually operating in exactly the opposite way to that embedded in the most widely accepted beliefs about it.

At the most fundamental level, this network of interlocking myths and hidden systems processes make it very difficult indeed to conduct any rational discussion of what should be done. Yet — despite the dangers inherent in exposing them and the difficulties of doing anything about them — we ignore these myths and systems processes at our peril.

### **EXAMPLES OF THINGS NOT BEING WHAT THEY ARE SAID TO BE FORM THE FIELD OF SOCIAL MANAGEMENT**

The term "Rational Planning" is typically used to refer to incomplete and irrational planning. It typically refers to a process from which the most important considerations — such as the preservation of the planet and improvement of the quality of life — have been eliminated. It ignores needs and feelings which are hard to make explicit and quantify — such as the reactions of tenants to high-rise housing. Planners tend to pay insufficient attention to considerations which cannot be quantified and weighted one against the other. They tend to regard certain considerations — such as a tenants concern with the sort of person who might become his or her neighbours as *illegitimate*. By dismissing such considerations as irrelevant and "subjective", planning has often become anything but rational - sometimes, dare one say it, less complete and less responsive to "non economic" needs than the market processes it sought to replace.

"Health care" is typically its opposite. The term health "care" would be expected to imply effective long-term measures. But the kinds of thing we are most commonly offered do not encompass such things as (i) the re-organisation of cities and workplaces to reduce stress, (ii) the re-organisation of agriculture to reduce the use of pesticides, nitrates, hormones, preservatives, and antibiotics, or (iii) the re-design of manufacturing industry to reduce the emission of pollutants which destroy the ozone layer and thus lead to the admission of radiations which destroy the immune system and lead to cancer. The fact that so very few evaluation studies have ever been carried out itself shows that the system is not primarily about care. Instead, we are offered a system which is primarily about creating a demand for technological devices, drugs, and chemicals which add still further to stress and, through pollution (including the worldwide diffusion through the atmosphere, the seas, and the waterways of minute, but highly damaging quantities of manufactured drugs) to the creation and perpetuation of disease.

It is apparent for all to see that the "defence" system is primarily about destruction - including the almost-certain annihilation of the "defender" himself. But, perhaps more importantly, it is about creating useless work (producing rapidly obsolescent products) for highly educated manpower and thus sustaining capitalist economies.

The word "Civilisation" is used to refer to the most uncivilised societies the planet has ever known — societies which ruthlessly destroy their own poor, other peoples, the natural order, and the planet.

The phrase "Law and Order" (which conjures up an image of state legislation and enforcement designed to prevent people killing, and stealing from, each other) actually refers to arrangements which facilitate state violence. The latter results in death, maiming, theft, and suffering exceeding in its effects — by several hundred orders of magnitude — what could possibly have arisen from person-to person violence and theft. It facilitates the concealment

and legitimisation of gross flouting of law by elites, and, in particular, the entrapment of the population into a set of thoughtways which advance the interests of a small group of capitalists and politicians.

Staff selection, appraisal, and "development" procedures are not about selecting the most competent personnel and promoting the growth of competence but about selecting and promoting those who are best at hype and least likely to question the workings of the system and fostering the belief that "the best" public-spirited people have been promoted into the most important positions.

The word "community", despite its warm, localistic, human connectedness connotations, is used to refer to places where no one knows anyone and in which "welfare" workers — social workers, doctors and teachers — are inquisitors and persecutors bent on instilling other values and who, although crucial to the survival of the "community", do not live in it.

### **EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD OF GOVERNMENT**

Here we have seen that democracy (presented as open government of the people, by the people, and for the people) largely refers to a process through which leaders, by controlling information, the presentation of issues, and the use of slogans and symbols, control the people (although they themselves may be puppets of organisations like the Trilateral Commission). As authors like Chomsky, George, Hancock, and Janicke have shown, it refers to a process which enacts legislation on behalf of the TNCs (including the banks), which conceals the misdemeanours of the TNCs and the public service, which restricts and controls the flow of information, which generates and communicates disinformation, which prevents the generation of counter information, and which deprives people with other than mainstream priorities and views of the resources they would need to collect the information needed to substantiate their case and publicise their thoughts.

It is said that "Capitalism has triumphed", that "Communism is everywhere on the run". Yet the policies enacted by the Thatcher government in Britain reveal something different. They are best understood as the swansong of Capitalism. They reveal a government living way beyond its means — living off its capital by selling assets — to create the impression that the system is working. They reveal a government which is terrified of the public, of the opposition, of the enquiring minds of the 1960's generation — a government bent on destroying the right to know so that no one can find out what is going on. They reveal a government determined to make it illegal for anyone who knows anything to tell. They reveal a government so terrified of the consequences of its own actions that it has introduced more, and more powerful, legislation enabling it to roundup dissenters and usurp control than any British government before it. They reveal a government determined to harness the mythologies which surround the "educational" system in such a way as to ensure that it performs its contrary, sociological, function even more effectively. They reveal a government hell-bent on entrapping the middle class in the system by encouraging them to buy shares and invest in pensions and exposing them to horrifying visions of what will happen to them if they do not join the system. Correctly understood, therefore, the claims and policies of the Thatcher government and its successor are those of a capitalist minority who have become aware that their days are numbered and who are already engaged in a fight to perpetuate their position, world view, and ideology at any cost. The situation is the opposite of what the rhetoric claims.

Heads of government and governmental organisations seem to be appointed for their ability to present a public facade, to hitch self-interested, but publicly destructive, policies onto issues of widespread public concern. Hancock (1992) gives numerous examples of the

way Barber Conable, as head of the World Bank, attached its West-interested policies to a professed concern with the Third World, appearing to acknowledge that the Bank's policies had in the past not, after all, worked as well in the interests of the Third World as had been hoped but that – contrary to all the evidence — everything was now going to be put right.

These thoughts prompt the reflection that Mrs. Thatcher's *one-liners* — which at one point seemed to reveal an incredible ability to latch onto vital issues but then offer exactly the wrong solution — may need to be read backwards. The second parts — the statements of policy — are to be read first. These define policies which are to be pursued for reasons which are not disclosed. They are then hooked onto vital issues of widespread public concern, which are then presented as the reasons for the policies. An analysis of Reagan's policies reveals that, whereas Mrs. Thatcher consistently did what she said she was going to do, Reagan consistently did the opposite. In a similar vein, heads of electricity boards and oil companies continually mouth environmental concerns and give "assurances" ... while their companies do exactly the opposite.

The most far-reaching example of the claim that nothing is what it seems to be and that what happens is determined by hidden systems processes has been put forward by Robb (1989, 1991). He suggests that the invisible institutions (by which he does not mean the deliberately created man-made organisational arrangements which we use to manage our affairs) — like the marketplace and the educational system — which control what happens in our society function in the "dysfunctional" way we have documented, supported by the kinds of mythology we have reviewed, precisely in order to release and consume *freeable energy* as effectively as possible, thereby promoting entropy according to the second law of thermodynamics. His claim is that living beings reduce energy differentials much more effectively than micro-molecular processes. Human beings are — as organisms — themselves extremely energy-inefficient, and the globally "destructive" activities they initiate are extraordinarily good at releasing and consuming vast amounts of energy, thus reducing energy differentials. Both the institutional arrangements human beings have been induced to establish and the mythologies developed to support them were selected to promote entropy. Thus we provide work for idle hands, not because those hands are thereby better used to the benefit of all, nor because their idleness leads to poverty which inflicts low quality of life on those concerned in a way which is liable to rebound on us all, but because the work they do directly consumes energy and because they contribute to the development of institutional arrangements which will consume even more energy.

If Robb is right, we would be *interfering* with physical processes — if not the 'Gaian' processes the planet has established to keep itself alive — if we sought to stem the "damage" we are doing to the planet. That damage is what we were "designed" and developed to effect. Thus, we really do need to encourage all peoples to ape the behaviours and thoughtways of the most destructive and inefficient "economies" in the world. All things die, the planet as a living organism (Gaia) among them. On the other hand, if we are really clever, we could work *with* nature and accelerate entropy production in ways which prolong our own, and the planet's, viability.

On the other hand, should we decide that it would, after all, be right and proper to seek to perpetuate our species and the life of Gaia, Robb's theory points to the need to intervene in ways which are very different to those most commonly advocated. We would have to organise things such that our own actions not *only* promote entropy but also serve human ends at the same time.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROPOSITIONS

We must beware of adopting a holier-than-thou attitude, for those of us who have been concerned with the environment frequently find ourselves using words in ways which mean their opposite. Thus we usually discuss pollution as if it were "out there" — and not in our own minds and bodies. We externalise the environment. We attend to the external and not to ourselves. Thus Dorota Biela (1993, 1994) has shown that, if we attend to our own bodies and feelings, natural family planning has much more to commend it, ecologically, than any technological solution commercially available. Technology encourages us to do things to ourselves regardless of consequences for our bodies, the environment, and society. Employment of technology to solve our problems lowers our sensitivity to our feelings — the very thing which would provide us with a means of knowing whether we were living in harmony with nature. There is a double jeopardy here: An unwillingness to rely on sensitivity to our bodies leads us to adopt expensive capitalistic solutions. This puts money into TNCs and encourages all the exploitation, waste, and destruction associated with them. These disbenefits occur both in the rubber plantations and in the whole network of transportation, manufacture, and marketing associated with market processes. It would be much cheaper, much more cost-effective, and much less destructive of both the external environment and human beings to teach people natural methods of family planning. More importantly, it would create ecologically aware individuals. Above all it would have the benefit of encouraging people to be sensitive to the feelings which would help them to answer the question of whether they personally were working with God/Gaia, and thus break the preoccupation with the tendency to unthinkingly follow dictates coming from the Church, the State, or other authority.

### **AN EMERGENT INSIGHT**

Only half-jokingly, one could say that there is almost a socio-psychological law that every intentional action ultimately produces its opposite ... a Calvinistic quest for hard work and austerity produces affluence; defence systems produce self-destruction; institutionalised education produces trained incapacity and the promotion of the incompetent; market mechanisms designed to enable the individual to make his feelings felt result in more centralised control by still fewer people; and centralised law and order produces state violence and illegality. What this means is that poorly understood systems processes tend to undo and corrupt the effects of well-intentioned human action. Here, therefore, we have further evidence to reinforce our emphasis on the need to devote more attention to the study of such systems.

### **A LINKED DIFFICULTY: THE POWER OF WORDS**

Words have enormous power, not only to conceal and deceive, but also to stimulate actions quite different from — and often entirely opposite to — the overt connotations of the messages. These effects are produced by a — perhaps intuitive — understanding of either or both the communication process and the way hidden sociological processes will interact with the actions stimulated by the words to produce effects quite other than those overtly intended.

To illustrate the point, we may recall the way the Thatcher government undermined serious investigative programmes at the BBC by initiating apparently entirely justifiable enquiries into its cost-effectiveness and of the way it undermined attempts to nurture high-level competencies in schools by introducing measures ostensibly concerned with cost-effectiveness and public accountability. It is also useful to recall the way Headstart was *subverted*.

These examples illustrate a number of problems which include:

(i) the way in which words can be used to (a) evoke images and emotions which provoke actions which have never been explicitly mentioned, let alone encouraged, against targets who have never been mentioned, or which facilitate or stifle social or economic processes which have never been mentioned and which are, on the surface, unrelated to the topic being discussed.

(ii) the way in which groups who owe their position to their facility with words are able to perpetuate their position — and a kind of society which operates to their advantage — without really thinking about it. This process reveals a self-generating sociological process which somehow depends on wordcraft. It differs from (i) in that appears to involve little deliberate manipulation and is thus much harder to deal with.

The question of how words are used to release emotions and evoke behaviour is embedded in a wider set of questions about the way in which slogans, images, flags, and symbols release emotions and orchestrate action. These processes have been little studied by psychologists, yet they involve some of the most powerful forces controlling human behaviour. Leaders who can release energy into action by linking it to idealistic goals (like the achievement of liberty, equality, and fraternity or the promotion of causes like Christianity, Islam, or Communism) or to the belief that societal problems are attributable to certain social groups — such as the bourgeoisie, the Jews, or Serbs — can unleash enormous forces for good and evil. What is remarkable is not the ability of leaders skilled in these techniques to manipulate the way issues are perceived and to set up hierarchical structures which depend on the use of rewards and punishments for their effective operation. Rather it is the way in which enormous amounts of energy are released — even at very junior levels — into activities which lead to more extreme interpretations of what the policy implies and to the personal invention of "better" ways of pursuing these policies. The leader need only set the general direction. Mao's ability to release the invention of ways of pursuing absurd policies ranging from the denunciation of neighbours for trivial "offences against the people" to the manufacture of steel in every village was based more on the power of words than fear of the sword. The power of words and symbols to release hatreds between neighbours who have lived together for years is conspicuous in what was previously Yugoslavia, but was readily apparent in countries which were occupied by the Nazis during the Second World War. Given but little inducement, people flock to denounce their neighbours instead of collaborating with them to resist oppression.

But it must not be thought that it is only leaders who reap benefits from a facility with words. We have seen that middle class people use word-based success in the educational system and word-based justification of the value of their contribution to society to secure disproportionate benefits. When policies are introduced with the apparent intention of benefiting the poor and the Third World, it is the articulate middle classes who define the problem and put themselves forward as the main agents to their solution. They then reap the benefits. It only *looks* as if it is an economic law that the rich get richer. The process parallels that observed among the *priesthood* in the mediaeval church.

Clearly, if we are to find better ways of managing our society, these processes need to be better understood and steps to guard against them need to be invented. Of course, these are among the processes that Adam Smith sought to ameliorate by introducing a marketplace which would enable people to give effect to their feelings without having to articulate them. Unfortunately, he did not solve the problem. It turned out that the tune was called by those who controlled the ticket system — and the rationalisations they put forward for their actions were every bit as deceptive — and relied just as much on magic — as any preceding system.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper we have reviewed numerous examples supporting the following generalizations:

- Words and phrases often mean the opposite of what they seem to mean; Social processes work quite differently — indeed often in exactly the opposite way — to the way in which the (myths of the) culture says they work;
- The actions and emotions elicited by words and phrases are often quite different from those which would be expected from a surface reading of the words;
- The actions elicited by words commonly interact with poorly understood social processes to produce effects quite other than those overtly (but possibly not covertly) intended.

It follows that explicit — verbal — discussion of the steps needed to find a way forward is going to be very much more difficult than is generally anticipated.

The way in which words come to stand for their opposites merits study in its own right — but this apparently academic activity is in fact a vital prerequisite to effectiveness in attempts to place the formulation of policy on a sounder footing. The way in which social action comes to have effects which are the opposite of those intended demands the most careful and continuing analysis. It follows that the progress we need is unlikely to come from public debate which is not informed by inputs from professionals who have made a careful study of the issues. However, since the very processes we have examined mean that those who undertake such work will rapidly be marginalised by the system, this means that we have to make arrangements to *cosset* heretics and mavericks and take their work seriously.

More specifically, finding a way forward is going to involve articulating and challenging many of the myths brought together in this paper. It will also involve the exposure of systems processes which contradict our faith in human rationality and undermine our belief in the goodwill of authority. It will therefore involve serious arguments with many well-meaning people who accept conventional beliefs and thoughtways and are seriously doing their level best to improve society within the constraints of their belief systems. Confronting the myths of which we have spoken will therefore involve considerable distress on the part of some of the most socially committed people in society — people who will often have devoted much of their lives to pursuing their causes. Equally — if not more — seriously, finding a way forward will involve confronting those many people occupying influential positions who have either been moved into those positions because they accept the dominant myths of society or have engineered their own entry to those positions because they value the power they have and know — perhaps intuitively — how to use the verbal processes of which we have spoken to their own advantage. We will also have to confront the *deliberate* use of words to evoke actions which are contrary to the overt content of the message. All of these are difficult and demanding activities. The irony and danger is that they can only be pursued effectively by people who are themselves preoccupied with power and who know — perhaps intuitively— how to use words in a devious way to achieve desired ends. Perhaps the solution to this problem lies in the adoption of personnel procedures which will enable us to select for these tasks only people who are concerned with what McClelland (McClelland D., 1975) has termed socialized rather than personal power.

A more specific question is how to expose and control the activities of governments and TNCs who owe their position and influence to the manipulation of social processes in the way discussed in this and my previous writings but the effects of whose actions are presented as resulting from the operation of market forces. We have seen that the 'real' problem is, not the market mechanism, but what Milbrath has termed the "dominator society", with all that that implies about widely shared public thoughtways and the preoccupations of the public in general and those who hold influential positions in particular.

How are we to bring about the demise of the dominator society? We suggest that the answer involves the development of institutional arrangements which encourage and support those who are able to analyse the effects of policies which are presented as having one purpose, show that they appear to be designed to have quite other effects, and develop alternatives. (This involves recognition, of the right of those concerned to pursue their enquiries and publish and discuss the results without fear of reprisal.) It involves the deliberate creation of mechanisms to collect and disseminate *counter-intelligence*. It involves the introduction of new procedures to assess the motives of those who are to be advanced into positions of power. It involves the establishment of an *inviolable* right, without reprisal, to refuse to follow orders and instructions with which one does not agree. This last is important because the continuance of the regimes we need to fight depends on acceptance of the view that following orders without questioning them is acceptable. In fact, it is not merely not a duty to follow orders, following them without questioning them is unethical. Naturally this means challenging the right of governments to issue orders.

These conclusions reinforce our earlier observation that fighting dominator societies using dominator thoughtways is likely in the end to be self-defeating (for one gets more of the same) ... yet not fighting them allows their continuance. The truth is, of course, that one needs to be able to monitor what different regimes are doing long before the need for open warfare becomes apparent so that they can be stopped by small scale action. Long before they become a social menace we can refuse to engage in activities on which they depend. Finally, we can pick them off as individuals, not nations. Participation, penetration, generation of counter-information and counter-viewpoints, and civil liberties become keywords.

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