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Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age

An **Institute of Ideas** symposium at King's College London, 22 November 2003

Opening panel: **Therapy Culture - general trends**

Speaker:

Frank Furedi professor of sociology, University of Kent, and author of *Therapy Culture*

Respondents:

Adam Curtis maker of *The Century of the Self*, a BBC2 documentary series about how Freud's ideas have been used for social and political purposes

Bill Durodié senior research fellow, Centre for Defence Studies, King's College London

Hilly Janes editor of [Body&Soul](#), *The Times*

Dr David Wainwright University of Bristol Medical School

Chair:

Claire Fox director, Institute of Ideas

Opening remarks and panel discussion

Claire Fox: Good morning everybody. My name is Claire Fox and I'm the director of the Institute of Ideas. I'd like to welcome you all to this symposium. When the Institute of Ideas first launched, which was three and a half years ago now, we had a month of opening conferences and one was entitled 'The Therapeutic Society', which we organised at the Royal Society of Arts. We were delighted to be able to return to this issue prompted by the brilliant and very controversial book by Professor Frank Furedi, which this conference is based on and it's part of the launch of that book. Before we actually start the symposium, I'd like to introduce two of the partners in the event to say a few words. Hilly Janes, editor of *Body&Soul* and Digby Halsby from Routledge.

Hilly Janes: I'm not sure how many of you are familiar with the *Body&Soul* section, which *The Times* launched only 12 weeks ago. The issue you can see today is our 12th issue, so we're a very young section. I'm not sure how Frank will react to this, but we actually have three therapists who write every week. We have the psychoanalyst Darian Leader, who has already debated some of the issues in the section and whose column you can read today. We also have Irma Kurtz, the agony aunt, who has written a fascinating piece on what it's like to live with racist parents when you're in a mixed race marriage. I am pleased to say that Andrew Marshall who will be one of our respondents later on is here. He writes a weekly column called 'psychobabble', which teaches people how to use therapeutic jargon. So if you've ever called anybody a narcissist or been accused of that yourself, read Andrew's column and you'll find out what you're *really* saying. Virginia Ironside, who writes for us regularly, is also here and so is Philip Hodgson so if anybody thinks *Body&Soul* is an anti-therapy product, I think you've probably got the idea by now that we're not.

It's a great day for us because it's the first time that we've jumped into bed with anybody else, if you like. It's the first time we've been media sponsors for an event like this and I'm delighted that there's such a good turnout and that obviously we're going to be in such interesting and

stimulating and expert company. So I'd like to thank Claire for the opportunity of that and of course Frank for writing a book that's provoked such a lot of stimulating debate already. We had a huge reaction when we offered some free tickets to our readers for this event and if you are here today I would love to meet you. I hope you enjoy what promises to be a stimulating and probably sparky event. Thank you.

Claire Fox: Thank you, Hilly. We were delighted obviously to be working with *Body & Soul* on this event. I'd now like to welcome Digby Halsby from Routledge who have obviously published *Therapy Culture* and who are organising this event with us.

Digby Halsby: Good morning everyone. Speaking on behalf of the publishing company Routledge, I would like to say a couple of thank yous. Thank you to Claire and the Institute of Ideas for organising this event and to Frank for actually writing the book. Working on the publicity in the run-up to the publication of this book, what really struck me was the real depth of emotions that this book inspired and it seems to have really polarised opinion on this issue. The many column inches, I think, really give a testament to how much of a crucial issue this really is and I think this should really inspire some interesting debate today. Thank you very much.

Claire Fox: Thanks to both our partners. I want to have one light rider before I open this symposium. The first thing is, there is always a danger when you organise a conference discussing therapy culture that it's simply interpreted in a very narrow way as therapy and therapists whereas the point of controversy and the interesting aspect of Frank Furedi's book is the idea of a therapeutic culture that we live in. I would hope that we'll be able to broaden out and look in some depth at what that concept means rather than it either being a defence of or a therapy bashing session, which would not be interesting. The second thing, that I suppose has to be a bit of a warning is that this isn't a therapeutic conference! So much as I'm interested in your personal problems, I'd rather you queued up and saw *The Times'* therapists who are all here, rather than necessarily sharing them with us....

In this opening session, Professor Furedi will give us an overview for about 20 minutes or so and then we'll have a discussion with the panel, and I will now introduce them.

Professor Frank Furedi is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent. He has written widely on history, sociology and politics. He is the author of two of the biggest zeitgeist books of recent years I think. One of them, *The Culture of Fear: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectations*, really raised a whole discussion on our risk averse society. More recently, *Paranoid Parenting: Why Ignoring Experts May Be Best for Your Child*. Again, another cutting edge book that created an enormous amount of public debate. His next is going to be on the role of public intellectuals and as I think Frank is probably one of the country's leading intellectuals, we're delighted to be involved with the launch of his book.

Hilly Janes is the editor of the new *Body&Soul* supplement in *The Times*. She's a former features editor from the *Independent* and has also written on health, food, relationships and parenting for broadsheet papers and national magazines.

Bill Durodie is senior research fellow at the Centre for Defence Studies here at King's College, and in many ways is our host here today. He is currently project coordinator of the ESRC-funded 'Domestic Management of Terrorist Attacks Programme', which is an inter-institutional and inter-disciplinary project, which straddles international relations, law, political science, psychiatry and sociology. Bill's publications include 'Perception & Threat; Why Vulnerability-Led Responses Will Fail' and, with Professor Simon Wessley, is the author of 'Resilience or Panic? The Public's Response to Terrorist Attack'. As we know, the discussion of terrorist attacks is quite in the news at this moment so Bill is one of the people you often see on the news or hear on the radio.

Adam Curtis is director of the BAFTA-award winning documentary series *The Mayfair Set* and, more pertinently for this conference, in 2002 produced the four-part documentary series *The Century of the Self*, which examined the growth of mass consumer society in Britain and the US, and the influence of Freud's ideas and techniques on society over the last century

and how they've been applied politically and kind of came up with the notion of 'the all-consuming self'.

Dr David Wainwright is a research fellow in social medicine at Bristol University Medical School. He will be speaking after lunch on the issue of work stress, which is the topic of his recent book.

Now, Frank Furedi:

Frank Furedi: I want to take this opportunity to clear up some misconceptions that have already been created around the book, because it would be nice if I had a chance to debate with people ideas that I kind of believe in rather than ideas that I'm not particularly opinionated about.

I was fascinated by the fact that some critics have called the book anti-emotional. Of course, people who know me will know I'm not a stranger to emotions by any means, and that in fact the book isn't against emotion. One of the arguments is that therapy culture is far more hostile and suspicious of emotion than we used to be in different circumstances.

We have this language today of positive and negative emotions which means that we can stigmatise certain emotions and make them the target of therapeutic intervention. Anger is the best example. It can be a good emotion rather than something that has to be managed all the time. Anger management is, to me, an emotionally illiterate way of dealing with what is a problem of existence rather than a target of psychology.

I also want to make very clear that therapy culture is not about therapy, and I was quite surprised that a lot of people, including the British Association of Counsellors took it that the book was about them. Actually what it's all about is not what happens in a therapists' offices but outside of them – the impact a meaning system has on society. That's what I'm interested in.

The real issue is the fact that increasingly in society, therapy has become a cultural phenomenon, something that incites us to interpret our day-to-day existence along particular lines according to a very clear meaning system. It gives us a vocabulary to make sense of our day-to-day existence and is therefore very powerful. Therapy culture is not the only cultural influence that affects our lives. I think it's probably the most distinct influence of 21st century society and is also becoming increasingly powerful, particularly in the way that it leads to influencing our day-to-day relations with each other.

In fact, that's the reason I wrote the book, because I'm concerned with the impact it has on the relationships between human beings, both within and outside the family, in communities and in workplaces. It's a discussion about the cultural manifestations of therapy and how the therapeutic frames everyday human experience. One of the things I've tried to argue in the book is that it tells a distinct story about personhood.

Today, we have a clear story about what a human being is, what we expect a human being to be able to handle. It's a story about how people should deal with pain, disappointment, adversity. It's a story about how much we should love. Ultimately, it's a story about whether we should be passionate or not. Or if we should be involved with what therapeutic culture tells us to be, which is a process of cultural cooling where we become distant from each other in case we get too hurt.

One of things I argue in the book and it's one of the few things I'm very certain about, is that it offers us a story where the human condition is defined by its vulnerability. It becomes the key metaphor by which we understand ourselves and actually we believe that individuals lack the capacity to cope with things. And you often find that statements and claims are increasingly made in the language of vulnerability, and it even has changed the usage of the English language. So we often talk about children communities, women as being vulnerable. But vulnerable to what?

There was a time, when we used the word, that it had some kind of objective link to it. It's just enough to say that you're vulnerable, because the minute you raise the question 'vulnerable to what?', the only answer our culture comes up with is 'vulnerable to everything'. That is ultimately the story that we're told.

I was really struck by this the other day as I was going into the bank. There was a group of trade unionists that I walked up to. They said do you want to sign our petition? I asked what it was for and they said 'Well, all these jobs are going to India, (which I was a bit suspicious of because I don't think that necessarily is a problem), and we live in a vulnerable community.'

And that was the trade unionists' way of describing themselves. They didn't say we need more money, better conditions and so on, as they might have done in a different era. It was entirely the language of therapy they were using to make their claims, because as far as they understood it, the way you put a convincing argument forward is by making an appeal to some kind of therapeutically related issue. I thought the kind of usage of the language and the anticipation the language had about the kind of response you'd receive very much sums up the way that claims-making takes place in contemporary society.

One of the problems I have with therapy culture is that it tells human beings that we cannot and should not expect to be able to handle challenges and adversity on our own. In a sense it incites us to feel ill. I consider therapy culture to be a public health problem. Particularly with children – the minute a child is remotely energetic you get the Ritalin tablets out, give them an overdose of Ritalin. All these people coming to schools saying 'these children are depressed', whereas they're quite entitled not to be happy that day.

The more you tell university students exams are stressful and you're gonna have an exam syndrome, the more they freak out. It's actually an invitation to feel ill. If you don't believe me, come down to my university around exam time where all these young men and women are actually feeling ill and fragile because they have an exam. The reason they are like that is not that examinations have become more difficult, that students are less intelligent than in a previous era. It's because of the way that the challenge of taking exams is now framed. The expectations of being able to cope with a three hour exam is now seen in terms that are very, very different than in the past.

I was having a debate with some Australian therapist, who also thought the book was about him, and was very much insulted when he realised I wasn't talking about him. He was getting more and more agitated and points a finger at me and says 'you know, Frank, the problem with you is that you don't realise that there are a lot of damaged people out there. You don't actually talk about them'.

And of course there are a lot of damaged and ill people. I don't think there are necessarily any more now than in the past. I just made the point: yes, there are some damaged people in our society who probably do need help. They are a minority. But I'm much more concerned about the damage this culture causes the rest of society, a damage that is actually far greater because it's systematic, it's institutionalised and it continually promotes a process whereby informal networks, personal relationships are continually under threat, under compromise, where, in fact, children already at the age of three are now becoming the objects and targets of medical intervention. I'm much more concerned about the damage that causes, which is actually never discussed or acknowledged than anything else.

One of the reasons this culture is so successful and has been accepted and internalised by so many of us - I don't think anybody in this room is above or transcends this culture, I think you and I have got a lot of that in ourselves – is because in today's circumstances when we lack a common system of meaning, therapeutic culture gives us a system of meaning. It actually makes sense of our individual circumstances. It gives us a very clear direction. It explains why we behave the way we behave. It links us to our own family narratives of what we were like as children and it makes sense in a way that almost nothing else does – religion, ideology and science do not seem to have the capacity to actually situate us within a system of meaning which links the self to that. I think that's why it's so powerful.

I think the downside of this, and this is a lot of what the book is all about, is that it encourages the professionalisation of everyday life and to me it is that which is the main issue here. One of the distinct arguments of the book, and it's something I'm interested in hearing your opinion about, is the explanation of why we have this culture, why it has become so powerful, because I just assume that it exists.

And a lot of my co-thinkers who often think a long similar lines often point to things like the decline of religion, tradition, the role of individualisation, fragmentation, uncertainty, social mobility. And I think all of these are factors that I wouldn't want to ignore, but my argument is that it's not any of these influences that allow therapy culture to be so influential. Because religion has been in decline for 200 years and so has tradition. We have been fragmented from each other for a very long time.

I've been trying to suggest that what we have is fragmentation and individuation that is mediated through professional intervention, where so much of our life is refracted to us through the professional, through the mentor, the facilitator. I mean, these days you can't have a little seminar of 16 people without there being 'the facilitator'. So much of our everyday existence is mediated through them that our lives become professionalised. And the downside is that it continually encourages us to formalise our personal relationships.

The more our everyday life is filtered through the professional, the more you and I as lovers, as man and woman, parent and child, or as uncle and aunt, or as workmates, neighbours, the more these relationships become formal, codified. They take the character of a transaction where you act according to an informal contract. That is one of the main downsides. It is the formalisation of relationships that is responsible for what I think is the most destructive process today – the disorganisation of the private sphere.

One of the important things about therapy culture is that it both feeds off the disorganisation of personal relationships and actually consolidates it at the same time. We are continually encouraged to become suspicious of each other, where healthy relationships of dependency – because we all need to be dependent on each other – become compromised by the whole process. And I think, ultimately, it is the way we become estranged from one another, whether in the place of work or in neighbourhoods or within the home, that is ultimately the most destructive consequence of this.

It's interesting, these days that when we face adversity we need help. Call me simple, but as I understand the human experience, it is through facing adversity that real resilience is cultivated and established. It is when push comes to shove and you and your lover or friends or community are up against the wall, when you're facing that pressure, it is at that point that real relationships, those unforgettable bonds of camaraderie actually become forged. And all you've got to do is talk to people who have been through the Second World War or a local disaster, or a student occupation, people who've organised demonstrations – where they've faced pressure – and you find that the bonds that were forged under those circumstances really withstand the test of time. They are really very powerful.

Today what we are told is that's being in denial. When you have a little disaster in the community, an oil spillage or something else, you have more counsellors than rats appearing on the scene. Somebody dies in a school, what happens immediately? It's almost pornographic. All these people just descending to give support and give help. And it's precisely at that moment in time, when you're facing adversity in that direct, up-front kind of a way, that the real organic relationships that will be able to give the people the strength to cope with things are being formed. Yes, they may need help, two, three months down the road. But at that moment, if you go in and intervene, you actually sabotage, you short-circuit the process through which the community or those individuals are able to establish resilience.

And I think that is why there is so much at stake in this discussion. Because it is which side of the debate we're on, how we interpret this development, that will ultimately tell us what kind of policy we support, what kind of politics we opt for and, ultimately, it will tell us what we think of each other as human beings, where we think the answers lie, where we think the future is.

It's because of this that I'm particularly passionate, regardless of whether you agree with me or not, that we get a chance to properly debate these questions and ensure that this process doesn't simply occur and continue to be institutionalised in this kind of semi-secret, under-the-surface kind of a way, but is actually tackled and discussed and ultimately clarified. Thank you.

Claire Fox: Thank you Frank. I'm going to ask all of the panel to give me very brief thoughts just to kick things off and then I've obviously got a number of questions. Adam, your initial thoughts or interests in this area.

Adam Curtis: OK, very briefly. What I want pick up upon is the question of why this has happened. I think it is a phenomenon that is happening. It has very little to do with therapy itself. It is about a particular type of way of looking at human emotions and humans as fuelled by particular types of emotions, which has got into many of our institutions like Human Resources, Medicine, the Law and Politics. That's how people are conceived of and talked to.

I just wanted to briefly talk about the argument for it. The people who think this is a good thing, say this: 'Look, this is an extension of democracy. For the first time, professional elites, managerial elites, political elites are actually listening to what people feel – how they feel about themselves'. And the real big phenomenon about this is that people like it. They really do. It's seen as a sort of populist thing – they're listening to us, they're taking account of our feelings, they're not talking down to us as they used to do.

I mean, where I work, in TV, this is very, very powerful. All these programmes which allow people to tell us what they feel. It's seen as an extension of democracy. This is very, very powerful. And also, it actually empowers people because the *old* managerial elites don't get it. They don't get your feelings. So therefore you can sort of have one over on them and you can talk to any human resources person and they will tell you this. It's a tweak in the nose.

Now, that's the argument for it. My other reaction is that Frank's right – it is a simplification of what humans are emotionally. It's taking out particular types of emotions. In a way that even therapy itself doesn't. It's a simplification of therapy. So, anger becomes one particular emotion, appropriate only to certain circumstances. Now that's actually not an extension of democracy because it's not a question of diversity, it's about a growing conformity of feeling.

And, really, the question I wanted to ask, which I don't really know the answer to, is if this really about management of peoples' feelings by simplifying them and it's not democracy, it's not allowing diversity, then in whose interest is it? I mean, is it, are these new elites emerging who are managing our emotions for something else as opposed to the old patrician elites and, if so, who are they? What sectors of society do these new 'emotionalists' represent?

Or is it just a generational change within the old elites who are noting that there's an extension of democracy and self-confidence going on and just working out different ways of talking and conceiving of people and managing society and in a way of simplifying people. That really is my question that I wanted to ask.

Claire Fox: Bill, your take on this?

Bill Durodie: Obviously, as Claire indicated, I coordinate a programme here called 'The Domestic Management of Terrorist Attacks' and that's really investigating the UK policy response to the events of September the 11th 2001 and one of the things that is *the* most striking in all of our work so far in looking at what the public authorities have been up to in the last two years is really to understand and notice the extent to which, for the first time, British authorities are extremely concerned about the public response to a terrorist attack were it to occur on British soil again, and that concern verges, really, on fear and paranoia in many instances, and they are very interested in commissioning work from psychiatrists to look at the psychological impact of emergencies and things like that.

Now, you might think that seems highly appropriate and sensible, but you really do have to ask yourself as well the extent to which it is a new phenomenon. Because, certainly that was not the case during 30 years of war with the IRA.

The other thing I'd say is that it's fairly clear looking at all manner of emergencies that people are actually resilient – they do get on, get up and carry on with their lives. Panic is very rare in disasters, as was evident in the evacuation of the World Trade Centre, and I think in many ways what we're seeing is that it's not so much that a terrorist attack in this country necessarily – obviously it's one of its aims to corrode social bonds and to fragment people and make them worried – but I rather prefer to invert that relationship and see the extent to which a terrorist attack will actually *reveal* the extent to which social bonds have been fragmented, people feel very isolated and their vulnerabilities have been heightened by all of the professionalisation that Frank's been talking about.

Claire Fox: Thanks Bill. Hilly, I know, is maybe slightly more sceptical...

Hilly Janes: Yes, I do have quite a lot of difficulties with what Frank is saying. And I'm not an expert in any kind of therapy or I'm not an academic, but I have spent about 20 years watching this trend in culture emerge through my job as a journalist.

What I find difficult about Frank's arguments is that they don't seem to acknowledge that the world has changed enormously, that we don't live in the same kind of world at all that we lived in before this kind of culture existed. He mentioned the bank staff who are worried about all their jobs being done in India, which actually is quite true – they've probably got every reason to be worried. But the reason they feel worried and vulnerable is because now they've seen what happens to communities in sectors of employment which disappear and vanish because we've seen that happening in the manufacturing sector, in shipyards, in the coal industry in south Wales and so on and it's not a very jolly prospect, is it? No wonder they feel vulnerable and anxious about that.

And I think he's exaggerating grossly about the number of therapists and counsellors there are in schools. I've got school-age children and the only examples I've seen of that have been extremely useful and have kept teenage kids who are really seriously going off the rails stay in the education system because they've had learning mentors.

Children *are* victims of bullying. I think it's a good thing that we now understand that and that people who have been bullied in the past are allowed and encouraged to talk about it. I don't see what the opposite of that has to offer really. What's the opposite of that? That you put up and shut up?

Again, he talks about students being anxious about exams. The world that students live in now is so different from the time that Frank and I went to university. You know, students are loaded with debt – they have to work as well as study. This didn't happen to Frank and me, we were part of a much more privileged generation. A lot of them for example who live in the south east have no chance to ever leave home because they can't afford it. That's a very different kind of world and if they feel that their exams are important, perhaps it is because they are. They need to pass them to be able to pay all that money back and get a decent job.

He's talked about the break-down of religion. What I feel is happening now is that you don't have to be...if you live in Ireland now you don't have to be necessarily a Catholic or a Protestant. You can now be in this country a Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Buddhist, shamanist...I think that's great, very liberating and taps into what Adam has been saying about democracy.

Also, what I call into question is this idea that the swarms of counsellors that go into schools after a disaster or whatever are short-circuiting the bonding process. Maybe there is evidence for that, but I'd like to know where he's got it from. What the studies have shown and how, really, you can prove that.

I agree with him on the professionalisation of relationships. It's worrying and a bit sad, but, on the other hand, if you look at the way people are increasingly turning towards alternative therapy here, why they don't go to their doctor anymore, they go to their osteopath or their iridologist or their reflexologist. Again, I can't prove it, but working on this section, I can tell you that one of the most important reasons they go is because if they find a sympathetic therapist whom they can talk to, it works. It makes them feel better. It may be nothing to do with the stones or needles. A lot of it has to do with therapeutic process of being able to talk to someone. That puts the NHS in trouble really, because how come GPs can't offer that? What are they going to do – put you on Prozac? Is that a good idea?

So, what too I would like to ask Frank is if he doesn't want therapy culture, what does he want instead and why is it better?

Claire Fox: OK, thanks Hilly. And then, David, just your initial thoughts.

David Wainwright: Frank, when you wrote *Paranoid Parenting*, you made a very compelling argument that children who are over-socialised or wrapped up in cotton wool tend to grow up to be fairly incompetent adults. They don't learn to negotiate risk or manage their relationships properly. I think you also suggested that that's quite a fixed identity, that it's quite difficult for people to actually reverse that in adulthood if they've grown up in that sort of a climate.

Now, it occurs to me that we've got a generation of people under 25 who have grown up absolutely steeped in a culture of emotionalism and a therapeutic culture. I'm wondering if that identity is also fixed and do you see it as something people can easily opt out of? How do you go about dislodging that identity and what does a kind of post-therapeutic identity look like? Because these social, cultural phenomena are always in the process of becoming something else. I wondered if you could tell us what we can expect in the future.

Claire Fox: Thanks David. I want to discuss a couple of these questions. Just to start off with related points. This idea that we live in a different world now and this idea of it is a generational change? There were times when for example you were saying when we face diversity, that's how we develop strong resilience and you gave the example of the Second World War. Obviously, the caricature of your position is that people will say 'You wanna go back to the days when the stiff upper lip existed'. As Hilly said, 'we put up and shut up'. But isn't it the case that there's been a progressive move away from that. Is it a generational thing? Has the world changed?

Frank Furedi: I think the world has changed and the book is about a changing world where identities and meaning systems are no longer able to stay stable. But I think that the way that we think the world has changed is not actually what has happened. Therapeutic culture gives us a picture of the world we are absolutely convinced of, but it can be questioned.

To give you an example, Hilly talked about students in the south-east who are so poor – we are so poor in the 21st century – that they couldn't possibly afford leaving home before 35. They're desperate about examinations. If you actually look at the statistics most of undergraduates money is spent on going down to the bar and getting plastered. You will also find that my generation of students weren't that rich. We would rather live five to a bedsit in fairly uncomfortable circumstances than live with Mummy and Daddy because our aspiration for autonomy overrode everything. We would rather be really poor and slum it.

Whereas today, they flaunt in your face the fact that it's so comfy at home. 'I can even take my girlfriend home, Mummy doesn't mind.' You know, a 28-year-old man. Very sensual experience! I actually think that the idea that the world is so much tougher for students is a cultural myth that we've adopted. Our disposable income in the 21st century is no less, even in London, in the south-east, than 30,40 years ago.

On democratisation, you see the main argument I encountered all the time is this: We no longer live in an age of deference. Apparently, we no longer defer to anybody and superficially that's right. We no longer defer to prince Charles and we no longer defer to the

Tory hierarchy and we no longer defer to the old farts. But we no longer defer to anybody? Is it really the case that when you go out into the real world, deference no longer exists?

All that has happened is that we now defer to different people and to different customs. And I think therapy culture is definitely one institution that we defer to time and time again. The hushed voice when something disturbing, a disturbing drama is on TV. 'If you've been disturbed by this programme, do call up this helpline to help you'. That is an institution that's part and parcel of us. 'If you think a child is in trouble, if you've got the slightest worry about it, do phone up this and please tell us that...'

Actually, when you look at the real situation, our culture is, if anything, even more deferential than it used to be. It's just that we don't recognise the targets that we defer to on a fairly systematic basis. And we flatter ourselves. We think that in the 21st century, unlike the old peasants in the past, we are so liberated and so democratised without realising that all that's happening is that, as Adam was suggesting, even in the workplace we are human resources to be managed along a conformist code of conduct, where our behaviour is carefully regulated in a way that was never the case on a shop floor 50 or 60 years ago.

And who do we defer to? Not the boss, but the human resource manager. And I think we have to recognise that the real world out there isn't as flattering, isn't as democratic as we think it is, but it's probably just as insidious as it was in the past, but it has taken a different form.

Claire Fox: Bill wants to comment.

Bill Durodie: Just one interesting comparison on the extent to which we do or do not live in a different world. Of course, we've just done a paper here comparing responses to the Blitz to responses to the war on terror, which is very revealing in many ways because there are clear parallels as well as differences. And obviously, as Frank says, British society is less coherent and compliant than it was 50 years ago, but I think, above all, it's less confident.

And the people who are the least confident are the people who are in charge and that, in my mind, is the problem. Because if you look at what happened 50 years ago the government was absolutely adamant that they would discourage what they called 'the deep shelter mentality' and that was the idea that during the Blitz you would dig yourself in, cover up and hide away from the war. Because they needed people to get up and get on with ordinary life. You look at the response to September 11th, we are actively encouraged to dig ourselves and hide away from danger, and the more you hide away, the less you know what's going on and as you become disconnected so you become more fearful.

Claire Fox: Adam, anything at this point?

Adam Curtis: What it seems to me is that actually everyone is agreeing on this panel. We're not actually divided by a world where we're saying we're run by emotion and a world where we should be elitist and patrician and deal with each other rationally. Everyone's agreeing we are entering a sort of new world in which feeling and emotions have become the sort of currency of discussion. The real question seems to me is who decides what's a good and a bad emotion.

I was thinking, when I was listening to Frank talking in the end about what, in a sense you were describing as a noble virtue: in adversity, people have courage. They're not victims. So you were describing emotions as well, but you were saying 'Look, these emotions are better than the emotions that trauma counsellors ascribe to you, which is victimhood', which you see as possibly repressive.

So it seems to me that what's going to happen, and this is what you're saying, is that those at the top now don't really understand the complexity of the world we're moving into where feeling becomes the currency of discussion, of how we deal with each other. And the battle is going to be about, in a way, what is a virtuous emotion. What is good and what is bad. And

that is going to be decided on whose interest that emotion really serves, from different points of view.

That nobility, which is what you're talking about, is about taking something into your own hands and doing something about it and changing the world. It's still an emotion, it's still a feeling that drives it. All those revolutionary films that have stirring music. It's about emotion and maybe we've just been through a funny little blip in society where we thought we could be technocratic and just deal with people rationally and organise and plan and we're sort of moving back to that old discussion that the Victorians used to have about 'what is virtue?' 'What are the good virtues?' 'What is noble?' And is whose interest is this nobility? That's really my reaction.

Claire Fox: Hilly just wants to comment.

Hilly Janes: I very much agree with Adam. What worries me about this is this idea of the emotional police. Who are they? Who are is going to decide what emotions are right or wrong? I think we've had a fascinating example over the last few weeks with the case of Margaret Hodge and the young man who was abused in Islington. And for me, what happened there was a very good result. You see how somebody who obviously has been damaged, was in a system that we know did abuse lots of children, still 20 years on being told he's only saying this because he's disturbed and he's bonkers. I think that's a very good example of you know, who are you going to put in charge of this. Margaret Hodge? Is she going to be Minister of Emotions? I hope not.

Claire Fox: Frank, this actually reflects on another thing Adam raised in his introduction, which I would just like you to expand on: whether it is what you're saying. Whether it is sort of like 'who's benefiting from this?' Whether we should have Margaret Hodge in charge of our emotions or not. But also this idea that some people are selecting the emotions. I know that our hosting organisation in fact is running a fascinating course next week in anger management for all their staff and they have to go along and be told how to cope. Obviously Bill is signed up – he certainly needs to! Anyway, the point is: is that what you're saying? That it is this new elite now deciding what's in and what's out? Who is benefiting? You talked about professionalisation. Adam is trying to interrupt...

Adam Curtis: My point is I don't know. It seems to me that Frank is right. The emotional speak within many of these professional, managerial institutions is a very simplified emotional version of human beings, which doesn't create diversity. It *is* about management, it's doing the same old job, but in different ways. Now, is that a new elite emerging? Take the case of the focus group, which is where you go and ask people what they *feel* about politicians.

Now, is that actually just another way of a political elite managing you or is it actually a new version of people which actually suits commerce, selling them things in which power is now mediated in a different way. Is there a new elite or is it just the old elites finding a new way, realising that emotion is here to stay – you can't go back, let's manage them in a different way. Let's talk a new language.

Claire Fox: OK, Frank.

Frank Furedi: I think the reason Adam doesn't know is because *nobody* is benefiting from this. That's one of the ironies of the situation. I think we can point to very important dynamics of generational change and obviously new generations tend to define themselves in contrast to the ones that have gone by. That's always been and the case and you get that sense among younger politicals who flaunt the fact that they're not like the older ones. I think you can point out the specific groups that profit and benefit from this and a lot of my colleagues who agree with me broadly have said that for example the counselling profession or the psychological benefits from this. I think that's nonsense.

They may privately profit from this, but it's not greed or self-interest that drives this whole process. It's got to be something more powerful than that. I think that, at the moment, this is a process that is primarily culturally driven. It is not something that begins in the therapy room

and somehow because of its persuasiveness ends up as a policy that's taken up by the Social Exclusion Unit. It's something that is kind of culturally driven and it feeds of the broad processes that we have discussed earlier on to do with decline of meaning, with the way society is now structured, the way we experience uncertainty. And I think that's precisely why it, in one sense, is so powerful.

And why, at the same time it's not always so palpable. There isn't a therapy party out there that's asking for your vote. There aren't even individuals out there consciously promoting it. I think it's wrong to point a finger at this stage. It may well be the case that 10, 15, 20 years from now, because I think we're in an early beginning of the process – we haven't really begun to see the beginning of the damage it's going to cause. We're at a very early stage cause it's only now that children are being targeted. That's a very new development.

I think that 10 or 15, 20 years from now you will see perhaps people who can be seen to indirectly benefit from this, but I would argue that at the moment we all pay the price for this without exception. We are all of us the victims of this process. Nobody benefits, because in the end even if you're a therapist, do you really want to have a relationship with your lover where you're continually calculating your emotions, having to 'acknowledge what's inside of you' rather than just get on with it and love each other? I think all of us, in some shape or form, especially parents, pay a very, very big price for this.

Claire Fox: OK, thanks. And Bill, very quickly.

Bill Durodie: I think Adam hit on a very important thing, which is the obsession with feeling in all of this discussion, and I just wanted to make a point in relation to Hilly's point about how she goes into schools and doesn't see so many therapists and in fact they're doing a great job. Actually, it's not the therapists you need to be looking for: it's the history teacher who asks students to think about how the Romans *felt* when they did something rather than actually asking them to *think*.

Claire Fox: Just one last thing. I think David asked a very important question, which is actually the question of the day in a way. Is there any room for manoeuvre on this? Hilly has made the point that a lot of these things work because it makes people feel better. Frank's argument, one I have more sympathy with, is that actually we're creating a very fragile generation, but it's very difficult to know what room there is to manoeuvre and I just wanted people's responses to whether they think there was any kick-back to this.

There has been some response to your book, Frank, but you do feel as though it's everywhere and it is very internalised and I just want us to see if it is possible to overcome some of this culturally. Because actually people do, whether we like it or not, now perceive that, even though Hilly said it's great that we recognise bullying in school - when bullying in school can be having been called names or being excluded from friendship groups and children are told they will be damaged if they experience that – that seems to me to be pretty traumatic for them because it means the most trivial, silly aspects of life, they're being told they won't be able to cope with, and at some point you wouldn't be able cope with things if you went through that lack of resilience. So, any last thoughts on that, anyone?

Frank Furedi: I am very optimistic, because most people I encounter, regardless of whether we agree or not, are looking for answers. I think we're all looking for answers in the kind of world we live in and I think it's within ourselves to be able to provide them. One of the reasons I feel particularly confident is because, you know, I'm prepared to bet my £50 against your £1 that the more we do this, the worse off we are so the more we talk about bullying, and the more bullying counsellors that we have and the more we acknowledge bullying, the more bullying becomes a problem.

I mean, since the bullying issue was raised we don't have less bullying in schools. Instead, every parent is obsessed with this so we have more bullying and five years from now you're gonna have to see how much bullying there's going to be. So, acknowledging bullying doesn't solve the problem, it simply frames it and expands it into new areas of life so that people become even more worried about it.

Similarly with therapy. You see, the more you talk about these issues... It doesn't mean that people have better sex lives now because they've been to a therapist, that now, in the 21st century, unlike in the 1950s, we have wonderful sensual experiences and have intense passions because of all this support that we're getting – it just complicates our sex lives and we have even more complicated sex lives than we used to.

I think you find that with all of these things, it doesn't make things better; it just expands it into new areas, and I think a time will come when sensible people will say 'Well, actually I heard this now, I've been supported by a lot of people. The more I'm supported, the more the problem seems to be even more complicated'. How many people you know have actually sorted these things out? Very few. The might say 'Frank, you know, I've really come to terms with my issues' and then six months later new issues emerge which are the same old issues but in a different form, so I think that there's a lot out there.

I just think people should point a finger, argue against it, have the courage of their convictions and not worry about being a little bit unpopular and don't worry about silly charges like being for the stiff upper lip. How silly can you get? Who is for the stiff upper lip these days? It's a very cheap argument that people are forced to use because they cannot actually engage with what's going on now in the 21st century.

Claire Fox: OK, thanks. David?

David Wainwright: I think I'm a little bit more pessimistic than Frank and I think it's because of the way that emotions operate. It's not like encountering political ideology. If somebody has monarchist beliefs you can make a strong argument against that and persuade them, but people experience their emotional life not as a set of ideas that they've opted into, but as something that's very physiological.

Even those people that were howling in the streets after the death of Diana didn't think that they were consciously opting into an ideology, they felt sort of overwhelmed by their feelings. And it seems to me that the sort of therapeutic culture addresses that and it almost takes it out of the range of rational debate really. It is very difficult to talk people out of an emotional response. So I'm not quite as optimistic as you. I wouldn't give up on the idea we should struggle against it but it seems to me quite a difficult one to deal with.

Claire Fox: Well, I hope we can put some rational debate into this. Hilly do you want to say something?

Hilly Janes: I just wanted to go back to the point about bullying and children. The reason schools are far more conscious of this is because they're obliged to be. The department of education and the state system says that all schools must have a bullying policy. Now, I think that's a good thing because it means that they're not allowed, on the one hand, to ignore it totally, which in the past they have been, therefore where there are extreme cases just ignoring it. And it makes them think hard, quite strategically, about how they are going to deal with this problem so I think the idea that, you know, just because you're called 'fatty', the bullying policy is going to be kicked into action. I think that's actually misunderstanding what's going on there.