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Paul Atkinson

Heart & Soul in the Grip of Neo-Liberalism:
What kind of players do we, psychotherapists, want to be?

What’s irritated me about the whole direction of politics in the last 30 years is that it’s always been towards the collectivist society. People have forgotten about the personal society. And they say: do I count, do I matter? To which the short answer is, yes. And therefore, it isn’t that I set out on economic policies; it’s that I set out really to change the approach, and changing the economics is the means of changing that approach. If you change the approach you really are after the heart and soul of the nation. Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul

Margaret Thatcher, May, 1981

How successfully has the neoliberal project captured the heart and soul of the nation? What kind of player has the profession of counselling and psychotherapy been in its penetration of our psychological life? Are we now thoroughly recuperated by the market, or do we yet have scope as therapists to contribute to alternative visions of the personal and the communitarian?

Paul Atkinson has been working as a Jungian therapist in private practice for 30 years. His first encounters with psychotherapy were in humanistic groups, men’s therapy and radical therapy groups in the 1970’s. He worked with north London school refusers in the 80’s. He has chaired the Guild of Psychotherapists and the Jungian training in the West Midlands, and was a member of CPJA (UKCP) exec committee for many years. He joined other members of Psychotherapy and Counselling for Social Responsibility in supporting the Occupy camp at St Paul’s and has since been reorienting his thinking about psychological life, individual and social change towards a more communitarian practice. He has helped set up the Free Psychotherapy Network (freepsychotherapynetwork.com), organises men’s therapy groups, works with the Alliance for Counselling and Psychotherapy and the Political Activist Reflection Group. He has two adult children. He is very tired of money.