acerbic wit, and a willingness to tackle the big issues of contemporary society — as the subtitle of her latest book attests. She has a PhD in cellular immunology, and the genesis of this book lay in her shock on learning that macrophages play an apparently dual role in the body, on the one hand encouraging inflammatory responses to invasive agents, and on the other aiding tumour growth and metastasis. This prompts her to ask: if we cannot trust the workings of our physiology at the cellular level, to what extent can or should we aim to control our bodies and minds, and hence our health and longevity?

After ranging across a diverse array of topics including gym workouts (for which she is a practising advocate in her eighth decade), evidence-based medicine, the abuse of power by the medical profession, the growth of narcissism in our self-obsessed culture, the solipsistic practice of mindfulness, and our changing attitudes towards death, she returns to the 'self vs. non-self' paradigm of immunology and its implications for auto-immune disease, pregnancy and menstruation, and the ageing process.

Along the way are brief diversions on the emergence of the very notion of 'the self', attributed to Rousseau and other Enlightenment thinkers; the evolution of religious beliefs from animism through polytheism and monotheism to their widespread abandonment; and the ever-widening gulf between the rich and the poor, the former indulging in luxury 'wellness retreats' and the latter being held morally culpable for their ill health (and dying earlier).

Having argued convincingly that we have much less control over our fates than we are led to believe by doctors, lifestyle gurus, priests, and Gwyneth Paltrow, the atheistic Ehrenreich takes solace from the thought that the universe, even in its inanimate components, is full of unpredictability and what she rather mystifyingly calls 'agency'. Personally I find little comfort in *'the ghostly flickerings of quantum fluctuations'* that she celebrates; on the other hand I do like the idea that a carefully induced psychedelic trip can ease the existential pain of terminal illness. Put it on my death plan, please.

Dougal Jeffries,
Retired GP, Falmouth, UK.
Email: dougal6@gmail.com

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Poverty Safari: Understanding the Anger of Britain's Underclass

Darren McGarvey

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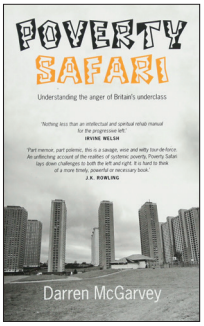

STRUCTURE VERSUS AGENCY

It is often said that statistics are human beings with the tears wiped away. Halfway through *Poverty Safari: Understanding the Anger of Britain's Underclass*, the first book by the Scottish rapper, writer, and columnist Darren McGarvey, the author provides us with some statistics.

Now in his mid-thirties, he looks back at his upbringing in Pollok, a so-called 'deprived' area of Glasgow, with his four siblings:

'Four out of five have experienced alcohol or substance misuse problems at some point. Five have experienced long term financial problems which involve debilitating debt or defaults and poor credit history.'

The list goes on:

'Five have experienced abuse and neglect at the hands of a care giver … five have experienced health problems associated with poor nutrition and lifestyle.'

Then, in stark contrast:

'Zero have gone to university. Zero are on the housing ladder. Zero have any savings. Zero go on foreign holidays at least once a year. And none of us care for Radio 2, yoga or Quorn-based food products either.'

The tears may have been wiped away, but the anger is palpable. McGarvey wants the reader to understand his anger (and, by extension, that of 'Britain's underclass', particularly relevant in the context of Brexit) by drawing attention to the hypocrisy of the political class, the damaging effects of widening socioeconomic (and therefore health) inequalities, and the false beliefs that people on both sides of the class divide hold about each other.

So, what should we do about it? *'It's not rocket science,'* he writes, *'listen, and those who feel ignored will re-engage passionately.'*

McGarvey is a gifted communicator; in the first of 32 short chapters (each named after a novel, with titles such as Nineteen Eighty-Four, A Tale of Two Cities, and Trainspotting, providing a hint of what's to come), he describes his approach to engaging a small group of female prisoners in a rap workshop. Challenging and insightful, this is recommended reading for anyone involved in small-group teaching or other public engagement activities.

As well as greater empathy, McGarvey's other antidote to fixing our broken politics is to reclaim *'the idea of personal responsibility from a rampant and socially misguided right wing'*. He has changed radically (now sober and living with his partner and baby son), so why can't others?

Alas, if only it were that simple. In keeping with the (rapidly growing) evidence base on Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, McGarvey's apparent 'resilience' may be attributable, at least in part, to the presence of trusted adult support (his child psychologist Marilyn *'had a fundamental influence on the direction of my life, one that remains to this day'*) and to serendipity (recounting a 'sliding doors' moment involving close friends and a crack pipe, he writes *'That day I dodged a bullet. But so many others don't.'*).

Regardless of the route taken, we should be grateful that McGarvey reached a place where he was able to write this book. It's an unflinching and invaluable contribution to the debate about how to fix our broken system, from an authentic and articulate voice of the working class, the likes of which is all too rarely heard in today's political and media landscape.

David Blane,
Academic GP, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK.
Email: David.Blane@glasgow.ac.uk

Poverty Safari: Understanding the Anger of Britain's Underclass was the winner of the Orwell Prize, 2018.

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