

The causes of some mental ill health are deep-rooted in...

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I found yesterday's discussion of mental ill health by Theresa May pretty insulting. It's an issue I know something about. I have had the good fortune to never suffer any serious mental ill health. I have known, and helped, those (more than I would wish) who have. I'm not going to claim specialism as a result. I am not going to generalise either: there are too many causes of mental ill health to do that. But what I do know are two things.

The first is that the current treatment of mental ill health is not just a social injustice as Theresa May would seem to have it: the existence of that mental ill health is the consequence of social injustice.

Second, I know that unless those social injustices are treated increasing mental ill health services, whilst welcome and essential, cannot solve many of the problems at the heart of this issue.

This is why I suggested that mental ill health be considered one of the criteria for the success or otherwise of a society when writing *The Courageous State*. In that book I suggested we have more areas of need. We need to achieve material, emotional and intellectual well being, but all only support our achievement of purpose. This comes when we have a feeling of worth. It's absence is indicated all too often by mental ill health.

Do not get me wrong: I am not saying those who suffer mental ill health are not of worth. My argument is the exact opposite: what I am saying is that many who suffer in that way have something, someone or some event that denies them that sense of worth that comes from the achievement of their purpose which they are entitled to.

I am not for a moment suggesting that all such problems are the responsibility of the state. That would be absurd. Of course they are not. But equally I am suggesting that the state does have a big role in tackling the environment in which mental ill health flourishes. And so too does economics.

An economics, backed by the state, that says that a person does not have the right to secure employment but can be treated as expendable at will is one designed to foster mental ill health. It disrespects the person at the most fundamental level. But that is what we have.

A state that does not guarantee a person enough to meet basic needs does not value the well-being of those it is meant to serve. And this is our reality.

A state that denies a person a right to secure accommodation in a community where their support network lives is fostering ill health. And yet we have the bedroom tax.

A state that threatens the income of those already in poverty can destroy every shred of worth a person has, and cause untold stress that harms almost every capacity the person has to enjoy life. This is what the benefits cap will do to some.

A society that lauds those who have tells those who have not that they are not of worth, and the message is heard, everyday.

A society that makes the least well off suffer austerity has chosen to victimise people and they know it. And yet austerity is still on the agenda when it is not needed.

A society that takes away financial support from those authorities that face the greatest demand for mental ill health services indicates what value it places on those who suffer. And that is what is happening to local authorities in the areas where need is greatest.

A state that will cannot guarantee a child with mental ill health the support they need is not valuing their life. And even Jeremy Hunt has admitted he is failing woefully on this issue.

A state that does not support its own employees when they know things are going wrong at work is fostering the bullying that creates mental ill health and yet whistle-blowing in the NHS is nigh on impossible.

A state that denies choice creates a path to desperation. No wonder people are attracted to populist politics.

These are all issues the state can address when it comes to mental ill health. None of these are small issues. They are about fundamentally revaluing our society. But when we have so much mental ill health that is very clearly what we need to do. This sickness requires radical treatment and I heard nothing about that yesterday.

Instead I heard a debate diverted into meaningless discussion of four hour waiting times for those with minor physical ailments. Which says most of what really needs to be known.