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A CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Our everyday information-- from Hurricane Katrina's revelations of racism, to the strain on global resources that widens the gap of wealth and poverty-- addresses everyone's moral agency. We arrive at a critical point in cultural and ecological devolution which requires radical social change, and a congruent shift in human awareness and behaviors. One would hope that psychology and related professions dedicated to human well-being can contribute to solutions.

But if, as Prilleltensky (1994) and others propose, psychology (and other helping professions) now function to band-aid the status quo, solutions may be beyond the maps that psychologists traditionally use. I present some points of view that may be almost invisible to many in the professions, even among **Perspective** readers concerned with promoting human well-being. The purpose is not to be critical, but to encourage agency in crafting solutions to critical needs.

INTEGRAL PSYCHOLOGY'S CRITIQUE Ken Wilber's Integral Psychology 'all-quadrant ' model will be familiar from presentations in the Perspective (June/July 2005), and can be refreshed by John Giannini 's article in this issue. Wilber is most forthright: "My belief is that psychology as a discipline 'referring to any of the four traditional major forces (behavioristic, psychoanalytic, humanistic/existential, and transpersonal) is slowly decaying and will never again, in any of its four major forms, be a dominant influence in culture or academia." He notes specific social reasons, such as the medical/insurance and 'managed care ' industry supporting only brief psychotherapy and pharmacological interventions. Biological psychiatry, behavioral modification, and cognitive therapy generally work by 'adjusting your premises. '

Because of the epidemic reliance on the use of medication, 'Silly things like trying to find out why you behave in such a fashion, or trying to find out the meaning of your existence, or the values that constitute the good life, are not covered by insurance policies, and so, in this culture, they basically do not exist. ' Thus, three of the four forces that examine interiors 'psychoanalytic, humanistic/existential, and transpersonal 'are selected against, 'so that these major forces are one jot away from dinosaur status. ' (He adds, wryly, 'This is not necessarily a bad thing. ')

What remains acceptable (to HMOs or outcome-based research) are the exteriors of being 'neurophysiological mechanisms, organic systems, and brain neural networks. Cure involves 'fixing these organic pathways (usually with medication, sometimes with behavioral modification). ' But Wilber 's integral approach insists that the interior events in mind and consciousness are interdependent with exterior events in brain and body, and further that all of them are inescapably anchored in cultural and social realities as well . . . 'with none of those quadrants being reducible to the others. '

If they survive at all, Wilber proposes, the only psychologies that will survive will plug into an 'all-quadrant, all-level ' framework (which includes behavioral, intentional, cultural, and social dimensions),

'all of which stretch from matter to body to mind to spirit.' Indeed, such a psychology transcends psychology as we know it (with its various split-off domains). Wilber observes that social, cultural, and personal development lines are interdependent. Other Integral Institutes (spun out of Wilber's Boulder, Colorado, think tank) focus on cultural/social institutions, governmental and nongovernmental. But in Wilber's Integral Psychology, one might conclude that positive changes in the whole system are posited on personal consciousness arising (at its highest level, Kosmic), which then interacts within systems.

CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY'S CRITIQUE Prilleltensky (1994) proposes the key of conscientization, in a way parallel to how Wilber keys on consciousness. That is, psychology and related social-service professionals need 'conscience' to arise. Otherwise they serve to perpetuate the status quo of power-over structures and social injustices that work against social evolution and human well-being.

I first intended for this article to be simply a review of Prilleltensky and Nelson's (2002) *Doing Psychology Critically*. Prilleltensky's story includes his being 'radicalized' in his Argentinian youth by abuses of power, oppression, and resistance to American imperialism. He studied and practiced psychology in Israel and Canada. As his Introduction notes, 'Psychology's deflections of social problems into individual maladjustments, together with an abuse of power . . . led me to explore critical psychology . . . that would not blame victims, that would not be divorced from social issues, that would listen to people's concerns in all their complexities.' In working with schools, community groups, children, youth, and families, he sought a practice that pursues social justice, self-determination, collaboration, and democratic participation 'in both the process and outcomes, i.e. 'doing psychology critically.'

EARLY DAYS OF CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY But Prilleltensky is not the whole story. There is a global movement under the rubric of critical psychology. But before leaping ahead, we might story an interesting moment in the history of psychology when he with Dennis Fox petitioned the 101st American Psychological Association convention (1993) for a Conversation Hour on the topic 'Will Psychology Pay Attention to Its Own Radical Critics?'

The petition noted that past APA presidents and respected elders had repeatedly urged psychology to 'reconsider its uncomfortably close ties to the status quo and to work for widespread social change.' While noting that psychologists on the left are frequently published by APA journals 'beginning with Albee (AP, 1982) urging that APA get behind 'more widespread and expensive social reform' 'they are published and then ignored. The petition goes on to note that when it gets right down to APA's political positions (and the actual therapeutic approaches of mainstream psychologists), there is little attention to dehumanizing social institutions as a source of 'emotional distress and mental disturbances in our society.'

Table 1. A JOURNEY OF PERSONAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

Ecological level	Values	Oppression (disempowerment)	Liberation and empowerment (processes to overcome oppression and achieve well-being)	Well-being (a state of personal, relational, and collective well-being)
Self	Personal (self-determination and health)	Internalized, psychological oppression	Conscientization situates personal struggles in the context of larger political and structural forces	Control, choice, self-esteem, competence, independence, political rights, and positive identity
Others (relationships)	Relational (human diversity, collaboration, and democratic participation)	"Power over," domination of, or by, others	"Power with," power sharing, egalitarian relationships, and peer mentoring support, individuals' and groups' quest for rights, identity, and dignity	Positive and supportive relationships, participation in social, community, and political life
Community and society	Collective (distributive justice, support for community structures)	Oppressive social practices manifested in policies and community settings	Empowering social practices (manifested in policies & community settings provide larger structural context for wellness)	Access to valued resources such as employment, income, education, & housing

from Isaac Prilleltensky and Geoffrey Nelson, DOING PSYCHOLOGY CRITICALLY, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002

The petition asked for cosponsors from several APA Divisions, including the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Society for Community Research and Action, Humanistic Psychology, and Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology. APA approved the request for a Conversation Hour, but scheduled it in the convention 's final time slot when almost everyone had left Toronto. Still, two dozen graduate students, professors, and practitioners showed up. That session became the founding meeting of the Radical Psychology Network (www.radpsynet.org), which now has more than 500 members in more than three dozen countries. Although teaching from Prilleltensky 's *Psychology and the Status Quo* for five years or so, I 've been pretty naive about the deeper premises and broader promulgation of critical psychology. As Ian Parker describes, 'There have been a number of theoretical and methodological developments inside psychology in the last twenty years that give the appearance, to some, of profound and radical changes in the discipline, [but their relative invisibility] reflects the overall dominance of US America in the development of ' psychology and my position in the UK. '

At the end of this article are some resources (particularly the on-line sites) that have helped inform me, and I provide here some milestones. The energy in critical psychology seems indeed sourced mostly outside US America. Although a major advance in critical psychology work began in 2001, organized by California State University Monterey Bay and RadPsyNet, key conferences have been outside the U.S. The 2003 International Conference at the University of Bath [UK] had about 4% from the U.S. in attendance. The 2005 International Critical Psychology Conference in Durban, South Africa, has not yet posted its papers, but its theme Beyond the Pale was cheeky. 'Outside the boundaries of the acceptable ' may indeed define a feature of critical psychology 's relation to mainstream psychology. But Beyond the Pale also hints of the white world 's 'intellectual imperialism and monopoly on academic resources ' ' highly privileged, and narrow in domestic concerns 'from a global perspective.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa is one of a few worldwide to offer study in critical psychology. Some net searching will disclose universities in Australia, the UK, Germany, Canada, and

elsewhere with embedded interest. For those who would be learners or teachers, an outline of Fox and Prilleltensky's (1997) *Critical Psychology: An Introduction*, designed as a teaching tool, can be accessed by going to RadPsyNet.org and following the threads to 'teaching materials.' There we also find Ian Parker's teaching packet, ways to plug into the network, and soon-to-be free distribution of the Annual Review of Critical Psychology. Also check out journals such as *Asylum*, *Nordiske Udkast*, *Psychology in Society*, and sites for Psychology Politics Resistance, www.psyact.org, and Psychologists for Social Responsibility, www.psyr.org.

I get it from Dennis Fox that the first premise of critical psychology is 'systematic examination of how certain forms of psychological action and experience are privileged over others, how dominant accounts of psychology operate ideologically and in the service of power.' To summarize the position of critical psychology: Psychology is not, and cannot be, a neutral endeavor conducted by scientists and practitioners detached from social and political circumstances.

It is a human and social endeavor. Psychologists live in specific social contexts. They are influenced by differing interests and complex power dynamics. Mainstream psychologists too often shy away from the resulting moral, social, and political implications.

CRITIQUES FROM THE FIELD For the last ten years or so, I have asked all our entering candidates for clinical psychology to answer a questionnaire where one of the items is 'Should psychologists function as moral agents of social change?' Of course I wanted to posit their views about a 'valuefree' psychology before they were exposed to conscientization. An interesting comparison is that the 1999 class split 22/21 across the median. In 2005, 30 candidates agree that psychologists should function as moral agents of social change, and only 13 disagree at any level. Thirteen candidates 'strongly agree,' and only two 'strongly disagree' that their role carries moral agency.

From these small samples, it appears that a post 9/11 crop of psychologists seeks to act in moral agency beyond the 'atomistic' presentation of an individual client's problem. Recently I interviewed many of them now in their internships, with the general question being, 'what's the worst problem you're having with the idea/practice of psychology that you're entering?' Their answers resonate with both Wilber's and critical psychology's critiques. When you interview a client according to protocol, you already set up a powerover situation. Once you assign a diagnostic category 'an insulting simplification of the human experience' they are further removed from democratic alliance. When the diagnostic category has entered an HMO . . . well, they recognize their complicity and hate it.

They complain about artificial boundaries that deny touch and community interaction with clients. One candidate provided a scenario in which a single mother subsisting at poverty level (somehow) brings in her 15-year-old son for counseling. He has been seething with anger, and the mother believes he will either kill or be killed. 'What I'm expected to do for this client is offer anger management,' said the frustrated trainee, knowing that would trivialize his situation and her own awareness. But, 'What can I do about the gang lifestyle?' (Actually, *Doing Psychology Critically* offers many specifics, from shifting the counseling paradigm to transforming social policy to participatory action research.)

Another intern described how 'spirit' was lacking, her 'dreams decaying' in terms of what she hoped to accomplish as a psychologist. Another comment that resonates with the premises of both integral and critical psychologists: 'In short-term therapy, we can explore mindfulness only at a level of ordinary coping' (with the status quo).

AN APA BOOK

One of the reasons this review expanded beyond critical psychology was my excitement in finding a 2005 book published by the American Psychological Association, *Critical Thinking About Psychology: Hidden Assumptions and Plausible Alternatives*, edited by Slife, Reber, and Richardson. The book critiques six fields of psychology: Clinical and Counseling; Social; Neuroscience and Experimental; Cognitive; Developmental; and Methodology. A first purpose is to apply 'rigorous thinking' to the assumptions and values (underlying worldviews) of the various fields of psychology. The second purpose is to present the 'most credible and convincing alternatives to psychology's currently favored ideas and methods.'

Frank Richardson's opening chapter 'Psychotherapy and Modern Dilemmas' echoes some of the propositions noted earlier. He provides a nice summary that reveals the atomistic nature of psychological practice (like Wilber), and proposes that 'modern psychology and psychotherapy both creatively address emotional problems in living and inadvertently perpetuate ideals and practices of our way of life [the status quo] that may actually contribute to those very problems.' He also notes that our culture is producing narcissistic personality disorders so fast that all available counseling services can't dent it! He argues that citizens (including psychologists) 'have to give as much attention to restoring the cultural and moral context of the therapy . . . as [to] the therapy itself.'

Chapter 4 suggests that social science rethink its emphasis on individualistic forms. Chapter 6 criticizes the materialistic assumptions of neuroscience, supported by the power of the pharmaceutical industry, and offers an alternative holism. In her Conclusion, Suzanne Kirschner proposes a fundamental theme for psychologists: To frame every phenomenon ('be it depression, thinking processes, or intimate love relationships') in terms of wider contexts and systems. Many of the chapters deal with 'undoing dualisms' of mind and biology, self and society.

Table 2. OPPRESSIVE & EMANCIPATORY POTENTIAL OF VALUES, ASSUMPTIONS, & PRACTICES IN PSYCHOLOGY

	<i>Oppressive</i>	<i>Emancipatory</i>
<u>Values for</u>		
personal well-being	when belief in individualism leads to self-blame	when belief in self-determination leads to personal empowerment
relational well-being	when participatory processes obstruct social action and mask inequality	when participatory processes afford voice and choice
collective well-being	when the good of the collective comes at the expense of individual needs	when bargaining powers, resources, and obligations in society are shared equitably
<u>ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT</u>		
good life	when success and failure are ascribed to personal merit alone	when meaning is ascribed to interdependence
power in relationships	when power differentials are ignored or reproduced	when power differentials are acknowledged and dealt with
<u>PRACTICES REGARDING</u>		
problem definition	when pathologize	when de-blame
role of client	when promote passivity	when promote empowerment
role of psychologist	when arrogate power	when share power
type of intervention	when intrapsychic interventions ignore social conditions	when oppressive social conditions are addressed

from Isaac Prilleltensky and Geoffrey Nelson, DOING PSYCHOLOGY CRITICALLY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002

So themes that appear in those earlier critiques thoughtfully arise in this APA collection. But the central message of the book is about how to be a good critical thinker about psychology, how to have 'good conversation.' In comparison to the radical questioning and calls to action by integral and critical psychologists, it's rather 'pale' psychology talking to and about itself. (Richardson notes that, anyhow, 'any sort of deeper cultural renewal seems beyond the scope and competence of psychology as a field.') Furthermore, it's

striking that Ken Wilber 'probably the most prolific theoretical and philosophical writer on most of the

chapters ' themes ' is not in anyone 's references. And no mention in *Critical Thinking About Psychology* of those folks most active for many years in critical critique of mainstream psychology 's assumptions: Dennis Fox, Ian Parker, Geoffrey Nelson, Isaac Prilleltensky, et al. Remember (above) that the division Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology was invited to co-sponsor that 1993 APA conversation? We must suppose that the editors 'who include past and present presidents of this division 'declined to attend then and now to the work of their critical colleagues.

IN CONCLUSION Political, cultural, and global events have reached a 'critical mass, ' setting off explosions in the psyche of anybody who watches or avoids the news 'whatever your affiliation. The collision of worldviews and collective economic/political institutions resonates with us all. Or conversely, perhaps our inactive personal and professional agency, lollying in the shadow, feeds into the collective derangement.

Here I 've summarized some spokespersons who circle around the question of the helping professions ' potential for moral agency and change in these matters. Perhaps psychologists collaborate in programming the human spirit for acceptance or denial, or perhaps the profession has objectifi ed itself into irrelevance. But surely, thinking psychologically 'which for me involves heart and reasoned intentionality ' is critical for any possible solution to human-sponsored disorders affecting human well-being. Finally, perhaps not only persons but even institutions can be modifi ed by love, which none of these critiques quite dared mention.

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