

introduction

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Marxist Scholarship and Psychological Practice

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It is difficult to remember a time when so many people from such a variety of backgrounds took to the streets to draw attention to the widening disparity between the promises and the products of our economic and political institutions. As evidence continues to mount that our “advanced” nations not only accumulate massive amounts of wealth but also produce unprecedented inequalities in the distribution of that wealth, a vocal contingent of the working class has, for the last few weeks, occupied financial districts throughout the world. These protests have captured the imagination of a growing number of people who see neither their aspirations nor their sense of justice embodied in some of the fundamental structures of modern society.

In the wake of the near total collapse of the global financial system, we are also witnessing a growing number of activists, scholars, and practitioners who have begun to reflect on the relationship between certain academic disciplines and dominant economic and political structures. Yet for those working within the discipline of psychology, the connection between political economy and psychological knowledge is anything but transparent. For example, what are we to make of an article on the front page of the American Psychological Association (APA) website that, at the height of the global recession, urged psychologists to brace for recession

depression? Or another article that gives psychologists the tools they need to assist employers with kinder, gentler layoffs? What do articles like this from a leading psychological organization say about the relationship between modern psychology and the existing economic order?

Perhaps all this suggests is that modern psychology, like any other academic discipline, must operate within the confines of the existing social order. Given that the financial market periodically goes through natural fluctuations, the best that psychology can hope to do is to alleviate some of the anxiety that emerges from these brief crises. From such a perspective, the APA headlines are evidence not of psychology’s parochialism but of its willingness to ease the suffering of those who find themselves in an unfortunate set of circumstances.

Yet there is another dimension to the relationship between dominant economic structures and modern psychology that bears some scrutiny. It is clear that the roots of modern psychology are supported by the same enlightenment rationality that continues to sustain many of our modern institutions from liberal democracy to neoclassical economics. Given the symbiotic relationship that exists between psychology and these institutions, it seems inevitable that when one of

these institutions begins to exhibit certain weaknesses other institutions will step in to turn our attention to other matters. Thus, while the looming collapse of our financial structures could engender reflection on the legitimacy of the capitalist mode of production, the APA headlines shift our attention to matters that are less threatening to the existing state of affairs.

This suggests that a deeper relationship exists between our economic structures and our scientific pursuits. In other words, it is not only that psychological research and practice is financially supported by industries that have a vested interest in maintaining the existing economic structure of society. At an even deeper level, the very idea of a discipline such as psychology that attempts to understand the mental structures occupying the spaces between people and their environments or between people and other people expresses a logic that can only take capitalism as its point of departure. At this level, to make the relationship between economics and psychology thematic is to discover that what we refer to as psychology is simply a potent euphemism for alienation. The aim of this issue of the *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* is to identify and interrogate this alienation using the tools of Marxist philosophy and analysis.

While this issue certainly draws attention to the role that orthodox psychology plays in the reproduction of many of the dominant features of modern society, it also diagnoses the extent to which critical psychological scholarship has come to distance itself from all things Marxist. With some notable exceptions, critical psychologists suspicious of transcendental claims and secure foundations have often avoided Marxism opting instead to embrace less rigid forms of analysis. Perhaps such a lacuna is itself in need of a Marxist analysis particularly since the politics of recognition continues to demonstrate that simply appreciating the unique identity of marginalized groups in the final analysis does little to address the economic inequalities that support nearly every form of social injustice.

It should be noted that all the papers included in this special issue were originally presented at the first Marxism and Psychology Conference held at the University of Prince Edward Island in August of 2010. Sponsored by the Marxism and Psychology Research Group (MPRG), this conference brought together over 100 international scholars, activists, and students to discuss some of the most exciting issues at the intersection of Marxism and Modern Psychology. Ian Parkers contribution in this issue provides a comprehensive

account of the conference activities

Given the overwhelming success of this first conference, it was agreed that every effort would be made to organize additional Marxism and Psychology conferences on a regular basis and in a new location each time. We are pleased to announce that the second Marxism and Psychology Conference will be held from August 9-12, 2012 at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, located in Morelia, Michoacán, Western Mexico. Further information regarding this conference can be found on the conference website - <http://marxpsyconference.teocripsi.com/>.

While the contributions to this issue draw on a wide range of intellectual traditions, the three that figure most prominently are hermeneutics, critical theory, and psychoanalysis. This is not surprising given the influence that Marxism has historically exerted on these traditions. What is truly striking is the breadth of topics that contributors address in this issue. Against the background of these traditions, contributors reflect on the role of ideology critique in modern society, on the heteronormative undercurrents of certain forms of criticism, on the experience of shame, embodiment, the use of technology, crowd behavior, and community and developmental psychology to name only a few.

We hope the range of topics dealt with in this issue serves as a reminder of the continued vitality of Marxist analysis and the urgent need for an interrogation of many of the dominant features of modern psychology. We also hope that critical psychologists who have wandered away from Marxist analysis or who have never encountered it in the first place will discover something of value in this form of critique.