

The contradiction between aspiration and reality in Critical Psychology

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Abstract

As a science from the standpoint of the generalized subject, Critical Psychology demands a fundamental paradigm shift. In contrast to conventional research conducted from the external standpoint, rather than investigate ways of exerting influence on other people's modes of thought and action, the aim of Critical Psychology is to promote processes of "coming to a social understanding" about the subjectively perceived need to overcome societal conditions under which an orientation towards directing and controlling the actions of others appears to be in the natural order of things. The main subject matter of the research from a generalized subject consists in furthering awareness of the many ways in which the assumption of this task is systemically hampered. This includes the conventional opposition of individual and society and the separation of psychology and sociology. In both disciplines this systematically excludes the possibility of individuals affected by certain relevant conditions of life exerting an influence on them. It is thus also not possible to pose the question as to the preconditions that would be required to take advantage of this possibility and the many obstacles to its realisation cannot be subjected to scientific analysis. The general opposition of theory and practice has the same effect.

Keywords

societal dimension of human subjectivity, generalized responsibility, corrupting effects of restrictive conditions, manipulability and shame, self-denial and self-disciplining.

I

The importance of critical psychology is to have developed scientifically substantiated and verifiable categories, with which the specific dimension of human subjectivity and agency can be grasped. They render comprehensible the fact that humans, unlike other species, do not simply have to adapt to the

conditions they encounter, but are, within the framework of what is historically possible, capable of shaping and organizing their living conditions in accordance with their own insights and needs, which in turn will develop and concretize themselves in these processes.

This possibility as basis of human development is largely ignored in traditional psychology. As Klaus Holzkamp writes: “Individual subjectivity here is solely and *one-sidedly* conceivable as being *determined* by societal living conditions/power-structures, and thus the individual’s relations to these conditions are merely conceptualisable as relations of alignment, dependency, subjection and suffering, while the ‘other side’ – the possibility of constitutively acting on these conditions and changing them – is surely in some psychologist’s minds, but is not represented in their theoretical and methodological tools” (2013a, p. 32).

Generally, societal conditions are seen merely as an external framework of the individuals’ actions which they seek to use as efficiently as possible to their personal advantage. This orientation is rather supported than questioned by the scientific division between social and individual sciences, according to which the processes of societal and individual development can be seen and explored independently of each other. In contrast, critical psychology aims to develop a scientific approach in which the individuals are not conceived as mere products of their living conditions, but also as their self-conscious producers. As Holzkamp points out, this requires answering the question of “how, if subjectivity is seen as independent, can the difference between it and the societal conditions become reconciled with the fundamental unity of the individuals’ sociality and uniqueness, which nonetheless exists?” (1979, p. 12, translation by the author).

As has become apparent in the further research process, answering this question wants a fundamental change of perspective (see for example, Holzkamp, 2013a, 2013b, 2015). In contrast to the established research from an external or observer standpoint, a psychology from the standpoint of the generalized subject – here abbreviated as “subject science” – is not interested in perfecting the methods for directing and controlling the actions of other people in accordance with ruling standards and pre-defined targets which themselves remain unquestioned. Rather, its aim is to become aware of the implicit partiality of a research that is restricted to people's observable behaviour without taking into account the concrete conditions that more or less directly require this.

Thus, seen from the standpoint of the generalized subject, the societal conditions are neither an abstract framework that defines the possibilities and limits of our actions nor are they a reality, which we can influence directly according to our personal ideas and interests. Rather, it is seen as product of our interactions with each other and thus as a basically open system. This has significant consequences for our scientific thinking. It means, first of all, that the

conditions that are determining for our acting, can, in turn, be changed by us. However, this possibility of self-conscious influence on the conditions of our development exists solely on a supra-individual level. It can be realized only if we succeed in developing ourselves into a social force under the common goal of creating the conditions for the unhindered development of all. In this sense, this possibility is not simply 'given' to us, but it must be gained and defended time and again against the many forms in which we are prevented from realizing it.

Such an approach differs sharply from individualist ideology, which largely determines our thinking in everyday life as well in psychology, and the implicit message of which is that adaptation to prevailing circumstances and demands is the only reasonable access to them. However, even a psychology which, in contrast to such an orientation, emphasizes the specifically human capacity to consciously influence these conditions remains within the limits of the prevailing thinking and individualistic ideology, if it merely points to this possibility without discussing the many obstacles, which hamper its practical realisation. These obstacles, however, can only be perceived and analysed if psychological science breaks with the usual division of labour, according to which it itself is responsible for the development and dissemination of critical insights, while others are responsible for their practical implementation. Hence, in a psychology that is not aimed at adapting people to prevailing conditions, but interested in the question of how the specifically human possibility of deliberate influence on our living conditions can be realized, the focus of research is on the analysis of the many forms in which the realisation of this ability is being systematically hampered. In this perspective, the usual opposition of individual and society and the individualistic ideology inherent to it prove to be crucial impediments to becoming aware of this possibility and our joint responsibility for realizing it. We have good reasons to deny this possibility if we must be afraid to be held personally responsible for its implementation. Under these premises everybody who attempts to fight the conditions of their suppression is, as already Freud pointed out, doomed to fail. "He will become a madman, who for the most part finds no one to help him in carrying through his delusion" (1961, p. 28).

The persuasive power of the individualistic ideology is evidently not least because it 'frees us' from this responsibility for the social conditions in which we live and act, thus protecting us from all conflicts that we would have to face if we tried to act in accordance with this responsibility. What is 'perverse' about the reduction of our responsibility to our personal acting is that the relief it promises to bring about is in fact the reverse. It turns out to be an unrealisable demand which is doomed to fail, since, from a subject science perspective, we can only take responsibility for our acting to the extent that we can determine the conditions that require it. A responsibility which is limited to our own actions

amounts to self-discipline in accordance with to prevailing expectations and interests.

Since, however, the individualistic ideology is not only functional for justifying the prevailing power conditions but also for coping with life within these conditions, the mere knowledge of its restrictive implications is not enough to give it up. Rather, the real task is to jointly develop conditions under which we can afford to openly discuss the problematic implications of our own actions instead of denying them. Even if we have good reasons to do so, we thus nonetheless confirm the condition of our estrangement and powerlessness.

II

To be able to effectively counter the individualistic restrictedness of our thinking and acting, first of all, a scientifically verifiable concept of human subjectivity is needed, that comprises its dual nature. Here, Critical Psychology, as developed in Berlin, has done important preliminary work. The dual character is that, on the one hand, our actions are essentially determined by societal conditions and expectations, and, on the other, that the experience of our external determinateness implies the subjective necessity to overcome such a dependency. This, however, is only possible on a supra-individual level, that is, by 'generalizing' our possible influence on our living conditions through joining with others under this goal. However, the concept of 'generalized' influence on the common living conditions is only the prerequisite for the actual task of critical science. The task is to 'publish' the many forms in which we are prevented from such a generalization of individual experiences and possibilities.

On the other hand, as long as we have no concept of the supra-individual dimension of human agency, efforts for independence usually remain within the limits of prevailing power relations, reduced to attempts of securing our own privileges and powers over others. And only when we have a concept of this supra-individual dimension of human life and possibilities for action, we can recognize where and for what reason we fall behind this knowledge.

As a whole, subject science research is less concerned with achieving predefined abstract goals. Rather, it focuses on the question of in whose interests the respective goals are, and how far what we do corresponds to what we mean or intend to do. This requires a critical distance to our own views and actions, that is, recognizing that they are not universally valid, but relative, depending on our particular position within given power relations. In contrast to individualistic ideology, such an approach emphasizes that neither our own actions nor the actions of others are self-evident or self-explanatory. In fact, they become

understandable only in the light of the concrete conditions to which they correspond. In this sense, subject science research also differs from sociologically oriented approaches in that it does not see human action as directly determined by the respective conditions, but rather by the perceived possibilities of influencing these. Since this possibility can only be realized on a supra-individual level, the focus of this research is on the many forms in which we are isolated from each other and played off against each other so that, from the start, every understanding of the common, albeit different, restrictions of our acting and the shared interest in overcoming these restrictions is being hampered. Thus, coming to a shared understanding of the societal hindrances and constraints underlying our views and actions is a first step in overcoming the individualistic ideology and of its restrictive impact on our relations with each other and on our possibility of a self-conscious life.

Such a common understanding of the dependence of our acting from the societal conditions that require it is tantamount with the 'objectification' of our seemingly merely private experiences and ways of dealing with them. It makes it possible to recognize the factual interconnectedness with each other by this dependency, and implies the awareness of the shared responsibility for realizing the possibilities for a self-determined life as well as the shared responsibility for overcoming the external and internalized coercions and limits, by which such endeavours are rather hampered. It is identical with achieving the critical distance to our own thinking and acting necessary to challenge them according to their societal conditions and implications. Such an objectification is the basis for understanding our own acting as well as the acting of others, and for realizing our joint possibilities and responsibilities for developing the societal conditions in the interest of all. On the other hand, we can only accept such 'generalized' responsibility if we don't interpret it as a moral imperative and additional burden that we must accept for the sake of our own social recognition, but understand it as a way out of the imposed ego-centred narrowness of our life.

The concept of 'generalized' responsibility is a counter-concept to individualistic ideology, according to which we are only for our own actions responsible, and references to restrictive circumstances appear rather as a flimsy excuse. In contrast, science from the standpoint of the generalised subject is based on the insight that any knowledge that does not "demonstrate ad hominem" (Marx, 1970a, p. 182), i.e. which is not grounded in the individuals' own experiences, will hardly reach them. Thus, the emphasis on supra-individual responsibility remains itself an abstract demand and within the limits of allowed thought, if it is not subjectively substantiated, grounded in experiences of the restrictedness of our own acting and in its asocial implications.

While in individualistic ideology the possibility that our actions might have consequences that contradict our intentions and beliefs is systematically excluded, this issue is at the center of subject science research. The interest is in the concrete conditions under which this discrepancy occurs and, moreover, in which it is not opportune to address it. But by privatizing it, any constructive dealings with it is prevented. It appears as a problem of our personal inadequacy that we should be ashamed of and that we seek to conceal as far as possible from ourselves and others. In this way, we are also ‘inwardly’ bound to the conditions of our humiliation, which is not least reflected in the fact that the ultimate goal of our actions is to gain social recognition. Objectifying our shame on our seemingly personal shortcomings, that is, addressing the conditions, which make us act in a way we are ashamed of, is thus a first step in being able to consciously deal with it instead of remaining ‘unconsciously’ determined by it. In this sense, Marx calls for the “revolutionary audacity” which flings at the adversaries the “defiant words”: “*I am nothing and I should be everything*” (1970a, p. 185). For Marx, shame is “a kind of anger which is turned inward. And if a whole nation really experienced a sense of shame, it would be like a lion, crouching ready to spring” (1970b, p. 133). The alternative would be a “*modest egoism*”, “which asserts its limitedness and allows it to be asserted against itself” (1970a, p. 185 and, in its wake, “infinitely proceeding division of society into the most manifold races opposed to one another by petty antipathies, uneasy consciences and brutal mediocrity” (ibid, p.177f.).

III

The individualistically narrowed understanding of psychology, which disregards the social and societal consequences of our actions as well as the question of the societal function of established psychology as a whole, implies a specific split of consciousness. This manifests itself in the separation between intentions and consequences of individual action or, more precisely, in the tendency of equating, in our own case, our intentions with the effects of our actions, while, in the case of others, we extrapolate their intentions from the results of their actions. Such a splitting is evidently facilitated by the ‘natural’ fact that the intentions that underlie our own acting are ‘closer’ to us than their results, which are primarily experienced by others, while the effects of the actions of others are more or less directly visible to us, but not their intentions.

Thus, the change of perspective required for subject science research is also required for our own thinking and acting. The overarching question that only we ourselves can answer is then of how far our acting is determined by our own

insights and interests, or defensively oriented at fulfilling external demands and outdoing others in the struggle for our own acknowledgement and the associated benefits. But also, our own insights and interests are not something that we know or 'own' and that we can determine at will. Rather, they are in constant change, depending on the concrete conditions, and it is a lifelong task to find out for what reason we want what, or to what extent what we do is based on our own insights and interests, or on the internalization of prevailing demands and expectations. On the other hand, the knowledge of our own interests, however vague, is necessary to face the danger of being instrumentalized for interests that are contrary to what we ourselves consider important and hope to achieve.

The self-denial inherent in the individualistic ideology entails evidently necessarily the devaluation of other; it thus contributes to normalizing societal relationships in which one's own successes are primarily defined by the relative worse performance of others. In general, we can only address the limitedness of our actions and the impact this has on our relationships with others if they are understood as an overall problem that can only be dealt with constructively on a generalized or societal level. In this sense, a psychology from the standpoint of the generalized subject doesn't offer abstract guidelines on how to deal with the problems encountered. It only highlights the danger that, by adopting prevailing expectations, we tackle the problems in a way that rather amplifies them than helps to overcome them.

Subject science concepts are in principle meant to examine the sociality of one's own actions, that is, to answer the question of how far it contributes to consolidating or overcoming restrictive conditions. For this purpose, the conceptual pair of restrictive and generalized ability to act has been developed. It loses any emancipatory substance if it is used in the usual manner as a means of assessing the actions of others. Such an approach implies the necessity of clarify the question of what interest we ourselves have in the problems and in overcoming them and how this relates to the interests of the other participants, who might perceive the situation from their point of view quite differently. The task would then be to come to a joint understanding of how our different views of the problems largely depend on the societal position from which we perceive them. On this basis, the connectedness with each other would become recognizable behind all the societal divisions. In this sense, subject science research is less interested in classifying individual differences. Rather, the focus on the dependence of all acting on the concrete societal conditions allows us to recognize the many forms in which we participate in the reproduction of prevailing power relations and of our own powerlessness to them. The perception of the involvement of our actions in the existing power relations is the material basis for becoming aware of our co-responsibility for these and thus also for the

possibilities of life and action of all others. Here, too, there is the double possibility of openly addressing this powerlessness and its corruptive effects on our acting, or of negating it, thus blocking any prospect of overcoming it. Since the problems continue to persist even when we try to deny them, we tend to fall back on the usual practice of making others responsible for them and/or of justifying our restrictive acting towards them through their 'inacceptable' behaviour.

From a subject science point of view the idea that, unlike others, we are largely immune to the effects of restrictive conditions, points rather to the opposite, namely the internalization of the values and interests of those whose decisions largely determine our possibilities of life and action. The consequence of such an external determinateness or other-directedness of our views and beliefs is that we must ward off all experiences that might call them into question.

In this context, Freud's concept of the superego as an internal control takes the discussion further. He sees its task in repressing rebellious impulses against the restrictions on our needs and desires and, moreover, to make us ashamed of having these at all. Such a superego, as Freud points out, primarily determines the conduct of 'culture carriers', that is of people who enjoy leadership positions as long as they show themselves capable and willing to enforce the interests and objectives of the dominant classes against those groups, who are expected to put these into practice. While Freud speaks of the internalisation of external constraints, Marx talks of the priest outside of us being replaced by our "priestly nature" (1970a, p. 182) This "priestly nature" manifests itself in all tendencies to distance us from those, who don't correspond to our internalized ideas of what is 'reasonable' to think and do. The "bondage of devotion" is, as he calls it, replaced by the "bondage of conviction" (ibid.)

Thus, the fight against the restrictive conditions requires, as Marx points out, a fundamental change of consciousness. This cannot be achieved by adopting or propagating new dogmas, but only "by analysing the mystical consciousness, which is incomprehensible to itself, whether manifested in a religious or political form" (1970b, p. 144). Such a change of consciousness would be "a work for the world and for us. It can be only the work of united forces. It is a matter of a confession, and nothing more. In order to secure remission of its sins, mankind has only to declare them for what they actually are" (ibid, p. 145).

IV

The foregone conclusion by which the perception of the generalized ability to act is blocked from the outset includes the separation of theory and practice, which is an integral part of individualistic ideology. Due to this separation, the key issue of subject science research remains systematically excluded from scientific discussion. This is the possibility that under the pressure of circumstances we see ourselves repeatedly forced to act in a way, to which we cannot stand. The exclusion of this topic from the scientific discussion, in turn, seems to be the price that psychology has to pay as a reward for its recognition as a scientific discipline. In this view, all insights that point to the need to change prevailing circumstances are dismissed as politically motivated and therefore not scientific.

As a result of this division of labour between theory and practice the systematic collaboration in exploring the causes of the problems and the ways of overcoming them is largely excluded. What is left is the usual practice of blaming each other for the continued existence of the problems. While the theorists see the reason for the failure of their findings in practice in the practitioners' inability to implement these according to scientific instructions and standards, practitioners see the theorists' lack of contact with reality as key problem which they seek to compensate for by selecting from the different theoretical approaches those aspects that confirm what they are doing anyway (Holzkamp, 2013c). In contrast to such a mutual estrangement and disempowerment, in a psychology from the standpoint of the generalized subject, theory and practice do not stand in opposition to each other nor are they independent of each other. Rather, they contribute from different perspectives to our knowledge both of the subjective meaning of societal conditions and our joint possibility and responsibility for developing these towards societal relations where the "free development of each is condition for the free development of all" (Marx & Engels, 1970).

V

The basic contradiction to be tackled in a subject science approach is that, on the one hand, we can only recognize the many forms through which we are prevented from acting in accordance with such a generalized responsibility, if we have an idea of it. On the other hand, the knowledge of this generalized responsibility doesn't transcend prevailing ways of thinking if the multiple forms in which the practical implementation of this responsibility is obstructed are obviously not of scientific interest.

As long as this question is ignored, even critical-psychological concepts remain within the limits of 'acceptable' thinking. Again, the obstacles can only be experienced if we accept our co-responsibility for the implementation of critical insights, and we will only accept this responsibility and remain obliged to it if we are convinced of its subjective significance. Concepts that are not subjectively substantiated in this way remain abstract, without personal meaning and therefore not binding; they are freely usable, applicable wherever and whenever it seems advisable.

In general, critical-psychological concepts differ from traditional concepts in that they not only consider the societal context of individual action, but also the fact that the subjective evaluation of these conditions and of their impact on our actions is not absolute, but relative, dependent on the perceived possibilities of conscious influence on them. They are meant to make us recognize the societal implications of our own actions, that is, enable us to deal with the question of how far they contribute to consolidating or overcoming restrictive circumstances. They emphasize the twofold possibility of either simply accepting the given circumstances and demands or questioning the conditions under which such an adaptation to the prevailing conditions and the adoption of prevailing beliefs seems natural. This includes also the question of the personal consequences that the two different orientations have for us and our social relationships. As a rule, such questions only arise when the prevailing explanations apparently don't help to clarify the problems and we have to look for alternative approaches to the problems.

The subject science concept of generalization, based on the knowledge of the specific human possibility and necessity of self-conscious influence on the conditions of our lives, is in distinct contrast to the notion of generalization as it is used in traditional psychology. In a subject science, it is to be done by the individuals themselves. Instead of averaging the data collected on specific aspects of individual behavior and using the average value obtained as a measure of the level of development of the behavior under investigation, subject science aims to factor in the concrete conditions to which the different views and actions correspond. The common task is then to combine the different perspectives through which we perceive the societal reality into an overall picture that is as coherent as possible. In this way, the risk becomes recognisable and thus reducible of undermining our possible influence on the societal development by mistaking our own view of it for universally valid and use it as a yardstick for judging the actions others.

In such an approach, the differentiation between researcher and the individuals used to answer the research questions is rather counterproductive. It corresponds to the power structures within scientific community that prevent any

practical thinking that exceeds the limits of what is allowed or contradicts the established scientific standards. The critical point is reached when, in preemptive obedience, the research is not limited to meeting prevailing standards and expectations, but these standards and expectations are themselves subjected to critical reflection. Seen in this light, also the talk of co-researchers at best means a liberalization of these power structures, not their overcoming. This would only be possible in an approach in which the question of how much these power structures affect the definition of the problems to be investigated is part of the research.

By contrast, in subject science approach all participants are the subject and object of research at the same time. The common goal is to reach a meta-standpoint from which it becomes possible to take notice of the societal constraints and impediments that underlie the individual's actions and with it the generalized interest in overcoming them. From such a meta-standpoint, we are less interested in the actions of particular individuals than in the social relations among each other and the question of how different, even contradictory modes of action can contribute to the reproduction of power relations that one believes to overcome. As Holzkamp points out, "*intersubjectivity itself is made into the object of structural reflection*" (2013d, p. 325). On this level "I reflect the fact that, from their particular standpoints, all those involved have their own perspective on the entire scene which is absolutely on a par with my own, and in comparison to which my own view is in no way privileged or advantaged" (ibid.). "'Systematization' in processes of self-understanding" aims at "*jointly developing a scientific language which allows a higher degree of issue-related reflectedness*. One talks, in the end, about the same problem as at the beginning, but on a higher level of self-reflection and object-relatedness" (ibid., p. 338). The method appropriate to this goal is, as Holzkamp points out in relation to Marx (1970b, p. 145) that of social self-understanding.

From such a meta-standpoint it becomes comprehensible that the societal conditions are not external to us, but that we are part of them, and therefore also responsible for them. Again, only when we have a concept of the joint responsibility for the societal reality in which we live and act can we become aware of the many forms, in which we are prevented from acting accordingly. These hindrances include the taboo to talk about them and especially about their impact on our own acting. But by subjecting to this ban, we negate not only for us ourselves any subjective necessity to change the prevailing conditions, but make it difficult for others too to address the impact of restrictive conditions on their acting. Any criticism of social power structures, however, remains an empty, non-binding utopia if it is not formulated as a definite negation of our own actions within these relationships.

VI

Seen from the standpoint of the generalized subject we are not directly responsible for the restrictive impact that the prevailing restrictions have on our actions, yet for the way we handle it. We can either negate it or face the conflicts that are to be expected if we would openly ‘confess’ this. In the one case we contribute to the reproduction of the prevailing power relations and their immanent logic, according to which the problems or difficulties of dealing with them always arise through the other’s lacking insight in our personal superiority over them. In the other case, we help to ‘generalize’ the awareness of the subjective need to overcome societal condition, in which we are led to deny the restrictedness of our own thinking and acting so as not to be held personally responsible for it. However, since obstacles continue to exist especially when they are not tackled as a general problem, ultimately, we are left with the restrictive choice between two personalizing options, namely to seek the ‘guilt’ for the inadequacy of our actions in ourselves or in others. In the end, such a choice will always be to the detriment of those who are alien to us in one way or another, and this especially under societal conditions, under which ‘being different’ per se is considered suspicious.

In a subject science approach based on realizing the specific human possibility of conscious influence on our living conditions, differentiations of people according to their personal qualities and capacities are not the result, but the starting point of the research. Hence, such an approach is less interested in personal differences than in the question under which societal conditions and from which standpoint the interest in these differences appears natural. In this view the problem is not the ‘otherness’ of others, their ‘deviance’ from the norms and rules that govern our own acting and thinking. Rather, this is the unwillingness or inability to take note of the well-groundedness of the actions of others, which in turn must be examined for their societal precondition and implications. Such defensive attitude towards others entails the implicit idea that we ourselves belong to the group of those, on whom all others should orient in their own interest and which will determine all the more our thinking and acting, the less it is openly expressed. Holzkamp speaks in this context of a “centred relationship mode” (2013d, p. 332). It is, as he points out, “*interwoven on different levels with just those knowledge interests that are to be brought to light in social self-understanding processes*” (ibid.). They are the “*formal side of reason/meaning complexes which, in one way or the other, factually contain the exclusion, suppression, negation, disregard of the – individual or collective – other’s interests in their life and dispositive power over it*” (2013d, p. 333). In this sense, Holzkamp defines all statements in which we reject actions of others

as unfounded, irrational, irresponsible, etc., as the starting point of subject science research. To doubt that people have reasons for the way they act, how 'deviant' this may appear to us, is, as he points out, identical with negating their subjectivity and right to a self-determined life. Thus, we affirm societal conditions under which the equal rights of all people are valid only on the condition that they behave in way that corresponds to our ideas and interests.

The necessity to recognize the reasons that make people act in the way they do, derives from the only subject science a priori that nobody can consciously violate their own interests (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 350). If I realize that the devaluation of others means the impoverishment of intersubjectivity and thus of one's own developmental possibilities, I will, in my own interest, try to overcome the conditions under which this is commonplace. All actions become intersubjectively comprehensible and explicable as soon as one considers the concrete circumstances under which they occur.

VII

The individualistic view of human agency and subjectivity implies also a one-sided notion of suppression. It is treated primarily as something that is done to us, but that we do not do ourselves. Or alternatively as something that is done to others who are unable to defend themselves against it and for whose interests we fight, as long as they act in accordance with our own ideas and interests. There is no language for expressing the specific humiliating experience that, in order to be accepted by those in power, we try to demonstrate our spiritual and moral superiority over those to whom such recognition is denied from the outset. This distancing from 'inacceptable' people that is more or less directly demanded under prevailing is generally associated with the suppression of our own 'inacceptable' insights and 'deficits' which could jeopardize our relatively privileged position if we expressed them. In this way, we not only affirm our alienation from ourselves and our fellow humans, but we also confirm societal conditions in which self-disciplining and self-denial in the interest of allegedly higher values are seen as the price for the development of individuals and of society as a whole.

In contrast, subject science seeks to make apparent that by distancing ourselves from others, no matter how vital this may be in the concrete situation, we reproduce our own powerlessness towards the prevailing power relations and, hence, our own manipulability and corruptibility by these. In this view, the distinction between 'us' and 'other people' is the core of our corruption. It complies with the ideology of the anti-social nature of human beings, which must

be controlled in the interest of all. This control has then been exercised by those who, for whatever reason, are capable of the demanded self-control and thus in charge of enforcing the prevailing norms and requirements against those who are not ready or able for such a self-disciplining.

The self-denial and the feeling of shame because of this is impressively described by Didier Eribon (2013), using the example of his feelings of shame about his false social background and his false sexuality. In particular, he emphasized the social consequences of such feelings of shame, which make us not only negate us ourselves, but also those who too deviate from prevailing norms. By thus taking the standpoint of those by whom our right of self-determination is fundamentally negated, our resistance to restrictive conditions is also 'inwardly' broken.

VIII

As already mentioned above, from a subject science point of view the problem is less the fact that we comply with demands and orders, even if we are not convinced by them or consider these unjustified. Under prevailing conditions, this is part of normal life. This will only be a problem if we deny this and conclude from the simple fact, that we have acted in a certain way, that it must have been right. With this we are definitely got caught in the trap. We can only have such ideas if we, guided by the individualistic ideology, equate the intentions that led us to our actions with their results. Yet by doing so, the subject science task gets out from sight from the very start, which is to expose the many forms in which we not only see ourselves compelled to act against better knowledge, but also to deny this fact.

In contrast to prevailing expectations on science, subject science research does not provide solutions to problems defined by others. It starts, so to speak, a level before. A central part of this research is to examine the societal context, in which the problems arise, as well as the possible partiality of the interpretations offered. This includes the question of the conditions under which these interpretations are convincing, but also of where and when we find it helpful to be told how we should see and handle the problems encountered. Such an approach challenges, above all, the common practice in psychological research to consider only those problems as appropriate for scientific research, to which the standard repertoire of methods is applicable.

By contrast, subject science research is primarily designed to grasp the respective problems as comprehensively as possible, that is unbiased by personal interests and fears. This includes the critical reflection of the situation from

which we evaluate the respective problems and the broadening of this evaluation basis by materializing the common necessity and possibility of conscious influence on the situation within which the problems arise.

In such an approach, the usual distinction between ‘professional’ researchers, who are essentially tasked with formulating the questions to be compatible with the methods and procedures available, and the persons needed to answer questions, which have little to do with their everyday lives, is rather counterproductive. Subject science research, however, would itself remain within the limits of prevailing thinking if it fundamentally questions the justification of traditional psychology and offers itself as a universally valid alternative to it. The only subject science imperative refers to the necessity of including in the research both the clarification of our own interests in the particular question and of the problem-adequacy of the methods used.

Acknowledgement

This article is a revised version of an article entitled “Widerspruch zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit in der Kritischen Psychologie” (*The Contradiction between Aspiration and Reality in Critical Psychology*) which was published in the journal *Forum Kritische Psychologie* in 2017.

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