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The Morals and Politics of Psychology: Psychological Discourse and the Status Quo. Isaac Prilleltensky. Albany: State University of New York, 1994, xiii + 283 pages, \$19.95 paper.

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This critical overview of psychology calls for a radical transformation of both academic and applied psychology. The author, Isaac Prilleltensky, joins others who criticize psychology's narrow focus and its repression of sociopolitical dimensions — specifically, the oppressive aspects of capitalist society, including its unrestrained individualism. In the preface to *The Morals and Politics of Psychology: Psychological Discourse and the Status Quo*, George Albee states that the book “will force its readers to reconsider the historic, slavish, ongoing preoccupation of psychology with attempts at changing the individual to the neglect of changing the social environment” (p. ix). The book ranges widely over various fields within psychology, describing the pervasiveness of the narrow focus. The author's stated intention is to advance the understanding of “the mechanisms involved in the utilization of psychology in the maintenance or reproduction of the prevalent social system” (p. 11). The description is persuasive; however, the analysis suffers from certain limitations, highlighted in this review.

While the analysis is ambitious in its scope, it is not ambitious enough. Prilleltensky acknowledges confinement of his investigation to “only a small segment of the total machinery involved in social reproduction — that is, the messages to conform operating in psychological theories and practices” (p. 13). This limitation is unfortunate, since the conformist role of psychology as a *profession* cannot be fully understood apart from description and analysis of *the pervasiveness of the psychological perspective in the culture*. The author may have acknowledged this pervasive fetishism of psychology; but he does not substantially describe it or analyze the forces that have produced it.

Another problem may be the author's presumption of an adequate level of readers' shared consciousness about the critique of capitalism and individualism. This may explain his somewhat unrealistic optimism that a raising of consciousness about psychology's conformist role may move “service providers and consumers alike [to] demand change” (p. 9). Other similarly hopeful sentiments appear at various places in the book.

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The book contains liberal acknowledgments, citations, and quotations. Parts I and III consist of general discussion, often repetitive. Part II consists of specific chapters (mainly adapted from the author's earlier publications), including: "Psychoanalysis"; "Behaviorism"; "Humanism"; "Cognitivism"; "Abnormal Psychology"; "Industrial/Organizational Psychology"; and "School Psychology."

Prilleltensky's central argument is that psychology's theories and practices, whatever their modest value, serve overall to promote the fetishization of the "individual solution," along with repression of sociopolitical dimensions of conflict, powerlessness, and suffering. This reinforces the culture's competitive and possessive individualism, meritocracy, and an implicit "blaming the victim" for personal troubles and failures. All of it helps to maintain the ideology of capitalism. Prilleltensky does not get into any real description of capitalist society; rather, he highlights its pervasive individualism, inequality, and injustice (see especially pp. 15-18; 69-186). He calls for psychology to engage in active "denunciation" of psychologism and unrestrained individualism, along with active "annunciation" of *distributive justice, cooperation and community* ("social ethics").

The chapters, "Behaviorism" and "Cognitivism," describe the inherent limitations of these specific fields. The chapter, "Humanism," highlights humanistic psychology's contradictions and banality, including its exaltation of "self-actualization." The chapter, "Industrial/Organizational Psychology," describes the prevailing promanagement bias of psychologists in this area of practice; approaches such as organizational development, sensitivity training, and QWL (quality of working life) serve to personalize and pacify conflict, promoting "cooperation" and technological rationality. Prilleltensky advocates more collaboration with labor, rather than with management. But the cited example of such an effort is not a persuasive one; it describes only a modest role for psychology, and it also fails to acknowledge the harsh reality of labor's current situation and limited vision (p. 149). The chapter, "School Psychology," argues that the prevailing narrow approaches of school psychologists mystify problems and reinforce meritocracy. Prilleltensky urges lobbying for policy changes in the educational system; but his discussion focuses narrowly on process, and does not include substantive content.

A longer chapter, "Psychoanalysis," describes the domestication of Freud, with the ultimate domination, in North America, of more conservative — over more radical — sociopolitical and/or sexual interpretations of Freud. Curiously, Reich is not mentioned. And, while Prilleltensky notes that Fromm's radical analysis is unique among the so-called neo-Freudians, he does not actually describe Fromm's powerful weaving together of Freud and Marx. Also, there is no mention of the contribution of Richard Lichtman (1982); his integration of psychoanalysis and marxist theory is, arguably, rivaled only by Joel Kovel's (1981), in recent decades. Both writers describe how capitalism has produced erosion of community, along with increasing fragmentation, antagonism, privatization, unrestrained individualism, bewilderment, and the fetishization of the psychological perspective.

The longest chapter, "Abnormal Psychology," employs the categories: "asocial"; "microsocial"; "macrosocial"; and "macrosociopolitical." (The scheme is somewhat problematical because of overlapping and the unclear fit of many examples.) The defect model (or medical model), in both its biogenetic and psychological forms, is "asocial." Prilleltensky notes that the criticism of this paradigm is compelling; however, he appears to underestimate the persistence of the paradigm, particularly the biogenetic form. He does not acknowledge that the power of psychiatry is, in fact, undiminished, even though its theoretical foundations may be seen as dissolved.

Psychiatry is shored up by drug companies, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the rest of the mental health industry, including psychology (in active and passive collusion). Prilleltensky might have noted this if he had included some history of the decline of the late 1960s–early 1970s critical movement (see Barney, 1994).

Along with this, Prilleltensky fails to acknowledge the continuing power of “diagnosis.” The power of this enterprise is undiminished, despite its being revealed as a pseudoscientific farce. Prilleltensky says very little about “schizophrenia,” a construct that — along with “depression,” another purported “essence” — plays a critical role in the legitimation of psychiatry. “Findings” of purported biogenetic causation of “schizophrenia” and “depression” are regularly trumpeted as *fact* by the mental health industry, while there is little reporting of the compelling debunking of such “findings” — they are, if anything, biological and neurological *correlates or concomitants, not causes*.

Under “microsocial,” Prilleltensky discusses sociological labeling theory, Szasz, Laing, and family therapy. The author takes special aim at Szasz’s conservative social philosophy. This characterization is accurate enough, given Szasz’s conceptions of responsibility, liberty, and choice — devoid of connection to sociopolitical reality — plus his unremitting hostility to any ideology except for a utopian right libertarian “free enterprise.” But Prilleltensky’s discussion of Szasz becomes muddled; he goes too far in his criticism, misrepresenting Szasz’s powerful critique of psychiatric essentialism by suggesting that Szasz’s use of the term “myth” implies *non-existence* of so-called mentally ill behaviors, rather than simply the *medicalization and mystification* of these behaviors (p. 107). Such interpretation, common among psychiatric critics of Szasz, is incorrect. Szasz’s conservatism and extreme individualism have been incisively critiqued without misrepresentation of his basic contribution.

Prilleltensky’s excellent discussion of family therapy, employing critiques such as Jacoby’s (1975), describes the early promise and the ultimate failure of both R.D. Laing and the mainstream family therapy movement to widen the context beyond the family, to include sociopolitical forces. Absent a wider focus, family therapy mystifies the turmoil of the family. The family is left as the “defect,” or the primary *cause* of the problems of its individual members, rather than being viewed as more the *victim* — a mediator or plaything of larger forces. Unfortunately, Prilleltensky does not include historical analysis of the family’s deteriorating situation: with erosion of community, growing insecurity and powerlessness, the family is increasingly overburdened, often overwhelmed, yet still expected to function as a “haven.”

Prilleltensky describes community psychology as “macrosocial,” because of its failure to become “macrosociopolitical.” He characterizes its advocacy as either tentative or timid liberal–reformist, but he does not offer substantial description or analysis of the limitations of its liberal–reformist policies.

“Macrosociopolitical” includes a *potentially* radical community psychology, along with feminist psychology and the psychiatric survivors activist movement. These last two come in for the author’s highest praise. But, in holding them up as models for approaches to power, Prilleltensky glosses over their limitations, along with the general problem of particularistic analysis and struggle. Significantly, after several pages of praise for feminist psychology, Prilleltensky drops in a succinct comment — that “feminist psychology, itself, tends problematically, to reproduce the individualism and conservatism of the larger discipline” (p. 121). But no elaboration follows this statement; he simply shies away from substantial criticism of the liberal feminism that dominates feminist psychology. Similarly, his discussion of the psychiatric survivors movement glosses over the fact that the focus of this movement

is limited (understandable enough, given the immediacy and enormity of psychiatric oppression). The point is — Prilleltensky does not deal with particularism and the dilemma that it presents for reconstruction of socialist vision.

Part III begins with the chapter, "Human Welfare and the Status Quo," outlining principles of a humane democracy, and emphasizing the need for "distributive justice." But the discussion is not substantive. Here, Prilleltensky takes up the subject of work, a logical place for a real attempt to articulate a vision going beyond liberal welfare state reform. In his one-page discussion, he makes a start — he advocates full employment and the democratization of the *distribution* of work, based on both ability and need (p. 177). But he stops short. He says nothing about *qualitative dimensions* — arguably, the picture of the experience of work in late capitalist society is one of general degradation. Nor does he attempt to say at least something about critical structural issues, such as ownership, organization, scale, and planning. Admittedly, the articulation of a socialist vision is a difficult task, at this time — with the market deified, global capital celebrated as triumphant, and the rethinking of socialism still in an early phase.

The last two chapters are disappointing; they do not provide additional substantial sociopolitical content. Here, Prilleltensky discusses a variety of mechanisms and moral concepts, such as "conscientization," "hegemony," "denunciation," "annunciation," and "empowerment." But he discusses them in only a skeletal fashion, without ever getting into analysis of the larger forces that explain the pervasive psychologism in the culture.

Prilleltensky may be underestimating the depth of the crisis of late capitalism, with its production of increasingly widespread alienation, powerlessness, and profound bewilderment, beyond more obvious forms of oppression. He says nothing about the *culture industries* and their huge role in the decline of critical thought, mystification of reality, and reproduction of capitalist ideology. In fact, the culture industries penetrate every area of life, promoting consumerism, celebrity, the cult of the self, and the fetishization of psychology, in an already dazed citizenry. While psychology *as a profession* may actively or passively promote all of this, and exploit it, its role is, arguably, a secondary one. Prilleltensky does not make this clear.

To conclude: this review has focused mainly on the limitations of the book; nonetheless, the book is clearly a major contribution to the critique of psychology. It provides an excellent view of the current state of the profession and its pervasive conformist role. And it is a gold mine of information and references.

A final comment. At several places in the book, Prilleltensky comments about the major stumbling block presented by the situation of the disciplinary fragmentation of the social sciences; and he urges adoption of *interdisciplinary* approaches to psychological issues (pp. 13; 20; 128–129; 202). He might have gone further; he might have joined the call for the clear establishment of the *primacy* of supradisciplinary approaches — with an end to psychology as a separate "discipline."

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