

One Generic Criminality? A Psychospiritual Perspective on Free Will, Psychological Innocence, and Criminal Behavior

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This paper considers human free will and criminal behavior from the perspective of Sydney Banks's psychospiritual understanding of human psychological experience. Banks proposed three universal Principles—Mind, Consciousness, and Thought—as the fundamental basis through which psychological experience becomes possible. After clarifying this ontological account, the paper considers its implications for human free will, psychological innocence, and the possibility that diverse forms of criminal behavior may share a generic psychological basis. Psychological innocence, as used here, does not imply legal innocence or the absence of personal responsibility, but refers to the possibility that harmful and criminal actions may arise while individuals are unknowingly experiencing their own psychologically generated constructions as compelling realities. From this perspective, a non-retributive response to criminal behavior would seek to deepen individuals' understanding of the source and transient nature of psychological experience rather than focusing exclusively on controlling or correcting its particular contents. The paper concludes by describing an intervention derived from Banks's understanding and reviewing preliminary evidence concerning its application with individuals involved in the criminal justice system.

Keywords: One Generic Criminality, Free Will, Human Psychospiritual System, The Power of Thought, Innate Mental Health, Psychological Innocence

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Whether human beings are genuinely free to choose their actions has occupied philosophers and scientists for centuries (Roskies, 2006). The question has particular significance for the criminal justice (CJ) system because conceptions of agency and choice underlie criminal responsibility and traditional models of retributive justice (Caruso, 2023). Criminal responsibility generally presupposes that individuals possess sufficient capacity to understand the wrongfulness of their actions and exercise meaningful control over their conduct.

This assumption has been challenged by deterministic and free-will-skeptical perspectives emphasizing biological, developmental, social, situational, and neurobiological influences on behavior. Neuroscientific findings concerning neural activity preceding reported conscious decisions have further contributed to questions about conscious agency (Libet et al., 1993). Some scholars consequently question whether the free will required for basic-desert moral responsibility exists (Harris, 2012; Pereboom, 2014) (Caruso, 2023), whereas compatibilists maintain that meaningful freedom and responsibility can coexist with causal determination (Dennett, 2003; Fischer, 1994). Others conceptualize conscious agency as a more limited capacity to influence behavior (Baumeister, 2008).

The implications for criminal justice are substantial. If the strong conception of free will underlying basic-desert retributivism cannot be sustained, punishing people simply because they deserve to suffer becomes difficult to justify (Pereboom, 2014). This does not require abandoning accountability or society's legitimate need for protection, but it invites reconsideration of criminal behavior and the purposes of criminal justice responses.

The present paper considers these questions from Sydney Banks's psychospiritual understanding of human experience. Banks proposed Mind, Consciousness, and Thought as three universal Principles underlying psychological experience. Rather than locating human behavior exclusively within either autonomous choice or causal determination, Banks's understanding directs attention to the psychospiritual ground from which moment-to-moment experience arises and thereby suggests another perspective on human agency.

This paper explores the implications of Banks's understanding for free will, psychological innocence, and the possibility of a generic psychological basis underlying diverse forms of criminal behavior. *Psychological innocence* does not imply legal innocence, absence of accountability, or denial of harm; it refers to the possibility that people may act without recognizing the source and nature of the psychological experience from which they are acting. The paper then considers a non-retributive approach to criminal behavior derived from this

understanding and reviews preliminary evidence concerning Three Principles-informed interventions with criminal justice populations.

Banks's Three Principles Understanding of Human Experience

(Banks, 1998; Banks, 2001; Banks, 2005) proposed three universal, formless Principles—*Mind*, *Consciousness*, and *Thought*—as the basis of human psychological experience. These Principles do not refer to particular psychological contents, traits, or mechanisms but to what Banks regarded as the fundamental basis through which psychological experience becomes possible.

Mind refers to the universal intelligence or formless life energy underlying psychological life. It does not refer to the individual mind, cognition, intellect, or a collection of mental processes, but to a more fundamental source of intelligence and life that Banks regarded as universal rather than personal.

Consciousness refers to the Principle through which psychological experience becomes experientially present. Through Consciousness, the forms arising within experience are experienced as real in the moment. Banks therefore used Consciousness more fundamentally than conventional psychological constructs such as wakefulness, attention, or self-awareness.

Thought refers to the formless creative Principle through which psychological form becomes possible and must be distinguished from particular *thoughts*. Ideas, interpretations, memories, images, beliefs, and other psychological contents are manifestations of this creative capacity rather than the Principle itself. Thought, in Banks's usage, therefore extends beyond deliberate or verbal thinking to the universal capacity through which psychological experience takes form.

Together, the Principles provide what Banks regarded as the formless basis of psychological experience. Moment-to-moment experience takes form through Thought and becomes experientially present through Consciousness against the more fundamental ground Banks termed Mind. Thus, similar circumstances can be experienced differently by different people and by the same person at different moments.

This perspective does not imply that external circumstances are unreal or inconsequential. Poverty, victimization, discrimination, interpersonal conflict, physical danger, and other conditions can impose genuine constraints and harms. Banks's claim concerns how such circumstances become *psychologically experienced*: their immediate psychological form arises through the Principles rather than being transferred intact from the external world into consciousness.

Innate Mental Health

A second central feature of Banks's understanding is that psychological well-being is intrinsic rather than something that must be continuously

manufactured through psychological effort (Banks, 1998). Banks described mental health as remaining within human consciousness even when temporarily obscured by the changing contents of Thought. Distress therefore does not necessarily indicate that the underlying capacity for clarity, wisdom, and well-being has been damaged or lost.

Persistent distress may occur when people become absorbed in distress-producing thinking without recognizing its transient nature. Contemporary research similarly identifies maladaptive repetitive thought (MRT), including worry and rumination, as a transdiagnostic correlate of psychological distress (Caspi & Moffitt, 2018; McEvoy et al., 2013; Watkins, 2008). These findings neither establish Banks's ontology nor equate MRT with the Principle of Thought, but they are consistent with the more limited observation that sustained engagement with distress-producing thinking is associated with psychological difficulty.

Why people persist in such thinking despite its adverse consequences remains an important question (Luca, 2019). From Banks's perspective, persistence need not reflect deliberate choice or a defective psychological mechanism. People may remain caught in distress-producing thinking because they do not recognize the source and transient nature of experience that appears compellingly real to them.

The Informational Significance of Psychological Distress

Banks's understanding also suggests a distinctive interpretation of psychological distress. Feelings of insecurity, anxiety, anger, and other forms of distress need not be understood solely as information about external circumstances; they may also provide information about the quality of one's current psychological experience.

This does not mean that people consciously choose “unhealthy thoughts” or improperly use the Principle of Thought. Rather, distress may accompany states in which changing psychological contents have become compelling without their transient nature being recognized. Recognizing the source of experience may therefore change one's relationship to distress-producing thinking without requiring every troubling thought to be eliminated, suppressed, disputed, or replaced.

Banks's Three Principles consequently do not constitute a technique for controlling thought or producing desirable psychological states. The proposed change lies instead in understanding the nature and source of psychological experience. As that understanding deepens, thoughts and feelings that previously appeared to demand continued attention or action may lose some of their apparent authority. Psychological distress can thereby become informative without implying that the person's intrinsic capacity for mental health has been lost.

Human Free Will

Banks's Three Principles understanding suggests a different approach to human free will. Rather than asking only whether behavior is freely chosen or causally determined, meaningful freedom may vary with people's understanding of the nature and source of their psychological experience. Freedom may increase as individuals recognize thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and states of mind as changing forms arising within consciousness rather than realities that necessarily require belief or action.

This proposition does not assume that people freely choose which thoughts enter awareness. Thoughts frequently arise spontaneously and without deliberate intention. The proposed locus of freedom lies instead in the possibility that a thought can occur without determining what a person subsequently does.

Through Consciousness, psychological contents can become compellingly real. When their internally arising and transient nature is not recognized, individuals may become absorbed in them and experience narrowed possibilities for action. Anger may appear to require retaliation, insecurity self-protection, craving substance use, or perceived disrespect aggression. Such actions may feel freely chosen even though the person remains largely unaware of the psychological context within which the choice occurs.

Understanding the Three Principles may alter this relationship. Recognizing thoughts and accompanying feelings as transient forms of experience does not require eliminating or controlling them. A thought need not be treated as an instruction, an angry feeling need not become aggression, and an urge need not be enacted. Greater freedom therefore concerns less control over the *occurrence* of psychological contents than freedom from being governed by them simply because they appear compellingly real.

This perspective does not deny biological, developmental, social, interpersonal, or situational influences on behavior. Such factors can profoundly affect people's lives and the thoughts and possibilities that become salient. Banks's understanding instead proposes that these influences become part of lived psychological experience through the universal Principles described above. Freedom may therefore vary partly with whether that experience is recognized as experience or taken unquestioningly as a reality requiring a particular response.

Free will, from this perspective, is not an all-or-none capacity. When people become caught in anger, fear, resentment, craving, insecurity, or desperation, perceived behavioral possibilities may narrow. When these states are recognized as transient psychological experience, previously obscured possibilities may become available. Banks's understanding thus suggests a form of practical or experiential freedom: not independence from biological, social, developmental, or situational influence, but greater freedom in relation to the psychological experience occurring in the moment.

Case Examples

Accounts from individuals involved in the criminal justice system who were introduced to Banks's understanding illustrate the proposed change (Studley, 2024). These reports do not establish the Three Principles ontology or demonstrate the existence of free will; they illustrate how participants described changes in their relationship to psychological experience.

One individual receiving criminal justice supervision for a drug offense described recognizing that painful thoughts were transient rather than inherent features of identity:

“These painful thoughts were not inherently who I was.... I came to understand that these thoughts were transient phenomena, arising and passing through....” (Studley, 2024).

Another individual with an extensive history of criminal justice involvement for robbery described recognizing the relationship between painful experience and attempts to escape it:

“This light bulb went off in my head.... All I was trying to do was escape from my painful feelings. I realized that we are never broken; we just suffer from a misunderstanding of where our experience of life is coming from.” (Studley, 2024).

Other participants similarly described becoming less identified with distressing thoughts, recognizing a common spiritual source connecting them with others, and becoming less defined by diagnostic or criminal justice labels (Studley, 2024). Collectively, these accounts portray change not simply as increased control over cognition but as a different understanding of oneself and one's psychological experience.

The relevance of Banks's understanding to free will therefore lies not in greater control over which thoughts arise but in potentially reducing the authority they exercise over action. As psychologically compelling contents are recognized as transient experience rather than unquestionable reality, additional possibilities for response may become apparent. Human freedom, in this sense, may reside less in choosing what appears in consciousness than in the possibility of not being compelled to act from whatever happens to appear there.

The Psychological Innocence of People Who Commit Criminal Acts

Banks's understanding also suggests a distinctive meaning of *psychological innocence*. The term does not imply legal innocence, absence of agency or responsibility, or denial of harm. Rather, it refers to people's lack of recognition, in particular moments, of the source and nature of the psychological experience from which they are acting.

People ordinarily experience thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and interpretations as representing how circumstances actually are. When anger, fear, resentment, humiliation, craving, jealousy, or insecurity becomes compellingly real, associated behavioral possibilities may appear similarly compelling. Retaliation may seem necessary, theft justified, violence

protective, or substance use the only available relief, without the individual recognizing the role of Thought and Consciousness in the psychological reality within which those actions make sense.

Psychological innocence therefore concerns misunderstanding rather than absence of choice or consequences. Individuals may experience the thinking supporting criminal behavior as accurate, justified, or necessary without recognizing themselves as caught within a transient psychological reality. From Banks's perspective, they are innocent of this misunderstanding in the limited sense that they cannot recognize an understanding they have not yet seen. This does not eliminate agency: compelling experience may narrow perceived possibilities without determining behavior.

Case Examples

(Sedgeman & Heath, 2021) illustrated psychological innocence through an individual who responded to depression and insecurity with increasingly self-destructive behavior, including repeated sexual encounters, alcohol use, travel, and extensive spending. When the individual eventually asked, "What kind of person does that?" Sedgeman located the behavior not in an inherently defective person but in insecure thinking experienced without understanding its source. Sedgeman and Heath argued that distressing feelings can become informative when understood as reflecting current psychological experience rather than automatically as evidence about external circumstances. Psychological innocence, from this perspective, supports compassion for the person without requiring approval of harmful behavior.

A more consequential example involved an individual incarcerated for a school shooting committed during adolescence. Looking retrospectively at the period preceding the offense, he recalled both thoughts supporting the shooting and another thought urging him not to proceed. He later interpreted the latter as an expression of wisdom he had failed to recognize, whereas his thinking supporting violence had appeared compellingly real (Sedgeman & Heath, 2021).

This account does not establish that greater understanding would have prevented the offense. It illustrates instead the distinction between the *content* of psychological experience and one's *understanding of the nature of that experience*. The individual described competing possibilities but experienced the thinking supporting violence as sufficiently real to guide his behavior.

Psychological innocence can therefore coexist with accountability and societal protection. A person may commit a serious criminal act and require criminal justice intervention while having acted without recognizing the source and transient nature of the psychological experience within which the behavior appeared justified or necessary. Psychological innocence concerns how the person and the experiential context of the act are understood; it does not erase what occurred.

This distinction has implications for criminal justice. If criminal behavior sometimes occurs while individuals are absorbed in psychologically compelling experience whose nature they do not recognize, retribution alone does not address that misunderstanding. Accountability and public safety may remain necessary, but a response informed by Banks's understanding would also seek to deepen recognition of the nature and source of psychological experience, potentially expanding the behavioral possibilities available when similarly compelling states arise in the future.

One Generic Criminality?

Criminal behavior is highly heterogeneous, arising within diverse developmental histories, social environments, interpersonal circumstances, motivations, opportunities, and states of mind. Criminological research has identified numerous biological, developmental, psychological, social, and situational influences on criminal behavior. Banks's Three Principles understanding provides no reason to replace these influences with a single conventional cause of crime.

The possibility of *one generic criminality* proposed here refers instead to a common psychospiritual condition relevant to how these diverse influences become psychologically experienced. Whatever circumstances individuals encounter, Banks proposed that their moment-to-moment psychological experience arises through the universal Principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought. The contents and circumstances of experience vary enormously; the Principles underlying its possibility are proposed to be universal.

Societal inequity, adverse childhood experiences, criminal peers, family conflict, substance use, interpersonal provocation, and other established correlates of criminal behavior therefore remain consequential. They can shape development, learning, opportunities, and the situations people encounter. Banks's perspective addresses a different question: *Through what universal basis do such conditions become part of a person's lived psychological experience?*

The proposed generic element thus does not reside in particular contents of thought. One individual may become preoccupied with perceived disrespect, another with obtaining money, another with jealousy, fear, or anticipated rewards. What may be common is that psychologically compelling contents can appear sufficiently real or necessary that alternative possibilities become difficult to recognize. Retaliation may appear required, aggression protective, or substance use the only available relief. Psychological innocence concerns the individual's lack of recognition of the nature and source of this experience.

Accordingly, *one generic criminality* does not refer to a single criminogenic trait, cognitive distortion, psychological mechanism, or causal pathway. It refers to a possible common misunderstanding within otherwise diverse criminal behavior: psychologically compelling experience may be taken as a reality that requires, justifies, or strongly invites particular actions without its

transient nature being recognized. This misunderstanding does not determine criminal behavior or eliminate agency; as argued previously, compelling psychological experience need not be enacted.

Banks's perspective therefore complements rather than replaces established criminological explanations. Developmental adversity, social disadvantage, peer influence, learning, opportunity, substance use, and other factors address important conditions associated with criminal behavior. The Three Principles address the more fundamental psychospiritual basis through which such conditions become psychologically experienced.

If criminality can meaningfully be described as *generic*, then, it lies neither in a common criminal personality nor in a single cause of crime. It lies in a universal possibility of human psychological experience that may become particularly consequential in criminal behavior: people can become caught within compelling experience without recognizing its nature and source. Greater recognition may increase freedom in relation to such experience and expand behavioral possibilities when criminal action might otherwise appear necessary or justified. This possibility provides the basis for the non-retributive intervention considered next.

A Non-Retributive Alternative for Addressing Criminal Behavior

The preceding analysis suggests a non-retributive approach to criminal behavior grounded in Banks's Three Principles understanding. Like Caruso's (2023) public health quarantine model, it rejects punishment justified solely by basic desert, favors the least restrictive measures reasonably necessary to protect others, and emphasizes the dignity and well-being of people involved in the criminal justice system. Its distinctive contribution concerns psychological intervention.

A Three Principles approach does not replace efforts to improve social, developmental, economic, or situational conditions associated with criminal behavior. Rather, it addresses whether individuals can become less governed by psychologically compelling experience through recognizing its nature and source. The intervention therefore does not primarily prescribe particular thoughts, emotional states, or behaviors. It seeks to help individuals recognize the distinction between the universal Principles underlying psychological experience and the continually changing contents appearing within it.

Practitioners working from this perspective do not regard people who commit serious or repeated offenses as fundamentally psychologically defective. Criminal behavior is not excused, but neither is anger, fear, insecurity, craving, or other compelling experience assumed to have eliminated the person's underlying capacity for mental health. The intervention instead seeks to deepen recognition that such experience is transient and need not dictate action.

This orientation is compatible with accountability and public protection. Where individuals present continuing risk, criminal justice supervision or

restriction may remain necessary. A non-retributive approach concerns the *purpose and character* of that response: protection, accountability, and rehabilitation rather than suffering imposed because suffering itself is deserved.

Three Principles practitioners also distinguish *intellectual* from *insightful* understanding. Being able to describe Mind, Consciousness, and Thought does not necessarily indicate that one's relationship to experience has changed. The proposed therapeutic significance lies in personally recognizing the implications of this understanding in lived experience. Whether such insight can be reliably measured and shown to predict behavioral change remains an empirical question.

How This Alternative Differs from Established Correctional Interventions

The Three Principles approach differs in emphasis from established correctional interventions, although these differences do not establish its superiority. Cognitive behavioral interventions have substantial evidence supporting their use with justice-involved populations and commonly address patterns of cognition and behavior through cognitive restructuring, behavioral learning, problem solving, and skills development. A Three Principles approach does not primarily attempt to replace problematic thoughts with more adaptive ones. It seeks instead to change individuals' understanding of the nature and source of psychological experience, such that thoughts may occur without necessarily being treated as true or requiring enactment.

Trauma-informed and trauma-focused approaches address the consequences of adversity through diverse methods emphasizing such processes as safety, emotional regulation, interpersonal trust, and meaning. Banks's perspective does not dispute the reality or seriousness of traumatic events. Its distinctive proposition is that the underlying capacity for psychological well-being remains available despite what has occurred and that insight into present psychological experience may facilitate change without assuming that this capacity has been permanently damaged.

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and mindfulness-based interventions share certain similarities with the Three Principles approach because they can help individuals relate differently to thoughts and feelings rather than simply eliminating them. ACT emphasizes psychological flexibility and reduced cognitive fusion, while mindfulness commonly cultivates nonjudgmental awareness of experience. An important distinction lies in explanatory framework and the role of deliberate practice. ACT and mindfulness-based approaches typically employ structured exercises to develop psychological capacities, whereas the Three Principles approach emphasizes insight into the nature and source of experience rather than repeated techniques for managing psychological states.

Consequently, Three Principles interventions tend to be conversational and relatively nontechnical. Practitioners attempt to point toward an understanding

that participants can recognize for themselves rather than teaching them to continually monitor or control internal experience. Whether this approach is more accessible, acceptable, or effective for correctional populations than established interventions remains an empirical question.

The Three Principles approach should therefore be regarded as a theoretically distinctive and empirically testable alternative rather than an established replacement for evidence-based correctional interventions. Comparative and longitudinal research should examine psychological and behavioral outcomes, including institutional behavior and recidivism, and whether changes in understanding mediate these outcomes.

Guidelines for Three Principles-Informed Practice

A Three Principles-informed approach does not prescribe a fixed sequence of therapeutic techniques. Practitioners instead commonly emphasize four orientations: grounding their work in their own understanding of the Principles, creating conditions conducive to insight, listening deeply, and pointing participants toward Mind, Consciousness, and Thought. The aim is to facilitate insight into the nature and source of psychological experience rather than produce particular thoughts or states of mind.

Practitioner Grounding

Three Principles-informed practice begins with the practitioner's own understanding. Rather than merely possessing intellectual knowledge or delivering standardized information, practitioners attempt to work from an understanding they have recognized within their own experience. This grounding influences how they view participants: not primarily as psychologically defective individuals requiring correction, but as people possessing the same intrinsic capacity for mental health and wisdom as others. This orientation neither minimizes criminal behavior nor denies responsibility; it distinguishes the person from the act.

Creating Conditions Conducive to Insight

Because insight cannot simply be transmitted or produced through effort, practitioners seek to establish respectful, nonjudgmental relationships conducive to new understanding. Consistent with psychological innocence, they attempt to understand behavior within the psychological experience from which the person was acting without confusing understanding with approval.

The assumption of innate mental health is central. Psychological well-being is not something the practitioner must install in a damaged individual but a capacity presumed to remain available even when obscured by distressing experience. The practitioner therefore seeks to create conditions in which participants may recognize this capacity for themselves.

Deep Listening

Practitioners attempt to listen with minimal preoccupation with their own judgments, expectations, or predetermined therapeutic agenda. Rather than listening primarily to categorize problems or select techniques, they seek to understand how the individual's world currently appears from within that person's experience.

Three Principles teaching sometimes describes this orientation in terms of quietness of mind or intuition. These descriptions need not imply privileged access to another person's psychological state. Rather, they characterize a receptive stance in which practitioners remain open to what emerges rather than imposing a formulation in advance. Because insight is individual, practitioners cannot know precisely what another person needs to see or when insight will occur.

Pointing Toward the Three Principles

Practitioners ultimately point participants toward the distinction between the universal Principles and the changing contents of psychological experience. The objective is neither to persuade participants to adopt particular beliefs nor to teach them to monitor, suppress, challenge, or replace unwanted thoughts. It is to facilitate recognition of the nature and source of experience.

An individual may, for example, recognize that an angry thought does not require retaliation, insecurity does not necessarily indicate external danger, or an urge need not be enacted. The relevant change is not elimination of these experiences but a reduction in their apparent necessity as guides for action.

The practitioner's role is therefore better characterized as *pointing toward* an understanding than teaching participants to operate a psychological system correctly. Mind, Consciousness, and Thought are not techniques to be used more effectively; within Banks's ontology, the Principles are continuously operative. What may change is the individual's recognition of their implications for moment-to-moment experience.

These orientations—practitioner grounding, conditions conducive to insight, deep listening, and pointing toward the Principles—represent practice implications derived from Banks's understanding rather than established therapeutic mechanisms. Whether and how they contribute to psychological and behavioral change remain questions for empirical investigation.

Preliminary Empirical Support

A small body of research has examined Three Principles-informed interventions with correctional populations. The findings remain preliminary and neither establish intervention efficacy nor validate Banks's ontological claims, but they provide an initial empirical basis for evaluating outcomes associated with this approach.

Catherine-Gray and Denkers (2023) studied 127 volunteers incarcerated at HMP Nottingham in the United Kingdom. Participants received normal prison

programming, with 66 additionally receiving a 3-day Three Principles intensive. Paired *t*-tests and analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) controlling for preintervention scores showed greater postintervention innate health, self-control, well-being, and prosocial behavior and lower aggression among intervention participants than waitlist controls.

Kelley et al. (2021) examined men incarcerated at HM Prison Rye Hill in Warwickshire, United Kingdom, for sexual offenses. Participants received either cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) supplemented by intensive exposure to Banks's teachings or CBT alone. Paired *t*-tests and ANCOVAs controlling for preintervention scores indicated greater improvement in affective well-being and greater reductions in low self-control, depression, anxiety, and anger among participants receiving the supplemental Three Principles intervention.

T. M. Kelley et al. (2019) examined a 3-day Three Principles intensive among volunteers incarcerated at HM Prison Onley in Warwickshire, United Kingdom. Participants comprised an intervention group ($n = 36$) and waitlist comparison group ($n = 39$). Measures included the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, Purpose in Life Test, and PROMIS depression, anxiety, and anger scales. Paired *t*-tests and ANCOVAs indicated increased well-being and purpose in life and reduced depression, anxiety, and anger among intervention participants. Improvements in institutional behavior were also reported, with effects maintained at 6-month follow-up.

Additional studies have reported similar findings. A study of 54 adults under criminal justice supervision Kelley (2011) found a positive relationship between understanding of the Principle of Thought and psychological well-being and mindfulness. Also, T. Kelley et al. (2019) reported favorable outcomes following Three Principles-informed psychoeducation among participants incarcerated at HM Prison Onley in the UK.

Evidence with Children and Adolescents

Related research has examined Three Principles-informed programming among young people at risk for substance misuse, delinquency, and other adverse outcomes. Controlled evaluations of the Speaking to the Potential, Ability, and Resilience Inside Every Kid (SPARK) Pre-Teen Mentoring Curriculum included 357 students from two U.S. middle schools (*citations removed*; (Green et al., 2021a; Green et al., 2021b)). Compared with students in comparison conditions, participants reported improvements in communication, decision making, problem solving, emotional regulation, and resilience. Because these were primarily school-based samples, the findings are more appropriately viewed as evidence for prevention and developmental applications than direct evidence of correctional effectiveness.

Qualitative evidence has also been reported. Karn (as cited in Studley (2024)) described delivering the intervention to adolescents incarcerated for offenses including theft, violence, and assault. During one session, an adolescent identified participants who previously would have been considered

enemies because of gang affiliations and stated that he now felt “love for all of you” (p. 135). Other participants reflected on how reduced conflict and crime might follow from the understanding they had developed. Although such accounts cannot establish effectiveness, they illustrate interpersonal changes attributed by participants and practitioners to the intervention.

Overall, existing research suggests that Three Principles-informed interventions may be associated with improvements in well-being, emotional distress, self-control, aggression, and prosocial functioning. However, volunteer samples, relatively small studies, and limitations of existing designs preclude strong causal conclusions. Larger randomized trials, independent replications, behavioral outcomes such as institutional misconduct and post release recidivism, and longer follow-up are needed. Comparative studies should also determine whether Three Principles-informed interventions add to or outperform established correctional approaches.

The theoretical account advanced here suggests a further test. If beneficial outcomes occur partly because participants develop a different understanding of nature and source of psychological experience, changes in that understanding should precede or mediate subsequent psychological and behavioral change. Testing this proposition would evaluate the theoretical pathway proposed here more directly than favorable outcomes alone.

Conclusion

This paper has considered the implications of Sydney Banks's Three Principles understanding for human free will, psychological innocence, and criminal behavior. Banks proposed Mind, Consciousness, and Thought as universal, formless Principles underlying human psychological experience rather than as psychological mechanisms or techniques. Their relevance to criminal behavior therefore lies not in identifying another criminogenic variable but in reconsidering the experiential context within which choice and action occur.

From this perspective, meaningful freedom may reside less in choosing which thoughts arise than in one's freedom in relation to them. Psychologically compelling thoughts, feelings, and perceptions need not determine behavior, and recognizing their transient nature may make previously obscured behavioral possibilities more apparent. *Psychological innocence* refers to the corresponding possibility that people may act without recognizing the nature and source of the experience from which they are acting. It does not imply legal innocence, absence of responsibility, or denial of harm.

Similarly, *one generic criminality* does not imply a single cause, trait, or pathway underlying criminal behavior. Biological, developmental, social, interpersonal, and situational influences remain consequential. What may be generic is the human possibility of becoming caught within compelling psychological experience without recognizing its nature and source. In this limited psychospiritual sense, an innocent misunderstanding of experience may

constitute a common condition relevant to otherwise diverse forms of criminal behavior.

A Three Principles-informed intervention seeks to address this misunderstanding through insight rather than primarily through controlling psychological contents. This approach can coexist with interventions addressing social and developmental conditions and with legitimate requirements for accountability and public protection. Preliminary findings reviewed here are encouraging but do not establish Banks's ontology or the superiority of Three Principles-informed interventions. They support further investigation of whether changes in understanding contribute to enduring psychological and behavioral change.

The broader implication is neither that people who commit crimes lack agency nor that they simply choose to think badly. Human beings can act from psychological realities whose source they do not recognize and whose apparent necessity can obscure other possibilities. Banks (1998) wrote that “a lost thinker experiences isolation, fear, and confusion” and that thoughts alienated from inner wisdom contribute to “violence, cruelty, and savagery in the world” (p. 83). From the perspective advanced here, understanding the source of psychological experience may therefore offer not freedom *from* Thought, but greater freedom within the continually changing experience that Thought makes possible.

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