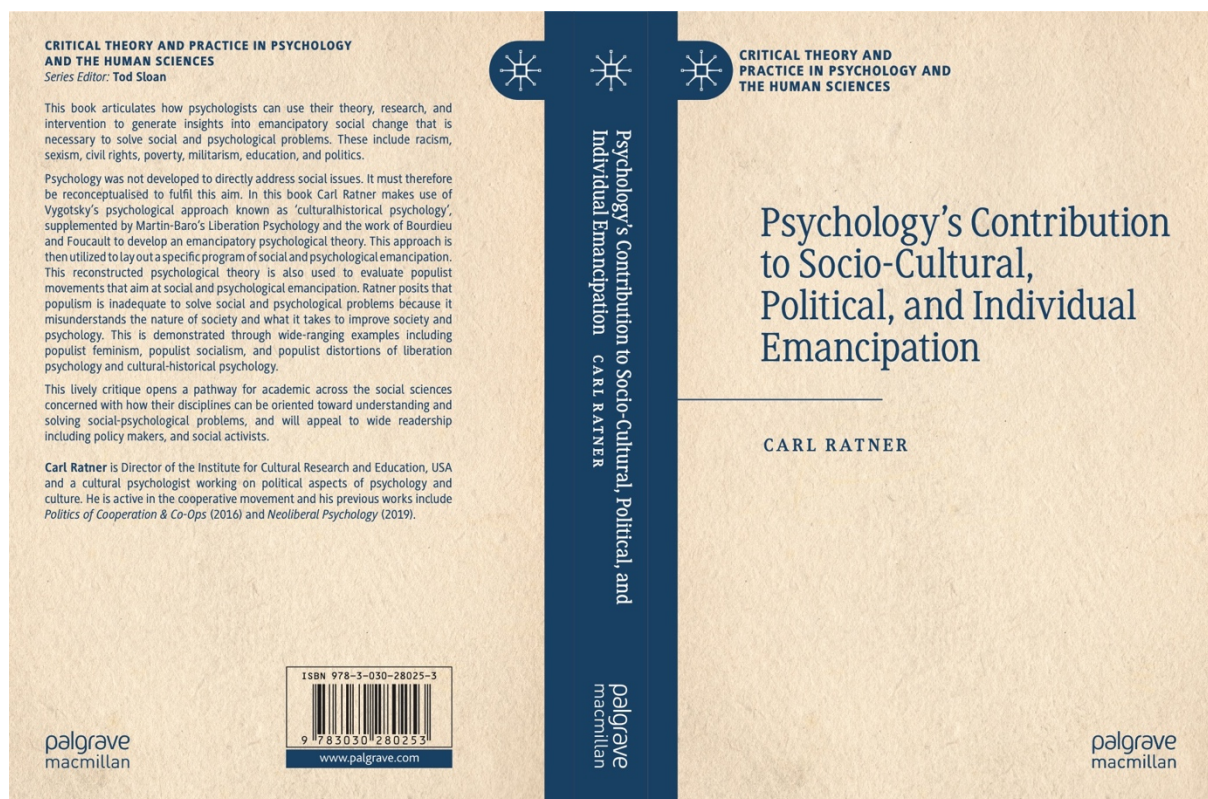


Psychology's Contribution to Socio-Cultural, Political, and Individual Emancipation (Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2019)

Carl Ratner

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Description

This book articulates how psychologists can use psychological theory, research, and intervention to generate insights into emancipatory social change that is necessary to solve social and psychological problems. These include racism, sexism, civil rights, poverty, militarism, education, and politics.

Psychology was not developed to directly address social issues. It must therefore be reconceptualised to fulfil this aim. In this book Carl Ratner makes use of Vygotsky's Marxist

psychological approach known as ‘cultural-historical Psychology’, supplemented by Martin-Baro’s Liberation Psychology and the work of Bourdieu, to develop an emancipatory psychological theory.

This approach is based in historical materialism. It is utilized to lay out a specific program of social and psychological emancipation.

This reconstructed psychological theory is also used to evaluate populist movements that aim at social and psychological emancipation. Ratner concludes that progressive populism is inadequate to solve social and psychological problems because it misunderstands the nature of society and psychology, and what it takes to improve society and psychology. This is demonstrated through errors in cooperatives, populist feminism, gender/racial identity, and populist socialism (e.g., Richard Wolff’s populist socialism). Civil rights are also shown to be inadequate for emancipation.

The book additionally identifies populist distortions of emancipatory social and psychological theories. These include Liberation Psychology (in the work of Montero), cultural-historical Psychology (in the work of Stetsenko, Nardi), and historical-materialism. (in the work of Cuellar).

This book recuperates and revitalizes the fields of cultural psychology, Vygotsky studies, general psychology, Marxism, and emancipatory politics.

This book will be of interest to the general reader, policy makers, and social activists. It will also be of great use to social scientists concerned with how their disciplines can be oriented toward understanding and solving social-psychological problems.

Carl Ratner is a cultural psychologist working on political aspects of psychology and culture. He has been active in the cooperative movement and has published two books on it. He has lived and taught in China, Saudi Arabia, India, and England and received several Fulbright Fellowships.

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Dedication: To Jenny and Matthew, a wonderful couple who make the world a better place.

Acknowledgments: Thanks to contemporary friends Jim Lantolf, Fernando Lacerda, Gus Bagakis, and Fernando Wolff Mendonça for their stimulating academic ideas, their political support, and their friendship; and to Jim Hansen at the University of Buffalo (1966-1968) when he introduced me to Critical Social Theory, Hegel, and Chicago Blues.

Epigraph:

United States Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Marx:

Our motto must be: reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but by analyzing the mystical consciousness that is unintelligible to itself. The reform of consciousness consists only in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it out of its dream about itself, in explaining to it the meaning of its own actions.

We do not dogmatically anticipate the world, but only want to find the new world through criticism of the old one. We do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth, kneel down before it! We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles.

In order to secure remission of its sins, mankind has only to declare them for what they actually are.

(Marx to Ruge, Sept. 1843;

https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm).

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Section One:

Developing A Psychological Theory for Scientifically Understanding and Enriching Psychology and Society

Preface

Transforming Psychology, Transforming psychology, Transforming Society

This book seeks to make the discipline of Psychology — which includes academic Psychology, psychotherapy, educational psychology, special needs psychology — relevant to understanding and correcting urgent social and psychological problems of our era. I seek to make this understanding and practice (i.e., praxis) integral, or built into, Psychology. In other words, Psychology contains the tools for this praxis within its theories, methodologies, and interventions.

Psychological theories, methodologies, and interventions are emancipatory. Social-psychological improvement then informs psychological work — psychological theory, methodology, interventions. Understanding and practicing social-psychological improvement will be performed in the course of doing Psychology.

Transforming Psychology requires reclaiming and reformulating its theories, methodologies, and interventions. Transforming the science of Psychology requires transforming its understanding of psychology. Psychological phenomena are reconceptualized as cultural phenomena. An emancipatory Psychology is a cultural Psychology that researches cultural-psychological phenomena. This makes psychological phenomena into windows into culture/society. Psychological phenomena are formed in macro cultural factors by cultural processes which impart a cultural form to psychology. Formulated in this way by scientific, cultural Psychology, psychological phenomena reflect and reveal culture; they critique culture; and they call for improving culture.

Emancipation becomes a component of psychological phenomena and scientific Psychology. Psychological science, psychological phenomena, and emancipation are integrated into a triple helix.

This will correct Psychology's historic errors of a) ignoring social issues, and b) psychologizing social issues by reducing them to abstract, psychological principles. These complementary errors have stunted Psychology's scientific potential as well as its sociopolitical potential for improving social life and psychological functioning.

Explaining the vast extent of this reclaiming and reformulating of Psychology's elements shall occupy the first half of this book. The

second half shall utilize refurbished Psychology to prove its mettle by analyzing and improving social movements that aim at social and psychological emancipation. This is one way that a refurbished Psychology can make important and distinctive contributions to social, political, and psychological enrichment.