

Pakeha Psychology and its Resistance to the Maori Challenge

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Psychology in Aotearoa

In this paper I want to attempt a partial, response to the question as to why it is that psychology is so opposed - actively and passively - to Maori initiatives in what it regards as its territory. Unlike some disciplines within the social sciences, psychology has resisted the calls for change, so that only three of six departments in the country have Maori lecturers. Those departments that have made appointments to the field have done so only in the last 3 years and the initiatives remain fledgling and marginalised, a shadow of what they should be under a genuine biculturalism. As a consequence psychologists training for applied careers have little or no formal input on bicultural issues and their practice reproduces the ideologies of the parent discipline.

A number of the contributions in this volume have examined a range of effects of the personal and institutional racism which characterises psychology. My goal is to report from the philosophical and political structures that sustain the frontlines of this conflict. It is my intention to write the large lines and thus I do not dwell on the resistances, revolts and challenges to established practice that I know exist within the discipline.

I look first to the alignment of psychology to the general epistemology of the western order, look at the nature of that system and its relationship to the state, before concluding with a sketch of the particular role of psychology in the power relations of Aotearoa.

The Ideology of Science

Psychology belongs to positivist science, the epistemological system which dominates the creation and legitimation of knowledge in western countries and their colonial offspring. Science is theorised as the exclusive path to the discovery of the TRUTH about the world and all that is in it. The familiar and central claim that science is objective and ideologically neutral, attempts to create a clear distinction between science and non-science which renders the latter meaningless or irrelevant in relation to scientific fact.

Like the Christianity of the middle ages, this epistemology cannot tolerate alternative approaches and findings because to do so undermines its authority as sole arbiter and legitimator of what counts as knowledge.

With its universalist goal of description and prediction in a unitary system, positivist science is an an prototypical monoculture that carries the torch of western superiority once borne by its ideological predecessor, Christianity.

Science and Power

Science began to displace the Christian worldview of the middle ages as the theology of western domination about 200 years ago. Prior to this most of the phenomena of the natural world and the works of humanity were credited to the glory of god. Rulers, benign or despotic, could not succeed without an authority to legitimate their activities, but increasingly as the credibility of various gods was undermined by advancing technologies, political manoeuvrings at all points of the ideological compass were justified in terms of scientific evidence or prediction.

In practice there is no clear separation of epistemological and political domination and the two are deeply interwoven in the culture of western societies; our worldview proclaims our superiority and justifies the subjugation of others which reinforces the original claims and encourages us to view the situation as an expression of the natural order of things.

Thus in a cyclical fashion as the credibility of science - built on "successes" which have much to do with investment and technological innovation - increased its power and influence, theory moved to consolidate its advances with rational, appar-

ready noted however, these conclusions are steadfastly rejected or ignored by the scientific establishment in spite of the point that no satisfactory rebuttal of either the theoretical or case argument can be mounted.

I suggest that the reason behind this approach has been the fear that once opened, the breach of subjectivity will admit a sea of illusion and quackery ushering a chaotic relativism in which the old order would be submerged. Parallel to this would run a catastrophic loss of power, influence and funding for science. While science as ideology stands to lose, the key factor in resistance to change lies with the people, the scientists and practitioners whose, livelihoods are at risk.

The Human Face

Psychology wears the mantle of support and respect accorded a science and must pay the dues for such acceptance. It is one of the bastions upon which our society is built and is with the others charged with warding off the chaos assumed to attend any kind of pluralism. In the end the only currency traded is the normative control of citizens; a hand in the production of Foucaults docile bodies.

The places where psychologists are most willingly paid by the state for their services are the places where they can contribute to the reduction of deviance in various forms, in education, in justice, in health. The private sector values psychologists in much the same way, drawing on their knowledge of the human frame to facilitate the lucrative mass marketing of material and ideological products. In addition both sectors have silver for those who will work to reduce profit-sapping interpersonal conflict in organisations.

It is these applied aspects of psychological practice which provide a major part of the justification for the continued funding and support of the discipline within academic teaching and research establishments.

The other mainstay to the ongoing support of psychology is tradition. Once established in academic institutions, disciplines are almost impossible to change quickly. Careers, reputations and livelihoods of individual tenured academics are extremely secure and only truly profound incompetence or major scandals are sufficient grounds for their removal. Thus developments of theory

and knowledge are often best measured in terms of lifetimes, but even so the processes of selection and promotion of students ensure that the establishment of schools and traditions will often long outlast their founders.

The Challenge

It is from this empowered combination of personal and institutional political interests and commitments that the maintenance of the articles of faith of positivist science within psychology receive their strongest support. To such interests the manifestations of a competing epistemology as represented by the steadily gathering presence of Maori students and teachers within the discipline are confusing, threatening and, most critically, undermine of the universalist premises upon which their practices are based.

For years Maori have told us that our work is producing findings and proposing interventions that are inaccurate, inappropriate and damaging to their people. Now Maori psychologists are claiming a distinct discipline built around their own worldview, experience and history, complete with its own methods, theorising and findings. If these things are different from established practice, contradict it and compete with it, where then the pre-eminence of positivist psychological science. This appears to fuel the repression that those working for Maori in Psychology report so eloquently here.

So what do we as a discipline do? Apparently we do nothing and hope it will go away. And when it doesn't, we give too little too late, begrudgingly and count and proclaim ourselves overgenerous and Maori "privileged". We ignore the advice that we don't like the sound of and consult with others who are more comforting to our divide and rule. We evoke bureaucratic procedures and cry poverty. And if Maori initiative trips on the steep, slippery path we allow it, we attack, criticise and reject.

The discipline, as practitioners, individuals and departments in this country, needs urgently to look to the standards against which its enterprise is evaluated, to tease out the ideological threads woven into that fabric and make decisions and commitments about the goals, the possibilities and the costs of continuing its collaboration with a repressive state.

ently unproblematic explanations of how it worked to produce miracles and progress. In this now conventional view, science is seen to consist of a unique method which, in combination with a series of ethical requirements on the part of its practitioners, guarantees the facticity of its products.

In the last two decades, the work of some philosophers of science, Kuhn (1970), Hesse (1974), Feyerabend (1975) has strongly questioned this received ideology and presented a thoroughly human image of scientific enterprise; subjective, partisan, self-contradictory, chaotic, anarchic. And altogether undifferentiated from other typical human activity - except that it enjoys access to the vast resources and power of the modern state.

Such views are congruent with those of feminist philosophers (Weedon, 1987) and flow also into post-positivist conceptions of science (Gergen, 1990). These are rejected, unrebutted, as heresies by the scientific establishment.

Philosophical Racism

Psychology has its antecedents in the philosophy and science of the 18th and 19th centuries when sages, freed at last from the eternal verities of religious knowledge, wrestled amongst other things, with the various challenges presented by consideration of the human condition. Descartes, Locke, Hume and other thinkers sketched out most of the fields which currently divert our sharpest talents.

What is so fascinating when we look in detail at the marks these people have left for us is that the peculiarities of time and culture which are so obvious to hindsight in their work, were not recognised as limits to the generality of the "knowledge" of the day.

Of particular relevance in this context are the theories of race espoused by these philosophical fore-runners of social science. Reviews by Bracken (1973) and Squadrito (1978), detail the extent to which such people usually from positions of great political power as well as their philosophical stance, espoused racial theories which justified slavery, colonialism, military conquest and economic domination of

"... those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered in its nonage. [in which case] ... a ruler is warranted in the use of any expedients that will attain ... their improvement." (Mill, 1975, p15)

Scientific Racism

At the turn of the century developments of notions of the inherent superiority of the white, male, ruling classes, supported the social sciences of eugenics and intelligence testing. These in their turn advised and supported a plethora of injustices perpetrated by political and judicial authorities on a wide spectrum of inconvenient individuals and groups. This less savoury catalogue of scientific activity traces closer to the present in the acknowledged atrocities performed by medical and other scientists in Nazi Germany and the array of routine and experimental abuses uncovered by those prepared to look in almost any given society, including our own.

A thoroughly contemporary and relevant example is given in a critique by Leslie (1990) of a published paper by the psychologists Rushton and Bogart (1989) in which they attempt to establish that higher susceptibility to AIDS among Africans, resides in genetically based intellectual and moral behaviour.

Here in Aotearoa the psychological assessments of Maori in the Rakau studies by Beaglehole and Ritchie (1957) and conclusions such as *"That the Maori student in higher education may have difficulties with his [sic] work because of an average lower mental functioning, is not improbable according to recent psychological investigations."* (p152)

contributed to justifications for a generation of damaging educational and social policy directed at Maori.

More recently, in 1981, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research introduced an intelligence test called TOSCA which although locally constructed according to the best scientific principles, is heavily biased against Maori children (McCreanor, 1988; Nash, 1983). The test is widely used for streaming or similar organisational decisions at entry to secondary school and contributes to the contemporary crisis in the education of Maori (Smith, 1990).

In this light there is no comfort to be taken from the anti-historical claim that the cases referred to are simply examples of the misuse of an ideologically neutral tool. Instead they should be taken as evidence of the seamless unity of science and politics in human activity and as debunking the conventional philosophy of science. As al-

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