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## THE PATIENT AS REVOLUTIONARY

It is thrilling to be here in Cuba. In many ways, my own development — both politically and as a group psychotherapist — has paralleled the development of the revolution in Cuba. Since 1959 — when I began graduate school and the people of Cuba began socialism — I have devoted almost all of my intellectual energies, as well as my practical energies, to the study of two things: psychology and revolution. I have done almost all of that practicing and studying in the United States, from California to New York, north, south, east and west. I've traveled on many different paths, and viewed these matters from many dif-

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ferent perspectives. I want to share just a little bit of that journey so you'll have some sense of the practical-critical methodology that I bring to this discussion.

I received my doctoral degree in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of history from Stanford University in California in 1963. I began, some 28-29 years ago, to study the scientific validity (or invalidity) and the methodology of the social sciences and history and, most particularly, the validity (or invalidity) and methodology of psychology. That was before I was a Marxist. I share *that* with you because my belief that bourgeois psychology is a myth — that it is based on profound methodological errors, that it is essentially an intellectual and bourgeois (ruling class) biased methodological fraud — came long before I studied Marxism carefully. Actually it's more accurate to say that I became a Marxist out of the realization that psychology (and much else in bourgeois society, I must add) is a fraud. I say this at the beginning so that those of you who are listening (or reading) won't think that my critique of psychology is based purely on the fact that I am a dedicated Marxist and therefore *dogmatically* committed to the fundamentality of politics and not psychology. Psychology has always struck me, from the very beginnings of my philosophical investigations, as a pseudo-science.

In the course of the 1960s, while teaching philosophy at the university, I (like many others) became involved in radical politics. It was at that time that I began to study, as well as to participate in, the political process, in the revolutionary process, in the process of social change. There are those who might say, understandably, that the U.S.A. is a rather bad place to study revolution. But that's where I was so that's where I studied. In the course of the 1960s and the 1970s, my political activism caused me to be dismissed from one university after another in the United States. I sought, therefore, to find another profession. Life is filled with many

ironies. An irony in my life has been that, coming out of an academic background in the philosophy of science, as someone who specialized in critiquing psychology, the profession that I came to in the 1970s was psychology. I became first a drug counselor and then a psychotherapist.

I therefore had to deal, in some way, with this transparent contradiction: I was now working in a field which I took to be, without a doubt, an intellectual fraud. To be sure, many people in bourgeois society engage in activities which they take to be frauds; it's the story of all too many working people's lives. But I was eager and able to engage this personal/political fraud. So I began an extended examination of what it would mean to develop a clinical psychology, to construct a psychotherapy, which did not embody the fundamental contradiction of orthodox psychology.

So far as I can see (I saw it this way in 1959 and I see it still as we're approaching 1989), the attempt to construct a paradigm, an explanatory model for human behavior, for social activity, for the processes which we identify as human life based on the model of the natural sciences, creates a hopeless contradiction for the entire field of psychology. You see, if we look, even in a very superficial way, at the origins of the model of the natural sciences which has dominated the capitalist world these past 300-400 years, we discover that Galileo and others were able to identify a *proper object of study* for the natural sciences, in particular, for physics. And that by virtue of that *ontological* breakthrough, they were able to create a new science, to revolutionize the feudal, pre-scientific (Aristotelian) world view. Put simply, Galileo was able to recognize that physics' proper object of study was not *things at rest* (as defined by the Aristotelian framework), but *things in motion* and, ultimately, *motion itself*. Not *things at rest*, but *things in motion*, i.e., *motion itself*.

On the basis of that quite extraordinary ontological discovery Galileo, together with many others, of course, constructed a model

and a practice of natural science — essentially a mathematical model — which has proved to be remarkably explanatory and developmental albeit, in the final analysis, reactionary in the hands of the white male supremacist international bourgeoisie in terminal crisis. Over a period of hundreds of years, that natural science paradigm — which proved so efficacious in the development of technology and the transformation from feudalism to first mercantile and then industrial capitalism, in navigational and military advances, in industrial advances — that model became the model of *all* science. Even more, it became the model of understanding, of explanation, itself. Science, defined by this mathematicized naturalistic model, has become the paradigm for all human understanding. It should come as no great surprise, therefore, that there has been, over the course of this century, an attempt to apply this scientific-now-commonsensical model of understanding to human behavior.

Now while it is certainly true that the Galilean discovery of motion as the object of study was fundamental for the creation of his *Two New Sciences* (the treatise which introduced the *modern* sciences of mathematics and physics) and subsequent mathematical paradigms — while that was certainly valid for *nature* — the treatment of human activity as fundamentally analogous to the motion of matter in space and time (no matter how many qualifications you make, no matter how liberal you may be in saying, "Of course we appreciate the difference") is an error of inestimable magnitude. To use a model of comprehension or understanding (physical science) which is so rooted in the mathematicized conception of the natural world is fundamentally to distort what human beings are; it is, ultimately, to treat human beings as structurally analogous to the objects of study of the natural sciences.

In the 1960s I attended many conferences on this very topic. I was very very naive, very innocent. I assumed, after many confer-

ences, that we had put this issue to rest. Philosophical fool that I was, I thought we had successfully buried psychology by analytically destroying its foundations. But I have learned that things like psychology, things like capitalism, things like exploitation, racism, sexism, homophobia, are very difficult to bury. They do not die easily. Moreover, they often die much sooner than they get buried. So psychology goes on! In fact, as in a bad horror movie, it thrives. In fact, it grows.

Let me make a jump here. What I had told people I would talk about today is the psychopathology of the United States left. Let me make clear first of all what I *don't* mean by that. I don't know if you know this, but in the United States, in my country, politically reactionary and backward as it is, they actually give grants to show that revolutionary behavior should be understood as *deviant*. So when I speak of the psychopathology of the U.S. left, I don't mean for a moment that leftists or Marxists or Leninists or revolutionaries are crazy people. Nor do I mean that we revolutionaries are unusually or disproportionately sane! *Rather I want to suggest that the U.S. left — despite all of its anti-psychology rhetoric — has transformed into a sectarian pseudo-psychology movement.* I think the modus operandi of the U.S. left is, in effect, to attempt to alter the subjective state of oppressed peoples and working peoples. Its "tactic," in the final analysis, is what is called "consciousness raising."

Never in the history of our species has a consciousness *ever* been "*raised*." But the United States left languishes in a totally impotent state by virtue of its having been transformed into a pseudo-psychological operation (consciousness raising) and is no longer concerned, as a revolutionary movement must be, *with the activity (and the duty) of making revolution.* So what has happened, ironically, is that this mythic pseudo-scientific manipulation called psychology, this essentially fraudulent activity, the attempt to transform people's minds understood as physical objects (or physical

motion) — what might best be called coercion — has reshaped the U.S. left. Profound opportunities exist in the United States for the development of a broad movement, a mass movement of working people and oppressed minorities (the possibility of that exists in the United States today, in my opinion, more than at any time since the 1930s). But nothing is effectively organized, because the progressives (the honest ones, at any rate!) have become sectarian “consciousness raisers.”

Over the course of the past 10 or 12 years, I have been associated with a group of people who have developed the largest independent Marxist therapeutic center in the United States. I’m here with some of my colleagues — Dr. Lenora Fulani and Dr. Lois Holzman and others. We have developed an approach, social therapy, which we identify as Marxist. At a meeting yesterday an audience member asked, “Why do you call your approach Marxist? After all, many people identify the origins of psychopathology as social. Is it only Marxists who know that?” I agreed that it is not just Marxists who know that. But the issue of whether social therapy is Marxist therapy does not turn on whether we recognize the causes of psychopathology to be social, but rather on the recognition *that human beings are capable of radically reorganizing social structures, that human beings are fundamentally capable of creating and reorganizing the social environment which creates and develops pathology.* The conception of a human being that underlies our Marxist therapy is that people are not fundamentally passive or inert, not fundamentally overdetermined by our environment, but are in a dialectical and contradictory relationship to that determining environment; that is, a human being is someone who has self-consciously helped to build (with her or his labor power) the very environment which causes pathology. That strange characteristic of our species must be a fundamental presupposition of any Marxist therapy.

In social therapy, we treat people from many different commu-

nities: middle class people (the usual patient population), working class people, Black, Latino, white, farmers, many people. They come to our offices, thousands of people each year, because they are in pain, because they have emotional problems — they come for the same reason that they would come to see any therapist or counselor. These are ordinary people. *We relate to these people as revolutionaries!* Our assumption about the fundamentality of who a human being is, of what a person is, our Marxist presumption, is that people, organized into various social groupings, are fundamentally identifiable as a social force capable of transforming their environment radically. People are not simply to be understood as basically adaptive to societal norms, though to be sure we all adapt to varying degrees. There’s no question that we can adapt to societal norms — sometimes all too easily. But to presume *adaptiveness* to be the essence of a human being yields a therapeutic approach which is totally, qualitatively different from what you get if you presume that a person is *fundamentally* a revolutionary.

Let’s talk about the difference between relating to someone as fundamentally adaptive to a societal situation as opposed to relating to someone as fundamentally a revolutionary who is capable of radically transforming a social situation. We’re not talking about whether the patient, client, whatever, becomes politically active. We’re talking about how effectively we can treat psychopathology if we relate to people as capable of transforming the world — i.e., history — as opposed to relating to people as simply adapting to existing society and its roles. If we change that basic premise, what are the effects, scientifically speaking? What are the effects in the group therapeutic situation? So far as I know we are the only ones in the United States who are treating people from the vantage point of this radically different perception of what a human being essentially is. And we have effectively “cured” thousands of people, in many cases after every other clinical treatment has failed.

What do we mean by "cured"? We mean people who have spent decades destroying themselves with alcohol and drugs giving them up. We mean people who have spent decades and thousands of dollars at traditional treatment centers but remain incapable of functioning in society at all becoming productive, powerful and capable of emotional gratification. We mean people who have gone through between 10 and 30 years of orthodox treatment and by their own accounts (as well as by the accounts of the outrageous testing which goes on in many institutions of psychology) have been unmoved by any psychological treatment declaring themselves "better."

We have treated thousands with this revolutionary model. People ask, "Why do you think it works?" One reason it works, we believe, is that the root cause of a great deal of pathology has to do with people's difficulties in adapting to society. People's problems are in part *caused* by their difficulty in adapting to society. Therefore it is sometimes exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to "cure" them by counting so heavily on their capacity to adapt. If people come to you, as a therapist, and somehow or another their adaptive capacities have been impaired, or if people come to you and they simply have no desire to adjust (I think here of Dr. Martin Luther King's marvelous quotation about how the people who he thinks will have to change the world *are the maladjusted*), it seems very odd to us that traditional therapists so frequently and typically count on them to do the very thing that they don't know how to do or don't choose to do in order to improve!

The approach that we're taking does not require people to be more adaptive to society. It does something else. We talk about helping people to adapt not to *society* but to *history*. We make a distinction between society and history — between society as a particularly organized form of the historical process at a particular extended spatio-temporal moment, and history as the continuum

of that social process. We seek to find ways to help people not to adapt to society, but to find their adaptive location in the broader social continuum identifiable as historic process. But to adapt to history rather than to society is, in its essence, revolutionary, because (and as) it is to express the human capacity to radically reorganize the totality of the social environment. So what we seek to do is to help people to develop further what we take to be a fundamental human characteristic — that revolutionary essence of our species. We attempt to reach that revolutionary essence, that fundamental sense of self as capable of *being* in history, by transforming it. Therefore, in adapting to history — which, after all, *leads* society — people are in a better position to do something about how they relate within society. History leads development in the sense of the discovery of the renowned Soviet psychologist/methodologist Lev Vygotsky that learning leads (is in advance of) development. All too frequently, the price that you have to pay for adapting to society — I'm talking about U.S. society in particular — is to be sufficiently alienated so as to be totally distanced or removed from or estranged from history. So the contradiction of traditional therapy, if you will, is that even when it works to help people to adapt to their society, if it's a reactionary, racist, sexist, homophobic, backward, alienated, classist society like the one I come from — and to varying degrees all of modern society! — if you develop a therapy which simply adapts people to that, then you do so only at the price of people being further removed from history, which means people being further mis-identified as who we are fundamentally as a species. *To make people societally sane, using traditional therapy, you must make them historically crazy!*

Modern science arose from the bringing together of the science of physics and the science of mathematics, and a political economic base which needed that mixture for continued human development. Traditional psychology, together with its companionpiece,

traditional economics — the two new pseudo-sciences of the last several hundred years — must be effectively rejected. We must find a new science and organize a new political economic basis in order to "treat" the psychological problems that now stand in the way of continued human development. I am not suggesting, by the way, that psychological problems are in the mundane ordinary sense of the word fraudulent. No. Our world is filled, sadly, with people who have serious psychological problems. I am suggesting that traditional psychology has done precious little, if anything, to deal with them. I am saying that we must find some new paradigm (or anti-paradigm) — a *new way* — to deal with the psychological problems of our species. The paradigm or anti-paradigm? The new way? Revolution!

I think revolution needs to be the substitute for psychology. I think we should change the name of our psychological association to the "Interamerican Congress For Revolution." Now a lot of people say "That's terrible! It would make the whole thing political!" It would *not* make it political — it would make it scientific! It is *currently* political.

As currently organized, traditional psychology — not simply at this congress, but all over the world — is fundamentally an anti-scientific, secularly religious political operation. If we were, in fact, to take a step forward out of the dark ages and create a new approach, a new social science which truly dealt with people's emotional disorders as well as with issues of pedagogy, with issues of socialization, with all the issues that psychology is concerned with, we would discover scientific revolution.

Now, having said that, how do we carry out scientific revolution? How do we address social problems from the vantage point not just of some set of slogans, but from the scientifically organized activity of revolutionary change? One of the ways we do that, in my opinion, is to insist that we not simply speak of revolution to

revolutionaries. We don't only speak of clinical psychology to psychologists. It would be very strange if we had created a science of clinical psychology where a precondition for coming to see a therapist would be that you were a devotee of psychology. Our patients come to us for help. They have problems, they're in pain. We don't require that they be "committed to psychology." Now if we are truly to make the shift from traditional, pseudo-psychology to revolution, we must do the same thing. We need to say, "Please come into my office, I'd like to help you. What we do is revolution. Have a seat."

"Is this some kind of joke?" you ask. No. Because by *doing revolution*, you are using a scientific approach, a model, which fundamentally rests on a certain conception of a human being as capable of transforming totalities. And we cannot minimize for a moment how fundamental that is to the carrying out of revolution and how fundamental that is to people being able to be cured. Because cure is a social revolutionary phenomenon when it is not an adaptation to society, when it takes place in history, in the world, not in reactionary society.

We have practiced this radical approach for almost two decades. The difference in responses to it is, as you would expect, very radical. What does that look like? It looks like people first of all saying, "What are you *doing*? What is the meaning of this? I *insist* that you relate to me as a passive recipient of your goods and services. Fix me up! I am a consumer. I wish to be fixed by you." "It can't be done," we say. "We cannot fix you. We cannot cure you." "Well, if you cannot cure me, why have you hung up that shingle?"

People say, "I simply wish to be cured of my pain! I simply wish my pain to be relieved! Why can't you do that for me?" "Because we can do something for you that can change your life, that will develop your emotionality, that will reorganize your 'psy-

chology,' we can do all kinds of things for you, but we cannot cure you insofar as you insist that you are a commodity that is going to be effectively, coercively altered by something called traditional psychology." And a profound struggle ensues.

To wrap up. Going back briefly to the U.S. left. Here's an incredible irony. The U.S. left is forever telling me and others with whom I work very closely throughout our country that "our problem" is that we do psychology rather than politics. And we respond to them by saying your problem is that, in the name of politics, you in fact do bad, mythic, coercive, bourgeois pseudo-psychology.

I have spoken on just a few occasions to the orthodox U.S. left. I have said that one striking characteristic of the U.S. left is that they have no idea of how U.S. society functions! Never in the history of a left wing movement anywhere in the world has a grouping of leftists or so-called revolutionaries sought to revolutionize or change a society knowing so little about how it works. Their view, in the most arrogant, chauvinistic, exceptionalistic tradition of the United States, is to think that all one has to do is *raise the consciousness* of working people, or poor people, of oppressed minorities, and somehow this coercive pseudo-psychological activity will produce revolution. As I said before, in my opinion, consciousness is not raised. I do not think there has ever been a single known case of the raising of consciousness. I might sound like a vulgar materialist to you all, but I think buildings are raised, I think sometimes money is raised, I think children are raised, a lot of things are raised — but I don't think consciousness is raised. The conception of consciousness being raised, which dominates the U.S. left, is that an intellectual activity, a private mentalistic activity, is the precondition for carrying out revolutionary social activities. But as a matter of fact, it has been proven everywhere that exactly the opposite is true. In fact it is the active reorganization of social life which is

the precondition for the *transformation of consciousness*. Marx taught that in the first pages he ever wrote. It is fundamental to the understanding and activity of revolution and for the psychology which I am calling revolution.

We speak of social therapy as revolution for non-revolutionaries. This radical Marxist conception — that the fundamental or essential human characteristic is being capable of carrying out revolutionary activity (what Marx called practical-critical activity) — that's the foundation of anything which can be called or should be called a Marxist psychology. Ours is a radical insistence that we not accommodate reactionary society by relating to people — *any* people — as anything but revolutionaries.