



Transforming the Soul and Practice of Psychology: Placing Human Rights at the Center

Mike Wessells
Columbia University
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Overview

- Pressures for the misuse of psychological science are increasing
- Need for critical reflection
- Why human rights are important
- Ongoing challenges to respecting human rights
 - state abuses
 - moral drift in societies and organized psychology
- Regaining our moral values and compass
- Systemic transformation—primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention

Why Human Rights Are Important

- Grounded in the horrors of the Holocaust & World War II
- Civil society actors and state actors conformed to Nazi law and visions of ethics
- Nazi state became an instrument of terror, oppression, genocide
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 - state and non-state actors bound by obligation to protect universal rights—inviolable entitlements
 - states cannot allow national law to supercede international human rights
- Key in addressing mass oppression, violations of rights
- Promoting security, humane treatment, ethics

Ongoing Challenges to Respect for Human Rights in Psychology

- Context of terrorism, politics of fear, intense nationalism and the transformation of professional ethics
- Governments as perpetrators—not only ISIS and other non-state actors
- Psychology tends to reflect the Zeitgeist
- Diffidence and silence
- Reluctance of organized psychology to influence governments on human rights issues or challenge governments for human rights abuses
- Consignment of human rights to secondary position

U. S. Example

- Close relations between psychologists, the military, and the national security/intelligence establishment
- Post 9/11 attacks, psychologists were increasingly involved in national security work—BSCTs, ‘psy ops’, interrogation of ‘high value detainees’
- Longer term pattern of extensive research funding from Department of Defense
- Cozy relationship—systemic collaboration, visible in movement to attain prescription privileges
- Are we too close? Are psychologists and psychological organizations keeping appropriate boundaries?

U. S.—Moral Drift

- Unwillingness to speak out, take stance against the Bush administration redefinition of torture or psychological methods of torture & mistreatment
- Silence of most psychologists and psychological organizations in the face of abuses
- Collusion of the APA with national security actors
- Shifting ethical priorities--primary commitment to preserving/protecting one's country, enabling national law to take precedence over human rights standards
- Self-serving biases
- Comfort ourselves with statements and prohibitions (e.g., the prohibition against torture) that do not successfully address the pattern of abuses
- Not U. S. problems only

Regaining Our Moral Integrity

- Make human rights central in conceptualizations of professional ethics
- Align all professional ethics codes with international human rights standards
- Human rights as a litmus test
- National law cannot supercede international human rights
- When professional bodies fail this litmus test, penalties must be applied
 - IUPsyS bars and publicly reprimands national organizations whose ethics codes allow human rights violations
 - UN withdraws consultative status
 - National government withdraws non profit status

Institutionalize Human Rights Within Psychology

- Integrate human rights into science and practice-- holistic, systemic approach of primary, secondary, tertiary prevention of rights violations by psychologists
- (1) Primary prevention
- Education about human rights and what is appropriate in science and practice
- Monitoring--including independent monitoring when governments are perpetrators--even before actual violations occur.
- Enable appropriate boundaries relative to and distance from military and national security actors

Secondary and Tertiary Prevention

- Create a bright line against torture as defined by UNCAT
- End impunity for psychologists who cross the line
- Take steps against perpetrators, including citations for ethics violations and barring them from practice
- Whistleblowing and documentation of mistreatment/ violations
- Careful attention to the psychological, legal, and financial stresses that whistleblowers may undergo
- Provide psychological support for victims and witnesses

Conclusion

- Organized psychology is a duty bearer in regard to human rights—we should do our part to protect and promote human rights
- Focus on regaining moral integrity and moral transformation rather than image loss, repairing reputational damage, and quick fixes
- Make human rights central in the profession of psychology, in research, education, training, and practice
- Take a long-term, proactive, systemic approach to change
- Encourage and model critical ethical reflection, moral leadership, and concerted action in support of human rights, even when it is inconvenient to do so