



Book Review

Indigenous Healing and Its Prescription for Contemporary Psychology

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By Richard Katz

Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 2017, pp. 480.

There is something peculiar about the almost obsessiveness with health and wellness in the present day to the point where what goes by the name of wellness is actually its antithesis. For example, the emergence of the health and wellness marketplace for mass consumption, while having some beneficial aspects of raising awareness, is not a sign of the attainment of health and wellness. On the contrary, it is a sign of their deficiency or absence, to the degree of illuminating the ascendancy of the illness and dysfunction of this era. The rise of the global tourism industry, specifically the big business of what has become known as *spiritual tourism* or *psychedelic tourism*, often ends up commodifying the traditional wisdom and healing practices of the indigenous peoples, as if there could be a price tag or monetary value placed on such knowledge or healing practices. These phenomena are further indicators of the profound thirst for wholeness and transcendence and simultaneously the spiritual crisis of the modern world.

The quest for health and wellness outside of the conventional paradigm is in large part due to the intrinsic reductionism of modern science and its inability to confer what is beyond its scope of competence, principally the spiritual dimension. Mainstream psychology as a derivative of this materialistic science is in large

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part unable to provide authentic healing due to its inability to access realms that transcend the empirical order. Yet across the world since time immemorial, there have been and are modes of knowing and healing connected to the diverse religious and spiritual traditions of the world. Knowledge and science for the traditional peoples are inseparably connected to sacred science, metaphysics, and spiritual principles; however, this is not the case for modern science and its ways of knowing.

Seldom are alternatives known to the hegemony and colonialism of mainstream psychology. It is all too often assumed that modern Western psychology is the *only* psychology, when it is actually one among *many* psychologies. To be sure, there is nothing absolute or universal about modern psychology. It is often unknown that prior to the long historical trajectory of events that occurred in the modern West such as the Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, and European Enlightenment, there was a shared common or underlying metaphysics with the rest of the world's religions and spiritual traditions, and it was only in the post-medieval world of the West that this desacralized outlook atrophied and divorced itself from metaphysics. It is in the transcendent unity of religions that the perennial psychology, which recognizes that within each of the divinely revealed religions, including the religion of the First Peoples and their shamanic traditions, there exists a traditional psychology or "science of the soul" that can provide a multidimensional framework and pluralistic epistemology to understanding both the human psyche and its healing.

This book brings together Katz's work spanning over five decades within the discipline of psychology and with Indigenous Elders, healers, and knowledge keepers in Africa, India, the Pacific, and the Americas. He received his doctorate degree from Harvard University, where he taught for twenty years, and is professor emeritus at the First Nations University of Canada and an adjunct professor of psychology at the University of Saskatchewan. It contains a prologue, three sections, and eight chapters. *Chapter One: "If We Can't Measure It, Is It Real?": Entering the Profession of Psychology* provides an overview of the discipline of modern Western psychology as it is known through its "four forces," consisting of behaviorism, psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology, and transpersonal psychology to examine its limitations due to its reductionism. *Chapter Two: "We Try to Understand Our World—That's Just What We Do": Indigenous Elders as Our First Psychologists* presents the author's research in the field living among indigenous communities, the learning that transpired, and his exposure to ceremony, traditional knowledge, and healing. *Chapter Three: "We Respect What Remains a Mystery in Our Lives": The Enduring Foundation of Spirituality in Everyday Life* documents how the sacred pervades the whole of indigenous ways of life and is not limited to indigenous psychology and outlines how radically different mainstream psychology is in comparison due to being cut off from the spiritual dimension. *Chapter Four: "The Purpose of Life Is to Learn": Research*

as a Respectful Way of Experiencing and Knowing explores the distinction between the research methods of mainstream psychology focusing on prediction and control as an empirical science versus the differing ways of knowing of the indigenous peoples that are based on the principles of respect and exchange and how these sacred epistemologies can benefit scientific research. *Chapter Five: “All in the Circle of Our Lives Remains Valuable”*: *Nourishing a Recurring Fullness throughout the Life Cycle* discusses human development over the lifespan as informed by indigenous ways, in contrast with the developmental paradigms of modern Western psychology. *Chapter Six: “Health Is More Than Not Being Sick”*: *Balance and Exchange as Foundations of Well-Being* looks at the ways that healing is understood by indigenous psychology, which is not the same as obtaining a cure or the absence of symptoms as understood in modern psychology; health and well-being are not static, but require a way of life that is connected to the sacred. *Chapter Seven: “All My Relations”*: *Honoring the Interconnections That Define Us* explores how indigenous peoples understand the notion of relationship as it extends throughout the entire web of life to include the human being with all sentient existence, including the unseen and sacred, and how this differs from the perspective of modern psychology and its notions of the separate self and individualism that separates itself from community or society. *Chapter Eight: “There Is No One Way, Only Right Ways”*: *The Renewing Synergy of Multiple Psychologies* speaks to the diverse indigenous peoples and their distinct ways of knowing and healing modalities which inform their understanding of psychology.

Katz emphasizes that the book has been very effective as foundational reading to enhance work with indigenous individuals and communities in programs that train counselors and therapists, as well as in psychology courses. Contemporary psychology appears to be unaware of the fact that its presence within underrepresented and marginalized communities signifies the long-standing and continued process of a colonizing force and perhaps to its surprise is not perceived as a healing or liberating force to bring equity to all. The decolonization of psychology can allow it to become a psychology to benefit the well-being of all human beings to the degree that it is rooted in the sacred epistemologies of these diverse religious and spiritual traditions.

The discipline of psychology needs to be vigilant about continuing to be a vehicle of colonialism. Katz writes, “When racism and oppression and their consequent diminution of others infects mainstream psychology, its power becomes overpowering, denying diverse nonmainstream groups their rightful access to healing resources and social justice” (p. 5). To decolonize psychology is to restore it at its metaphysical roots so that it can once again become a true “science of the soul” as opposed to a *psychology without a soul*.

Conventional psychology’s commitment to the biomedical or medical model that exclusively focuses on the somatic (including the neurological and genetic)

dimensions, which exclude the intermediary dimension of the human psyche and its connection to the Spirit, is not only symptomatic of its reductionism, but is at its core also an important facet of its colonializing force. Katz points out, “A biological, materialistic approach continues to dominate, promoted as ‘superior’” (p. 75). Across the diverse cultures of the world is the recognition of the tripartite constitution of the human being and that of the cosmos, of which the human being is a small mirror, which consists of Spirit, soul, and body or the spiritual, psychic, and corporeal states. The notion that modern Western psychology is universal and applicable to all peoples regardless of fundamental factors of human diversity, cultural distinctions, and religious and spiritual traditions is an immense overreach and is an assault on what it means to be truly human. Moreover, “the global adherence to the Western-sourced *Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM)* as *the* definitional authority for what is mental illness, is but one example of the continued exportation of a false universalism” (p. 79). It is *scientism* purporting to be science that is the problem, for when science claims a monopoly on the truth, it trespasses beyond its own domain of knowledge, namely the empirical order. Katz conveys the fallacy of scientific neutrality: “The very concept of *neutral* research or *neutral* science is problematic” (p. 216).

The author points out that “spiritual journeys are at the heart of a healing psychology” (p. 36). At the essence of every integral psychology or “science of the soul” is the recognition of psycho-spiritual transformation or *metanoia*, which is inseparable from the spiritual dimension. Katz speaks to this: “To heal, one must die and be reborn into an enhanced state of consciousness” (p. 100). Healing and transformation are then possible within the lived experience and adherence of one of the divinely revealed religious or spiritual traditions of the world, which remains outside the scope of secular or conventional psychology. Traditional healing can never be an object to be obtained once and for all, even if the symptoms are no longer found, as it requires living in a balanced manner by way of the sacred teachings and practices of a given religion or spiritual tradition. Even when the spiritual dimension is not pathologized and is introduced in a favorable manner, it is often done without clear criteria and in an *ad hoc* manner. Katz adds, “spirituality’s position in Western psychology is unclear. Largely misunderstood, ignored, and dismissed within mainstream approaches, spirituality is gaining a foothold among countercurrents within that mainstream—but even there, confusion and misdirection still prevail” (p. 201). The recovery of indigenous psychology and all authentic forms of the “science of the soul,” known as perennial psychology, as a distinct discipline from mainstream psychology, requires the restoration of its sacred foundations in the spiritual domain (Duran & Duran, 1995; Smith, 2021; Stewart et al., 2017).

Regarding the present-day phenomena of the spiritual marketplace attempting to sell indigenous knowledge and healing practices for mass consumption, let the buyers

beware. Indigenous elders, such as Ratu Civo speak in unison about the fact that “Our sacred teachings are never for sale” (p. 132). At the same time, they are never free as such. This is further explained by the Fijian healer Ratu Civo, “Freely given ... yes. But not free. You do pay for these teachings. You pay in your struggle to understand them and even more in your struggle to apply them in your life” (p. 133).

This is an insightful and timely work that aims to establish a constructive comparison between modern Western psychology and indigenous psychology. Katz covers the essential elements in exposing the erroneous notion that mainstream psychology is universal and the standard or the only psychology, which it is definitively not. In fact, it could be said that as long as mainstream psychology disqualifies the intermediary realm of the human psyche, it is not a psychology or “science of the soul” at all. For the decolonization of psychology and psychotherapy to occur, its secular Eurocentric epistemology needs to be thoroughly examined and recognized. This work provides guidance to individuals or mental health professionals who wish to turn to indigenous psychology to understand the human psyche and its sacred knowledge and healing modalities. It is not about one psychology dominating all others, such as the ongoing hegemony of modern Western psychology, but the needed recognition that there are many psychologies that are to be found within the religious and spiritual traditions of the world. Through unlearning all that we thought we knew, we become capable of actually learning, so that a new path can emerge for us to comprehend integrative models that will support decolonizing therapies. It is through a life lived with intention and reliance on the Spirit that this path becomes discernable. As Danny Musqua, an Anishnabe Elder, instructs, “All ways of knowing, all teachings are connected. One thing leads to another, making it more clear” (p. xii).

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