

# Some lineages and resources of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology

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## ABSTRACT

Critical work and organizational psychology is developing on an international scale. Against the background of this evolving scientific field, in this extended version of my opening speech at the first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology, held from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2022 at the University of Innsbruck, I aim to address the following three questions: (1) What concepts may be relevant for critical work and organizational psychology in analyzing established „mainstream“ (i.e., hegemonic) conceptualizations within work and organizational psychology? (2) Cui bono, critical work and organizational psychology? – To what ethical foundations do (or can) representatives of critical work and organizational psychology refer to when they intend to criticize theory and practice in work and organizational psychology? (3) What do we know about work and organizations beyond domination, subjectification and social alienation? – About fractals of a humanist, socially sustainable economy. Preliminary answers to these questions and implications for the future of critical work and organizational psychology will be discussed.

## Keywords

Critical Work and Organizational Psychology – Critical Theory – Radical Humanism – German Critical Psychology

## Concepts und categories for the critique of established work and organizational psychological conceptualizations and practices

In recent years, research and teaching in *Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology* (abbreviated: critical W-O psychology) has developed increasingly on an international scale. This is evidenced by a growing number of conceptual reviews, seminal articles, special issues, and scientific conferences, including the present one (e.g., see Bal & Dóci, 2018; Dashtipour & Vidaillet, 2020; Fotaki, 2020; Gerard, 2016, 2023; Hornung, Höge & Unterrainer, 2021; Islam & Sanderson, 2022; Lefkowitz, 2012; Mumby, 2019; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012; Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2020). Therefore, to provide a complete overview on concepts, criteria and tasks of critical W-O psychology is not possible within the limits of this presentation. The more detailed or

focused articles by Bal and Dóci (2018), Hornung and Höge (2022), Islam and Sanderson (2022), Quaas (2006), or McDonald and Bubna-Litic (2012), which I used – complimentary to primary literature from different critical approaches – to identify topics and characteristics of critical W-O psychology, are helpful to gain a more in-depth understanding. Here, I will mainly refer to several concepts relevant for critical W-O psychology stemming from the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory and Analytical Social Psychology, Dialectical Materialist Activity Theory, and German critical psychology, and their reception within our network (<https://www.futureofwop.com/critical-wop>). That is, I will present several approaches relevant to critical W-O psychology with an emphasis on influential streams in German-language literature. Figure 1 provides an overview of these different schools of thought in the German context (including examples of some representatives).

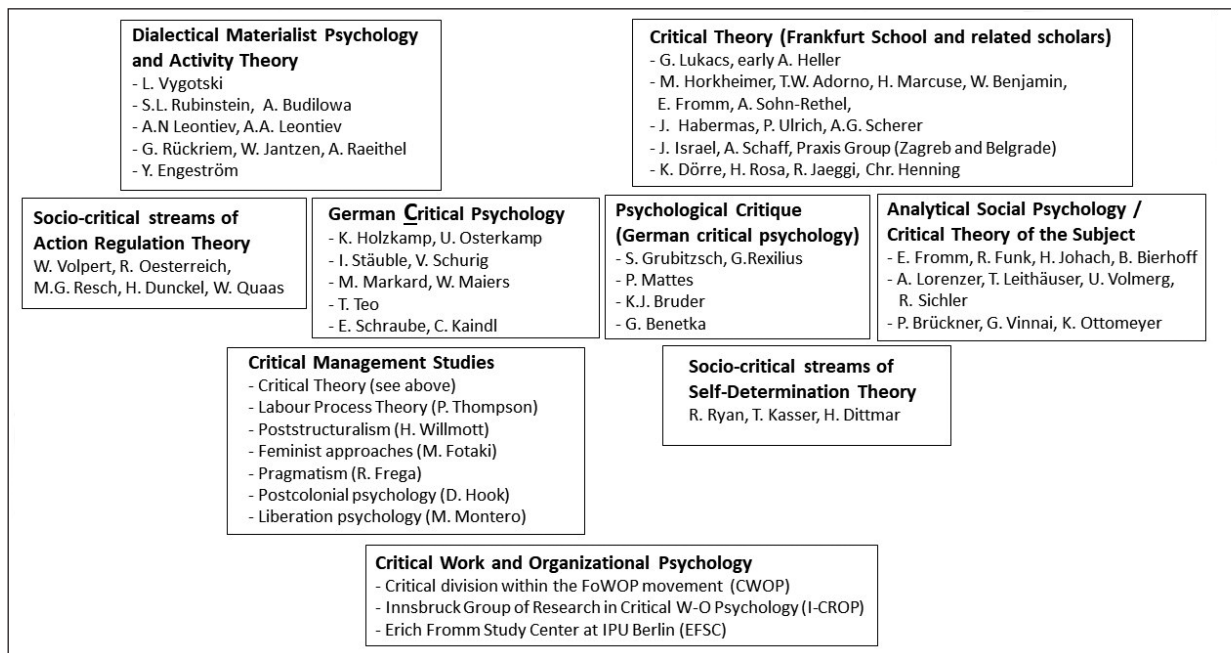


Figure 1: Some approaches of critical W-O psychology – socio-theoretical, socio-critical and pluralistic.

Starting from the *Dialectical Materialist Psychology* that emerged in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the 1920s, *Critical Psychology* (Holzkamp tradition) and *Action Regulation Theory* were developed in the 1970s in German-speaking countries and Scandinavia. Similarly, the *Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School* influenced the development of Erich Fromm's *Analytical Social Psychology* by researchers organized in the International Erich Fromm Society and, later, the Erich Fromm Research Center at the International Psychoanalytic University in Berlin (e.g., Rainer Funk, Thomas Kühn). Based on the work of the Frankfurt School psychoanalyst Alfred Lorenzer, a *Critical Theory of the Subject* was developed by Thomas Leithäuser, Birgit Volmerg, and colleagues at the University of Bremen (outline: Leithäuser, 2010). Both approaches created analytical methods to analyze the socialization of social character and the development of occupational lifeworlds of managers, workers, and consumers in the context of organizational power structures based on capitalistic principles. Also influenced by Critical Theory, an additional critical psychology network emerged in Germany that focused on *psychology critique* (theories and institutional practice) and, in part, also referred to concepts of Rubinstein's *Dialectical Materialistic Psychology*. Thus, both main strands of development (namely *Dialectical Materialist Psychology* and *Critical Theory*) are not independent of each other. While mutual criticism dominated in the 1970s and 1980s, (limited) attempts at integration from both branches are also discernable, especially in the Anglo-American and Scandinavian realms (e.g., see Teo, 2015). Within

*Self-Determination Theory*, a stream of research emerged in the 1980s devoted to the conceptual and empirical problematization of American corporate capitalism (e.g., Kasser, Cohn, Kanner & Ryan, 2007). This critical branch of Self-Determination Theory draws, among others, on Erich Fromm's Analytical Social Psychology (Weber, 2019). *Critical Management Studies* (e.g., Alvesson & Willmott, 1992), representing an international network of researchers, has had an even stronger influence on critical W-O psychology. This approach, which appeared in the beginning 1990s, has a strong pluralistic and discursive orientation and attempts to integrate concepts from Critical Theory and Foucault's Poststructuralism, as well as concepts from numerous organizational theories. Further influences on the development of critical W-O psychology, which also have been taken up in Critical Management Studies, can be found, for instance, in feminist approaches (e.g., Fotaki, 2020), in capitalism-critical streams of pragmatism (e.g., Frega, Herzog & Neuhäuser, 2019), postcolonial psychology (e.g., Hook, 2005), and indigenous and liberation psychology (e.g., Montero, 2017). For a more in-depth discussion of these approaches see Teo (2015).

All approaches that are relevant for the development of critical W-O psychology seem to share at least six interrelated themes that are outlined further below. However, different approaches weight the significance of these topics differently. For example, Critical Theory, including Analytical Social Psychology and Self-Determination Theory, focus on a humanistic ethics, whereas Dialectical Materialist Psychology and, its offspring, Activity Theory (the Leontiev tradition),

but also German Critical Psychology, attribute more importance to the political-economic foundation of their concepts. Moreover, different conceptualizations may compete within the same topic. For example, while Rubinstein's tradition of Dialectical Materialist Psychology, as well as Action Regulation Theory, stress the importance of mental work demands for self-actualization of workers. Analytical Social Psychology and the Habermas tradition of Critical Theory focus more on socio-moral learning opportunities within organizations. Activity Theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the multifaceted development of motives and sensory experiences through work. Additionally, drawing on psychoanalysis, Critical Theory and Analytical Social Psychology refer to the construct of dynamic unconsciousness (forming typologies of social characters), whereas Dialectical Materialist Psychology (Rubinstein tradition) and Action Regulation Theory oppose this psychoanalytic construct. Finally, the approach of Critical Management Studies is heterogeneous by definition, representing a pluralistic framework of several (more or less compatible) theories.

The following topical overview is preliminary and without claim to completeness, but may serve as a rough guide to compare and classify the above approaches. It may also stimulate the evolving categorization of topics, theories, and concepts relevant to critical W-O psychology. For each topic, approaches that made focal contributions are indicated:

- (1) *Dialectical concept of person-activity-society interplay*: Societal, cultural and historical genesis of psychological phenomena instead of biological / neuropsychological or behavioristic determinism (including dialectical spiral of acquisition, objectification and further development of cultural-historical shaped knowledge, competences and skills). Focal contributions: Dialectical Materialist Psychology and Activity Theory, Action Regulation Theory, German Critical Psychology, German Psychological Critique, Analytical Social Psychology.
- (2) *Image of socially embedded self-determination of human beings*: Human potential of self-actualization, socially embedded activity / agency / self-determination (including intentionality, self-reflexivity), solidarity, prosociality, and humanitarian moral competence (divided into sections 2a and 2b).
  - (2a) Cognitive personality development at work through regulation requirements fostering complex mental structures and processes, for example, related to weighting, judging, planning, designing, decision making. Focal contributions: Dialectical Materialist Psychology (Rubinstein tradition), Action Regulation Theory.
  - (2b) Socio-moral and experiential personality development at work through opportunities to (further) develop and satisfy socially acceptable basic needs, higher-order human motives, and to experience emotions of self-actualization, self-transcendence, and meaning in work (e.g., different concepts of subjectivity, identity, identity work, meaning, personality, or dynamic unconsciousness). Focal contributions: Activity Theory (Leontiev tradition), German Critical Psychology, Critical Theory (Habermas tradition), Analytical Social Psychology, Self-Determination Theory, Critical Management Studies.
- (3) *Ethical foundation in humanism*: Reflexive and/or discursive humanitarianism (opposed to neoclassical utilitarianism, social Darwinism, Confucianism, or ethical relativism). Focal contributions: Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), Analytical Social Psychology, Self-Determination Theory.
- (4) *Critique of the capitalistic deformations of economic systems, organizations, and work*: Political-economic and / or ethics-based critique of capitalistic domination, power, oppression, and work and social alienation in the scientific sphere of W-O psychology and related socio-economic disciplines and in the practice spheres of production, distribution, and consumption (divided into sections 4a and 4b).
  - (4a) Ideology critique of neo- / positivist functionalism and scientism, critique of managerialism (including psychologization, decontextualization, naturalization/reification, instrumentalization, competitive individualization, consumerism, commodification). Focal contributions: Action Regulation Theory, German Critical Psychology, German Psychological Critique, Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), Analytical Social Psychology, Self-Determination Theory, Critical Management Studies.
  - (4b) Empirically-based critique of economic, organizational, and working conditions and their social and psychological effects that are constraining, degrading, or harming persons and social systems. Focal contributions: Action Regulation Theory, German Critical Psychology, Analytical Social Psychology (especially, Critical Theory of the Subject), Self-Determination Theory, Critical Management Studies.
- (5) *Emancipatory epistemological interest*: Humanistically-oriented emancipation or liberation perspective, especially (though not only) in the interest of dependent, less powerful working people (including precarious self-employment),

research interest to contribute to micro-, meso-, and/or macro-system transformation (humanization, democratization, ecological and social sustainability). Focal contributions: All critical approaches depicted in Figure 1.

- (6) *Pluralistic methodological orientation anchored in the social sciences and humanities*: Critical methodological pluralism, depending on scientific object/subject-matter and concrete epistemological interest, participative research methods (including action research), focus on subjectivity-related methods embedded in a critical sociological frame of analysis. Focal contributions: Dialectical Materialist Psychology / Activity Theory, German Critical Psychology, German Psychological Critique, Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), Analytical Social Psychology, Critical Management Studies.

Complementing the described humanistic and emancipatory programmatic topics and characteristics, contributions to critical W-O psychology examine which opposing *philosophical* (including ethical or epistemological) and *political assumptions* are inherent in the very categories and models used within the prevailing W-O psychological literature. Critical W-O psychologists ask what *socio-structural influence factors*, what *technologies* of organizational power, and what possible impacts stemming from both *collective experiences* and *individual biographies* of employees are considered or obscured within prevailing or popular W-O psychological theories, models, or concepts. Critical W-O psychologists develop *socio-psychological*, that is, *dialectical multi-level models*. Such models specify dynamic interactions between the political-economical structure and cultural practices of a given society (macro-level), organizations within the respective economic system (meso-level), and psychological and psycho-social phenomena concerning persons acting within the economic and organizational context (micro-level). Here, the *historical and societal genesis of mental structures and processes* is accentuated as well as the *changeability* of societal and organizational features through (mostly long term) collective and individual action. Critical W-O psychologists are investigating in how far concrete principles and specific features of economy, enterprises, and work systems *serve or disregard human needs*, social security, and occupational health of the majority of the working people and those for whom these workers care – including those working under precarious conditions (e.g., in global supply chains) and the unemployed. Consequentially, in scientific and practical collaboration with experts from other disciplines, critical W-O psychologists explore how economy, enterprises and work activities can

be changed to serve those involved in a better way. Criticizing hegemonic currents within W-O psychology from a critical theoretical and radical humanist point of view does not necessarily imply that the majority of researchers and practitioners do not intend to improve organizations, work conditions, and work tasks for dependent, non-managerial workers. However, I agree with the assessment of McDonald and Bubnalitic (2012, p. 850) that „[w]hile the majority of applied social psychologists are genuine in their desire to improve the workers lot, their research, theories, and practice are only as good as the philosophies and theories that underpin them.“

### **Cui bono, critical W-O psychology? – To what ethical foundations can critical W-O psychology refer to?**

The first generation of Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School, like Horkheimer and Adorno (1972, original: 1947), similar in this regard like orthodox Marxists, were skeptical about formulating *positive* ethical principles or even projecting features of a humanist economy beyond the dictate of commodity production and profit-maximizing shareholder value orientation (see Wiggershaus, 1995; Jeffries, 2016). Many critical psychologists and representatives of Critical Management Studies have shared this deep skepticism. One reason for this self-restraint was the fear that positive visions or values would be instrumentalized, abstracted, and diluted by „neoliberal“ capitalist actors following the logics of commodification, or by ruthless populist politicians – as it had happened in the Stalinist past. However, a closer look on characteristic concepts of Critical Theory and related approaches indicates their implicit or explicit ethical foundations.

In the works of main representatives of Critical Theory (e.g., Adorno, 1993; Horkheimer, 1992; Habermas, 1970) and its cognate, Analytical Social Psychology (e.g., Fromm, 1968, 1976), their normative criticism of phenomena inherent to capitalist economies and scientific psychology is obvious. For instance, it manifests in the critique of instrumental (instead of moral) reason, social alienation, commodification of personality, economist thinking patterns, reification, and naturalization of capitalist political-economic principles and organizational relations. Such concepts reveal clear references to the humanism of Immanuel Kant, to the radical humanism of the early Karl Marx, and also to the idea of basic human rights as guiding principle of liberal republican democracies. Effects of managing, working, consuming, and being commodified under radical capitalist, so called „neoliberal“ economic conditions are considered as harm-

ful for both societal cohesion and individual psychosocial development and health (cf. reviews by Beattie, 2019; George, 2014). Consequentially, in *The Eclipse of Reason*, published in 1947, Max Horkheimer, criticizing the ideology of ethical relativism by liberal economists, even goes so far as to advocate humanist values, such as justice, equality, tolerance, and freedom, against their capitalistic de-essentialization in form of manipulated, arbitrary individual „preferences“ (Horkheimer, 1992). Distinct from – yet also related to – preceding concepts from Critical Theory, constructs from other streams within Critical Management Studies (e.g., Labor Process Theory, parts of Poststructuralism), like managerialism, domination, subjectification, instrumentalization, naturalization, or psychologization, clearly indicate references to Marx' critique of the political economy and to Kant's second formula of the Categorical Imperative, namely, the prohibition of instrumentalizing humans for ends outside themselves.

Similar to Marx, *Radical Humanism* in the tradition of Erich Fromm (1968, 1976), who broke away from the mainstream of the Frankfurt School, criticizes the pure emphasis of humanistic idealism inside an isolated ivory tower or a children's playground that underlies some approaches of Humanistic Psychology or so-called Positive Psychology. The latter is defined by its protagonists as „the scientific study of optimal human functioning“ (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Alas, those proud and noble knights of neo-Positivism have forgotten to tell us for whose benefit does this functioning in the context of labor really serve...? Rather, Fromm defends Humanism in *Marx' Concept of Man* (1961) and his later works: Humanism as a normative guiding principle states the absolute, *unconditional value* of each human being, and insists that the freedom and dignity of all human beings worldwide shall be the *uncircumventable objective* of personal, social, economic, and political endeavors (Fromm, 1976; for further conceptualizations of humanist ethics applied to work and organizations see Bal, 2017; Lefkowitz, 2012; Quaas, 2006; Ulrich, 2008). Several basic or civic rights can be derived from the three universal standards concerning living, human dignity, and personal freedom, such as freedom of expression, freedom of movement and other freedoms, voting rights, principles of justice and equality, private property, but also the social obligation of propriety. Highly relevant for psychological tasks concerning work and organizational design is that humanism is committed to guiding ideas of personality development, including moral development, comprehensive education, and application of creative capabilities and knowledge. Principles and concepts from humanism have influenced some research areas of W-O psychology (like job analysis and design or leadership studies)

to a certain extent (see Lefkowitz, 2012). However, what is the *difference* between *conventional* humanist approaches and *radical humanist approaches* in W-O psychology?

A main difference is that the radical humanist perspective (sensu Fromm, 1968, 1976) conceptually attempts to *overcome psychological reductionism*. To extend the explanatory power of theoretical frameworks of W-O psychology, radical humanism strives for the understanding of functioning and effects of *political-economic* and *organizational power structures*, their related *ideologies*, and the pervasion of those power structures and supporting ideologies into the concerned employees and consumers' minds (for related elaborations see Dejours, Deranty, Renault & Smith, 2018; Funk, 2011, 2023; Hornung & Höge, 2022). This conceptual work is very important for W-O psychology because those *societal* structures, their economic sub-structures and ideologies potentially pervade *individual* values, attitudes, cultural practices, communication, and job-related behaviors of people interacting in work-settings. Here, the *theory of the social character* plays a central role: A socialization theory integrating political-economic and psychoanalytical concepts, established by Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby (see Maccoby & McLaughlin, 2019) and further developed by Rainer Funk (2011) and other researchers in the International Erich Fromm Society. For further theoretical support for the „pervasion-thesis“ considering political-economic ideology and individual beliefs see, for example, Islam's (2020) multi-level model of the interactions between intra-individual, inter-individual, and the political-economic and cultural context of ethical decision-making and behaviors in business (adapted to the context of precarious employment by Seubert, McWha-Hermann & Seubert, 2023). Or, consider the content-analytically founded conceptual studies by Bal and Dóci (2018) on neoliberal ideology in organizations, by Ferraro, Pfeffer, and Sutton (2005) on economic business language, by Keenoy (2009) on HRM, or by Weber and Moldaschl (2014) on organizational citizenship behavior.

Beyond Critical Theory and Analytical Social Psychology, considering the German branch of *Critical Psychology*, founded by Klaus Holzkamp and Ute Osterkamp (for outlines see Motzkau & Schraube, 2015; Teo, 1998), I encounter further concepts very relevant for critical W-O psychology such as psychology from the standpoint of the subject, participants as co-researchers, general vs. restrictive agency, collectively planned environmental control, or collective care for subsistence. While this variant of Critical Psychology shares the deep skepticism against formulating of positive, context-isolated ethical values, at least during the first two decades of its



development, Critical Psychology used Marx' critique of the political economy as its social theoretical base. The concept of generalized agency envisioned the global transformation of capitalistic economy through long enduring endeavors of workers solidarity. In my view, a future task of critical W-O psychology could be to elaborate evidential relations and also differences between the concept of generalized agency and concepts of cognitive moral psychology and its foundation in Habermas' discourse ethics (see Ulrich, 2008). Further, the current critical psychological concept of *practice research* tries to support the participant in becoming aware of both external social conditions and subjective premises that hinder his/her personal development and his/her liberation from domination, and pain. I am tempted to see in this mutually reflexive research strategy of Critical Psychology *somewhat* a reference to aims of personality development which are also characteristic for the radical humanist approach within W-O psychology.

Finally, *criteria of humane work* developed by members of a stream within Action Regulation Theory critical to capitalistic labor utilization, represent a further approach of applying humanistic-ethical principles to W-O psychology. The focus of this German research network (e.g., Walter Volpert, Rainer Oesterreich, Wolfgang Quaas, Marianne Resch) guided the development of criteria and methods to analyze inherent qualities of work tasks and working conditions for the promotion (or impairment) of employees' cognitive and social competences and psycho-physical health. Originally starting with a Marxist analysis of the alienating structure of wage labor in 1975 and also referring to Leontiev's Activity Theory (outline: Weber & Jeppesen, 2017), Volpert and colleagues later derived three fundamental features of human activity from available cultural-anthropological studies. Resulting in an empirically grounded classification of humane work, these criteria were operationalized in a comprehensive observation and interview manual (Volpert, 1988, 1989; Dunckel & Pleiss, 2007). Accordingly, work tasks should offer the employee: *I. Purposefulness* (i.e., large scope of decisions; considerable temporal discretion / relative time independence; transparency and the possibility to influence the conditions of work; absence of (preventable) organizational or technical hindrances / objective stressors); *II. Object relatedness* (i.e., sufficient physical activity; direct contact to material and social reality; various sensory perceptions; a variety of working methods); and *III. Social relatedness* (i.e., complex communication requirements).

Reading the underlying action regulation theoretical publications, we can identify explicit references to humanistic conceptualizations of the *human condition* or *human potential*. Specifically, they

point to the first theory of alienation by Karl Marx (1961; orig.: 1844) referring to alienation from (a) the essential powers of humans; (b) from work activity; and (c) from social relationships to other humans. Consequentially, job analysis based on this action regulation theoretical classification of humane work criteria follows the idealistic guiding principle of the „all-round developed personality“ (Marx, 1961). Additionally, mostly without referring to Marx' political economy, the approach of *Socio-technical Systems Design* (see Trist & Murray, 1995) can be considered a forerunner of this critique of alienating work under the tread of radical capitalist management concepts. Moreover, within the socio-technical approach, similar criteria of humane work have been developed into methodologies for the redesign of work systems integrating psychological, technological, and economic criteria and design principles (e.g., Zink, Kötter, Longmuß & Thul, 2009).

Critical psychologists like Teo (2022) have explained that even humanist and critical theoretical conceptualizations of W-O psychology, often developed within capitalistic countries in the Western hemisphere, may be culturally biased or are at risk to be instrumentalized by a Western cultural supremacy. This can cause serious misunderstandings of other work cultures and result in biased scientific theories, methods, and results. Even worse, concepts of humane work and organization could degenerate into means of psychological repression or destroy well-functioning local cultures. Researchers conducting cultural and postcolonial studies (e. g., Hook, 2005; Salter & Haugen, 2017) have raised this well-justified objection against a normative humanistic foundation of critical W-O psychology. Therefore, the question arises whether moral or cultural relativism or a „value-free“ research orientation represents a meaningful alternative to a normative humanistic foundation of critical W-O psychology?

I do not think so, because, on the one hand, *value-free* research is not possible in an applied social science, which has to *evaluate* work and organizations with regard to human characteristics and potentials. This has been demonstrated in countless epistemological debates and work on Critical Management Studies. On the other hand, I do fully agree with critical theoretical scholars like Peter Ulrich (2008) and Thomas Teo (2022), who have demonstrated that an indispensable epistemological modesty does *not* imply relativism:

„Recognition means valuing the accomplishments of all cultures without invoking supremacy. Indeed, such recognition could mean appreciating the development of universal human rights that have a strong Western historical influence. Temporality entails that such rights can be extended or

expanded that they must be analysed as to how they have been used or misused, their cultural validity, and so on. The ongoing project of universal human rights is not in contradiction to cultural diversity but the goal of such a project would be to find agreement among cultures on human rights, and to ensure that they do not reflect the aspirations of only a select few.“ (Teo, 2022, p. 335)

Following Habermas' (1990) discourse ethics (his variant of Critical Theory) several presuppositions exist as uncircumventable, universal preconditions for tolerance, recognition, and respect for difference, also difference in values. These represent an essence of human rights. Among them are the right of life and integrity of the person. Without guaranteeing these, respect for diversity or a debate on cultural differences, is not possible. Because, by definition, respect, recognition of the other, and discourses are grounded in non-coerciveness. Difference in living styles or cultures need to be protected through only a few but *essential* human rights. If these are guaranteed, then free debates on their further development or conditioned limitation, e.g., in case of conflicts between societal objectives or in case of unforeseeable historical incidents, will become possible.

**What do we know about fractals of systems of work and organization beyond domination, subjectification and social alienation? – About fractals of a humanist, socially sustainable economy**

I deeply hope that critical theoretical and further critical psychological concepts will support us not *only* in criticizing and further-developing W-O psychological theory and methodology. In addition, there is need for gaining new empirical findings that help us and our collaborating professionals in education, business organizations, civil society, and politics, to contribute to humane organizational and societal change with regard to often global and pressing problems, such as (a) „self-exploitation“ under the reign of „neoliberal“ management in science and practice, for example, spurious and exploitative empowerment / employee participation, job crafting, enforced performance „excellence“, and self-endangerment; (b) digitalization, undemocratization and dehumanization, driven by big software corporations, global investment firms, and their political supporters by means of AI, robotics, and surveillance technologies; (c) development of an ecologically and socially sustainable economy, despite powerful „neoliberal“ or right-wing populist forces of inertia; (d) also as an effect of the above crises,

increasing alienation from representative democracy by citizens who experience work, market, and economy as „natural“, unalterable, technocratic dominion.

Islam and Sanderson (2022) have demonstrated in a thorough conceptual review that, after about 100 years of W-O psychological research, an emancipatory discourse that offers alternative possibilities in the field of economy and business is still underdeveloped (cf. Bal & Dóci, 2018). Like Critical Management Studies, radical-humanist research implies an emancipatory epistemological interest (Habermas, 1970; Hornung & Höge, 2022). Empirical studies are *not only* guided by objectives like identifying substantial deficiencies in work conditions and in leadership behaviors or deconstructing ideological tools of HRM. Radical-humanist research is also aimed at the development of *economic democracy*; namely, measures for reducing or removing political-economic, organizational, or technological factors that impede dignity and democracy at work (Bal, 2017; Weber, 2019). This emancipatory interest in critical interventions, embedded into a vision of *transforming* radical-capitalist economies including their work organizations, democratically and peacefully from the inside-out, is one of the main reasons for the separation between Fromm's more optimistic *Revolution of Hope* (1968, 1976) and Horkheimer and Adorno's (1972) deep cultural pessimism in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Economic democracy embodies a heterogeneous bundle of objectives, political strategies and tactics, that can counteract processes of erosion of democratic societies in work, organizations, and overarching economic institutions. Economic democracy encompasses institutions through which influence can be exerted on the management of companies and corporate groups, oriented toward the protection and advancement of employees and further stakeholders affected by economic decisions (for a comprehensive outline see Wright, 2010). By means of a complex structure of deliberative, direct democratic, and representative democratic instruments, workers and other stakeholders are to gain a directing and controlling influence on investment, employment and labor policy.

Internationally, it has not yet been possible to develop and anchor an economic democracy alternative that is influential in the political public sphere and in political institutions (parliaments, chambers, associations). However, democratically constituted enterprises represent an important component of a potential long-term strategy for building economic democracy in democratic republican societies. This is because various forms of democratic enterprises actually exist worldwide. Practices, successes and problems of employees' collective participation in decision making and cooperation that take place in those companies can be experienced and

communicated to an interested public. Democratic enterprises are business organizations (i.e., firms, companies, corporations), in which participative structures and processes are located at the organizational level, and where employees or their elected representatives are involved in decision-making processes, particularly, concerning strategic or tactical issues. Typically, participation rights are based on employees' shareholder status as co-owners of the enterprise (Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2020).

Given the non-existence of an alternative, democratic economic system and the failure of dictatorial, undemocratic planned economies, the promise of such *real utopias* (Wright, 2010) should not be underestimated. Future critical psychological research on democratic enterprises can also refer to Bal and de Jong's (2017) eight ways to promote human dignity through workplace democracy. Empirical studies (for reviews see Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2020; Unterrainer, Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2022) suggest that democratic enterprises, especially when applying socio-moral principles of the Solidarity Economy (<https://www.ripess.org/?lang=en>) or the Economy of the Common Good (<https://www.ecogood.org/en/>), represent institutions that can counter corrosive psychological and societal phenomena. These include: authoritarianism and obedience to authority; commodification of employees as „human capital“ or „human resources“; economic thinking patterns and reification of human beings; naturalization of capitalistic economy and corporate governance; moral disengagement or impairment of universal perspective taking. Further, corrosive emergences are encompassing forms and techniques of subjectification and identity-formation that internalize „neoliberal“ principles (instrumentality, competition, individuality); as well as managerialism, power asymmetries, and structural inequality and precarity. Current theoretical conceptualizations by representatives of Critical Management Studies and Radical Humanism, that are discussed at this congress (e.g., Funk, 2023; Kühn & Bobeth, 2022; Parker, 2017; Parker, Cheney & Fournier, 2014; Tischer, Yeoman, White, Nicholls & Mitchie, 2016; Yeoman, 2021), also form indispensable foundations to research the potential of organizational democracy for an ecological and social transformation and to develop respective socio-psychologically based political interventions.

## Conclusion

To conclude, we are living in times of global economic domination and financial speculation, far reaching corporate corruption, and global profit-driven environmental destruction causing humanitarian cata-

strophes. Against this backdrop, let me pose the question, whether scientific W-O psychology can really be prepared for the future, if we, as scientists and practitioners, do not have the civic courage to engage in international research, policy counselling, and practical politics regarding feasible and viable alternative economic and societal subsystems that support the urgently needed radical transformation of regional, national, and global economies?

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