Psychology and Politics

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Psy-sciences (psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, pedagogy, criminology, special education, etc.) have been connected to politics in different ways since the early twentieth century. Here, in twenty-two essays, scholars address a variety of these intersections from a historical perspective. The chapters include such diverse topics as the cultural history of psychoanalysis, the complicated relationship between psychoanalysis and the occult, and the struggles for dominance between the various schools of psychology. They show the ambivalent positions of the “psy” sciences in authoritarian regimes, revealing the role of psychology in legitimating and normalizing them on the one hand, and being exposed to the repression of dictatorships on the other.

The authors also discuss the ideological and political aspects of mental health and illness in Hungary, Germany, post-World War I Transylvania, and Russia. Other chapters describe the attempt by critical psychology to understand the production of academic, therapeutic, and everyday psychological knowledge in the context of the power relations of modern capitalist societies.

Psychology and Politics brings together an intriguing set of essays on the ever-ambivalent relationships of various psy-sciences to geopolitics and personal political commitments alike. Special attention is paid to conditions under repressive regimes, from the Russian Empire to Nazi Germany, and from Eastern European states-socialist to military dictatorship Brazil and apartheid South Africa, along with contexts of war or anti-Semitic upheavals. A major strength of the collection lies also in the wealth of evocative primary material assembled here. The essays are moving, vivid, informative, and revelatory.

Dagmar Herzog, author of Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an Age of Catastrophe

This rich collection of essays traces the complex interplay between the psychological sciences and politics in twentieth-century history. It provides a thought-provoking and sometimes unsettling account, from the direct implementation of policies to more indirect, hidden, and mediated forms of social, ideological, and cultural influence. Two things in particular make the book stand out: a geographical emphasis on the less discussed Eastern and Central European regions, and critically engaging with the topics of trauma, social injustice, and political-ethical responsibility in the history of psychoanalysis.

Tuomas Laine-Frigren, author of Searching for the Human Factor: Psychology, Power and Ideology in Hungary during the Early Kádár Period