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Praxites and Mal-praxites in Psychological Research: Hoaxes

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Title: Praxites and Mal-praxites in Psychological Research: Hoaxes

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T. S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) is often cited as groundbreaking for advocating that science is not necessarily or not only the accretion of theories and facts closer to something true (1). Instead, science encompasses the identification and resolution of problems within the constraints of constructs, theories, and notions of reliable and valid data accepted by *praxites*—i.e., members of communities who toil enmeshed within these constraints. Often enough and through this toil, enough anomalies arise to suggest the constraints are problematic and less desirable than others. New constraints develop and begin to be followed by converts, and resistance to the old way dissipates by force of argument, career change, or psychological decline and death. But as with evolutionary theories (2) and against Hegelian notions of progress towards the Idea wherein the real is the rational and the rational is the real (3), the iterative result is not necessarily closer to anything that might be true.

The constraints above have been described by many definitions of the construct *paradigm* (4) and were foreshadowed by sociologist Ludwik Fleck's *The Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* in 1935 (5). One might think that such a precarious position would engender epistemological humbleness among scientists, especially *praxites* of scientific psychology who continue to be viewed with suspicion by many physical scientists and philosophers of science (6). This might especially be the case given scientific psychology's failure to meet the challenge from philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend's "Explanation, Reduction, and Empiricism" (1962) which critiqued empiricist accounts of explanation and theoretical reduction, as well as advocated that constructs, theories, methodologies, and interpretations are necessarily incommensurate across research studies (7).

Instead of humbleness, however, there seems to be righteousness and sanctimonious which engender the corruptness of *mal-praxites*—i.e., members of communities who, as some translators of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-1880) have elided from the text, '...to the intelligent man, without God, everything is permitted' (8). And this *everything* takes two forms.

The first is for *mal-praxites* to selectively choose data and statistical analyses that best support hypotheses *a posteriori*; fabricate data and analyses; protect access to data, methods, and analyses precluding attempts at replication; and present *a posteriori* hypotheses as *a priori* ones conforming to collected data. Yes, there are contemporary attempts to prevent all of this by the likes of researchers such as Brian Nosek, co-founder and director of the Center for Open Science, and associates (9). But these latter *mal-praxites* do not address the challenge of Feyerabend and his acolytes. In essence, there's an implicit hoax by these latter *mal-praxites* to clean the Augean stables, when the problem is the stables not the filth (cf.10).

The second is the double hoax of *mal-praxites* accepting for publication articles that bear one's desired conclusions, even if the means to the ends are suspect. These accepted articles are intentional hoaxes written by *mal-praxites* impelled to smoke out the mal-praxites who accept the articles for publication based on suspect desires. There are two exceptional examples of this in the last 25 years. The first is physicist Alan Sokal's "'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" (1996) published in *Social Text* (11). The editors of the latter privileged physical scientists who seemed to support the social constructionist nature of the physical sciences. The second comprises articles written by literature and history scholar Helen Pluckrose, philosopher James A. Lindsay, and mathematician Peter Boghossian and accepted by some journals with specific political stances on race, gender, sexuality, and other forms of identity (12).

Only one tentative conclusion for psychological research here is that while insisting on criteria for tenure, promotion, and prestige based on refereed presentations and publication, citation counts, and grant dollars, psychological researchers are being hoisted towards dubious battle by their own petards. And history's irony is two-fold. First, while the Soviet Union's consummate mal-praxite in Stalinist times, Leon Trotsky, was assassinated with an ice axe in Mexico City by Soviet intelligence operatives, the mal-praxites of psychological research seem to be on much safer ground. And secondly, one of the participants in the assassin on planning was Soviet intelligence operative Leonid Eitingon, brother of a member of Sigmund Freud's inner circle, psychoanalyst Max Eitingon (13). Might this be the acting out of a Kuhnian paradigm?

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Abstract/Description: This article describes intrinsic problems with the pursuit of psychological knowledge in a socio-political world.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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