

... with Peter Kinderman

'How to fight against creation'

One book

The Plague, by Nobel prize-winner and existential philosopher Albert Camus. This book transformed my personal philosophy of life. Camus discusses the choices we make in an unfair, absurd and (at least in my mind) deterministic universe. The hero of the novel, Dr Rieux, is challenged as to why he continues to provide medical care without any hope of success: '... in this respect Rieux believed himself to be on the right road – in fighting against creation as he found it.' The world constrains our freedom of action: the purpose of life is still to make moral choices even in the face of that unfairness and absurdity. We can't choose our genes, we can't choose our childhoods, we can't influence much of what happens to us in our lives, and we can't choose to change our personal history. And yet, like Rieux, we can still choose how to respond; how to fight against creation.



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One inspiration

Just after I qualified as a clinical psychologist, I had the chance to pursue a combined academic and clinical career by working with Richard Bentall, who became my PhD supervisor and general inspiration, mentor, colleague and occasional sparring partner. I went to meet Richard to discuss the possibility of collaborating on some research – he was already well known in psychology circles. It was the day of Margaret Thatcher's resignation as leader of the Tory Party and therefore Prime Minister. I was waiting outside his office, a little nervous, when he sprang into the corridor, looked up and down, saw me and said (the first words he said to me): 'The bitch has resigned!' Sometimes you can form an impression of someone quite swiftly.

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Say yes... to everything within reason.

One thing that you would change about psychology

I'd remove the concept of 'abnormal psychology' from our thinking, from our textbooks, from our curricula. We don't expect scientists to

apply one special branch of physics to car crashes and differentiate this from the laws of physics that apply to 'normal life'. We all use the same basic processes to understand the world, even if we come to very different conclusions. There simply isn't an 'abnormal psychology' that applies to distress or explains 'illnesses' and a different 'normal psychology' that applies to everything else. There is just psychology.

One choice

Psychologists should remember that we are all either fighting for social justice or morally bankrupt if we aren't. Read *The Spirit Level* by Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson. It isn't a 'psychology' book, it's more economic sociology, but it highlights not only how unequal we are as a society, but also the level of harm that this inequality causes. I think psychologists should read it for the 'Camus' point – that so much of our experience as human beings, even our thinking, is constrained by our social circumstances, our culture, our upbringing and learning. And psychologists should also read it to ask 'psychological' questions: In what sense is our thinking shaped by our environment, and how does that happen? What gives some people the resilience, creativity or motivation to become statistical outliers and achieve more than their social cohort? What role does professional psychology have in the battle for universal human rights and social justice?

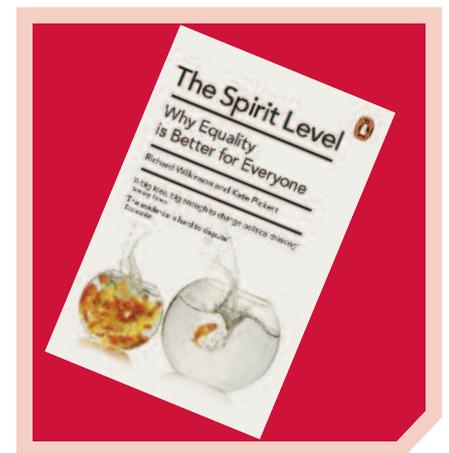
One regret

A very radical haircut I had 24 hours before beginning filming for a BBC *Horizon* programme. If only I'd been able to appear on TV with a

sexy haircut, my entire career would have turned out differently!

One thing that organised psychology could do better

Pretty much everything. The APA is strong, effective, visible, powerful. But there are many things that the APA could have done with that strength – support reforms of the American healthcare system, oppose the appalling gun culture in the US, speak out more about racial and social inequity. And, of course, the Guantanamo Bay waterboarding scandal still casts a shadow.



The BPS has many of those faults too – it seems to be weirdly reluctant to campaign on issues of importance to members, let alone members of the public. It's a charity, with a statutory requirement to promote psychological science for the good of citizens. In my mind the BPS is wonderful, but it really does need to do better in almost every area of its operations. That's not just 'the BPS', it's members, too – members of the BPS should be out there, on the radio, on TV, writing to Ministers and their MPs, asking questions on *Question Time*... and helping 'the Society' by writing reports, articles for the newspapers, leaflets for the public and even, sorry, by joining committees.

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