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Psychological universals and nomothetic aspirations of social psychology**

The experimental social psychology basically rejects idiographism, though its nomothetism is only sometimes similar to the one that dominates in natural traditions. This is illustrated in the paper on instances of the selected theories. They often differ from their equivalents in the natural sciences because they describe the instruments of human psychological functioning which either are non-universal or appear with various frequency in different cultural and/or historical contexts, fulfill diverse functions there, and even sometimes have a different meanings.

Keywords: *naturalism, nomothetic science, psychological universal, theory*

The nomothetism characteristic of natural science traditions is understood as aiming at the discovery and justification of laws described by general statements which refer to reality as understood in a deterministic or probabilistic way. They are regarded to be universally true (unconditionally or with varying probability: cf. Carnap, 2000; Hempel, 1991), which distinguishes them from generalizations whose truth is determined by limitations in time and space or the proper names describing them (Malewski, 1975).

Following the work of Karl R. Popper (1999) only those theories sufficiently rich in content, which serve the detection of truth and undergo strict tests should be regarded as scientific. This concept comprises generalizations which, in the natural sciences, are usually characterized by a quite high level of homogeneity and internal coherence. Its meta-layer comprises philosophical, meta-theoretical and methodological assumptions (Madsen, 1980), and are rarely discussed by the mainstream social psychologists.

They usually avoid formulating narrow generalizations which could indicate their idiographic tendencies. Yet, it happens that in this way they show naive, mindless universalism (Kofta, 2007) by their trusting belief that their research is sufficient to make universally true statements, although in reality there is an insufficient basis for it.

In opposition to experimental social psychology directed at constructing and testing theories, there remains

the position of social constructionism in particular. It rejects the scientific model of cognition and accepts idiographism, and declares definite support for one side in Dithley's opposition of sciences of culture versus sciences of nature (Dithley, 2004; Malewski, 1975). If theories of "empirical" social psychology are to be formulated, according to the supporters of the anti-naturalistic traditions of social constructionists, they have to be different by principle from the ones emerging in the natural sciences because of the inalienable specifics of its character. In such an understanding it belongs wholly to the humanities, and has to concentrate on penetrating the individualized, experiential worlds of the research participants treated as subjects.

Social constructionists, blaming the mainstream researchers for ignoring the context and assumptions of holism, believe people capable of intentional actions remain autonomous and, even that is why phenomena and psychosocial processes are alterable and unique. Social psychology should concentrate on them and, at the most, on locally specific regularities (Gergen, 1973, 1985). It is especially so because the wide popularity of psychological knowledge modifies patterns of mass behaviors, as a result of which theories earlier supported with research on human behavior lacking such knowledge become inadequate (Gergen, 1973).

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Influential representatives of mainstream social psychology look for a compromise between the two positions, show affinity to their intellectual origin and the possibility of their integration, and postulate assimilation of ideas rather foreign to the nomothetic traditions of this stream (Jost & Kruglanski, 2002). However, such a compromise requires resigning from the notorious overestimating the scope of authenticity of theories by social psychologists who are under the illusion of naive universalism. In light of the large amounts of data, it turns out that popularizing psychological knowledge does not influence mentality and the behaviors reflecting it as much as to make the preceding theories, not taking these changes into consideration, inadequate. In any case, influence of the acquired knowledge on human behavior can be described and accounted for with another theory which will take it into account (Grobler, 2006).

The compromise between both these positions should not mean complete resignation from the nomothetic orientation of experimental social psychology, recognition that causal explanations of human actions are something completely different from the ones used in natural sciences (Jost & Kruglanski, 2002; Schlenker, 1974; Stroebe & Kruglanski, 1989). Reorientation for idiographism, or even the theory being not abstract enough, would be remarkably harmful for it and its further development (Kruglanski, 2004).

Behind the aspirations for social psychology derived from naturalistic traditions stand important arguments, yet can one talk about the fundamental similarity of its theories to the ones formulated in natural sciences? Is its nomothetism of the same kind? Is the universalism of the laws researched by social psychologists in particular identical as the ones observed in natural sciences? Also some of the theories of natural sciences state rules on probabilistic laws, allowing the formulation of explanations and predictions that are accurate only with some probability and statistical dependencies here and there to achieve causal interpretation (Carnap, 2000; Hempel, 1991). Yet, among these and a lot of other similarities, can one notice important differences between them as well?

Peculiarities of psychological universals versus limitations of the theories describing them

Neither is it necessary to accept extreme positions of social constructionism nor viewpoints and assumptions of anti-naturalism in order to notice significant differences between nomothetically oriented theories of experimental social psychology and the "ideal" natural sciences, especially physics. In particular, formulating universally true, practically useful and cognitively valuable theories makes the described peculiarities of psychological instruments difficult (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005), which

gives rise to dilemmas without literal equivalents in natural sciences.

Access to the mainstream of social psychology, with its aim to find general and universally true theories, means taking the perspective of an outside, independent observer. At the same time, acceptance of the distinction between themselves and what is researched, as well as treating research participants as objects, is foreign to traditions of humanities in general, and to humanistic psychology in particular (Grobler, 2006; Lewicka, 2007). One must not forget that mainstream psychologists question the usefulness of the concept of human agency or at least strive to incorporate it into the naturalistic traditions (Trzópek, 2011).

Such an attitude is accompanied by the belief in the objectiveness of cognition, rejecting the belief that representations of described reality are always arbitrary and dependent on the taken perspective. It is optics outside the traditions referring to Wilhelm Dilthey, according to which getting familiar with the world of culture is to be characterized by recognizing its inalienable specificity. Attempts to understand cultural and historical phenomena as the creations of human spirit were to be based on the researcher's empathy as well as internal experience, emotions and intuition (Dilthey, 2004).

If the nomothetic aspirations of contemporary experimental social psychology were to be accepted, its theories would have to be regarded as different from those postulated on the basis of natural sciences only by the research field. In various ways, though mainly in causal terms, they present the social entanglements of individuals, or more rarely nowadays, the functioning of micro-communities. They also indicate the occurrence of various mental attributes or psychosocial phenomena.

Psychological universals, which enable one to formulate the theories that are always and everywhere true, are comprised by various psychical instruments of man equipment, including his mental structure. Thus, from the perspective of evolutionary psychology, it is possible to distinguish adaptation problems, to whose solution the human brain was adapted in distant past (Buss, 2003). First of all, some of its functioning and deep structures of thinking seem to be universally the same, attracting the attention of structural anthropologists and psycholinguists. Also, some contents of beliefs and ideas as well as thinking habits that play an important role in psychosocial activity of people, most likely occur universally, although in a different 'disguise'. Their occurrence enables social psychologists to formulate true statements regardless of time and place thanks to research conducted in various populations whose members function not only in different cultural and historical conditions, but also the climatic and ecological ones¹ (Matsumoto & Juang, 2007; Norenzayan

¹ Challenges of the physical environment do not necessarily have direct influence on human psychological functioning, e.g. in a severe

& Heine, 2005; Oyserman et al., 2002).

The biggest permanence and recurrence, and therefore universality, characterize slightly complicated phenomena and mental processes directly placed on the biological substrate that constitute human attributes, such as drives and emotions, especially the simplest ones. Yet, also some more complex phenomena, such as love or sexual jealousy, are considered by evolutionary psychologists as fundamentally the same regardless of the time and place (Buss, 2003). Generally emotional phenomena are universally quite well recognized by people, although the accuracy of identification is higher when they are expressed and perceived by members of the same national or ethnic group than when they are identified in people from other such groups (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002).

Susceptibility to social interactions in particular remains under the influence of cultural and historical conditions, which is not surprising. Research studies on conformity – understood as an important category of social influence using a famous Asch paradigm – indicate its increase in collectivist cultures of East Asia and its decrease in the USA beginning in the early 1950's for over forty years, experiencing social-political changes there (Bond & Smith, 1996).

Although varying in intensity, this phenomenon most likely occurs universally. In particular, normative conformity, conducive to inter-group diversity and intragroup homogeneity, contributes to the development of a variety of adaptive behaviors. Even though there are quite a lot of ambiguities still requiring a number of empirical tests, the universality of the occurrence of this phenomenon and its consequences is still supported by both the social psychology findings and the results of animal research conducted under behavioral ecology and evolutionary biology (Claidiere & Whiten, 2012), thus it might be the same about laws of animal psychology.

What is important here, universally true statements do not have to relate exclusively to the attributes, phenomena, or mental processes embedded in distinctive characteristics of the human species. Social psychology is not and should not be reduced to descriptions of biological laws; taking the naturalistic perspective does not necessarily have to mean being reduced to referring to physiological or neurophysiological bases of mental processes (Trzópek, 2006). Universally occurring mental regulatory mechanisms and behaviors cannot be fully described by laws of theory of evolution, behavioral genetics or brain science (Kofta, 2007). A lot of psychological universals seem to have a dual nature: the biological one, and the one irreducible to the properties of the human species. It is the result of human settlement - in particular the ecological environment and, above all, in the cultural/historical setting, which shares

climate the wealthier the people are, the more positive appraisal of their health. In a moderate climate this relationship disappears (Fischer & Van de Vliert, 2011).

some properties with other environments. The world would be a strange creation if each culture had a completely distinct logic of its functioning, different from those which govern the functioning of other cultures (Leung & Cohen, 2011).

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the common heritage of human evolution in its psychosocial functioning, yet the universal aspects of the latter are also rooted in the similarities of all 'cultural responses'. People isolated as a species share basic cognitive competences and motivational capabilities, which interact however, in various ways with the cultural context (Lewicka, 2007; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005; Secord, 1976).

The reductionist attempts of evolutionary psychologists seem to be unjustified when they claim (Buss, 2003) that culture is never an autonomous source of mental phenomena and processes and even that there is absolutely no room for its autonomy of the fundamental psychological mechanisms formed in the course of evolution. There are a lot of indications that at least some cultural/historical universals are not creations of merely human biological heritage (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005; Ossowski, 1967). In order to assign universality to them, one only has to operate at the appropriate - usually sufficiently high level of generality (Kruglanski, 2004; Schlenker, 1974). Even Kenneth Gergen (1973), over-emphasizing the variability of mental attributes (phenomena and processes), acknowledges that they can be put on 'the continuum of historical stability' – where on one end will be the ones which are the most susceptible to the influences of the context, on the other 'the more stable' ones, relatively resistant to influence, less susceptible to changes.

A given psychological attribute, such as the way of understanding the world or the type of behavior, may appear in the constellations of very different conditions, or even universally. Notoriously favoring cultural adaptations, it does not have to have genetic lineage (Cohen, 2001). The existence of 'human nature', not referring to its human species basis, can be regarded as a necessary condition and also sufficient for the occurrence of psychological universals (Ossowski, 1967). It is describable in the language of cultural adaptation mechanisms at a sufficiently abstract level (Cohen, 2001; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005).

Various environments are conducive to different behavioral adaptations, but whose diversity is limited. The similar pressure of various 'cultural responses' sets the acceptable range of variation of a given psychological or psychosocial phenomenon. Even the universally occurring behavioral dispositions and habits, formed through effective survival and reproduction problem solving in the past, do not have to be a product of evolution. They can occur without genetic changes and be passed through generations by cultural transmission (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Even if they are a product of evolution, they serve the function of a

'window' through which the nature of adaptation problems solved by our ancestors can be seen (Buss, 2003). However, references to the theory of evolution are often speculative (Eagly & Wood, 1999), as when without sufficient empirical support a psychological mechanism is explained as the hallmark of human species because of its alleged usefulness in solving a specific survival and reproduction problem in the distant past (Buss, 2003).

In this case, although the optimal variant of a given mental mechanism is not always adopted in a given cultural environment, over a longer period of time (not necessarily long from the evolutionary perspective!), it has a better chance of joining and consolidation than the alternative option that has proved less useful (Cohen, 2001). That is indeed the case, as the processes of natural selection described by evolutionists shape the psychological mechanisms which affect the culture and cause its transformation (Claidiere & Whiten, 2012). Yet, the culture and psyche influence each other, each of them can be described in a language useful in portraying the other (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005).

The theory of gender differences seems interesting here, as it is influential in evolutionary psychology and referred to by social psychologists (Kofta, 2007). It assumes that the occurrence of systematic differences between the sexes takes place because in the course of evolution each of them faced different adaptation problems. As a result, women attach more importance than men to resources and the position of a permanent partner and his ability to gain them, preferring his older (than their own) age. At the same time men prefer a permanent partner a woman younger than themselves, particularly valuing their fidelity and physical attractiveness. Although the canons of feminine beauty depend on the era and culture, however, to some extent one can speak of the universal elements of feminine beauty (Buss, 2003).

Such outlined differences between the sexes seem to occur universally, as expected by evolutionary psychologists, however there is a clear influence of social-cultural environment on them. Sometimes this influence results in clearly weakening them, though never leads to their complete disappearance. It turns out that for most of those differences the smaller they get, the greater the equality between the sexes. Such an interaction is not obvious for evolutionary psychologists, yet it can be explained and predicted on the basis of the competitive theory of social structures. It accounts for the differences in preferences and behaviors between the sexes by various social roles played by women and men, as permanently and universally experienced by their division of work (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

There are many indications of the universal occurrence of some of the instruments of human psychological or psychosocial functioning, and not only those reducible to

biological endowment. They are always and everywhere used analogously, serving similar functions, with the same meaning and even with the same frequency, and thus are likewise available. As a result, their universality is 'full' and not limited in any way (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005). As such, social psychology has (or can have) sufficiently general and universally true theories that describe them (Dymkowski, 2007; Kofta, 2007; Lewicka, 2007; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005; Schlenker, 1974). It can be reasonably expected that they are substantially similar to their counterparts in the natural sciences.

An example of a theory fully describing the pattern – in light of the knowledge universally available today – is the 'biological' model of social facilitation (Zajonc, 1983; Bond & Titus, 1983), describing the relationship between the subjective difficulty of the task and the level of performance in the presence of other people. This relationship most surely occurs as frequently in different socio-cultural contexts, and even appears in animals low on the phylogenetic ladder (Zajonc, 1983) and thus one can speak here of an animal psychological law.

However, the status of most of the influential social psychology theories, in which the important role is played by mental processes and/or complicated motivations, is not so obvious. Even the other models of social facilitation, taking into account the diversity of influence on the task performance level of various auditoriums and the mediating role of cognitive mechanisms (Daszkowski, 1988) describe the regularities clearly dependent on the cultural environment.

Sometimes the unsatisfactory status of the theory may lead to attempts at reformulating it, showing its not previously noticed relationship with another or replacing it with a theory that is more general and universally true, already existing, or formulated ad hoc (Dymkowski, 2007; Schlenker, 1974). These and similar endeavors should contribute to meeting at least some requirements of nomothetism and bringing experimental social psychology closer to the naturalistic tradition of natural sciences.

Thus, for example, the theory of cognitive dissonance, still influential in social psychology, most likely describes, after some reformulations, the same mental mechanism that occurs universally, though at a different frequency, in various cultures. It has similar functions there and means the same, also the relationships described by the theory take a similar shape, thus it can be assigned functional universality (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005). In the individualistic West dissonant effects are created without major obstacles, as a result of referring the relevant information to different standards, especially the easily available aspects of the independent self. However, in the collectivist East, creating dissonance effects seems to be a bit harder. There it requires a confrontation of information with relevant aspects of the interdependent self, determined by the self-relevant social

others or by their implicit public self-image (Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Kitayama et al., 2004).

Perhaps the underlying pressure to seek the consonant structure of knowledge was shaped by evolution, however, a universally accurate formulation of the theory describing its mechanism requires consideration of the reinforcement or blocking by various cultural/historical environments. For example, consistency of the self in different situations Westerners is necessary for subjective well-being, its presence favors receiving positive evaluations from others. At the same time, the people of East Asia perceive themselves as being well adapted to changing social reality despite the inconsistencies of various aspects of self-concept across situations, their well-being and the assessment received from others are not clearly related to their cohesion (Suh, 2002). They tolerate dissonance more easily and it rather does not cause serious negative mental consequences in them (English & Chen, 2011; Suh, 2002). However, like the people of the West, they feel the time incompatibility of different aspects of the self as aversive (English & Chen, 2011).

Thus the peculiarities of many instruments of psychological or psychosocial functioning make the theories describing them hard to be included in naturalistic traditions without reservation. For these phenomena and relationships either do not occur omnipresently or they can be assigned (and this is particularly frequent!) only "existential" universality (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005). They not only occur with various frequency in people located in different cultural and historical environments, but also serve different functions there, or even take a different form and with a different meaning. In any case, it is not infrequently about apparent nomothetism, poorly concealing cultural or historical relativism. General and universally true statements are allegedly formulated, which in fact are only spatio-temporally limited generalizations.

Thus, cognitive distortion consisting in the observer's excessive search for causes of the behavior of others (the actors) in personal factors, compared to the effects of the volatility of the situation, turns out to be only a generalization, which is supported mainly in the circle of Western cultures. Even here it occurs only in certain conditions (Malle, 2006); recently published results indicate that its intensity depends in particular on religious affiliation (Protestants make more internal attributions than Catholics: Li et al., 2012). The East reveals its reduction, loss, or even reversal – the causes of the actor's behavior are seen more in the volatility of the situation (Nisbett, 2009; Norenzayan et al., 2002; Oyserman et al., 2002).

So, are these only a broad generalization? Well, by referring to the most probable universally true theory it can be explained why, in one type of cultural background, this attributive asymmetry appears, yet not in another, and even that its reversal can be observed. The thinking of all

people about the social world remains under the influence of the availability heuristic, they use experiences typical in their environment which dominate their conceptions of lay psychology. For the people of the East, accustomed to attaching much importance to the context, there are external (situational) reasons for the behavior of others, they attract attention every day and therefore their impact is sometimes overestimated. For Westerners, personal reasons are the most cognitively available, and therefore sometimes overestimated (Nisbett, 2009; Oyserman et al., 2002).

The conception of egotism – very influential in social and personality psychology – should be given, at most, existential universality (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005) or even be regarded as merely a broad generalization. It assumes various manifestations of the pursuit of the most positive beliefs about themselves, and its expectations have clear empirical support in the individualistic West. However, in the East, the results are inconsistent, often dominated by self-criticism which is strategically useful in attempts at self-improvement (Chang & Asakawa, 2003; Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Takata, 2003). Even if some egotistic effects appear in both types of cultures, they occur at different frequencies, and can also mean something else.

However, it is possible to attempt to formulate a more general theory, declaring a universally occurring meta-purpose, assigned to the "human nature". It consists of becoming a good person, perceiving themselves as a significant person and remaining in compliance with the requirements of their own culture, and nurturing positive feelings towards themselves. A description of achieving this goal with one of these complementary efforts (egotistic and self-improvement), applicable only to "their" cultural environment forms a general theory, is probably universally true (Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005).

People socialized in East Asian cultures often reveal not only lower self-evaluations, but also generally agree with a lack of control over themselves and their own behavior as well as the reality external to the self (Nisbett, 2009). While individualistically oriented Americans of European descent most often reveal an internal locus of control, the collectivist Asians are characterized by external locus of control (Matsumoto & Juang, 2007). Thus the experience of subjective agency, which comprises both a sense of agency and the belief in exerting control over themselves and the outside world, appears to be typical for the people of the West, not as an attribute of universally understood man.

Most likely some, especially (but not only!) biologically "grounded" aspects of personality can occur in a similar way in very different cultures (Mc Crae & Terracino, 2005; Yamagata et al., 2006). However, research results also indicate a spacial variation of the appearance of certain personality characteristics, which are of great importance for social behaviors (Matsumoto & Juang, 2007).

Thus, for example, inter regional differences in the occurrence of manifestations of sexuality, extraversion, and openness to experience are explained on the basis of several theoretical models that describe the mechanisms of genetic and cultural adaptation (Schaller & Murray, 2008). These models, aspiring to universality, found support in data – collected in more than seventy regions of the world – concerning the occurrence of nine infectious diseases in the past. Their prevalence in former times contributed to the formation (for women) of restrictive sexuality and (regardless of gender) the decrease in extraversion and openness to experience. This situation makes it difficult today to formulate universally true theories, in which important independent variables comprise these dimensions of personality.

Knowledge of the rules in force in a given culture makes it easier to understand and predict human behavior in the people socialized in it. The individual differences that occur there might mean something else than in other cultures, if only because of differences in their history, each of which can specifically describe the meanings of their characteristic situations and typical behaviors (Cohen, 2001; Leung & Cohen, 2011). If so, the same measurement results of a given personality trait, done with a diagnostic tool for measuring individual differences in a specific cultural environment, may mean something completely different elsewhere. Ignored by Western psychologists – for many decades accustomed to ascribing not only similar meanings and the same correlates to specific positions on such key personality dimensions as extraversion, but also global self-evaluation, self-esteem or locus of control – can lead to nonsense interpretations and misunderstandings.

Fortunately for the naturalistically oriented social psychologists, no culture can generate enough peculiar logic of its functioning to make all individual differences within its framework have completely distinct meanings than in other cultures. On the other hand, similar manifestations of those differences may, in a particular place and time, mean not quite the same as elsewhere. As it is emphasized by cultural anthropologists (Benedict, 1999; Linton, 1975), particular types of cultures prefer the appropriate for themselves (“modal”) personality profiles, rejected or marginalized by others.

Is it still in the circle of naturalistic traditions?

Thus, only in case of some theories of social psychology, nomothetism is clearly congruent with the naturalistic traditions. A prerequisite of formulating claims that meet its essential requirements is the existence of psychological universals, supported by human distinguishing factors or resulting from universal similarities of various “cultural responses”.

Sometimes social psychologists, following in the footsteps characteristic of anti-naturalism, recognize the ontological distinction of the worlds studied by natural sciences and humanities (Gergen, 1973). Since they try to position their discipline in naturalistic traditions, their theories must be limited to aspects of research reality that meet the appropriate test for these assumptions and traditions undergoing testing by methods appropriate for them (Grobler, 2006; Trzópek, 2011).

As it is known, psychology “always” evolved between the natural sciences and humanities, yet it was (is still is) usually closer to the naturalistic tradition. Its connections with positivism are in the mainstream of cognitive extension, which puts a premium on scientific objectivity, intersubjective reliability and communicability of claims. Yet, probably as it has been so far, in the future it will also be “doomed” to a variety of compromises, not devoid of the eclectic toleration of different ways of studying human psychological functioning. In social perception there is mistrust of its claims to being regarded scientific (Lilienfeld, 2011), and especially nomothetism of social psychology seems to be peculiar, lacking some of the characteristic properties of the prototype.

The weakness of its theories, and especially the lack of precise descriptions of the laws allowing it to accurately predict social behaviors seem to be a consequence rather of the social psychology subject specificity than its underdevelopment. The possibility of getting accurate knowledge of the simultaneous effect of many variables on human behavior probably will always be limited, and thus it will never gain the status of a paradigmatic discipline, which characterizes the “mature” natural sciences (Trzópek, 2006).

One of the reasons for not meeting the standards of nomothetism is the frequent formulation of assertions about “man in general” in situations where they are based on empirical studies of people from culturally and historically specific Western countries (in other branches of psychology recruitment of research participants does not always have as many serious consequences). Also, research participants are often students, usually born in the USA. At least until the sixties of the last century, research studies using such students dominated social psychology, which made it very difficult to estimate the universality of the theory as such research participants are not representative, even for Americans. They are a sociologically specific category of people, quite substantially different in a lot of key psychological dimensions from fully adult individuals (Sears, 1986).

Theories of social psychology tend to be different from their counterparts in the natural sciences also because of the language used. They lack internal homogeneity and cohesion of natural sciences and are characterized by very limited explanatory and predictive utility. It happens that

the described relationship meets the requirements of logical implication, but its predecessor appears – as happens in the social sciences, but differently than is usually observed in the natural sciences – only in some places and times. However, one can speak of a universal dependence; when it is already there, always and everywhere after a while there is a successor. For example, it has been quite well documented empirically that, in all ages and cultures in which there was a prevalence of increased need for achievement, it was eventually followed by economic growth (McClelland, 1961).

The reasons for the failure of social psychology to meet nomothetic standards should be seen primarily (though, of course, not only) in the peculiarities of the psychological instruments presented here; the interactions between the independent variables of theories in social psychology and the cultural/historical context not having their counterparts in the “model” natural sciences. Although a certain exaggeration can be seen in the categorical statement that no psychological theories can be attributed identical universality, as that which is characterized by descriptions of the laws of nature (Grobler, 2006), the specificity of the status of a number of influential theoretical models in the contemporary experimental social psychology appears to be obvious. In addition, the knowledge of the modifying influence of context is sometimes very poor, in general it is known that “things are different” in a given environment (or type of environments) than in another. It usually regards the differences between the individualistic West and collectivist East, though in each type of cultures it is possible to distinguish cultures significantly different from each other (see. e.g. Brewer & Chen, 2007; Oyserman et al., 2002).

The inclusion of “context” variables in the theory is sometimes a very difficult task when there is no (which can be regarded as a rule) meta-theory pronouncing on the nature of the differential impact of a given type of context. In addition, it is necessary to take into account the complexity, especially the multidimensionality of the latter, which compels one to adapt a laborious interdisciplinary perspective (Schlenker, 1974; Secord, 1976).

Social psychologists are trying, in different ways and with various effects, to get by with this not so comfortable situation. It seems to be particularly fruitful ad hoc to create very general (abstract) models, allowing an adequate explanation of the differences between environments (Dymkowski, 2007; Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005; Schlenker, 1974). Yet, it should not be forgotten that at least sometimes it can be characterized by excessive “blurring” of the concepts used, or even a complete loss of empirical sense (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005). Also, generalizations of social psychology are usually not able to fulfill the function of meta-theory allowing the integration (Kruglanski, 2004), or even a

comparative compilation and contrasting less general theories. The latter, often coming from different traditions and relating to different agent areas, operate with mutually untranslatable languages and remain incompatible.

To sum up: although contemporary experimental social psychology more than the social sciences can meet the scientific standards appropriate for naturalistic tradition, full universality of psychological instruments, empowering the formulation of theoretical models resembling the ones usually found in the natural sciences, occurs rather rarely. Its theories are often characterized by only existential universality (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005) and thus (remember) what they describe occurs with different frequencies in various cultural/historical contexts, serves different functions there, and may even take different forms and meanings. And for even this reason social psychology is located at the most on the edges of broadly understood naturalistic traditions.

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