Social Psychology in Brazil and in the international scene

Helmuth Krüger
Catholic University of Petrópolis

Abstract

Social Psychology in Brazil has been showing a progressive scientific growth since the 1970´s. Such development justifies the current interest in performing an evaluation of scientific contributions of Brazilian Social Psychologists within the international context. In this respect, a literature review allowed the identification of 10 evaluative models in Social Psychology. Such models are applied to the psychological and sociological currents in Social Psychology, which are the most prominent internationaly. Even though such evaluative models are well designed, they present limitations with regard to their spectrum of application within Social Psychology. Thus a 5 – dimensional conceptual model has been developed: Philosophical assumptions; Research subject; Research methods and techniques; Conceptual matrix; Applications. Main results of the literature review were obtained from this 5 – dimensional model.

Keywords: current Social Psychology; evaluative models in Social Psychology; psychological social psychology; sociological social psychology.

Resumo

Psicologia Social no Brasil e no cenário internacional. A Psicologia Social no Brasil vem apresentando uma crescente maturidade científica desde a década de 1970. Esse desenvolvimento justifica o atual interesse em proceder a uma avaliação das contribuições científicas de psicólogos sociais brasileiros numa perspectiva internacional. Nesse sentido, foi conduzido um estudo bibliográfico, que possibilitou a identificação de 10 modelos de avaliação da Psicologia Social. Esses modelos são aplicados às vertentes psicológica e sociológica da Psicologia Social, que são as que mais se destacam no plano internacional. Embora esses modelos avaliativos estejam tecnicamente bem fundamentados, apresentam limitações quanto à abrangência do objeto a avaliar, que é a Psicologia Social. Assim, propõe-se um modelo baseado em cinco dimensões: pressupostos filosóficos; objeto de investigação; métodos e técnicas de pesquisa; matriz conceitual; e, aplicações. Os principais resultados deste estudo bibliográfico foram obtidos mediante a aplicação do modelo dessas cinco dimensões básicas.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia Social na atualidade; modelos de avaliação da Psicologia Social; psicologia social psicológica; Psicologia Social sociológica.

In Brazil, Social Psychology is an integral part of the Social Psychology being developed throughout the world. Undoubtedly, itemized analyses have disclosed several differences in both philosophical and scientific foundations of the theoretical and practical work performed by social psychologists today. Nonetheless, despite this observation, we find justifications to admit that social psychologists all over the world, despite the huge scientific and professional diversity, participate in the same scientific and professional project aimed at learning about human beings in their social relations, and the promotion of individual and collective wellbeing through psychosocial interventions. This argument is compatible to the assumption of universality of scientifically framed phenomena, as Merton (1970, chap. 18) in a quite old work clarified. It is worth mentioning that the validity of this viewpoint is directly proportional to the level of theoretical maturity achieved by the science under analysis. In the context of Social Psychology, shorter range theories have been elaborated, according to Merton (chap. 2), as illustrated by the theories of identity, social learning, social representations, social cognition, social attitudes, criticism and social intervention, eligible to cross-cultural generalization.

It is observed that, in face of the abounding literature on Social Psychology, the history of this science or Psychology specialty - depending on the viewpoint adopted - has been deeply studied in different times and countries. These studies, by themselves, reveal to be useful also to achieve knowledge about the main aspects of Social Psychology, besides providing information on the research centers and groups most active in this field of contemporary sciences. Due to this use, the history of sciences has been the most popular research way when it comes to performing comparative studies on the theoretical and professional development reached by Social Psychology in the

countries where it is represented. However, this sort of research is hard to perform to authors missing the due background in History. In fact, accepting the belief that research on the history of Social Psychology does not require for specialized training fosters historical research that, at least, miss scientific quality. As regards the research on sciences history, two methodological issues arise. The first one regards the research general orientation, i.e., the decision to be made between two options: internalism and externalism. When adopting the internalist orientation, emphasis should be placed on the historical path of theories, with great attention to the processes of complementation and time continuity of some of these, as well as on the logical links typically of opposition and concurrence, set forth by rival theories. Hence, in this orientation the historicist attaches attention to the main product of the scientific production – the theoretically-structured knowledge – trying to analyze it in its production and performance over time. The historical research carried out under the externalist perspective, in turn, bears the scientific interest of getting acquainted to the mutual influence between the science being studied and the society, which is ultimately considered in its economic, political and cultural aspects. This orientation demands huge factual knowledge beyond Psychology, additionally to technical competence to corroborate assumptions about the links pointed out. The second issue regards the required care when evaluating the scientific contributions, i.e., of research concepts, hypotheses, theories and methods, besides the intervention techniques generated by authors whose work, due to their influence on science or to the scientific field where it came about, starts deserving particular study. Here, this piece of work should be considered in the light of the evolution of the author's thoughts since, considered as a whole, it reveals the continuity of a creative process and, therefore, any other attempt toward getting to know it considering it just as a part, and not trying to comprehensively incorporate it to the set of works, is fated to fail. On this matter, Salzinger (1980, chap. 16) wrote an ironic, yet clarifying text, pointing out some obstacles and dilemmas that a Psychology historicist should be able of identifying and overcoming to successfully perform his/her work. Otherwise History becomes nothing but just one of the ways to get to know a given science.

Existing meta-scientific methods to evaluate Social Psychology

We could made empirical or formal science an object of study. That is exactly what the Meta-science proposes, as outlined by Price (1976) – one of the most notorious and productive theorists and disseminators of Meta-science. Strictly speaking, Meta-science is not an autonomous subject; rather, it is a multidisciplinary set composed by several sciences, each of which with its uniqueness. Altogether, these make up a set aimed at investigating a given science. The number of meta-scientific subjects and fields is not fixed, since scientific research is more and more interested on science-related aspects that used to be disregarded, and are now in the spotlights. Therefore, Psychology or Social Psychology becomes eligible to the philosophical analysis and empirical inquiries of economic, sociological, anthropological, political and historical nature, among others,

such like the well-known Psychology of Science, which should be more properly named as Psychology of Scientists. An important fact to be considered is that, except for Psychology of Science - a specialized field of Psychology – no meta-scientific subjects directly contributes to the theoretical and practical development of this science. Generally speaking, however, the outcomes of these enterprises are expected to be used in the specialized subject or field of research subjected to meta-scientific inquiry, notably to unfold its philosophical grounds, define inquiry topics, improve the research methodology, clarify the limits of the knowledge that could be achieved through its intellectual resources.

Due to its uniqueness and the scientific and practical relevance granted to it, Social Psychology in Brazil has been a customary object of meta-scientific research and studies. By developing this kind of Social Psychology-focused inquiry, researchers find a specialized field of research or scientific subject somehow autonomous, depending on the viewpoint. Social Psychology should be deemed as a scientific field if understood as integral part of Psychology while, on the other hand, it should be qualified as scientific subject if one considers its independence from Psychology. In anyway, researchers should face a wide range of topics, but also astonishing scientific and professional divergences, typically put in a belligerent way in specialized texts and scientific meetings, shaping the content of teaching programs in undergraduate and post-graduate courses in Social Psychology in Brazil. Moreover, they should also observe disputes about outstanding positions in higher education institutions, professional associations and publishers of books and journals, geared by the interest of social psychologist groups in imposing their understanding about Social Psychology. Undoubtedly, social psychologists – just like any other researcher – are neutral in the light of values and interests, both individual and collective. In this sense, all of these are committed, to a lesser or greater extent. Despite their individual efforts to remain neutral in axiological terms, which are mandatory for ethical reasons, they fail in fully meeting this goal. However, the required and desired neutrality, as observed by Popper (1978), in the light of the Philosophy of Science, is not a subjective issue; rather, it is the result of a logical-social process; it is not dependent on a stoic self-control of isolated researchers - it is more conditioned by the way how the scientific community behaves, allowing for debate, confrontation of ideas and facts, in a setting of mutual tolerance.

The meta-scientific study of Social Psychology uses different models that were created and are applied to describe, explain, construe and evaluate the Social Psychology development, each of which based on specific assumptions about the scientific nature of this field or subject, and its relations to society. In this paper ten of these models should be presented, selected through the brainstorming on texts published in different times and places, notably in Brazil. Therefore, the method used to elaborate this typology was empirical in the selection and evaluation of documents; and reflexive, phenomenological regarding the designation and classification of the models. Additionally, a different model - of structural nature - should be proposed. This could also serve to develop studies like those under consideration

herein.

Internalist. This model values scientific theories, since it believes the development of a science is conditioned by the structure and dynamics of its theories. Winning consistence and broadness, the internalist model is characterized by the far-reaching historical, thematic, theoretical and methodological analysis, integrated to the diversity of ontological levels of inquiry that ranges from intra-psychic phenomena to the psychological components of macro-social processes. A current example of this model is the book by Álvaro and Garrido (2006), which brings a detailed analysis on the favorable and antithetic arguments in relation to the integration of Social Psychology to Psychology, proposing scientific autonomy to Social Psychology. Other texts can fit into this model, like the book by Collier, Minton and Reynolds (1996), where, despite the strong importance attached by the authors to Social Psychology of psychological orientation - the most popular in the USA and in countries influenced by the North-American scientific culture – some attention has been attached to the influence of post-modern philosophical thoughts on the theoretical work of social psychologists, like on that of Gergen – a prominent representative of the Social Constructionism.

Externalist. The origin of externalism can be traced to the Sociology of Knowledge at large, and particularly to the Sociology of Science. The general assumption is that of mutual influence between science and the society. This model is quite applicable to the research on Social Psychology's history, since the 20th century staged historical facts that influenced the theoretical path of this specialized field or scientific subject. One of these facts was the experience of forced migration of German thinkers and social scientists of Jewish origin, in the 1930's, which influenced their selection of research topics and the theoretical work they have further developed, as well. This is a widely known subject, since the victims of such prejudice and persecution provide abundant examples of this influence. Lewin (1970) is a good illustration in the history of Social Psychology, as well as Fleck (1980) in the research against syphilis. Schmidbauer's (1976, vol. 2) work provides detailed information on the disastrous effect suffered by Psychology by the time of the expelling of psychologies from Germany and Austria, after the electoral victory of the Nazi Party in 1933. When the main theoretical representatives of Psychology were banished, two profitable psychological traditions – strongly influent on Social Psychology - were definitely disrupted in those countries: Gestalt psychology and Psychoanalysis.

Periodized historical description. Historical research demands periodization. Historical facts that could be relevant to a given science are construed in the intellectual light where such occurrences, in its time path, have moved out from a phase, stage or period to another. This understanding is included in the internalist and externalist models; however, it misses the due emphasis. There of the proposal of this model, characterized by the importance attached to the moments of theoretical or methodological rupture in the history of Social Psychology. The unpublished dissertation by Fabro (1983) is a good example of the model proposed. The author describes the history of Social Psychology in Brazil since the 19th century, clearly identifying four different periods. In Modern Brazil, this meta-scientific model is implicitly accepted by psychologists and other professionals linked to the so-called São Paulo School of Social Psychology, whose origin and historical development has been object of a wide range of publications. Among these, one of the most recent ones is the article by Carvalho and Souza (2010). The authors emphasize the definite rupture of that School with the Social Psychology of psychological and experimental orientation, in the 1980's.

Brief historical description. There are many reasons for the wide use of this particular model in Social Psychology. One of these is the pedagogical reason. Brief descriptions of Social Psychology are accepted and used in Psychology undergraduate and post-graduation courses. In fact, well-prepared historical summaries provide accurate introduction to the study of any science, providing students or interested individuals with pieces of information that allow for obtaining a more organized understanding on the science being studied. However, these summaries are hard to be drafted, demanding lots of knowledge and intellectual competence from authors. Hence, it demands insight to identify most relevant facts and individuals, and tracking the logic, implication or causal relations between these and the less relevant facts and individuals. The latest Brazilian publications subordinated to this model were produced by Camino and Torres (2011), and Ferreira (2010; 2011).

Theoretical-structural. One can get to know Social Psychology through the prevailing theories. Although being a partial evaluation, it emphasizes the main aspect to be considered in any science, i.e., its theoretical contribution. In the traditional view – which is a valid one – theories are the intended outcome of any scientific endeavor, exactly because these structures made of interconnected concepts allow for understanding, explaining and forecasting, within given limitations, the phenomena inserted in the thematic field of the science under consideration. Gilmour's and Duck's (1980) book provides an example of this model. The authors have identified 16 general and leading theoretical psychological perspectives, underlying assumptions and theories specific to the Social Psychology in the 20th century. This last observation lets us infer this is a work committed to the Social Psychology of psychological orientation.

Most influent theorists. All sciences are impregnated with the thoughts of eminent authors. They are great masters, whose theories outline a way of thinking the object of a given science throughout time, offering a sort of matrix theory. One of the most representative models of this meta-scientific model is that by Schellenbert (1979) which analyzes the theories of Freud, Skinner, Mead and Lewin on the scientific development of Social Psychology. A particular aspect to be considered when it comes to these influencing theories is the use of some of its assumptions in more extensive groups and collectives, notably those assumptions related to construing human nature, outlining contemporary theories on our psychological experiences in social interactions.

Most relevant concepts. Identifying core concepts helps the theoretical understanding of the sciences using these. Thus, Gestaltism is understood when one knows that balance is one of its core concepts, just like adjustment is to Functionalism.

Therefore, some studies on Social Psychology have tried to get to know the concepts most frequently used to formulate hypotheses and theories. The idea of balance is one of these. Without this concept, one cannot understand the set of cognitive theories of the contemporary Social Psychology. Other ideas have been studied in this meta-scientific model, like that of irrational processes which Diamond (1974, chap. 27) deemed to be crucial do the development of Social Psychology. By the way, recent Social Psychology hypotheses and theories have considered the influence of unconscious processes, notably those related to social cognition. These processes are not mixed up with the psychoanalytical unconscious, as stated by Dijksterhuis (2010), since in Psychoanalysis the unconscious is a core logical construct, while for the social cognition approach unconscious is the idea one has about the processes unfolded with no conscious participation but that, nonetheless, even if in a subjacent way, decisively influence on cognition, affection and social behaviors and conducts.

Bibliometrics.   In Meta-science some research use quantification techniques, among which the bibliometrics. Bibliometrics aims at gathering objective data that provide information on the publications made on behalf of the science under study, in order to allow for inferences about the factors that have influenced the development of that science, enabling the establishment of conjectures about its future. Cruz and Van Stralen (2012), and Ribas Jr. et al. (2009) have contributed to the research perspective, as a result of careful bibliometrics research of the texts on Social Psychology published in the last few years.

Social networks.   The objective in mind when we use this model is to get to know the geographic and institutional location of researchers, groups and research centers, supplemented with information about the links between those. This sociological descriptive investigation leads to data that can be plotted in graphics, thus facilitating an insight on the set of social networks and scientific collaboration previously established, while allowing for outlining possibilities of links and closer scientific and professional relations between the researchers members of such networks. The recent publication by Neiva and Vaz Torres (2011) illustrates this model.

Personal testimonials.   The most subjective form of meta-scientific research is that based on personal testimonials of academics, researchers and professionals. This model is much generalized and quite old. In Social Psychology it is illustrated by the well-organized collections by Brannigan and Merrens (1995) and Rodrigues and Levine (1999). The social psychologists presented in those collections describe the path that led each of them to be selectively interested on some topics of theoretical study and empirical research, setting a link between the topics selected and familiar, social, political and scientific experiences. Few years ago, the Brazilian social psychologist Sá (2007) described some of his most relevant scientific experiences, through a spontaneous and direct testimonial. This kind of statement is subjective, and is not committed to the ideals of objectivity and neutrality, which are attributes appraised in scientific inquiry. As above mentioned, however, according to Popper these attributes are more dependent on culture, social rules and procedures employed by the scientific community when evaluating the research, than on the researcher's self-control.

Basic dimensions.   The aforementioned classification of meta-scientific models used in Social Psychology inquiry does not prevent the elaboration and presentation of other models, since the list presented is of empirical origin, resulting from an analysis of the content of papers and research works focused on Social Psychology. One can assume that other studies and research on Social Psychology have been developed – or are to be developed – and were not comprised by this paper. Emphatically: the texts evaluated do not exhaust all options of meta-scientific inquiry. One class of this sort of inquiry that was not described is the Psychology of Science, or – although the expression may seem strange – the Social Psychology of Social Psychology. This could be illustrated by the Doctor's Degree thesis by Souza (2005), resulting from a survey on the Social Psychology social representations. However, additionally to this and to the remainder models presented, one can consider the possibility of adopting a model based on basic scientific dimensions. The use of that model has yet not been recorded. The main advantage of that model is the guidance it provides to compared research on several scientific and professional tendencies of Social Psychology in time and space. It is based on the five fundamental dimensions of any science: the first one is that of ontological assumptions which refers to the nature of the object of study and research, and of the epistemological assumptions related to the limits of knowledge that can be obtained from this object; then, we have the dimension of topics and issues to be investigated; thirdly, there is the study and research methodology; following, based on that dimension, the specialized terminology, i.e., the conceptual matrix available to the theoretical work; and, finally, the dimension of practical use of concepts, hypotheses, theories and research methods and professional intervention techniques. This model seems to have not been tested in practice; nonetheless, it is feasible. In the immediate plan, it served as general reference to prepare the remainder sections of this text.

Social Psychology geography

In all continents, social psychologists are devoted to research, teaching and professional activities, based on their scientific knowledge. However, this articulated set of individuals and activities is still to be fully known. The tasks required to get this knowledge could be developed if there were interest and financial and material resources available, since it abounds in hardcopy materials, virtual sources of information, and efficient e-communication means available. So, considering the current situation that is below the ideal in terms of knowledge about Social Psychology, we could try to get an approximation of this reality that is quite informative, so as to allow at least the evaluation of its scientific and practical merit. In this sense, one should obtain knowledge on the main topics of research in the contemporary Social Psychology, on the most influent theories and methods of inquiry and techniques of intervention, through the analysis of scientific books, specialized articles and research reports, besides the evaluation on the subject found in Social Psychology compendiums and didactic works of greater circulation, observing comparative procedures.

Nothing in this proposal is new, except for the suggestion

on the adoption of a more systematic methodology to increase the possibility of getting more useful information in cognitive and practical terms. Notably regarding the topics and issues to be investigated, as well as technology, sciences are influenced by economic, social, political and cultural conditions of the society where these are developed, to different extents and in different forms, according to time and place. Particularly, considering the ideological changes that have altered the destiny of many contemporary societies in the last two decades of the 20th Century, and restricting the remarks to be made regarding Social Psychology, one must recognize that it has suffered relevant changes regarding its recognition in societies that have undergone a drastic ideological and institutional change from 1991 on, with the fall and abolishment of the Soviet Union. The collapse of political, legal, social ad cultural institutions strictly based on the philosophical principles of dialectic materialism, since 1917, was followed by a turnaround in the scientific environment that facilitated the acknowledgement of a science that used to be qualified as idealist, bourgeois and controller but that, similarly to the society's psychological level, has caused countless disappointments, frustration, ideological conversions imposed by circumstances that produced subjective conditions favorable to intra-personal, familiar and collective conflicts that – in face of the uneasiness subjectively experienced by many Russians and citizens of other nationalities released from the Soviet control – probably can still be found in the relations between the youth and the elderly. In this broad process, the Social Psychology evaluation underwent significant changes. During the Soviet regiment, the Social Psychology developed and practiced in the West was highly criticized, as reported and explained by McLeish (1975). However, today the programs of Psychology subjects reflect a thematic and methodological content similar to that found in North-American and European universities, as observed in the curricula of the State University of Moscow M. V. Lomonosov.

On the other hand, little attention is paid to the scientific activity developed by social psychologists in Asia. These have become more active and motivated for research, being open to scientific debate, notably after the establishment of the Asian Association of Social Psychology (AASP) in Hong Kong, in 1995. The Association gathers social psychologists from countries in that region of the world, who are outstanding the in study and research on Social Psychology topics. According to statistical data provided by Bernardo (2011), current Secretary-General of the AASP, the most frequently represented countries through their social psychologists are as follows: Japan, China, South Korea, Indonesia, Hong Kong, USA (Eastern states), Taiwan, Australia, Malaysia and Philippines, respectively. Asia is made up by a conglomerate of countries bearing different ethnical traditions that, nonetheless, preserve some quite common cultural standards and social rules which are expressed in the ways of thinking, feeling and acting of individuals socialized in those countries. The understanding on these differences and similarities has influenced the Asian social psychologists in the selection of their research topics, notably those related to culture. This statement is corroborated by the findings of the survey carried out by Jones (2011) regarding the access to articles published in the Asian Journal of Social Psychology, since its creation in 1998. Data disclose that of the 10 most accessed articles in the 13 years of existence of that journal, six bear culture as object of study or research. Despite this thematic tendency, the understanding of Social Psychology - including topics, methods and theories - prevailing in those countries do not significantly vary from the psychological and sociological aspects of Social Psychology known and adopted in Western societies, although the AASP aims at building a "third power" in Social Psychology as an alternative to the European and North-American experiences in this branch of contemporary sciences.

The influence of the USA scientific contribution is unchallengeable, and is also found in the education, thinking and professional behavior of social psychologists all over the world. The validity of this statement can be corroborated by the bibliographic references of the most notorious international books and articles approaching Social Psychology topics. This bibliography reaches even social psychologists from sub-Sahara African countries. Except for social psychologists from South Africa – the most important country of the region in economic and political terms – who are more exposed to the British scientific traditions, when analyzing the works by authors like Bandawe (2010) from the Republic of Malawi, one can observe that the references to works by North-American and European social psychologists are of utmost relevance. Generally speaking, Social Psychology in the USA, observed with remarks since there is no full agreement or homogeneity regarding the viewpoints adopted by academics and theorists, is mostly linked to Psychology. This can be evidenced by the analysis of the content of the didactic handbook by Michener, De Lamater and Myers (2005), very popular in that country and translated in Brazil.

Until the end of the 2nd World War, the United States was home to the main theorists and research centers of Social Psychology. To a large extent, the theoretical advance of Social Psychology in that country in the 1930's and 1940's was due to the expatriation of European psychologists, social scientists, psychoanalysts and thinkers like Heider, Asch, Erich Fromm, Franz Alexander, Karen Horney, Erik Erikson, Max Wertheimer, Adorno and Carnap, to mention only some of the most notorious ones, expelled from their countries for ideological and ethnical reasons. Kurt Lewin, who would surely be affected by the racial laws enforced by the Nazi regime from 1933 on, was already active in the University of Iowa by the time of the expurgation in the German universities. This forced migration benefited the USA, fostering its philosophical and scientific development while, in the other hand, caused serious losses to Central Europe, as aforementioned. Only after the 2nd World War the Social Psychology started developing in Europe. In the beginning, it was influenced by theorists from the Social Psychology developed in the USA. It was only after the foundation of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology, in 1966, that Social Psychology was somehow empowered and increased its scientific importance. Then, the European social psychologists became interested on inquiry topics related to the European political and social-cultural experiences; the research on identity, intra- and cross-group relations, the political and social influence

of minority groups, social representations, and prejudices and stereotypes were outstanding. The European Journal of Social Psychology that started circulating in 1970 disseminates the scientific work of the European social psychologists and, therefore, is an important source of information about the nature of the work carried out by them. In face of the set of scientific contributions by the European social psychologists, one can observe a huge thematic and methodological heterogeneity that hinders the acceptance of the common belief in Brazil that in that region of the world the Social Psychology would be sociological, in opposition to the Social Psychology developed in the USA which is mostly of psychological orientation. In fact, in the USA it is both sociological and psychological. Comparing the 4th edition of the handbook by Hewstone, Stroebe and Jonas (2011) – a widely known work adopted in European universities – one can find that most of the topics approached are related to Social Psychology of psychological orientation, since of the 15 chapters therein eight deal with psychological topics of social interaction, while only four approach more sociological content. The transnational acceptance of this handbook ensues from the fact that it results from a joint work of 22 authors, of which eight are German, eight are British, four are Dutch and two are Swiss citizens.

Social Psychology in Latin America, notably in Brazil, has been subjected to lots of studies, mainly of historical nature, some of which have already been mentioned in this text. It is tributary to the scientific currents and thoughts from Europe and the USA. However, there are dissident authors and groups of academics and researchers, among which the aforementioned São Paulo School of Social Psychology, that follow a critical line opposite to the Social Psychology developed in the USA and that developed in Europe. According to Carvalho and Souza (2010) that School – with materialist-dialectic foundations – is aimed at the social transformation. The authors believe that to achieve that purpose it must neglect the individual and emphasize the group, the collective and the society. This understanding gave rise to the criticism – and even the refusal – of the Social Psychology fit into the scientific tradition. Therefore, it is a project to implement the 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, introduced by Karl Marx in 1845, which could be read as follows: "Philosophers have done nothing but construed the world in different ways; the issue, however, is to change it". This social and politically committed view on Social Psychology, which tends to prevail in Brazil today, bears a philosophy similar to the Critical Psychology found in Germany, in the 1970's, by Holzkamp and Braun (1977), which is enthusiastically accepted by many followers, but that lost some power of influence after the fall of the Democratic Republic of German, in 1989, and the gradual dilution of the Marxist thought in Europe.

Comparative and conclusive analysis

Using the information gathered and related to the topic of this assay, some findings have been formulated and are presented below, according to a brief formulation observing the meta-scientific model of *basic dimensions*.

Philosophical assumptions. The Social Psychology realm misses accurate analyses on the anthropological assumptions that are implicitly accepted by almost all studies and research. Therefore, there is no clear understanding on the nature of the facts surveyed, notably those found, on one hand, in the intersection between Social Psychology and Social Sciences and, on the other hand, those related to biological processes. Thus, one cannot rationally decide on the shares corresponding to hereditary and environmental components in the development of personality and in the human social manifestations. Conscious about these limitations, there are no methods and criteria that allow for a more accurate evaluation on the scope and validity of the knowledge obtained. In empirical terms, the limitation related to the external validity of the Social Psychology assumptions and theories could be reduced through cross-cultural research; these, however, are very rare.

Research topics. The research on Social Psychology bears many topics and issues. It is worth adducing that most of this miss stability, is transitory, and in the short time is vanished from the field of scientific interest. There are few more stable topics. Attitudes, prejudices, social learning, social perception and social reasons are among the oldest ones, as example of said continuity. These current affairs result from the diversity of scientific currents combined to the plurality of scientific and professional interests, which deny to Social Psychology a clear identity. Therefore, the election of research topics and issues is conditioned by the aforementioned reasons and by the metaphysical level where the intended studies and research are placed, which ranges from the level of intrapersonal processes to that of the human experience in society and history, passing by the group and collective levels. In the light of scientific community, and in regard to the issue of continuity of themes and, therefore, of research lines, it is worth mentioning the social influence exercised by renowned authors, whose influence can be decisive on their collaborators and followers.

Research methodology. Two factors mind when making a decision on the use of different research methods and techniques in Social Psychology: the nature of the problem to be investigated, and the ideological options. In the first one, the selection is reasoned, while in the second one it is made arbitrarily, disregarding the scientific objectives. The experimental and empirical methods are used in the Social Psychology understood as natural science and, therefore, subordinated to Psychology, but also in Psychology defined as an autonomous subject. However, these methods based on the statistical treatment of the data gathered are refused by the authors who adhered to the materialist-dialectic critical orientation, who prefer methods known as qualitative which are typically used to perform social interventions.

Conceptual matrix. Regardless the object and intellectual way of understanding, reflection demands ideas and concepts crucial for organizing the thinking, i.e., for qualifying it to order, compare, relate, infer, deduce and, above all, generate concepts. Ideas should be clearly defined, however bearing in mind that it should not hinder the assignment of other meanings to the terms and expressions used in scientific activities, depending on the viewpoint of those using these mental artifacts. Under this intellectual light, the terminology used by contemporary Social Psychology, recalling its scientific plurality which has

been many times restated in these pages, needs more attention as regards its meaning, and care in its use. Frequently, concepts are not defined, or are ambiguously presented, leading to discrepant interpretations and, therefore, different research orientations. This technical issue is serious in Social Psychology, since social psychologists, as known and observed in the paragraph above, work at ontologically differentiated levels, thus performing an intellectual work based on concepts from different sciences, like Psychology, Sociology, History and Politics. However, to justify the expression that designates this scientific field or scientific subject, keeping some fundamental psychological ideas in the conceptual matrix employed is a must.

Applications. Concepts, hypotheses, theories, research methods and professional intervention techniques can be useful in activities performed by professionals from several areas, as well as in those developed by laymen in different situations. In principle, the advertising of the outcomes of social psychologists' works through the different communications means available raises the self-awareness of all those who get in touch with the aforementioned scientific contributions. This result clearly empowers each individual or group. Bearing the information and knowledge about the processes in the origin of our psychological and psychosocial experiences one can, to some extent, exercise self-control on such processes in order to reach more desirable individual and collective results, in the line of wellbeing. However, it is worth making a note of moral nature: the effects considered herein depend on the quality of the knowledge disseminated. Therefore, this statement leads us to infer that social psychologists are responsible for insisting on obtaining valid knowledge, while refusing to disseminate as valid knowledge what is nothing but an opinion, missing logical or empirical grounds, or – even worse – try to pass off as science what is nothing but mystification.

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Helmuth Krüger, doctor's degree and master's degree in Psychology at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation/Rio de Janeiro, Graduate in Philosophy at the Guanabara State University, Graduate in Psychology at the Rio de Janeiro State University, coordinator of the Psychology master's degree course at the Catholic University in Petrópolis. E-mail: helmuth.kruger@ucp.br