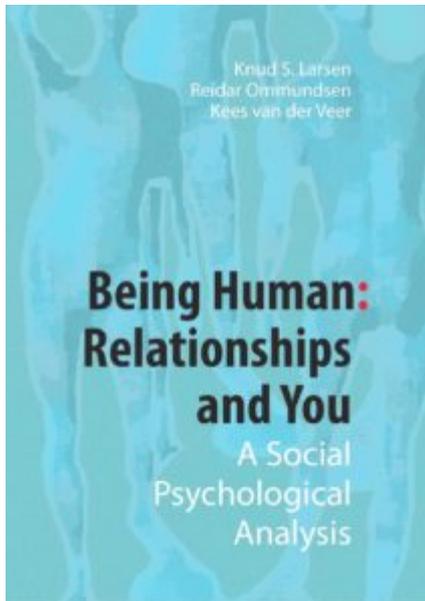


Being Human: Relationships And You. A Social Psychological Analysis ~ Introduction



The roots of Psychology are international, but so is psychology. A major figure in the history of psychology was the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov. The premier pioneer in the study of childhood development was the Swiss biologist Jean Piaget. The father of the psychoanalytic movement was an Austrian medical doctor Sigmund Freud. Modern European social psychology has made major contributions, for example in the field of social categorization theory. Henri Tajfel and his collaborators made signal contributions to the understanding of group behavior during his tenure at

Bristol University, as did collaborators from other European countries.

However, Moghaddam (1987; 1990) described the United States as the “superpower” of academic psychology. In support of this claim he cites the volume of resources available to American scholars. Other observers have also described the US as the major source of academic social psychology, and the “center of gravity” for professional development (Bond, 1988). It would not be inaccurate to state that the vast majority of social psychological research is conducted in North American settings, including Canada. This might therefore be described as the “first world” of social psychology in terms of production and influence on the world scene.

Europe, with Great Britain and France leading in social psychological research, may be considered the second world of social psychology. Generally the university settings are smaller, and funds available not as large as those in the US, but social psychologists in Europe have made distinctive contributions of their own in the development of theory. In particular European scholars give more attention to intergroup behavior (e.g. Doise, Csepele, Dann, Gouge, Larsen, & Ostelli, 1972), and the wider social context like social structure, and culture (e.g. ideology)

(Jaspars, 1980; Doise, 1986). European and some American colleagues tend to criticize American scholars as being too individualistic (e.g. Sampson, 1977) and culture-blind in their orientation, having mainly developed theories that reflect the salient values, goals and issues of the United States that may not be equally valid in other societies, and neglecting other social phenomena like minority influence and social change (Moscovici, 1972).

European social psychologists have developed unique laboratory methodology, the minimal group situation to study the effects of social categorization on intergroup relations (Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971), along with observation studies of how people communicate attitudes in natural settings and create shared social representations (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Van Dijk, 1987; Moscovici, 1981).

The third world of social psychology is found in the developing nations. Psychology in these countries is greatly hampered by lack of funding, and therefore has to rely to a large extent on psychology developed in other countries and cultural settings. There are many problems in these countries, which could benefit from a mature research based social psychology. The social problems of developing countries are to some extent distinctive as they involve issues of poverty, ethnic conflict, and lifestyles very different from the urban lives of the western world (see e.g. Kim, Yang and Hwang, 2006).

In the future we must look to the development of social psychology from all three worlds. There is much in the human experience that we have in common. We are all born into the world as dependent beings, all have to face developmental tasks, including forming families, and finding our social niche. We all face the great existential issues including the transitory nature of life. World psychology can provide insights that are helpful to all societies on these and other problems we all face. There are also specific problems unique to each society and culture. This is where the third world must make its contributions based on patient theoretical development, and empirical research. Reliable and valid empirical findings are superior to any armchair theorizing, regardless of the quality of the theoretical ideas. Only by empirical means can we eventually develop a significant world social psychology. Such a social psychology would describe the processes of social relations, thinking and social influence which would be common to all human beings. May this book be a step toward that noble quest, and stimulate the next generation of students, scholars, and all those interested in the field.

