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BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS ON HIGGINS AND KRUGLANSKI'S *SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: HANDBOOK OF BASIC PRINCIPLES*

In the Pursuit of Basic Principles of Social Psychology

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Writing a review of *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles*, edited by Higgins and Kruglanski, is a daunting task. First is the sheer size of the book—nearly 1,000 pages. Second, and more important, the 1,000 pages do not read like *War and Peace*: no plot, no linear story line, and no beginning or end. As an edited volume, the book consists of a collection of chapters by different authors. These chapters vary in content from hormonal influences on emotions to cultural factors in social interaction, from cognitive principles to group dynamics principles to evolutionary principles. As is typical of edited volumes, the various authors rarely refer to the content in other chapters, and no explicit attempt is made to integrate the chapters or to analyze any converging themes, overlaps, parallels, similarities, or differences among them. In a sense, each chapter stands alone as a presentation and an analysis of its own topic.

With this in mind, questions asked in most book reviews are somewhat irrelevant here. Does the book have a coherent perspective? Is an organizing principle evident? Is it structured appropriately and integrated in its presentation? Is it written in a flowing and engaging and unitary style? Does the book have an evenness? Are the major points clearly articulated and do these points serve to organize the book? With a single-authored text dealing with a circumscribed content, we could analyze whether the area was treated fully and completely, whether the history and development of the area were covered accurately, and whether some novel perspective or creative approach to the issues in the area had been achieved. Issues of interpretation, substance, innovation, and uniqueness can easily be raised in a review of the traditional single-authored text, but not here.

So what are we as reviewers to do? One approach is to simply summarize and briefly evaluate each of the 28 chapters. That would entail about half a manuscript page per chapter—clearly insufficient for these full and rich chapters and far too boring for both the readers and the reviewers.

The Principle of Basic Principles

Fortunately, despite the fact that this is an edited volume without explicit integration of the chapters and without cross-referencing among chapters, the book does have an implicit underlying theme—a basic approach to the field that serves as a framework and guiding strategy for each and every chapter. As the editors note in the preface, the overall purpose is to provide a presentation and an understanding of a wide range of basic principles that underlie human social behavior. These principles, represented at all levels of analysis from the biological to the cultural, are to be articulated in each chapter and to be comprehensively analyzed.

The text is thus different from most edited volumes in looking for global principles that underlie different, and seemingly unrelated, social psychological phenomena, rather than focusing on the phenomena themselves. Each chapter is supposed to represent a domain that is at the same time broad and yet uniform enough to allow for the articulation of a fundamental principle. The idea is that readers will get the “big picture” of the domain of each principle, including historical background, empirical support, and significant conceptualization. A profoundly important implicit theme for this text is that these underlying principles are envisioned as cutting

across diverse areas that at first blush have little in common. Surface similarities are to be ignored in order to identify and articulate these basic principles and to show that the guiding and integrating themes of social psychology lie not in the content of phenomena but in the principles that apply widely across such content. This means that some traditional chapter headings (e.g., aggression, attitudes, the self, stereotyping) are nowhere to be found. Instead, the editors tried to identify the proper fundamental principles and to select the appropriate authors who would allow this mission to be followed. Thus, the editors are not only comfortable with, but are excited by, the possibility that the same concept, for example attitudes, might appear in several different chapters as the different principles in these chapters might apply to the conceptualization, formation, change, or expression of attitudes. At the same time, within any chapter, the principle might apply to topics as diverse as altruism, attraction, attitudes, attributions, self-perception, and cross-cultural differences.

Rusbult and Van Lange articulated this goal and mission best in their statement about interdependence theory:

Although researchers examining issues of interdependence tend to employ differing methodologies—varying from the use of experimental games to the coding of videotaped interaction in ongoing relationships—such researchers frequently examine common properties of interdependence. There is a lack of integration among researchers who study such phenomena. For example, although the subfields of prosocial behavior, close relationships, conflict resolution, and bargaining are conceptually related, there is an absence of cross-fertilization by scientists addressing such issues. Social psychology textbooks tend to devote separate chapters to each subfield, as though the superficial character of an observed behavior necessarily defined the unique theoretical meaning of the behavior. Interdependence theory has clear potential for eliminating such artificial distinctions, through its emphasis on the fundamental properties that define interdependence phenomena. It is to be hoped that this potential will become increasingly realized over the coming decade, through enhanced exchange and coordination of methods and theoretical insights across the several subfields of social psychology. (p. xxx)

This goal differs a great deal from that of the *Handbook of Social Psychology*. The major purpose of the *Handbook* is to review several content areas and to provide a historical treatment of traditional areas of social psychology from their roots until the present. The chapters in the *Handbook* are thus much more traditional with separate chapters explicitly devoted to attitudes, the self, conformity and compliance, social con-

flict, and so on. This volume, on the other hand, clearly tries to choose principles rather than phenomena or content as chapter headings and to have these principles applied across a variety of the traditional content areas of social psychology.

Benefits of Basic Principles

This theme and its approach, and its implications for the substance and organization of the chapters in this volume, are compelling. The elder Sherman has for many years been confused about and critical of the way in which our field of social psychology is organized and conceptualized. This is most notable in the organization of our undergraduate textbooks. The typical organization is purely and simply in terms of types of social behaviors—conformity, compliance, attitude change, stereotyping, impression formation, bargaining, and so on. Each has its own separate chapter. The actual principles that underlie these various content-defined behaviors may be quite similar, but nowhere are these general and guiding principles to be found in our textbooks. Other areas of psychology are not organized in this way. Imagining a text in animal psychology or in cognitive psychology that was organized by the content of behaviors—running down a maze, learning lists, forgetting names—is difficult. Instead, books in these areas are organized by general principles such as attention, perception, implicit and explicit memory, and so on—principles that apply to a wide range of behaviors. By dividing social psychology, or any discipline, into phenomena and content areas rather than underlying principles, we lose the ability to identify fundamental similarities across seemingly different areas. For example, despite the operation of very similar principles underlying the development of stereotypes of groups, the development of impressions of individuals, and the development of self-concepts, these areas have always been treated in separate chapters of social psychology texts. Recently, we have, in different contexts, argued that the application of a common set of principles can help us see the important connections and similarities among these three areas that have been artificially separated in our texts for so long (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Sherman, 1996; Sherman & Klein, 1994).

In addition, by focusing on content rather than behavioral principles, we can obscure important differences and distinctions within what seems to be a unitary content area. For example, within the area of conformity, for many years social psychology texts lumped together as a single phenomenon all instances where the judgment by an individual was altered by the observation of the discrepant judgments of others. This ap-

proach obscured the important distinction between conformity based on a need for information (as exemplified in the Sherifs' work) and conformity based on a need for acceptance by the group (as exemplified in Asch's research). The principles of conformity underlying judgments based on a need for acceptance versus a need for information are quite different in important ways. Over the years, these two principles of conformity have been more clearly explicated, but they still appear within the same single chapter in our textbooks. At the same time, in the chapter on attitude change in the traditional textbook, discussions of two types of attitude change—internalized change and change at the public level only—are typically included. Again, these two types of attitude change, although they both involve a change in the evaluation of an object, are based on quite different principles. In fact, from our point of view, and perhaps from the point of view of the editors of this volume, discussing in one chapter attitude change based on public compliance and conformity for the purpose of group acceptance and discussing in another chapter internalized attitude change and conformity based on a need for information might be far more sensible. Each chapter would also include any other behaviors and content areas that fit this distinction based on a similar guiding principle. In essence, the principles underlying the behaviors provide more conceptual integrity than the superficial content of the behaviors.

We find two notable exceptions to the organization of basic social psychology textbooks by content and phenomena. The first was written by Jones and Gerard (1967). Their text was organized around two principles, effect dependence and information dependence. These principles were applied to every traditional content area within social psychology, from attitudes to group dynamics to person perception. The work was a bold attempt to change the way in which social psychologists represented and organized their field, but its success in achieving this change was limited at best.

More recently, the textbook written by Smith and Mackie (1995) identifies eight basic principles of social psychology. The book is organized around two fundamental principles (people construct their social reality, social influence pervades social life), three motivational principles (striving for mastery, seeking connectedness, valuing me and mine), and three processing principles (cognitive conservatism, accessibility, superficiality vs. depth). Each of these principles is then referred to and examined within the context of the traditional content areas of social psychology. As an instructor, this organization is extremely useful for helping students see the "big picture" of when, why, and how social psychology is important across domains, as opposed to the students simply memorizing a list of theories and findings.

Analysis of "Basic Principles"

The current text takes on a similar mission (although at a much more advanced level)—to find the principles that organize our field and to show how these principles both make sense of and serve to integrate a wide variety of socially relevant behaviors. For the text to succeed, two things were necessary. First, the editors had to be accurate in identifying the principles that would serve to form the different chapters of the book and to communicate the relevant principle and the goal of the text to each author. Second, the authors of each chapter had to be clear about what the guiding principle of their chapter was, and they had to apply this principle appropriately to a range of relevant social behaviors.

If the usual procedures for publishing an edited volume had been followed, the book probably would not have accomplished its mission. The typical scenario of an edited text is that the editors ask, entice, cajole, and beg authors to write a chapter for their book. The goals are usually vague, and no clear guidelines are provided about what is expected for the chapter or for the text as a whole. A deadline is given, but it is rarely met by many of the authors. Thus, any extensive feedback by the editors that would allow for some general goals of the text to be achieved cannot be given. The editors are happy enough to have received all of the chapters, and the publisher is happy if the book is not more than a year behind deadline.

We surmised that Higgins and Kruglanski were not typical in their editorial stewardship of this book. Rather than being hands-off, just-get-your-chapter-in editors, we guessed that they were in fact very active in controlling the process by which this book was written and in the final product of each chapter. We suspected that they were extremely clear up front about what was expected for the chapters and about how that might be achieved. We further suspected that the editors provided quite a bit of feedback about each chapter to help mold these chapters toward their vision of what a principle-based volume would be. But rather than leave this to surmise and speculation, we contacted a sample of the chapter authors. Indeed, the authors reported that Higgins and Kruglanski were far more active and hands-on in the publishing of this book than is the case for most edited volumes. The authors were well informed of the goals in a clear way right from the start. In addition, most received very detailed feedback from the editors about how to add to, change, and reconceptualize their initial drafts.

In light of this, our reading of this volume (as carefully as could be done given the 1,000 pages; the depth and breadth of each chapter; and the difficulty in carrying a book of this size from place to place so that it could

be read at home, at work, on airplanes, etc.) indicates that the goals of the editors were met to an impressive degree. Most of the chapters were indeed nontraditional in their scope and nature, and they were written around a central principle or set of principles that was articulated, explained, and then applied to a remarkably diverse set of content areas. As might have been hoped for, the same content areas appeared in any number of different chapters, each time explored through a different lens provided by a different guiding principle. That seems only appropriate. That the complex behaviors and concepts that constitute the domain of social psychology (e.g., attitudes, attribution, attraction, attachment) can be understood by any single principle is unlikely.

Our intention is not to go through each and every chapter to indicate the extent to which the basic goals were met. However, a few examples are chosen to support our contentions that, in general, broad guiding principles were identified, and that these principles were indeed applied across a wide range of content areas. The chapter by Cacioppo, Berntson, and Crites on social neuroscience is extremely broad and serves to integrate a broad range of diverse research traditions. It provides a multilevel, integrative analysis that spans both neural and social perspectives, and the chapter is based on and is held together by a few well-articulated principles of arousal. Within these principles, content areas as diverse as emotion, cognitive dissonance, attribution, altruism, and attraction are discussed and are integrated via these principles.

The chapter by Trope and Liberman employs a few principles of hypothesis testing to integrate and make sense of areas such as persuasion, impression formation, stereotyping, and individual differences. Similarly, Anderson, Krull, and Weiner's chapter starts with a seemingly narrow principle of explaining events and shows how this principle can be applied to help understand marriage, depression, altruism, aggression, stereotypes, and attitudes. Reis and Patrick begin with the component processes of attachment and intimacy, and they use these principles broadly to provide some clarification and integration of both the emotional and cognitive aspects of a wide range of social behaviors. In fact, many chapters employ their guiding principles to examine both cognitive and motivational factors that are involved in the relevant social behaviors. The inclusion of affective, cognitive, and behavioral components within a single chapter is, of course, not unique to the chapters of this book, but the breadth of treatment across such an expansive wide range of content areas and the integration of the cognitive and motivational bases of behavior within a single guiding principle is unique. The fact that the two editors, Higgins and

Kruglanski, have been significant contributors to work involving both cognitive and motivational factors in social behavior is not, we are sure, irrelevant to achieving this integration throughout the chapters of the book.

On Breadth and Depth: How Basic Should Basic Principles Be?

The general success of goal achievement does not mean that each and every chapter completely succeeded in providing a clearly articulated principle or set of principles and bringing it to bear on a wide range of social psychological phenomena and content areas. Although every chapter was in fact content rich and well constructed, some seemed too narrow in scope for the text in order to qualify as general organizing principles for a discipline as broad as social psychology. The chapters on social psychosomatics, social support, and conflict in close relationships, for example, seemed somewhat narrow in their application. Whether this is because the authors interpreted and applied their principles more narrowly than they might have or whether the editors simply misjudged in some cases the appropriate level of guiding principle in developing the organization of the book is not clear. Certainly, in some cases, it seems as though the concept of a basic principle has been stretched pretty thin. One advertisement for the book brags of the 1,000,000 printed words and the "hefty" nature of the book. However, one may reasonably wonder whether 1,000 pages or 1,000,000 words of basic principles in social psychology can legitimately be found. And if the discipline does have that many principles, then how basic can they really be? This is certainly a far cry from the modest attempts by Jones and Gerard (two basic principles) and by Smith and Mackie (eight basic principles) to organize the field.

One result of the large number of basic principles examined in the book is that cross-content integration becomes particularly difficult to achieve. As the number of principles increases, the breadth of each principle decreases, and there is less likelihood that any principle will be applied across multiple content domains. Even a concept as seemingly basic as accessibility has been overwhelmingly examined within the content domains of impression formation and social judgment. Although the principle of accessibility might have easily been applied to many other domains of research, other principles do not translate as easily. For example, principles of conflict in close relationships have been explicated within a fairly narrow range of content domains, and how some of those principles generalize outside of those domains is even less clear. Thus, we find a trade-off between the number of basic

principles examined and the breadth with which their impact across social psychology can be described. We do not know the ideal number of basic principles to be identified in a book such as this one; however, in some cases, it seems that including fewer principles that apply more broadly might have been advantageous.

On Breadth and Depth: How Broadly Should Basic Principles Be Applied?

The breadth and depth question is important not only across different chapters, but within those chapters as well. Even when chapters were broad enough from a conceptual point of view, many times they seemed to focus too much on descriptions of process and too little on using the principles to account for the range of relevant behaviors. For example, the chapter by Trope and Liberman (discussed earlier) was exemplary in its development and presentation of the processes involved in hypothesis testing. However, this kind of discussion is fairly typical of the traditional treatment of hypothesis testing. Within the context of the current text, and for achieving a uniqueness of approach, we wish that more consideration had been given to the areas of social behavior that were identified as potentially explicable through these principles and processes of hypothesis testing—persuasion, impression formation, stereotypes, and so on. Trope and Liberman's use of their principles to account for why people disagree about the world was especially interesting and compelling, and it seems that more such exciting ideas could have been pursued within the framework that was provided.

Another case where the potential of the chapter for achieving a comprehensive analysis of various levels and types of social behavior was not fully met was Miller and Prentice's chapter on social norms and standards. The chapter is truly excellent in its account of the construction of social norms. Yet this account of norms sticks fairly closely to the individual psychological level of analysis. We would like to have seen a discussion of the principles in terms of group level functioning as well. This absence is especially noteworthy considering that the chapter appears in the section on the group and cultural system rather than in the section on the cognitive system.

In contrast, one chapter that navigated the breadth and depth question most effectively was the one on expectancies by Olson, Roese, and Zanna. The chapter is successful because it sacrifices some detail in order to make broad theoretical statements that apply across many content domains. Although one may criticize this approach for producing a less "meaty" chapter, this seems to have been exactly the right strategy given the goals of the book. If we are talking about basic princi-

ples, then it is surely better to err on the side of generality than specificity. This may be particularly true in the case of this book, which attempts to examine so many basic principles. If the principles are not applied generally, then the book becomes an enormous store of isolated, content-oriented facts, much like the *Handbook of Social Psychology*. Although we believe that many of the chapters in the book were successful in providing a broader perspective, the fact that the book fails to achieve an integrative analysis in many of the chapters makes it unlikely that the book will be useful for undergraduate instruction; it has simply too much detail and jargon in many places. As such, the book will be primarily useful to graduate students and researchers as a tool to help them achieve a broader and perhaps more innovative way to think about their own areas of work.

The Difficult Transition to a Basic Principles Approach

One reason why the degree of cross-content integration may not have been ideal is that the goals of the book are advanced beyond the reality of the field of social psychology. The simple fact is that we have all been trained primarily to think in terms of the specific content domains that we study. For the most part we all do our own research within particular content domains and do not typically examine how our principles may apply across various topics in social psychology. Until we change the way we train our students and change the way we do our own research, then such integration of principles across content areas probably will continue to be difficult. This problem is most clearly evident in cases where the same general principle was described in multiple chapters of the book without any acknowledgment, integration, or attempt to address the different treatments. For example, principles of goal attainment are described at length in the chapters on self-regulation, goal effects on action and cognition, and mental control. Yet we find almost no overlap in the way these processes are described across the three chapters, and we find no attempt at integrating the perspectives. As a reader, one can gain the "big picture" only by reading all three chapters. Perhaps this is a case where the editors could have done more to encourage integration.

The Parity of a Plethora of Approaches

As two social psychologists who are affiliated primarily (although far from exclusively) with a social cognition approach, we were somewhat surprised and delighted to see social cognition principles, paradigms,

and research represented in the vast majority of the chapters, regardless of the level of analysis. Even discussions from the point of view of the biological system, the interpersonal system, and the group and cultural system made substantial use of the concepts, theories, and findings that have been part of the social cognition approach to understanding social behavior and interaction. Furthermore, we were heartened to see work in the social cognition tradition cited without its being either reified or vilified. For this text, at least, social cognition was neither sovereign nor damnable, neither the salvation and the future of social psychology nor the very downfall of our discipline.

And this is how it should be. Social cognition is not a grand theory, it is not the unifying theme for all of social psychology, it does not present the only paradigms to be used for a comprehensive analysis of social behavior, and it is not a master plan for understanding all of social psychology. Rather, social cognition is an approach that focuses on that aspect of the social domain involving the world as perceived, represented, and remembered. It is to be used in conjunction with other approaches that focus on biology, neuroscience, language, interaction, motivation, and culture to arrive at an understanding of social behavior and interaction at all these levels of analysis and across a wide variety of content areas.

This kind of framing and use of theory and research in the social cognition tradition has been suggested in recent years in chapters such as that of Sherman, Judd, and Park (1987) and in texts such as that of Devine, Hamilton, and Ostrom (1994), and it is certainly the framing that characterizes the chapters of Higgins and Kruglanski's book. In fact, even though the authors of each chapter certainly had their own favorite theory or approach, in no case did we see a claim that one approach or another was the only way or the best way for social psychology to proceed as a discipline. The recognition and use of multiple theories and approaches within each chapter was a refreshing change from many books and chapters that are quite rigid and dogmatic in their approach for arriving at a comprehensive understanding of social psychological principles and phenomena. Thus, the book was not only representative of all levels of analysis and all approaches to understanding social behavior across the chapters, but this was often true within the chapters. Perhaps this is not so surprising when we consider that the two editors are among the social psychologists who are the most eclectic in their interests and the broadest in their approaches. The kind of openness, flexibility, and comprehensiveness represented in the book can only be good for our field as a whole.

What to Read First?

Given both of our association with an approach to social behavior that focuses on the individual psychological level (as best represented by the sections on the cognitive system and the personal motivational system), that we actually got the most out of the sections in the book that focused on other levels of analysis—the biological, interpersonal, and group and cultural systems—is interesting. These chapters served to give us a much better appreciation of social psychology as a whole and allowed us to see the ways in which the individual psychological level worked along with processes at other levels to produce the outcomes that we observe in human affect, judgment, cognition, and behavior. Although the research literature on biases in exposure to information (reading only things consistent with our existing beliefs and values) has been equivocal in its findings, we have no doubt that most social psychologists read only or primarily chapters, articles, and books that are similar in level of analysis and approach to that of their own work. Speaking honestly, had we not been asked to write a review of this book, we probably would not have read many of the chapters outside those dealing with the cognitive and the personal motivational systems. Only by being forced to do so by task demands were we exposed to the principles and processes at the other levels of analysis. This allowed us to see links between our own work and our own thinking to ideas, paradigms, and models that we might not have otherwise considered. We might suggest, therefore, that, if readers cannot read all 1,000 pages of this text, they focus on those levels of analysis that are different from the one that they usually employ in their own research and thinking.

This is not to say that we were disappointed with or that we learned little from the chapters in the sections on cognitive and personal motivational approaches. On the contrary. Not only were these chapters full of new data, but they also presented fresh ideas. The presentations were more than a comprehensive review of an area. They employed the principles across levels of analysis, compared and contrasted alternative approaches, and presented new models. Finding ideas that stimulated new questions and new research in the areas of social psychology that are of most personal interest to us was not difficult.

Potential Drawbacks With a Basic Principles Approach

In principle, we strongly support an emphasis on basic principles rather than content as a way of summa-

rizing the field of social psychology. However, if the traditional content-based organization of social psychology is to be forsaken, then it is essential to ensure that the important content areas receive adequate coverage within the discussions of principles. For the most part, this book has met this challenge. For instance, although the topics of attitudes and the self do not have their own chapters, these domains are well represented throughout the text. In only one case did we note the focus on principle coincided with a relative neglect of a major content area: the topics of intergroup perception and conflict. Whereas whole chapters on interpersonal conflict and conflict within groups are included, the coverage of intergroup conflict is sparse. The index has no listing for intergroup behavior, intergroup bias, intergroup conflict, or anything intergroup. Bits and pieces (a few paragraphs at most) show up here and there, but many of the most important concepts simply are not included. For example, neither realistic conflict theory nor the contact hypothesis is anywhere to be found. In almost 1,000 pages of text, the index lists only two sites where a discussion of prejudice can be found. Discrimination is nowhere to be found. The same is true for intergroup perception. Although certain aspects of stereotyping get limited coverage in a few places, some of the most basic topics are not addressed. For example, discussions of stereotype formation are almost nonexistent. Social-role theory is not covered. The issues of contact, stereotype change, and subtyping are similarly absent from the text. Surely, these processes are among the most basic and heavily researched in all of social psychology. Their absence from such an encyclopedic collection of social psychological knowledge is odd, indeed. If a second edition of this book is published, we hope this oversight is corrected.

The wide distribution of information on intergroup perception and conflict raises another important question about pursuing a strict "basic principles" approach. What if a student or researcher wants to know about all the different factors that contribute to intergroup bias,

attitude processes, or aggression? In this book, the person would have to dig through multiple chapters to find the relevant bits and pieces. Obviously, an emphasis on basic principles can never entirely replace content-oriented texts. Both organizations will be useful to people, depending on their current goals. Of course, a researcher interested in the issue of intergroup bias will have no trouble finding all the appropriate information summarized elsewhere in one place in the overabundance of content-oriented texts. What has been missing is a text and an approach that can point out the commonalities across content domains. For this reason, the *Handbook of Basic Principles* represents a historical leap forward in the way we organize, conceptualize, and pursue social psychological knowledge.

Notes

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