THALIA DRAGONAS

«Αλλά με τις ξόβεργες μπορεί να πιάνεις πουλιά,
δεν πιάνεις ποτέ το κελαηδητό τους»

Οδυσσέας Ελύτης
«Ανοιχτά Χαρτιά»

CAN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AFFORD TO BE OPTIMISTIC?

«'The knowledge explosion' of the past thirty years or so has little to do with knowledge as such. It has primarily to do with knowledge as a commodity produced by the 'knowledge industry'. And like every other form of industrial production ... today, its most significant side effect is pollution: the pollution of minds»[1], deplores Wilden, thus raising perhaps the most challenging issue that social psychology is facing.

During the last decade, repeated warnings come from the field of social psychology about a prolonged crisis of confidence in the discipline[2]. A steadily growing concern has been voiced over scientific methodology and experimental approach in social psychological studies. The crisis is attributed to the number of research expectancies such as to have statistically significant results that lead to the devolopment

1. Wilden, A. *System and Strueture: Essays in Communication and Exchange.* London: Tavistock Publications, 1980, p. 1.

2. Newell, A. You can't play 20 questions with nature and win. In W. G. Chace (Ed.) *Visual Information Processing.* New York: Academic Press, 1972.

Elms, A.C. The crisis of confidence in social psychology. *American Psychologist,* October 1975, 967-975.

House, J. S. The three faces of social psychology. *Sociometry,* 40, 1977, 161-177.

Backman, C.W. Promises unfulfilled: The premature abandonment of promising research. In R. Gilmour and S. Duck (Eds) *The Development of Social Psychology.* London: Academic Press, 1980.

Harré, R. Making social psychology scientific. In R. Gilmour and S. Duck (Eds) *The Development of Social Psychology.* London: Academic Press, 1980.

Sampson, E.E. Cognitive psychology as ideology. *American Psychologist,* 36, 1981, 7, 730-743.

Gergen, K.J. The social constructionist movement in social psychology. *Amerian Psyehologist,* 40, 1985, 3, 266-275.

of «handsome, polished and sweeping» theories, as well as to the usual strategy of narrowing conditions, refining results and looking for generalizations of limited range. «Social psychology is currently passing through a period of more than usual uneasiness, an uneasiness which is felt even more by researchers inside the field than by outside observers» McGuire[1] noted in 1973. This statement seems to be no lesser true thirteen years later. Yet, the experimental approach still prevails in universities, analogous literature grows at a fast pace, and the established standards in designing research and applying for grants, dominate the scene. Stroebe[2] conceives of the social organization of the research community as one which promotes theoretical and methodological uniformity, thus creating a situation which is detrimental to the progress of the discipline.

Critics within the field have begun to requestion psychology's claim to being a science. The postulates on which theorizing and research in social psychology have relied are being re-examined. The present article will talke up and discuss those postulates.

In Emulating Positivism and Empiricism

It has been always felt that psychology lagged behind the natural sciences in terms of 'scientism'. Yet, the goal of psychology, right from the beginning, was to model itself after physics and biology following the experimental approach. The pioneers in the field were prepared to abide to the notion that psychology can be adequate to science, often overlooking the respective adequacy to man[3]. Both the study of mind and behaviour were based on the Cartesian paradigm and more specifically on Newtonian concepts of reality[4]. The structuralists studied the mind through introspection analyzing consciousness into its constituents. The behaviourists were based on precise laboratory experimentation and studied behaviour with the unshakable belief that it is lawful and determined. In the effort to account for human behaviour the existence of

1. McGuire, W. J. The yin and yang of progress in social psychology: Seven koan. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 26, 1973, p. 456.

2. Stroebe, W. Process loss in social psychology: Failure to exploit. In R. Gilmour and S. Duck (Eds) *The Development of Social Psychology.* London: Academic Press, 1980.

3. Koch, S. *Psychology: A Study of Science* (Vol 3). New York: McGraw Hill, 1959.

4. Capra, F. *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982.

mind or consciousness was deliberately ignored. The understanding of how mind and body interact with each other was rendered impossible.

The first three decades of the twentieth century however, mark a major change in natural sciences. Relativity theory and quantum theory shattered several basic concepts of the Newtonian world view. Yet, despite developments in physics, the mechanistic principles of Newtonian physics retained their strong influence on Western scientific thought. Laing asserts that hardly anything has changed our world more during the past four hundred years than the obsession of scientists with measurement and quantification[1]. Today a number of natural scientists and even a greater number of social scientists still hold the mechanistic, positivist paradigm while physicists themselves have gone past it.

Positivism has dominated thinking and research in psychology for most of its history. This 'scientific' approach unquestionably continues to be the mainstream in a large part of psychology. It is characterized by faith in objectivity and detached observation, empiricism, operationalism and logical positivism[2]. The positivist assumptions will be presented in an effort to bring out the similarities and differences between them and the prevailing ideology in social psychological research. Three major claims of the 'orthodox' natural sciences are summed up by Ryan[3]. They will be borrowed for the purposes of the present article.

The assumption of generalization, reproducibility and objectivity

The aim of science is to produce general laws which are universal, i.e. which apply to all events or things of certain kind, which are precisely stated, i.e. which say exactly and unequivocally what will happen, and whieh are of as wide as scope as possible[4].

To what extent are social psychological phenomena governed by universal laws which can stand up to generalization, reproducibility and objectivity? Research in social psychology has attempted to simulate human behaviour with experiments whereby the manipulation of an independent variable will produce changes in a dependent variable. Whenever

1. Laing, R. D. *The Voice of Experience.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983.
2. Panlconer, J.E. and Williams, R.N. Temporality in human action: An alternative to positivism and historicism. *American Psychologist,* 40, 1985, 11, 1179-1188.
3. Ryan, A. Is the study of society a science? In D. Potter et al (Eds) *Society and the Social Sciences.* London: The Open University Press, 1984, p. 10.
4. Ibid.

experimental data would not support a particular theory there would be more experiments conducted which would identify reasons for the initial failure[1]. «Time and again the social psychologist's laboratory findings on main effects and simple interactions that are expected to be dependable generalizations turn out to be will-o'-the-wisps, because they fail to stand up in conceptual replications or turn out to be the product of higher interactions with relatively trivial variables that are specific to the experimental setting» writes Janis[2]. The remaining question however, is not whether we must attribute our failures to artefacts in the experimental setting. The real issue is the extent to which we can infer, deduce, generalize and extend from experimental research to the understanding of human social behaviour.

The variables that take part in social psychological phenomena are greatly culturally determined and are thus rendered largely nonrepeatable and labile over time and place. Social psychology cannot really make any lasting or truly generalizable discoveries because of its historical nature[3]. It is the context in which phenomena are embedded that provides words and action with meaning. This is true, says Bateson[4] of «...all communications whatsoever, of all mental process, of all mind...». Meanings are thus local and make sense only in specific context and structure. The postulate for generalization necessarily leads to abstraction from context and structure and therefore to a misperception of the reality being studied. Along this line of thinking, Harré[5] refers to two 'grotesque', as he calls them, examples in social psychological research: the first one concerns the study of interpersonal attraction whereby mere frequency of presentation is measured as a condition of liking and the second refers to the study of repetition as a factor in learning whereby the successful repetition of nonsesne syllables is being measured. However, if we did

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1. Meelhl, P. E. Theoretical risks and tabular asterisks: Sir Karl, Sir Robert and the slow progress of social psychology. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 46, 1967, 806-834.

2. Janis, I. L. Field experiments on the effectiveness of social support for stressful decisions. In M. Deutsch and H. Hornstein (Eds) *Problems of Applying Social Psychology*. Hillsdale, N. J.: Erlbaum Associates, 1976.

3. Gergen, K. J. Social psychology as history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 1973, 309-320.

4. Bateson, G. *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. New York: Bantam Books, 1980, p. 16.

5. Harré, R., op. cit.

increase the similarity of investigation to that of life situation we cannot necessarily argue for greater generality of results[1].

The importance of history, culture and context are part of any discourse away from positivism. The crux of the argument is that the understanding of human action requires our understanding as historical beings. It is the very nature of selfhood, not just its context, that is historically, culturally and temporally bound[2].

The scientist was traditionally thought of as someone who can study a system without intervening in the operations of the system. Rational objectivity in science presupposes that science would observe nature but nature would not reflect upon its being observed. Similarly, the traditional conception of a scientist is that of an objective seeker of the truth following a value-free approach to knowledge. Both of these views seem terribly limited. We will take up firstly the issue of reflexivity and then the one of human values.

The effects of experimental bias, self-fulfilling prophecy, demand characteristics, are all phenomena known to social psychologists. Yet, a good number of researchers are still unnerved by them and, as already mentioned, approach the problem as one requiring greater experimental control. «Only if we accept all behaviour as communication, we will not be dealing with a monophonic message unit, but rather with a fluid and multifaceted compound of many behavioral modes—verbal, tonal, postural, contextual etc. —all of which qualify the meaning of all the others» remark in an intelligible way Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson[3].

Reflexivity does not only refer to the ways behaviour is changed as we are being studied. It also has to do with how the results of studies can change our behaviour in nonexperimental contexts. It is what Gergen[4] calls an 'enlightment effect'. When research findings are communicated to the scientific or nonscientific community, people tend to believe that they actually are what the researchers suggest they are. A great danger implied in the 'enlightment effect' is the one mentioned by Koch[5]. When

1. Kazdin, D. E. Evaluating the generality of findings in analogue therapy research. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,* 46, 1978, 673-686.

2. Smith, M.B. Perspectives of selfhood. *American Psychologist,* December 1978, 1053-1063.

3. Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J.H. and Jackson, D. *Pragmatics of Human Communieation: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies and Paradoxes.* New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1967, p. 50.

4. Gergen, K. J., Social psychology as history, op. cit.

5. Koch, S. Psychology and its human clientele: Beneficiaries or victims? In R. A. Kasschan and F. S. Kessel (Eds) *Psychology and Society:In Search of Sumbiosis.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981.

the reductionist and impoverished models of humans are implicit in social psychological research — which they often are — qualities basic to human essence are seriously threatened. A 'dehumanizing', as Koch describes it, distortion occurs. Scientists are thus rendered responsible for the research they conduct not only intellectually but morally as well. This last comment brings us to the issue of value-free versus value-laden research.

Is it possible to separate human knowledge from the knower? In other words is scientific explanation free from the human intrusion of values? Nagel[1] distinguishes four clusters of arguments concerning value orientation: a) The first cluster includes questions regarding the selection of problems for study and whether the interests of the scientist determine what he chooses to investigate. b) The second cluster of arguments questions the extent to which the notions, the standards, the considerations of the social scientist himself intervene in his analysis of social phenomena. c) The third, even more sophisticated, group of arguments refers to the distinction between fact and value which is assumed to be untenable when purposive human behaviour is being analyzed. Values would thus enter into what appears even as 'purely descriptive' and 'factual' statement. d) The last cluster consists of questions dealing with the extent to which value commitments enter into the very assessment of evidence by social scientists. The differences between social scientists' assertions can easily be attributed to the influence of social, national, religious or other biases of which they are a product themselves.

The answer to the above questions should be that an ethically neutral science is inherently impossible. Philosophers of science may still debate the role of values in scientific research, yet the controversy, notes Howard[2] has shifted from 'whether' values influence scientific research to 'how' values intervene and shape scientific research. Sperry[3], the Nobel prize winner, shows the strategic controlling power of human values as universal cerebral determining forces. «From the standpoint of brain function» he says «it is clear that a person's or a society's values directly and consistently shape its actions and decisions. Any given brain will respond differently to the same input and will tend to

1. Nagel, E. The value-oriented bias of social inquiry. In D. Potter et al (Eds) *Society and the Social Sciences*. London: The Open University Press, 1984.

2. Howard, G. S. The role of values in the science of psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40, 1985, 3, 255-265.

3. Sperry, R. W. Bridging science and values: A unifying view of mind and brain. *American Psychologist*, April 1977, p. 238.

process the same information into quite diverse behavioral channels, depending on its particular system of value priorities».

The classical ideal of an objective, value-free, description in science has been contested by modern physics as well. According to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics, phenomena are understood only in relation to the processes of observation and measurement. The end of this chain of processes always remains in the consciousness of the human observer. The critical characteristic of quantum theory is that the observer not only observes the properties of the atomic phenomenon, but brings about these properties as well[1]. «My conscious decision about how to observe, say, an electron, will determine the electron's properties to some extent. If I ask a particle question, it will give me a particle answer; if I ask it a wave question, it will give me a wave answer»[2]. Thus, the results scientists obtain, will be conditioned by their frame of mind, their concepts, thoughts and values.

The assumption of prediction and control

[The aim of science is to produce general] laws [which] should enable us to predict and control events, i.e. they should form the basis of a reliable social technology[3].

Another major claim of orthodox science is that everything, in principle, is predictable and controllable. Our reliance on experimentation has lead us to think that a phenomenon is not predictable and controllable only because we lack the sufficient knowledge.

The social psychological research is virtually based on correlated events to which researchers attach some meaning. Right from the onset of the methodological design, we select certain variables that we believe may be causally related. To what extent however, can we claim the existence of a causal status? With the dependent and independent varia-

1. The interpretation of the Copenhagen School was contested by the Realistic School — Einstein, de Broglie, Schrödinger, Planck — which claimed that quantum phenomena are objective and causally determined. Yet, this school introduced as well the notions of dynamic objectivity and multiple possibilities of quantum systems during the act of measurement. Both the Copenhagen and Realistic Schools contest the classical mechanical conception of nature. (Bitsakis, E. *Physique et Matérialisme.* Paris: Editions Sociales, 1983; Selleri, F. *Le Grand Débat de la Théorique Quantique.* Paris: Flammarion, 1986).

2. Capra, F., op. cit., p. 87.

3. Ryan, A., op. cit.

bles the experimental design inherently produces a unidirectional snapshot in time and place. It is the demands for technically exploitable, predictable, and controllable knowledge that require the use of the transsituational and transhistorical logico-mathematical operations, whereby the technical interest constitutes reality[1]. But are human beings, the subject matter of psychology, suited for this abstract, unidirectional model? Social behaviour has to do with interactive systems in which feedback loops are more characteristic than linear causation[2]. In a dynamic interactional sense, where the emphasis is on the process and not on the unidirectional causal relationship, the constantly changing biocultural and historical context affects and at the same time is affected by the changing individual and his or her social environment. While in linear progressive chains of causality it is meaningful to talk about the beginning and the end of a chain, it is completely meaningless to do so in systems with feedback loops. The variables involved in circularity may not be appropriately seen as antecedent to or consequence of each other. Since there is no beginning and no end to a circle, the point of entry into the circle is arbitrary. The traditional notion pertaining to independent and dependent variable is rendered thus anachronistic[3].

When causality is implied, we mean that event b (occuring in the present) follows event a (having occurred in the past). The sequence is never thought of in reverse; an event occuring in the present cannot precede an event which has occurred in the past. When, however, the sequences of cause and effect become circular, the description of these sequences within the limits of timeless logic becomes impossible. Logic is unable to deal with recursive circuits and complex communicating systems without generating paradox[4]. Circularity permits us to regard a change in any part of the circle as cause for new change at a later point in time, anywhere in the circle.

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1. Sampson, E. E., op. cit.

2. Smith, M. B. Is experimental social psychology advancing? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,* 8, 1972, 86-96.

3. Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J. H. and Jackson, D., op. cit.

Lerner, R. M. and Spanier, G.B. A dynamic interactional view of child and family development. In R. Lerner and G. Spanier (Eds) *Child Influences on Marital and Family Interaction.* New York: Academic Press, 1978.

4. Riedl, R. The consequences of causal thinking. In P. Watzlawick (Ed) *The Invented Reality.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1984.

Bateson, G., op. cit.

In sum, the reciprocal and circular nature of social processes does not render itself to prediction and control. Moreover, this is even true for natural sciences, says Bateson[1], since for large classes of natural phenomena atomic prediction and control are simply impossible. As an example of unpredictability, he mentions, among others, the Brownian movement of molecules in liquides and gases. The individual — and in this particular case the individual molecule—does not render itself to extrapolation. Knowledge of what happens at one moment is not enough for making predictions. Similarly in quantum physics individual events do not always have a well-defined cause. According to a certain point of view, the jump of an electron from one atomic orbit to another, or the disintegration of a subatomic particle, may occur spontaneously. The prediction of when and how such an individual event is going to happen is impossible[2].

Yet, in the description of crowds, classes of individuals, populations, millions of molecules, behaviour can be predictable probabilistically. The general concept implicit in crowds, classes of individuals, populations, is that of aggregation. Statistitians by definition can only refer to the properties which are descriptive of the aggregation itself and not to the properties of particular members. It is «the generic we can know, but the specific eludes us», notes Bateson[3].

What is wrong with the current growth in social psychology is that it is based on analogy with the serial processing computer, failing, on the one hand, to recognize that the whole is greater and different than the sum of its parts and, on the other, to uncover the complex pattern of communication.

The assumption of cumulative knowledge

«[The aim of science is] the search for [general] laws which should be carried on systematically and incrementally, i. e. each generation should be able to inherit knowledge gained by the previous generation and should be able to build on it in turn»[4].

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1. Ibid.

2. In referring again at the Realistic School, at that level of physical reality we are dealing with a statistical law which presupposes a deeper causal determination. (Bitsakis, E., op. ci) t.

Capra, F., op. cit.

3. Bateson, G., op. cit., p. 45.

4. Ryan, A., op. cit.

According to the positivist-empiricist promise, science progresses and accumulates knowledge in a steady, cumulative fashion. This assumption is certainly true during what Kuhn[1] calls the 'normal science' periods. What characterizes 'normal science' is the steady progress whereby the scientific community works for the addition of new theories, for the improvement of techniques and for the provision of explanations based on an already established theoretical account sremming from a single set of fundamental beliefs. This status of science well reminds us of the present state of social psychology, where an extensive accumulation and combination of fragmented information and an absence of challenge for alternative explanations prevails. This fragmentation reflects in a way the fragmentation existing in technologies, institutions and life styles surrounding us.

However, the natural sciences have witnessed periods during which developments shattered notions such as absolute space and time, the strictly causal nature of the physical phenomena and the objective description of nature. The replacement of such a paradigm can only belong to a non-steady, explosive, 'revolutionary' period of science.

The Kuhnian non-positivist accounts of science greatly attracted the social scientists who wished to witness the transcendance of the positivist model[2]. Experimental evidence was denied a decisive role in moments of 'revolutionary' scientific change. Similarly the existence of rules for the appraisal of scientific procedures was also rejected since paradigms consist rules in themselves. Elms[3] believes that Kuhn's analysis of a paradigmatic crisis in social psychology offered wishful hopes to social psychologists' general malaise. Yet, he warns them that Kuhn's account of scientific change, regardless of whether it is correct, does not apply to social psychology. Elms claims there is little evidence of a Kuhnian paradigm existing in social psychology. No theory or methodology has ever gained the general acceptance or entire consensus commensurate to that of the natural sciences' paradigm as expressed by Kuhn. One could only talk about an incomplete paradigm or, in Kuhn's words, about a preparadigmatic stage.

1. Kuhn, T. S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd rev. ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

2. Gholson, B. and Barker, P. Kuhn, Lakatos and Laudan: Applications in the history of physics and psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40, 1985, 7, 755-769.

3. Elms, A.C., op. cit.

Is there room for optimism?

The mainstream assumptions in the positivist-empiricist tradition have been presented and the pervasive influence they have exerted on social psychology has been aknowledged. At the same time it has been argued that the understanding of humans hardly renders itself to such a model.

We have operated on the basis of prediction and control. Is it because control is another word for power and we have wanted to hang on to that power? We have aimed at a value-free science. Yet, what we believe to know about the external world is, in fact, knowledge about ourselves. Are we afraid of that knowledge and have thus avoided turning the light on ourselves? We have insisted on thinking in terms of cause and effect. Is it because we have not been able to tolerate our assumptions being falsified? Is it because we have not been able to take uncertainty? We have glorified scientism. Is it because demystification of science would reveal our nakedness? The receptivity to new experience is the more open aspect of life. But it entails risk. Have we been afraid of it? However, without risk the ability for growth is lost.

Yet, despite the pessimism conveyed by this last paragraph, there are active challenges to the traditional-positivist model which are appearing in a steadily growing fashion and which are aiming at making psychology a holistic endeavour. There may still be no well-established conceptual or institutional framework to accomodate the formulation of a new paradigm, but the outlines of such a framework are already apparent.

Pribram[1] claims that convolution and matrix models which can be applied more efficiently in parallel networks, are becoming influential. These new mathematical descriptions fit neurophysiological and neurobehavioural data much better than do the less sophisticated hierachical models. In these models there is room for pattern perception and precise description of processes such as intuition, affect, attention and intention.

Harré[2] proposes an ethogenic approach to social relationships whereby interaction and transformation of structures, both personal and social,

1. Pribram, K. 'Holism' could close cognition era. *APA Monitor,* 16, September 1985, 9, 5-6.

2. Harré, R. Friendship as an accomplishment: An ethogenic approach to social relationships. In S. Duck (Ed) *Theory and Practice in Interpersonal Attraction,* London: Academic Press, 1977.

is being examined. He introduces the assumption that human models of functioning are culturally dependent to such an extent that the introduction of a psychological theory into a culture, will generate changes in the actual functioning to accord with it. The study of history is for Gergen[1], a necessary input to the understanding of social psychology in an integrated way. It is an alternative route away from the study of minute segments of behaviour. In this same line of historical interpretation Cronbach advocates intensive local observation as an «open-eyed, open - minded appreciation of the surprises nature deposits in the investigative net»[2].

Similarly, the ecologically oriented reformers seek to provide new answers to scientific practice. An ecologically oriented scientific study reflects an interplay between the features and phases associated with deduction, i. e. theory, manipulation, control, and those associated with induction, i.e. holistic data, ecological validity, discovery orientation[3].

Adherents of the systemic view turn our attention to the relationships and integration characterizing the world. Systems are integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to smaller units. Relationships which are inherently dynamic rather than isolated entities are being emphasized. Systems thinking is process thinking whereby form is associated with process and interrelation with interaction. The emergence of pattern brings to light a new reality. Opposites are unified through oscillation. In that sense reductionism and holism, analysis and synthesis, are complementary approaches that guide us towards a deeper knowledge of the living process[4].

There is an underlying similarity in the various reformist pleas which are being launched. We are not only presented with a dilemma concerning scientific practice but with one which cuts deeper still and

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1. Gergen, K. J., Social psychology as history, op. cit.
Gergen, K. J. Social psychology, science and history: A rejoinder. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 2, 1976, 373-383.

2. Cronbach, L. Beyond the two disciplines of social psychology. *American Psychologist,* 30, February 1975, 2, p. 125.

3. Gibbs, J. C. The meaning of ecologically oriented inquiry in contemporary psychology. *American Psychologist,* 34, February 1979, 2, 127-140.

4. Laszlo, E. *The Systems View of the World.* New York: Braziller, 1972.
Bateson, G., op. cit.
Capra, F., op. cit.

has to do with epistemology as such. Rising voices in the field warning us for an impending crisis, have certainly multiplied. But as Minuchin, the prominent family therapist, likes to remind us, the Chinese ideogram for 'crisis' is made of 'danger' and 'opportunity'. In this case the opportunity is expressed in the fact that the ramifications of basic epistemology for scientific practice are being increasingly recognized.

Δικαιούται η Κοινωνική Ψυχολογία να είναι Αισιόδοξη;

(Περίληψη)

Την τελευταία δεκαπενταετία, από το χώρο της κοινωνικής ψυχολογίας έρχονται αλλεπάλληλες προειδοποιήσεις σχετικά με μία παρατεινόμενη κρίση εμπιστοσύνης στον κλάδο. Οι προϋποθέσεις στις οποίες βασίστηκε θεωρία και έρευνα ενός μεγάλου μέρους της κοινωνικής ψυχολογίας, επανεξετάζονται. Χωρίς αμφιβολία η θετικιστική σκέψη κυριάρχησε, σε μεγάλη βαθμό, στον κοινωνικό-ψυχολογικό λόγο. Το άρθρο αυτό παρουσιάζει ορισμένα από τα αξιώματα του θετικισμού και εμπειρισμού και επιχειρεί να προβάλει διαφορές και ομοιότητες μεταξύ αυτών και της ιδεολογίας που επικρατεί στη θεωρία και έρευνα της κοινωνικής ψυχολογίας. Η αντικειμενικότητα, η ουδετερότητα, η γενίκευση και αναπαραγωγή καθολικών νόμων, η πρόγνωση, ο έλεγχος, η γραμμική σχέση αίτιου και αιτιατού, η απομονωμένη από το περιβάλλον αποσπασματική πληροφορία, αποτελούν ανασταλτικούς φραγμούς σε όποια ολιστική προσέγγιση. Οι παράμετροι που συνστούν τα κοινωνικό-ψυχολογικά φαινόμενα είναι πολιτισμικής και ιστορικής υφής και αυτό που τους προσδίδει νόημα είναι το πλαίσιο μέσα στο οποίο εντάσσονται. Ακόμη και η καθαρά περιγραφική, τεκμηριωμένη αναφορά, δεν μπορεί παρά να είναι αξιολογική. Ο εναλλασσόμενος, συμπληρωματικός και κυκλικός χαρακτήρας κάθε κοινωνικό-ψυχολογικής διεργασίας υπονομεύει την πρόγνωση. Την κλασσική μηχανιστική αντίληψη φύσης και ανθρώπου, που προήλθε από τις θετικές επιστήμες, έχει ξεπεράσει απο τις πρώτες δεκαετίες του 20ου αιώνα η κβαντική φυσική. Στο χώρο της κοινωνικής ψυχολογίας μπορεί να μην υπάρχει ακόμη ένα καλά εδραιωμένο εννοιολογικό ή θεσμικό πλαίσιο που θα στεγάσει τη διατύπωση ενός νέου παραδείγματος. Ωστόσο, το περίγραμμα ενός τέτοιου πλαισίου, ήδη φαίνεται να διαγράφεται από διάφορες πλευρές.

Θάλεια Δραγώνα