

make people behave in ways that, in retrospect, seem strange even to themselves. All this has led not only to a better understanding of the spectrum of human behavior in social contexts, but has also enabled us to develop prevention and intervention strategies.

Together with the “biases” literature from social-cognitive psychology, K&F put all this into one common pot of allegedly negativistic social psychology. They are certainly correct that there has been a “bias towards biases” in the literature, and the list they present in Table 1 is truly outrageous. But experimenter-imposed zero-tolerance norms or shortcomings of NHST cannot be blamed for the 40% of participants giving the strongest shock (450 V, labeled “XXX” in the Milgram (1974) study, being in the same room together with the student/victim, and the additional 25% who gave intense shocks (> 240 V) in this condition before they refused to continue. And Zimbardo’s (1971) results show that even when a majority behaves decently, a minority that does not (such as the guard “John Wayne”) can easily get the upper hand.

We need not, however, resort to laboratory classics and textbooks of social psychology, but can look into CNN, quality newspapers, and history books. Just consider behavioral reports from the recent (civil) wars in former Yugoslavia and in several African countries. The “field” tells the story. And history repeats: There are evocative parallels between the Austrian-German war against Serbia, which triggered WWI, and the recent U.S. war against Iraq. The parallel starts with the formulation of an unacceptable ultimatum by the super-power (luckily with much less tragic consequences in the latter case). It ends with American patriots fiercely requesting that *French fries* be renamed *freedom fries* because of the anti-war policy of the French, just as the Viennese demolished the windows of shops and cafés with foreign names some 90 years before, in 1914 (Kraus 1922 [1, 1]); and with my e-mail box getting spammed with Saddam jokes and war remembrance ads.

Taking an evolutionary stance, it is clear that a specific social behavior (e.g., unconditioned obedience to authority) can be beneficial in one context, and maladaptive in another. It is also clear that hypothetical human social adaptations to “then” (the social environments of our ancestors) are not necessarily beneficial now. Evolutionary thinking should never lead us into normative biology, or into Hume’s (1740) *naturalistic fallacy*: “Is” and “ought” do not naturally relate. It may be well understandable *why* socially situated humans act in a certain way, and their behavior may even be an adaptation. But this does not mean that behavior is completely inflexible, and that the “is” dictates the norms.

I am skeptical about an evolution-inspired Panglossian paradigm (Gould & Lewontin 1979) for social psychology, in the sense of Dr. Pangloss’s tragicomic stance, that “All’s for the best in this best of all possible worlds” (Voltaire 1759). Although K&F advocate a balanced agenda, to some extent they fall prey to their own optimism. They sometimes seem to suggest that in-group/out-group effects, stereotypes, and so forth only exist in the minds of researchers. Although a more balanced view of the positive and the negative, and a more integrated picture of “human nature,” may prove to be helpful for the field, I cannot see how this implicit denial of real effects should be useful. Of course, glasses can be either half-full or half-empty; but a generalized “I’m OK – you’re OK” attitude does not automatically promote social psychology.

So, is *Homo sapiens* a rational humanist?¹ Often, the easiest way to react (e.g., to obey) is neither the most rational nor the most socially desirable one. But I am an optimist, too: I believe in the power of education, insight, culture, and learning. I believe that informed human beings, who know what can happen, are better able to avoid bad outcomes. (That’s why history is taught in schools.) People can *learn*, also from social psychology, to behave differently. For example, they can learn to disobey when obedience may have fatal consequences.²

It was a central point of the Enlightenment that not everything is for the best in our world, and that humans do not always act humanistically. It remains a legitimate task of social psychology to explain why.

NOTES

1. This is, at least, what philosophers believed for the longest time. Many other metaphors have been proposed, such as *Homo economicus*, the selfish and corrupt guy who you would not necessarily like to live next door to.

2. In order to endorse such (extraordinary) courageous behavior, the Austrian empress Maria Theresia (1717–1780) instituted a high military decoration for justified and victorious disobedience to an order.

Social cognitive neuroscience: The perspective shift in progress

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Abstract: Krueger & Funder (K&F) describe social cognitive research as being flawed by its emphasis on performance errors and biases. They argue that a perspective shift is necessary to give balance to the field. However, such a shift may already be occurring with the emergence of social cognitive neuroscience leading to new theories and research that focus on normal social cognition.

Krueger & Funder (K&F) present a reasoned argument that much of social cognitive research – particularly, decision-making, judgment, and reasoning – is flawed, as it focuses on errors that people make. They suggest, quite reasonably, that these errors and biases may reflect adaptive cognition that is appropriate to real-world situations and leads to errors only in the somewhat artificial laboratory environment. They express a desire for errors, biases, and normal behavior to be considered in the same theoretical frameworks. I agree that research and theories should address normal behavior and not just errors. Further, I believe that there is a growing body of social cognitive research that tests hypotheses about social cognition by studying the range of performance, rather than focusing on “abnormal states” – K&F review some of these studies in their article (e.g., Ekman 1991/1992; Stanovich & West 2000).

Social cognitive neuroscience is a synthesis of social psychology and cognitive neuroscience, and the emergence of this field has brought new integrative theoretical approaches. Although in its infancy, I would argue that this field meets the challenges of K&F. There are several theories of social cognition that address different aspects of normal social cognition (e.g., decision-making, social judgment, intuition, theory-of-mind, attitudes, stereotypes, emotional processing, reasoning) (Adolphs 2003; Cacioppo 2002; Cacioppo et al. 2000; Damasio 1996; Greene & Haidt 2002; Haidt 2001; Lieberman 2000; Ochsner & Lieberman 2001; Wood 2003). Recent social cognitive neuroscientific research has explored moral judgment and moral reasoning to establish how people make moral decisions (e.g., Greene & Haidt 2002; Greene et al. 2001; Haidt 2001; Moll et al. 2002a; 2002b). Damasio and his colleagues have explored social decision-making and demonstrated that people are able to make good decisions in the absence of awareness of experimental contingencies (e.g., Bechara et al. 1997; 2000). These theories and research meet K&F’s criterion of considering error and accuracy in the same experiments and theoretical frameworks.

Even within more traditional reasoning research, it has been shown that people who fail classic reasoning tasks, such as Wason’s selection task (Wason 1968), can perform accurately if the stimulus materials are familiar rules that are presented in a familiar real-world context (e.g., Cheng & Holyoak 1985; Griggs & Cox 1982; Johnson-Laird et al. 1972; Wason & Shapiro 1971). In addition, it has been argued that failures on traditional reasoning tasks result from the comparison of everyday reasoning strategies with “an inappropriate logical standard” (for a recent review, see Oaksford & Chater 2001).

In summary, K&F’s take-home message is that social psychol-

ogy needs a shift in perspective to “a more balanced, full-range social psychology.” The purpose of their review is to stimulate such a shift. K&F eloquently argue that there is much research demonstrating a large number of different behavioral and cognitive biases in social cognition. This is true; however, there is also a large body of research meeting their criterion, that is, the need to study a range of behavior and cognitive performance (some of these are presented above). In my opinion, therefore, a “perspective shift” is already in progress. Research and theories have been published, and are continuing to be published, that address normal social cognition and behavior without proposing that we reason or behave in error-prone ways. That said, K&F’s article provides a timely reminder that we should seek to understand behavior as a whole and not simply focus on the ostensibly abnormal or unusual.

Authors’ Response

Social psychology: A field in search of a center

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Abstract: Many commentators agree with our view that the problem-oriented approach to social psychology has not fulfilled its promise, and they suggest new research directions that may contribute to the maturation of the field. Others suggest that social psychology is not as focused on negative phenomena as we claim, or that a negative focus does indeed lay the most efficient path toward a general understanding of social cognition and behavior. In this response, we organize the comments thematically, discuss them in light of our original exposition, and reiterate that we seek not a disproportionately positive social psychology but a balanced field that addresses the range of human performance.

In the target article, we argued that modern social psychology is characterized by an abiding preoccupation with troublesome behavior and flawed cognition. We traced this state of affairs to an underlying value orientation that accords primacy to negative phenomena and to the rigid way in which these phenomena tend to be cast in experimental design and statistical analysis. In conjunction, these properties of social–psychological research have impeded the development of theories with explanatory power and the ability to generate novel and nontrivial hypotheses. Our suggestions for a re-orientation were not radical. Instead, we sought to highlight several existing trends in both theorizing and methodology that could benefit the field if pursued more vigorously. Many of the commentators echo our concerns about the history and the current status of the field; they constructively elaborate on many of the proposed remedies, and they suggest new ones. Others defend the traditional view, arguing that social psychology should continue to focus on misbehavior and flawed judgment. We are indebted to all commentators for their carefully reasoned contributions. In this response, we highlight what we perceive to be recurring themes, and we delineate how the commentaries have shaped our thinking. As could be expected, we give more detailed consideration to commen-

taries that challenge important components of our original argument.

The relevant themes can be organized to parallel the organization of the target article. First, there is the question of *diagnosis*. Because we stressed the importance of studying the accuracy of social perception, it is only fair to ask whether our assessment of the state of the field is itself accurate. Second, there is the question of *methodology*. Our claim that the routine applications of null hypothesis significance testing contribute to the negative outlook turned out to be controversial; comments concerning moderator variables raised pertinent issues; and our proposal that research be oriented to examine the entire range of performance, rather than just the negative end, was in some cases misunderstood. Third, there are issues of *theory* and the kind of research most likely to help theory develop, which lie at the heart of the search for a balanced paradigm.

R1. An accurate diagnosis?

R1.1. Selectivity

There is no consensus among the commentators on whether social psychology is predominantly negative. Although many agree with our assessment that it is (Hertwig & Wallin, Jussim, Kihlstrom, Ortmann & Ostatnick, Schwarz), others object (Darley & Todorov, Gregg & Sedikides, Regan & Gilovich, Petty, Vitouch). Still others feel that there is a negative orientation, but that this is as it should be (Epley, Van Boven & Caruso [Epley et al.], Friedrich, Klar & Levi, Shackelford & Vallacher, Stolarz-Fantino & Fantino), or even, that this orientation is insufficiently negative (Maratsos). How then is one to arrive at a reasonably accurate negativity score? Database searches for relevant keywords such as *accuracy* or *bias*, of the kind provided by us or by Kruger & Savitsky, are only suggestive because they sample across diverse psychological subdisciplines and do not fully capture the impact of individual publications.

Our case for the overall negative orientation of social psychology traced its roots to an enduring ideological commitment that began with the idea that social groups are more likely to corrupt individuals rather than allow them to flourish (e.g., Allport 1924; Le Bon 1895). Although some later work (especially in the Lewinian tradition) examined effective leadership and heightened group performance, these topics faded from view as the cognitive revolution renewed interest in the psychology of stereotyping and prejudice. We also noted some of the rhetoric employed in the literature, which has included the characterization of human judgment as “ludicrous,” “indefensible,” and “self-defeating.” Regan & Gilovich claim that in context these particular terms were justified. Besides questioning whether describing human behavior with a term like “ludicrous” is appropriate in *any* scientific context, we would note that these three terms were drawn from a longer list of examples of negative rhetoric. To quote another prominent example, none of the commentators claimed that the comment “How could people be so wrong?” (Ross & Nisbett 1991, p. 139) was either justified or quoted out of context. It would be hard to deny – and we are not certain whether Regan & Gilovich intend to deny – that overall the rhetoric of the heuristics and biases literature has been both remarkably negative and effectively attention-getting.