Chapter 2
The Universal and the Particular in Psychology and the Role of History in Explaining Both

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There are two statements about human beings that are true: that all human beings are alike, and that all are different. On those two facts all human wisdom is founded. (Mark Van Doren, American poet (1894–1972))[1]

2.1 Universalism in Psychology

Universalism has been described as "a foundational postulate of psychology" (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005, p. 763). What it means in practice is that the theories of psychology are thought to be applicable to all human beings in all places and at all times. The topic has been debated extensively in anthropology but discussions of it in psychology are relatively rare. It tends to operate as one of the tacit assumptions of the field.

It is the assumption of universalism that has resulted in the limited sample of participants that is used in psychological research. A content analysis of the leading American journals in six different subdisciplines of psychology showed that 68 % of the studies used American samples, and another 28 % used samples from the other countries of the industrialized West (Canada, Europe, Israel, Australia, and New Zealand). Of the remaining 4 %, Asia accounted for 3 % and Latin America 1 %. Africa and the rest of the Middle East together accounted for less than 1 %. Even the samples used in these countries are not representative of the population as a whole. One might expect that social psychologists would be aware of the

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[1] Quoted in Norenzayan and Heine (2005, p. 763). It can also be found on numerous websites, but none of these websites provide a reference.

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importance of someone's social background, and yet 67 % of the American studies that were published in the leading journal of social psychology, the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, involved college students, while the figure for studies in other countries involving college students was an even higher 80 % (Arnett, 2008).

None of this would matter if the assumption of universalism were true, but common sense would suggest that American college students are not a representative sample of all the human beings in the world. They are usually in the age range from 18 to 22 and they are usually middle class. They are not even representative of Americans, let alone people in other countries. However, as Danziger (2009) has pointed out, the default assumption of universalism means that if anyone would be so bold as to suggest that American college students are not representative of humanity as a whole, the onus of proof would be on them.

Proof of this kind does exist. For example, it has been repeatedly found in research using American participants that they tend to put more effort into a task when they are asked to do it individually, as opposed to being asked to do it as part of a group. However, when the same experiments were conducted using Chinese participants, they tended to put more effort into a task when they were asked to do it as a part of a group as opposed to being asked to do it individually. This is just one example from a large body of literature where cross-cultural differences in experimental results have been found (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993).

It is not as if the majority of psychologists have chosen to ignore this research. For the most part, they are not even aware of its existence. Most of the research has emanated from cross-cultural psychology, which was a belated addition to the discipline in the 1960s and is still a neglected and marginalized field, at least in the countries of Europe and North America where most of the psychological research is carried out. Very few psychology departments in these countries have a cross-cultural psychologist on their staff or think it necessary to have one, and this is due to the universalism that pervades the field.

In spite of this situation, the majority of cross-cultural psychologists subscribe to the universalist view. They simply differ from their colleagues in the more mainstream areas of psychology in how they believe a universal psychology will be achieved. The key to understanding this point lies in the name: *cross*-cultural. They believe that by comparing the results of psychological research from different cultures, common features will be observed and out of these a universal psychology will emerge. The terms, "etic" and "emic" are frequently used in this connection. They are borrowed from linguistics and refer to the difference between "phonetics," which is the study of linguistic sounds in general, and "phonemics," which is the study of the sounds of a specific language (Berry, Poortinga, & Breugelmans, 2011).

One of the more interesting developments in psychology in recent years has been the rise of the indigenization movement (e.g., Allwood & Berry, 2006). It came about after psychology was exported on a large scale to the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the decades immediately after World War II. The influence of American psychology was at its height during these years and psychologists in these countries began to argue that it was not the universal science that it claimed to be

but reflected the society and culture in which it was produced. It was therefore inappropriate for their needs and would have to have to be adapted or modified to suit the local situation.

One might think that the adherents of this movement would be opposed to the idea of a universal psychology, but this is not the case. Danziger has written:

> A couple of years ago, I was asked to comment on a dozen or more accounts of "indigenized psychologies" that had been supplied by psychologists from all parts of the world: India, China, New Guinea, Poland, Cameroon, and many others […] more than half the accounts of indigenization that I looked at included explicit expressions of faith in what was generally referred to as "universal psychology" and no one explicitly rejected this ideal. Indigenization was seen, not as a rejection, but as a way of approaching a "universal psychology," though the manner in which this would be accomplished tended to remain a little hazy. (Danziger, 2009, pp. 2–3)

It can be seen in the other literature on indigenous psychology. For example, an edited book on the subject includes a postscript titled, "The Way Ahead: From Indigenous Psychologies to a Universal Psychology" (Berry & Kim, 1993). The basic idea is that by comparing different indigenous psychologies, a universal psychology will emerge. The argument is similar to that used by cross-cultural psychologists with regard to their research and it is no coincidence that the two fields are closely related with many of the figures who are prominent in cross-cultural psychology also being prominent in indigenous psychology.

It will be clear from all the above that the commitment to universalism among psychologists runs deep. It is not too difficult to understand why. Another foundational postulate of psychology is that it is a science. This point is usually made *ad nauseam* in the first chapter of introductory texts. Exactly what kind of science it is supposed to be is rarely spelled out, but the usual assumption is that it is a natural science. The natural sciences formulate general laws and this is what psychology has tried to do, albeit with limited success. If a biologist or a medical researcher is interested in understanding the internal organs of the human body, such as the kidneys or the heart, he or she need not take a broad range of samples from people of different ages, different social classes, or from a wide range of cultures. The internal organs of all these people can be assumed to be more or less the same. Opinion pollsters, on the other hand, need to include different types of people in their samples if they are to successfully predict the outcome of an election because the thought and actions of different groups of people are not unvarying in the same way. The commitment of psychologists to universalism is based on the erroneous assumption that they are.

It is not just an inappropriate biological model that has contributed to this view. The computer metaphor has had a profound influence on psychology in the last 50 or 60 years. It formed the basis of cognitive psychology, or what was originally called the "information-processing" approach, and it has been influential in other areas of the subject as well. The word "process" is an important part of this view. It is obvious that the content of my memory is not the same as yours, and the content of both our memories is not likely to be the same as that of someone who lives on a remote Pacific island or someone who lived in Ancient Rome. This does not matter

as far as most psychologists are concerned since it is not the content of people's memories that they are interested in but underlying processes that they assume to be universal. This view is not unique to cognitive psychology. As we shall see, social psychologists talk of "social processes" that are assumed to be independent of the context in which they occur.

2.2   The Particular with Respect to the Individual

While most psychologists are committed to universalism and the accompanying view that psychology is a natural science, there have been exceptions to the rule. One of them is the German psychologist and philosopher, William Stern. He is known to most psychologists as the man who invented the intelligence quotient, or IQ, and there is some irony in this situation in that he came to regret the way in which his invention was being used. What is considerably less well known is Stern's system of psychology, which he called "critical personalism" (Lamiell, 2003). At the heart of it lies the notion that individuals are unique. We can give someone a battery of psychological tests and discover that they have a high IQ or that they score highly on an introversion scale, but this is not the same as knowing the person in question. All it tells us is where they stand in relation to others on a numerical scale.

Stern's most detailed account of his philosophical system is contained in a work which appeared in three volumes with the title, *Person und Sache* (Person and Thing), and the distinction between the two was important to him (e.g., Stern, 1906). It was informed by the Kantian categorical imperative, that is, the moral dictum that we should treat persons as ends in themselves and not merely as means to an end. It thus embodied a teleological view of human action, as opposed to the causal view that is prevalent in natural science, and it was equally important to him to make this distinction as well. Stern's philosophy of psychology is complex and we need not detain ourselves over its details here, especially since an introduction to it is available elsewhere (Lamiell, 2010). The important point for our purposes is that it was based on the view that individuals are unique and that this should be the focus of psychology rather than general laws.

Stern worked in Germany between the two world wars where he was based at the University of Hamburg. Although he was not a practicing Jew, he had Jewish ancestry, and this was enough for him to suffer persecution at the hands of the Nazis. Like many of his colleagues, he emigrated to the United States where he found employment at Duke University in North Carolina. Also, like several other émigré psychologists, he did not live for long after moving to the United States. He died of a heart attack in 1938. Although some of his work was available in English (Stern, 1938), it was out of kilter with the mainstream of American psychology and it was generally ignored.

A notable exception to this rule was the American psychologist, Gordon Allport, and it is largely because of Allport that the issue of individuality came to be well known. Allport had studied with Stern in Hamburg and had even rented a room in

his house. Shortly after Stern's death, he published an appreciation of Stern's work. He noted that Stern's views "ran counter to the trend of the times" but boldly predicted that "the personalistic way of thought will yet have its day and its day will be long and bright" (Allport, 1938, p. 773).

In spite of their common concern with the issue of individuality, Allport differed from Stern in a number of respects (Allport, 1937). Whereas Stern had developed a philosophical system that had the issue at its heart, Allport had more empirical concerns. He also adopted a less confrontational attitude with respect to mainstream psychology. Taking his cue from Windelband (1894/1998), who had made a distinction between nomothetic (derived from the Greek word, "nomos," meaning "law") and idiographic (derived from the Greek word, "idios," meaning "own" or "private") forms of knowledge, he proposed that the science of psychology should have room for both. Even this was too much for his American colleagues and it led to what has come to be known to posterity as "the nomothetic-idiographic controversy" (Lamiell, 2003). Predictably, the controversy centered on the issue of psychology's status as a natural science.

Windelband had originally used the terms "nomothetic" and "idiographic" to denote the kinds of knowledge that are produced by the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Physicists might seek laws that were valid in all places and at all times but historians dealt with unique events. No two historical events were exactly the same. Similarly, no two individuals were exactly the same. In suggesting that science should be capable of handling both types of knowledge, Allport was departing from the general view. Most of his colleagues were having none of it. Skaggs wrote:

> Allport takes a broad stand for the broadening of the concept of science. This may be the proper progressive stand to take, but we doubt that our fellow scientists in physics, chemistry, geology, or astronomy will be very receptive to the idea. Perhaps we, as psychologists, could attain a more satisfactory adjustment to the order of things by saying that some of our content or knowledge is *science* while other content or knowledge is *non-science*. (Skaggs, 1945, p. 234; italics in original)

This was like the proverbial red rag to a bull as far as most psychologists were concerned. After Beck (1953) had published an article with the title, "The Science of Personality: Nomothetic or Idiographic?", Eysenck (1954) responded with an article titled, "The Science of Personality: Nomothetic!" Here he expressed the view that psychology was a science and anything that was not science, and this included the idiographic approach, could not logically be psychology. This was the view of the overwhelming majority of psychologists and it led to Allport publicly conceding defeat on the issue toward the end of his life (Lamiell, 2003).

It continues to be the view of the overwhelming majority of psychologists today. There are a few exceptions to the rule and one of them is James Lamiell who has been responsible for much of the historical work that deals with these events. Interestingly, he began his career as a personality psychologist who was interested in the problem of individuality and he published work in which he argued for what he called an "idiothetic" approach (e.g., Lamiell, 1981, 1987). He has often told the story of how several colleagues advised him to read the work of Stern. He became

so interested in it that it led to him learning German and he transformed himself into a historian of psychology along the way.

Although Allport did not succeed in his attempt to make room for the study of individuality in psychology, he played an important role in establishing the field of personality as a branch of the discipline (Nicholson, 2003). Even Eysenck (1997, p. 3) described him as its "patron saint." In spite of the efforts of Eysenck and others to turn it into an experimental and quantitative field, it is still regarded by many psychologists as the least scientific branch of the discipline, and this is no doubt due to the fact that it deals with differences between people rather than features that they are thought to have in common. University courses in personality tend to act as a dumping ground for the approaches to psychology that do not fit in with the discipline's image of itself as a natural science. It is here that the undergraduate will get the briefest of brief introductions to the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung and the humanistic theories of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, even though "personality" was not the main focus of their work.

2.3   The Particular with Respect to Culture

It was mentioned earlier that cross-cultural psychology was a belated addition to the discipline in the 1960s and is to this day a neglected and marginalized field. As late as 1984, Smedslund (1984) published a book chapter with the title, "The Invisible Obvious: Culture in Psychology." In the 1990s, a new branch of the subject began to emerge under the label, "cultural psychology," and one of its most prominent representatives was (and is) Richard Shweder. He wrote the opening chapter of a collection of readings on the subject with the title, "Cultural Psychology—What is it?" (Shweder, 1990). The fact that he had to begin the book with this question shows how new the field was at the time.

Much of the chapter is concerned with what cultural psychology is not, and one of the things it is not is "general psychology" (Shweder, 1990, p. 4). The point should be made here that Shweder is using the term in an unusual way. Division 1 of the American Psychological Association is devoted to General Psychology and defines its mission in terms of "creating coherence among psychology's diverse specialties by encouraging members to incorporate multiple perspectives from psychology's subdisciplines into their research, theory, and practice."[2] What Shweder means by the term is a psychology based on universalism. He also uses the term, "Platonism," on the grounds that Plato was concerned with the essences behind the appearances. He refers to the popular song, "Ebony and Ivory" by Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder, which contains the line, "People are the same wherever you go," and says that this is the basic assumption of general psychology. He goes on to say: "Of course people are not the same wherever you go. Not even Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder are the same" (Shweder, 1990, p. 5).

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[2] See http://www.apadivisions.org/division-1/about/index.aspx

Needless to say, cultural psychology is not cross-cultural psychology either. Shweder is particularly scathing in his criticism of the universalistic pretensions of this field:

> Cross-cultural psychology has lived on the margins of general psychology as a frustrated gadfly, and it is not too hard to understand why. For one thing, cross-cultural psychology offers no substantial challenge to the core Platonic interpretive impulse of general psychology (the principle of psychic unity). Moreover, if you are a general psychologist cum Platonist (and a principled one, at that) there is no theoretical benefit in learning more about the quagmire of appearances. (Shweder, 1990, pp. 11–12)

This explanation for the marginalization of cross-cultural psychology seems somewhat misplaced since cultural psychology has not fared any better. As Shweder points out, the universalistic assumptions of mainstream psychology lead to the view that culture in general is not of much interest or concern. It also has to be said that not even all of the psychologists who describe their work as "cultural psychology" agree with Shweder's anti-universalist views (Kitayama & Cohen, 2010). As Lonner (2015, p. 808) has recently pointed out: "Most culture-oriented psychologists strongly believe in psychological universals."

2.4 The Particular with Respect to History

If we were to construct a scale of marginalization in psychology, cultural psychology would be higher up the scale than personality psychology, and historical psychology would be even higher still. It is so neglected and marginalized that most psychologists are not even aware that it exists. Its basic premise is similar to Shweder's view that "people are not the same wherever you go" (1990, p. 5) but it is concerned with historical rather than cultural diversity. As it was famously expressed in the opening lines of the novel, *The Go-Between*: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there" (Hartley, 1953, p. 3).

Some historical psychologists have tried to adopt Wundt and Vygotsky as ancestors on the grounds that they included a temporal dimension in their theories, but this is a bit of a stretch. As late as 1935, the eminent sociologist of knowledge, Karl Mannheim, expressed surprise that the field of historical psychology did not exist (Mannheim, 1935/1940). The genuine "classics" of the field include *Problems of Historical Psychology* (1960) by Zevedei Barbu, a Romanian social psychologist who was teaching at the University of Glasgow in Scotland at the time, and *The Changing Nature of Man: Introduction to a Historical Psychology* (1961) by Jan Hendrik van den Berg, a Dutch psychiatrist who was influenced by phenomenology. Ignace Meyerson also promoted the subject in France (Meyerson, 1987). The Netherlands has had a more recent champion of historical psychology in the form of the late Harry Peeters (e.g., Peeters, 1996) and a veritable avalanche of books on the subject was published in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. The Berlin psychologist, Gerd Jütteman, is a particularly prominent figure in this field (e.g., Jütteman, 1988; Sonntag & Jütteman, 1993).

What is particularly interesting about all this work is that it has emanated from continental Europe, or at least from continental Europeans. It seems that a historical approach to psychology is more compatible with certain traditions of continental European philosophy than it is with the empiricism that has tended to dominate Anglo-American thought. There is a notable exception to this rule, and that is an article by the American social psychologist, Kenneth J. Gergen, with the title, "Social Psychology as History" (1973). Its basic premise is that the phenomena of social psychology change over time and it therefore has more in common with history than it does with the natural sciences. It is one of the most widely cited articles in the history of psychology and it led to a great deal of debate but little in the way of historical research. An edited volume titled, *Historical Social Psychology*, that was subsequently co-edited by Gergen and his wife, Mary Gergen fell on the same stony ground as all the other literature that has been published in this field (Gergen & Gergen, 1984).

One of Gergen's most vociferous critics was Barry R. Schlenker, so that the controversy became known in some quarters as "the Gergen-Schlenker debate" (e.g., Thorngate, 1976). Schlenker (1974) argued that Gergen had fundamentally misunderstood the nature of science. Variations in the natural world, such as the fact that water boils at different temperatures depending on atmospheric pressure or that dinosaurs no longer exist, have not prevented natural scientists from formulating general laws. Similarly, variations in the social world should not prevent social scientists from looking for general laws within them. Manis took a similar approach based on the psychologist's traditional distinction between contents, which are thought to be variable, and processes, which are not: "A tentative generalization might be that the *processes* underlying social behavior are probably relatively stable, although they operate on an endless variety of social *contents* as we vary the time and places of our investigations" (Manis, 1975, pp. 453–454; emphasis in original).

In his reply to these critics, Gergen asked rhetorically, "Where are the durables?" (Gergen, 1976, p. 377). The best that Schlenker (1974) could come up with is the incest taboo, which seems to have a biological basis, though there has been enormous historical and cross-cultural variation even here (Leavitt, 2003). The interesting point is not the view that some social activities have a biological basis—they obviously do—but that the historical and cross-cultural variation in specific manifestations of them are not the social psychologist's concern.

There are parallels between the controversy that followed the publication of Gergen's article in the 1970s and the publication of Allport's views on individuality several decades earlier. Both posed questions about the status of psychology as a natural science, and psychologists responded to this perceived slur by defending that status. The "official" view of the controversy was expressed by Jones in his introductory chapter to the third edition of the *Handbook of Social Psychology* from 1985. He described Gergen's article as "a sweeping indictment of social psychology's pretensions to scientific status" and called his statements "intellectually irresponsible invitations to despair" (Jones, 1985/1998, p. 48). The attention they had attracted was attributed to a "widespread need for self-flagellation, perhaps unique among social

psychologists" (p. 48), and the whole affair was dismissed as "a minor perturbation in the long history of the social sciences" (Jones, 1985/1998, pp. 48–49).

Looking back on 15 years of the controversy, Blank wrote:

> Contrasting opinions about Gergen's (1973) article, "Social Psychology as History," have continued since its publication. Relatively extreme early reactions to the article appear to have given way to a consensus within mainstream social psychology that discounts the radical import of Gergen's message, places its significance in a historical context, and asserts that Gergen's pessimism is no longer warranted and the revolution he proclaimed no longer needed. (Blank, 1988, p. 651)

As for Gergen himself, it is clear that he has never changed his views on the historical nature of social psychology (e.g., Gergen, 2014; Graumann & Gergen, 1996) but this ceased to be the main focus of his work after the 1970s. In the 1980s and beyond, he began to promote a comprehensive system of psychology which he called, "social constructionism," and it is this for which he is now best known (e.g., Gergen, 1985, 2009).

Someone who has taken up the cause of historical psychology in recent years is Kurt Danziger. He too was a social psychologist in the 1970s (e.g., Danziger, 1971, 1976), but he turned his attention to the history of psychology in the 1980s and 1990s and it is this work for which he is now best known (e.g., Danziger, 1990, 1997). There was a subtle shift in his work in the first decade of the twenty-first century that few people seem to have noticed, and this shift represents a move away from history of psychology towards historical psychology. In making this move, he was aware of the close relationship between the two. If the objects of psychology are historical, it will inevitably have consequences for the theories of psychologists. To the extent that the theories of psychology have had an influence on society—and few of us nowadays have never heard of "conditioning," "closure," or a "learning curve"—it will influence its objects of investigation (Brock, 1995). However, he agreed with authors like Richards (1987) and Smith (1988) that the history of psychology does not go back very far. One of the crucial differences between history of psychology and historical psychology is that the latter often deals with historical periods that pre-date the birth of modern psychology.

In an invited address to the Canadian Psychological Association titled, "Prospects of Historical Psychology" (Danziger, 2003), and in an interview which I conducted with him in the same year (Brock, 2006), Danziger expressed the view that historical psychology had been a jungle of proposals and counter-proposals but could stay grounded by focusing on the history of psychological objects. It would take the objects of current psychological research and examine their history. Danziger had already done this in his book, *Naming the Mind* (1997), but here he was concerned with objects like "intelligence," "personality," and "motivation" that had been created by psychologists in the twentieth century. Some of the objects of psychology were much older than the discipline and these objects became the focus of Danziger's work.

In a book chapter titled, "Historical Psychology of Persons" (2012), he looked at the history of the term and its various meanings. For example, the only people who were regarded as "persons" (*persona*) in Ancient Rome were adult males. It was a legal term that denoted a certain section of the population with specific rights, such

as the right to own property. Children could not be "persons" since they did not have the same rights. They were regarded as "minors" and had fewer rights. Women were also regarded as "minors" rather than "persons." At the bottom of the heap were the slaves who had no rights at all and were similar in status to domesticated animals. Danziger goes on to talk of how the adoption of Christianity in the Roman Empire gradually undermined this view. Christianity promoted a more universal view of "persons" based on its doctrine that all human beings have an immortal soul. This view of the "person" as someone with a certain social status who is deserving of respect is embodied in the modern concept and underlies its use in the work of psychologists like William Stern, though its historical background is largely unknown.

Danziger's most extensive work on historical psychology is his book on the history of memory, *Marking the Mind* (Danziger, 2008). This book is also concerned with one of the objects of modern psychology that pre-date the birth of the discipline and shows how it has changed over time. For example, the mnemonic techniques that were a source of great interest in Ancient Rome and in medieval Europe largely disappeared after the invention of the printing press. They had an important role in societies where books had to be written by hand and were relatively rare. The availability of printed documents also led to a new interest in the accuracy of memory and a new image of memory as a recording device. This would not have been possible without some kind of standard with which memory could be compared. Far from postulating the existence of transhistorical "memory processes," Danziger is concerned with changes in the conception and practice of memory over time. He ends the book with a section titled "Is the memory in the head?" (Danziger, 2008, p. 259) and suggests that it is not just a property of individuals but also a set of social practices that are closely related to the technology of the time.

Like Shweder (1990), Danziger has been scathing in his criticism of the universalistic pretensions of psychology. In a keynote address to the International Society for Theoretical Psychology, he compared the search for universals in psychology to the search for the Holy Grail (Danziger, 2009). He suggested that their existence can only be established through historical and cross-cultural research but the default assumption of universalism ensures that this research will never be done.

We seem to have arrived at an impasse. History is concerned with the particular, and most psychologists, for better or worse, are interested only in universals. This problem is discussed in a recent book on the relationship between psychology and history. In his foreword to the book, Gergen (2014, p. xii) refers to "the alienated relationship between psychology and history" and writes:

> Closely related to this is the psychologists' penchant for general laws or principles on the one hand, and historians' focal concern with the unique and the particular. (Gergen 2014, p. xii)

It is a recurring theme throughout the book, and the editors return to it in their postscript:

> A related tension between the two modes of enquiry, which was mentioned in several chapters in this volume, is between the *universal* and the *particular* [emphasis in original]. Some historians will argue very convincingly that history is a discipline of the particular. It is the story of a specific historical context, an account or interpretation of a particular

event, issue or biography played out by particular actors in a particular time and place. Many psychologists, on the other hand, will argue that psychology is a discipline of the general and universal, one that aspires to uncover the universal laws of human behaviour, laws that transcend particular contexts and unique experiences of individuals. (Tileagă & Byford, 2014, pp. 285–286)

This is one of the reasons why history is thought to be of no relevance to psychology. It is of course common practice in psychology departments, particularly in North America, to offer a course on the history of psychology to undergraduates, and there is a significant market for textbooks to accompany these courses, but they have more to do with socializing new recruits into the discipline than anything else. Psychologists will also take a fleeting interest in history when anniversaries come around, such as the centennial of the founding of Wilhelm Wundt's laboratory for experimental psychology at the University of Leipzig in 1879 or the centennial of the establishment of the American Psychological Association in 1892. Both are ancillary functions. When it comes to the business end of the discipline, namely, its research, history is usually thought to be irrelevant. This explains why the history of psychology has a limited pedagogical role within the discipline, while historical psychology is largely unknown.

Does this mean that psychologists who engage with history must accept that it can only deal with the particular and that they must concede the investigation of universals to others? Fortunately it does not, and Danziger (2009) can be an important guide here as well.

2.5   Historically Emergent Universals

It has often been observed that some psychologists have belatedly taken an interest in culture at a time when anthropologists, who were traditionally considered to be responsible for its investigation, have begun to have doubts about its usefulness (Kuper, 1999). One of the reasons is that we live in a globalized world where travel and communication has never been easier. Contact between people from different cultures has always existed but technological advances have led to it happening on a much greater scale than before. The world is becoming increasingly homogenized and the idea that every human being belongs to a single local culture seems outmoded and quaint. This is the point of Hermans and Kempen (1998), who have argued that one of the basic assumptions of cross-cultural psychology, namely, that culture is geographically localized, is simply wrong. It is possible to exaggerate the degree of homogenization that exists, and I suspect that this is what Hermans and Kempen have done. Most writers on the subject are of the view that cultural diversity still exists but it is being gradually eroded and has come increasingly under threat (e.g., Seabrook, 2004).

Whatever position we take on this issue, it is important to acknowledge that we cannot content ourselves with studying the differences between people but must study their similarities as well. This is where Danziger's notion of historically emergent

universals can help (Danziger, 2009). In *Marking the Mind*, he showed how technological changes can have psychological effects and how some of their associated practices have been universal. For example, the universal distress signal for shipping, "SOS," that was operative for most of the twentieth century was originally adopted by the German government in 1905 and by other countries at an international conference in 1906. It came into effect in 1908 and was eventually discarded in 1999 due to advances in technology.[3] Although most psychologists associate the term "universal" with "biological," there is no reason why that should be the case. This distress signal was universal without being biological and it had a history as well. A similar situation applies with the adoption of the UN charter on universal human rights, universal standards for weights and measures, and international accounting standards.

Another example that is of greater relevance to psychology is the adoption of what is commonly known as "APA style" by psychologists all over the world; that is, the style of writing that is prescribed by the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association, 2010). Just as technological changes can be linked to psychological changes, the adoption of a certain set of universal standards can have similar effects. Thus, the APA *Publication Manual* has been analyzed in terms of its behaviorist rhetoric (Bazerman, 1988). Its rules were clearly devised with the aim of writing experimental reports and it is not particularly suited to historical or theoretical work.

Historically emergent universalism in psychology goes way beyond this. Some excellent work on the universalization of the disorders recognized by American psychiatry exists. In particular, a book by Ethan Watters with the title, *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche* (2010) ought to be much better known than it is. The backdrop to the book is globalization and the export of American culture to the rest of the world. It is nothing unusual to see people in remote corners of the world eating in McDonalds, wearing Nike trainers, or listening to rap music but Watters goes even further and claims that, "We are engaged in the grand project of Americanizing the world's understanding of the human mind" (Watters, 2010, p. 1). At the heart of this project lies the unequal division of wealth and power between the countries that are usually described as "the West" and the other parts of the world. Western universities train clinicians and academics from all over the world, often as part of their foreign aid programs. Westerners also have a disproportionate degree of influence over academic journals and international conferences. Western drug companies provide funds for research into mental illness and spend billions on marketing their products. Western-trained mental health professionals, who are often employed by aid agencies, offer their services in places where there has been war or where natural disasters have struck.

The main part of the book consists of four case studies showing how the disorders of American psychiatry have been spread to different parts of the world. One chapter looks at how explanations in terms of spirit possession in Zanzibar are giving way to explanations in terms of schizophrenia. Another documents the arrival of

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[3] See, for example, http://www.telegraph-office.com/pages/arc2-2.html

anorexia nervosa in Hong Kong, a disorder that was previously unknown. Another chapter looks at the marketing of antidepressants in Japan. It is one of the richest countries in the world, but there was no market for antidepressants there because the concept of "depression" was unknown. The drug companies very quickly put that situation right. The last case study shows how the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder was introduced into Sri Lanka after the tsunami of 2004.

The universalization of these disorders can be explained by what the Canadian philosopher, Ian Hacking, has called "the looping effects of human kinds" (e.g., Hacking, 1995a). Hacking points out that the descriptions we apply to human beings can be understood by them and affect their actions in ways that the descriptions that we apply to natural objects do not. One example that he has frequently used is the category, "child abuse," which he traces back to a conference of pediatricians in Denver, Colorado, in 1960. Hitting children was common at the time and for many years afterwards. However, attitudes on this subject have changed significantly in many countries over the last 50 years and hitting children is now frequently characterized in this way. The decision by astronomers to strip Pluto of its status as a planet in 2006 had no effect on Pluto itself, but a decision by a medical doctor to label the actions of a parent "child abuse" inevitably will. Quite apart from any damage it might do to their reputation, it could lead to an appearance in court. They may accept the label; they may contest it. Either way, it will influence their actions, and their actions will influence the labels that are applied to them, and these will influence their actions in a never-ending loop. The point here is that the human sciences are not like astronomy in that they have no influence over the phenomena they observe. They are involved in co-creating their objects of investigation, though this point is rarely recognized by the scientists themselves.

Hacking (1995b) has illustrated these points in a history of multiple personality disorder as a cultural phenomenon in the United States. He shows how it went from being considered rare in the early part of the twentieth century to reaching epidemic proportions in the last two decades of that century. He also shows how the nature of the disorder changed along the way. For example, sufferers generally had only two or three of personalities in the early part of the twentieth century and this is reflected in the popular film, "The Three Faces of Eve" (1957). However, a later film, "Sybil" (1976), portrayed someone with 16 personalities, and that became the norm from then on. Young (1997) has produced a similar history of post-traumatic stress disorder in the United States. Like multiple personality disorder, it was adopted by the "Bible" of psychiatry, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or DSM* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), for the first time in 1980, and its rise in popularity was closely linked to the opposition to the Vietnam War. If it is possible to write a history of how these disorders were adopted in the United States, it is possible to write histories of how they were subsequently adopted in other parts of the world.

One could in principle do similar research on how psychological objects like "intelligence," "personality," and "motivation" were spread to different countries. As Danziger (1997) has shown in his book, *Naming the Mind*, they were created as recently as the first half of the twentieth century. There must obviously be similar stories of how they were adopted in different parts of the world. Regrettably,

research of this kind has not been done, largely I suspect due to a lack of recognition that their universal adoption by psychologists has a history. The small amount of literature that exists on this subject is largely theoretical.

One example is a book chapter by Moghaddam and Lee (2006) in which they introduce the concept of "double reification." It is an ugly term, but the concept behind it is interesting. It refers to a sort of looping effect but one that is slightly different from the one that Ian Hacking outlined. The assumption that American psychology is universal leads to it being exported all over the world. Once it has been established in some remote corner of the world, its existence there is then seen as evidence of its universality. We might think of the people in developing countries as culturally different from ourselves but the idea that everyone in a particular society has a shared culture is misleading. The usual pattern in developing countries is that there is a large traditional sector, involving people whose lives are not very different from those of their ancestors, and a westernized elite that is based in the major cities and owns much of the country's wealth. It is among this westernized elite that psychologists and their students can usually be found, and they are not as culturally different from people in the West as we often suppose. In addition to teaching and studying psychology, they are likely to speak English, listen to Western pop music, watch Western TV programs and films, and frequent fast food outlets and internet cafés. This situation is a problem in cross-cultural research since, as the content analyses of journals that I referred to earlier show, college students tend to be used in a large percentage of the studies. If similarities are found between students in the United States and students elsewhere—for example, on emotional expression or personality traits—it may be due to the cultural similarities between them rather than the universality of the phenomena concerned.

2.6   Psychology and Science

If psychology were to take history more seriously, it would be better placed to deal with the particular, something that it currently refuses to do. It could also provide a more sophisticated account of universals than the sterile universalism that currently exists. Whether or not it is likely to do so is a different matter. We have seen repeatedly that universalism as a foundational postulate of psychology is intimately connected with the view of psychology as a natural science. This point is also discussed by Moghaddam and Lee (2006). It is the view that psychology is a natural science and hence studies universal phenomena that lead to it being exported all over the world. People in developing countries are receptive to American cultural exports because of their association with the wealth and prestige of the United States, and psychologists are no exception in this regard. Similarly, psychologists all over the world like to associate themselves with the wealth and prestige of the natural sciences. They have transformed our lives in many respects from the harnessing of electricity to the creation of the internet. Medical advances like the invention of antibiotics have also transformed our lives. The benefits of the humanities and the

social sciences are not as easy to see, and this has led some people to conclude that they are luxuries that we can do without.

At the time of writing, there has been a great deal of discussion over a letter of 8 June 2015 that the Japanese Minister of Education sent to all the state universities in Japan, in which he asked them to either downgrade or close their departments of humanities and social science. It was made clear that future government funding would depend on their willingness to comply with this request, and 26 of 60 state universities that currently offer these subjects have already indicated their willingness to do so.[4] There is nothing unique about this situation. It is merely an extreme example of something that is happening all over the world. The American philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, has written:

> The humanities and the arts are being cut away, in both primary/secondary and in college/university education, in virtually every country in the world. Seen by policy-makers as useless frills, at a time when nations must cut away all useless things to stay competitive in the global market, they are rapidly losing their place in curricula, and also in the minds and hearts of parents and children. (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 2)

Faced with this situation, it is likely that the majority of psychologists will continue to seek refuge among the natural sciences. While this might bring with it certain financial and social advantages, it comes at the cost of marginalizing the historical, cultural, and personalistic aspects of their discipline and adopting an inappropriate universalism with regard to the rest.

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[4] See, for example, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/social-sciences-and-humanities-faculties-close-japan-after-ministerial-intervention

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