

# Philosophy and History of Social Psychology

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Psy 614/2  
Session 1

# Preface

- Syllabus on Blackboard and Webpage
  - ▶ <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~bfmalle/issues.html>
  - ▶ Topics, readings, papers, grading
- Too little time
  - ▶ Selection
  - ▶ History, philosophy, theory isn't covered elsewhere
  - ▶ Several classic readings; recent research in last sessions
- Short presentation; discussion; lecture

# The Field of Social Psychology

- Textbooks and keywords
  - ▶ Social cognition
    - impression formation, attribution, self, stereotypes, prejudice
  - ▶ Social interaction
    - relationships, aggression, prosocial behavior, group dynamics
  - ▶ Social influence
    - persuasion, conformity, obedience
- ...Individuals in a social world

# Social Psychology as Science

- Levels of analysis
  - ▶ Matching answers to questions
- Psychology vs. common-sense (folk) psychology
  - ▶ Is psychology a cultural evolution of theory of mind?
- Commitments to causality, experimentation, statistical inference, generalization, ... (theory)
- What is science anyway?
  - ▶ Vienna Circle and Popper, “demarcation problem”
  - ▶ Criteria of “verifiability,” “falsifiability,” rational method

# Being Scientific

- Being scientific is not the same as *looking* scientific
  - ▶ Statistics, high-status methodologies, *talk* theory
- *Being* scientific means:
  - ▶ Identifying a phenomenon
  - ▶ Conceptual and theoretical analysis of the phenomenon's causal nexus
  - ▶ Collecting empirical data on assumptions >> building a theoretical model
  - ▶ Deriving and testing predictions
  - ▶ Revising theory

# Theory

- Examples of theories
  - ▶ Lewin's field theory
  - ▶ Festinger's theory of social comparison
  - ▶ Bem's self-perception theory
  - ▶ Attribution theory
- Ingredients of theories
  - ▶ Ontology (conceptual elements)
  - ▶ Assumptions about mechanisms operating on ontology
  - ▶ Empirical relationships with other elements
  - ▶ Explanation of phenomena by mechanisms

# Themes in Readings

- The fate of theories: Support and falsification
- Testing weak theories ( $H_0$ ) with weak criteria ( $p < .05$ )
- Patching theories after falsification
  - ▶ Whole theory is never tested but can “fade away”
  - ▶ Okay if periphery is patched, core stays intact
  - ▶ Easy to challenge “operationalization” (because atheoretical)
- Strength of data to inform us about status of theory
  - ▶ Few falsifications (within distribution of  $d$ )
  - ▶ No alternative explanations
- Ideal: effect-size predictions